

RICHARD FARNWORTH OF TICKHILL

Richard Farnworth was born in Tickhill Yorkshire in 1625. His father was another Richard and his mother Gartrude Dickinson. His parents, who married in 1622, had only one son and five daughters (three of whom died young). Richard, senior, died in 1633 when Richard, junior, was only nine years old. The family lived on a farm (probably in the Sunderland district of Tickhill) and his mother continued to work the farm after his father's death.¹

As a youth of 16 the Lord's work began within him and he became zealous in hearing sermons and in Bible reading and private prayer. In 1644 Richard's mother died leaving him the farm then valued at £5 p.a. He does not seem to have worked the farm but went to live with one Thomas Lord of Brampton-en-le-Morton in the parish of Treeton a few miles southwest of Tickhill. The Lord household was a strict Puritan one and in it Richard studied the new sects which were at that time springing up all over Britain. In his early manhood there was no more ardent Puritan and Roundhead in the district than he and he 'could have persecuted even unto death those who were licentious and did not walk as he did.'

At about 21 years of age questions began to arise in Richard's mind and disturb his religious complacency. He was to become a Brownist and then an Independent. He came to believe that he should look for Christ inside himself, rather than seeking intercession involving others. Following this belief he refused to join the household in family prayer. This brought him into conflict with Thomas Lord and he was dismissed. He then went to work for Coronet Heathcoat as a husbandman. Heathcoat has not been identified but there was a Heathcoat family in the nearby Cinderford (where the woman destined to become Richard's wife was born) and this may have been the area to which Farnworth moved.

At this time he came into contact with a group of Seekers based in Warmsworth and with them he seems to have found a spiritual home. They had found the "Quaker Experience" independently of Fox and worshipped by sitting alone in darkness and silence awaiting the word of God from within.

At this time George Fox was preaching in his native Leicestershire and had been committed to prison in Derby in 1650 after being found guilty of blasphemy. It would seem that Fox and Farnworth were

already in touch as, in a letter to Fox dated in 1653, Richard Farnworth referred to 'those letters that thou desired to have which were written to thee whilst thou was in prison in Derby.'² It seems that soon after Fox was released in October 1651 he travelled north to meet the Warmsworth Seekers and he spoke with them "at Balby." Some of the Warmsworth Seeker Group, including Richard Farnworth, were convinced. It is unlikely that this historic meeting actually took place in Balby as this group was based in Warmsworth, but it would have been in the district of Balby. At the time the village of Warmsworth was in the act of moving some five miles to its present position and the new village where the Seekers met may not, at the time, have had a name - hence the use of the district name Balby. The meeting may even have taken place in Richard's home town, the nearby Tickhill, as this was referred to as "Tickhill, Balby" at that time. The Warmsworth Seekers formed themselves into a Quaker Group out of which grew the Balby Meeting. The Balby meeting actually met in Warmsworth and in 1672 a meeting house was built there opposite the house of Thomas Aldham.³

It is interesting to note that, in addition to Farnworth, amongst those who were convinced at the Balby meeting was Thomas Aldham whose mother, Margaret, was the sister of Thomas Lord with whom Richard Farnworth had lived. The wives of Thomas and John Killan, who were convinced at the same time were also daughters of Margaret Lord.⁴

Richard Farnworth and the Aldhams and Killans accompanied Fox towards Wakefield and at Stanley another meeting was held where more were convinced. These included William Dewsbury and James Nayler as well as Thomas Stacey whose daughter Mary was later to become Richard Farnworth's wife. Thus in a few short weeks Fox had convinced and collected about him the nucleus of the Yorkshire Friends who were to serve him well as the Quaker Message spread throughout the land.⁵

In 1652 Fox again visited Balby and the new Quaker group that had been formed there. This time he fell foul of the Church as he visited the local churches (steeplehouses as he called them) and spoke during the services. One of these churches was St. Mary's Tickhill in the town of Farnworth's birth. There are conflicting reports of the events at Tickhill but the best in detail is that taken from Nickalls' edition of Fox's *Journal* which includes information from other sources.⁶ It would seem that there were several Quakers in Tickhill at the time and that a meeting was held there. Certainly in the years to follow there is evidence of Quaker activity in the town centred in the Sunderland area. Fox attended a Meeting at Tickhill and was moved to leave and enter the church where he caused considerable disturbances. (Fox seems to have

often been moved to leave a Quaker Meeting to preach at a nearby church).

Thomas Rookby, the priest at Warmsworth took out a warrant against both Thomas Aldham and Fox but it seems to have been served only on Aldham. Nevertheless Fox travelled with the arrested Aldham towards York and the party seems to have stayed at Lt. Roper's house where they met up with Farnworth and others and held a meeting. The party seems then to have broken up as Aldham was sent to prison in York and the others dispersed to continue their ministry.

Farnworth continued in Yorkshire, speaking in churches. This was not so unusual during the seventeenth century and at the time it was allowed except during the sermon. By May 1652 Fox and Farnworth were again together and we find them travelling in Yorkshire visiting various Seeker Groups. They visited Halifax and continued up the Dales towards Lancashire where they came to Pendle Hill.⁷ Fox and Farnworth climbed the hill and it was at this time that Fox had a vision and proclaimed the day of the Lord – the point often taken as the start of Quakerism. The two stayed on the hill until hunger forced them to descend into the valley. Before nightfall they reached an inn by the riverside and spoke with the alewife who agreed to circulate a paper prepared by them in the inn which was addressed to all priests and professors (i.e. those professing the Christian Faith). The great movement which was to lead to Quakerism had started. In Farnworth's words:-

Wee have pitcht our Tents, drawn our swords, made Ready for ye Battel : it is begun

James Nayler joined Fox and Farnworth in the Lake District at Kendal where they stayed at the house of Francis Howgill at Todthorne in Grayrigg (about 6 miles from Kendal) and at this house they had a 'great and effectual meeting.' Fox stayed in Lancashire but Farnworth returned to his native Yorkshire continuing preaching as he went. We find him, in the summer of 1652 perhaps as early as July, in Malton with Jane Holmes a noted Quaker minister who may have originated from Farnworth's home town of Tickhill. Jane Holmes was arrested and put into York prison where she suffered a fever and ranted in 'wild airy spirit.' Farnworth visited her in prison but could avail nothing.⁹

In July Farnworth and Nayler were travelling together in Lancashire following Fox and they caught up with him at Swarthmoor just as Judge Fell had returned to find that his household had taken to Quakerism.¹⁰ Farnworth discussed the matter with him and was given a fair

reception¹¹ and Swarthmoor Hall became the headquarters for the movement in the north. Both Farnworth and Nayler returned to Yorkshire in the autumn of that year and at Christmas we find Farnworth at Malton again, this time with Dewsbury, when nearly 200 Friends gathered.

In autumn 1652 Farnworth was in Stanley, near Wakefield and many were 'wrought on by the power of the Lord.' These included 'a captain's wife who ripped off her silver lace to humble herself.' Later Farnworth held a meeting there at the house of Dr. Hodgson where he (Farnworth) spoke forcefully. That night the Quakers were stoned as they left the town and the 'stones flew as fast as bullets in battle,' but no one was hurt.¹²

After visiting Friends in York prison, including some Balby Friends, the group went to Malton where they had a powerful meeting for two nights and a day.¹³ The party, accompanied by many Malton Friends, then made back for York over-night and pushed on back to Stanley via Selby.

Farnworth wrote of this occasion:-

So I see the Lord glorifying himself every way to His own praise: but the world is on fire. I am much threatened of my life but fear not what man can do: I hear that there is warrants out as for blasphemy that I should say 'I am the light of the world.' Ah, dear hearts be valient the lord rides on triumphantly.¹⁴

Not all churchmen rejected the movement, as in 1652 we find that Fox and Farnworth were at a church 'on the moor near Pickering' which seems to have been at Thornton Risebough. There they were welcomed by the vicar, a man called Boyes, who was chaplain to Justice Robinson.

Later in 1652 we find Farnworth back near his home at Balby. During this period Farnworth does not seem to have spent too much time away from his native area as we again find him near his home in 1653. He wrote a letter to Fox¹⁵ in that year outlining his return from "Worsop" [Worksop] via Tickhill (where he stayed amongst Friends) to Balby, (which probably meant Warmsworth). The letter is addressed:-

ffor my Brother
Geo: ffoxe where
he is these are

This rather vague address seems to have found Fox as the letter probably

travelled by hand to Swarthmoor and then on by hand to Fox wherever he was ministering.

Farnworth now moved on with his ministry spreading the word away from his native Yorkshire. His method of preaching is indicated in a letter from him to George Fox in 1653¹⁶ where he writes:-

I am out of all friends and creatures whatso ever and lives only by faith in the sense of love and power of the LORD and readeth revalation much; and often that is the book that I preach out of. I am as a white paper book without any line or sentence; but as it is revealed and written by the Spirit, the Revealer of secrets so I administer

In 1653 he visited the Midlands and was in the Isle of Axholme (Lincolnshire) and spent half a week amongst Friends at Sturton and three nights at Mansfield and then went on to the home of Elizabeth Hooton.¹⁷ The minister at Mansfield was John Firth and Farnworth called him 'a very high deceiver.' Firth was boarded for a quarter at a Friend's house where Farnworth disputed with him for three hours until he was 'much cut and confused' and all other Friends present were 'made bold everyone to take a bout with him' – one feels sorry for the poor minister!¹⁸ In July 1654 a number of the inhabitants of Mansfield petitioned Cromwell for Firth to be made a permanent minister and amongst the reasons given was that in the absence of a permanent minister 'the common enemy of mankind ... hath poisoned the spirits of very many with that erroneous spirit of Quaking, whereby the interests of satan hath increased more and more ...'¹⁹

In January 1654/5 Farnworth was preaching, again with George Fox in Leicestershire and was also there in March when he was with Fox as he visited his family. Together they had a dispute with Nathaniel Stephens, vicar of Fenny Drayton and other priests on 12 and 17 March.

He was continuing travelling as in May he was at Gainsborough causing more controversy. At the nearby Glentworth on 31 May he confronted a group called Manifestarians (or Mooreans) – a sect gathered about Thomas Moore at Kings Lynn and in the adjacent Fen Country. Farnworth challenged their teachers to go preaching with him for a fortnight, neither party taking any sustenance but a little spring water nor looking in a book during the time.²⁰

He is reported at Banbury in autumn, 1655 and he attended Ann Audland's trial there in September. Ann Audland was found guilty of blasphemy but refused to make a bond of good behaviour so was imprisoned. Feelings were running high in the town against Quakers

and when a woman spoke against the trial in church the following Sunday she was dragged off to gaol. Afterwards Farnworth met the Mayor and a Justice in the street but refused to remove his hat and was immediately imprisoned. His trial was by the Borough Bench and produced a long debate on such diverse matters as immediate revelation, swearing oaths and the preaching of women. The Bench seemed to be intent on removing Farnworth from the borough and he was offered his freedom if he paid the cost of his night in prison and agreed to leave the town. Characteristically he refused, and as a consequence suffered eight months imprisonment. During his stay in prison he continued his preaching through the prison grating and convinced others.²¹

In the North Midlands again towards the end of 1656 Farnworth was travelling and preaching with Thomas Goodyear keeping up the momentum of the work. At Baddesly in Warwickshire he found a thriving Meeting of nearly 100 Friends and reported Meetings working at Leicester, Lichfield and Swannington.²²

This was certainly a year of much travel for Farnworth but he still found time to write detailed instructions for the holding of General Meetings each month in all settled Quaker groups and named Friends to see that this was done.²³

These instructions contained the now famous postscript:-

These things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of light, which is pure and holy, may be guided ...

which now stands as one of the corner stones of the Quaker ideal.

The next year, 1657, was also a hectic one as we find Farnworth in Drayton-le-Clay (Fenny Drayton), Leicestershire with George Fox and still in dispute with priests. Fox and Farnworth were in debate with the local vicar, Nathaniel Stephens, and others centring on the payment of tithes. This was a major problem for Quakers at the time as they refused any payment rejecting the concept of a paid ministry in any form. Later that year he was in Kidderminster, Worcestershire with Thomas Goodyear and spoke at Richard Baxter's church but the vicar avoided direct debate preferring to carry out the discussion in print.

Baxter's efforts in publishing tracts against the Quakers were not unusual at the time and it was common to publish such tracts for and against various causes. The Friends were not slow to use this method and Richard Farnworth was one of the most prolific early writers. He had a particular dispute in print with John Statham, vicar of Terling, Essex, and in one of the anti-Farnworth tracts²⁵ we find published a copy of a certificate from Samuel Kendall, vicar of Warmsworth. It shows

Farnworth in a very poor light but it contains interesting details of his earlier life which enabled us to identify his town of birth and his family background. Also in 1657 there was a joint crusade in Bedfordshire and Farnworth took his part together with Fox, Edward Edwards and others.

By 1658 Farnworth seems to have reduced his travels although in November of that year he was in Lincolnshire composing differences amongst Friends. He became based in London where he published some 40 works of a religious nature. A listing of Farnworth's writings is found in Joseph Smith's *A Catalogue of Friends' Books*. The earliest record is in 1652 – a religious text outlining Farnworth's discovery of the "Truth". Most of his works were in the nature of tracts or were pamphlets putting the Quaker point of view in answer to attacks in other publications. His last publication was in 1665, being an answer to an open letter, attacking the Quaker stance, from John Perrot in Jamaica to those in England.

Farnworth married Mary Stacy of Ballifield Hall, Cinderhill on 13 July 1658. Although he must have known Mary in Yorkshire he probably met her again in London. Before marriage she was a powerful Quaker minister who travelled the country spreading the word. In 1658 she is recorded as preaching in St. Austell, Cornwall.

In 1661 John Perrot, having just been released by the Inquisition in Rome, returned to London bringing with him a number of ideas which were to cause considerable internal dispute amongst Friends. Some problems, at this distance in time, seem minor (such as the difference between praying with one's hat off and doing so only if moved to do so) but these minor matters were outward signs of a wider division between orthodox Friends and the Perrot Group who followed Perrot's imaginative mysticism. Fox, Dewsbury and Farnworth each faced the matter in their own way. Fox was trenchant, holding to his austere standards of Quaker conduct and lovingly reproached Perrot from his turning from the established way. On the other hand Dewsbury, while acknowledging the hurt done, felt less outrage and more need for healing and restoration. Farnworth came to the fore in the movement at this time and applied his strong reasoning power and his literary bent to the situation. In October 1661 Dewsbury wrote to Margaret Fell²⁶:-

Richard Farnsworth is raised up in the great power and have been abroad among Friends: the sweet presence of the Lord hath gone along with him.

In the summer of 1663 Farnworth wrote a confutation of the Perrot position.²⁷ He pointed out that the inward man was the seat of religion

and that outward forms were only a bodily exercise which profited but little, and he held that the inward man was subject to spiritual laws government and worship and no outward law could extend to it.

Farnworth was again in London in April 1664 and remained in that city until his death. With Josiah Cole and others he continued to combat the Perrot faction. His death of fever in July 1666 (only a year after Perrot's) was regarded by the Perrots as a judgement against his opposition to them. In his driving testimony Farnworth spoke out against this group who wore "linsey-woolsey garments" (prohibited by Deuteronomy xxii 11) and denied that he was 'under a cloud for something'.²⁸

In his final years Farnworth had also been in conflict with the Muggletonians. This sect was based around John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton who claimed to have been the two witnesses referred to in Revelation xi who should seal the elect and the reprobate before the final coming. John Reeve died in 1652 but Muggleton continued the cause believing he possessed a commission of the Spirit to curse or bless for all eternity. Muggleton and Farnworth had a number of clashes in print about this time. Muggleton claimed to have been instrumental in the deaths of a number of Friends after damning them and one of these was Farnworth. In 1673 Muggleton wrote²⁹:-

... a great red dragon, very fierce and fell: he was exceedingly fat and full of fury: he has two great wings on the sides of his breasts, and his tongue was, as it were, all in a fire with the poison that was in it ... and this dragon died about a year and a little more after he was wounded – this great dragon was Richard Farnworth.

Farnworth's wife, Mary, seems to have returned to her old family home at Cinderhill as her will was made there in 1679 and she died there on 21 October 1680 and was buried "at Balby". There is some doubt about the date of her death as one version of the Friends Burial Book at Balby Meeting gives the date as 20 October 1680, but the older one clearly states the date to be 'the twenty and one day of October'. Strangely, against normal custom the name of the month is given for this one entry only in the burial book. The significance of this is not known.³⁰

The above outlines the life of Richard Farnworth who was born in a minor Yorkshire town and who was an active Quaker minister and a close friend of Fox from the earliest time, being a part of the Quaker movement from its very beginnings on Pendle Hill, until his untimely death at the age of 41 only 16 years later.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ The parish records of St. Mary's Tickhill (at the Doncaster Public Library, Archives Branch).
- ² LSF Swarthmore MSS, iii, 53.
- ³ Warmsworth is still a separate township lying to the south of Doncaster. The Quaker meeting still survives having now moved into Doncaster.
- ⁴ W.C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism to 1660*, (1979 edn), 59.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.
- ⁶ *Journal of George Fox*, ed. J.L. Nickalls, (1986 edn.), 98 *et seq.*
- ⁷ Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 103 *et seq.*, also *Journal*, 103 *et seq.*
- ⁸ *Journal*, 101-104; Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 78; E.E. Taylor, *The Valiant Sixty*, (Ebor Press, 1988), 13 *et seq.*
- ⁹ Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 75.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 119; also see Margaret Fell's account in *Ellwood Journal*, ii, 513.
- ¹² See letter from Farnworth to Fox and Nayler, LSF Swarthmore MSS, iv., 229, reprinted in *Letters of Early Friends*, ed. A.R. Barclay (1841), 216.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 76.
- ¹⁵ LSF Swarthmore MSS, iii, 52.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ¹⁷ Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 127-8.
- ¹⁸ LSF Swarthmore MSS, iii, 52, letter from Farnworth to Fox.
- ¹⁹ *Extracts from State Papers Relating to Friends* (1st. Series), 2-3.
- ²⁰ LSF Samuel Watson MSS (MS vol. 41), 208.
- ²¹ Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 199-200.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 193.
- ²³ The original letter is still in existence and is preserved in the records of Marsden Monthly Meeting. There is an imperfect copy, wrongly attributed, in *Letters of Early Friends*, 277-83.
- ²⁴ *Journal of George Fox*, 184.
- ²⁵ *The Reviller Rebuked* by John Stratham (1657).
- ²⁶ LSF Swarthmore MSS, iv, 148.
- ²⁷ LSF John Penington MSS, (MS vol. 344), iv, 40.
- ²⁸ Braithwaite, *op. cit.*, 247.
- ²⁹ *The Answer to William Penn* by L. Muggleton (1673).
- ³⁰ Microfiche copies of the Balby Meeting Registers are available at the Doncaster Public Library, Archives Branch.