

History

An early Quaker woman printer

Trish Carn remembers an unusual late sixteenth century printer

Printing was a dangerous occupation in 1643: Parliament's Licensing Order of 1643 instituted pre-publication censorship; registration of all printing materials with the names of author, printer and publisher in the Register at Stationers' Hall; search, seizure and destruction of any books offensive to the government; and arrest and imprisonment of any offensive writers, printers and publishers. If unlicensed, your printing press and any printed materials could be destroyed. Why is this important? Well, Quaker printers could not be licensed as they were printing 'seditious material'. And print was the way Quakers spread the word.

In 1646 Andrew Sowle was apprenticed to Ruth Raworth, a printer who was renowned for publishing radical and reforming works. On completing his apprenticeship, Andrew set up his own press in Shoreditch. In 1678 he was charged with printing *Persecution under Episcopacy*, 'a scandalous and seditious book' with the intention of causing discord between the King and his subjects. The jury found him not guilty. Because he printed Quaker pamphlets and books, his press was unlicensed and hence illegal. His printing house was often searched and the press broken up and taken away, along with any Quaker material found on the premises. Andrew quickly became the principal publisher of Quaker material, numbering among his friends George Fox and William Penn. Although he never went to Pennsylvania himself, he was one of the first to buy land and he printed a map of the colony. His name does not appear on any of his printed material before 1680, as the act requiring printers to be licensed didn't lapse until 1679.

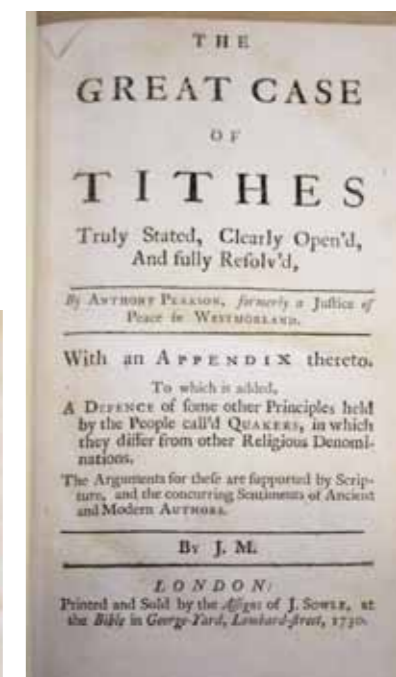
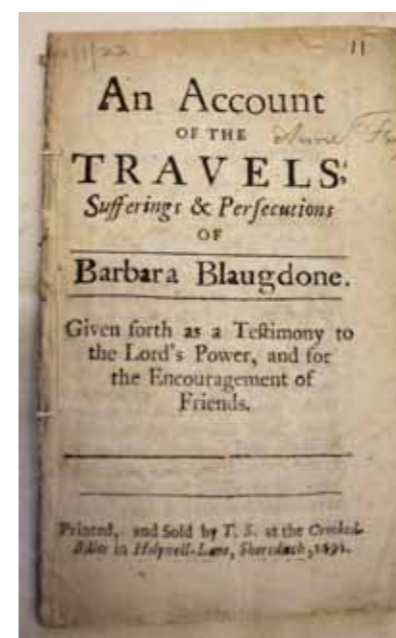
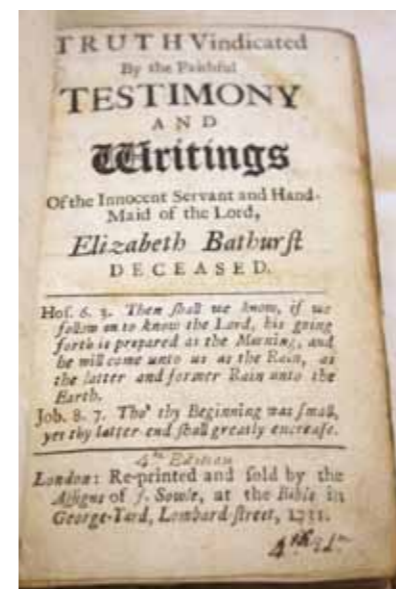
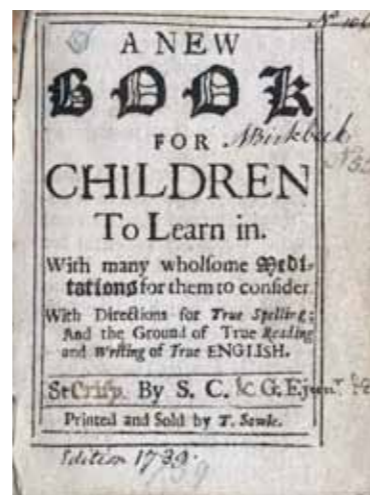
Tace Sowle, born around 1665, was the daughter of Andrew and Jane Sowle who were both printers. She

served her apprenticeship under her father, taking on his mantle as a principal Quaker publisher when his eyesight began to fail. Her name appears from 1691 onwards. After Andrew's death (1695) she ran the printing press at the Crooked Billet In Holloway Lane, Shoreditch, London, first with her mother and, after her mother's death in 1711, with her husband Thomas Raylton. Although a hosier, he helped her until his death in 1723 and she continued alone until 1738 when she went into partnership with Luke Hinde, a nephew. They continued together until Tace's death in 1749 aged 84, the oldest printer in London. Luke was left her share of the business and the rest of her substantial estate. The printing business continued to thrive under Luke's management. It is interesting that her other printing address in 1694 was 'next door to the meeting house in White Hart Court, Gracious Street'.

According to Gil Skidmore, who wrote about Tace in *Dear Friends and Sisters* (Sowle Press 1998), 'Tace considerably increased the number of Quaker books published by the firm and eventually became virtually the official Quaker printer. She sometimes had more of an eye to business than some Friends appreciated, often printing more copies of a book than she had been asked for if she thought that there was a demand, until her paymasters, Six Weeks Meeting, ordered her to stop. In 1734 she was asked to join the Women's Meeting of London, probably so that they could draw on her business acumen, as Tace was never a public Friend.'

Tace Sowle is remembered today by a fund that bears her name. The fund aims to enable the publication of Quaker works in the developing world. Supported by a modest percentage of the annual membership dues, the fund is run by Quakers Uniting in Publication.

Trish is a member of North West London AM.



Title Pages

Above is a range of sample title pages from some pamphlets and books published by Tace Sowle between 1691 and 1731. 'The Travels, Sufferings and Persecution of Barbara Blaugdone' and 'An Exhortation to all People in General together with a Warning to the Drunkards of England' are both from 1691. 'A Brief Representation of the Quakers Case of Not-Swearing' is 1694 while the other two are from 1730 and 1731 – almost the end of her printing life. Do we need explanatory leaflets like these today? All held by and used courtesy of The Friends House Library. Photos: Trish Carn