

Rowntree's Writings

Seeböhm Rowntree died over 60 years ago, at his home in Hughenden Manor – ironically, given his Liberal and Quaker leanings – at the former home of Benjamin Disraeli. Though a shadowy figure in modern British history, by his work in linking Poverty, Social Policy, and Business Efficiency, and working at the heart of government through two World Wars, Rowntree has come to be regarded as one of the major pioneers in the shaping of modern Britain.

Little is known about Seeböhm the man, as he famously burnt his papers shortly before his move to Buckinghamshire. But the titles of his works are a sure sign of the continued relevance of many of the social questions still being debated today.

The Rowntree Company and the Philanthropic Trusts

Seeböhm's father Joseph built up his wealth by developing gums and pastilles. Chocolate drinks were promoted by Quakers as an alternative drink to alcohol for the working man. The rapid growth of the company led to the building of ultra-modern new factory premises, as well as a garden village in response to Seeböhm's work on Poverty in York. In 1904 Joseph put half of his wealth into three philanthropic trusts with the aim of creating a fair, equal and democratic society.

Benjamin Seeböhm Rowntree (1871-1954)

Quaker scion of the Rowntree confectionery company in York. Innovator in business management, champion of the poor, unemployed, homeless, and old people. Key architect of the welfare state, industrial democracy, and scientific management.

Rowntree and Poverty Studies

Poverty, a Study of Town Life became a classic text in the emerging field of sociology. From his research Rowntree was able to develop and define the notion of the Poverty Line, and determine how much a family needed to earn to live above that line.

Rowntree and his workers' welfare

Rowntree introduced a range of pioneering welfare benefits for the Rowntree & Co workforce, such as a works dentist, retirement pension, widow's benefit, and a central works council – all putting into practice what he outlined in his famous works *The Human Needs of Labour* and *The Human Factor in Business*.

Rowntree and Lloyd George

Rowntree was an intimate of Prime Minister Lloyd George. He served as director of the welfare department of the Ministry of Munitions, and in the national post-war Reconstruction Committee. Their strong relationship culminated in their joint authorship of the pamphlet, *How to Tackle Unemployment*, 1930.

Rowntree calls for a Fair Wage

A letter written in Downing Street in 1916 shows Rowntree's involvement in a debate, first begun by the Fabians in the 1890s, calling for a national minimum wage.

Rowntree and Four Women

Lady Florence Bell wrote *At the Works* in 1907, a study of working-class industrial life in Middlesbrough in the tradition of Charles Booth and Seeböhm Rowntree.

Beatrice Webb said of Rowntree that he was “an invaluable individual...eager to spend his time and money in working up special subjects...[but] too modest and hesitating in opinion to lead a committee.”

Nancy Astor, an American and the first woman to sit as an MP in the House of Commons, was a friend of Rowntree's and visited him in his home in York in 1920.

Mary Follett, another American and “the Mother of Modern Management”. Rowntree said of her that “she realised that the principles which should determine an organisation are identical, no matter what the purpose which the organisation is designed to serve.”