

The Somerby Estate.

THE CHIEF ENDOWED PROPERTY OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF LEICESTER AND RUTLAND.

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PART II.—THE MEETING.

There are but few allusions to the Meeting of Somerby, or to those who composed it. Possibly the period of its chief usefulness to the “rude forefathers of the hamlet” was that preceding the death and the bequest of William Tompson, when the population was from 150 to 200. The Parliamentary Commission of 1656 returned Somerby as one of the eight parishes in Leicestershire absolutely without an appointed clergyman—hence the villagers would especially hail itinerant ministry, while the hospitable elasticity of the Tompson’s and Chapman’s dwelling-halls accommodated the worshippers. There is no recorded account of prayer or exhortation. Persecution was a sufficing test of “membership.” Among the names of early adherents belonging to the parish were:—

Tompson	Highby	Redmile
Chapman	Harris	Atton
Beeby	Bott	Dansey

Yet as Somerby was by far the most convenient centre for the Friends of the twelve or fifteen villages comprising “Branstone and Oakham” Monthly Meeting, the First-day meetings appointed to rotate in most of those villages were probably better attended at Somerby than elsewhere. To these meetings came Friends from Great and Little Dalby, Burrough on the Hill, Twyford, Tugby, Tilton, Keythorpe, East Norton, Langham, and Withcote. There is little or no direct evidence of vocal ministry in these earlier Meetings for Worship, although known Ministers lived round about. Probably William Money’s mother, and her second husband, William Chapman, were preachers. John Richards, of East Norton, was an attender and a Minister—he, whose long imprisonment for conscience’ sake (through an Exchequer process) ended but with his life. Here, too, worshipped that earnest

adherent of Quakerism, Isabel Hacker, of Withcote Hall, the widow of Colonel Hacker, the regicide. Her name occurs as a sharer in a noted local discussion with Baptists. In London she was one of that memorable company of men and women Friends who in 1664 lay packed on ship-board in the Thames, under sentence of banishment for seven years to Jamaica. Her death is recorded in Friends' local Register as occurring at Strathern, near Belvoir, and probably Clawson grave-yard was the place of her burial. By 1700, Samuel Fish, of Keythorpe, was a very useful member and Minister, until suspended for disputing an inheritance. And good John Pearson, of Oakham, the diligent scribe of the Society, was married and ministered there.

But George Robinson, though generally resident at Oakham, was beyond all others *the* Minister of Somerby Meeting. His affectionate regard for it lasted from the time of his marriage in 1707 to Mary¹⁰ Beeby, of Somerby Meeting House, until his death in 1772. By his own wish he was buried in Somerby graveyard (probably by the side of his wife, though her death is not registered) and then his honoured funeral closed a devoted association of sixty-five years. During his long life he made leisure in the midst of his callings as a cooper and afterwards as a farmer (suffering enormous tithe distraints), not only to minister often at Somerby and elsewhere, but also to travel "in Truth's service" into many parts of England. With the one exception of the early-removed Mary Hawley, his Certificate as a Minister is the only one given forth by Oakham Monthly Meeting.

Somerby Meeting House was one of the twelve for which the Quarterly Meeting paid the Licence fee of 1s. each in 1712. After a warm appeal from Oakham Monthly Meeting that the Quarterly Meeting should circulate for the convenience of County Friends, Somerby Meeting House was chosen for the Eastern Division, and the Quarterly Meeting met there in the summers of 1718 and 1719. This was exchanged for Oakham after its Meeting House was built. It does not appear that any of

¹⁰ Mary Radley's papers state as above, but the Marriage Registers record that George Robinson married *Lydia* Beeby in 1707. See next note.

the before-named Somerby families except Beeby remained Friends after internal discipline had been organised as essential for the vitality and health of the little Church.

The Register of Branston Monthly Meeting, obviously imperfect though it is, shows eight births recorded, all of them between 1692 and 1716, and six marriages from 1693 to 1738.¹¹ There were ten recorded Burials from William Tompson's in 1680 to George Robinson's of Oakham in 1772.

Until 1762, the First-day meeting at eleven or twelve o'clock had circulated evenly between Branston (at the Pilkingtons and Allens), East Norton (at the Hubbards and Richards), and Somerby. That autumn

It was resolved that Somerby should be the Meeting Place once in the year only, *viz.*, on the 1st First Day in the 5th month, and at no other times, except by particular appointment.

In 1784, Norton Meeting, too, is "to be discontinued," and Ridlington Park (James and Ann Hubbard's) is to begin on the fifth First-day of every month at eleven o'clock, instead of at Oakham, where none is to be held at the same time.

In 1789, 3rd mo.,

The representatives are to inform the Quarterly Meeting that it is the opinion of this Meeting that the Meeting which has heretofore been held at Somerby once a year would better be dropped, and desire their opinion.

4th mo. The Quarterly Meeting concurs that the Meeting had better be discontinued until it can be held to more advantage, it is therefore to be discontinued in future. In 1790, one year afterwards, both "the Monthly Meeting of Oakham" and "the Quarterly Meeting of Leicester and Rut^d" were themselves dissolved in order to the approaching union with Warwickshire Quarterly Meeting.

One, and only one more allusion to a "Meeting" at Somerby has been found. In Robert Hawley's long cash account for the early years of last century is the entry:—

¹¹ John Pearson to Mary Redmile; George Robinson to Lydia Beeby; John Pilkington to Ann Atton; Edward Hawley of Long Clawson to Ann Killingsby; John Pearson (the younger) to Elizabeth Beeby; Richard Leaver of Nottingham to Elizabeth Richards.

12th of 9th mo. 1802. To expenses of a Meeting at Somerby held by appointment & attended by Tabitha Middleton & William Simons, £1 2s. 1½d.

And among some loose Meeting papers is a soiled little bill of same date from an Oakham waggoner, "Taking the Meeting forms to Somerby, 8s." Tabitha Middleton, *née* Hoyland,¹² was the wife of Benjamin Middleton, of Wellingborough (himself a descendant of John Evans, the chief Friend of Wigston). It has been said that the ministry of T. M.'s daughter, Maria Fox,¹³ much resembled her own. No one can ever forget who ever attended any of M. F.'s special meetings for haymakers, in barns and outhouses, during the Middlesex harvest, the sensible manifestation of the power of Christian sympathy which characterised those gatherings, nor the wrapt receptivity of the listeners in their various attitudes of rest after the heavy labours of the day, oblivious of their rough toil-worn dress, while the tender sister, the willing servant of the one Master, told of His service, His terms, His exceeding great rewards. Those who have had the happy privilege of witnessing one such meeting can conceive the welcome and blessed effect and result of the gathering of the Somerby villagers at their last public meeting in the old Tompson Homestead.

MARY RADLEY and HENRIETTA ELLIS.

1682. The names of some of the wealthiest dissenters in the parish of Cheshunt—Quakers:—

Gaven Lourdy [Lawrey],¹ merchant and speaker, Samuel Goodacre, Wm. Page, John Robins, Wilm. Bates, Anthony Deighton, senr., Nicholas Ring, Widow Runnington, Nathaniel Thompson, John Blendall, Robert Cooper.

From *Extracts from Hertfordshire Sessions Rolls, 1581-1698*.

¹² See THE JOURNAL, iii., 141, 142.

¹³ See *Memoirs of Maria Fox*, 1846.

¹ Gawen Lawrie was a noted Friend of his day, and much interested in the settlement of New Jersey. He died in North America in 168 . . .