

Stockton Meeting House, 1814-1914

JN 1814, in the reign of George the Third—the king on whose “pageant, pride, grief, and awful tragedy” Thackeray let the dark curtain fall, and in the regency of the then Prince of Wales—a “solitary, stout man, who did not toil, nor spin, nor fight”—in 1814, in the time of Shute Barrington, Bishop and Count Palatine of Durham; and in the Mayoralty at Stockton of George Sutton, the Friends’ Meeting House was built. Here is the record in Thomas Richmond’s *Local Records of Stockton*:

“September 15.—The new Meeting House of the Society of Friends, in Mill Lane (though not finished) was opened this day for worship. It will seat above 200 persons; cost about £1,800. The Burial Ground contains 17 roods.”

There was an earlier Meeting House, dating far back in the history of the Society. In a map of Stockton for 1724 the older Meeting House is shown, blocking the end of “Dove Cote Lane.” When in 1814 the new one was built, the old one was converted into cottages, and afterwards passed out of record. On the 15th of Fifth Month, 1814, Stockton Meeting “called in” £200 then lent on mortgage, “to go in aid of building the new Meeting House.”

Quakers in those days took little note of the changes in buildings they used, so it is not surprising that there is not in the Monthly or Preparative Meeting books any record of the first use of the new Meeting House. But Stockton Preparative Meeting records in Twelfth Month, 1814, that it appoints a Committee to

“consider of a plan for altering the old meeting house into suitable dwellings, and carrying the same into effect, viz.,—George Coates, Henry Richardson, Benjamin Atkinson, Benj. Atkinson, jun., John Procter, Aaron Richardson, John Atkinson, Isaac Stephenson, and Samuel Stephenson.”

A few months later Trustees were appointed for “two new dwelling houses, late the old meeting house,” and these trustees included John Procter, Isaac Stephenson, George Smith, John Procter, jun., George Coates, S.¹ Chipchase, and George Coates, jun.

The new Meeting House was opened on the 15th of Ninth Month, 1814, as stated. In the same month, George Sanders, William Alexander, Isaac Crewdson, and Isaac Wilson visited Stockton, a Committee of the Yearly Meeting.

What was Stockton Meeting like in 1814? It was part of Stockton Monthly Meeting, the other Meetings being Darlington and Yarm. At the first Monthly Meeting held in the new Meeting House in Ninth Month, 1814, the representatives were: from Darlington—Joseph Pease,² and Jonathan Backhouse, jun.; from Stockton—John Atkinson

¹ The name-initial resembles S, but possibly it is J = John Chipchase.

² Joseph Pease, of Feethams, uncle of Joseph Pease, the first Quaker M.P.

and John Procter; and from Yarm—Cuthbert Wigham and Joseph Flounders. The Clerks of Stockton Monthly Meeting in 1814 were Jonathan Backhouse, jun., and Cuthbert Wigham, assistant. Stockton Monthly Meeting contributed to Durham Quarterly Meeting in that year £16 18s. od.—from Darlington, Stockton, and Yarm. The Quarterly Meeting Clerks were Thomas Robson and Robert Spence, assistant. There were eleven representatives to the Quarterly Meeting in Seventh Month, 1814, from three Monthly Meetings: Newcastle—David Sutton, John Mounsey, William Richardson, and Joseph Taylor; Stockton—Edward Backhouse, John Spence, Henry Richardson, and John Atkinson; and Staindrop—George Hall, William Coates, and Joshua Ianson.

At Stockton Monthly Meeting, held at Darlington, 18th of Tenth Month, Isaac Stephenson brought forward a concern to visit Staindrop Monthly Meeting and the west of the county. He was a “minister in unity and good esteem,” and probably his visit helped forward a movement for union. A conference of committees of Stockton and Staindrop Monthly Meetings was held, to consider a recommendation from the Quarterly Meeting for the union of the two Monthly Meetings. At first Staindrop did not “at present apprehend it expedient to unite with Stockton”; but later other opinions ruled, and the two Meetings united and became *Darlington* Monthly Meeting about 1820. The Quarterly Meeting,—which had for scores of years been held in Durham city, began to “circulate,” at the suggestion of David Sams, and from 1816 to 1826 several Quarterly Meetings were held in Stockton. In 1825, Newcastle Friends had an exciting visit to the Quarterly Meeting at Stockton. They came by sea from Shields to the Tees, taking ten hours for the voyage; and in returning two days later, they only got to Hartlepool by the steamer,—the rest of the journey being in a carriage, in “fish carts,” and on foot. John Richardson,³ of Spring Gardens, Newcastle, tells the story in a letter copied in *The Society of Friends, Newcastle*.⁴

Exact numbers of members are difficult to give for a century ago. But a little later we have definite figures. The membership in 1836 for the old Stockton Monthly Meeting was—in Stockton 89; in Darlington 139; Now, nearly eighty years later, the latest numbers are—Stockton, 118; Norton 38; Darlington, 315.

In the century, Stockton has increased its population from 4,229 in 1811 to 52,158 in 1911; and Darlington from 5,059 in 1811 to 55,633 in 1911. Contrast, then and now, could be indefinitely pursued, for Stockton then began running coaches (to Whitby, “fare 20s. od.”), projecting canals or railways, and Volunteers against invasion by Bonaparte wore pigtails and used hair powder.

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Darlington.

³ Father of David, James, and Henry Richardson.

⁴ *Historical Sketch of the Society of Friends in Newcastle and Gateshead, 1653-1898*, by John William Steel, *et al.*, 1899, p. 93.