

# THE PURITAN AND THE QUAKERESS: THOMAS HALL AND JANE HIGGS

The earliest focus of Quakerism in the county of Worcestershire<sup>1</sup> seems to have been Chadwick, a hamlet in the large parish of Bromsgrove. It was at Chadwick (now more often called Chadwiche) that the two Quakers who may be regarded as the 'First Publishers of Truth' in Worcestershire, the Yorkshiremen Richard Farnsworth<sup>2</sup> and Thomas Goodaire, held a debate on 21 February 1654/5 with two members of the Worcestershire Association of ministers, Henry Oasland of Bewdley and Andrew Tristram of Clent.<sup>3</sup> The Quakers later claimed that they had won this 'great battle'. The fact that the debate took place here indicates that Quakerism had taken a firm hold in Chadwick and the district around it.

The names of some of the early Quakers in Chadwick and nearby are known. Richard Baxter states that<sup>4</sup> '[The Quakers] sent many papers of queries to divers ministers about us, ...I wrote an answer and gave them as many more questions to answer, entitling it "The Quakers' Catechism"...'. In this work of 1655 Baxter names, among other Quakers, Jane Higgs (of Chadwick), Thomas Chandler (of Chadwick) and Edward Newey (of Rednal in King's Norton). King's Norton was a curacy within Bromsgrove parish where the minister was the Presbyterian Thomas Hall, of whom more will be said later. The Quakers' tactics were not merely to question ministers by sending them 'papers' but actually to question and challenge them during the services they conducted. There is no doubt that they regarded Richard Baxter, the acknowledged leader of the Worcestershire Association, as their leading foe. To them he was "the great Rabbi" and "the chief priest" of the county. On Sunday 25 March 1655 a service in Kidderminster church taken by Baxter's assistant Richard Sergeant (the "Great Rabbi" was absent ill) was interrupted by Thomas Goodaire, who loudly asked 'How are the ministers of Christ and the ministers of Antichrist to be known asunder?' On 7 May 1655 Baxter himself was 'spoken to', while preaching at St. Swithun's, Worcester, by both Farnsworth and Goodaire.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas Hall<sup>6</sup>, curate of King's Norton, was born in Worcester in 1610, and educated at the King's School there and at Oxford. In 1629 he became Master of the Grammar School at King's Norton, curate of the

chapelry of Wythall in 1632, of the chapel at Moseley in 1635 and finally curate of King's Norton in 1640 under his brother John Hall, Vicar of Bromsgrove (d.1652). Despite the fact that he was Worcestershire-born, Hall's main ecclesiastical connexions were with the county of Warwickshire<sup>7</sup>, particularly with the town of Birmingham where he was a Lecturer (preacher) by the 1650s.<sup>8</sup> Hall did not join the Worcestershire Association but in 1654 helped to form the Kenilworth (Presbyterian) classis in Warwickshire. Baxter later wrote of Thomas Hall: 'At King's Norton was silenced Mr. Tho:Hall, an ancient divine known by his many writings, of a quick spirit, a godly, upright man and the only Presbyterian whom I knew in that county'.<sup>9</sup> Despite their differences, there was, it seems, a mutual respect between the two men, and they were united in their opposition both to unlearned lay preachers and also to the radical sects, most notably the Quakers.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear why Chadwick developed as the first Worcestershire centre of Quakerism, but its geographical position must have been a factor. Quakerism was to a large extent a Northern movement in origin<sup>11</sup> and it entered Worcestershire, it would seem, from the North East. Chadwick, in the North East of the county, was close to the county's borders with Staffordshire and Warwickshire (from which it was only a few miles distant). The manor of Chadwick belonged to Christ Church, Oxford which had by 1618 sublet it to one Anthony Cole.<sup>12</sup> Chadwick may possibly exhibit an example of that weak manorial control which, in the view of some historians, permitted the emergence of dissent.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the growth of Quakerism there may be largely due to the presence of Anthony Cole. In 1655 George Fox, the greatest figure in early Quakerism, stayed in Chadwick at the house of Anthony Cole (?Chadwick Manor House). He had a 'brave, serviceable meeting at Chadwick on the side of a hill, for the house could not hold the people, they were so many...'.<sup>14</sup> The Bromsgrove parish register records that 'Anthony Cole of Chadwick was buried twice 6th September 1661, first by the Quakers and after in the churchyard'.<sup>15</sup> In 1666 George Robinson of Bishop's Cleeve, Gloucestershire, yeoman, was accused of being 'present at an assembly or coventicle in Chadwich in the parish of Bromsgrove under colour or pretence of an exercise of religion, in other manner then is allowed by the liturgie or practice of the Church of England...'.<sup>16</sup> In 1689 'The edifice conteyninge about three bayes of buildings scytuate in Chadwich in the parish of Bromsgrove... adjoyninge to the lands of Anthony Dowbridge'<sup>17</sup> was certified as a Quaker Meeting House (a subsidy list of 1690 lists Anthony Dowbridge as a Quaker).<sup>18</sup> In 1778

Chadwick had about 480 inhabitants and 80 houses<sup>19</sup> and by this date it was the focus point of a large Quaker district.

Jane Hicks or Higgs of Chadwick appears to have been the person of that name who was baptised at Bromsgrove on 4 October 1627, the daughter of Daniel Higgs. In 1618 this Daniel Higgs is recorded as paying rent of 1s 4d. a year for 'certain freehold lands called Callow Brook containing 12 acres'. In 1628 Daniel Higgs, yeoman, Nicholas Newey, labourer, and John Newey, yeoman, made recognizances for the appearance of Nicholas Newey at Quarter Sessions.<sup>20</sup> It may be significant that both in 1628 and in 1655 a Higgs<sup>21</sup> was associated with a member or members of the Newey family. If the above identification is correct, Jane Higgs was 28 years of age when she 'spoke to' the Rev. Thomas Hall in King's Norton Church of 7 September 1656.

This incident is referred to in a MS. 'Life' of Thomas Hall, perhaps written by the Rev. John Reynolds and possibly based on a (now lost) MS. by Hall himself.<sup>22</sup>

'One of these Quakers interrupting him in his publick ministry was bound over to the Sessions; there this Jane Higs (a comon disturber of ministers in publick) accused Mr.H. 1) of cruelty in persecuting the saints called Quakers. To wch he answered yt all Quakers were not saints, for the devil is a Quaker, he believes and trembles.<sup>23</sup> 2) She accused him of lying, in yt he said he would grease her hands if they were so stiff yt she could not curtely<sup>24</sup> (*sic*) without greazing; yet never did it. To wch he replied yt the stiffnes was not in the hands but in the proud heart, and therefore he conceived that cudgel-oyle was fittest for this cure'.

There is a Quarter Sessions document which relates to this actual incident (it belongs to the proceedings for Michaelmas 1656):<sup>25</sup>

Worcester shire Ss : The informacons of Thomas Bennett, Edward Hobbis and Joseph Tomlinson taken before mee the 7th day of September 1656 against Jane Heeke for disturbinge Thomas Hall, minister of Kinges Norton, in the time of devine servis.

Thomas Bennett, Edward Hobbis and Joseph Tomlinson made oath that upon the 7th day of September they did heare and see the said Jane Heekes make a disturbance in the parish church of Kingesnorton by interruptinge Mr. Thomas Hall in his sermone by questioninge his doctrine to the disturbance of the sayd Mr. Hall and the whole congregacon

*Tho: Milwarde*

Thomas Milward had been the Bishop's Bailiff at nearby Alvechurch and one of the leading Parliamentarians in the County in the Civil War of 1642-46. Thomas Hall had clearly acted quickly in getting three members of his congregation to swear an information before a local

Justice of the Peace on the very day of the incident. What Jane Higgs actually said to Thomas Hall on 7 September 1656 must remain a matter of conjecture. The accusations reported in the 'Life' do not really amount to the 'questioning' of his 'doctrine' mentioned in the Quarter Sessions document, and are likely to have been made over a period of time. At any rate, Hall seems to have felt, among all his Quaker opponents, particularly threatened by Jane Higgs. In the Early Fine Printing Section in Birmingham Reference Library is a copy of Baxter's *The Quakers' Catechism* which once belonged to Thomas Hall.<sup>26</sup> When, at the beginning of the section headed 'An Answer to the Quakers' Queries', Baxter mentions Jane Higgs, Hall has noted in the margin: Jane Heekes my antagon(ist) in prson [?prison].

We know that Jane Higgs was imprisoned at Worcester for interrupting Thomas Hall in September 1656. In Besse's *Sufferings of the Quakers*, the source of this information, we also find, under the year 1658, that 'Jane Higgs, being several times concerned to bear her testimony to the truth to the people assembled at their place of public worship in Bromsgrove, was committed to Worcester prison. She was also four several times set in the stocks, one of those times a whole night and part of two days'. In January 1660/1 she is one of 47 persons listed as being in the county gaol at Worcester.<sup>27</sup> Of her subsequent life nothing is known. Her opponent Thomas Hall was ejected from his living at King's Norton in 1662 and died there on 13 April 1665. He left a library of books to the town of Birmingham and a smaller library to King's Norton.

C.D. Gilbert

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

##### *Abbreviations*

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| D.N.B.   | = Dictionary of National Biography.                      |
| D.W.L.   | = Dr. Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London.         |
| H.W.R.O. | = Hereford and Worcester Record Office (at Worcester).   |
| T.B.A.S. | = Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society. |
| V.C.H.   | = Victoria County History.                               |
| W.H.S.   | = Worcestershire Historical Society.                     |

<sup>1</sup> On the coming of Quakerism to Worcestershire see *The First Publishers of Truth* (ed. N. Penny, 1907), 274-85 (based on a MS. account by the Worcester Quaker Dr. Edward Bourne).

<sup>2</sup> On this debate see F.J. Powicke, *A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter* (1924), p.249 (henceforth Powicke).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>4</sup> *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (ed. M.Sylvester, 1696) I,i, 116-180.24 (henceforth *Rel.Baxt.*).
- <sup>5</sup> On all this see Powicke, 246f.
- <sup>6</sup> On Thomas Hall see F.J. Powicke in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* vol. 8 (1924), 166-90 (henceforth 'B.J.R.L. '); Helen Goodger, 'King's Norton' (1990), 62-64; W.S. Brassington in T.B.A.S. (1887), 10f.
- <sup>7</sup> Hall's Warwickshire friends Thomas Dugard, Vicar of Barford, and John Trapp, Headmaster of Stratford Grammar School, had been his near contemporaries at King's School, Worcester. On Hall and Warwickshire generally see Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire 1620-1660* (1987). See also Michael Craze, *The King's School, Worcester* (1972), 64-6, 74-5.
- <sup>8</sup> T.B.A.S. (1887), 15.
- <sup>9</sup> *Rel. Baxt.* III, 93.
- <sup>10</sup> See, in particular, Hall's *The Pulpit Guarded* (1650), occasioned by a dispute at Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, against five lay preachers.
- <sup>11</sup> See e.g. Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (1964), ch.III; Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (1985), ch.I.
- <sup>12</sup> V.C.H. Worcestershire II, 176; III, 23-24; Chadwick Court Rolls.
- <sup>13</sup> See e.g. Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* (1981), 298 f.; Alan Everitt in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *Land, Church and People* (1980), 178f.
- <sup>14</sup> *First Publishers of Truth*; cf. George Fox's *Journal* (1911 Cambridge edition) I,196.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Notes and Queries for Bromsgrove' I,88 (henceforth N. & Q.)
- <sup>16</sup> H.W.R.O., Ref.110: 108/89.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 110: 69/13. Dowbridge was probably the lessee of the manor by this date.
- <sup>18</sup> N. & Q. I, 91.
- <sup>19</sup> N. & Q. I, 72.
- <sup>20</sup> H.W.R.O., Ref.110: 54/26; 'Quarter Sessions Records' (W.H.S., ed. J.W. Willis Bund), 446, where Daniel Higgs is wrongly given as a 'husbandman'.
- <sup>21</sup> The Higgs family seems to have been a fairly important yeoman family from the Middle Ages onwards. See 'Bromsgrove Court Rolls 1494-1504' (W.H.S.1963), index s.v. Heekes.
- <sup>22</sup> D.W.L., Baxter Treatises vol.IX, nos.293-99: 'A Briefe Narrative of the Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Hall, late Pastor of King's Norton in Worcestershire...'. It was edited by John Reynolds, ejected minister of Wolverhampton, and possibly written by him. For the problems posed by the MS. see F.J. Powicke in B.J.R.L. 8(1924), 167-9.
- <sup>23</sup> This is a reference to the Epistle of James 2.19: '...the devils also believe and tremble', and to the convulsions which gave the 'Quakers' their name.
- <sup>24</sup> The MS. has 'cirtely' but this probably arises from a misreading of 'curtesy' (i.e. 'courtesy'). The Quakers refused to acknowledge their social superiors by the traditional actions of removing hats (in men) or curtsying (in women).
- <sup>25</sup> H.W.R.O., Ref. 110:93/45.
- <sup>26</sup> Birmingham Reference Library, Early and Fine Printing Collection, 094/1655/C.27 (no.121654). It is part of the Thomas Hall Library.
- <sup>27</sup> Joseph Besse, *The Suffering of the Quakers* (1753) II, 60-61.