

# Durham County Friends' School

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By the kindness of Sir Alfred E. Pease, Bart., Pinchinthorpe, Guisbrough, Yorkshire, we have had in examination the "Minutes of the Meetings held on the Subject of the School for the Education of Friends' Children, 1809," a book of 140 pages dealing with the schools in charge of Joseph Sams and Henry Frederick and Selfe Smith.<sup>1</sup> The names of numerous Peases and Backhouses, of Darlington, appear and also those of Friends from other parts of Durham Quarterly Meeting.

The first meeting decided that "such an establishment properly conducted would be found extensively beneficial to this County," and it was also decided to inform Joseph Sams, who was then a teacher at Ackworth, of this opening. He readily agreed to take charge of such a school at Darlington. A house was offered for £1,450, the sum to be raised by forty proprietors taking shares of fifty pounds each.

The first General Meeting was held 2 i. 1810—proprietors were present from Darlington, Newcastle, Sunderland, Stockton, Staindrop and Yarm. There was much trouble regarding a house—one on the High Row did not suit and one in Feethams was not quite satisfactory. Hence it was decided to build, and a plot of land was purchased in Coniscliffe Road from the Earl of Darlington and building begun, the first stone being laid 6 vi. 1811 and the building to cost £1,750.

There is a copy of Joseph Sams school prospectus attached to the Minute Book, a two-page quarto in small type announcing the opening of the school "the 27th of the 8th month, 1810." Copies were to be sent to Friends according to a long list, including many well-known names.

At the opening of the year 1812 the proprietors expressed entire satisfaction with Joseph and Mary Sams despite some "detractive reports" which had been circulated, but as time went on things proved less satisfactory—J. Sams did things on his own responsibility, removed trees from Feethams, and gradually gave less attention to the School, occupying his

<sup>1</sup> This record must be read in conjunction with and as supplementary to the articles on Sams and Smith to be found in vols. xix. xx. xxii-xxiv.

time more than good for the School in bookbinding and selling. and "in keeping cows."

In January, 1816, numbers declined and Sams could not afford to pay the rent, the subscribers observing

with regret that their views in forming this establishment have not satisfactorily succeeded, they unanimously conclude to leave Joseph Sams at liberty to quit the premises.

Much correspondence ensued, and finally, 15 vii. 1816, Sams had notice to quit, "the first day of the fifth month next."

A suitable tenant was advertised for and, 13 v. 1817,

John Backhouse informs this Meeting that Henry Frederick Smith, of Croydon—(a Member of our Society) has applied to take the Premises for a Boy's Boarding School, & he being a Person considered by the Committee as eligible for the situation, it is agreed to let him have the same for the first year at Forty Pounds, the rent to commence the 7 mo. next & for the second year at Fifty Pounds he keeping the Premises in proper repair & paying all Taxes and other outgoings.

Repair was needed to be done at the house, amounting to £7 4s., which was justly due from Joseph Sams, but he was excused "from a wish to remove any possible ground of uneasiness from his mind." Various agreements were entered into with H. F. Smith, and the premises were offered to him for £1,317, but apparently he continued to rent them.

The minutes of 19 vi. 1827 contain the following: "H. F. Smith being about to leave the Premises belonging to us, and wishing the proprietors to take some fixtures we have agreed to take . . . for the sum of £100."

But, apparently the wife of H. F. Smith continued the School (H. F. Smith is said to have gone to America), as there is a minute (the last in the book) that there is "no objection to her continuing in the house at the rate of 30/ p wk to quit at 7 days notice."

Lastly, in a paper enclosed in the book, we read:

Darlington, 6 mo. 24. 1831. We apprehend that thou, with the proprietors generally, art aware that the school Premises here are likely to be very shortly vacated

owing to the discontinuance of the School on the part of our Friend Selfe Smith. The contiguity of the boys and girls schools recently established at York . . . induce us greatly to doubt whether any occupant will be found for the premises in union with the original design in their erection [so it was decided to dispose of them] [signed] Joseph Pease, William Backhouse, James Backhouse, John Ianson, John Backhouse, John Pease, Joseph Pease, Jr.

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### Persecutors as "Friends"

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The following anecdote of Miles Halhead is culled from Sewel's *History of Quakers* :

" Being brought before the magistrates it was asked him what business he (who dwelt in Westmoreland) had in Devonshire ? to which he answered that he came there to see his old friends whom, formerly, about ten years ago [*circa* 1658] he had acquaintance with. One of the magistrates asked him what were the names of those friends he meant. To which he returned : ' One sir John Coplestone, who was then high-sheriff of Devonshire ; John Page, who was Mayor of Plymouth ; one Justice Howel, who was then the judge of the sessions of Exeter ; and one colonel Buffet, who was also a justice at that time.' One of the magistrates then said to the others : ' Truly, gentlemen, though this man calls these men his friends, yet they have been his persecutors.' Another of the magistrates then gave him an account into what pitiful condition those men were fallen, and how they lost their estates ; nay, Buffet had been committed to prison for high treason, and was escaped out of gaol and not to be seen in his own country. He further said to Halhead : ' Thus I have given you a true account of your old friends ; if these men were your persecutors, you may be sure they will trouble you no more : for if they that trouble you and persecute you have no better fortune than these men, I wish that neither I, nor any of my friends, may have any hand in persecuting of you.' Thus these discreet magistrates suffered him to go his ways without meddling with him."

For these men see Besse, *Sufferings*, under Devonshire.

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A Quaker who married out of the Society asked the officiating clergyman why his fee was five shillings. " Prove it to be Scripture and I'll pay." " Very well," said the minister, " What of this verse in Proverbs ' A good wife is a *crown* to her husband.' " " Excellent, friend, here's ten shillings for your fee."