

Conscientious Objectors

Beatrice Cadbury and Kees Boeke

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Beatrice Cadbury, the youngest child of Richard and Emma Jane Cadbury was born at Moseley Hall in 1884 and lived there until she was 7, when the family moved to the newly built Uffculme on Queensbridge Road. She spent 4 years attending the Fröbel kindergarten, a child centred, experimental school which focused on learning through play. At the age of 11 she began her formal education at Edgbaston High School for Girls, later spending two years as a boarder at The Mount School, a Quaker school in York. She attended Westfield College, London from 1903-1905.

Her idyllic childhood also included many holidays abroad with the family including a tour of Egypt and Israel and Syria when she was 13, staying for a time with Richard's cousin Caroline Cadbury in Brummana, Syria, at the Friends Mission Station. Unfortunately a second trip to Egypt in 1899 would prove fatal for Richard who contracted diphtheria and subsequently suffered a heart-attack. However opportunities for travel continued, including a world tour in 1906 for Beatrice and Emma Jane en route to visit another Cadbury daughter, Daisy and her husband who were missionaries in China for the Friends Foreign Missionary Association (FFMA). Luck while travelling didn't seem to be the Cadbury's side, as Emma Jane fell downstairs on a ship to Canada. She never regained consciousness and died on the 21st May 1907.



Photo of Beatrice Cadbury as a child¹

Beatrice then moved in with her sister Helen and Helen's husband Charles in their home Tennessee in the grounds of Uffculme, as Barrow (Beatrice's eldest brother) who had inherited the Uffculme estate turned the main house into an Adult Education Centre in memory of their father. Charles was an evangelical preacher whose work took him around the world, and so further opportunities for travel presented themselves, instilling Beatrice with a desire to do mission work of her own. She joined the FFMA and served on the Candidate Committee, the group responsible for appointing missionaries. The FFMA worked in China, India, Madagascar and Syria. Having travelled in Syria she agreed to also serve on the Syria Committee. In 1910 the Candidate Committee met to select a Head teacher for the Boy's School in Brummana. One of the candidates was Cornelius Boeke.



Uffculme – home of Richard Cadbury²

Cornellius Boeke, known as Kees (pronounced Case), was from Alkmaar in Northern Holland. He was 26 and a post-graduate student of engineering at Delft University, but had been studying at the University of London. He was recommended for the post by Henry Hodgkin, chair of the Student Christian Movement Conference and FFMA. Kees was the youngest child of a large family on Mennonites and the son of a secondary school teacher.

1. Photo source: <http://www.tricia-blackbooknews.com/2011/10/interview-with-fiona-joseph.html>

2. Photo from *Charles M Alexander; A Romance of Song and Soul Winning* by Helen Cadbury Alexander

He had decided he did not want to be an engineer because he felt called to do mission work, especially in education, and was very interested in the work of the Society of Friends. Kees was given the job and began a year's training, some of which was at Kingsmeade, and some at Woodbrooke in Selly Oak. Beatrice remained involved with Kees and his fellow Brummana trainee Christofer Naish, by inviting them to a study group at Kingsmeade.

Their courtship began when Kees wrote to Beatrice asking her to pray for him because he was nervous about speaking at a conference and an attraction blossomed based on their common beliefs and ideals. For Beatrice it was truly a meeting of minds. On July 19th 1911, after only 6 weeks they became officially engaged. Although some of the family were not happy with the speed of the courtship, Helen and Charles were supportive. In September Kees went out to Brummana to get acquainted with the school and the Arabic language, before returning in December to marry Beatrice on the 19th after exactly 5 months of engagement.

The journey back to Syria was taken at a leisurely pace to include a trip to Kees' mother in Alkmaar and also stops in Paris, Marseilles, Cairo and Beirut. They enjoyed life in Brummana, the boys at the school were well behaved and although simply the living conditions and cuisine agreed with Beatrice. Tackling 'the evils that characterise village life' was more difficult, despite their progress with learning Arabic. In November 1912, their first child, a daughter they named Helen was born, but soon afterwards Beatrice was struck down by Typhoid, and was severely ill for some time. Whilst the couple were away in England and Holland recuperating, another headmaster was appointed for the school. When they returned in 1913, Kees was instead given the job of inspecting day schools, traveling by donkey to different villages. Integrating with the locals was more difficult but their effort in learning the language paid off as Kees was able to give addresses in Arabic at meetings. In 1914 while arranging to return to the school at Brummana, their plans were shattered by the outbreak of war. Although Beatrice was now Dutch by marriage and Holland was neutral in the war, they were persuaded by the British consulate that as they worked for an English Missionary society it would be better for their Arab friends not to be associated with English people. Sadly they returned to England, expecting the war to be over soon so they could return to Syria, this time with two children, as Beatrice was now pregnant for the second time.

1914-1916

Significantly, as when the boat arrived at Southampton, their Dutch papers were under suspicion and they were ordered to stay on the boat until London to receive their official paperwork. After this they remained largely untouched by the war during 1914, as they lived at Tennessee and prepared for the birth of a second child. However as Quakers, Beatrice and Kees would have to decide their stance towards the war. In 1915 they joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an organisation where different Christian denominations banded together to oppose the war on religious grounds. Their activities included press campaigns, pamphleteering and street preaching. Henry Hodgkin was a key member, and Kees became the secretary of the Birmingham branch. The FOR opposed Conscription and worked with the No-Conscription Fellowship to support Conscientious Objectors.



Photo of Tennessee, the home of Helen and Charles 'in winter dress'³



Lawrence Cadbury in the FAU⁴

The Cadbury family were somewhat divided in their views on the war – with some joining the military or working towards the war effort and others taking a compromise position like Lawrence who joined the Friends Ambulance Unit, but for Kees and Beatrice, their position was an Absolutist one. Kees decided to take a more active role in peace campaigning and in July 1915 he travelled to Germany at the request of the FOR to meet with German anti-war campaigners. With Holland remaining neutral in the war, Kees was ideally placed for travel across Europe and hoped to enter Germany without being interrogated.

While Kees was away Beatrice was questioned by a policeman – his letters from Holland had been opened and the authorities wanted to know the exact nature of his trip. Beatrice proudly told the policeman that her husband was “carrying out peace work in Europe”. When

Kees returned in September, he was elated to have met with prominent peace campaigners such as Elizabeth Rotten, a Swiss Quaker who was helping prisoners in Germany, Eduard Bernstein the socialist and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze who was a friend of Henry Hodgkin’s. He had been able to get papers allowing travel to Germany by getting a separate Dutch passport which didn’t show his travel from England, but had almost been stopped from re-entering England. Fortunately his policy of honesty with the customs official, admitting that he’d travelled around Germany using a Dutch passport was successful and he was allowed to return to his family.

Kees’s troubles began in 1916 when he was asked to resign from the private school Woodruffs where he had been teaching since October 1915. During scripture lessons he told the boys that ‘the Germans are our brothers’ and quoted biblical passages including ‘Love your enemies’. Several parents feared their children were being taught German propaganda! Beatrice was angry at the way he was treated, but both agreed that they were now free to throw themselves into work with the FOR.

The time had also come when Beatrice felt that living in luxury at Tennessee was wrong – it did not balance well with the horrors which European civilians were enduring, and the hardships their Syrian friends must be facing as American missionaries were forbidden to carry out relief work. Beatrice may also have worried that their forceful stance towards the war would reflect badly on the Cadbury family and her sister’s household.

Kees and Beatrice moved into 52 Anderton Park Road in Moseley. It was a modest house by their standards, without fine furniture and servants, but the couple’s friend Eveline Fletcher would be moving in with them and so be on hand to help with the children. Eveline’s husband Ernest was a Photographer, and both had a strong Church of England faith which would not allow them to support the war. Ernest was currently serving a sentence in Portland Prison as a conscientious objector and so was relieved to hear his wife was being taken into the Boeke household. At this time Kees was regularly preaching outside a munitions factory and Beatrice was involved with the Friend’s War Victims Committee, giving support to the families of ‘enemy aliens’; German, Austrian and Hungarian men living in England at the outbreak of war, who were interred in camps to prevent them being a danger to the state.

In December 1916, Kees was preaching as usual when unnoticed by him two special constables began to observe and write down his speeches in their notebooks. As usual a crowd had gathered to listen to him, he was a compelling orator, he told them “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you!” “The Germans are our brothers. Let soldiers throw down their arms and refuse to fight and join in the brotherhood of man.” Most of the crowd was enthusiastic, and there were cheers of support, but a drunken soldier accused Kees of being a traitor. The special constables intervened and stopped the speech on the grounds that it was ‘becoming disorderly’ and Kees was moved on.

4. Photo source: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/15/cadbury-brothers-first-world-war>

1917-1918

However he continued preaching in the streets, whilst Beatrice, who was now pregnant with their fourth child, would hand out leaflets to the crowds. She remarked to the children that “It speaks much for English freedom of speech that Daddy is able to speak at street corners and in squares without being officially forbidden”. Their anti-war work continued to grow in boldness. In January 1918 they were sent on behalf of the FOR to mobilise the pacifist movement growing in Welsh mining communities. The family moved to Neath and Kees spoke at many church and chapel meetings, but the reception was not what they might have hoped for. The Welsh sometimes mistook his accent for German and he was arrested under a local bye-law for causing an obstruction, being sent to Swansea prison when he refused to pay the fine. However a search revealed sufficient money on his person to pay the fine and he was released.

The press in Birmingham got hold of the story and goaded the police by saying “How is it that this young Dutchman is left free to undermine military authority and public morale? We answer by publishing a certificate of his marriage” implying that Kees' connection to the Cadbury elite kept him out of trouble. This was not the case, in February 1918 he was summoned to stand trial for offences against the new DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) at Birmingham Law Courts. The charge was that in a public square he had made statements ‘likely to interfere with the success of His Majesty’s forces and prejudice their recruiting and discipline’. The prosecutor argued that Kees's statements – especially the call for soldiers to lay down arms, made him an insurrectionary force and therefore he posed a threat to the country’s stability. The magistrate, Lord Ilkeston, was not likely to listen to Kees's philosophical arguments, that his statements were in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ and thus he was only breaking the law to “fulfil a higher law”. Kees was ordered to pay a £50 fine or face 41 days imprisonment, as was expected Kees would not, on principal, pay the fine and so was sentenced to serve out the term at Winston Green Prison. This was not unexpected and it could even be said that Beatrice and Kees had an overly romantic vision of the nobility of confinement. However no-one expected Lord Ilkeston’s next move –he recommended that Kees Boeke be deported back to Holland. Although Kees himself remained calm, the reaction from their friends on the FOR was one of shock and disbelief –causing Lord Ilkeston to order the immediate clearance of the courtroom.

Although support for Kees continued after the trial, with members of the FOR writing to the home office and a supportive article in *The New Crusader* a Christian Socialist magazine, it made precious little difference. In April 1918 a Deportation Order was issued and Kees was transferred from Winston Green to Wormwood Scrubs to await deportation. Here he discovered that he was actually suspected of being a German spy. Beatrice struggled to make plans whilst Kees was in London and their only contact was through fortnightly letters on prison paper. The date for deportation was kept secret, perhaps to foil a publicity campaign. This meant that Beatrice travelled to London on April 9th only to find her husband had been deported the previous day! Despite fears about the danger of a channel crossing he arrived safely at his mother’s house in Alkmaar. However it would be months before the rest of the family could join him. They were finally granted permission to travel with a camouflaged convoy in July 1918 and they could undertake their own perilous journey across the channel. They survived without serious incident, although the children were seasick, to be reunited in Alkmaar. After a blissful summer of reunion they began to look for a house of their own and settled in Bilthoven, outside Utrecht. Their villa was known as *Het Boschhuis* – ‘the house in woods’ and it was an idyllic location in which to raise the children, but also the large house was the perfect place to continue their peace work. They had begun to settle in well when on Helen’s 6th birthday on the 11th November 1918, armistice was signed and the war finally ended.

After the war

The joy which the ceasefire should have brought was somewhat marred by Kees once more getting himself into trouble with the authorities. In the evening of the 11th, Kees cycled to Vreeburg Square in Utrecht and began to preach for the first time in Holland. He was promptly arrested (although later released without charge) because outdoor meetings were illegal in Holland, without prior permission from the Mayor, and Kees was not in possession of the proper license. This was an early indication that the authorities in Holland would prove to be even less forgiving than those in England.

The joyful mood of the time could not be dented for long though – this was an era of idealism, with many working hard to ensure a conflict on the scale of ‘The Great War’ could never happen again. Kees, Beatrice and their friends Ernest and Eveline Fletcher (who relocated to Bilthoven after the war) worked with Henry Hodgkin of the FOR to bring together pacifists from across Europe, for a conference at *Het Boschhuis* in October 1919. There were 35 delegates – both men and women, from 10 countries. These delegates included Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze (realising Kees’s dream of bringing him and Henry Hodgkin together) and many others including Pierre Ceresole from Switzerland, whose staunch pacifism included refusing to pay tax in protest at government spending on arms. He had also given away a large part of his inherited wealth. His views would go on to have a powerful effect on the Boeke’s. The delegates had come together in friendship to share their belief that war and Christianity were incompatible, they formed the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and parted joyfully with plans for another conference in the following year.



An international meeting at Het Boschhuis⁵

Kees and Beatrice were even more determined than before and after a few months of pamphlet making and speech writing, they took to the streets once more to spread their message, despite their applications for permits being rejected. The Armistice Day incident had given some indication of the likely consequences, but no-one was prepared for the outcome. Once Kees began to speak, himself, Beatrice and Ernest who had accompanied them were all quickly arrested and fined for preaching without a permit. The real trouble began when they refused to pay their fines – after all they believed they had done nothing wrong, and so were ordered to appear in court the following week. All three were given prison sentences – Kees and Ernest for three weeks, and Beatrice for two weeks. This was a complete shock to all because at that time Beatrice was 8 months pregnant!

The jail sentence was borne by all with as much patience as possible, but it was especially hard for Beatrice who suffered from claustrophobia in her cell alone at night and could not bend down to the grate which provided the only source of fresh air. Thankfully her baby did not arrive early, and Candia (her fifth child) was born on the 6th May 1920, 8 days after Kees was released from prison. When the news of her incarceration reached Birmingham, the Cadbury family were dreadfully worried. Little did they know that this was the start of a much more radical period for the Boeke family.

Despite using her wealth for many good causes – including the building of a new conference centre next to *Het Boschhuis* and the printing of all their pamphlets, Beatrice felt increasingly guilty about her wealth. She would go on to decide to gift her shares in Cadbury to the workers – giving workers power to affect company policy and money to spend as they saw fit on advancing the cause of peace. They would also stop paying taxes, give up using money and instigate an open-door policy in their home. The circumstances surrounding these momentous decisions are detailed in Fiona Joseph's book, *Beatrice: The Cadbury Heiress Who Gave Away Her Fortune*, which also goes on to describe the Boeke's eventual decision to start a school. Kees Boeke became well known in Holland as an educator and founder of The 'Werkplaats' School (The Workplace or Workshop). Several works about the school were published in Dutch.

The impact which The Great War (and later the Second World War) had on the ideals of both Beatrice and Kees Boeke, remained central to their unending commitment to creating a better society, where Christian values would ensure that conflict was unthinkable. Their legacy is ensured as 'two of the most original and exceptional educators of the twentieth century, in Holland and around the world' (Joseph 2012; 235).



Kees Boeke and Betty Cadbury⁶

Have you enjoyed this article?
Would you like to know more about KeesBoeke and Beatrice Cadbury?
A copy of Fiona Joseph's book
Beatrice: The Cadbury Heiress Who Gave Away Her Fortune
is available to read as part of The Collection held by Moseley Society Local History Group.

6. Photo Source: www.sociocracy.info/about-sociocracy/first-implementation/