

Future prehistoric black line art

Your Meeting's Records: a handbook for clerks and custodians of records, 2nd edition, ed. Library Committee of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, Quaker Books, London 2004, 34 pages plus appendices, ISBN 0-85245-363-9, £8.00

It is the year 2352. Recki, aged nine, is running full of excitement to the tent of his community's wise woman, Eklesa Yasta. "Look what I've found!", he says and hands her over a strange object, consisting of sheets of withered wooden fabric with a multitude of strangely looking black lines on them. "Oh, this is truly amazing", says Eklesa, "I've never seen one of these in such good condition." – "What is it? Please tell me." – "It is an artefact from the people who lived in the time before the Great Darkness. They must have spent most of their lives in creating these sheets of wooden fabric and then covering them with many mysterious black lines. I suppose it is some weird kind of art." – "It looks very boring to me.", says Recki. "This cannot be art. There are no people, no animals, no trees, not even rocks." – "Yes, you're right. This kind of art is completely vain. And it is for this vanity that Mother Earth has punished these prehistoric tribes and brought the Great Darkness upon them, so that they were reminded of the more important things in life: eating, drinking, and making children."

Eklesa Yasta was known as a wise woman, but she could not read or write. If she had ever acquired such skills, she would have noticed that she held a handbook for Quaker records in her hands. Yet for her, it was but another meaningless piece of mysterious prehistoric black line art.

Both Eklesa Yasta and the little boy Recki were descendants of few survivors from the super-volcanic eruption that hit the Earth in 2117 and resulted in several years of darkness and a severe global cooling. Reading and writing were, for obvious reasons, not a high priority in the education the first survivors of the global disaster gave their children. And so it came that these skills completely vanished within a few decades.

The last owner of the handbook who was still able to appreciate its contents was one Archibald Binder. He did not live for long after the super-volcanic eruption, for he wasted the final 47 days of his life on vain attempts to bring his 4D Windows computer back to life. His desperate attempts to resuscitate technology were, however, fully understandable. After all, on that fateful day that sent clouds of ash around the globe, Archibald was only a fortnight away from submitting his PhD thesis on the topic of 'Consistency in a changing environment: Recommended Quaker record management practices under the challenge of early computerisation 1986-2004.' – The handbook was one of his most important primary sources, and, unlike his computer, survived for a long time, due to its heavyweight good quality paper that must have caused concern among environmentalist Quakers in its days.

Little is known about the handbook's original owner. His surname was Dante, his initial P, and he or she belonged to a local Quaker Meeting that – is it coincidence? – was one of the last that transcribed their minutes into magnificently bound books of best archival quality paper, hand-written in a way that any professional calligrapher would have been proud of. Fortunately P. Dante died too early to realize that these minute books, along with the entire Meeting's library, would one day be burnt by ignorant survivors of the catastrophe for the simple matter of keeping themselves warm in the face of the disaster driven global cooling.

"All this is vanity.", says Eklesa Yasta. "But I shall add this object to my collection and pass it on to our descendants. Who knows," she contemplates, "one day these strange lines might make sense to someone."

Charlie Blackfield