

THE COMPLAINTS BOOK OF RICHARD HUTTON

One of the treasures of the archives of Friends School Saffron Walden, now stored in ideal conditions in the Record Office at Chelmsford, is the Complaints Book of Richard Hutton, who was Steward at Clerkenwell from 1711 to 1737. It is a large, leather bound book with nearly 190 folio pages, containing, in Richard Hutton's handwriting, a collection of documents relating to his service as Steward. The London Record Society thought the work to be so important for knowledge of London life, that they obtained permission for Timothy Hitchcock to transcribe, edit and print the book, which was published in 1987 as Volume 24 of their publications of primary sources of London life.

The purpose of the Institution, the brainchild of the Quaker pioneer, John Bellers, was outlined in his "Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry". Friends in the Quarterly Meeting of the London Monthly Meetings established it in 1702. A community, housing poor people, a family of both old and young, admitted on the recommendation of Friends, was to be governed by a committee of Friends, supported financially by Monthly Meetings and the profits gained from the trade in yarn, - cotton worsted and linen - spun in the house.

Most of the entries are copies of papers that were prepared for other purposes. There is no way of discovering the criteria that Richard Hutton used to select his entries. Some do not relate to his time of office. The inclusion of a copy of a letter, dated 1683, about consanguinity signed by, among others, George Fox¹ and a series of entries, dated 1681, about taking oaths², do not, on the face of it, have much to do with the Institution.

Together, however, the entries give a fascinating glimpse into the details of life in the house during his Stewardship. It is as though Richard Hutton uses the Complaints Book to get things off his chest or to create a record of his side of the story. But it is not a journal or a diary. There is no systematic or chronological account. He records, almost randomly, the daily situations, the recurring difficulties and the occasional problems of the family. Indirectly, he shows that he brought effective administrative skills to the complex task of managing an institution that had an amalgam of personnel problems, trading business, educational responsibilities, public and Quaker relationships, community health matters and financial

solvency to resolve. But he tells us very little about himself or his family. We know from elsewhere, not from the Complaints Book, that he was born into a Quaker family in Lancaster in 1662, was apprenticed as a tailor, married Sarah Steed, and with her had nine children, all of whom died before they were eighteen months old. He died while still Steward of Clerkenwell in 1737 and is buried in Bunhill Fields, where George Fox is buried³.

Throughout we find we are in touch with a man who was determined to rescue the reputation of the institution to which he was appointed Steward nearly ten years after it was founded. He shows that he had an eye for detail and a command of all the various elements involved in running what was, in effect, a great experiment. He recognised that the committee was responsible for the existence of the institution, deferred to its wisdom and worked very hard on its behalf. If some of the entries feel a little tetchy, it is because the situations recorded were exasperating. Perhaps writing in the Complaints Book enabled him to deal better with the matters than he might otherwise have done.

Even on their own, without reference to any other document, such as the best and rough minutes of the Committee, the entries in the Complaints Book give a very comprehensive picture of the Institution. They show most aspects of the management of a community housing both old people (ancients) and children. There are details of the finances of trading in yarn⁴, of tending to sick inmates⁵, of receiving, or not, the legacies due to the House⁶. There is evidence of the continual tightrope walked in dealing with interested Friends and relatives of inmates⁷. Accounts of indiscipline and of predicaments of individual inmates bring a very personal touch⁸. There is reference to the bill of fare⁹, central to the welfare of an institution at that time, which was the cause of argument, complaint and rumour. There are copies of the documents that Richard Hutton used to negotiate his own salary from a committee keen to make ends meet and glad to have the service of two, Richard and Sarah, for the price of one¹⁰. The qualifications and duties of teachers are included¹¹. And for good measure there is an extract from a sermon of Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury¹², and an essay by Richard Hutton on methods for being

a dextrous and ready penman and accurate accomptant¹³.

The details are different but the situations are recognizable from experience over two hundred years later, though there is no Complaints Book for 1968 - 1989¹⁴ to prove it!!

Let Richard Hutton describe the House, mostly, in the words of his own entries.

By May 1718:

After 17 years continuance (the House) hath 75 persons maintained in it (including steward & servant)¹⁵.

But they caused problems:

Two of them, a man and the other a woman, are lame and use crutches, and another woman friend is blind. The rest are mostly aged and weak, of whom several have kept their beds pretty much this last winter and three of the women friends who are usually sent into the house now are not of ability to be nurses as formerly they were. And our children are generally now small and several of them have been sickly and weak most part of last winter. One girl in particular was ill near six months, who had been sorely afflicted with convulsion fits to such a degree as had made her incapable of walking but by use of crutches; and she had a fire in her chamber constantly for several weeks and one to sit up or be with her in her chamber all the time, the fits being often upon her and suddenly taken¹⁶.

And:

...there are so many small children and 17 or 18 of them are girls, who are more trouble than boys...¹⁷

Attending to ancients and children simultaneously with very different needs presented real problems.

To keep in good order a family made up partially of men and women who are aged and too liable to be discontent, also boys and girls whose parents and other relations... has and yet may give much uneasiness, seems to be very difficult to keep in good order...¹⁸

This situation was only one reason for discontent. One ancient, William Brady, had complained that he was starved while he was in the house. Richard Hutton had to write a long report to the committee refuting the allegations. William Brady was not alone.

Our family have generally speaking consisted of dissatisfied persons very unfit for a community, also having amongst us as a people such who are very unskillful in their sentiments relating to the managing such an affair...¹⁹

Older residents had been granted special favours before Richard Hutton became Steward. They resisted change.

...many other difficulties I could mention which we have and do still lay under. And it seems to us very unlike it should be, otherwise, whilst persons are placed here on a different foot to the rest, who esteem themselves not equal but superior to us, and we but as their servants...²⁰

William Townsend caused many headaches. He objected to the bill of fare, wanted repayments if he stayed away from the house, demanded special treatment and alleged that the Steward was cruel, did not give good value and lined his own pocket from the inmates' payments. He took his complaints to the committee on three occasions. Richard Hutton faced considerable difficulties. He and Sarah were sufficiently incensed to prepare detailed memoranda giving their version of the altercations over provisions, bill of fare and reports to and from people outside the institution. Clearly personal relationships were fraught. He described his difficulties:

...how hard it is for us, and my wife in particular, to reside in a community amongst a dissatisfied people some of which will give themselves liberty to say almost anything to serve a turn, you would conclude our post very uncomfortable... Justice ought to be done upon us... I know not one friend who has thoroughly known of our treatment but who have thought it very unreasonable that we should be thus imposed upon²¹.

We do think that if the committee were sensible how hard it is for us... to reside constantly amongst a dissatisfied people...

Hopefully, the writing of fifteen pages²² was therapeutic, bringing a clearer mind and calmer emotions. The detailed memoranda suggest that Richard Hutton, even if he was not entirely confident that he would receive full support from the Committee, recognized that the Committee had loyalties, often conflicting, to the institution as a whole, to the family within, and the Society of Friends without as well as to the Superintendent and his wife. He expected redress

from the committee, but there is no record in the Complaints Book of the outcome.

Richard Hutton found that he and Sarah had little privacy.

So we hope it may not be thought unreasonable if, with submission, we desire the little parlour and kitchen to ourselves... We desire it not for ostentation, but... that the business which requires privacy may be done accordingly, also to have a place to retire to as occasion requires...²³

Some inmates wanted special attention, such as fires in their chambers and constant attendance. Some had higher expectations because they made greater payment and demanded separate rooms. These demands caused difficulties within the house and damaging accounts of it outside. The choice was between a charge for such services and a poor reputation for inadequate attention. Richard Hutton proposed action to quell both difficulties. He could improve matters by increasing contentment within the house from the better bill of fare that he had introduced in 1713:

they are allowed each: 8oz of butter and 16oz of cheese per week, about 14oz of bread (it not being weighed except Daniel Rosier's, who has 18oz) per day, 8oz of flesh per meal & if not enough they are desired to send for more, 19oz of pudding per meal, and more if they can eat it (which is 10oz per meal more than the former allowance), furmenty, milk etc a sufficient quantity²⁴.

The committee could also play their part by visiting once a week to see that things were in good order, by giving regular reports to meetings and by discouraging false reports. The Steward could try to manage affairs within the house, but he could not control what went on outside. A recurring difficulty was the spread of these reports, which did such damage to the reputation of the house, especially among the meetings that sent the inmates to it. He clearly thought that the committee should tackle this:

...complaints were taken out of the house: the poor were oppressed, the aged and sick wanted due tendance. Which proved to the disadvantage to the house by discouraging several poor honest friends who might have been helpful and likewise thankful for so comfortable a provision²⁵. There has

lately been many false stories spread abroad to the defaming of the house and those who have the care thereof and hurt of the children already here, to whom such reports have been privately brought. Which to prevent for the future we see no way at present... unless ...a minute ...from the committee be directed to each monthly meeting requesting such reports may be discouraged so often as they are related. And also that at the taking children into the house the parents have both orders (rules) and bill of fare read to them and report thereof made to the committee before such child be admitted into the house²⁶.

But there was appreciation. Richard Hutton records a letter of thanks from Thomas Sands.

Kind steward

These are to acquaint thee that I am safe arrived at my uncle's house where I was kindly received. My love to thee and thy wife, also to all the friends of the committee and to my master that taught me to write. My love to all the ancient friends and all the children of the workhouse which were my school fellows...My uncle is about placing me at Exeter to Arthur Purchas, a tucker. I am in all due respects thy friends²⁷.

And in 1721 Richard and Sarah would have been pleased to receive this:

Ed. H. Said thou and thy wife are brave folks indeed, and much valued. This great undertaking has been a great success under your management²⁸.

Perhaps these commendations helped the Steward to deal with the problems of discipline, which challenged his authority.

It would be tedious, also unpleasant, to hear the whole of the provocations rehearsed; also here are too many to mention the particulars of those who in their turns are addicted unto. But, the ground of it all is their being under any obligation, either with respect to the orders of the house, bill of fare and the diet therein mentioned²⁹.

He certainly needed his wits to deal with John Gorden, a boy who got up to much mischief before he broke into the storeroom.

...At another time he got a candle over night and got up about twelve o'clock at night and took a pane of glass out of the storeroom window and got in, from whence he took four pounds of plum pudding, although he, as well as the rest of the big boys, had a full pound for dinner besides their suppers. And he ate so much in the storeroom he could not come thence without leaving behind what is not fit here to mention...³⁰

The servants were not an unmixed blessing either! Elizabeth Rand refused to carry out instructions, complained about her work, was reported to the committee, apologized and then negotiated with the Steward and his wife the basis of a return to work³¹. Other servants employed as teachers were given detailed directions for the schoolmaster and schoolmistress to observe.

The Steward had to negotiate his own salary with the committee and produced papers to justify his requests. In 1720 he wrote to the committee:

Friends, It's not pleasant to use this to apply, yet think ourselves under a necessity to let you understand that we are not thoroughly satisfied with our present salary, it being now going on nine years since we came to serve the committee...³²

He had been engaged for £20 per annum in 1711, which was increased to £25 next year and to £30 in 1714³³. He felt that he deserved more than the £40 paid since 1719³⁴. In 1725 he asked for £60 arguing that this was for the service of two people, that they had no other income, had no time for other employment and had improved the reputation of the house. He reminded the committee of his duties: buying wool, spinning yarn, trading in spun yarn, keeping accounts, drawing bills, clothing the family, buying provisions. The committee agreed that he deserved £60, but in February decided to advance £10 now and £10 some time after as that would be easier for them than to find £20 at one time³⁵. Richard Hutton renewed his case and in September 1725 the committee agreed to the full £60.

...in consideration of his care and pains with respect to the trade and his wife's conduct and service in the family, ... himself and his wife having assured us that they will not at anytime hereafter ask any farther advance to said salary and that they will continue their service so long as they live and are able³⁶.

There are several entries that relate to the finances of the house. The Steward negotiated the price of bread

(8s 6d per hundredweight)³⁷.

recorded the costs of supplying clothes for members of the family

(26 new hats brought of Thomas Pittflow £2 12s)³⁸.

and entered schedules of the earnings and gains from the work of the children

(earnings and gains over 12 years £2590 3s 6¹/₄ d)³⁹.

When John Wilson was sick, he received a special diet. Over six months his supply of 71 oysters cost 10d and 1³/₄ lbs of chocolate cost 6s 1¹/₂ d⁴⁰. There is an estimate for repairs of the workhouse at Clerkenwell, which was not new when Friends leased it.

Ripping and tiling the whole in the same form as it is	
now in, being 158 square at 15s per square	£118.10s
Materials and carpenter's work shoring and	
repairing the rafters and eaves boards	£30.00s
	<hr/>
	£148.10s⁴¹

The house made its own beer to provide sufficient for the inmates. Richard Hutton tells us how.

Take about 2 ounces of the finest & clearest isinglass beat or cut very small, put it into an earthen vessel with as much vinegar... as will cover the isinglass. Brush it very well with a whisk twice or thrice a day till it be quite dissolved & as it grows thick put a little more vinegar to it till becomes a very thick syrup, then strain through a cloth about a pint thereof,.... Then open the bung of the cask. With a whisk then pour in the strained isinglass, stirring it very well also & bung the cask very close & in 24 hours your drink will be very clear⁴².

There is a recipe for a lotion to apply to sore eyes and a recipe to deal with an incipient problem, bedbugs.

Take of the highest rectified spirit of wine... half a pint; newly

distilled oil or spirit of turpentine, half a pint; mix them together and break into it , in small bits, half an ounce of camphor, which will dissolve in it in a few minutes. Shake them well together, and with a sponge... wet very well the bed or furniture wherein those vermin harbour or breed, and it will infallibly kill and destroy both them and their nits...⁴³

A paper of this length cannot do full justice to the riches in the Complaints Book. Together, the entries give a comprehensive view of the issues involved in managing an institution in the eighteenth century. It was a community of old and young, the ancients needing shelter, support and some nursing, the children needing nurture, learning and some training. But it is also a human document about a family. Individuals come vividly to life: mischievous John Gorden, cantankerous William Townsend, grumbling William Brady and grateful Thomas Sands. So also, despite his dry, sometimes long-winded reports, does the Steward: anxious, serious, diligent, meticulous, purposeful, determined that the inmates should have comfort and no cause for complaint within the house and concerned that the committee should promote its reputation for fairness and good-order without. Surely the institution is able to celebrate its tercentenary partly because Richard Hutton established such a firm foundation in those early years between 1711 and 1737.

John Woods

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References give date, when available, the page in the original (O) and the page in the published edition (P). e.g. 11 May 1713, O.p.4, P.p.2.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 30 May 1683, O. p. 158, P. p. 84.
- 2 14 November 1677, O. p. 22, P. p. 13.
- 3 P. p. vii
- 4 e.g. 25 March 1729, O. p. 154, P. p. 82.
- 5 e.g. 14 June 1729, O. p. 157, P. p. 84
- 6 e.g. 1716, O. pp. 16-21, P. pp. 10-13.
- 7 e.g. 4 February 1727, O. p. 146, P. pp. 78-9.
- 8 e.g. 30 January 1716, O. pp. 41-3. P. pp. 22-4.
- 9 e.g. 11 May 1713, O. p.4, P. pp. 2-3
- 10 O. p. 150, P. p. 81.
- 11 O. p. 45, P. p. 25.
- 12 O. pp. 160-61, P. pp. 85-6.
- 13 O. pp. 10-14, P. pp. 6-9.
- 14 When the writer of the article was Head of Friends School Saffron Walden.
- 15 O. p. 66, P. p. 37.
- 16 1716, O. p. 67, P. pp. 37-8.
- 17 1712, O. p. 68, P. p. 38.
- 18 O. p. 174, P. p. 91.
- 19 O. p. 115, P. p. 63.
- 20 18 October 1711, O. p. 111, P. p. 61.
- 21 O. p. 93. P. pp. 52-3.
- 22 3 November 1718 onwards, O. pp. 74-93, P. pp. 41-53.
- 23 18 October 1711, O. pp. 112-3, P. pp. 61-2.
- 24 11 May 1711, O. p. 4, P. pp. 2-3.
- 25 April 1717, O. p. 50, P. p. 28.
- 26 O. p. 66, P. p. 37.
- 27 30 October 1717, O. p. 52, P. p. 29.
- 28 1721, O. p. 178, P. p. 92.
- 29 30 March 1720. O. p. 120, P. p. 66.
- 30 O. p. 5, P. p. 3.
- 31 30 January 1716, O. pp. 41-3, P. pp. 22-4.
- 32 8 February 1720, O. p. 148, P. p. 80.
- 33 22 November 1714, O. p. 52, P. pp. 81-2.
- 34 1 February 1725, O. p. 148, P. p. 80.
- 35 1 February 1725, O. p. 148, P. p. 80.
- 36 13 September 1725, O. p. 151, P. p. 81.
- 37 O. p. 3, P. p. 2.
- 38 15 May 1713, O. p. 35, P. p. 20.
- 39 O. p. 168, P. p. 88.
- 40 O. p. 136, P. p. 73.
- 41 O. p. 118, P. p. 65.
- 42 O. p. 162, P. pp. 86-7.
- 43 O. p. 170, P. pp. 88-9.