

## ‘STANDS SCOTLAND WHERE IT DID?’ SOME THOUGHTS ON QUAKERS IN SCOTLAND DURING THE LAST HALF CENTURY

I think I first heard the word Quaker from my father. It was in rather curious circumstances. I can have been only five or six years old, but I have a very clear picture of him, jogging around the small parlour in the manse in Lochgelly in a sort of shuffle as he intoned the words (one could scarcely call it singing):

Merrily danced the Quaker's wife,  
Merrily danced the Quaker.

I had no idea of the significance of the words, and I do not know what they meant to my father. Only many years later was I to learn that the tune and the words were traditional and that Robert Burns, that great authority on the folk music of Scotland, had written to the tune what he thought was ‘one of the finest songs I ever made in my life’. but the words, the catchy tune and my father's enthusiasm stirred my youthful interest and I had an immediate and lasting impression of Quakers as happy joyful people. Then some two years later when I was beginning piano lessons with the church organist you can imagine my pleasure when I found in my Hemy's Tutor that one of my first practice pieces was ‘Merrily danced the Quaker’.

The first Quaker I met I came across perhaps five or six years later in the pages of Sir Walter Scott's novel, *Redgauntlet*. I would not have you think that I was reading the Waverley novels, complete and unabridged, when I was ten or twelve years old, even though I had a father and an uncle who were devoted admirers of the novelist. One of the tales of their childhood that I was often told was how my uncle, scarcely into his teens, was bursting with pride and boasting of his achievement when he could claim he had read them all, but my father almost two years his junior trumped his ace: Uncle Willie, having read all Scott, had exhausted that pleasure, while my father with two of the Waverley novels yet to read had still in store a pleasure his brother was now denied.

My first introduction to Scott was in an abridged version, *Scott for Boys and Girls*, retold by Alice F. Jackson. I started with *Redgauntlet* and I think it remains my favourite among Scott's novels. One of the most attractive characters in *Redgauntlet* is the Quaker, Joshua Geddes, whom the hero Darsie Latimer, meets during his adventures in Galloway.

Scott knew something about Quakers<sup>1</sup>. His father's great-grandfather, Walter Scott of Raeburn, had become 'infected with the error of Quakerism', along with his wife, 'probably at the time when George Fox made an expedition into the south of Scotland about 1657', and had suffered for his convictions by imprisonment first in Edinburgh tolbooth and then in the prison of Jedburgh, while their children were 'taken by force from the society and direction of their parents, and educated at a distance from them, ... where they might be free from all infection in their younger years, from the principles of Quakerism'; and on his mother's side, his great-great-grandfather, John Swinton, was also a convert and suffered a long imprisonment in Edinburgh castle, where it is said his 'admonitions had a considerable share in converting to the tenets of the Friends Colonel David Barclay, the father of Robert Barclay, author of the celebrated *Apology for the Quakers*'. But Sir Walter tells us elsewhere: 'I am glad I escaped the honours of the stiff-rumped Quakers which threatened to descend on me from two different channels.'

You remember Darsie Latimer's first impressions of Joshua Geddes:

At this moment the horseman approached us. His whole exterior at once showed that he belonged to the Society of Friends, or, as the world and the world's law call them, Quakers. A strong and useful iron-grey galloway showed by its sleek and good condition that the merciful man was merciful to his beast. His accoutrements were in the usual unostentatious but clean and serviceable order which characterises these sectaries ... A comely and placid countenance, the gravity of which appeared to contain some seasoning of humour, had nothing in common with the pinched puritanical air affected by devotees in general. The brow was open and free from wrinkles, whether of age or hypocrisy. The eye was clear, calm, and considerate.

They start talking, and Joshua offers hospitality to our hero. At home the Quaker speaks of his forebears:

'A better judgment was given to my father's father, Philip Geddes, who, after trying to light his candle at some of the vain wildfires then held aloft at different meetings and steeple-houses, at length obtained a spark from the lamp of the blessed George Fox, who came into Scotland spreading light among darkness.'

and when he has concluded his account of himself and his family 'his sister, Rachel, the only surviving member of it', enters the room:

Her appearance [Darsie tells his friend] is remarkably pleasing. ... The absence of every thing like fashion or ornament was, as usual, atoned for by the most perfect neatness and cleanliness of her dress; and her simple close cap was particularly suited to eyes which had the softness and simplicity of the dove's. She had a well-formed mouth, teeth like pearls, and a pleasing sobriety of smile, that seemed to wish good here and hereafter to every one she spoke to.

The company then settled to their breakfast 'after a blessing, or rather an extempore prayer, which Joshua made upon the occasion, and which the spirit moved him to prolong rather more than Darsie Latimer felt altogether agreeable'. During the meal there is one delightful episode. Darsie Latimer had been offered some sweet-cake, which at the moment he declined, but a little later, seeing it within his reach, he naturally enough helped himself to a slice, putting it on his plate, whereupon his host 'in a very calm and quiet manner, lifted it away and replaced it on the dish, observing only "Thou didst refuse it before, friend Latimer." '

It is an amusing anecdote and not untypical of Friends, even today: I have myself known such polite precision.

Later Rachel Geddes shows our hero into 'a small study containing a little collection of books, in two separate presses', and Scott appends a note, as he says, 'not very necessary for the reader', explaining how in his youth, when he resided for a considerable time in the vicinity of Kelso and had few acquaintances, and books which were at the time almost essential to his happiness, he was particularly indebted to the liberality and friendship of an old lady of the Society of Friends who allowed him to rummage at pleasure in her late husband's small but well-selected library. She permitted him to carry home whatever volumes he chose, on condition that he should take, at the same time, 'some of the tracts printed for encouraging and extending the doctrines of her own sect'.

She did not even exact any assurance that I would read these performances, being too justly afraid of involving me in a breach of promise, but was merely desirous that I should have the chance of instruction within my reach, in case whim, curiosity, or accident might induce me to have recourse to it.

This episode, of Darsie Latimer's stay with the Quakers, is reported in the course of his correspondence with his friend, Alan Fairford, into which Alan's father interjects a word of warning:

It is come to me also by a side-wind, as I may say, that you have been neighbouring more than was needful among some of the pestilent sect of Quakers - a people who own neither priest, nor king, nor civil magistrate, nor the fabric of our law, and will not depone either *in civilibus* or *criminalibus*, be the loss of the lieges what it may. ...

Now, Mr Darsie, ye are to judge for yourself whether ye can safely to your soul's weal remain longer among these Papists and Quakers, - these defections on the right hand, and fallings away on the left; and truly if you can confidently resist these evil examples of doctrine, I think ye may as well tarry in the bounds where ye are.

Despite the single derogatory remark, put into the mouth of a character in the novel, of course, and so not to be taken as representing in any way Scott's own point of view (I am thinking of the statement that 'The Quakers, with all their demureness, can bear malice as long as other folk'), the picture of the Quaker that emerges from the pages of *Redgauntlet* is such as to evoke the reader's respect and admiration and, in particular, to impress an impressionable boy.

I was a pupil at Dunfermline High School before I made the acquaintance of other Quakers, also in a book. One of our prescribed home readers was John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*. Galt called his novels 'theoretical histories of society' and the *Annals* is such a history. It fascinated me when I first read it, and it fascinates me still. The successive chapters narrate the incidents the minister thinks worthy of record year by year, and it is in 1795 that the Quakers appear.

Two English quakers, and a quaker lady, tanners from Kendal, who had been at Ayr on some leather business, where they preached, but made no proselytes. The travellers were all three in a whisky [a light gig], drawn by one of the best ordered horses, as the hostler at the Cross-keys told me, ever seen. They came to the inns to their dinner, and meaning to stay all night, sent round, to let it be known that they would hold a meeting in friend Thacklan's barn; but Thomas denied they were either kith or kin to him; this, however, was their way of speaking.

In the evening, owing to the notice, a great congregation was assembled in the barn, and I myself, along with Mr Archibald Dozendale, [one of my elders], went there likewise, to keep the people in awe; for we feared the strangers might be jeered and insulted. The three were seated aloft, on a high stage, prepared on purpose, with two mares and scaffold-deals [trestles and planks], borrowed from Mr Trowel the mason. They sat long, and silent; but at last the spirit moved the woman, and she rose, and delivered a very sensible exposition of Christianity. I was really surprised to hear such sound doctrine; and Mr Dozendale said, justly, that it was more to the purpose than some that my younger brethren from Edinburgh endeavoured to teach. So, that those who went to laugh at the sincere simplicity of the pious quakers, were rebuked by a very edifying discourse on the moral duties of a Christian's life.



So my acquaintance with Quakers grew. I knew them as straightforward, plain, and honest, whose word was their bond, their yea, yea, and their nay, nay, and that they worshipped in a way that seemed unusual to a young Presbyterian used to hymns and prayers, scripture readings and long sermons: they had no ministers and worshipped largely in silence.

Some years later I came across George Fox himself, but not yet in his own Journal. I found him in the pages of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, a set book in my second year at Edinburgh University.

This man, the first of the Quakers, and by trade a Shoemaker, was one of those, to whom, under ruder or purer form, the Divine Idea of the Universe is pleased to manifest itself; and, across all the hulls of Ignorance and earthly Degradation, shine through, in unspeakable Awfulness, unspeakable Beauty, on their souls. ... Sitting in his stall; working on tanned hides, amid pincers, paste-horns, rosin, swine-bristles, and a nameless flood of rubbish, this youth had, nevertheless, a Living Spirit belonging to him...

Picture George Fox on that morning, when he spreads-out his cutting-board for the last time, and cuts cowhides by unwonted patterns, and stitches them together into one continuous all-including Case, the farewell service of his awl! Stitch away, thou noble Fox: every prick of that little instrument is pricking into the heart of Slavery, and World-worship, and the Mammon-god. ...

George Fox, the greatest of the Moderns ... stands on the adamantine basis of his Manhood, casting aside all props and shoars; yet not, in half-savage Pride, undervaluing the Earth; valuing it rather, as a place to yield him warmth and food, he looks Heavenward from his Earth, and dwells in an element of Mercy and Worship, with a still Strength.<sup>3</sup>

Carlyle's rhetoric, his 'piebald, entangled, hyper-metaphorical style of writing' (his own description), is heady stuff, potent and intoxicating, and I can still remember how it gripped me when I first read *Sartor Resartus* some 57 years ago.

I have spoken at some length about my literary encounters with Friends, for until I was in my twenties I had never met a real live Quaker. My personal experience thus confirms what William Marwick had to say in the *Short History of Friends in Scotland* he wrote for the holding of London Yearly Meeting in Edinburgh in 1948:

In Scotland, Friends have always been a very small and rather obscure community.

Four years later he made the same point in the Epilogue he contributed to George Burnet's *Story of Quakerism in Scotland* (London: James Clarke, 1952). Writing on 'Friends in Scotland during the Last Century, 1850-1950' he said:

In Scotland ... it must be admitted, the Society has had ... but an inconspicuous part in the life of the nation.

(Incidentally, as it happens, I knew Dr Burnet quite well. His first charge as a Church of Scotland minister was in the Guthrie Church in Cowdenbeath and my father had been, as it is designated, the interim moderator during the vacancy, so there was considerable coming and going between the two manses when George Burnet arrived to take up his call, and he naturally came to look upon my father as his senior colleague, friend and adviser. I doubt if he had at that time any intention to become the historian of Scottish Friends.)

How small and obscure and inconspicuous Friends have been - and still are - in Scotland is illustrated by the immediate response of a highly intelligent and generally well-informed mathematician in the University of Strathclyde when a mutual friend happened to mention to him that I was a Quaker. He was being neither derisive nor condescending when he said simply, 'Are there any Quakers in Scotland?'

The explanation for this comparative obscurity and inconspicuousness of Friends in Scotland is largely because in this northern kingdom there is a national church which is Presbyterian in government, plain and simple in its forms of worship, democratic rather than hierarchical in its organization. In England, Friends (as William Marwick puts it) 'are one of the powerful company of Free Churches, in a land where Nonconformity is as important historically as the Establishment'. In Scotland, on the other hand, the majority of churches and church members are, in English terminology, 'Nonconformist'.

The Presbyterian form of church government, not only in the Church of Scotland but in the other Presbyterian sects in the country, is remarkably similar to the church government of Friends. There are the individual congregations meeting regularly for worship throughout the country, each with its body of elders meeting as the kirk session and (according to the sect) its managers or deacons' court looking after the material affairs of the church buildings, halls and manse. The congregations in a convenient area are grouped into presbyteries, meeting more or less monthly, where the main concerns of the church are discussed and its business conducted, and decisions passed up or down to the other courts of the church, or indeed to the world at large. For example, the recommendation that a translation of the Bible be made in the language of the present day, which eventually resulted in the publication in 1970 of the New English Bible, was first made in an overture from the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1946.

The presbyteries in a convenient area are grouped into synods, meeting quarterly, and the church's annual general assembly is its Yearly Meeting. The parallel is wonderfully exact.

There are, of course, significant differences. The churches in Scotland lay great emphasis on the preaching of the Word and so honour and value their tradition of an educated separate clergy, though the contribution of the elders, and indeed of the laity in general is recognized. The churches also celebrate the sacraments of baptism and communion, but communion is offered infrequently, in some congregations only twice a year, more generally quarterly, though more frequent celebrations are increasingly the pattern.

So with the ecclesiastical environment of the country firmly in the Protestant tradition and with a simplicity in its forms of worship and its church architecture and furnishings there was perhaps not so much for the Quakers to protest against and their position in Scotland, it has been pointed out, has been similar rather to Continental than to English Friends. Nevertheless, in my twenties I did meet my first real live Quaker, one whom some of you may have known, and if so, you will remember him, as I do, with warm affection: Alec Hay.

In Dunfermline in the years before the Second World War there was an active branch of the League of Nations Union and I used to attend its meetings with the school friend and library colleague whom I later married. She had known Alec Hay as the art teacher who came round the primary schools of West Fife to encourage the appreciation and the practice of drawing and painting. He was a Quaker and a pacifist - his elder brother had been killed in the South African war and his letters from the front had stirred the younger brother's conscience - and it was natural that Alec should be interested in the League of Nations Union and the people, particularly the younger people, who attended its meetings. We came to know and love this wonderful man.

There is a glowing memoir of Alec Hay by Marion Holbourn (privately printed, n.d.), and this is how it begins:

To describe this lovable character the adjectives which spring to my mind are:- generous and warm-hearted; hot-tempered, impulsive and stubborn; humble and child-like, scrupulously honest, outspoken and sincere; unpunctual, impatient, human.

I would like to add - essentially good; but this would be treason, for he was acutely aware of his own imperfections and his liability to be beaten in his struggles against them. The suggestion that he could be described as 'good' would probably have produced a burst of his characteristically uninhibited laughter.

Alec Hay's influence and example, more than anything else, I believe, brought my wife Betsy and me into the Society of Friends. There are delightful reminiscences of this good man in Marion Holbourn's memoir, including the account we can vouch for of his habit of digging over and tending street verges in his part of the town, and surreptitiously and late at night planting roses where he thought they were required in plots of open ground where streets met, but I would add a further memory from our own experience. During the Scottish Friend's family conference at Bonskeid in 1956 or 1957 Alec buttonholed us - we had by then been attending for some time the meeting in Perth in the home of Cyril and Ethne Walmesley - and he said gently but firmly: 'Don't wait to apply for membership until you think you're good enough. That way you'll never join. Apply now' and he added: 'To attend Meeting and not apply for membership is like taking all the privileges of the trade union without paying your dues.'

Among other Friends no longer with us who have made their mark on the Society in Scotland, and indeed in the wider world, I remember with particular gratitude William Marwick. I cannot now recall when and under what circumstances I first met him. He was so open, friendly and approachable and you felt immediately at ease with him, as if you had already known him for a very long time. We met frequently and not only at Quaker meetings. He stayed with us in Ayr when he and Crawford Thomson were attending meetings of the Historical Association, and Betsy and I visited William and Maeve Marwick in Edinburgh on various occasions. For almost 55 years, from their marriage in 1923 to her death in 1978, they loyally and lovingly supported each other, and he faced with stoical fortitude the bleakness of his last years without her.

On my frequent visits to the National Library of Scotland I rarely entered the reading room without finding William Marwick already there. His son has told us that what he most associated with his father was books.

He was a great man for bookshops, libraries, and of course his own collection which, my mother always said, would some day come through the ceiling into the living-room below.

The affinity I came to feel with William Marwick owed something to our shared background: his father was a minister of the United Presbyterian Church and my father was brought up in that same church and trained for its ministry, although he was not ordained until after the



union of 1900, when the United Presbyterians joined with the Free Church in the United Free Church of Scotland.

William Marwick graduated at Edinburgh University in 1916, with first-class honours in history. A pacifist by conviction, he had been accepted for war relief work with Friends, but the tribunal he faced refused to exempt him from military service, and he was arrested and court-martialled and served a sentence of hard labour. Eventually he was allowed to join Friends' War Victims Relief Service in March 1918.

After the war the conscientious objector seeking employment frequently found himself victimized for his views, and a year passed before William Marwick was appointed a tutor-organizer for the Workers' Educational Association in Glasgow and the West; then 12 years later he became Edinburgh University's first full-time extra-mural tutor, until in 1948 he was appointed a lecturer in economic history. Over the years he published books and pamphlets and innumerable articles, and his pre-eminence in his field was recognised in 1978 by the publication in his honour of a volume, *Essays in Scottish Labour History: A Tribute to W. H. Marwick* (Ed. Ian MacDougall. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1978).

To consider separately his life and work within and outwith the Society of Friends is to make a distinction that William Marwick himself would not have drawn, for he was a whole man who lived his life all of a piece. He joined the Society only in 1938 and characteristically he was immediately active in Friends' affairs. For many years he served on Meeting for Sufferings, the Northern Friends Peace Board, and Friends Service Council; he was for ten years, from 1943 to 1952, clerk of General Meeting for Scotland, and for more than 20 years editor of its *Newsletter*; from 1948 to 1952 he was chairman of the European section of the Friends World Committee. He was a frequent contributor to *The Friend*, writing many articles and reviews, and even more letters to the editor.

On his retirement in 1964 he was appointed for a year to a fellowship at Woodbrooke, and it is typical of the man and his thinking that the outcome was his provocative pamphlet, *Quaker Social Thought*, published in 1969. In that same year he was president of the Friends Historical Society.

At the time of William Marwick's death in his 88th year our Friend Fred Nicholson, another Scottish Friend, now a member of Ambleside Meeting, whose father also had been a minister of the United Free Church of Scotland, wrote this tribute:

Of similar origin and upbringing we had many common interests and enjoyed a close friendship for many years. ... It was a rare and treasured experience to encounter a man of such absolute integrity, with a mind so amply furnished yet so free from conceit or envy. His quiet, undogmatic manner may have hidden from some his profound concern to promote social welfare and the just distribution of material resources. Such continuous concern for others, his courage and patience even in his old age, will remain an example and encouragement for which I shall always be deeply thankful.

When William Marwick died in 1982 I was editing my second issue of the *Scottish Friends Newsletter* and it seemed to me a good idea to print as a tribute to him a message pieced together from his contributions to *The Friend* over the years 1961 to 1969. I called it ‘A Radical Social Testimony’. Here then is William Marwick speaking:

In the society where money remains the measure of social value, the true spirit of service must be thwarted or perverted for the majority. Our present social order is based on the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest: its characteristics are the rat race and the pecking order. Yet our national Press is full of encouragement to money making, as the main aim in the professions as well as in business - surely the most contemptible aim ever set before civilised man.

Our peace testimony is weakened because we persist in seeing it in terms of personal relations. Even the most extroverted has a narrow limit to those with whom he has genuine personal relations. Our opponents argue that the spiritual and moral principles applicable to individual relations are irrelevant to collective relations, especially those of the State. Here we have still to find the missing link by working out the collective relations which express the same spirit of love as we invoke in individual relations. This is the real crux of the situation, of the Niebuhr contrast between Moral Man and Immoral Society.

The same reasoning applies to the economic order: living in a society where these relations are essentially collective, we as citizens must find ways of applying to the economic order as a whole the principles we cherish as private individuals. We cannot contract out of the community. Friends have never adopted a hermit asceticism. We must eat to live, and we are all dependent on others for our daily bread. If we rightly seek ‘creaturely’ comforts, we cannot reject ‘creaturely’ activities to obtain them for ourselves, still less to seek to secure them for others. A chief function of religion is to overcome the self-centredness which, in Toynbee’s language, is a necessary outcome of man’s attainment of consciousness and freedom of will. The most God-centred are the least self-centred, spending themselves in the service of their fellows.

William Marwick’s writing and his ministry were both memorable and aptly illustrated. One of his favourite quotations was the passage from Joel about the old men who dreamed dreams and the young who saw visions. Although in his later years he classed himself with the old men, all who heard his vigorous voice recognized that his dreams had the

clarity and the inspiring quality of visions, for William Marwick remained always young at heart.

When Perla Campbell died less than six months later Scottish Friends suffered a great loss. She was born in Edinburgh and became an active member of the Scottish Episcopal Church, but later she was disappointed that her church did not respond more positively to the challenge of nuclear weapons and in 1961 she came to the Society of Friends. She had a warm, quiet, sympathetic personality which made a great impression on me when she led a Quaker retreat at Scottish Churches House.

We remember her particular concern that as many Friends as possible should write to the Prime Minister in support of disarmament at the time of Yearly Meeting 1981, in view of the approaching United Nations Special Session on Disarmament. Her concern was brought to Monthly Meeting and endorsed by Meeting for Sufferings, and it is recorded that the volume of Mrs Thatcher's correspondence was so great at that time that additional civil servants had to be recruited to deal with it.

Fred and Martha Matthews - one always thought of them together - Betsy and I met only when they retired to Ayr. Fred was, I think, the first birthright Quaker I came to know well. His family connections with the Society of Friends were recorded for more than 200 years in the Family Bible in which he took a very natural pride. Despite his early involvement with Friends in the old Kilmarnock Meeting he had felt he should enlist in the 1914-18 war. He was an upright man of character who followed a disciplined way of living, dependably regular in his attendance at the Meeting that had just been started in Ayr, eloquent in his ministry, and always concerned and helpful in his service.

Another Friend I came to respect and admire I never met, but when Betsy and I moved to the west of Scotland in 1958 some five years after Lewis Fry Richardson had died, our first home there was in a house that belonged to his son Olaf, named after the author Olaf Stapledon, whom Richardson had met while serving with the Friends Ambulance Unit in France, and from him we learned something of his father.

Lewis Richardson, a birthright Quaker, was principal of Paisley Technical College from 1929 to 1940, and during that period and after, he and his wife played an active role in Glasgow Meeting. His distinction as a meteorologist was recognized after his death when in 1972 an extension to the Met. Office HQ was named the Richardson Wing. His keen mind, which owed much, he thought, to his boundless and insatiable curiosity, combined with a healthy scepticism and habit of

doubt, found many interests beyond meteorology. He had been a conscientious objector in the First World War, and he later applied what has been described as his 'rare mathematical talent' to a consideration of the causes of war and how to maintain peace. His 'daring attempt to deal mathematically with foreign politics' and his statistical analysis of the arms race make him a pioneer in peace studies, and it is entirely appropriate that his name is perpetuated in the Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research at the University of Lancaster.

So far this very personal view of Quakers in Scotland in the last 50 years or so has mapped my own pilgrimage towards and among them. A more objective survey can be found in the pages of the *Scottish Friends Newsletter* to which I have referred more than once. It is an indispensable source for any study of Quaker life in Scotland in the last half century.

In his Epilogue to Dr Burnet's history William Marwick had written that 'a problem that exists for Friends everywhere is particularly acute in Scotland, that of the isolated member, for geographical reasons normally severed from his fellow members and from Meetings for Worship and other activities of the Society', and he noted that the issue of a periodical newsletter had recently facilitated a measure of contact.

This newsletter had been launched as a four-page broadsheet in autumn 1944, while William Marwick was clerk of General Meeting. The first editor was Katie Ratcliffe, wife of the Fabian journalist S. K. Ratcliffe, but before the third issue was published in summer 1945 the Ratcliffes had returned to England and with the fourth issue she laid down the editorship.

I wish I might have met her successor, but I never did. The second editor was an Edinburgh Friend, Mary Baird Aitken, no relation of mine though we share the same surname, and curiously my mother was a Mary Baird, and so after her marriage to my father another Mary Baird Aitken. I knew Mary Baird Aitken first as the writer of a novel, *Soon Bright Day*, a story of Edinburgh at the time of the French Revolution, and I learned that she was a Quaker from a note appended to a perceptive article on the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid she contributed to a Scottish literary periodical in 1949. Sadly the note announced her recent death. It was only when I was myself appointed editor of the *Scottish Friends Newsletter* and began to take an interest in its history that I found that Mary Baird Aitken had been one of my predecessors and had been responsible for five issues before retiring through ill-health in 1947.



There was a succession of editors, various changes of style and format, and a number of broken sequences of irregular issues until William Marwick assumed the editorship in 1954. Since 1969 its format has been broadly consistent and it has appeared at regular quarterly intervals. Stanley Johnson followed William Marwick as editor in 1975, and I served six years, from 1982 to 1987, before handing over to the present editor, Sheila Miller. You will find that the pages of the *Scottish Friends Newsletter* have provided a number of items for the anthology, *Quakers in Scotland*, published for the holding in Aberdeen of this year's London Yearly Meeting.

From time to time a supplement is issued with the *Newsletter*, most recently the reports and minutes to General Meeting in September 1986, which were published under the title, *The State of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Scotland Today*.

At the General Meeting in Edinburgh when the reports were received there was a large map of Scotland on the wall behind the clerks' table and the reports from the different Meetings were taken in an order determined by their geographical location in a roughly clockwise circuit from Dumfries and Galloway in the south-west to the Borders in south-east Scotland. Passages from some of these minutes and reports are included in the anthology, *Quakers in Scotland*, I have just mentioned, but I may make two points now: first, as the clerk pointed out in introducing the reports, one of Scotland's four Monthly Meetings, that for the North of Scotland, covers about one-fifth of the area of Great Britain, which dramatically emphasizes the geographical problems northern Friends have to surmount; and, second, that the supplement included reports and minutes from some 27 Meetings - or groups of families of Friends - throughout the country.

This is perhaps the most significant fact to emerge from the whole exercise. When London Yearly Meeting first came to Scotland in 1948 the number of Friends' Meetings in Scotland was eight; by 1950 there were seven; in 1960 there were only six... These were grouped into Edinburgh Monthly Meeting and Aberdeen Two-Months Meeting. The number of Friends in Scotland in 1948 was given as 316.

In contrast, the latest Summary Tabular Statement in *Quaker Work in 1988* records for Scotland four Monthly Meetings, 24 Recognised Meetings and a membership of 600, with some 500 attenders and 279 children not in membership. One statistic that is over the years consistently high among Friends in Scotland is the ratio of attenders to members, currently 500 attenders to 600 members, and as we all know some of our attenders are our most loyal and committed supporters.

Even more remarkable than the figure of 24 Recognised Meetings recorded in the 1988 Tabular Statement is the fact that the Arrangements Card for 1989, published by General Meeting, lists no fewer than 34 Meetings for Worship currently held in Scotland. Granted, a number of these meet only once a month, but there are 12 that meet every week. Further, some are inevitably very small - but size is not everything, and the smallness of Friends Meetings is nothing new: in 1947 Alec Hay was reporting from the Dunfermline Meeting.

at which, week after week, the same little group of five or six attend. But all feel it to be very well worth while, and believe it not only a duty, but truly a privilege to worship together.

There are indeed unique strengths and values in small Meetings. For one thing, everyone knows everyone else in the Meeting, so any absences are immediately noticed and the reasons can be investigated, problems can be shared and support given. In a small Meeting there is a greater sense of community, as of an extended family, and as Bob Hay puts it, 'There are few inactive Friends in Scotland because it is hard to hide in a group of ten.'

Certainly, there are many activities that the members of a small Meeting cannot tackle on their own, but then Friends are so scattered and so few in numbers even in the whole of Scotland - our total membership is scarcely more than half the membership of one of the larger congregations of the Church of Scotland: Dunblane Cathedral, for example, has well over 1000 members - that we are all of necessity used to working with others in our religious and communal concerns: peace activities, bread and cheese lunches for Christian Aid, the World Day of Prayer, local committees for race relations, housing conditions, unemployment, and so on.

We can rejoice that the number of Friends in Scotland and the number of Meetings for Worship has so increased that there are now these groups of Friends, however small, in different parts of the country to provide a Quaker witness, and (who knows?) some influence.

So I come finally to ask the question with which the exiled Macduff greeted his 'ever gentle cousin', Ross: 'Stands Scotland where it did?'

Ross, you may remember, had no good news for Macduff:

Alas, poor country,  
Almost afraid to know itself! ... where nothing  
But who knows nothing is once seen to smile.

For Friends today, however, the answer would seem to be: 'Scotland is in good heart and advances steadily.' In Scotland Friends are indeed a very small and rather obscure community, but when in 1986 we considered the state of the Religious Society of Friends in our country and reviewed the strengths and diversity of our Meetings, we were reminded not only of our weaknesses, but of the common strands that bind us together. The minute which concluded that meeting continued:

The exercise of examining ourselves has opened up questions which we must continue to address. Some of us have been prompted to explore more fully the meaning of 'unity'; others to consider our commitment to shared concern.

Fortunately in Scotland we are recognized and accepted by the other churches in the community and can co-operate with them happily; we join fully with them in the Scottish Churches Council and in their ecumenical committees, projects and activities, both locally and nationally, and our fellowship with these other churches is both sought and welcomed.

In 1948 William Marwick concluded his *Short History* thus:

Scottish Friends ... are glad to feel that they are now as active and united a body as at any date in their history:

and in his Epilogue to Dr Burnet's book he reaffirmed his conviction:

Scottish Friends are as alive and active a group as ever they have been, enjoying a genuine community life, 'knowing one another in things temporal and things spiritual'.

Forty years later we can with equal confidence say that Scotland, in this respect, stands where it did.

*William R Aitken*

The above is a shortened text of the Presidential lecture given to the Friends Historical Society during London Yearly Meeting at Aberdeen on 2 August 1989 (Ed.).

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>See his note to the Prolegomenon the *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*: 'Author's connection

with Quakerism'. I have used Andrew Lang's Border Edition (London: Nimmo, 1893), vol. I, p.1 p.365-9. The last sentence is quoted from a memorandum Scott enclosed with a letter to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (*The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson and others, vol.IV, London: Constable, 1933, 153).

<sup>2</sup>Ed. James Kinsley (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 151-2.

<sup>3</sup>Ed. P. C. Parr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 150-2.