

REPORT

Friends Historical Society - Residential weekend - Glenthorne, 6-9 October 2006.

Twenty-five Friends from many different parts of the country gathered at Glenthorne in early October for a weekend of discussions, lectures and visits. This was the first time that the Friends Historical Society has staged an event but it is the fervent wish of participants that it will not be the last.

The focus of the weekend was the 1652 country and Glenthorne made an ideal setting. Even in indifferent weather the Lake District was stunning. We visited by coach Meeting Houses at Brigflatts, Preston Patrick, Yealand Conyers and Meeting for Worship on Sunday at Swarthmoor. All of these seventeenth century sites impressed and we were treated with great generosity by local Friends, who provided explanations of the buildings and their place in Quaker history, as well as refreshments and in two places room to eat our packed lunches. Perhaps Brigflatts, the oldest, was the most evocative, since it has changed relatively little since its construction in 1675, but all four were full of interest. We also saw the splendid court room at Preston Patrick Hall which dates from the late middle ages, the spectacular site at Firbank Fell where George Fox spoke to a crowd which he claimed exceeded a thousand people, and the Quaker burial ground at Sunbrick near Swarthmoor, where Margaret Fell and over 200 other early Friends are buried without gravestones. The environs of Sunbrick have a glorious view over Morecambe Bay which will remain in the memory.

I hope without offending our generous hosts at the other sites I can say that I was particularly glad to see Swarthmoor Hall some fifty-six years after first attending the American college named for it and grateful to the warden, Bill Shaw, for making us welcome, giving us a tour of the house and willingly answering our questions. Bill was formerly a member of my Preparative Meeting, York Friargate, where he is much missed, but on this showing our loss is certainly Swarthmoor's gain, for he is the right person for the right job.

This was a lot to crowd into two days, but in addition to all we saw we also enjoyed a lecture by Roy Stephenson, formerly secretary of the North West 1652 Committee. Roy explained to us the causes of the initial Quaker flowering in north-west England and its consequences, though to some of us his claims for our subsequent influence seemed almost too impressive to be true. He also listed the

challenges arising from our early history which lie before us today, combating climate change and coping with Christian evangelicalism being only two. The lecture was an excellent introduction to the weekend, hugely stimulating and particularly appreciated as Roy had to leave us at its end to rush off to London to attend Meeting for Sufferings the following morning.

No less interesting was the lecture two evenings later by David Butler, author of the magnificent two-volume study entitled *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (1999), a labour of love and a revelation to all who have seen, let alone read it. David gave us an illustrated tour of about a dozen historic meeting houses in Cumbria which we did not visit. His lightly carried scholarship was eye-opening, even to those who knew local meeting houses well. His expertise was much appreciated by all those who love historic architecture, which must have included the whole audience.

We were heavily indebted, not only to the persons already named, but to the hard work of Peris Coventry and Clifford Crellin, organisers of the weekend. I hope that the success of the event was ample reward for their patience and hard work.

David Rubinstein