



# Quaker Scouts and Remembrance Day

## Advice & Queries

### Friends Committee on Scouting

## Introduction

Throughout the world, *Scouts* are often called upon to participate in local and national observances for Remembrance Day, as it is known in the Commonwealth, Veterans' Day or Memorial Day, in the USA, or ANZAC day, in Australia and New Zealand, or other similar events. Scouts might join a parade, carry flags, offer readings, or lay wreaths at such ceremonies. In many places, it is common to wear an artificial red poppy as an act of remembrance.

These ceremonies may present a quandary to some Quaker *Scouts* who may wish to avoid such ceremonies, given our peace testimony, and may have concerns that these ceremonies glorify war and past military deeds.

This document has been prepared by [Friends Committee on Scouting](#) to assist Quaker *Scouts* in making an individual decision to participate in such ceremonies.

## Our Peace Testimony

Our peace testimony, as Friends, is well-known and long established. In 1660, George Fox and others declared to King Charles II of England that: "...we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings [sic] with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world."

Friends often frame their understanding of our peace testimony with these oft-quoted words.

Yearly Meetings around the world also encapsulate the peace testimony in their respective Advices & Queries. As an example, Britain Yearly Meeting's query on the subject is as follows:

*31. We are called to live 'in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.' Do you faithfully maintain our testimony that war and the preparation for war are inconsistent with the spirit of Christ? Search out whatever in your own way of life may contain the seeds of war. Stand firm in our testimony, even when others commit or prepare to commit acts of violence, yet always remember that they too are children of God.*

This query makes an important note: we do not condemn those who take up arms in conflict. Instead, we are reminded that "they too are children of God" and are worthy of our compassion and our love even if we disagree with them.

We must also recognise the diversity of opinion amongst Friends on our peace testimony. Some Friends take an absolutist view on the subject and will not participate in any way in war or the preparation of war and may even refuse to pay the percentage of their income taxes that go to support the military in their country. Other Friends take a more contextual view. In the past, some Friends chose to fight in the

American Civil War and both World Wars while other Friends responded to these crises by focusing on reconstruction work during or after a war or serving, during World War II, in the Friends Ambulance Unit.

## Scouting and Peace

The founder of the worldwide Scouting and Guiding Movements, Robert Baden-Powell, was a soldier but, after leaving the British Army, and founding the worldwide Scouting & Guiding Movement, and having experienced the horrors of modern war, became convinced that Scouting and Guiding could be a positive force for peace in the world by bringing the world's children together in fellowship.

In Baden-Powell's last message to Scouters and Guiders, released following his death in 1941, he wrote:

*[Scouting/Guiding's] aim is to produce healthy, happy, helpful citizens, of both sexes, to eradicate the prevailing narrow self-interest; personal, political, sectarian and national, and to substitute for it a broader spirit of self-sacrifice and service in the cause of humanity; and thus to develop mutual goodwill and cooperation not only within our own country but abroad, between all countries. Experience shows that this consummation is no idle or fantastic dream, but is a practicable possibility – if we work for it; and it means, when attained, peace, prosperity and happiness for all.*

He was deeply shocked by what he experienced during World War I and later wrote in *Rovering to Success* (1922) that, "...there is something wicked and profane about war."

We recommend *Scouting and Peace*, published by the World Organisation of the Scouting Movement, and downloadable from its website, for a fulsome discussion of Baden-Powell's view on war and violence and Scouting and Guiding's efforts to build a lasting global peace.

## Suggested Advices & Queries

If you, as a Quaker Scout, are called in participate in a Remembrance Day (or similar) ceremony and you are unsure of whether you should participate, here are some queries to consider:

### Integrity

It is not always easy to live our testimonies as Friends. Throughout our history, we have often taken, as a religious society, unpopular positions and faced burdensome consequences as a result of those positions.

Prayerfully consider your beliefs when asked to participate in Remembrance Day activities. Consider also your Yearly Meeting's Advices & Queries on integrity. As an example, here is Britain Yearly Meeting's query on the subject:

*38. If pressure is brought upon you to lower your standard of integrity, are you prepared to resist it? Our responsibilities to God and our neighbour may involve us in taking unpopular stands. Do not let the desire to be sociable, or the fear of seeming peculiar, determine your decisions.*

### Peace Testimony

Consider the 1660 Declaration of George Fox and others along with your Yearly Meeting's Advices & Queries on the subject.

- How do you understand our peace testimony?
- Do you believe it to be absolute or are there occasions where war may be justified?
- If a particular war or conflict is justified, in your view, would you participate? How?
- Have you carefully considered the consequences of our peace testimony and how you would respond in a time of war?
- What have you done to live our peace testimony in your daily life?

### Remembrance Day Ceremonies

Learn about the event in which you are being asked to participate:

- Will it glorify past military events?
- Will it be a solemn act of remembrance of loss and suffering?
- Will its central message be “never again”?
- Will it motivate people to work to prevent war?

Learn more about what you are being asked to do at the event:

- Is it a religious or secular event? You may feel uncomfortable being asked to read a prayer at a religious event if you are a Friend in the unprogrammed tradition.
- Participating in a parade with military personnel or carrying a flag at such an event could be interpreted as glorification of war or past military deeds. Do you agree?
- Laying a wreath at a cenotaph is usually understood to be an act of mourning and not an act of glorification. Do you agree?

### Wearing a Poppy

Particularly in the Commonwealth, it is customary, in the weeks before Remembrance Day, to wear a red poppy as an act of remembrance of those who have died. Quaker *Scouts* may be asked or expected to wear a red poppy on their uniform.

Some Quakers choose to wear a white poppy as an alternate to the red poppy, to mourn all those who have died or suffered as a result of war and as a public commitment to peace and nonviolent conflict resolution. Other Quakers choose to wear both a red and white poppy. On the other hand, some people consider the wearing of a white poppy to be an insult and/or an overt political message.

- What does the red poppy mean to you? Traditionally, it is considered an act of remembrance and mourning for Allied combatants who fought and died in war. Given our peace testimony, is it appropriate to wear a red poppy? Alternatively, if we are called to remember that such combatants are also ‘children of God’ should we not mourn the loss of their lives?
- Some opposed to the white poppy argue that, by mourning all those who have died as a result of conflict, we are necessarily mourning those not worthy of commemoration such as war criminals. Does it? Should it?
- One of the fundamental principles of Scouting/Guiding is that it is strictly non-political and *Scouts* should not make political statements while in uniform. If some people view the wearing of a white poppy to be a political statement (rather than an act of mourning) should you wear a white poppy on your uniform given Scouting/Guiding’s political neutrality?
- Does wearing both a red poppy and a white poppy satisfy these concerns?

- You may choose to wear only a white poppy. If so, have you considered how you may respond if challenged for wearing only a white poppy? Remember to avoid provocative language and unnecessary criticism in any response to confrontation.
- Revenue from the sale of red poppies often supports veterans' physical and mental health rehabilitation but may also be used for community events, cadet corps, and other activities. Consider investigating where the revenue goes from the sale of red poppies. Are you comfortable with your donated funds being used for other purposes beyond rehabilitation?

## Terminology

In this document,

- "Remembrance Day," refers collectively to Remembrance Day in the Commonwealth, Veterans' Day and Memorial Day in the USA, ANZAC Day in Australian and New Zealand and or any other similar ceremony around the world.
- The term "*Scout*" when italicised refers collectively to any youth or adult member of a national Scouting or Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting organisation.

## Acknowledgements

In preparing this guidance for Quaker *Scouts*, we wish to acknowledge the pamphlet called "Remembrance: Should Quaker's Take Part" which has been prepared by the Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee of Britain Yearly Meeting. This pamphlet may be downloaded from the committee's webpage.

## Contact

Are you a Quaker *Scout* struggling with the issues raised in this document or have questions or concerns? Friends Committee on Scouting is here to assist. You can reach the committee in care of the contact details on the FCS website which can be found here: <https://www.quakerscouting.org>.