



From Bugg's *Pilgrim's Progress from Quakerism to Christianity*, 1698

Our Recording Clerks

Continued from Vol. I, p. 68

No. 3. BENJAMIN BEALING, 1689-1737

TOWARDS the close of the clerkship of Richard Richardson, there were two assistants, Mark Swanner and Benjamin Bealing. The latter has been traced back to the early part of 1685 by his writing in minute books. He was paid fifty shillings in 2 mo. 1687 by the Meeting of Twelve.

In the Fourth Month of 1687 the Six Weeks Meeting (the London finance committee) appointed several Friends "to consider and conclude with the Meeting for Sufferings whether 3 Clerks shall be continued, or whether of y^e two Mark Swanner or Benjamin Bealing should go off."

Swanner's services were dispensed with and Bealing continued as Assistant; and on the death of Richard Richardson, 13 iv. 1689, Bealing was appointed to the post of clerk to Friends, and commenced a service which lasted forty-eight years, fifteen years longer than any of his race.

Settled in his office as "scrivenor," at Three Kings Court in Lombard Street, the premises rented from Richard Davies for £30 a year, Bealing turned to matrimony and on the last day of Sixth Month, 1693, he married (son of Edward and Alice, of Penryn, Cornwall), at Devonshire House, Elizabeth Laterup or Latherup, of Spitalfields, spinster. Children arrived in course but to find early deaths—between 1694 and 1703 five children came and went. One son, Samuel, lived to be thirty-two, the second, Benjamin, appears to have survived. Elizabeth Bealing died in 1703, aged thirty-seven, and B. B. took to himself another wife at the close of 1706—Cordelia Cowdry, of Southampton, a widow. Similar infant mortality attended the second

marriage. The survivors of B. B.'s marriages have not been traced. Cordelia Bealing died in 1729, aged fifty-two. It was probably from his second wife that he became possessed of a small estate at Millbrook, near Southampton, respecting which there are letters in **D**, with a reference to Cordelia Cowdry, daughter of Cordelia Bealing, she and her step-father being both deceased.

The long years of B. Bealing's secretaryship, from the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689, and consequent slackening of persecution, to the establishment of birthright membership in 1737, saw many changes in the Society and much drawing apart from external interests.

"It showed little of that daring spirit of adventure and missionary zeal which had given Quakerism its immense initial energy" (*250 Years of London Y.M.*, 1919).

Year by year appeared the Epistle, through all, signed thirty-three times by Bealing, 1689 to 1721, by appointment; after the latter date it was signed by the clerk of the Yearly Meeting.

John Kelsall wrote in his Diary of the Yearly Meeting of 1704:

"D. Quare first proposed whether John Field or B. Bealing was properly Clerk of the meeting. After some debate it was concluded to the former, yet not so but that the next Yearly Meeting might appoint whom they thought fit."

But the epistle of this year was signed by B. Bealing as before and after.

Francis Bugg, apostate Quaker, in his *Pilgrim's Progress from Quakerism to Christianity*, 1698, chapter xiii, "The Quakers' Convocation," describes a sitting of the Yearly Meeting in which, after recording sermons by George Whitehead and William Bingley, he states (page 121):

"Benjamin Bealing, Clerk. Let us sing an Hymn of Praise, and Self-Exaltation, and to the Confusion of our Adversaries as you will find written in the Epistle-General of the Son of Thunder, Edw. Burrough, prefixed to our Apostle, George Fox's Great Mystery. Printed 1658:

‘ The Waters have I seen dry’d up, the Seal of the great
 Whore,
 Who hath made all Nations drunk with her inticing Power ;
 And caused the whole Earth, She hath, Her Fornication
 Cup to take,
 Whereby Nations have long time err’d, on whom She long
 hath sate ’ ”

and sixteen more lines.

To this statement, B. Bealing replied :

“ These are to Certifie all sober Readers. That Francis Bugg’s Representing me, as calling to the Yearly Meeting, ‘ to sing an Hymn of Praise and Self-Exaltation ’ &c and making some verses (out of Edward Burrough’s Preface to G. F.’s Great Mystery) to be that Hymn: Tis all an idle false Invention and Forgery of his own; for I never was concerned in any such thing in my life-time; and I am heartily sorry that this poor Man should be so given up in his old Age to serve the Father of Lyes, with whom, in the Lake, he may expect to have his Portion, without he unfeignedly Repents

“ Witness my Hand

“ BENJAMIN BEALING.

“ London, *the 4th of the 5th Month, called July, 1699.*”

(Whitehead’s *Rambling Pilgrim*, p. II.)

In a later work of Francis Bugg, *A Finishing Stroke*, 1712, p. 554, there is another version of Bealing’s part in the Meeting :

“ Now comes Benjamin Bealing, with a Psalm, or Hymn of Thanksgiving. Friends, let us sing a Psalm of Praise to our Light within, as you find it in p. 45, 46, of our Prophet Josiah Coale. The Whore Unveil’d ”

followed by twenty-two lines, and this after B. Bealing’s disclaimer.

As the years went by, the ability of the Clerk to conduct the duties of his office lessened and it became a question of help to be rendered him. In the minutes of Yearly Meeting, 1729, when he would probably be between sixty and seventy, we read :

“ A motion being made to this Meeting in favour of Benjamin Bealing y^e care over him, and allowing him such

further assistance as may be Judged Reasonable, is referred to y^e Meeting for Sufferings.”

The Meeting for Sufferings agreed to allow him £28 13 3 “to help in his low circumstances and for extraordinary charges he has been at.”

His usual salary was about £40 per annum.

In the minutes of the Meeting for Sufferings, 27 i. 1733 we read :

“ This Meeting having maturely considered y^e affaire of choosing an Assistant to Benj. Bealing, do agree y^t Benjamin Bourne be accepted for y^e service.”

Four years more, and the end of the service of nearly half a century arrived. Bealing would appear to be a lonely survival, widower, and perhaps without a descendant near. Friends desiring a quiet remainder for the life of their servant recommended his removal into the country. Joseph Smith surmises that his retirement was spent either in Cornwall or Hampshire but now we know that it was Northamptonshire! If born about 1663, his age at death would approximate seventy-six years.

“ Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, the 21st day of Novemb^r 1739 :

“ We whose Names are hereunto Subscribed do hereby Certifie all whom it may concern, that Benjamin Bealing, One of the People call'd Quakers, died at the house of Lawrence Cowper in this Town on the 26th Day of the Month calld May, 1739, and was Buried in the Burial Ground belonging to the People call'd Quakers on the 29th day of the Month aforesaid.

“ Witness our hands the Day and Year first above written

“ LAWRENCE COWPER.
BENJ^A. MIDDLETON.
THOMAS THURGOOD.
JOHN HOUGHTON.
WILLIAM BROWN.”

“ Nov. 22^d 1739.

“ I do hereby Certifie that a Copy of an Affidavit was brought to me properly attested and bearing Date May y^e

31st, 1739, Setting forth that the Body of Benj^a Bealing Late of Wellinborough Deceased was Wrapped for Burial in Nothing but what was made of Sheep's Wool only. So Testifyeth

“ THO : HOLME, Curate of
Wellingborough.”

No. 4. BENJAMIN BOURNE, 1737-1746, 1748-1757

The fourth in succession of the Society's principal officers was Benjamin Bourne. What little we know of him presents a picture of trouble of both a family and official character.

Born about 1684, son of Thomas Bourne, of London, gloveseller, he appears to have followed his parental occupation, for at his marriage with Hannah Parker, at the Bull and Mouth in 1710, he is described as of Cheapside, Citizen and Glover.

The fatality which accompanied the family of the previous holder of the clerkship was increased in that of his successor—according to the Registers of London, B. and H. Bourne had sixteen children between 1713 and 1730; and eleven of them died in infancy. There were two Josephs, two Marys, three Hannahs, two Benjamins and two Thomas. On the first of Fourth Month, 1716, daughter Hannah died, aged nine months, and on the 26th of the next month another Hannah died, aged eleven days.

In 1733, when approaching fifty years of age, Bourne relinquished his business life and entered the service of the Society as assistant to Benjamin Bealing and on the retirement of the latter, four years later, he became Clerk.

After nine years of service, and for some reason not at present evident, B. Bourne was superseded in the clerkship of the Yearly Meeting, the Meeting for Sufferings, and other bodies; and by minute of Third Month, 1746, Joseph Besse was appointed to his position and at this date Besse's writing begins. B. Bourne was appointed to the subsidiary post of “recording the sufferings,” with a reduction of his previous salary of fifty pounds a year.

Presumably financial difficulties sent him to the Fleet Prison from which he wrote the following letter :

“ To Friends of the Meeting of Twelve To be held the 27th of 8th month 1746.

“ Esteemed Friends

“ Necessity obliges me thus to Address you

“ Requesting that you would be pleased so to Consider of it, as to find out some Way to order the payment of my Quarterly Bill Exhibited to the Meeting on the 29th of 7th month Last.

“ The Various & grievous Oppressions & sore Afflictions, I have for some time Labourd under, together with the Extream Illness, Weakness and Languishing Condition in which my Poor Afflicted Wife has Layn for five Weeks, have brought me under great Straits.

“ And altho' this delay of Payment may in it self be but a Small Matter, Yet to me at this Juncture, it proves an insupportable hardship—and had it not been for the Singular & unexpected kindness of Two or three particular friends only, We might, in this months time, have been in want of common Sustenance.

“ Wherefore I do Earnestly intreat that you would Consider of it (pray Excuse my Tautology) & forthwith order my said Bill amounting to £7 : 16 : 4 to be paid me.

“ Your poor friend
very greatly afflicted
and Distressed,

“ BENJA. BOURNE.

“ Fleet Prison

the 27th 8th mo. 1746.”

The bill was passed for payment at the meeting held on the date above mentioned.

A letter from B. Bourne to the Meeting for Sufferings early the next year resulted in the decision that a quarter of a year's notice was to “ be given on either side before the current year expires in case of parting,” which perhaps was preparing the way for the re-instatement of the writer.

B. Bourne again addressed the Meeting, in Eleventh Month, 1747, with the result that the Meeting approved the decision of a committee that “ Joseph Besse should be continued in his present post till the 24th of Fourth Month, and that then Benjamin Bourne be restored to the place of clerk to the Meeting for Sufferings as formerly.”

The handwriting of B. Bourne recommences 3 iv. 1748 ; he is careful to insert the decision of the Meeting in the index to the volume of minutes.

After a further service of nine years, during which time his successor, Jacob Post, was appointed to assist, B. Bourne, weakened by attacks of an asthmatic affection, departed this life 20 i. 1757 at the age of seventy-three, at Camberwell, and his remains were buried at Bunhill Fields.

No. 5. JOSEPH BESSE, 1746-1748

The brief interval in the clerkship of Benjamin Bourne was filled by Joseph Besse, who was at this time occupied with work for the Society of a secretarial and editorial nature. The minute which installed him, Meeting for Sufferings, 2nd of Third Month, 1746, runs thus :

“ This Meeting desires Joseph Besse to write the business of this Meeting, usually done by the clerk of the same, from this time and during the ensuing Yearly Meeting, and untill such time as the Meeting shall otherwise direct, and this Meeting will satisfy him for his trouble and Labour therein.”

Besse was born in 1683, so would be about sixty-four at this time. He died in 1757.

To be Continued

Nephew of Peter Collinson

“ At Bath, of a paralytic stroke, under which he had lingered ever since Oct. 26, 1802, Thomas Collinson, esq. nephew of the late eminent Naturalist Peter C. and formerly partner with Hinton Brown, esq. banker, whose daughter he married. He was distinguished by his progress in the various branches of science, and his readiness to communicate his knowledge. About ten years ago he made the tour of Europe, with his friend John Walker, esq., only son of his friend and patron Isaac W. esq. of Arnold's Grove, Southgate, whereby his curiosity was gratified to his utmost wish, and his observations on this excursion, which his modesty concealed from all but his intimate friends, would, if permitted to see the light, be a greater gratification to the learned than half the tours which are obtruded on them. Though bred in the principles of Quakerism, Candour taught Mr. C. to be the friend of mankind and even the misfortunes he had experienced in a profession to which he was ill-adapted did not oppress or debase his philosophic spirit.” He died in August, 1803.

Gentleman's Magazine, 1803, II. 795 ; Brett-James, *Peter Collinson*, 1925 ; letters in D.