

TESTIMONY TO JOHN LINTON
VERSION AS OF 21ST JULY 2010

For our friend, **John Linton**, who has died (4 March 2010) aged 99, India – and especially Mahatma Gandhi - was a major religious influence. For example, John was for many years a passionate vegetarian. He is still fondly remembered among Friends in India.

John was born in 1910 at Dulwich into a solidly Anglican line of squires, parsons, professors and army officers. Oxford played a key part in his life - happy school holidays during and after World War I, student days at University College, and decades of retirement in North Oxford.

It was in Trinidad, in 1934, working as an oil refinery operator, that John met people of Indian descent and found himself identifying with the disadvantaged. Subsequently, during theological training in Birmingham, he abandoned plans to be a clergyman and instead became a preparatory school teacher. In 1939 he joined the Lincolnshire Regiment and soon volunteered for the Indian Army - another turning point.

In 1941, John sailed to Bombay (now Mumbai), later becoming major on the General Staff of the Army Headquarters in New Delhi, where he reported on India's political and economic situation for the Army. His superiors noted 'his imperturbable temperament' which 'enabled him to undertake work under heavy pressure without losing his very sound sense of judgement'. Returning to England in 1946, John worked for the old India Office and then as Indian Programme Organiser in the BBC World Service. He was asked to stand as a Labour Party candidate for Wimbledon, - but could not do so as a BBC employee.

John's personal life was dogged by tragedy. He lost his first wife, Zoya, to cancer. His only child, Julian (born on the day the bomb fell on Hiroshima in August 1945) died of cancer in 1966, aged 21, as an undergraduate at Oxford. In later years, John would invite close friends to commemorate these events every 6th August. He never became embittered.

John and Erica, his second wife, became Quakers and were appointed Quaker International Affairs Representatives for South Asia, based in New Delhi. A later stint as Quaker International Affairs Representative followed service as an Oxfam volunteer in Bihar and then research at the Gandhian Institute of Studies in Benares (now Varanasi) into Indo-Pakistan relations.

Inspired by his Indian experience of meetings in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians worshipped together in Quaker silence, John was convinced that no one religion had a monopoly of truth. His 1977 lecture 'Quakerism as Forerunner' led to the foundation in 1978 of the Quaker Universalist Group (www.qug.org.uk), with its journal 'the Universalist', relevant pamphlets, local groups and annual 'leading edge' conferences.

For some British Quakers, the movement affirmed their own convictions, while other Quakers were concerned at what they saw as a departure from the Christian roots of the Religious Society of Friends. During the 1980s, both Universalist and 'Christocentric' Friends articulated their divergent understandings in the pages of *The Friend*.

Thinking that it was not right for him to belong to a Religious Society which professed to be Christian, in 1985 John resigned from Friends for a number of years. During that period he attended Unitarian services in Oxford. He rejoined Quakers in 2002.

John spoke on Universalism not only in the UK but also in the USA. This led to the foundation of the thriving US Quaker Universalist Fellowship (www.universalistfriends.org) with digital outreach, publications, lectures and conferences.

John was active in retirement, supporting the United Nations Association. In later life, the award of which John was most proud was his honorary life membership of UNA. He remained to the end keenly interested in everything to do with the United Nations, and was convinced that the world needed UN and not US world hegemony. He also supported Ex-Services CND. A friend summed up John's stance as 'a principled supporter of CND, Anti-Apartheid, a strong anti-war protester and a committed Quaker.'

Poetry played an important part in John's life. His love of western classical music was recognised at his Memorial Service by the playing, at his request, of a Bach Partita.

John is warmly remembered for his wide-ranging friendships and for his generous support for many younger friends. Till frailty prevented his travelling far from home, he also delighted in seeing his many friends and visiting India and other countries. One particularly memorable visit was to San Francisco (USA), where the UN charter was signed in 1945. Until his last months, John wrote encouraging letters to his friends worldwide. He cherished his extended family. Ruth Barker, his partner of over 20 years, and his nephews, Peter Linton and Martin Linton, survive him.

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