

# George Fox and the Purefeys

A study of the Puritan background in  
Fenny Drayton in the 16th and 17th  
centuries

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## INTRODUCTION

THE present investigation was begun as a background study to the life of George Fox (1624-1691), the Leicestershire villager who was chiefly instrumental in establishing the Society of Friends (Quakers). The story told in the following pages unfolded itself as research proceeded, until it became the history of a family rather than of an individual. But the original intention has been kept constantly in mind: in writing the account, those matters relating only to the wider theme have perforce been omitted.

### THE PUREFEYS OF MISTERTON

The tradition of religious dissent in the Fenny Drayton district of Leicestershire, where George Fox grew to manhood, is closely bound up with the fortunes—economic, social and political—of the Purefey family. The Purefeys were, in Thomas Hodgkin's phrase, the "territorial aristocracy" of Fenny Drayton for more than 300 years, from about 1400 to 1706.<sup>1</sup>

The Purefey history is a typical instance of the rise of the squirarchy, familiar to historians of the period. In these pages we shall trace this family of country gentlemen through two and a half centuries to see how their influence grew as their wealth increased until a climax was reached during the Civil War and time of Cromwell. Thereafter the Purefeys' power declined and their large inheritance was eventually dispersed.

<sup>1</sup> J. Nichols, *History and antiquities of the county of Leicester*, 1795-1815, vol. 4, p. 600. Hodgkin states in error that Fenny Drayton was sold "towards the end of the eighteenth century", *George Fox*, 1897, p. 10.

First, let us describe their origins as a landed family, and set the geographical stage. The earliest record of the Purefeys in Leicestershire appears to be that of a William Purefey living in or about 1275 at Misterton, a village a mile to the east of Lutterworth (Dugdale, *Warwickshire*, 1736, p. 39). William Purefey was succeeded in 1336 by his son Philip, who was in his time a Justice of the Peace in Leicestershire and Warwickshire. By his legal work and by his marriage to an heiress, Margaret of Shirford in Warwickshire, Philip set examples that a number of his descendants were to imitate with notable success. Two sons of Philip Purefey's, William and Thomas, both founded branches of the family that play an important part in our story.

The elder brother William, added the two manors of Shalstone and Foxcote in Buckinghamshire to the manor of Shirford by marrying the heiress to those estates.<sup>1</sup> With William Purefey's family we are not at first concerned, although the earliest instance of Puritanism occurs among his descendants.

## THE PUREFEYS OF FENNY DRAYTON

c 1400—1605

The younger brother, Thomas, like his grandfather before him, was "trained up in the laws" and was "in commission for the conservation of the peace" in Warwickshire from 1390-1419 (Dugdale). He acquired an estate through his marriage to an heiress, Katherine of Welsborough. Katherine's parents, John and Elizabeth of Welsborough, vested in Thomas and his heirs, manors at Fenny Drayton and

<sup>1</sup> B. Willis, *History of the hundred of Buckingham*, 1755, p. 263. The descendants of William Purefey still reside at Shalstone Manor, near Buckingham. The family has held the manor continuously, though sometimes through the female line, since before 1418.

Welsborough. On their deaths Thomas would enter into possession. Meanwhile they gracefully acknowledged his legal status by payment of the customary "yearly rent of a rose at the nativity of St John the Baptist".<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Fenny Drayton story, with which we are specially dealing in this article, begins when Thomas Purefey established himself there not long after 1398.

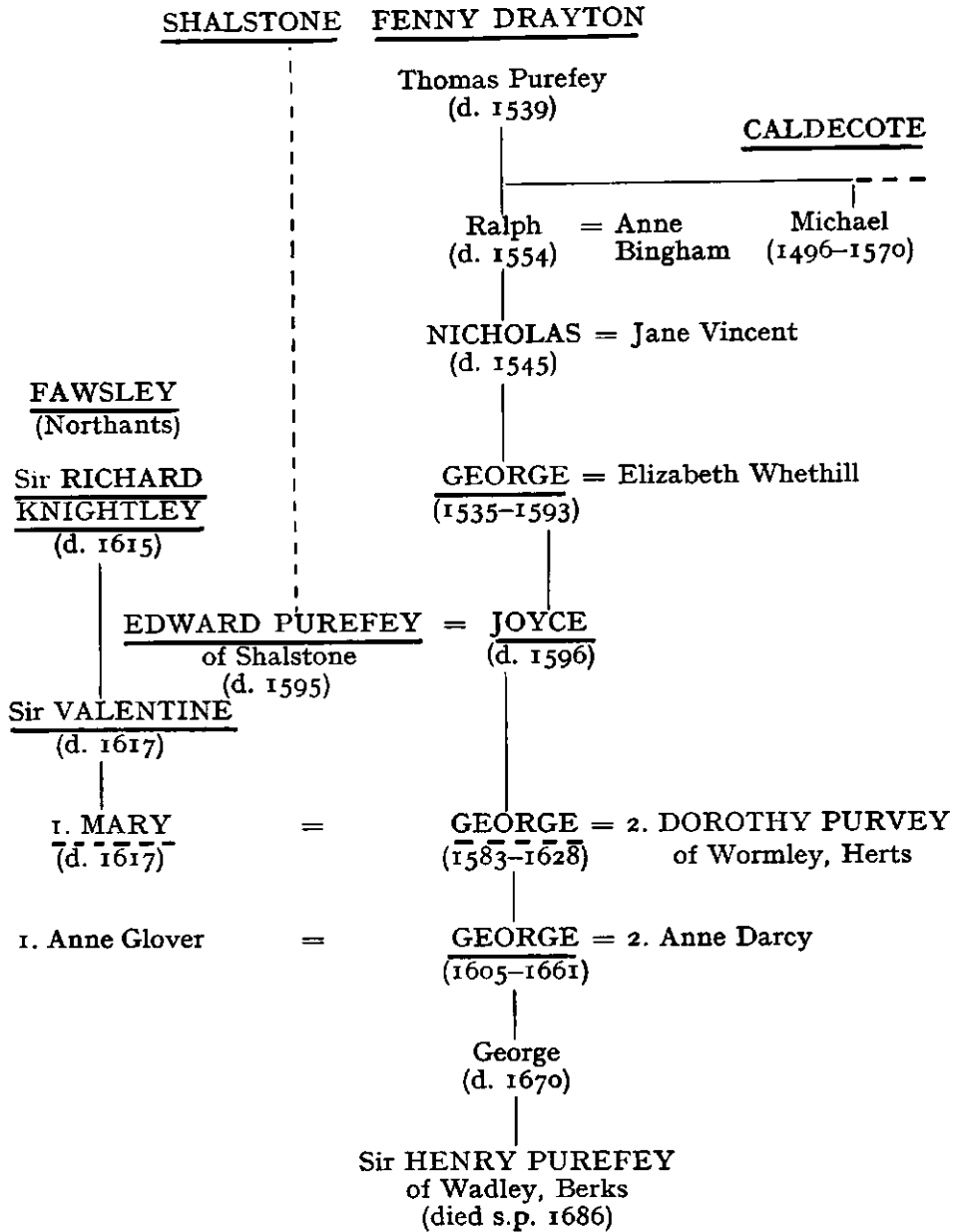
In the deed by which "John de Whellesburgh" granted the manors to Thomas, he "did also pass his arms to be born by the said Thomas his heirs and assigns, as entirely as he and his ancestors had born them" (Nichols, *loc. cit.*, p. 963\*). Thomas Purefey had adopted for himself a coat consisting of three pairs of silver gauntlets clasping one another, on a black ground.<sup>2</sup> The family crest was the trunk of a broken spear held in a mailed hand. The crest and coat of arms are portrayed on magnificent monuments in Fenny Drayton church, together with inscriptions which tell the legend of how they came to be adopted. What significance these heraldic details held for the later Puritan Purefeys will be told in due place.

In 1485, one of Thomas's descendants strengthened his position in the neighbourhood by adding a second manor in Fenny Drayton to his patrimony. The influence of the Purefeys increased greatly during the sixteenth century, and the probable reason for this is not far to seek. In the year 1500, the Hardwick family enclosed the adjoining estate of Lindley. This was said to be one of the first enclosures in the Hundred of Sparkenhoe, in which Fenny Drayton also lies. Whether from the Hardwicks' example or another, the Purefeys became noted as enclosers, according to Hoskins who writes: "The country gentlemen of Leicestershire, a small county in which everyone of some social position knew everyone else, were not slow to learn from each other the new way of doubling their incomes by turning their estates

<sup>1</sup> G. F. Farnham and A. Herbert, "Rectors of Fenny Drayton" in *Trans. Leics. arch. soc.* vol. 14 (1925-6) p. 110. William Burton, *Description of Leicestershire*, 1622, p. 92 is evidently wrong in stating that Thomas Purefey purchased the manors.

<sup>2</sup> W. Burton, *Description of Leicestershire*, 1622, p. 92: "Sable three payre of gantlets, clypping or joyned together Argent". There is no support among later writers for Dugdale's statement that this coat of arms was used before the time given above. William Purefey, Thomas's older brother, used the coat of arms "Azure three stirrups Or" which is described as of Purefey of Misterton.

## THE PUREFEYS OF FENNY DRAYTON IN LEICESTERSHIRE



## KEY

Referred to in the text	..	..	GEORGE
Puritan sympathies suspected	..	..	GEORGE
Puritan views known	..	..	<u>GEORGE</u>



into sheep pastures and driving away their tenants from the one-time arable farms.”<sup>1</sup>

Also during the sixteenth century, various branches of the Purefey family improved their social position in other ways. The first university graduate was “Anthony Purfray BCL”, who matriculated at Cambridge in 1525. From the 1540s onwards more and more Purefeys went to Oxford and Cambridge. The Shalstone family on the whole favoured Oxford; the Leicestershire and Warwickshire families, Cambridge. In some generations, all or almost all of the sons passed through a university and not infrequently received a legal training afterwards.

In the sixteenth century the Purefeys begin to appear as sheriffs of Leicestershire, and from 1550 onwards occasionally as members of Parliament (Willis, *Notitia parliamentaria*, 1750). At first it was the Hertfordshire Purveys, as this branch of the family called themselves, who sat in Parliament. Not until the seventeenth century did the Leicestershire and Warwickshire Purefeys (Purefoys) follow their example.

The period in Purefey family history that chiefly concerns us, extends from 1545 to 1662 and falls roughly into two halves, the division being marked by the ejection of a Puritan clergyman from the rectorship in 1605.

### George Purefey (1535–1593)

In 1545 George Purefey, a boy of ten years, succeeded to the Drayton estates on the death of his father, Nicholas, whose alabaster tomb is to be seen in the church. Nothing is known about George Purefey’s early years but it can hardly be without significance, in view of his known character later, that he came of age during the troubled reign of Mary Tudor. Two of the Marian martyrs, Robert Glover and Mrs Sarah Lewis, lived at Mancetter, which lies only two miles west of

<sup>1</sup> W. G. Hoskins, “The deserted villages of Leicestershire” in *Trans. Leics. arch. soc.* vol. 12 (1921-2), p. 262. Yet the Purefeys had not enclosed their land at Shalstone by the 1640s: Terrier in possession of G. P. Purefoy (1962).

Fenny Drayton. Lawrence Saunders was burned at Coventry less than a dozen miles to the south.

By 1593, when George Purefey died, the family properties included the manors of Fenny Drayton, Welsborough, Muston, Atterton, and 2,240 acres of land in Leicestershire and Derby, with messuages and two mills besides.<sup>1</sup> Not all of these possessions were acquired by purchase: some had been added by marriage to heiresses.

At a date between 1555 and 1567 George Purefey had acquired the advowson of the church at Drayton. From our present point of view this is important because the religious opinions of successive Purefeys are revealed by the character and opinions of the rectors they presented to the living. For this reason we must review the history of the benefice.

#### THE RECTORS OF FENNY DRAYTON

The early history of the Drayton living need not detain us. From 1416 to the Reformation it had been in the gift of the Priory at Sheen. No doubt the Purefeys could to some extent influence appointments to the living. For example, one member of the family "Anthony Purfrey priest" became rector in 1525 for a year until his death in 1526.<sup>2</sup>

Purefey was followed by Thomas Kyng, BA, about whom no information is available. Kyng was succeeded by William Dewsnapp, who resigned the living in 1567. About him a comment is necessary. Between 1560 and 1574 the clergy were required to accept the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity under pain of deprivation. Between 1561 and 1569 three clergy in the diocese of Lincoln were deprived and four resigned. Among the latter group was Dewsnapp. The cause of resignation is not stated but the *Victoria county history* suggests that possibly the incumbents were of Papist views. In Dewsnapp's case at least this hypothesis is untenable. Dewsnapp was rector not only of Fenny Drayton but also of Sibson, a larger village some three miles to the north. After vacating Drayton he continued as rector of Sibson until his death in 1573. It is therefore certain that he resigned from the Drayton living for reasons unconnected with Roman Catholicism.

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. Leics. arch. soc.* vol. 4 (1875), pp. 102-3.

<sup>2</sup> G. F. Farnham and A. Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 110, for this and subsequent references to rectors; also in certain cases, *Alum. Oxon.* and *Alum. Cantab.*

John Barber, the first rector presented by the Purefeys, succeeded Dewsnapp in 1567. Barber was described in the *Liber cleri* of 1576 as then thirty-five years old and "indifferently learned in the latine tonge and in the scriptures", a report frequently made upon clergy at this period. He resigned the living in September 1582.

Although Barber's own opinions are not revealed by the information available, it is likely that George Purefey himself held Puritan opinions prior to 1582, because he presented a Puritan to the living in that year. We could perhaps learn whether Barber was a Puritan if his activities subsequent to his departure could be traced. My own efforts to identify him with clergy of the same name elsewhere have not so far met with success.

*Anthony Nutter (I): rector 1582-1593*<sup>1</sup>

In 1582 George Purefey presented Anthony Nutter, a man described as "noe graduate" but "bred in the schools". A good deal can be learned about Nutter. He was probably a native of Yorkshire. He played a prominent part in the Puritan movement of 1570-1592, which sought to reform the Church from within on a presbyterian model. He was a member of the Warwick *classis*<sup>2</sup> with the leading Puritans Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) and Humphrey Fenn (d. 1634), and nine or ten others (Usher, *op. cit.*, p. xix). Thus the earliest explicit reference to a Puritan at Fenny Drayton comes from 1586 or the year following although the *Liber cleri* of 1585 noted that he had produced no evidence of subscription to the articles.

Late in 1589 four leaders of the Elizabethan presbyterian movement were arrested, and in 1590 eighteen ringleaders, among them Nutter, were imprisoned. In Nutter's examination certain facts of interest to us come to light.

Nutter openly admitted that some ministers had met for "four or five years past" in "conference at Warwick and

<sup>1</sup> An error occurs in J. Nichols, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pt. 2, p. 590, where John Dod, MA, a Puritan clergyman is included as rector of Drayton "about 1590"; due apparently to a confusion of place-names—Dod, sometime of Fawsley, Northants, was at Fenny Compton in Warwickshire for a time (*DNB*).

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Usher, *The presbyterian movement*, 1905 (Cam. soc. 3rd Ser.): "The ministers of twelve parishes combined to form a *classis* to handle matters common to the parishes" (p. xvii).

Coventry divers times about the Discipline<sup>1</sup> and other things". He said that they had "handled scripture", questions between "the Papists and us", perused the Book of Common Prayer "to satisfy themselves how it is to be yielded unto for their ministries sake: also by what godly means authority might be moved to establish the discipline in question", and "how Brownism might be stayed". He also admitted "that, they agreed and subscribed certain articles in approbation of the discipline, and promised to observe the same, as is set down in the articles". Further, he stated that some had followed the heads in the chapter "De Ratione Liturgius" if they thought fit. There was no "form of prayer", he said, in the Book. He and his companions denied that they had consulted to use a form of prayer before it was allowed by the Queen and Parliament.

The Warwickshire *classis* assembled, seemingly, at Coventry and had on one occasion "discussed", according to Cartwright, or "resolved" according to Bancroft<sup>2</sup> certain questions, for example, the sign of the cross not to be used in baptism; private baptism unlawful, etc. On that occasion in 1588, Nutter is noted as having been present.<sup>3</sup> In 1592 the lawyers reported that no illegal practices could be proved, and the prisoners were released.

Thus we see that at least as early as 1586 or 1587 Fenny Drayton had a Puritan rector. From Nutter's subsequent history it is clear that his inclusion among the eighteen imprisoned leaders represents his true position in the movement for reform. We should note in passing that he was not a radical Puritan. He was opposed to Brownism. His moderate Puritanism seems to have reflected the general feeling in his patron's family.

Usher, Babbage<sup>4</sup> and Marchant<sup>5</sup> take the view that Nutter "turned Queen's evidence". This interpretation is open to question. Among the accused men were two groups:

<sup>1</sup> The book of discipline of the movement.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bancroft (1544-1610), later Archbishop of Canterbury, 1604-1610.

<sup>3</sup> See Strype's *Whitgift*, vol. 3, pp. 275ff, for a detailed account of the examination in the Star Chamber Court.

<sup>4</sup> S. B. Babbage, *Puritanism and Richard Bancroft*, 1962, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> R. A. Marchant, *The Puritans in the church courts 1560-1642*, 1960, p. 266.

some stone-walled every enquiry; others frankly admitted what had happened. Nutter was one of the latter.

The suggestion, that Nutter and those who thought as he did believed that they had done nothing illegal—a view with which the lawyers concurred—and that their duty to their spiritual superiors was to state the truth, is much more likely to be the true interpretation. As we shall see, the part of prosecution witness is entirely *out of character* for Nutter. Certainly his Puritan views were unchanged after his release, as we can see from the Archdeaconry Correction Court Book after 1593.

At this point I must break off the narrative about Nutter in order to continue the chronicle of the Purefey household.

#### Edward Purefey: Lord of the Manor 1593–1595

In 1593, the year after Nutter's release, George Purefey died. He was succeeded by Edward and Joyce Purefey. Joyce was George Purefey's thirty-three-year-old daughter and sole heiress. In about 1580 she had married Edward Purefey of Shalstone. This marriage merged the two families descended from William and Thomas Purefey of Misterton (see p. 6). For two centuries the lines had remained unconnected by intermarriage, at least so far as the heads of the families were concerned. Now their wealth and power were united.

If later events are a reliable guide to Edward Purefey's opinions at the time we are now considering, we may conclude that Puritan rectors were acceptable to him also. Such a conclusion is probably justified by the fact that the rector of Shalstone, John Bursey, was summoned before the Bishop of Lincoln for nonconformity in 1604. Bursey had been appointed to the living at Shalstone by Edward Purefey in 1580, two years before Nutter arrived at Fenny Drayton.<sup>1</sup>

Edward and Joyce Purefey did not long survive George Purefey. Edward died in 1595 and his widow in the following year.

<sup>1</sup> C. W. Foster, *The state of the church*, 1923, pp. cxix–cxx, and B. Willis, *op. cit.*, entry under Shalstone.

Joyce caused two splendid monuments to her father and husband to be placed in the chancel wall of Fenny Drayton church. Two Latin inscriptions tell the legend of the origin of the surname and of the Purefey crest and coat of arms. The motto "Pure foi my joye"<sup>1</sup> is displayed. Edward Purefey had had the qualities of the ancestor whose courage in battle and faithful service are symbolised by the trunk of the broken spear grasped in the right hand, and by the clasped gauntlets.

The derivation of Purefey, or Purefoy as it was more usually spelt later, from the French "pure foi" (pure faith) is debatable. But to suggest that the legend is a sixteenth-century invention is beside the point; the Purefeys plainly believed it. Their Puritan faith was their joy. Two small indications of this will be mentioned. At Barwell, six miles east of Drayton, there once stood a manor house called Red Hall, which bore the date 1591, together with the motto: "Pure foy fai me joye".<sup>2</sup> The second instance is found at Burbage, a village three miles south of Barwell. Magdalen Purefoy of Caldecote had married Anthony Grey, later Earl of Kent, the Puritan rector of Burbage from 1589 to 1643. Most of their children were given biblical names: Grace, Patience and the like. But one daughter whose birth and death are recorded in 1605 was called Faithmyjoye. Although one cannot gauge the influence of so intangible a factor as a family legend, there can be little doubt in this case that the story was in harmony with the prevailing Puritan sentiment and strengthened it.

On Edward Purefey's death in 1595, his son George, a boy of nearly thirteen, succeeded him. For few of the twenty-two years that the second George Purefey was squire was the village without religious troubles. We turn now to trace these incidents from 1593 when his grandfather died and Nutter was released from prison, to the time when the latter was deprived of the living in 1605.

#### *Anthony Nutter (2): rector 1593-1605*

We have already noted that imprisonment did not cure

<sup>1</sup> Illustrations and inscriptions given in J. Nichols, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 592f, but with slight inaccuracies.

<sup>2</sup> J. Nichols, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 476. Red Hall survives (1962) only as the name of licensed premises.

Nutter of his Puritanism. Chalmers<sup>1</sup> has drawn attention to several significant court cases in which Nutter figured at this period.

In 1593 one of Nutter's women parishioners was presented for refusing to be churched, and he undertook her legal defence. In 1594 Nutter "admitted 'plucking down the board in the chancel', presumably part of a screen". At the same hearing, the churchwardens achieved a masterpiece of understatement and political tact. When asked the meaning of their presentment of Nutter "for indistinct reading of common prayer", they explained that it meant "that Mr Nutter doth not observe the book of Common Prayer in all points". Chalmers also describes cases arising out of a long quarrel with Richard Collins to whom he refused communion for four crimes, "to wit swearing, contume[-ly], absence from church and from the catechism". The cases are too long to summarise here but Chalmers observes that Nutter was arrogating to himself a right to discipline Collins which properly belonged to a church court, where Nutter should have presented him. Lastly in this series of cases, Nutter was in trouble for not wearing a surplice at dates between 1593 and 1604.

No major incidents marked the closing years of the century in Fenny Drayton. But James I's proclamation in March 1604 requiring the conformity of his subjects to the new Prayer Book, resulted in an upheaval in the village.

On 3 October 1604, according to Babbage, the Bishop of Lincoln summoned ninety-three men before him to answer charges of nonconformity. Thirty of them proved stubborn, and presented their reasons to the King for their non-conforming. The bishop cited them "for not wearing the surplisse and not conforming themselves to the use of the Ceremonies of the Church in the celebrac'on of divine service and administrac'on of the sacramentes, & accordinge to the booke of common praier". The accused confessed that the charges were true, and craved time to deliberate about their conformity.

<sup>1</sup> C. D. Chalmers, *Puritanism in Leicestershire 1558-1633*, 1963, unpublished MA thesis, Leeds University. This thesis, which has only lately come into my hands, is essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the background of Leicestershire history against which events in Fenny Drayton took place. Besides ecclesiastical matters, social, political and economic aspects are dealt with. Extracts are given here by permission.

On several occasions later in 1604 Nutter and others appeared and were admonished to conform. On 18 January he appeared again and answered "that he hath not yet conformed himself neither will conforme himself, and saith that whatsoever ys the invention of man ys not to be allowed in the service of God"; whereupon the bishop passed sentence of deprivation.<sup>1</sup>

George Purefey's rector at Shalstone also appears in the records at this time, though less conspicuously. On 3 October Bursey was cited to answer for not wearing a surplice. On 4 December following he alleged his conformity but refused to subscribe to Whitgift's Three Articles. On 10 April 1605 George Bursey had still not subscribed. There is no evidence that he did so later, yet he remained rector of Shalstone until his death in 1629. Probably Bursey, being a man of moderate views and lacking Nutter's intransigence, was allowed to remain in office at that time like many others of similar views and peaceable temperament (Foster, *op. cit.*, pp. lxxv, cxix).

*Anthony Nutter (3) of West Ardsley, Yorkshire*

At his deprivation, Nutter disappears from the Fenny Drayton scene.<sup>2</sup> But G. F. Nuttall has drawn my attention to an Anthony Nutter in Yorkshire, referred to by J. A. Newton in *Puritans in the diocese of York 1603-1640*.<sup>3</sup> The following extracts are taken by permission:

"Anthony Nutter (who may have been previously deprived for nonconformity) was presented for Puritan offences, as minister of West Ardsley (near Batley), in 1623 and 1633. In his will of January 19th, 1633/4 (proved October 1634), he described himself as 'of Woodkirke Clerke, and the unworthy minister of Christ' (Probate Registry, York, 42 f. 325)—Woodkirk being another name for West Ardsley" (p. 437).

"In 1623, he was presented for 'sitting and receveing the

<sup>1</sup> See C. W. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 263 and entries under indexes to Introduction and Text.

<sup>2</sup> C. W. Foster noted Usher's error in stating that Nutter was re-inducted to the living. Nutter, however, may not have disappeared immediately from the Drayton district. The will of Hugh Glover of Mancetter, 1615, Birmingham Probate Registry, mentions a "preacher Nutter".

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London.



holie Communion', and (1633), for not reading prayers on all set occasions nor wearing the surplice. (Footnote p. 32)."

Newton suggests (p. 32n) that the Nutters of Woodkirk and Fenny Drayton may have been one and the same, and makes the following observation: "It is an interesting coincidence if nothing more that George Fox was born at Fenny Drayton, and James Nayler hailed from West Ardsley or Woodkirk, the places where Nutter if he were one and the same man, was successively minister."<sup>1</sup>

R. A. Marchant in his fuller study states that: "The most extreme Puritanism discovered by the episcopal authorities was centred in the two chapelries of Morley and Woodkirk" (p. 108).

The importance of Newton's suggestion for an understanding of the sources of Quaker leadership and of the influence of tradition is obvious. A brief discussion of the matter is therefore appropriate at this point.

\* \* \*

It is tempting to assume that identical and unusual surnames belong to the same person, but those acquainted with this familiar pitfall in genealogical study will require a plain demonstration before deciding that the Nutters of West Ardsley and Fenny Drayton had a common identity.

Examining the Yorkshire records first, we find that at the Visitation of 1619 Nutter of West Ardsley is described as aged and infirm, and his age given as seventy. In the Chancery Court in May 1633 a Puritan acquaintance "alleged Nutter 80 or more and very infirm of body" (Marchant *ibid.*, p. 266). These references gives us dates of birth: 1549, and not later than 1553, respectively. Among the Leicestershire records of the diocese of Lincoln we learn that Nutter of Fenny Drayton was "ordained priest by the bishop of Coventry 29 Sept 1578". Nutter's ordination can hardly have taken place at an earlier age than twenty-two years and his birth would thus have been not later than 1556. In 1633 he would be at least seventy-eight. Thus we see that the date records are in harmony. The two Nutters could have been one man.

<sup>1</sup> James Nayler was an important leader of the Quaker Movement in the 1650s. The information Newton gives about the Congregational church of 1653 that was formed at West Ardsley, and of which James Nayler was a member, shows that a separatist congregation met nearby twenty years earlier

Nutter's will, referred to by Newton above, has also been examined. Besides Woodkirk, the will mentions only three place-names: ". . . *Maxfeild* [Macclesfield] in *Chessheire* and Peter Monsonn of *Adarstonn* and my sister Edmunds wife [i.e. his sister-in-law, his brother Edmund's wife to whom he has already made a bequest in the will] of *Edington* in *Warwikeshire* . . ." "Adarstonn" or "Aderston" were seventeenth-century renderings of modern Atherstone; "Edington" can only be Ettington, a village nearly twenty miles south of Coventry. Whether Atherstone, about four miles from Fenny Drayton, or Atherstone-on-Stour, some five miles from Ettington, is intended, cannot be determined. Inconclusive though they are by themselves these geographical links between the Nutter stamping grounds are certainly curious.

Turning now to the Woodkirk records, we find that in 1633 nine persons were accused of refusing to come to church and of refusing to kneel when receiving Holy Communion. Nutter is quoted in the Chancery Court proceedings of 1633 as saying "that whatsoever ys the invention of man ys not to be allowed in the service of God"—an opinion expressed in identical words, for which the Bishop of Lincoln had deprived Nutter of Drayton nearly thirty years before.

A search for autograph documents among Leicestershire records has turned up several examples of Nutter of Fenny Drayton's handwriting for comparison with the Woodkirk will. The similarities are striking. Dr D. M. Barratt of the Bodleian Library of Oxford, and my colleague, E. R. C. Brinkworth, have kindly examined the documents. In their opinion the writing is by the same hand.

Taken together, the pieces of evidence assembled here place beyond reasonable doubt the conclusion that the Anthony Nutters of Drayton and Woodkirk were one and the same man. Nutter must have moved to Yorkshire where we find him under the powerful patronage of Sir John Savile, spreading the same ideas, and his congregation disciplined for the unorthodox practices he had earlier taught the churchwardens and villagers of Fenny Drayton. A further suggestion is perhaps justifiable. The fact that the Woodkirk will mentions two dozen of his relatives, yet specifies in only three cases the towns where legatees reside—and these three outside Yorkshire—perhaps constitutes evidence that all the

rest lived in Yorkshire in not distant places. If so, there is a strong likelihood that Nutter was a native of Yorkshire.

\* \* \*

On 30 January 1605, as we have seen, the squire and villagers of Fenny Drayton found themselves without Anthony Nutter's presence in the rectory. Over a period of twenty-three years, except for his interlude in prison, he had impressed his personality upon the village community.

Before leaving him finally let us try to estimate his position in the Puritan movement. In 1590-1592 Nutter had been one of eighteen ministers in the whole of Britain to suffer imprisonment. In 1604 he was one of the thirty more stubborn non-conforming clergy in the large diocese of Lincoln. In the country as a whole, only eighty or ninety clergy suffered deprivation. Nutter was one of the nine deprived in the diocese of Lincoln and one of the four ejected in Leicestershire. He was not one of those who conformed later. Such was Nutter's physical vigour that we discover him almost three decades later still a leader in a centre of extreme puritanism in the York diocese, where a strong separatist group which became the first Congregational church in the West Riding was established soon after his death.

Although not as radical as some, he preached and practised Puritan Christianity as long as he lived, in spite of disciplinary action frequently taken against him. His record leaves no doubt that in Anthony Nutter, the villagers of Fenny Drayton and Woodkirk, in turn, enjoyed or did not enjoy, according to their own private opinion, the ministrations of an ardent, uncompromising and outstanding Puritan.

### George Purefey (1583-1628)

Earlier we said that the second George Purefey succeeded—while a young boy—to the family estates in 1593, the year in which Anthony Nutter returned to Drayton after his imprisonment. In about 1604, the year when the bishop sum-

moned Nutter to subscribe and conform, this George Purefey came of age, and married Mary Knightley of Wadley, Berkshire. Their son and heir, the third to be named George, was born in January 1605. Mary Purefey predeceased her husband, who married twice more before his death in 1628.

About the second George Purefey's religious opinions the evidence leaves us in doubt. Perhaps the most revealing fact is his marriage into a family as staunchly Puritan as any to be found in the Midlands. Mary Knightley's father, Sir Valentine, was the heir of the Knightleys of Fawsley, Northamptonshire, a village situated some thirty-five miles south-east of Fenny Drayton.

Sir Richard Knightley, the grandfather of George Purefey's wife, was "one of the earliest and most zealous patrons" of the Puritan party. Some of the Marprelate publications were printed at Fawsley. For his part in this subversive activity, Sir Richard was fined heavily by the Court of the Star Chamber. It was a tenant farmer at Upton, under Sir Valentine Knightley, Mary's father, who transported Walgrave's press from Molesey to Fawsley.<sup>1</sup> Mary Purefey's father and grandfather placed themselves in further peril when in 1605 they joined with thirty-seven other gentlemen of Northamptonshire in petitioning against the deprivation of non-conforming ministers. The two Knightleys and Sir Edward Montagu presented the petition, which was held by King James to be "factious and seditious". The petitioners were placed in custody and the presenters punished. The Knightleys were dismissed from the Commission of the Peace, and Sir Richard also put out of the lieutenancy of the county.<sup>2</sup>

The marriage of George Purefey and Mary Knightley may well have been one of the many instances of connections between landed families holding the same religious views. It was a later Puritan Sir Richard Knightley who married John Hampden's daughter, and thus allied himself with the house of Cromwell, of whom it was said that "the ties of social connexion were superadded to the force of public principle" (Baker), but the remark was equally applicable to this Knightley-Purefey marriage early in the century.

<sup>1</sup> G. Baker, *History and Antiquities of the county of Northampton*, 1822-1841, vol. 1, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup> *S.P.Dom. Jac. I*, vol. 12, Nos 69, 74.

Perhaps the most curious fact noted in the course of the present study relates to the origin of the Northamptonshire Knightleys, a family that was prominent in the county from King Henry V's reign onwards and outstanding for its Puritan sympathies for at least a century. The Knightleys first established themselves at Fawsley in 1415-16 when a certain Richard Knightley from Staffordshire settled there with his wife Elizabeth. Elizabeth Knightley was a daughter of Thomas Purefey, founding father of the Fenny Drayton family.

*Edward Lynne: rector 1605-1606*

The rectory remained empty after Anthony Nutter's departure in January 1605 until Edward Lynne was instituted in August of that year. Lynne, a man of scholarly attainments, left Drayton about twelve months later for more tranquil pastures.

*Robert Mason: rector 1606-1638*

George Purefey's second choice of rector was a north-countryman: Robert Mason, MA, of Crosthwaite, Cumberland, who transferred from St Peter's, Derby. Mason settled into the living and held it for thirty-two years. Little information about him is available. We know that he administered communion to his flock while they knelt but two items of circumstantial evidence suggest that he had Puritan leanings. The first is that his son John became vicar of Faringdon, Berkshire, where Sir Robert Pye, the Purefeys' near neighbour when they were at Wadley, possessed the advowson. Sir Robert Pye was a strong supporter of the Parliamentary cause during the Civil War. The other item of information concerns Robert Mason's bequest ". . . to my friend Mr George Abbott books written by Dr John White."<sup>1</sup> The George Abbott mentioned here was the son-in-law of the Puritan William Purefoy of Caldecote. Abbott also took the side of Parliament.<sup>2</sup> G. F. Nuttall has suggested to

<sup>1</sup> Robert Mason's will, Leics. Prob. Reg., proved 1 June 1639; transcript in Leics. Mus. Arch.

<sup>2</sup> "Purefey" was the spelling that was beginning to be adopted by the Purefeys. No doubt it was still pronounced "Pur-fey" or "Pure-fey". Adopted first by the Caldecote branch, it serves here as a convenient distinction between the two neighbouring families. (The grandfathers of William Purefoy of Caldecote and the third George Purefey of Fenny Drayton, were brothers.)

me that the books bequeathed to Abbott were probably the writings of the Puritan John White (1570–1615). Mason died in 1638.

#### LAY NONCONFORMITY IN FENNY DRAYTON

Robert Mason's long tenure of the living was far from uneventful. Up to this point (1605) the religious opinions of successive lords of the manor and of their nominees in the rectory have engaged our attention. Now, we discover that the villagers had adopted Nutter's ideas. Our next task is to trace their stout and in some cases life-long resistance to ecclesiastical control.

In the year after Mason's institution, the first of a long series of instances of lay nonconformity in Fenny Drayton appears in the diocesan records. The Episcopal Visitation at Leicester in July 1607 discloses that thirteen villagers had "not received the communion at Easter last and the reason is because they refuse to take the same kneeling". Both churchwardens, George Heard and "George" Pegge, and also Sibell Pegge, Ann "Hurd", George Batling, and Anne his wife, Richard Dence and Anne his daughter, George Orton and his wife, Anthony Smith, Margaret Smith, and Margaret Pettie are named in the proceedings.<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop's Transcripts of the Drayton parish registers (the registers themselves are not extant for the dates we are considering) show that George Heard and Robert Pegge (for which the name "George Pegge" in the episcopal court records seems to have been given in error) were churchwardens from "March 1607–March 1608". In the previous year George Batling had been a churchwarden. Thus from the earliest time for which records are available, some of the villagers were making a Puritan witness.

Subsequent proceedings taken against the same persons are given in the Correction Court Book of the archdeaconry of Leicester.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. W. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. lxxix. Also noted by W. T. Hall in Notes to a transcript of *Fenny Drayton register 1570–1850*, 1930 in Leics. Mus. Arch., but misplaced by him in the archdeaconry court. Other errors appear in the Notes, which, both as to facts and conclusions, should be treated with reserve.

<sup>2</sup> At this point I must express my indebtedness to G. A. Chinnery, Archivist at Leicester Museum, without whose assistance and continued interest I should not have been able to give much of the following account of Puritanism among the Fenny Drayton villagers themselves.

At Michaelmas 1608 the Heards, Batlings, Ortons, Anthony Smith, Richard Davy, with John Nettleton and his wife Anna besides, were accused of the same offence of refusing to receive Communion kneeling. The accused were ordered to receive Communion publicly in Leicester. All are said to have conformed at this time. But George Heard did not appear on this occasion. He did so at the next court day, when he admitted the charge. The Judge ordered him to receive Communion at the hands of Robert Mason and to certify that he had done so. An entry dated 2 June 1609 records an order by the Judge that Heard should be excommunicated for failing to certify.

In 1610 Margaret Pettie is noted as having been absolved but later in the same year she, with the ten persons punished in 1608, is once again cited. In 1611 the same eleven were accused. In the same year John Collins, a churchwarden, was charged with withholding an excommunication against George Heard and other Puritans in the parish. Chalmers regards this as an instance of a churchwarden using his influence to protect his fellow Puritans.

In 1612 the Act Book states that "John Nettleton one of the churchwardens standeth excommunicate".

Then comes an intermission for a year but in 1614 the Batlings, Ortons, Nettletons, and Margaret Pettie are noted as standing excommunicate.

At the Michaelmas Visitation of 1615 George Heard's wife is presented, together with the three other couples, for not receiving Communion kneeling.

At the Annunciation Visitation of 1616 the Batlings, Nettletons, and Ortons, but not Heard's wife, were again presented and excommunicated. At Michaelmas in the same year Batling and his wife still held out. Orton is noted as giving in, and his wife as having died. "George Orton pauper" is recorded as having been buried in March 1618.

Thus it is apparent that Nutter's teachings won life-long adherents among the villagers. The extent of lay non-conformity at this period can be determined from the *Liber cleri* of 1603 and the *Liber patronorum* of 1605,<sup>1</sup> where the population is given as 100 and the communicants as ninety.

Continuing with our examination of the Court Book, we

<sup>1</sup> C. W. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 298 and J. Edwards, *Fenny Drayton*, 1924, respectively.

find that in the next year, 1617, a new name appears: George Smith joins the Heardes and Batling, who persist in their customary offence. At the same sitting, two other villagers were in trouble for working on Tuesday in Whitweek: ". . . (they felled and carried ashes at the order of their master, Mr Purefey of Drayton) so that they were absent from evening prayer"—an entry that indicates an undutiful attitude to church attendance on the part of master and servants.

In 1619 George Batling reappears in office and, together with George Brownlow his fellow churchwarden, is excommunicated. Agnes Batling also stands excommunicate at this time.

During the next four years no entry under Fenny Drayton relevant to this account is found, but absence of nonconformity must not be argued from the silence in the records.

At this point we should note in passing that George Fox was born in 1624—"in the month called July" he tells us in his *Journal*. In the same month the Correction Court Book has a curious entry, where George Hollingshead is cited "for jangling the bells and leaving the church door open all night"—an incident whose significance is entirely open to speculation, since we are not told whether he was drunk or sober.

The final entry relating to the redoubtable George Batling occurs in 1628. The Court Book states simply: "deade". Batling's will (P. C. C. Clark 139) shows that he was a yeoman who left lands in Drayton to his son and dowries to his daughters then unmarried totalling £50. In 1607 the death of a servant of his was noted (Bishop's Transcripts). Thus we see that he was a man of some substance.

In 1626 George Smith was cited "for not receiving Holy Communion this Easter last". He was presented later in the year. In the following year he was excommunicated. Entries occur regularly twice yearly from 1628 to 1631 inclusive, stating that Smith had been cited to appear. With equal regularity he absented himself.

In 1633 "George Brownloe" reappears as churchwarden. In this year, also, Thomas Bennett appears at court to make reparation for an offence which is not specified, and he was discharged. Bennett, with William Whittell, was churchwarden in 1634 and 1635. "Whittle" was later in trouble in



1638 for an offence which was revealed in 1641 to be a refusal to repair his part of the churchyard mounds, although the reason for this dereliction of duty is not given. During the next four years (1634-1637) no entry occurs that is relevant to this enquiry, but in the next year a record of special interest is found.

In August 1638 the final entry relating to George Smith states that he was standing excommunicate and not seeking absolution. He did not appear, and was excommunicated. The churchwardens on this occasion were noted in the margin: George Hollingshead and "Christofer Coxe". Reference to the Bishop's Transcripts for 1638 and also in 1639, demonstrates that "Coxe" was written in error for Fox, due to a mis-hearing on the part of the clerk. Christopher Fox was the father of George Fox.

In this study of reformist ideas in the community in which George Fox was reared, special interest attaches to a court hearing at which Fox's father, on his first official appearance as churchwarden, witnessed a clash between ecclesiastical authority and a stubborn villager; particularly so in view of what we know later of Christopher Fox's own Puritan opinions.

This section on the villagers of Drayton is concluded with a summary of what is known of the churchwardens. The office of churchwarden at this period fell to the adult men of the village in turn. Of the thirty-five years from 1605/6 to 1639/40 inclusive, documents—mostly Bishop's Transcripts—survive for twenty-two. The surviving documents reveal the names of forty-three of the forty-four appointments made in those years. The forty-three appointments are shared between only twenty-one men, and among them only seventeen surnames occur. Fifteen wardens held office for one or two years; six for three or four. They normally served for two successive years, serving again after an interval of about ten years.

Turning now to their religious views, we find that three of the twenty-one, viz. Heard, Batling and Nettleton, suffered excommunication, and another, Pegge, was disciplined for refusing to take Communion kneeling. There is no indication that they renounced their opinions. A fifth, Brownlow, was excommunicated, while a churchwarden in company with Batling, although the reason for his excom-

munication is not expressly stated. Three others, Hollingshead, Bennett and Whittell, were cited for acts contrary to church discipline but not necessarily connected with Puritan views. Fox is known to have been a Puritan later. Puritans among the churchwardens re-appear, after an interval of years, still holding the same opinions. In one year at least, both wardens were excommunicated.

No other references to Drayton occur in the Correction Court Book before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, when the records cease, not to be resumed until the court began to function again (with greatly reduced powers) at the Restoration in 1660.

The evidence of Puritanism set out above, is drawn only from the Archdeaconry Correction Court Book and Episcopal Court Book. Probably other sources, such as the Instance Court Books at Leicester Museum and the extensive records in the diocesan archives at Lincoln would yield additional evidence of religious dissent at Fenny Drayton.

### George Purefey (1605–1661)

The second George Purefey, it will be recalled, married Mary Knightley in about 1604, and a son, George, was born in 1605. On this son and heir, Sir Valentine Knightley, Mary's father, settled the manors of Wadley and Wicklesham in Berkshire. Wadley House, situated a mile from Faringdon, became the principal seat of the family, but the third George Purefey was buried at Fenny Drayton, the last of the family to be interred there. He succeeded his father on the latter's death in 1628.

About the Puritan opinions of the third George Purefey we are in no doubt at all. Whatever the truth about Robert Mason's own views, he preached to a Puritan patron during the last ten years of his life. The presumption is that he was of that persuasion himself.

George Purefey appointed as Mason's successor in 1638, Nathaniel Stephens,<sup>1</sup> a zealous Presbyterian who figures

<sup>1</sup> See *DNB*.

prominently in the early pages of George Fox's *Journal*. In 1640 Purefey gave another demonstration of his convictions by receiving into the family at Wadley, John Hinckley<sup>1</sup> (1617?-1695) who was also a Puritan. In nominating such men George Purefey was but following the example of his kinsman across Watling Street, William Purefoy, who presented to the livings of Weddington (1627) and Caldecote (1630) Richard Vines, who was afterwards to become an eminent Presbyterian divine.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

We have now brought this narrative to the outbreak of the Civil War when national events begin to disturb the life of the village. In 1644, only six years after Stephens's institution at Fenny Drayton, we find him taking refuge in the Parliamentary stronghold of Coventry; George Fox, now a young man of nineteen, is travelling about the country seeking answers to his religious questionings and largely ignoring the national troubles; while George Purefey's movements are restricted by his command of the Parliamentary garrison of Compton Wynyates House, near Banbury.

The events of the first Civil War (1642-1646) lie in the background of this story and only a few local details need be picked out. The part played by George Purefey was a minor one compared with the career of William Purefoy of Caldecote. The latter became a notable soldier, a signatory of Charles I's death warrant, and afterwards one of the most important men in the realm.

The first action of the Civil War was an attack on Caldecote House. Unfortunately for the Royalist cause William Purefoy was not at home. In March 1643 he was commissioned to raise a regiment of horse and dragoons and given command of it. Among Colonel Purefoy's officers were George Purefey of Fenny Drayton and some of his relatives. The regiment took part in a number of minor engagements in the midlands. In June 1644 it assisted in the capture of Compton Wynyates House. The House was garrisoned and Major George Purefey placed in command. Purefey's most notable exploit was a

<sup>1</sup> See *DNB*.

<sup>2</sup> See D. Masson, *Life of John Milton and the history of his time, 1874-1894*, vol. 2, p. 522, vol. 3, pp. 19, 391.

successful defence of the House against a surprise attack, an account of which provided welcome propaganda at a period when the fortunes of Parliament were low.<sup>1</sup> Purefey remained at Compton until at least as late as May 1645 and probably until the end of the war in May 1646.

### THE FOXES OF FENNY DRAYTON

Our study of the tradition of religious reform in which George Fox was reared now nears its climax. The influences that bear upon the developing mind of a religious genius are many and varied. Here we are concerned only with a few of those that originated locally and influenced Fox in early life.

The village tradition of Puritanism, traced in the preceding pages, was transmitted to Fox by his parents, Christopher and Mary Fox. Christopher Fox we have met earlier. He was known as "righteous Christer" among the villagers. His wife, Mary (Lago) Fox was ". . . an upright woman . . . of the stock of the Martyrs", her son tells us in his *Journal*, and, according to William Penn, ". . . a woman accomplished above most of her degree in the place where she lived."<sup>2</sup> Christopher and Mary Fox's interest in things religious is evinced by their desire that George should become a minister of religion. They remained faithful adherents of Nathaniel Stephens.

Therefore, by the ordinary criterion by which one decides people's religious allegiances, we may reasonably conclude that Fox's parents were Puritans of presbyterian persuasion. This is to take a conservative view. George Fox tells us that his parents "saw beyond the priests", although they went to hear them. The phrase surely implies that they evinced more radical tendencies.

<sup>1</sup> *A letter from Sergeant Major Purefoy, Governor of Compton House in Warwickshire to his colonell, Colonell Purefoy . . . Febr. 7 1644(5)*. See also Beesley's *History of Banbury* and Whitelock's *Memorials*. The rank of "sergeant major" corresponded to that of major in modern usage.

<sup>2</sup> Efforts have been made, but so far unsuccessfully, to connect Mary Lago with the families of that name well-established as farmers in the villages near to Fenny Drayton, or with the most noted member of the family, Waldive Lago, one of Colonel Pride's "Lambs". Waldive Lago was the man into whose charge the mace of the House of Commons was delivered when Oliver Cromwell ordered "that bauble" to be taken away, and who, later, as Colonel Lago, added his signature to the instrument proclaiming Richard Cromwell successor to Oliver Cromwell.

*George Fox and Nathaniel Stephens*

Nathaniel Stephens was instituted as rector in 1638, a few weeks before George Smith was excommunicated by order of the archdeaconry court for the last time. From that date onwards for some twenty-five years, the Puritans in the village were assured of their rector's encouragement and support.

When Stephens arrived in Fenny Drayton George Fox was a serious-minded boy of fourteen. Five years later, in July 1643, the youth of nineteen left home and travelled about for over a year, staying for periods first at Lutterworth, then Northampton, Newport Pagnell, and London—all centres of dissent at that or earlier times.

Fox returned to the village in 1645, remaining there about a year. Stephens returned from Coventry to Fenny Drayton, and Fox tells us in his *Journal*: "Stephens would often come to me, and I went often to him." Probably from this year dates Stephens's praise of Fox ". . . there was never such a plant bred in England". Certainly 1645 and 1646 are the years when the tradition established by the Purefeys was impressed most directly upon Fox through the rector they had chosen. Probably Fox owed more to Stephens than he was aware of, despite the fact that the first premonitory rumblings of their later quarrel are recorded in the *Journal* for this period: "At that time, he would applaud me and speak highly of me to others: And what I said in discourse on week-days, that he would preach on the First-days; for which I did not like him."

Fox continued his spiritual search among religious teachers near Fenny Drayton, at Mancetter, Atherstone, Tamworth and Coventry. During this time some of his most important insights came to him and Stephens expressed anxiety to Fox's parents, about their son "for going after strange lights". Early in 1647 Fox resumed his travels, this time in the north midlands—Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. He gained no satisfaction from the religious teachers from whom he sought help. But by 1648 groups of people had accepted his own teachings. The beginnings of the organised Quaker movement must be dated not later than the years 1646–1648 and its origin located in the prepared ground of the north midlands.

In 1649, Fox returned to Market Bosworth in Leicester-

shire, where Nathaniel Stephens was preacher for the day. "He raged much" when Fox directed him and his hearers to "the Truth and Light within them to guide them to Christ, from sin", and Stephens told the people that Fox was mad. Fox and his friends were stoned out of the town. The Market Bosworth meeting was the first break between Stephens, representing the older tradition, and the new one then being established by Fox.

Also in 1649 Fox began his journey into Yorkshire and the north-west counties. From Balby, where he gained strong support, he travelled into the West Riding. He preached in West Ardsley church, where the congregation accorded him a rough reception. But James Nayler, who was a member of the congregation, came to Fox at Stanley, only a few miles from West Ardsley, and was there convinced by his teaching. Excommunicated by the church at West Ardsley, Nayler was shortly afterwards to join Fox on the great preaching movement out of the North of the "valiant seventy". Whether he and Fox ever realised the historical link between them represented by Anthony Nutter's ministry is not known, and may be doubted.

In 1654 Fox returned to Fenny Drayton from his remarkably successful missionary journey in the north of England. During this visit Fox and his supporters held two great debates in the village with Stephens and others, among whom was Stephens's son who was also called Nathaniel.<sup>1</sup> The complete rupture in personal relations between Fox and Stephens which then resulted was due perhaps partly to Stephens's jealousy of Fox's success as a religious teacher: "This is the business: George Fox is come to the light of the sun, and now he thinks to put out my starlight." Fox denied having any such motive. An attempt to effect a reconciliation between the two men in the presence of Christopher Fox and George's younger brother failed entirely. Stephens avoided a third debate arranged to take place in Fox's home. As a beneficed minister he could not accept Fox's argument that tithes had been ended (Hebrews ch. 7) and the priesthood with them.

Fox's references to Stephens in his *Journal* are bitter and scornful. Stephens, for his part, dissociated himself from the young man of whom he had once thought so much:

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of George Fox*, ed. N. Penney, 1911, vol. 1, pp. 152-158.

“. . . I will not make mention of that sect which goeth under the name of the Quakers; what they are, and who they are, God knows: I do desire to contain myself in such things as I have experience of.”<sup>1</sup>

## ENVOI

The rest of this story is soon told. It remains only to show what happened to the Purefeys and the reformers whom they had nurtured in their “utterly undistinguished village in Leicestershire” as one modern writer has mistakenly called it.

First, Nathaniel Stephens. He continued as rector until 1662, when he refused to accept the Act of Uniformity and was ejected from the living. Nichols and other historians state, but without citing documentary evidence, that Stephens suffered persecution at this period. Among the Leicestershire Certificates concerning Conventicles 1669,<sup>2</sup> we find Nathaniel Stephens described as “the preacher of about 20 Presbyterians” at Hinkley, some eight miles from Drayton. Nathaniel, junior, followed his father’s example. In the Hearth Tax Roll of 1664 “Nathaniel Stevens Junr” occupied one of the largest houses in Fenny Drayton. His name appears, together with his father’s, among those licensed to preach under the Declaration of Indulgence:<sup>3</sup>

Higham <sup>4</sup>	The house of Nathaniel Stephens, jr 29 May 1672	Presbyterian
Stoke Golden or Stoke- holden <sup>4</sup>	Nathaniel Stephens, senr, in his house, 29 May 1672	Presbyterian

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Stephens, *A plain and easy calculation*, 1656, quoted in T. E. Harvey, “The young George Fox and Nathaniel Stephens”, in *Friends quarterly examiner* vol. 80 (1946) pp. 69–78.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in “Nonconformists in Leicestershire in 1669”, in *Trans. Leics. arch. soc.* vol. 30 p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Printed in *Leicester notes and queries* vol. 3 (1893–5).

<sup>4</sup> Higham and Stoke Golding are both about four miles from Drayton.

Here we see the beginnings of two Nonconformist groups in south-west Leicestershire.

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There is little more to tell of George Purefey and his family at Fenny Drayton.

After the end of the Civil War he appears to have taken little part in public affairs. From September 1654 to January 1655 he and his neighbour Sir Robert Pye represented Berkshire in Parliament.<sup>1</sup> After Cromwell's death he—like a number of others who had fought on the side of Parliament—favoured the return of Charles II. He was nominated one of the Knights of the Royal Oak, an Order proposed, but never created, by Charles II to reward those who had supported his restoration. George Purefey's income is given in the list of Knights as £3,000 per annum: few of them were wealthier than he.

George Purefey died in 1661. His tomb, the most splendid of them all, is in the nave of Drayton church. He was succeeded by his son, yet another George, and the latter by Sir Henry Purefey, Bart. Sir Henry died in 1686 and passed most of the estates "away from his name and line". The Fenny Drayton estate was sold in 1706.

Few visible signs exist today in the village of the once influential Purefeys. Only the "funeral monuments now remain to attest their former greatness". Despite statements to the contrary, their manor house has vanished and its site as I believe, is occupied by Rookery Farm,<sup>2</sup> the large farm that adjoins the church, and from which a path and gate still lead to the church. Two church bells given by "Sir Henry Puriefey" in 1684—one is in its original state—are perhaps the most noteworthy of the Purefeys' contributions to modern Fenny Drayton.

\* \* \*

Of George Fox and his life-work no more need be said here. They have become a part of world history through the Christian witness of the Quakers.

<sup>1</sup> B. Willis, *Notitia parliamentaria*, 1750, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> While this article was in the press, Rookery Farm was demolished. A housing estate now covers the area to the north of the church. A new Rookery Farm has been built to the west of the church (1967).



## CONCLUSION

What is the outcome of this study of the history of Fenny Drayton? What broad conclusions, if any, emerge from it?

Our answers to such questions must be qualified for several reasons, all connected with the fact that the present essay does little more than open a furrow in a field that has received little attention from students of Quaker origins. In the first place, although the main outline of the Drayton story is clear enough, this study, as has been intimated already, has not been exhaustive, and details yet to be brought to light may give greater definition to its principal characters and more emphasis to its main argument. Secondly, owing to limitations of space, I have not shown how the Purefey's relatives and acquaintances among the local nobility and squirarchy contributed towards making the Drayton *district* one of strong Puritan sympathies: it is important to know that a person of radical inclinations reared in the village could have found kindred spirits in the neighbourhood. Thirdly, one cannot realise the nature of the Purefey's power in Fenny Drayton itself unless one appreciates that Drayton was but one focus of their influence which penetrated into half a dozen counties, and which was in itself but one example of the growing power of the landed Puritan families that was spreading like a network through the country—again for want of space I have referred to only a few facts under this heading.

Subject to the foregoing provisos, we may suggest the following conclusions. In general, we may say that the religious history of Fenny Drayton proves to be much like that of many scores of places where influential patrons spread reformist views by installing parsons of their own persuasion for the instruction of the people. Authorities on the history of religious dissent have long recognised the importance of this factor.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The great landlords had accumulated many rights of presentation in their hands: Lord Rich, later Earl of Warwick, controlled many in Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Northants, Suffolk and Essex; . . . Sir Richard Knightley, Sir Edward Montague, and Sir Francis Hastings, were great patrons in Northants." . . . "Careful investigation makes it seem probable that the majority of the Puritan ministers, in the counties where the sect was strongest, owed their places to the enthusiastic proselytism of those few influential gentlemen who have just been named." R. G. Usher, writing on the Puritan movement 1604/5, in *The reconstruction of the English church*, 1910, vol. I, p. 271.

But certain features of Puritanism in Fenny Drayton are remarkable. Its long duration, its continuity, and especially its strength during the Elizabethan period under the ministrations of Anthony Nutter, are all unusual. What makes the record quite outstanding are the eminence of the most notable scion of the Purefey stock, the regicide William Purefoy, and the quality of its finest product, George Fox the Quaker.

The continuity of Puritanism in Fenny Drayton from at least as early as 1584 on into the life-time of George Fox, and even into his home-life, has been amply demonstrated. The documentary evidence could hardly be more complete.

Some students, among whom is the present writer, maintain that the difference between radical Puritanism and the Quaker understanding of original Christianity is of a sort that makes all the difference. Yet, even if one holds that Fox's thought leaped far beyond Puritanism, the conclusion that that was the springboard from which it leapt is inescapable. I could have dwelt in greater detail upon the influence of Nathaniel Stephens and other local persons on the development of Fox's thought. Another and more difficult subject that must await research by a specialist is the connection between Leicestershire Puritanism in the sixteenth century and the Lollard heretics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when John Wycliffe of Lutterworth and others made Leicestershire for a time the leading Lollard county: some interesting clues await the attention of the researcher. Some influences of Lollardy upon early Quaker leaders, including Fox, can be demonstrated, but these too must await later treatment.

The conclusions set out above have deliberately been given a wide historical setting. Earlier in this century the spiritual antecedents of the Quakers were sought by some Quaker historians among the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic monks and nuns or among Protestant mystics who were influenced by them. This hypothesis is improbable and is supported by little evidence. It brings conviction to few today. Unfortunately, as it seems to me, the theory has had the effect of misleading researchers by directing their minds to exotic influences that are in the main not cognate and thus of diverting attention from the native roots of the Quaker Movement.

Finally, I have indicated how much remains to be written about both the immediate and more distant forerunners of Puritans in Fenny Drayton and south-west Leicestershire. If my main thesis proves correct it would seem that the study of Quaker origins in the country as a whole can hardly be said to have begun. It also seems that the development of the subject lies largely in the hands of local historians.

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