

## The Quaker and the Church Rates—Silent Friends<sup>1</sup>

“Some years ago in Boscawen Street, Truro, on the spot where Messrs. James & Sons’ establishment now stands, a Mr. Benjamin Wilkey<sup>2</sup> kept a grocer’s shop. He was a Friend who, like many of his brethren, conscientiously objected to paying church rates, and annually allowed his goods to be distrained. Having, however, a good eye to business, he never permitted his grocery stock to be interfered with, but by an agreement with the collector of the rate, an old clock which hung up in a lumber room was taken, and Mr. Wilkey would then at once re-purchase the clock for the exact amount of the rate, thus easily satisfying the scruples of his conscience and the church rate collector.”

“Mr. Zaccheus Prater, commonly called Mr. Key Prater, was, next to Mr. Wilkey, considered to be the most silent and reserved man in Truro.<sup>3</sup> These two gentlemen were great friends, and although continually walking about together, were never by any chance observed to address each other. It used to be related that they walked to Perranzabuloe, partook of two glasses of beer, and returned to Truro, without either of them speaking a single word.”

[*One and All*, a Cornish monthly illustrated journal newsletter and record of local history. Penzance, March, 1869. Eleven numbers only, May, 1868, to March, 1869; the last number was not printed or offered for sale.]

<sup>1</sup> Contributed by George Cecil Dymond, of Birkenhead.

<sup>2</sup> In 1756, there lived at Callington, a small town in East Cornwall, eight-and-a-half miles from Liskeard, two members of the Society of Friends named Edward and Mary Wilkey. Their son, John Wilkey, who appears first to have settled at Liskeard in the neighbourhood of the parental home, and afterwards at Truro, married, January 26, 1756, at Looe, Sarah Edey, daughter of Ebenezer and Elizabeth Edey of that town. The family of Ebenezer and Elizabeth Edey, who were members of the Society of Friends, consisted of ten children, of whom Sarah was the seventh. She was born at Looe, May 18, 1735, and married John Wilkey at the age of twenty-one years.

Benjamin Wilkey, born at Liskeard, December 27, 1759, about whom the above anecdotes are told, was their son. One does not nowadays quite understand the frame of mind which was satisfied with such a subterfuge as that related, but it was probably a case in which B.W. had no strong feeling about church rates himself, but was in favour of “discipline.”

Benjamin Wilkey died, unmarried, at his residence in Boscawen Street, Truro, on January 8, 1825, aged sixty-five, having retired from business some years previously. “On the morning of the day on which he died, he was as well as usual, and had taken his accustomed walk. In the afternoon he went to a small workshop, which he had fitted up for his amusement, and was shortly afterwards found there quite insensible. Medical assistance was immediately procured, but every effort to restore animation proved unavailing.” [*West Briton*, Truro, January 14, 1825.]

<sup>3</sup> The story of a preference for silent companionship is quite consistent with, though perhaps an extreme instance of, that sobriety of manner, and reserve of speech, which is often characteristic of members of the Society of Friends.