

# THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN CHRISTCHURCH

1937-41, 1946-47

*A MEMOIR*



***W.J. Foote***

## ***Dedication***

To all those who worked for the peace movement in Christchurch 1937-47 and in particular to the memory of LINCOLN EFFORD for his example and leadership and to the memory of BOB GORMACK, friend, writer, actor, craft printer, peace worker and cricket enthusiast.



*Lincoln Efford. Photo - Richard Thompson*

*"All wars are atrocious and no war is just."*- Archibald Baxter

## ***Acknowledgements***

My thanks to all who helped produce this memoir:

- \* Susan Barnes for the typescript
- \* Jaron Foote for the graphics
- \* The late Richard Thompson and David Grant for the photographs
- \* Warehouse Stationery for the photocopying

Published by The Glen Press, 79 Lowry Ave, Christchurch 8051.  
November 2007

Copies may be obtained for \$5 each from The Glen Press.

## ***Preface***

Christchurch is now a "peace city". Christchurch people have a long and proud history of peace action. This essay, written by one who was personally involved just before, briefly during and after World War II, may fill some small gaps in that record, covering a time when the peace movement did not have the widespread understanding and respect that it commands today.

As this account is written from memory of things that happened 60 to 70 years ago, there may be some small discrepancies of time and place and I may not have mentioned some people whose contribution should have been recognised. To them, my apologies.

For a wider view of the New Zealand peace movement at the time, read David Grant's 'Out in the Cold' (1986).



## **Chapter 1 – The Background**

I came to Christchurch in February 1937 from the district of Hook near Waimate in South Canterbury to study at the Teachers' Training College. I had been turned down by the Selection Committee but some better qualified applicant withdrew and the day before College opened I was asked to take his/her place. After two years at the College I spent my first year of teaching at the primary school in the Christchurch suburb of Sydenham. In 1940, as a consequence of my lowly position in the teachers' grading system, I hadn't secured a permanent position and was sent to Oxford District High School in North Canterbury as a sort of 'spare part'. After a term there I was transferred to Awaroa near Rakaia as relieving Sole Teacher. From both these positions I would cycle to Christchurch after school on Fridays. On Friday and Saturday evenings I met up with friends and joined in peace movement activities which will be described shortly. In between I studied at the University library and played cricket and badminton. On Sunday afternoons I cycled the 30 or so miles back to the workplace. In August 1940 I obtained a permanent teaching position as Sole Teacher, Kapuka South, Southland. Chapters 3 and 4 of these Christchurch reminiscences cover February 1937 to August 1940.

## **Chapter 2 – Beginnings**

At the time of entering Training College I did not have any firm views on peace and war. I was aware that other youths were concerned with the possibility of war and the need to make a personal decision. My older brother was a Science student at University in Dunedin and mixed with other students, some of whom were strongly anti-war. In particular he was influenced by Stuart Kingan, a distant relative and fellow Science student. Stuart came from a conservative Canterbury farming family. His radical political views must have caused concern in family circles. He had an agile, inventive mind. For instance, on their irrigation race he constructed a mini power plant which provided electricity for their house and farm buildings. He bounced radio signals off the moon – I don't understand this but I was told it was quite a scientific feat. If war came he had a plan to set up a community in a remote valley at the back of Molesworth. When conscription came, young war resisters could live there and evade internment. Fortunately this never came to pass. If the prospective members weren't quickly rounded up by the police, they would probably have frozen to death in the first winter. Rumours still persist that a similar camp in a remote West Coast bush location survived the War. However, none of the established peace groups considered such plans. Our aim was to oppose war and if possible stop our country's involvement in it, not to personally avoid it. I don't think Stuart ever joined any pacifist group. I didn't know him well but I think he just saw war as an affront to humanity. At some stage he left to live in Rarotonga, I don't know why or how, and lived most of his life there.

As we worked together on holiday jobs, thinning turnips, bagging potatoes, stooking wheat, my brother would expound on matters exercising his mind such as the Bahai faith and the morality of war, so I had some knowledge of matters others than cricket or shooting rabbits, which were my main passions at the time.

I think that parental attitudes also predisposed me to pacifism. My mother, although she wouldn't even have known what pacifism was, absolutely abhorred violence of any sort. My father, on the rare occasions when he expressed an opinion, conveyed a very cynical view of pomp and ceremony and the 'big wigs' who participated in it. I remember when I had to join the Cadets at Waimate High School and reported that I'd signed some document, he was furious. He thought I'd made some sort of commitment – fortunately it was just a clothing receipt for the uniform. I disliked Cadets intensely, not for any anti-war views, just for the impersonality, the discipline and that prickly uniform.

So, in summary, when I came to Christchurch I did have some background knowledge of peace issues but no firm views or commitment. I had an enquiring mind but was socially very shy and unsophisticated.

### Chapter 3 – 1937-39

At some stage early in College life I was invited to join a small Bible study group studying the Bible's relevance to modern society. The group members weren't all Christian pacifists but matters of peace and war were major concerns, no doubt because of the deteriorating international situation. Through this group I became aware of the Christian Pacifist Society (CPS). Group members were from various denominations. I was nominally Presbyterian, having attended Presbyterian Sunday School and church, mainly I think to please my mother. Church was one of the things my father was cynical about.

One of this Bible study group invited me to an Easter camp at a North Canterbury domain. I thought that the workshops at the camp might feature wide-ranging discussions of social problems. Instead it seemed that the main aim was to get commitment to Christianity and the church. The good Methodists who organised it had invited many what we now call 'drop-outs', aimless lads on the verge of real trouble. The climax of the camp was a rally in the hall. There were powerful speakers, music and a very emotional atmosphere, leading to a call to come forward and "dedicate your life to Christ". Many of the young people lined up. I did an about turn and walked out. That ended my flirtation with organised religion – though I know that much of the strength of the peace movement comes from committed Christians and I know that I have always been welcomed by Christian Pacifists even though I'm not one of them. I have no faith in a personal deity; to me God is just a name for the greatest good. One of the messages on the cards with which my good Presbyterian mother festooned my bedroom said "God is Love". Perhaps it should have been the other way round, "Love is God". If we believe that, war is unthinkable, a denial of our common humanity. As the Minister used to say, "Here endeth the first lesson".

While the great majority of Training College students were most concerned with their studies and enjoying the social life of the city, there was a growing interest in the matter of war and peace; what with wars in Spain, Abyssinia, China, the rise of Fascism and the Nazis, one could hardly avoid knowing something of international strife. The College magazine featured an excellent and well-illustrated poem on the horrors of war; there was an anti-war article to which I contributed. The Drama Club put on two anti-war plays; one was "Journey's End" the other featured a Mussolini-type dictator portrayed by Jack Woods, a College friend. We had a first class producer, Harold Baigent.

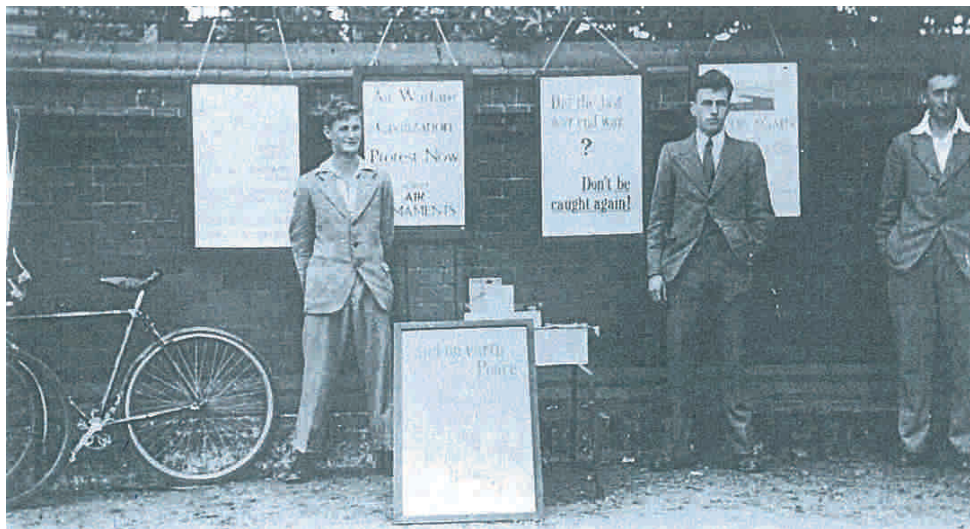
As well as attending College I started a BA degree, partly because it might help my future career, partly to emulate my brother's achievements. Most classes I attended were late afternoon or evening so my daily routine was to cycle down to University (now the Christchurch Arts Centre) as soon as College classes ended, take my books to the University library or Students' Association building (known as the StudAss, now the Dux de Lux) and study until lecture time. In the StudAss lounge I often sat near a tall, lean fellow; eventually one of us spoke and so started a lifelong friendship. He was Bob Gormack from Balclutha, another Southern man which explains the reticence on both sides. Bob was a student in the classical tradition, seeking knowledge for its own sake, not for the passing of examinations to further a career, and living on the smell of an oily rag. I remember calling at his 'digs' in Lower Riccarton and being invited to share his evening meal. He put a frying pan with congealed fat in it on his gas ring and added two rashers of bacon. When they were cooked, he put two slices of bread into the fat. That was our meal. Our common interests were literature, peace and cricket, not necessarily in that order. Of Bob, more later.

The StudAss notice board was a mine of information. Two items were of particular interest – meetings of the Left Book Club (LBC) and the No More War movement (NMW). I went to both, several times. The LBC under the leadership of Winston Rhodes, Senior Lecturer in my major subject English, encouraged students to read and discuss left wing Socialist-Communist books. One under discussion then was 'Red Star Over China'. I also recall a speaker who had been in the Spanish Civil War and signing up for three shares in a new left wing book shop. As it was anti-capitalist I never got a dividend. To one politically naive, it was all intensely interesting. I became convinced, and still am, that some form of democratic socialism is the best form of government. What came into conflict with my growing interest in peace was the fairly general conclusion of LBC members that armed conflict would be the means to that end.

The NMW members, a small but well-established group met in a tiny room in Chancery Lane just off Cathedral Square. The best known leader was the elderly Norman Bell, an academic with a long record of involvement in peace issues. To younger people such as myself the real leader was Lincoln Efford, probably then in his early thirties. Had he been born in a different age, or had views more widely acceptable, he could well have been a great Prime Minister. He had a commanding presence, he was an incisive speaker with 'the common touch'. He was the guiding spirit in most of the peace activities in which I became engaged.

Although I attended many of the NMW meetings I had not joined that organisation when the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) was started in Christchurch by Thurlow Thompson and his wife Kathleen. They were both Christian Pacifists. Thurlow edited the Anglican Church magazine. Kathleen later joined the traditional peace church, the Quakers or Society of Friends. The PPU had been started in England by an Anglican minister who saw the need for a peace organisation open to all war resisters, Christian, Rationalists, socialists, whatever. Membership was gained simply signing a pledge "I renounce war and will never support or sanction another". This organisation, I felt, met my needs and I signed.

At some stage during 1938 a small group of what we now call 'activists' took shape, under the general direction of Lincoln and meeting in the NMW rooms. The group of which I was a member functioned smoothly in spite of members belonging variously to CPS, NMW and PPU. The group's purpose was to make the anti-war case more obvious to the public. Members sought opportunities to speak to a wide variety of groups. I remember my first solo attempt, to a very conservative Anglican Church group of which a fellow boarder at my lodgings was a member. It was almost a complete disaster. I wasn't a confident speaker, the audience bombarded me with questions and Biblical quotes. The only bright spot was the supper. Whenever any large outdoor gathering took place, two or three of our group would stand alongside large posters proclaiming "No More War" or some such message and discuss our aims with anyone who approached us. A photograph in 'Out in the Cold' shows one such occasion on which I stand alongside John Morrison and John Summers outside the Show Grounds on Show Day 1938. On other public occasions we would have a stall with pamphlets and other peace literature.



Peace stand outside the Addington Show Grounds - 1938. From left, John Summers, John Morrison, Will Foote. **Photo David Grant/"Out In The Cold"**.

After our group had been active for some months a printing press was bought and installed in the NMW rooms. I think it had belonged to some now defunct church. Who paid for the press I don't know but I guess Lincoln had something to do with it. Most of the printing for peace groups

had been done by the sympathetic firm of Bullivants. I suspect economic pressure had been put on them. The press was a very old treadle model and required considerable dexterity to operate. One had to take a sheet of paper off a pile and put it on the type face with one hand, work the treadle, and take the printed sheet off with the other hand, in the process getting covered with printer's ink. Setting the type was a skilled task beyond most of us. Bob Gormack was one of the few that mastered it. That may have been the origin of his interest in the printing craft. I have copies of most of his works, gems of the printer's art, many written by him with great clarity of expression.

Under the name 'Co-operative Press' many thousands of anti-conscription, anti-war and pacifist pamphlets were produced. Some were for other groups, some we distributed by night to mail boxes, covering most suburbs. The press was eventually closed down under Emergency Regulations.

On Friday evenings, our group members would leave Chancery Lane armed with soap box and move to a grassed area off Victoria Street. There with Council permission – until early 1940 – we took turns addressing any passers by who cared to listen. Few did. Each speaker was free to express his own view or that of the organisation to which he belonged. The general themes were that war was wrong, whether for religious, humanitarian, political or philosophical reasons, that military force could be met with non-violent action, that if the country did go to war there must be no conscription, that the arms trade must be stopped, that we must call for a negotiated peace. Apart from receiving occasional remarks about our cowardly nature, it was all fairly peaceful. I remember once a soldier threw half a pie at the speaker, but it may have just been disgust at the quality of the pie rather than at the speaker's words.

The regular members of the group were John Morrison, Muriel Ockenden, John Summers, Connie Jones, Ron Scarlett, Colin Curtis and myself. Michael Young made occasional appearances but spent most of his time bravely giving the peace message to smaller centres which generally did not have the more tolerant city attitude. Others such as Bob Gormack and Stuart Kingan took part in more individual specialised activities.

Just as important, but not so obvious, was the work of older pacifists who made submissions to Council and the Government, wrote articles in magazines and newspapers, addressed church, Union and civic groups, provided finance for our activities, and after conscription came, supported and advised those who would come before the Armed Forces Appeal Board. Names I recall are Thurlow and Kathleen Thompson, Norman Bell, John Johnson, Dr Milligan, Rev Taylor, Charles Mackie, Bernard Elphick, Rev Basil Dowling. There was also support from organisations like the League of Nations Union, the WEA, the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, the Society of Friends and minority groups within the major religious denominations.

Another activity of the younger group was the sharing, reading and discussion of magazines – such as 'Peace News', the CPS Bulletin and various left wing journals and books. Some books I recall we shared were Dick Sheppard's 'We Say No', Max Plowman's 'The Faith Called Pacifism', Remaque's 'All Quiet on the Western Front', books by Wells, Joad and Angell. The simply expressed anti-war message in Baxter's recently published 'We Will Not Cease' had particular appeal to me and it could possibly have relevance to our near future. However, above all was the inspiration of Gregg's 'The Power of Non-Violence'. As the poet said, "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken". It answered the basic problem, how can one fight evil with the weapons of love?

## **Chapter 4 – 1940**

In 1940, due to the events mentioned in Chapter 1, my peace movement activities were confined to weekends. Anti-war groups were encouraged – and the authorities concerned – by the considerable public support for a new organisation, the Peace and Anti-Conscription Council (PACC). The name explains the purpose. The PACC gained support from most 'peace people', dissident Labourites, socialists, communists and unions. Some pacifists had doubts about common action with radicals who did not share their views, but our group joined in, particularly by helping with the printing and distributing of PACC literature and notices of meetings. I recall a very well

attended meeting addressed by Ian Milner, Lincoln Efford and Winston Rhodes. Sadly the new enthusiasm didn't last.

The 'phony war' ended, conscription was introduced, dissident Labourites were muzzled, government and local Councils banned 'subversive' meetings, the press was restricted in what it published, and by the time I left Canterbury in September the resistance to war was basically pacifist and less actively vocal. The focus was changing. Older pacifists were considering the possible treatment of conscientious objectors and the best ways of advising and guiding them. While the activist group still continued some now 'subversive' activity – Ron Scarlett, Connie Jones and Basil Dowling were later imprisoned in Wellington for speaking against war – naturally we spent much time discussing attitudes to our own conscription. Could conscience be judged? It seemed that there would be some form of trial. Should one appeal against service as a conscientious objector? If directed to work, what work could we do that didn't in one way or another help the war effort? Was joining the Army Medical Service compatible with our beliefs? A fairly common view was that if unable to continue in our chosen careers, we would offer to work in areas such as psychiatric wards in hospitals. Would the Government consider manning a non-military unit such as Quakers had done before?

As mentioned in the first chapter, in September 1940 I left the Christchurch peace scene for my first permanent teaching position in the much less tolerant atmosphere of Southland and after a year or so teaching there, I became a 'guest of the Government' as a military defaulter until I returned to Christchurch in late 1945.

## Chapter 5 – 1946/47

A condition of release from defaulter's detention camp was employment under the direction of the war-time Manpower Office. For some unknown reason I was ordered to report to the Christchurch officer who allowed me two days with my parents, then in Temuka, and then directed me to work at Kempthorne Prosser's in Hornby as a phosphate shoveller.



*Thurlow Thompson & Kathleen Thompson. Photo - Richard Thompson*

On arriving back in Christchurch I called at Thurlow and Kathleen Thompson's home on Port Hills Rd. They kindly offered me accommodation until I found permanent board. That still hadn't happened when I left in 1947, though I did change jobs to more congenial work as an orchard labourer in the Horotane Valley – a job I heard of through Basil Dowling who was doing similar work, the Presbyterian authorities not finding his pacifist views acceptable.

A result of staying at the Thompson's home was that I was plunged back into the heart of the peace movement. There were constant comings and goings of peace people and frequent meetings of PPU and combined peace groups. I became a sort of secretarial assistant, taking Minutes and penning letters. Matters of concern were the welfare of the few still in detention camps and gaols, finding work for returning detainees, and wider matters like peace settlements, the treatment of displaced persons and refugees, and what soon became a major issue, disarmament and the threat of nuclear weapons.

However, the work that soon took up most of the time for Christchurch peace people was the planning of a national pacifist peace conference. Originally Lincoln Efford's plan, it was widely accepted in peace circles. The aim was to form a United Front of peace groups, to seize the moment when people were weary of war, to persuade public opinion and eventually government of the need for reconciliation, for disarmament, for peace. Setting up such a conference involved a paper war – finding all ex-detainees, all those with appeals allowed, all NZ peace groups,

contacting all groups not specifically pacifist who might send a representative, arranging billets and venues, catering etc. Most of the people I knew earlier were still active and were helped by some of the ex-detainees from the wider Christchurch area - those I recall were Ron Black, Bruce McAlpine, Ken Ayers, Ray Adams. A new enthusiast was Morva Gunn, a CPS member from up north somewhere. She and Lincoln became very close friends and later married - as did Muriel Ockenden and John Morrison, and Connie Jones and John Summers. The peace movement was starting to look like a matrimonial agency.

Most of the country's pacifist leaders were at the conference - the Thompsons, Lincoln, Archie Barrington, Archibald and Millicent Baxter, Biddy Oldfield, Lucy Gibson, Ron Howell. There was a good representation of men from the detention camps. Looking at the group photograph after some 60 years, I can still recognise some - Bernard Wells, Jack Baxter, Derek Hancox, Les Charters, Alan Handyside, Wilson Gordon, Jack Crichton, Owen Hansen, Ron Black, Ray Adams, Bruce McAlpine, Jim Warburton and myself. A notable absentee was Ormond Burton, still wary of involvement with those who did not base their pacifism on Christian principles. The well-attended conference, held in the Trades Hall, was considered a great success. Remits were passed on such matters as conscription, compulsory military training, censorship and disarmament, and a NZ Pacifist Council was set up.



*The 1946 Peace conference in Christchurch. Photo - Author's collection.*

A few weeks after the Conference I left Christchurch to take up a position at a private school in Hamilton. Like all conscientious objector and defaulter teachers I was still banned from Government service. During those few weeks the main activity was follow-up work from the conference decisions. However, sadly, particularly for Lincoln who had such high hopes for a revitalised movement, the conference euphoria didn't last. Some blamed the ambivalent attitude of Christian pacifists who followed Ormond's lead. More important, I think, among those who had been detained for years and those who had worked for peace in the war years among general disapproval, was a need for respite, for normality, for getting back into careers and family life. But it was not a death, just a sleeping. The peace movement revived, in some cases even had majority support over the Vietnam War, the nuclear-free campaign, and most recently the Iraq War. Hope springs eternal!

## **References**

Barrington, A.C., **Conscientious Objectors in New Zealand in World War Two**. The NZ Foundation for Peace Studies.

Barrington, A.C., **Trials of a Pacifist**. The NZ Christian Pacifist Society.

Baxter, Archibald, **1980 (reprint) We Will Not Cease**. Cape Catley.

Cookson, J.E., **1983 Illiberal New Zealand**. The University of Auckland.

Efford, Lincoln, **1945 Penalties on Conscience**. Self published.

Foote, W.J., **1983 The Decision**. The Glen Press.

Grant, David, **1986 Out in the Cold**. Reed Methuen.

Gregg, Richard, **1960 (reprint) The Power of Non-Violence**. James Clark and Co.





