

## THE QUAKERS OF COUNTERSETT AND THEIR LECACY

Ella Pontefract, in her enchanting account of Wensleydale in North Yorkshire, describes how its river, the Ure, begins as a tumbling stream among the Pennine uplands that adjoin the Westmorland border. At first the valley follows a narrow line of cultivation, and the moor creeps down all round it: "as if it would snatch it back to itself".<sup>1</sup> Then, as it widens, the river winds its way through the green meadows and pastures of the upper dale. Further down the valley, it plunges tumultuously over the falls at Aysgarth and then moves on more placidly to the fertile lands of the Vale of York.

The valley has always been socially divided. The lower dale, feudal to this day, is the preserve of landowners, some noble, others wealthy gentry, whose extensive possessions are held by leasehold farmers paying rent to their landlords. The upper dale is different. There, the steep hillsides in many tributary dales do not make for easy farming. The land, much of which belonged to the Abbey of Jervaulx, was sold off after the dissolution of the monasteries and during the seventeenth century individual yeoman farmers were able to buy their own freehold. These men, descendants of the Norsemen who colonised those upper dales before the Normans came, were individualists. The names of their villages and their dialect recall to this day the old Norse speech. They have always retained a sturdy independence and they do not tip their caps to the gentry. Many of their solidly built stone farmhouses, often with a seventeenth century datestone, remain to reflect the rugged personalities of their builders.

Raydale is one of those tributary valleys that are so much a feature of upper Wensleydale. From the small but lovely lake, Semerwater, the river Bain flows down to Bainbridge where it joins the river Ure. High above the lake is the small village of Countersett, a huddle of ancient buildings that seem to hide themselves in a hollow beside the road from Bainbridge. The *sett* ending is derived from the Norse word *setr*, a shieling, indicating that the village was a summer pasture for the original Norse settlers, as were the nearby villages of Marsett at the head of Raydale and Burtersett just over the hill in Wensleydale. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Countersett Hall, the home of Richard Robinson, became effectively the Manor House of the village. Richard Robinson, not to be confused with George Fox's friend of the same name from Briggflatts, came from a

family long established in Wensleydale. Born in 1628 at Preston under Scar, he was baptised in Wensley Church but after his marriage to his wife Margaret, moved to Countersett, placing a stone above the door of the porch at his home with the initials R R M 1650. At that time he was a tenant of the City of London who owned the land. Soon afterwards, with several neighbours, he was able to purchase his own freehold. He was to live there until his death in 1693, raising a family of six sons and three daughters.<sup>2</sup>

During the Civil War and the Commonwealth that followed, there were many, dissatisfied with the Established Church, who sought the Lord in different ways. The Baptists, for example, gained many adherents around the campfires of Cromwell's army. It is not surprising that an independent-minded dalesman such as Richard Robinson should find no true satisfaction in the current teachings of priests and professors. After much heart-searching, he was drawn to Thomas Taylor, a dissenting minister from Carleton in Craven who was leading a party of separatist "Seekers" at Preston Patrick in Westmorland. At the same time, rumours of the remarkable preaching of George Fox were widespread. In May 1652, George Fox made his first journey through Wensleydale, writing in his journal that he "passt up ye dales, warning people to fear God & declaring his truth to ym .... And some was convinced & stands to this day..."<sup>3</sup> But he did not stop at Countersett, nor did Richard Robinson meet him then. As is well known, George Fox went on to Sedbergh, Briggflatts and the country beyond where at Firbank Fell he gathered together a large company of "Seekers", "The Children of the Light", who were to be the first Friends. Hearing of these developments, Richard Robinson at once set off for Westmorland and it seems that it was his Friend Thomas Taylor who convinced him that George Fox's teaching opened the way to true salvation. He soon returned to Countersett where his home was to become the principal Meeting Place of Friends in the dales and a resort for travelling preachers. He himself was to travel widely, often with Richard Hubberthorne, close friend of George Fox. They were frequently abused, but at the same time met with considerable success. Both were to be immortalised among the "Valiant Sixty".<sup>4</sup> Like so many others, they suffered from persistent persecution, Richard Robinson being repeatedly imprisoned for prolonged periods. It was in 1672, in prison in Richmond, that he wrote *A Blast out of the North and Echoing to the South To meet the Cry of their Oppressed Brethern*<sup>5</sup>, an account of the appalling sufferings of Quakers in and around the northern dales. It was published in 1680. As David Hall has pointed out, Richard

Robinson was the first Quaker in Wensleydale.<sup>6</sup>

George Fox did eventually make a visit to Countersett. In April 1677, travelling from Swarthmoor Hall, he and his companions passed through Garsdale to Hawes in Wensleydale and on to "Countersyde".<sup>7</sup> Tradition holds that Fox slept at Richard Robinsons, in a room over the porch at Countersett Hall.

It was undoubtedly through the influence of Richard Robinson and his friends that so many became Quakers in upper Wensleydale. At the same time, Richard's extensive travels in Yorkshire and throughout the land, sometimes taking him as far as London, helped to spread George Fox's teaching far and wide. When he died in 1693, his children and close family drew up the testimonies from which the account of his life in *The First Publishers of Truth* is taken.<sup>8</sup>

In 1710, some years after Richard's death, a Meeting House was built at Countersett to provide for the many Quaker families who had for nearly sixty years attended Meeting at Countersett Hall. They included the Fothergills who lived at Carr End, a farmhouse at the head of Semerwater, with sweeping views across the lake. Like Countersett Hall, Carr End was used for meetings of the early Quakers in Wensleydale. The Hillarys, linked by marriage to the Robinsons, came from Birkrigg in upper Wensleydale in 1699 to live at nearby Burtersett. The Harrisons were tenants of New Close House, later the Boar Inn in Countersett, which belonged to the Robinsons. Bartholomew and Isabel Harrison put a datestone on the house in 1667, with their initials and a Latin inscription:

NUNC MEA  
MOX HVIUS  
SED POST EA  
NESCIO CVIVS<sup>9</sup>

Later Harrisons were to live in Countersett Hall during the concluding years of the eighteenth century, before they moved at the beginning of the nineteenth century to Rochdale. It was they who were to become close partners of the Quaker Crosfields of Liverpool, who themselves had links with the Fothergills of Carr End. As we shall see, these families of Countersett Quakers, from a small and insignificant village in the Yorkshire Dales, made remarkable contributions to the life of their native land.

The Fothergill name is well known to Friends, particularly through the role played by Dr John Fothergill in the foundation of Ackworth School. But the family was also influential among Friends from the earliest days of the Countersett Quakers. The origins of the first Quaker Fothergill are uncertain, but in 1667 a John Fothergill placed

a datestone over a gate at his home, Carr End, which was to remain in the hands of the family for nearly two hundred years. He himself was one of that group of Friends brought together by Richard Robinson of nearby Countersett and with them he suffered imprisonment for his beliefs.<sup>10</sup> In 1678, he was incarcerated in Richmond. He died in 1684, nine years before Richard Robinson. His son Alexander, who inherited Carr End, also suffered for his faith. Like his father, he was a close friend of Richard Robinson and his signature was among those twenty four members of the Wensleydale Meeting who signed a testimony to their "Dear and Antient Friend and Brother" when he died in 1693.<sup>11</sup> During Alexander's lifetime, travelling ministers often stayed at Carr End. He himself died in 1695 after a period of harsh imprisonment in York following a prosecution on account of his Christian testimony against tithes.<sup>12</sup> His eldest son, John, at the age of eighteen, now took over the farm and the care of the three younger children.

John Fothergill was to be an influential preacher and itinerant minister during the early decades of the eighteenth century. In a journal written in later life he describes how it was some little while before, on one First Day at Meeting, "a fresh strong motion or concern came upon me, and I broke forth in a few words, but scarcely durst stand upon my feet. And after the Meeting, I got quietly away..."<sup>13</sup> How many other Friends have initially felt such uncertainty? But he soon became an accomplished speaker, travelling widely to visit Meetings throughout England and making a memorable visit to Scotland with other Friends in 1698. Unlike his forbears, he did not then suffer imprisonment but despite the relaxation of the laws relating to dissenters, he met with much abusive treatment, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Yet he wrote that mercifully they "were preserved from any material hurt".

John Fothergill was to play an important role among the Quakers of the American Colonies. In 1706, with his friend William Armistead, he sailed for Maryland. They visited and encouraged Friends, often in isolated settlements throughout the Colonies, meeting many who welcomed their spiritual guidance. Not unnaturally, they were particularly content in visiting Philadelphia, which they reached in time for Yearly Meeting there. It was, he wrote in his journal, "large and comfortable to us and Friends..." They finally visited Friends in Barbados and Jamaica, before sailing for home at the end of 1707.

Two years later, John Fothergill married Margaret Hough, with whom he settled at Carr End. They had eight children, Alexander in

1709, who was to inherit Carr End, Thomas, John, the future doctor in 1712, Joseph a year later, William, then Samuel, like his father a famous preacher, and Ann in 1718. The last was George, born in 1719. Sadly, Margaret died in childbirth and her last son soon afterwards.

John Fothergill was now to undertake more ministering journeys. In 1721, the Quakers in the American Colonies expressed the hope of another visit from the trusted Friend who had travelled among them a decade earlier.<sup>14</sup> His journey again took him throughout the Colonies and he preached not only at major centres such as Boston, where Friends had suffered so much in the early years, but also at every small Meeting House and many other places. It was during this visit that he met, at Mattocks in Virginia, "Justice Washington, a friendly man, where the love of God opened my heart towards the people".<sup>15</sup> Thus did he make the acquaintance of George Washington's grandfather. He finally reached home in 1724. He continued to travel and preach throughout the British Isles but in 1729 married his second wife, Elizabeth Buck, with whom he was to live in Knaresborough. In 1736, however, at the age of sixty, he was again moved to visit the American Colonies,<sup>16</sup> this time for another journey which lasted two years and which again concluded in Barbados, where there were now several Quaker Meetings. He continued to travel but seems to have retained contact with his native dale. February 1739 found him attending London Morning Meeting where he presented his certificate from Knaresborough. His companion on this occasion was Amos Robinson, grandson of Richard Robinson of Countersett, whose certificate stated that he was a "Sober and Religious Man, Caefull Circumspect in his Conduct and Conversation..."<sup>17</sup> John Fothergill died at Knaresborough in 1744; he was buried in the nearby Friends Burial Ground at Scotton.

John Fothergill's eldest son Alexander now inherited the family home. He was to be an influential figure in Wensleydale. He farmed at Carr End but at the same time he was befriended by Thomas Metcalfe of Nappa, a Justice of the Peace, from whom he obtained legal training. Although an important member of the Meeting at Countersett, he was never as devoted a Friend as his father or his brothers. A worldly man, he was involved in many of the affairs of his native dale. Among other adventures, he took it upon himself to ride over to Westmorland to witness the retreat of the Scottish rebels at the time of the '45.<sup>18</sup> It may have been prudent but it was not entirely a Quakerly act to arm himself with a pistol on that occasion.

His major contribution to Wensleydale, however, was to oversee the construction of the turnpike road that ran from Richmond,

through Wensleydale to Lancaster.<sup>19</sup> In 1751, Parliament passed the Turnpike Act that authorised this development, which was expected to open up the Dale's access to the outside world. Alexander Fothergill was appointed surveyor for the project. It was an ambitious undertaking. The road followed the dead straight line of an old Roman road, passing through hills and valleys, rising to two thousand feet, one of the wildest stretches of road in England. Alexander was forty-two when the road started and sixty-five before he could ride the whole length of the road. There were constant problems, which came to a head in 1774. He was now to be accused by the Trustees of dishonesty over financial affairs. A demand was made that he should put a sizeable sum of money on the table. Alexander was unable to comply and he resigned.

At the same time, his fellow Quakers in Countersett accused him of disorderly conduct. One First Day in 1774, after Friends Meeting, he was approached by two prominent members of the Society who charged him with the paternity of two bastard children in the town of Richmond "& others elsewhere".<sup>20</sup> Although he denied the charges, he was "read out of Meeting" and was not reinstated until he had made a detailed confession of his wrong doing and expressed his earnest resolve to amend his way of life.

These were not his only problems. Carr End had been heavily mortgaged for many years and he was being pressed for repayment. It was only with the considerable financial help of his brother doctor in London that the family home at Carr End was saved for at least another generation.<sup>21</sup> Alexander lived on, dying at Carr End in 1788. His son William, who in 1782 had married Hannah Robinson, great granddaughter of Richard of Countersett, inherited the property. He died in 1837 and Carr End passed out of the hands of the family in 1842. Nevertheless, subsequent generations of the Fothergills have continued to regard Carr End as their family home.

Alexander's legacy is the house that he renovated in the eighteenth century, as well as his turnpike, now a green road following the straight line of the Roman Road, which climbs up between Wether Fell and Crag and over the tops to Cam and beyond. He also played an important role in the building of the bridge, which passes over the Bain as it flows out of Semerwater. Built with money from the legacy of Richard Robinson's grandson, it is known to this day as "Quaker's bridge".<sup>22</sup>

Alexander's brother, the physician Dr John Fothergill, is the best remembered of the Fothergills.<sup>23</sup> He was born in 1712 at Carr End but after his mother's death he was brought up by his uncle, Thomas

Hough, at Frodsham in Cheshire. He went on to Sedbergh School and in 1728, at the age of sixteen, was apprenticed to Benjamin Bartlett, an apothecary of Bradford, a weighty ministering Friend well known to his father. Encouraged by Bartlett, he went on to the Medical School of Edinburgh University in 1734 and graduated MD two years later. It was the beginning of a distinguished medical career.

After Edinburgh, John Fothergill went to London where he received further clinical training walking the wards at St Thomas' Hospital. He was clearly ambitious. In 1738, as a student in London, he wrote to his brother Joseph: "I confess sometimes that I could not look upon an overgrown Doctor," he told him, "wealthy at the expense of his fellow citizens lives, lolling in his chariot and tacitly asking myself whether such a state would not mightily become me...."<sup>24</sup> After a journey through the Netherlands and Germany, he settled in Gracechurch Street in 1740 where he at once built up a successful practice among his fellow Quakers. Soon, he became one of the most sought after physicians in eighteenth century London. His patients were to include Clive of India, Sir Fletcher Norton (the speaker of the House of Commons), Lord Dartmouth (Secretary of State for the American Colonies and half-brother of the Prime Minister, Lord North), Benjamin Franklin, John Wesley, Fanny Burney as well as many others of the poorer classes whom he treated for no fee.

After 1750, his sister Ann came to live with him, acting as his devoted housekeeper.<sup>25</sup> At first, the new world of the successful London physician was entirely alien to Ann. It all made her feel "Cowardly and fearful: the latter I would not lose", she wrote to brother Alexander in Wensleydale, "as fear is said to preserve us ". She would not abandon her old country habits, she told him: "Singulear I am and so I hope to continue in my dress; the antice folly I observe does not excite me to imitate". She also managed to retain her inward calmness of spirit, telling her brother Samuel that she even found it possible "to be in solitude in the streets of London". As the years went by she and her doctor brother became increasingly close, the doctor in later years signing his letters from "J and A Fothergill".

John Fothergill was to become an important figure among London Friends. It may have been due to his father's close relationship with American Quakers that in 1738 he was nominated as the correspondent of London Yearly Meeting with the Philadelphia Friends. He was to be Clerk to the Yearly Meeting on three occasions, in 1749, 1764 and in 1779, a year before his death, by which time he

had become one of the leading Friends in the capital. He was unquestionably a formidable figure. When Fanny Burney met him in late 1777, the comments that she confided to her diary were scarcely laudatory.<sup>26</sup> She conceded that he might be a man of great skill, but she found his manners stiff, set and unpleasant. "He is an upright, stiff, formal-looking old man....", she wrote, "he enters the room and makes his address with his hat always on and lest that mark of his sect pass unnoticed, the hat that he wears is of the most enormous size that you ever beheld". It was a gross example of the pot calling the kettle black for Fanny's own hats could be monstrous. Later, when she came to know him better, her opinion of the ageing Quaker changed and she conceded: "he is as kind as he is skilful".

Being now so public a figure, it was not surprising that he could be a subject of caricature. Samuel Foote, in his play "The Devil on Two Sticks", a lampoon on London doctors, portrayed Dr Fothergill as Dr Melchisedech Broadbrim, a sanctimonious physican who as the doctor himself put it, was "brought there to say nothing but what is proper but to say it and appear in a ridiculous manner".<sup>27</sup>

John Fothergill maintained close links with the family at Carr End throughout his life. His correspondence with his brother Alexander has been preserved and illustrates his commitment to the family home. Often he would send greetings to the Robinson and Hillary families. In 1763, he and his sister Ann paid a visit to Carr End, attending Meeting at Countersett. Ten years later, when Alexander was facing the charge of "disorderly conduct", they arranged to meet their errant brother at Knaresborough. Alexander's diary records: "Brother and Sister manifested the highest regard... In advising for my good... and this in the most tender and affecting manner, not obtrudingly".<sup>28</sup> They went to visit their father's grave at nearby Scotton, standing together in silent contemplation. In 1778, when it was highly likely that Carr End would have had to be forfeited because Alexander could not pay off his mortgages, by now more than a thousand pounds, it was Dr John who came to the rescue.

Dr Fothergill's medical achievements are attested by his many publications on medical subjects, among which his writings on the Malignant Sore Throat, predominantly scarlatinal but also due to diphtheria, were well received, ensuring his reputation following their first publication in 1748.<sup>29</sup> His work was recognised by his election to the Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1763. At the same time he was a distinguished botanist. He kept a garden at Upton in Essex, which was said by Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, to be second only to Kew in the whole of Europe. His flowers

were painted by leading artists of the day, including some by the celebrated G. Ehret. The paintings were sold after the doctor's death to the Empress Catherine of Russia for, it is said, £2300. For more than two centuries they were lost to view but in 1987 they were rediscovered, all 1200 of them, by the chief curator at the Komarov Botanical Institute in St Petersburg, an artistic and botanical legacy of great importance, still to be subjected to detailed historical study.

In 1774, Linnaeus named a Pennsylvania witch-hazel after him, the *Fothergilla* of today's gardens. The doctor supported collectors in many parts of the world but particularly in America where William Bartram's *Travels through the Southern American States* were funded by Fothergill. Bartram's account of these travels is a lyrical account of the American wild that greatly influenced the English romantic poets, particularly Coleridge. The imagery of *Kubla Khan* owes much to William Bartram.<sup>30</sup>

He maintained a life-long correspondence with American Quakers and became a firm friend of Benjamin Franklin during his London years. With Franklin and David Barclay he made a last desperate attempt to prevent the outbreak of hostilities with the American Colonies in 1775. He wrote to his friend and patient, the Earl of Dartmouth: "Do, my Noble, much Esteemed Friend, forget the little trifling quarrels fomented by mischievous people for the ruin of this great Empire. Give America all she asks. Was my life worth the pledging, I think I could do it safely, that she will amply repay the condescension".

He lived for most of his life in London, first in Gracechurch Street where he attended Meeting, later in Harpur Street, Bloomsbury. He also maintained a summer home at Lea Hall, near Middlewich in Cheshire, close to Warrington, where his much loved brother Samuel lived. Here he and his sister Ann would spend the summer months, away from the hustle and bustle of London and seeking, as he put it, "to recover the power of recollection".<sup>31</sup>

But for Friends today, his most important legacy is unquestionably Ackworth School. For many years Friends had been concerned with the provision of better education. By 1777, Yearly Meeting decided that something must be done and in that year a proposal for a Boarding School "for the education of children whose parents are not in affluence" came before the Meeting. It was referred for action to the next year. Later that year, Dr Fothergill, whilst travelling in Yorkshire, heard that a large building at Ackworth, which had been set up by the Foundling Hospital in London, was for sale. The price was to be seven thousand pounds. Action was needed at once and

soon Yearly Meeting and Fothergill and David Barclay were able to guarantee the price. The matter then came before the Yearly Meeting in 1778, when William Tuke brought in a report commenting favourably on the project.<sup>32</sup> Raising funds did not seem to be difficult, Fothergill remarking that: "Friends seemed to vie with one another in their generous efforts". The doctor followed up with his *Letter to a Friend in the Country relative to the intended School at Ackworth*, published in January 1779<sup>33</sup> and the School was duly opened in October that same year. In a letter to his friend, the Unitarian scientist Dr Joseph Priestley, Fothergill wrote that the School was to build up Christian lives, "to establish young minds in Truth..."<sup>34</sup> It was a great satisfaction to the worthy doctor that he was able to visit the school, and find it flourishing just a few months before his death in December 1780. He was buried at Winchmore Hill.

Dr Fothergill's two other surviving brothers both settled in Warrington, a non-corporate town where dissenters were welcomed. Joseph became head of an iron industry large enough to provide "work and wages for 140 families". He married Hannah Kelsall and they had nine children, among them the lively Betty who went in 1769 to London to stay with her uncle and aunt in London. She left an engaging account of life in the doctor's household.<sup>35</sup>

Samuel became, like his father, famous for his preaching and for his travels in the ministry. It was not always so. His early years were dissolute and he wrote later that he had drunk up iniquity as an ox might drink up water. On departing for his third visit to the American Colonies in 1736, his afflicted father told him: "Farewell! Farewell! And unless it be as a changed man, I cannot say that I wish to see thee again". On his return two years later, attending Meeting at York, he heard a powerful address from a young Friend. He asked who it was. "That", they told him, "is thy son".<sup>36</sup> It was through the influence of a Quaker preacher fifteen years his senior, Susanna Croudson, that he had reformed. He married her and they set up business in Warrington, selling tea and a wide range of commodities.

Samuel soon became an acclaimed preacher among Friends. In 1754, like his father before him, he visited Friends in the American Colonies, his journey taking him on horseback for 8765 miles.<sup>37</sup> It included a remarkable meeting at Faneuil Hall in Boston where he preached to more than two thousand. It was an arduous odyssey that finished in Philadelphia in 1756. The Seven Years War had broken out, General Braddock and his expedition to Fort Duquesne having suffered a disastrous defeat, the General and many of his officers losing their lives.

Friends were deeply concerned about what they should do at a time of war and particularly if there were Indian raids on their settlements. Samuel, as well as Friends in London, strongly urged that the Pennsylvania Quakers should not waver from their traditional Testimony for Peace. As Samuel Fothergill put it: "If the potsherds of the earth clash together, let them clash!" He held a last meeting in Philadelphia where Friends likened his warnings of two years earlier to those of Jeremiah before the fall of Jerusalem. Samuel soon returned to England, living on as a much respected ministering Friend. He died, universally lamented, in 1772, earning an affectionate obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*..

If the legacy of the Fothergills is well appreciated by Friends today, that of their friends the Hillary family is virtually unknown. They deserve, however, to be remembered for one of them became, like John Fothergill, a Quaker physician of some note and another, nephew of the physician, founded the Royal Naval Lifeboat Institution in 1824.

The first Hillary to appear in the history of Wensleydale was a William Hillary, born in Clifton in 1632, who took as his second wife Anne, the only child of Trinian Metcalfe of Birkrigg and Rigg House, properties of some value at the upper end of Wensleydale, on the road from Hawes to Sedbergh.<sup>38</sup> William's father-in-law died in 1686 and the properties came into the hands of the Hillary family. William was not a Quaker and when he died in 1700 he was buried in Askrigg Church. His son John was born at Birkrigg in 1666 and he became a Quaker when in 1692 he married Mary Robinson, a daughter of that doyen of the Wensleydale Quakers, Richard Robinson of Countersett. The marriage took place at Semerdale House, home of Mary's brother John.<sup>39</sup>

For the early years of their married life, the Hillarys lived at Birkrigg, an isolated and lonely spot, which must have been bleak in winter when snow blocked the road from Hawes. They had several children during their years at Birkrigg - Ann, born in 1693, Isaac the eldest son born the following year, two other girls who did not survive and then in 1697, William, the future physician named for his grandfather. Within two years, however, the Hillarys had moved from Birkrigg. They bought a substantial house in the village of Burtersett, known today as Hillary Hall. It was a mere two miles from Countersett over the hill in Wensleydale. There were to be four more children - Margaret in 1699, Mary in 1702 and another son, Richard in 1703. Rachel, the youngest, was born in 1705. <sup>40</sup>

John Hillary, who had been involved with Friends in Hawes, now

transferred his allegiance to Countersett. He was often involved with local affairs. His marriage into the Robinson family greatly increased his position among Wensleydale Quakers. He was a friend of the Fothergills, and at least one letter to John Fothergill, the ministering Friend from Carr End, has been preserved.<sup>41</sup> John Hillary died in 1721, leaving his properties to his eldest son Isaac who lived on at Burtersett until his death in 1783. By Wensleydale standards, John Hillary was relatively wealthy. His inventory amounted to £960, of which £730 was for "moneys owing".<sup>42</sup> This sum would have included £300 for the mortgage that he held on Semerdale House, where he married his Robinson wife in 1692.

Meantime, his son William had become a physician.<sup>43</sup> Nothing is recorded of his schooling. It is, however, known that he initially learnt his trade from the same apothecary as Fothergill, Benjamin Bartlett of Bradford, to whom he was apprenticed in 1715. It may well have been Hillary's example that led Fothergill's father to choose Bartlett some years later. John Hillary's relative wealth was sufficient to enable him to send son William to study at Leiden under the famous Herman Boerhaave, the most distinguished teacher of medicine of the day. He graduated in 1722 with a thesis on intermittent fevers.

The next year, William Hillary settled in Ripon where he started practice. Throughout his life he was to record the changes in the weather and the epidemics that he encountered, in an attempt to correlate weather and disease. He stayed in Ripon until 1734, writing a book on smallpox and on other diseases, which came out in 1740.<sup>44</sup> Hearing of the death of a physician in Bath, Hillary removed to that spa town but the change in his circumstances was not a success. Although he discovered a small spa at Lincomb, which was used by the Earl of Chesterfield,<sup>45</sup> he did not prosper and the autumn of 1746 found him in London, where, concerned for his future, he consulted Dr John Fothergill, now established as a physician among Friends in the capital. For a while, he considered a position in Jamaica. There, however, Friends Meetings had been much reduced following the earthquake at Port-Royal, which was seen by many as a judgement upon them. Fothergill, presumably with knowledge derived from his father's visits, knew that Barbados would be a better choice. He sent information to his brother Alexander in Wensleydale, to be passed on to the Hillarys:

"At Barbados there are several meetings", he wrote, "the Island pleasant and healthy".<sup>46</sup>

Hillary travelled to Barbados in early 1747. It was an excellent

move. He was clearly successful in his practice for when he returned to England in 1759, the *Annus Mirabilis* of the Seven Years War, he had amassed as much as six thousand pounds. He would have been in time to hear the firing of the park and Tower guns, to see the flags flying from every steeple and to witness the greatest illuminations that the city had ever known, as London celebrated the fall of Quebec.

In Barbados he made observations of the weather and diseases that were to be published in 1759 in London, in his book on the *Diseases of the West India Islands*.<sup>47</sup> This was to go through another edition in 1766 and it was republished in Philadelphia in 1812. It was one of the first books on tropical diseases and contains descriptions of diseases, which are still quoted today.

His patients would have included not only the local population but also those who came to enjoy the equable climate for the benefit of their health. In 1751, he attended Lawrence Washington, mortally sick from tuberculosis, brought from Virginia by his brother, George, future President of the United States. And on All Saints Day, 1755, inhabitants of the capital at Bridgetown noticed something remarkable. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the tide suddenly rose several feet above normal, then retreated leaving the foreshore completely uncovered, and this went on for most of the afternoon. Hillary thought that it might have been due to an earthquake far out at sea and it was not until several weeks later that they heard the news of the dreadful earthquake in Lisbon on that day. From knowledge of the time difference and distance between Portugal and Barbados, Hillary was able to calculate that the shock wave must have passed across the Atlantic at seven and a half miles a minute, or four hundred and fifty miles an hour, a remarkably accurate assessment. It was the first time that anyone had calculated the speed of what came to be known as a tsunami.<sup>48</sup>

Hillary lived on for four more years, attending Peel Meeting. He occasionally saw patients, as when he asked to see Dr William Hawes, later to be founder of the Royal Humane Society. His family friend John Fothergill was also in attendance, but it was not a happy occasion for the two physicians disagreed about the appropriate treatment. This led to such a rift between them, that in 1763, when Hillary himself was dying "of a fever", he refused Fothergill's advice. He thrust his old friend's medicine from him, we are told, and probably lost his life "from his resentment".<sup>49</sup>

An administration was granted to William's younger brother, Richard, born in Burtersett in 1703. Richard, now living in Liverpool,

had gone into partnership with his nephew John Scott, son of his sister Ann who had married into the Scott family of Bainbridge Hall. The firm of Hillary and Scott were agents for Dr Fothergill, when in 1765 he consigned goods and chattels through Liverpool to Lea Hall, his newly acquired summer home in Cheshire.<sup>50</sup> In addition when his brother Samuel in Warrington sent potatoes to him, they were sent by sea from Liverpool by Hillary and Scott. He once complained to his brother that they had not arrived, even though the wind had blown from all parts of the compass.<sup>51</sup> The firm was deeply involved in trade with the West Indies and they developed property interests there, particularly in Jamaica. Richard Hillary seems to have maintained contact with his family in Burtersett, his sister Rachel recording in a letter to a cousin in 1756 that "Richd was a good while with us this summer".<sup>52</sup> Alexander Fothergill of Carr End also records in his diary meeting Richard in Wensleydale that summer.<sup>53</sup> Although Liverpool Friends must have thought Richard was a confirmed bachelor, he surprised them when, in 1764, at the age of sixty-one, he married Hannah Winn, the year after brother William's death. He was to have several children, among them two sons - Richard, born in 1768 and William two years later.<sup>54</sup> Richard himself lived on to see his sons grow up; he died in 1789. His property now passed to his eldest son but Richard Jnr, unlike his father, was not to be blessed with old age. He died whilst visiting his properties in Jamaica in 1803, at the early age of thirty-five.

Meantime, his younger brother William had parted with Friends. It is probable, however, that his father took him to the old family home when he was a boy for in later years there were Wensleydale Friends who he remembered. His early years, about which little is known, were apparently spent as an Equerry to the Duke of Sussex, with whom he travelled widely on the continent.<sup>55</sup> In 1800, he married Frances Elizabeth Fytche of Danbury Place in Essex, an heiress. At the end of that year, they had twins, Augustus, to whom the Duke of Sussex stood sponsor, and Elizabeth Mary. William Hillary, now living in some style at Danbury Place, was to play an important role in the affairs of Essex in those years when Napoleon threatened invasion. In 1803, he raised the first Essex Legion of infantry and cavalry, some 1400 men, the largest force offered by any private individual for the defence of the country.

In recognition of his services, he was created Baronet in 1805, describing himself as Sir William Hillary Bart, of Danbury Place, County of Essex, and of Rigg House in the County of Yorkshire, one of the old Hillary properties in Wensleydale. His difficulty, however,

was that his wife's family did all they could to ensure that he did not squander her assets. It soon became apparent that he could in no way continue to support the great expense of maintaining his Essex Legion. Danbury Place was by now heavily mortgaged and despite selling off Hillary Hall, the family home, as well as Rigg House and other properties, he could not meet his obligations. He had inherited valuable sugar estates on the death of his brother Richard in 1803, but the plummeting price of sugar on world markets did not help him. By 1807 Sir William was no longer able to satisfy those to whom he was indebted. At the same time, and not surprisingly, his marriage broke up, to the evident relief of his wife's family. Soon, alone and without wife or family, he moved to the Isle of Man, presumably to evade his creditors. It must have been a desperate decision.

He settled at Fort Ann, near Douglas. He soon became aware of the constant and repeated shipwrecks around the island. In 1822, when the government cutter *Vigilance*, the naval brig *Racehorse* and many other smaller vessels were wrecked in a storm, Hillary was persuaded that something had to be done about saving lives at sea. In February 1823, he published *An Appeal to the British Nation on the Humanity and policy of forming a National Institution for the Preservation of Lives and Property from Shipwreck*, dedicated to the King, George IV.<sup>56</sup> Visiting London the following year, Sir William gained important encouragement for his proposal from George Hibbert, chairman of the West India Merchants and from Thomas Wilson, M.P. for Southwark. With their support a meeting was arranged at the London Tavern on the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1824, under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury; it also had the support of the King, several royal dukes and William Wilberforce. Thus was born the *Royal National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck*. It was to become the RNLI in 1853, remaining to this day the entirely voluntary organisation that has done so much for those in peril. Sir William lived on the Isle of Man, going out in lifeboats on numerous occasions. In 1827, he helped in rescuing seventeen men from the Swedish barge *Fortroindet*, and in that same year, he broke six ribs while saving the crew of the *St George*. In 1830, at the age of sixty, he led a group of fourteen volunteers, who saved sixty-two persons from drowning. He himself was washed overboard in the process. It was an episode that won him the Gold Medal of the Shipwreck Institution.

There is evidence that there were old Quaker friends in Wensleydale who Sir William would have known as a boy and who he remembered during his years in the Isle of Man. In February 1825,

he wrote<sup>57</sup> from London to William Thompson of Hawes, presumably a lawyer, in response to a letter, which evidently concerned certain moneys he still owed in Wensleydale. He instructed Thompson to pass any moneys that he might have left in his hands to his "late servant", one Metcalfe. He also sent his best regards to William Fothergill and his family, at Carr End, as well as to the "widow of my grand old friend, Tho Harrison".

Sir William Hillary lived on the Isle of Man until his death in 1847, constantly occupied with good causes. He died full of public spirit to the last. Although born a Friend, he seems to have had no contact with Quakers after his childhood. Perhaps, however, we may claim that his philanthropic activities, and particularly his devotion to the saving of lives at sea, owed something to the Quaker genes that he had inherited from his great-grandfather, Richard Robinson of Countersett.

The "Tho Harrison" to whose widow Sir William sent greetings in 1825 belonged to a family who had been Quakers since the earliest days of Friends in Wensleydale. In 1662, among others prosecuted for attending a meeting were Batholomew Harrison of Countersett and Isabell his wife, "being fined either of them 12d".<sup>58</sup> In those years informers were pursuing Quakers in Wensleydale. William Thornaby of Richmond was one of the most active; in 1670 he listed nearly forty Quakers in Wensleydale, including Batholomew and Edward Harrison of Countersett. Bartholomew, however, was to be in trouble with Friends too, for in 1682 a testimony was drawn up "against his own disorderly wayes, being subject to take a sup (as he called it) of drink & the letting his Tongue clatter to the dishonour of God".<sup>59</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, after the last Robinson had left their family home, Reuben Harrison, who had married Hannah Smith in 1752, moved into Countersett Hall.<sup>60</sup> Their son Reuben was married in 1794 and in 1795 Daniel Harrison, destined to be one of the founders of the firm of Harrisons and Crosfield, was born there. In later years he could always remember the garden, set with flowers, terraced borders and snowdrops. The Harrisons left Countersett in 1802, the father to the neighbouring farm of High Blean, where he died the following year. Reuben, his son, however, went to Rochdale where Marsden Monthly Meeting welcomed him and his family into membership.

Reuben Harrison seems not to have enjoyed great success.<sup>61</sup> He first became a cotton spinner, then a labourer and when he died in 1827, at the age of fifty eight, he was a warehouseman. Nevertheless, he

had thirteen children, the eldest, Daniel, becoming a successful businessman. His youngest, Smith Harrison, was not born until 1818. Daniel was a pupil at Ackworth School from 1806 to 1807; he then became a coffee dealer at Liverpool. He worked in partnership with Octavius Waterhouse but by the end of the 1830s, as a result of a disastrous investment by his partner, the business failed and Daniel Harrison, who had been looking forward to retiring to country life, had to start all over again. He clearly inspired loyalty among his staff. One of his young clerks, John Thistlewaite, on being pressed to take another post, told him: "No thank thee, Daniel Harrison..... I Shall remain here another year until thou art fairly started again".<sup>62</sup> And he wanted no salary. By 1843 Daniel Harrison was so well recovered in the tea and coffee trade that he was able to go into partnership with his youngest brother, Smith Harrison, now in his twenties. Smith Harrison was also an Ackworth scholar, attending the school from 1829 until 1832.

At this time they were approached by George Crosfield of Liverpool.<sup>63</sup> The Crosfields were originally a farming family from Westmorland. Their fortunes, however, changed when George Crosfield, born in 1751, left rural life to become first an apprentice to a grocer in Kendal. He then moved to Warrington where he seems to have joined Samuel Fothergill in his grocer's business. In due course, after Samuel's death, he took over the enterprise. Later he ran a sugar refinery. He died in Lancaster in 1820. His eldest son, George, born in 1785, was to have further connections with the Fothergill family. In 1815 he married Margaret Chorley, the daughter of Alexander Chorley and his wife Betty Fothergill, niece to the Doctor whose London home she had so engagingly described in her diary during her visit in 1770. George Crosfield had a great admiration for the Quaker ministering Friend, Samuel Fothergill, and in 1843 published an edition of his Life and Letters.<sup>64</sup>

That same year, his son Joseph Crosfield, who had worked with the now defunct firm of Daniel Harrison and his partner Octavius Waterhouse, was thinking of setting up his own business. He was only twenty three. At his father's instigation, however, he was persuaded to go into partnership with Daniel Harrison and his brother Smith. The terms were soon agreed. George Crosfield advanced £4000 and guaranteed another £1000. The Harrisons matched Crosfields contribution with an equal amount of their own. Joseph was to have three tenths of the profits. So it was that the firm of Harrisons and Crosfield started business on the first of January 1844 as wholesale tea merchants.<sup>65</sup> It was at once profitable - they

made £3000 in the first year. In 1855, however, when tea clippers had turned to London as their destination, the firm moved to the capital. There too they prospered, becoming within ten years one of the three largest tea traders in the country.

Daniel Harrison moved to Beckenham in Kent, where he died in 1873 at the age of seventy eight.<sup>66</sup> His brother Smith was to live out his years as a member of Ratcliff and Barking Monthly Meeting. His first wife Sarah had died in childbirth in 1842, before the move to London, and in 1858 he married for the second time Jane Lister of Upton in Essex, daughter of Joseph Jackson Lister whose home was opposite John Fothergill's old garden in west Ham, now occupied by the Gurney family. It was almost a Quaker enclave. Elizabeth Fry had lived nearby. Jane's brother was Joseph Lister, the father of antiseptic surgery and a future President of the Royal Society. Although he had left Friends when he married the daughter of his Edinburgh chief, Lister retained the religious outlook that he had gained from his Quaker parents. His belief in the spiritual value of his work as a surgeon is illustrated by a letter that he wrote to his sister Jane in 1857, the year before her marriage.

I trust that I may be enabled in the treatment of patients always to act with a single eye to their good and therefore to the glory of our Heavenly Father. If a man be able to act in this spirit, and is favoured to feel something of the sustaining love of God in his work, truly the practice of surgery is a glorious occupation.<sup>67</sup>

Jane's husband, Smith Harrison, died in 1883.<sup>68</sup>

Joseph Crosfield lived in Reigate where he played a major role in the building of the Meeting House. He built a beautiful home, the Dingle, where his family was brought up. After the death of his wife, he was led in his last years into some form of temptation which led him to confess to the Monthly Meeting "that I have been through unwatchfulness been betrayed into sin". He was accepted back into his Meeting in 1877 but died two years later at the early age of fifty eight.<sup>69</sup>

Harrisons and Crosfield went from strength to strength. They were to diversify from their tea and coffee interests to become one of the most important firms dealing in Malayan rubber. Timber, building material and chemicals later came to be part of their commercial concerns. By the end of the twentieth century the firm's profits were more than £80 million,<sup>70</sup> a far cry from the £3000 of 1844. Neither the

name nor the original business exist today. The company now trades under the name "Elementis" and it is a specialty chemical company.

The question has to be asked whether worldly matters may have inhibited the cultivation of the inner vineyard amongst Friends who became so highly successful. There was no lack of warning voices. During the nineteenth century there were Quakers such as Lydia Ann Barclay who saw "nothing but danger in shaking hands with the worldly spirit". She was deeply disturbed by the open evidence of wealth, the portraits and fine residences.<sup>71</sup> Even the pious Dr Fothergill, always at full stretch in the duties of his profession, was warned by his brother Samuel, in a letter to his sister, Ann, that "some envious tongues are ready to say the desire of accumulating abundance is the cause of subjecting himself to so much fatigue".<sup>72</sup>

All who have been brought up in their early years in Wensleydale retain an abiding affection for their native dale. So too do those whose families have their roots there. Daniel Harrison's youngest daughter, Lucy, born in 1844 at the time of the foundation of Harrisons and Crosfield, became a distinguished literary scholar who was headmistress of a London School for many years.<sup>73</sup> She decided to retire to the country and chose to build herself a home in Bainbridge - Cupples Field - in 1885. There is a datestone with her initials and the date 1886 above the main door. The house is built in the style of years gone by, the mullioned windows being modelled on those of Countersett Hall, birthplace of her father Daniel Harrison.

Duty then took her to York where she was a successful headmistress of the Mount School. She retired in 1902, moving back to her home in Bainbridge, where she lived in rural contentment until her death in 1915. She delighted in her walks to Countersett, her father's birthplace. She once wrote to her much loved friend and companion, Amy Greener, that one December evening she had reached the little bridge close to the water at Semerwater. "The sun was setting red and brilliant behind the hills, white with snow," she told her, "and the little lake looked exquisite in the light...."<sup>74</sup>

Looking back today, one can only be amazed that a group of early Friends from so small a village as Countersett have left so significant a legacy - the spiritual contribution to early Friends in America, Ackworth School, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the medical achievements of William Hillary and John Fothergill, those priceless paintings in St Petersburg, the development of Harrisons and Crosfield in the industrial world, not to mention the influence that Lucy Harrison had on a whole generation of scholars, And *Fothergilla* blooms in my garden, turning as "red and brilliant" in the

autumn as Lucy Harrison's sunset. Her home, Cupple's Field, is today the home of the veterinary practice of upper Wensleydale. Lucy's tombstone stands outside the door of the Meeting House in Bainbridge. Dr Fothergill's botanic garden is now West Ham Park, where trees of his planting, for example an ancient Ginkgo, flourish to this day. Countersett remains little more than a hamlet but Richard Robinson's home is much as it ever was, at least from the outside. Carr End and the Burtersett home of the Hillarys are there still, as is the old road that Alexander Fothergill surveyed, striking straight up the hillside and over to Cams Houses and beyond. Friends still meet in the old Meeting House. And perhaps before Meeting on a still First Day morning, you may have a moment to walk down to Semerwater. You will cross the Quaker's bridge to the lake shore and if it is a windless day, you will see the hills perfectly reflected on the surface of the lake, a view unchanged since Richard Robinson became the first Countersett Quaker more than three hundred and fifty years ago.

*Christopher C. Booth*

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