

## 'ELVES, GOBLINS, FAIRIES, QUAKERS, AND NEW LIGHTS': FRIENDS IN THE ENGLISH REPUBLIC

It is St George's Day, April 23 1660, and a new poem is rolling off a little hand-press run by George Thomason at the Rose and Crown in St Paul's Churchyard, London. There's a crowd there, eager to snap up this new and no doubt delightfully scurrilous work by a Presbyterian minister turned ardent royalist. The Revd. Robert Wild DD has a certain renown as a pious preacher, but his greater fame is as an impious satirist, the scourge of his political enemies, whose merciless wit can make a laughing stock of yesterday's hero and kill a well-earned reputation in a cryptic couplet. And who, in any age, doesn't enjoy a good laugh at the expense of hapless politicians?

In what we might call (if we want to be fashionable) the 'royalist spring' of April 1660, the crowds on the streets of London were restless and volatile. They had seen a rapidly passing parade of hapless politicians, in today and out tomorrow. The death of Oliver Cromwell two years earlier had been succeeded by weeks of political mayhem, followed by his son Richard's short and ineffectual Protectorate which protected nobody, then a Committee of Safety so unsafe that it lasted a mere twelve days, then a Council of State that fell immediately into permanent implosion, all with occasional guest appearances by the recalled Rump Parliament. The army, now a shadow of the New Model Army that had deposed the Lord's Anointed and created the republic, was as divided as the politicians, General John Lambert in England and General George Monck in Scotland leading their troops in opposite directions, Lambert's towards a permanent republican settlement imposed by the army and Monck's towards a restoration of the Stuart monarchy - imposed by the army.

That January, the start of the swinging sixties of the seventeenth century, Monck had marched his men from Scotland to London to end the anarchy, drive out what he called the 'fanatics', and pave the way for the return of a king. He read the situation well enough. London and the country at large had had enough of civil war, endless political strife, relentless religious agitation, bellicose Bible bashing and joy-killing puritan sermons by sour-faced Malvolios.

#### 4 ELVES, GOBLINS, FAIRIES, QUAKER AND NEW LIGHTS

George Monck promised the people cakes and ale and a bit of peace and quiet. So what better day to honour General George than St George's Day, April 23? And who better to eulogise him and excoriate 'the Divil' Lambert and his defeated followers than the current celebrity poet, satirist and hireling priest, the Revd Robert Wild.

Wild's poem, hailing the wind of change from the north, was called *Iter Boreale* - literally 'Northern Journey'. More fully it was *Iter Boreale: Attempting Something upon the Successful and Matchless March of the Lord General George Monck from Scotland to England, etc.* In it, Monck was hailed as the hero who

...took Rebellion rampant by the Throat,  
And made the Canting Quaker change his Note.

Monck's rival Lambert was of course the arch-villain of the piece, and principal butt of Wild's poison-tipped pen. Rather as Milton seven years later was to picture Lucifer raising his army of fallen angels, Wild characterised the arch-demon Lambert.

A legion then he rais'd of Armed Sprights,  
Elves, Goblins, Fairies, Quakers, and New Lights  
To be his under-Divels; with this rest,  
He Soul and Body (Church and State) possest...  
Churches and Sacred Grounds they haunted most,  
No Chappel was at Ease from some such Ghost.  
The Priests ordain'd to Exorcize those Elves  
Were voted Divels, and cast out themselves.  
Bible or Alchoran, all's one to them,  
Religion serves but for a Stratagem.<sup>1</sup>

John Dryden recalled later that when the poem rolled off the Thomason press work stopped in the markets and exchanges while the dealers devoured it. 'So vehement they were at it,' he wrote, 'that they lost their bargain by the candles-end.'<sup>2</sup> Copies continued to circulate<sup>2</sup> throughout the king's reign, Samuel Pepys recording in his diary on Sunday August 23 1663: 'Lord's Day. Up to church without my wife, she being all dirty, as my house is ... and so home to my wife, and with her read *Iter Boreale*, a poem made just at the king's coming home ... [I] like it pretty well, but not so as it was cried up.'

Robert Wild is forgotten now by all but a few scholars specialising in early-modern political literature, but *Iter Boreale*, and particularly its enthusiastic reception and continuing popularity throughout the king's reign, is surely of more than passing interest (and amusement)

to today's students of Quaker history. It offers a telling glimpse into how early Friends were seen by a substantial slice of the general population at the collapse of the Commonwealth. Wild's depiction of Quakers as 'Armed Sprights' in Lambert's rag-bag republican army of elves, goblins, fairies, weirdos and fanatics clearly struck a familiar chord and delighted the crowds.

Why? We should remind ourselves that the Quakers had a political programme in the 1650s: the total abolition of clerical ministry; of the universities that were the clerics' breeding ground; of the tithes that supported both ministers and a legion of lay appropriators; and of the entire legal establishment. They demanded that the government deliver this godly reformation, including the nationalisation of church lands and the estates of recalcitrant gentry. They had spread from the dark corners of the north at the start of the decade, to number tens of thousands all over the country by its end. They were not to be satisfied by a New Heaven. As Edward Burrough made clear, they wanted a New Earth as well.

It is plain enough why the ruling elites hated and feared them. But why so many of the common people? Why that crowd of Londoners whooping with glee at Wild's mockery of Quakers? Let us remember where the mass medium of the day was located: the pulpit. 'If justices were generally ahead of governments in their severity towards Quakers', writes Barry Reay, 'ministers, particularly Presbyterians, were way ahead of the magistrates'. If Paul had been alive, preached one minister, he would have stoned Quakers - 'it was Christian zeal to stone them'. Another, preaching on the text 'follow peace with all', told his congregation 'they were not to follow peace with sectaries'. There were allegations of buggery, witchcraft, and orgies at meetings for worship. A rumour was spread that some Quakers 'had killed their mother... following the light within them'. And much was made of genuine examples of bizarre Quaker behaviour - walking naked as a sign, Solomon Eccles climbing into a pulpit during a sermon to do some sewing, a Norwich man sitting trouserless and quaking on the communion table, an Aldermanbury man bursting into church with his hands covered in excrement to signify the filthiness of the hireling preacher's biblical ministry. Combine hundreds of such examples with 'a mixture of xenophobia, class conflict, economic rivalry and the dehumanizing effects of propaganda', writes Reay, and we see why hostility to Quakers, as to radicals in later eras, was widespread even among the very people who would have benefitted most from the New Earth they sought to build.<sup>3</sup>

I revive the memory of minor poet Wild in order to revisit a running controversy among Quaker historians and historians of Quakerism: one in which I have meddled for many years. Put at its simplest, were Quakers pacifists in the Commonwealth period, or were they - or some of them - 'Armed Sprights'? Did the Peace Testimony of 1660-1 reassert and consolidate a commitment to non-violence, ways of gentleness and paths of peace, that had been at the heart of Quakerism since the emergence of the movement in the early fifties? Or did it mark a turning point, a U-turn, the end of a decade of ambivalence about violence and a re-branding of Friends as 'the Harmless and Innocent people of God called Quakers'?

It is clear that George Fox and his fellow-authors of the resonant peace declarations that followed the restoration in 1660 wished them to be understood, once and for all, as a clear assertion that Friends were *and always had been* opposed to the use of 'carnal weapons', and that they never had and never would take up arms for one party against another. Not 'this is how we are going to be in the future', but 'this is how we have always been from the beginning'. And that is how successive generations of Friends were led to understand their history. The Dutchman William Sewell, Quakerism's first historian, published the English version of his *History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People of God Called Quakers* in 1722 and dedicated it to George I because, as he informed the king, it described 'the rise of a people who are no small part of his faithful subjects, since they never (how much soever wronged and oppressed) offered any resistance to the Government and thus at all times they behaved themselves like a peaceable people'.<sup>4</sup> Quaker republicanism and support for the New Model Army as the 'Battleaxe of the Lord'? Sewell knew nothing of that, or if he did he wasn't going to tell King George.

Two centuries later William C Braithwaite in *The Beginnings of Quakerism* effectively goes along with Sewell. 'During the succession of changes which attended the downfall of the Puritan regime,' he writes, 'Friends, with one or two exceptions, took no active part in the shaping of affairs.'<sup>5</sup> They were, broadly speaking, unpolitical and pacifist from the start. That was how it looked at the cutting edge of Quaker historical scholarship in 1912 when Braithwaite's undeniably great work was published, and this comfortable conclusion continued to be comfortably endorsed within the Society of Friends.

Until well into the twentieth century very nearly all Quaker history was done by Quakers. Understandably, the picture that

emerged tended to be favourable to the established Quaker self-image as reflected in Fox's *Journal*, understood to have been put together under the leadings of the Spirit. The letters, tracts and pamphlets of early Friends (dubbed the 'First Publishers of Truth', with a capital T) were studied in this light, and the works of Quaker critics tended to be dismissed as ungodly ignorance or malice. In such circumstances enthusiasm tends to trump objectivity and the notion of a Spirit-led consistency is preferred to the kind of human fallibility that leads to tactical rethinks and embarrassing U-turns.

But the early Quaker movement suddenly became of interest to secular historians as the civil war and Commonwealth periods began to be studied not as 'The Interregnum' - a bizarre interruption of normal service - but as England's historic attempt at social, economic and political revolution, the first of the great upheavals that created early-modern society. Scholars like R.H. Tawney, Eduard Bernstein, David Petergorsky and Eric Hobsbawm pioneered a new 'history-from-below' methodology focused on popular movements. 1961 saw the publication of H. Noel Brailsford's unfinished but encyclopaedic study *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, linking Levellers and Quakers as a radical continuum. This was followed in 1972 by Christopher Hill's best-selling study *The World Turned Upside Down*, placing Friends in the broader context of Levellers and True Levellers, Seekers and Ranters, Muggletonians and Fifth Monarchists - all those 'Elves, Goblins, Fairies' mocked by the Revd Robert Wild but now given their due as the popular movements which would begin to nudge open the door to modern freedoms and democratic institutions. The new history, at first distrusted by Friends as owing more to Marxist materialism than to Quaker metaphysics, was by now filtering into the Friends Historical Society with revisionist contributions by Alan Cole, Hugh Barbour and others. It climaxed in 1985 with the publication of Barry Reay's *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, to which Christopher Hill contributed a Foreword where he made a bold claim, italicised in this quotation:

'During the present generation our understanding of the early history of the Quakers has been transformed. Thanks especially to theses and articles by Alan Cole and Barry Reay, *we now know that for the first decade of their existence Quakers - with the exception of some individuals - were by no means pacifists*. There is a natural tendency when writing the history of religious sects to read backwards, to push back into the seventeenth century the image of the sober, grey-clad, moderate, industrious and prospering Quakers which we know from the eighteenth century. This image has now been

shattered for the first decade of Quaker history.' While Reay's book was given pride of place for turning the world of Quaker history upside down, Hill added that 'it is greatly to the credit of the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* that it has contributed its share to recovering the often bellicose radicalism of Quakers in the 1650s'.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the collaboration of our own respected journal in promoting this revisionist understanding of how it was in the beginning, Friends out in the meetinghouses, perhaps more concerned with immediate problems such as avoiding nomination to yet another committee, remained for the most part blissfully ignorant of the way in which their traditional understanding of the Society's infancy was being undermined. The old view had been based on Quaker sources (letters, pamphlets, Fox's *Journal*) with little awareness of how these had been selected, redacted or censored by a later Quaker leadership anxious to rewrite the Society's history and downplay some aspects of its radical past. Reay described his book as 'a response to what I perceive to be a major shortcoming in all studies of early Quakerism, the failure of its historians to make use of non-Quaker sources. This is unfortunate, for there is a wealth of seventeenth-century materials: state papers, church court, quarter sessions, assize and Exchequer records, non-Quaker diaries and collections of correspondence, a mass of anti-Quaker literature. It is from this source material that it is possible to construct an account of what can be described as the other side of the coin of Quakerism: the image of the early movement, how Quakers were perceived by their contemporaries; their actual impact on seventeenth-century politics and history.'<sup>7</sup>

## 3

Inevitably this unashamedly secular analysis provoked a reaction from Quaker historians, and I am now proposing to look at some of the key contributions. First, the American Friend and scholar Douglas Gwyn offered his own reinterpretation of the tradition in an influential book *The Covenant Crucified*, published in 1995. Gwyn re-emphasised the spiritual over the political, covenant over contract, in 1650s Quakerism, writing, as an admirer commented, not only as a scholar but also as 'a prophet... with the burning coal of the Lord upon his lips'. Gwyn found Christopher Hill 'especially irritating' in his 'over-interpretation of the Quaker movement's relationship to the Army'. 'Perhaps guided by Marxist theories of revolution', he argued, both Hill and Reay 'have strained to find violent tendencies in the early Quaker movement.'<sup>8</sup> But his repudiation of the 'Marxist' conclusion that most Friends were not

pacifists in the 1650s is only one strand in an otherwise innovative and complex analysis of early Quakerism and its relevance today.

Next to contribute to the controversy was Rosemary Moore, a distinguished president of the Friends Historical Society (2002), with *The Light in their Consciences*.<sup>9</sup> Less polemical and 'prophetic' than Gwyn, Moore cast a cool, analytical eye over 'some fifteen hundred mostly ephemeral publications of the period, together with large quantities of manuscripts, comprising letters, reports, epistles, and memoranda'. She had no theory to propagate, no hypothesis to prove. Her objective, brilliantly realised, was to make some sense of this mass of half-forgotten, long-neglected, often contradictory material and impose some order on it.

As with Gwyn, the question of whether 1650s Friends were pacifists was only one of a host of matters Moore's researches touched on, but her conclusions were clear and concise: 'Few Quakers,' she wrote, 'were pacifists to begin with'. Recognising the prevailing ambiguity over the use of violence, she commented that 'Fox's attitude to armed conflict was not fully worked out at this time. He had warned Cromwell that his failures in war were due to his disobedience to God, and he had praised Quaker soldiers. He had not made any pronouncement against the use of force by the lawful government about its lawful occasions, nor against Quakers being soldiers, although he had consistently warned Friends not to take part in plots against the government, but to fight with spiritual weapons only. As the government began to collapse it became increasingly difficult for Quakers to know their right course of action.' Uncertainty only increased, Moore suggested, when Fox apparently suffered a nervous breakdown in August 1659, 'probably due to the difficulties of the situation and to a feeling that the Quaker movement, like the country as a whole, was running out of control'.<sup>10</sup> It was perhaps at this time, while Fox was indisposed, that Edward Burrough, never one to reach for gentle persuasion when divine denunciation came to mind, penned a broadside to the Government explicitly warning that Quakers did not exclude the use of armed force if the Government would not act in the godly manner approved by Friends. 'Now blood is like to run down', he wrote, 'and the innocent like to be devoured, and this is because of your transgression.'<sup>11</sup> The pamphlet was never published at the time, possibly because the London men's meeting, which acted as the Friends' censorship committee, found Burrough's language impolitic. But its suppression is telling evidence of indecision among the Quaker leadership. What did it mean to renounce 'carnal weapons' and at the same time hail the

English republican army, in Margaret Fell's words, as 'the Battle-axe in the hand of the Lord'?

So Douglas Gwyn had found the Hill-Reay thesis 'irritating' and 'over-interpreted', and Rosemary Moore had contented herself with noting that the early literature contained both pacifist and militant rhetoric in unresolved ambiguity. Gwyn never quite delivered a mortal blow to what he called the Marxist thesis, and Moore wasn't interested in delivering even a mild box on the ears. Who would come up with the scrupulously researched, diligently annotated scholarship that would seek to put to rest, once and for all, the troublesome reinterpretations of the secular historians and those within the Friends Historical Society who had been seduced into dancing to their tune?

This year (2012) Australian Friend Gerard Guiton published *The Early Quakers and the 'Kingdom of God?'*<sup>12</sup> In more than 500 pages of densely and passionately argued exegesis, Guiton spells out his own vision of Quakerism, past and present, as not just another socio-political phenomenon but a theocratic 'Pentecost/Paracletal' movement. His theme is not so much Quaker history as Quaker theology. History is stories, and 'stories, after all, can be set aside', he writes, while Quaker theology is 'unrestricted by time and space'. But within this wide (and disputable) perspective he devotes a major chapter to the pacifist question which must surely rank as the most thorough assault yet attempted on the radical revisionism of Hill, Reay and their school.

Guiton begins by acknowledging the violence of much early Quaker language. George Fox, Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill in particular frequently threatened their opponents with divine retribution by 'the sword of the Lord God' or the 'sword of justice'. Such passages have been cited by 'the Marxists', he complains, as evidence of the early Quakers' acceptance of violence in the cause of the revolution. Guiton argues that, on the contrary, 'sword here is clearly not a physical weapon. Rather, it is a metaphor, most likely from Revelation 19: 18, depicting ... an outpouring of divine wrath': a metaphor for 'law in general'.<sup>13</sup> This, by itself, is hardly controversial: Friends were by no means the only ones who drew on the Biblical metaphor of the sword of the Spirit. But when Burrough reassures the soldiers in Ireland (including Quaker soldiers) that 'your sword will be a terror and dread to them that fear not the Lord and live contrary to the Light', note how easily the sword of the Lord God has become *your* sword, in the hands of the troops. One wonders whether the Irish would have grasped that threats of 'the sword', 'terror' and 'dread' in the mouths of

the zealous enemy attacking them were mere metaphors which, as Guiton confidently assures us, when properly understood speak not of violent retribution but 'redemption, justice and compassion'.<sup>14</sup>

Guiton, however, pursues his argument far beyond the distinction between the sword of the Spirit and the sword in a soldier's hand. He does not shirk the task of tackling two of the most contentious passages in early Quaker literature, a short address by Fox to Cromwell beginning *Oh! Oliver* and a similar but longer one headed *To the Council of Officers and the Army*.

This is *Oh! Oliver* (in Guiton's occasionally awkward modernisation):

'Had you been faithful and thundered down the deceit, the Hollander had been your subject and tributers; and Germany had given up to have done your will; and the Spaniard had quivered like a dry leaf, wanting the virtue of God; the king of France should have bowed under you his neck; the Pope should have withered as in winter; the Turk in all his fatness should have smoked. You should not have a-stood trifling about small things but minded the work of the Lord as he began with you at first... Arise and come out, for had you been faithful you should have crumbled Nations to dust...'<sup>15</sup>

And this is Fox's address *To the Council of Officers and the Army*:

'Had you been faithful to the power of... God ... [and] gone into the midst of Spain ... to require the blood of the innocent that there had been shed and commanded them to have offered up their inquisition to you ... and knocked at Rome's gates ... and set up a standard... then you should have sent for the Turk's idol, the Mahomet, and plucked up idolatry.'<sup>16</sup>

The open letter goes on to address the troops directly, over their officers' heads. In words that cannot but remind one of any army padre delivering a morale-boosting parade-ground sermon he urges them to 'see that you know a soldier's place ... and that you be soldiers qualified'. One Quaker soldier, he boasts, is worth seven non-Quakers. If the army grandees would not see the work through, 'the inferior officers and soldiers' should bypass them and take on the task themselves. What task? 'Never set up your standard [that is, call a halt] till you come to Rome.'

I confess it seems to me that the plain meaning here is that, at a time when radicals of all colours were accusing Cromwell of betraying the Good Old Cause and halting the revolution in its tracks, Fox shares their bitter disillusionment. Cromwell and the

Army Council, as he sees it, had failed in their divinely appointed task to see the revolution through in England and then take it on to Holland, France, Spain, Germany, the Vatican, and the heart of the Ottoman empire - a holy war in which Fox would presumably have had Quaker soldiers (seven times more worthy than their comrades) participate with the sword of the Spirit in one hand and a more deadly blade in the other.

It takes some ingenuity to read these passages as pacifist metaphors or allegories, but Gerard Guiton is up for it. He does momentarily wonder aloud whether Fox might have 'wobbled', as he puts it, in what he insists is the Quaker leader's otherwise consistent pacifism, and he doesn't neglect to remind us that some scholars have found it hard to believe that Fox himself authored such bellicose documents (notably M. Hirst in *Quakers in Peace and War* where she suggests Fox the Younger, or Burrough as likely culprits). But he does not rely on such speculation. Instead, we are asked to understand these passages, and all other early Quaker statements that seem on a plain reading to support or advocate armed force, as having a quite different, hidden meaning; one that becomes accessible to us only if we recognise that early Quaker discourse was 'apocalyptic, theophanous and anagogical', going 'hand in hand with the use of metaphor, allegory, symbolism and rhetoric'. Such apocalyptic and theophanous thinking, says Guiton, 'was second nature to the Quaker imagination, indeed, characteristic of their daily discourse and writing'. So, the argument runs, *Oh! Oliver*, with its apparent call to take the revolution to quivering Spaniards, a withering Pope and the fat, smoking Turk, 'does not advocate physical invasion' as the simple reader might suppose. Instead, the letter 'urges the Protector to open himself to the Light so that it may invade his soul and by implication the nation and world ... This thinking,' Guiton continues, 'allowed outer events, looming large in the public imagination, to be interpreted as stark inner realities that needed urgent attention so that people could experience the reality of the Light, the Kingdom, and the salvation it freely offered'.<sup>17</sup> Marxists just wouldn't get it. One hopes that Cromwell and the army generals had more discernment and instantly grasped the nature of apocalyptic, theophanous and anagogical expression (which my *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* helpfully defines as 'mystical, spiritual, allegorical words with a hidden spiritual sense').

It is worth repeating, however, that while I find it impossible to accept Guiton's interpretation of such unambiguous, plain-speaking rants as *Oh! Oliver* and *To the Council of Officers*, he is clearly right to argue that a good deal else of what seems violent

and abusive in early Quaker discourse was not intended to be understood literally. Early Friends, along with pretty well everyone else engaged at the time in religious polemics, drew much of their rhetoric from the apocalyptic prose of *Revelation*, the dire warnings of the Hebrew Old Testament prophets, and not least the terrifying threats of Yahweh himself. After all, John Lilburne, when rebuked for the virulence of his language towards his enemies, answered that he got it all from the Bible.

So sometimes when Friends employed violent imagery it is plausible that they thought of themselves as prophets of divine rather than Quaker retribution (assuming that they were always clear about the difference). But this will surely not do as a blanket explanation covering every Quaker threat and warning, written and spoken. In particular, theophanous metaphor cannot credibly serve as an explanation of or apology for documents like Fox's *Oh! Oliver* or the disturbingly belligerent language of leading Friends such as Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill.

So we are back with the problem: how are such bellicose passages to be reconciled with the frequent expressions of what seems like pure pacifism found in even the earliest Quaker literature and throughout most of the fifties? The most familiar example is Fox's answer in 1651 where he is recorded as twice refusing to join the New Model Army when enlistment was offered to him as a get-out-of-jail-free card. The first occasion was in April when he was visited by the army commissioners in Derby jail where he was serving a sentence under the 1650 Blasphemy Act. To their offer of a commission he responded, according to his *Journal*, that he 'lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars,' and that he 'was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were'. Four months later, in August, when the army was passing near Derby gathering reinforcements for what would prove to be the final battle of the civil war, Cromwell's 'crowning mercy' at Worcester, the army tried again, this time offering him money to enlist as a common soldier. He told them, according to the *Journal*, that he was 'brought off from outward wars', since 'where envy and hatred are there is confusion'.<sup>18</sup>

There is little ambiguity here. But a year later in 1652 Fox has his Pendle Hill vision and begins his own recruiting campaign. I have drawn attention elsewhere<sup>19</sup> to the strong emphasis on making military contacts that is evident in the *Journal's* account of his iconic Pendle-to-Swarthmoor journey, when the Quaker movement achieved lift-off. Middle-ranking army officers, the men Cromwell had recruited for their commitment to the godly cause, now held

considerable power and influence in local communities across the country, and a plain reading of Fox's own account of his 1652 journey makes clear that he was deliberately seeking out these godly army officers as potential Quaker supporters. They are named and listed by rank, before Fox homes in on Judge Thomas Fell, Vice-Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and effectively Cromwell's regent in the North-West.

Clearly Fox was not just going a-wandering along the mountain tracks. He was purposefully networking his way across the dales and south Lakeland, picking up recommendations which helped him target influential men with known radical sympathies, particularly the military leaders of their local communities, Cromwell's newly-appointed guardians of the fledgling English republic. The army had failed to recruit Fox in 1651. Nine months later Fox sets about recruiting army men to the Quaker movement - and succeeds.

A conscientious objector in 1651, building an alliance with army radicals in 1652? The puzzle only begins to make sense when we realise that what Fox is reported to have said in Derby jail about living in 'the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars', now considered the classic expression of Quaker pacifism, is not a contemporary record. The event itself occurred in 1651 but the account we have of it, and of Fox's pacifist response as he reports it, was first dictated by Fox in Lancaster jail some time in 1663 or 1664. An elaborated version is found in the longer text dictated by Fox to his son in law Thomas Lower when they were both in Worcester jail in 1673 and 1674. That text underwent further revision by Thomas Ellwood for publication in 1694. Christopher Hill suggests that in telling and retelling the story many years later Fox and his editors provided a prime example of how Friends at the time unconsciously projected the pacifism of the post-restoration period back to 1651.<sup>20</sup> That Fox was offered an army commission in 1651 and refused it is not in doubt. But that his refusal was made in the Quaker pacifist language of the 1660s looks highly anachronistic.

What might we reasonably conclude from all this? It is surely clear that in the early fifties Friends looked to the English republican army to open up the revolutionary space in which the newly emerging Quaker movement could fulfil its divine mission. The army, with Cromwell at its head, was both the agent and the guarantor of the revolution. No army, no revolution: no revolution, no godly reformation ushering in a kingdom of peace and justice. Of course Friends backed the army: their godly enterprise depended on it. But their support was always conditional. When the Army Council acted in ways of which Friends approved, the army was

indeed 'the Battle-axe in the hand of the Lord'. When it faltered, Friends railed against it, limiting their support to what they saw as the more radical and godly factions within it.

This was the case as the fifties drew to a close in ungodly anarchy and it seemed that paradise promised would turn into paradise lost. The army is divided, Cromwell is ill and no nearer finding a religious and political settlement. The army leaders are denounced by Friends, not for militancy but for lack of it, and the army not for its armed strength but for its weakness and indecision. Cromwell dies and there are rumours of royalist rebellion and fears of a renewed civil war. General Lambert tries to rebuild the army, seeking reinforcements from among the radical sects, the largest and most vociferous of which is the Quakers. George Fox himself, under intolerable pressure, is at a loss as how best to instruct Friends, offering contradictory advice. In one letter he chastises the 'foolish, rash spirits' among Friends who were taking up arms, and in another, when asked by Bristol Friends whether Quakers could serve as soldiers, he answers that 'there is something in the thing... and you cannot well leave them seeing you have gone among them'.

Nor was it all talk. Barry Reay documents the appointment of leading Quakers in the new militias hastily assembled in 1658 and 1659: Nicholas Bond, William Woodcock, Amos Stoddart, Richard Davis and Steven Hart for Westminster, George Lambol and Thomas Curtis for Berkshire, Edward Alcock in Cheshire, Humphrey Lower in Cornwall, Henry Pollexfen in Devon, Mark Grime in Gloucestershire, John Gawler in Glamorganshire, Theophilous Alie in Worcestershire, Edward Stokes in Wiltshire, Thomas Speed, Dennis Hollister, Henry Rowe, Thomas Gouldney and Edward Pyott (all leading Friends) in Bristol. By the end of the year there were Quakers in army garrisons in York, Bristol, Holy Island and Berwick-upon-Tweed, Lancaster, Carlisle, Chester, Kent, Northamptonshire, Norfolk, Shrewsbury and London.<sup>21</sup> Lambert called on Quakers to help crush George Booth's royalist rebellion in Cheshire. The only hope now for the party that had dreamed of creating a new heaven and a new earth, declared the radical Quaker sympathiser Henry Stubbe, was that it was 'possessed with the militia of the nation, and under good commanders'. When the Rump fell and absolute power reverted to the army, the rush into the militias increased. One of the Quaker leaders most actively involved was Anthony Pearson, and I want to use him as a brief but illustrative case study by way of steering this address towards a close.

Anthony Pearson was a brilliant young lawyer, a judge in three counties before his twenty-sixth birthday. He was on the bench that tried James Nayler in Appleby in January 1653 and was dramatically convinced by his prisoner. With all the zeal of a new convert he turned his home at Ramshaw Hall, Durham, into the centre for Quaker operations in the north-east, where the movement spread rapidly, shielded from persecution by his personal protection. He immediately became one of Fox's inner circle, advising him on legal affairs, and represented Friends in an audience with Cromwell in the summer of 1653, barely six months after his conviction. With his fellow-justice Gervase Benson he published the first account of Quaker sufferings and the standard Quaker book opposing tithes. With Benson and Thomas Aldham he presented Parliament with a petition calling for the abolition of tithes signed by more than 15,000 Friends (and probably others) from Westmorland, Cumberland, Lancashire, Cheshire, Durham and Yorkshire, supplemented by a petition signed by 7000 women. Pearson was at the centre of Quaker action and all the more effective because of the pains he took to maintain key contacts in the political world and the army. He had been secretary to Arthur Hesilrige, one of the more militant Parliamentary leaders, and had served as clerk and registrar to the Government's Committee on Compounding. He was much the best politically-connected of all the Quaker leaders.

Pearson clearly identified with what we might call the left wing critics of the Commonwealth regime, those who feared that Cromwell's autocracy was stifling the revolution. As early as 1654 he attended meetings organised by Hesilrige's ally John Wildman who was plotting to replace Cromwell with Leveller support. The plot was discovered and Wildman thrown in the Tower, but Pearson avoided detection - for the time being. Again, in 1659 and now one of the many newly-appointed Quaker Commissioners for the Militia, Pearson was active in 'raising the country' and attempting to recruit Kendal and Lancaster Friends into a new militia under General Lambert's command.

What was the attitude of Pearson's Quaker colleagues to such direct involvement in politics and military activity? Some certainly expressed unease. Francis Howgill wrote to Edward Burrough that 'there is a good thing in him if he did keep out of the world's spirit, for that betrays him and hurts him'. Margaret Fell expressed similar misgivings, though it was at this time that she praised the

army as 'the Battle-axe in the hand of the Lord'.<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, George Fox himself seemed unable to give clear directions at this critical time when the very survival of the republic and perhaps of the Quaker movement was in doubt. But, crucially, despite these privately-expressed misgivings, Pearson's political and military activities were never disowned by the leadership. Moreover, throughout the final months of 1659 and right into the early weeks of 1660, Pearson played a critical part in establishing the Monthly Meeting, General Meeting and Yearly Meeting system which was to consolidate Quakerism in the coming period of virulent persecution. Recommending the new Quaker discipline in what William C Braithwaite picked out as 'a document of great importance', Pearson wrote to Friends spelling out the need for Quaker democracy and avoidance of the kind of top-down leadership that had thwarted previous attempts at church reform throughout history. He urged that 'none may exercise lordship or dominion over another, nor the person of any be set apart, but as they continue in the power of truth'. This turns out to have been Pearson's last service to the movement. Informed on after the restoration for his anti-royalist activities and threatened with the death penalty for treason, he made terms with Charles II, apologised for having embraced 'the chimerical notions of those giddy times', and died at the age of 37 a true son of the king's own Church of England.<sup>23</sup>

I see the Pearson story as illustrating all the contradictions inherent in early Quaker attitudes to the violence/nonviolence question. Whatever this was, it wasn't pacifism. That was to come later, not in a sudden instant of divine revelation, but as the fruit of bitter human experience of the consequences of violence and its corrosive effect on the best of causes. John Lilburne, whose life had been one long personal civil war against both royalist and republican tyranny, got the message as early as 1654, two years before he announced his conversion to Quakerism. In *A Declaration to the Freeborn People of England* he wrote: 'When political change begins with violence, the many who have been wronged will not rest until they find an opportunity of revenge'. This was the radical pacifist insight - that violence is mimetic, one violent act always sowing the seeds of the next - that the Quaker leadership caught up with in 1660, two years after Lilburne's death while a prisoner in Dover Castle.

We know what happened to the Revd Robert Wild's 'Armed Sprights' after the restoration. They finally renounced violence and found a better way of pursuing their dream of a new heaven and a new earth, though it cost them dearly through decades of

persecution. But what of Wild himself? It seems that he changed too, abandoning versified slapstick and emerging as a man of religious principle. Offered a bishopric by Charles II, he rejected it on the grounds that he was an unrepentant Presbyterian. Refusing to sign the Act of Uniformity of 1662, which required all ministers to conform to the episcopal Church of England, he was ejected from his parish. We last hear of him in 1669, hauled before Warwick and Coventry assizes for running a Nonconformist Conventicle, seditious and illegal as any Quaker meeting. It seems that the scourge of sectarian elves and goblins had himself gone off with the fairies.

The *Iter Boreale* had temporarily proved an ill wind for all those Quakers and New Lights, but its author too had come to find the wind's tooth, though keen, not so unkind as man's ingratitude. He was pretty well forgotten, while his despised Quakers, living experimentally and learning from experience, are with us still. If it were not too unquakerly a sentiment, you might say it was the elves, goblins and New Lights who had the last laugh.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Research Group for Electronic Textuality and Theory, [ett.arts.uwo.ca/rump/site/rsrctxts/1660/WW2132.html](http://ett.arts.uwo.ca/rump/site/rsrctxts/1660/WW2132.html)
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4. From the Dedication in the 1722 edition (my modernisation).
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6. Christopher Hill, Foreword to *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, by Barry Reay, (London, Temple Smith, 1985).
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8. Douglas Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified*, (Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill Publications, 1995), pp. 222 and 112 respectively.
9. Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: the Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).
10. Moore, pp. 122, 169-170.
11. Moore, p. 171.
12. Gerard Guiton, *The Early Quakers and the 'Kingdom of God': Peace, Testimony and Revolution*, (San Francisco, Inner Light Books, 2012).

13. Guiton, p. 337.
14. Guiton, p. 337.
15. Guiton, p. 345. The original manuscript is at Friends House, London, Bound Parchment Portfolio 9, p. 79. Edward Burrough quoted it approvingly in *Good Counsel and Advice Rejected*, 1659.
16. Guiton, pp. 340-341 in his own modernisation.
17. Guiton, pp. 346-347.
18. Fox's *Journal*, Nickalls edition (1975), pp. 65-67.
19. David and Anthea Boulton, *In Fox's Footsteps*, (Dent, Dales Historical Monographs (DHM), 1998); 'The Quaker Military Alliance' in *Friends Quarterly*, (October 1997), revised in my *Real Like the Daisies or Real Like I Love You?*, (DHM, 2002), and reprinted in *Militant Seedbeds of Early Quakerism*, Quaker Universalist Fellowship (USA, 2005).
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21. Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, pp. 88ff.
22. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, p. 114. Margaret Fell wrote in her letter *To the General Counsel and Officers of the Army*, October 1659, 'You have bin the Instrument of warre, and the Battle-axe in the hand of the Lord'. See Bonnelyn Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, (Macmillan, 1994), p. 134.
23. Braithwaite, pp. 112-114.