

**The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd
Director's Biography**

Prepared Jun 2005 to celebrate the Trust's Centenary

Joseph Stephenson Rowntree (1875-1951) Director 1904-1920



Joseph Stephenson Rowntree was a business man and a Quaker. His working life was spent at the cocoa works, and his spare time was devoted to Quaker committees and local Liberal politics.

Known as Stephen, he was the third son of Joseph and Anotoinette. On Stephen's birth certificate his father declared himself as a 'cocoa manufacturer', whilst on those of his older brothers he still described himself as a 'Master Grocer'.

By the time of Stephen's birth, Joseph, clearly felt himself settled into the cocoa business with his brother, Henry Isaac – but it was still a small operation, and his household accounts show that money was tight. Factory records show that trade was difficult during Stephen's early childhood.

Even as Stephen grew older and the business prospered, theirs was very much a Quaker household with a lack of luxury and ostentation. But Stephen was surrounded by books and could hardly help but absorb the intellectual interests and political and social concerns of his father and older brothers.

Like his two older brothers, John Wilhelm and Benjamin Seebohm, Stephen started his education under a governess in the family school room. He then followed in his father and brother's footsteps, attending the Quaker school Bootham, close to the family home in York. He was the first in the family to go to Cambridge – a conventional step for a member of the upper middle classes in the Edwardian period, but a departure for Quakers who had until recently been debarred from entering the old universities on religious grounds.

From Cambridge, Stephen went to work at the Cocoa works; and in 1905 he joined the board, remaining a director until around 1936. He was very involved with the Village Trust, as a board member and, later chairman, from 1904 until his death in 1951.

Stephen's obit in *The Friend* mentioned his talent as a "committee friend". He was on Finance Committee, Literature and Book Committee, The Northern Friends Peace Board and the Yorkshire Friends' Service Committee – to name a few. His work on the last of these was particularly important since it was set up to pursue the ideas of his oldest brother, John Wilhelm who died in 1905. Stephen also wrote and published Quaker pamphlets such as "What the Quakers Stand For" and "Silence as a basis for Worship".

His other sphere of interest was local politics; he was mayor of Harrogate from 1911-13. The notice of his death in the *Harrogate Advertiser* plays curious tribute to his part in the introduction of cocked hats as ceremonial attire. Perhaps more interesting was his role in the acquisition of the Harlow Car Estate which is now the northern home to the Royal Horticultural Society.