

The Quarterly Meeting of Norfolk

By ARTHUR J. EDDINGTON

THERE is, in the Meeting House at Norwich, a series of volumes containing the minutes of Norfolk Quarterly Meeting, and continuing as Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Quarterly Meeting after its junction with those two counties about the middle of the nineteenth century. It is evident that there was at least one minute book, possibly more, before 1708, the date at which the series now commences, but this is early enough to emphasize many interesting differences between the Quarterly Meetings of that time and the present.

The Quarterly Meeting now contains three Monthly Meetings; the west of Norfolk, including Lynn and Wells, is joined with the whole of the counties of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire in one Monthly Meeting area of very wide extent, whilst Norwich Monthly Meeting comprises the north, and Tivetshall Monthly Meeting the south of the eastern part of the county. In 1708 we find six Monthly Meetings in Norfolk alone, viz. Norwich, Lynn, Lammas, Hingham, Tivetshall and Wells.

The position of Norwich Monthly Meeting was peculiar. It was in direct communication with the Yearly Meeting, a privilege also held by Bristol, London and Colchester meetings. It appointed four representatives to that body, additional to a similar number appointed by Norfolk Quarterly Meeting. It forwarded separate answers to the queries on the state of the Society and had its own correspondents in London. These privileges were not relinquished until the year 1794, when the name of the united Meeting was changed to Norfolk and Norwich Quarterly Meeting. But the Monthly Meeting was also an integral part of the Quarterly Meeting, which was usually held in Norwich, and Friends of that city were frequently chosen to serve as clerk. This anomalous position gave rise to special problems, and led to the adoption of the following minute in 1724 :

Whereas upon divers Occasions heretofore discourses hath been raised how far Norwich Monthly Meeting

have been taken & deemed Members of this Quarterly Meeting; This Meeting to put an End to all such debates doe declare Norwich monthly Meeting to be equall Members with all the other Monthly Meetings in this County that make & constitute this Quarterly Meeting.

Representatives to the Quarterly Meeting were appointed by the Particular Meetings in the area, of which there were eighteen, and this practice was continued until 1719, when the constitution was altered, and the following letter was transmitted to the Monthly Meetings.

The State and Constitution of our Quarterly Meeting having been under the weightly Consideration of Friends at this Meeting, and upon mature deliberation it doth appear that there are divers Inconveniencies which doth attend this Meeting corresponding directly with the several Particular Meetings in this County, Particularly the Representatives of the Meetings not being Rightly deputed to attend the service of the Quarterly Meetings, as also the protracting of the time, whereby the Necessary Business of the Meeting is frequently left undone, time not allowing to go thro the same, the neglect whereof we are sensible tends to the Hurt of the Church's of Christ in this County: in order therefore that the same for the future may be amended, it is agreed and concluded at this Meeting as follows—viz. That Each Particular Meeting do carry into the Mo. Meeting they Belong unto, an Account of their Collections made for the Relief of the Poor, and if any Particular Meeting stands in need of Relief for their Poor, to apply to their Mo. Meetings who are to administer towards their Wants, and Each Monthly Meeting at the Meeting preceeding every Qly. Meeting, to make up their Accounts in general, of the Quarters Collection and Disburstments for the Poor, and to depute two friends at least for every Particular Meeting, to attend the service of the Quarterly Meeting in Representing the Monthly Meetings they come from, who are there to give Account of the Monthly Meetings Collections and Disburstments for the Poor the preceeding Quarter, and if more have been collected in any

Monthly Meeting then have been Disburst, the Remainder to be brought into the Quarterly Meeting, that thereby the Quarterly Meeting may be enabled to supply the Necessities of Such Monthly Meetings, whose Collections are not sufficient to answer the Necessities of the Poor belonging thereto.

It will be apparent from the above letter that the necessity of poor Friends was considered a matter of paramount importance at that time, and an interesting minute under this head appears in 1713.

A complaint being made to this Meeting, That a poor Widdow friend of Lynn, liveing in their meeting-house, receive some Collection of ye town, and thereupon wear ye Towns-poor-badge therefore this Meeting adviseth ye sd. Meeting of Lynn by their representatives here present, and acknowledging ye truth of ye sd. complaint, to take care to maintain ye sd. Widdow for ye future, according to our Christian principle, and Antient practice ever since we were a people.

Report was made at the next Meeting that Lynn had answered the request of the Quarterly Meeting by maintaining the widow at their own charge, but the incident evidently gave rise to the following advice.

There being an occasional debate in this Meeting relateing Mantaining of ye poor amongst us. This Meeting thereupon Conclude and agree, That all such as are Members of us and in Unity and fellowship wth. us ought to be releived by us ; whenever they shall or may be exercised wth. the tryall of poverty, and not by the parrish to wch. they belong : according to our Christian principle, seeing to doe good and Communicate is our Reasonable duty, especially to the worthy (though poor) of the houshold of faith. And that such poor as may att times come to our Meeting, on whome we never lay hands, nor Recd. nor ownd as Members, as well as those who have walked so disorderly as to have Church Censure upon them not reversed, be wholly comitted to ye parrish to be relieved : unto whom they belong ; Not hereby excluding any particular Meeting or persons Charity nor yet bowells of

Compassion to receive any such, whenever they shall return by unfeigned repentance, And friends are advised that a diligent and Watchfull Eye, be had in every particular Meeting to deal with all such person or persons, professing truth wth. us, in a Christian and reasonable Manner.

Many requests were made by the Monthly Meetings to the Quarterly Meeting for assistance in meeting the financial demands laid upon them, and some difficulty was experienced in the supply of their wants ; a typical minute occurs in 1736.

A Letter from the Mo. Meeting of Lynn directed to this meeting was read by which itt appears that the P. meeting is att present in debt on acct. of the Poor & the Charges of repairing Downing (Downham) meeting house & that they request the assistance of this meeting towards paying the same.

Ordered that the Clerk do write to the sd. Mo. Meeting & acquaint them that wee have only 2/ of the poor Stock now in hand notwithstanding an Additional Collection for that purpose was Lately ordered & only finished att this meeting & that the Charges of the Poor are of Late grown very heavy in severall of the Monthly Meetings in this County & that one Monthly meeting is now out of near Four pounds on that account which they Requested of this meeting but could not for the reasons before given have their request complied with.

In spite of these heavy financial burdens we read of generous collections for various other purposes, including one for the Friends in Scotland who suffered from the Rebellion of 1745, and another for the loss some Friends sustained in a fire at Wellingborough in 1742. There is a minute of 1731 directing a collection to be made for the relief of a Friend at Cottenham in Cambridgeshire, who had "lost all his substance by fire". This appeal was supported by the Monthly Meeting of Swavesey, to which he belonged, and it is interesting to contrast its reception with that accorded to an appeal for the rebuilding of Swavesey Meeting House twelve years previous to that date.

Read an Epistle from the Quarterly Meeting of Friends in the County of Cambridge, requesting the assistance of this Meeting towards rebuilding their Meeting-house at Swasey, which is burned down. Richard Ashby is requested to write to the friends of the said Meeting, & acquaint them that we judge it not proper for one Quarterly Meeting to apply to another in Cases of this Nature, but to apply for assistance to the Yearly Meeting at London.

Questions regarding the settlement of Friends almost invariably arose from an uncertainty as to which Meeting should be responsible for their relief. Where the dispute arose between Meetings within the area of the Quarterly Meeting, these were usually settled without much difficulty, but in one instance, in 1712, the problem seems to have been somewhat perplexing, and the following solution was therefore arrived at.

Whereas there hath been for some time past divers Controversies about the settlement of John Sharpin and there not appearing any clear Settlement on any Monthly Meeting, this Meeting Conclude and Agree (for preventing future Controversies) that the County be att two thirds of the Charge and Norwich Monthly Meeting att one third part of the Charge of his Maintainance.

Norwich Meeting, whilst it contained some Friends of substance, included amongst their membership a large proportion of Friends in necessitous circumstances, and in 1714 they made application to the Quarterly Meeting for help, with special reference to one particular case.

The Friends & Brethren of ye City of Norwich laying before this Meeting, the great & growing Charge of their Poor, whom they have been liberal in providing for, but now they are necessitated to Desire this meeting's Assistance the more Especially because our Antient Frd. Jno. Cady, who has been Supported by ye particular Charity of some Frds. but is now become ye Care of ye mo: meeting: who cannot be suitably provided for, without great Charge, & the Charge of

their other Poor being so great, that they are already much in debt, by doing for them what is necessary in a Common way, therefore this meeting tenderly recommends a Collection to be made to help our sd. Brethren, who have not been backwards in such good works upon every Occasion, that our Liberality may Encourage them to doe ye like for us when Occasion offers.

A collection amounting to £5 2s. 8d. was made for the use of Norwich Friends, but the next year the Monthly Meeting made a further request for some assistance towards the burden of relieving their poor, " which they cannot reasonably support without the Quarterly assistance of this Meeting, to the value of five pounds per Quarter". A further collection was therefore ordered, and to relieve the minds of divers County Friends the following minute was passed at the next Meeting.

This Meeting taking into Consideration the minute made the last Quarterly meeting Relateing ye quarterly assistance of Norwich frds. give an uneasiness to divers Meetings for want of explaining ye particular intent viz. for ye subsistance of John Cady wch. this meeting declares to be ye true meaning thereof & no other.

Before turning from matters of finance mention may be made of the National Stock, now known as the Yearly Meeting Fund, and it is interesting to find that even in those days, considerable difficulty was experienced in collecting a satisfactory amount on this account, as the following minutes illustrate.

29.10.1731. Edmund Gurney brought to this Meeting a Letter from Lascelles Metcalf by order of the Meeting for Sufferings respecting the Collections of Friends towards the Nationall Stock by which it appears that our last Collection was only £14. 13s. 6d and that the former was £32. 17s. 0d and Earnestly recommending Friends to make an Additionall Collection In order to make up the last mentioned Sume: It is therefore ordered that a Copy of this Minute be sent to every Mo. Meeting and What they collect for that end is desired to be brought to the next Quarterly Meeting.

It is also ordered that in the said Minute the Clerk do Send an Account of what Each Monthly Meeting brought in towards the last Collection.

28.4.1736. Ordered that a Collection be made throughout this County towards Increase of the National Stock the whole being Expended & the Yearly Meeting in debt & as In the Last Collection our County was very diminutive in proportion to other Countys, itt is Earnestly recommended that Friends may appear more generous than heretofore in this respect.

26.1.1746. This Meetg. observing with Concern that the Mo. Meetg. of Lynn have sent in only Two Pounds Collection towards the National Stock, It is ordered that the Clerk send a Copy of this Minute to them wch. it is hoped may incite them to a more liberal One suitable to the Occasion.

A further sum for three pounds was received at the next Quarterly Meeting from Lynn.

Friends travelling in the Ministry were expected to carry with them a certificate from their home Meeting, and in cases where this was not done, Friends were warned against giving the travellers any assistance, as a minute dated 1748 will show.

This Meeting, being informed that some Persons going under our Name, are or have been lately travelling in this County out of the Unity of Friends, or not having Certificates from the Monthly Meeting to wch. they belong ; Desires that Friends every where be very careful how they receive any such, & that they do not appoint them any Meetings ; That nothing may be encouraged by any that is contrary to the good Order & wholesome Discipline established amongst us : And the reproach that such bring upon our Society be thereby as far as in us lays prevented.

In 1743, the Meeting was informed that John Rumbelow, who had been disowned by Wells Monthly Meeting for immoral conduct, was travelling " to some remote parts of this Kingdom or Scotland ", accompanied by two women Friends of Wymondham Monthly Meeting, who had not

obtained Certificates for their journey. A warning was therefore sent to Robert Barclay of Ury, Thomas Eniskin of Edinburgh, Charles Ormiston of Kelso, and others, "that Friends may know he is not of our Society". At the close of the following year we find the following minute.

This Meeting being informed that the two Women Friends are returned, that accompanied John Rumbelow, . . . : it is requested that ye Monthly Meeting of Wymondham, to wch. they belong, do acquaint them with ye Discipline of our Society in yt. respect That, thro' Inadvertency they may not do ye same thing again.

A journey to North America was a very great undertaking at that time and when, in 1742, Edmund Peckover (1695-1767) of Fakenham laid his concern for this service before the Quarterly Meeting, supported by a minute from his own Monthly Meeting, he was granted a certificate signed by forty-five Men Friends.

The following Certificate to our Frd. Edmd. Peckover now near embarking for his intended Journey & Visit to Frds. in America was read approved & signed in this Meeting.

Our Frd. Edmd. Peckover having in a solid & weighty manner laid before this Meeting his Concern wch. for some time past had & still doth remain upon him to visit the Churches in America & he also acquainted this Meeting that he had settled his Affairs in such a manner that he expected shortly to embark for that purpose & also that he had acquainted ye Monthly Meeting of Fakenham to which he belongs therewith & had obtained from them a Certificate . . . wch. was read & approved of by this Meeting.

And we think proper further to declare that we have good Unity with our Frd. in this great Undertaking being well satisfied that nothing less than being in ye Way of what he believes to be his duty to GOD & his Church & People could induce him to leave his Family his Relations & his Friends to whom he hath been a great Comfort & with whom he hath lived in good reputation.

We sincerely recommend him as worthy of your christian Fellowship & desire it may please the divine Being to take him into his holy & heavenly Protection, may he prosper his Labours amongst you & may he graciously permit him safely to return back to his native Country with ye reward of Peace & Comfort in his own Breast.

On his return in 1744, the following minute was recorded.

Our dear Frd. Edmund Peckover being thro ye merciful Providence of Almighty God returned from his visiting of Frds. on ye Continent of America and ye Island of Barbadoes, brot. to this Meeting sundry Certificates from Yearly Quarterly & Monthly Meetings yt he visited relating to his Service and Conversation when with ym. wch. were read to ye great Comfort & Satisfaction of this Meeting.

There are, in the minutes, several Testimonies to deceased Friends ; some of these are very brief, but three are selected as containing matters of exceptional interest. The first was actually drawn up in the Quarterly Meeting held 1st month 1719, and records the services of George Gibson of Thetford, who died at the early age of 48 years. A short extract from the Testimony may be cited.

He was born of Believing Parents, who were taken from him when he was but Young, yett he was Educated among Friends; . . . and it pleased God to endue him (in a good Measure) with a Spirit of Wisdom, and of a sound Mind, whereby he was enabled to stop the Mouths of Gainsayers, while he was yett but Young.

And it pleased the Lord who saw the Sincerity & Uprightness of his Heart, to call him to the Work of the Ministry in or about the Twenty fifth Year of his Age, which he entered into with great Fear and Humility. He was slow of Speech, and not hasty to deliver what was upon his Mind, and notwithstanding his Voice was Low, the savour of life attended his Ministry, which he was very careful to wait for, and thereby was made Beautifull, as well as serviceable & Honourable in the

Church, and a Godly care was constantly upon him, to adorn his Doctrine by a Conversation suitable thereto, by which he obtained a good Report in the Parts where he dwelt, among those who made not Profession with us : He travelled pretty much in the Work and Service of the Ministry in this Nation, he was in Ireland and Scotland, and his Service was well accepted among Friends and others where he came.

And we have this further to observe of him that when he was not Employed in the Service of the Ministry he was very diligent and Industrious in his outward Business, thereby endeavouring to maintain his Family, and bring up his Children decently ; and it pleased the Lord so to bless his Labours, that the End thereof was answered.

John Gurney, " the Weavers' Advocate", friend of Sir Robert Walpole, died in 1740, and the Quarterly Meeting appointed six Friends to prepare a Testimony to be forwarded to Yearly Meeting. A second Testimony was subsequently drawn up by Norwich Monthly Meeting, which begins, " As our Friends in the County have given you a large & particular Acct. Concerning our dear decd. Friend John Gurney, we therefore only send you the following short Acct." The Quarterly Meeting document is of great interest, and, with its long and involved periods and curious expressions, is an excellent example of an eighteenth century Testimony.

He was descended of Worthy Parents, who recd. the Truth in the Love of itt, as professed by the despised People called Quakers, Soon after their first Appearance in the City of Norwich, & whose Father had no small Share, In Sufferings, for Bearing Testmony theretoo, in the most Severe Persecutions which Friends underwent in those Early Times, continuing faithfull therein to the End of days. They took particular Care, in the Religious Education of all their Children, And had the Satisfaction to find the blessed Effects thereof answer'd in most of them, Amongst whom (this) our dear Friend did not make the least Proficiency, Who having seen into the Follies & Vanities of Youth, did Set his Heart to Seek the Lord

in his Young and tender Years, and by Submitting to the Guydance of his holy Spirit, He was indued with a Good Understanding in the Misteries of the Gospell, and at about the 22d. Year of his Age, his Mouth was opened to speak in the Assemblies of his Friends, as a Minister thereof, much to their Edification & Comfort, and as he advanced in Years, So was that Excellent Gift more plentifully bestowed upon him, Being an Eloquent Man, and mighty in the Scriptures, His Ministry having the demonstration of the Spirit & Power of Life attending it, being delivered with much Plainness Coherence Copiousness, and so Suitably adapted as Generally reach'd the meanest Capacities, and Answer'd to the Witness of God in the Auditors, which made him very Acceptable to all Persons, who for the Most Part delighted to sitt under the Same, & Sought for Opportunities So to do, In most if not all Places where he was, tho' it may be said, He endeavour'd to hide himself and choose rather to be obscure, than to appear to Gratify the Curious, In the Pursuit of Satisfying their itching Ears, being very Examplary in attending to Immediate Pressure on his Mind, before he Enter'd at any Time thereon, and often gave Way to many Others, far Inferiour to Him in all Respects which still added Lustre and Beauty to Him, and made his Service more available & better Accepted ; His Life & Conversation well Corresponded with his Doctrine, Living in ye Fear of God, a Pattern of Sobriety, Chastity Moderation and Temperance, as well as of most other Christian Virtues thereby adorning the Gospell of Christ, therefore without Flattery we have this Testimony to give of Him—He was a Workman, that needed not to be ashamed rightly dividing the Word of Truth. He often travel'd to visit the Churches in this Nation and was well reced. where he came, and many are the Seals of the Powerfulness of that Living Virtue which attended his Labours of Love for the Good of Souls.

He was a constant Attender of our Religious Assemblies, Scarce ever missing, either On the first Day, or on the Meeting Day in the Week (If his Health permitted) As allso those of Discipline, Highly Esteeming

the Good Order Established In our Society, the Rules whereof he was well acquainted with, and great Regard was paid to his Judgment, not only in Mo. & Quarry. Meetings, But also in the Yearly Meeting at London.

He was a great Lover, & Promoter of Peace & was frequently Instrumentall In healing Many Wounds & Breaches, which have hap'ned in the Churches, He has been often heard to Express himself, that he Believed our Constitution respecting discipline &c. was preferable to any other (now Subsisting) in the whole World.

He was no less remarkable in the Body Politick, His depth of Judgment, Ripeness of Understandg. & Quickness of Apprehension, joined with a Solid & Grave deportmt. Soon made him conspicuous to Persons of the most Exalted Stations, being willing to serve Mankind Therewith when it Lay in his Power, which was very frequent, And not only those of his own Society, but Likewise other Parts of the Commonwealth, reaped no Small Benefit thereby, which rendred him Generally Belov'd & Esteem'd ; Yet was he not puffed up therewith, shunning the Opportunities of Applause, which frequently offer'd where his Lott was cast. . . .

His Removall is an Irreparable Loss to his Family, in which he was a most Loving and Affectionate Husband, an Indulgent & Tender Father and a Kind Master, To his Brothers & other Relations a Faithfull Overseer, a Worthy Counsellour & a Steady Friend, Which was not restricted to them only, for that he was no Less so to all his Friends & Neighbours, under the diversities of Circumstances, which In Course attend the Severall Situations, Mankind is Placed In, Many reaping no small Advantage, from those free & Candid Intelligences, which as Application was made to Him, He Generally & In a Christian Spirit Communicated.

All these Virtues Meeting together in One Person, mixed with a free & affable disposition, cou'd not but draw great Love and Respect from all Sorts of People towards him, and much more so from us Who were joined in the same Communion, Professors of the same Religious Principles, and Partakers in some degree of the Like precious Faith with himself, We Say our Love

and Esteem for Him is such, having had that Particular Right & Intrest in him, That we cou'd not hold our Selves Excusable, had we not said some few Hints, of what might be enlarged upon respecting Him, For it is a Fruitfull, tho' sorrowfull Subject, Who being Well known in the Society; We have this Testimony further to give of him, That He finished his Course In Unfeigned Love & Unity with [his] Brethren therein And also We doubt not but in perfect Charity with all Men.

His Body was attended to the Grave by some Thousands (as was supposed) of his Friends & fellow Citizens, Great many of whom, were in the highest Offices of Magistracy in the City, and of most affluent Fortunes; And a very Solemn Meeting it was, His Death being universally regretted.

We shall conclude with our hearty desires and Prayers, that the Great Lord of the Harvest will be pleased to raise up and send forth More faithfull Labourers Into his Vineyard, to Supply the Places of those Worthy's Who are removed out of Itt, for as our Blessed Saviour most justly remarked, The Harvest is truly Great, but the faithfull Labourers are Few.

Edmd. Peckover

After this date, with few exceptions, the usual practice of accepting the Monthly Meeting Testimony was carried out. Of these, one of the most interesting is that to Catherine Peckover, the daughter of Anne Long of Norwich, for it includes an account of her appearance before Judge Hollaway at the Norwich General Sessions of 1683, after she had been in prison for nearly eight months.

A Testimony from the Monthly Meeting of Wells in ye County of Norfolk, concerning their worthy Frd. Catherine Peckover deceased.

We think it incumbent upon us, to say something in Commemoration of ye Memory of so good and valuable a Woman, counting it no small Blessing to the Churches in these parts, that her Lot was cast in this Corner, wherein she continued from abt. ye 20th Year of her Age to her Departure out of this Life, and was all along

a very serviceable honourable Member amongst us. Her many Excellent Qualifications attended with a meek humble reverential Deportment in all respects rendered her very near & dear to us. It pleased God to bestow upon her a Gift in ye Ministry, which she was faithful to & very exemplary in waiting for, delivering the matter she had to say with much Plainness & Brevity, being always attended with great Power to ye no small Edification & Comfort of ye Churches. Her Life & Conversation well corresponded with her Doctrine & was much respected by People of other Societies. She was very Charitable & full of good works her Delight was to be found in Practices agreeable to & as became ye Gospel, & was an Eminent Pillar amongst us, a worthy Mother in Israel & a great Ornament to ye Society.

She received ye Truth as profess'd by us, whilst she was very young, & with her honourable Mother, was imprison'd for her Testimony thereto before she was Sixteen Years of Age, & undauntedly pleaded for it & confessed the same in her Examination before ye Judge & ye Court, being first called to answer to their Indictment, tho there were upwards of 60 Persons then present on the like good Cause & she ye youngest of them all, where she behaved with such Modesty giving pertinent reasons for her joyning along with her Friends in assembling together to worship God in Spirit &c, and refusing her Liberty on terms inconsistent with her religious Disposition, As drew from ye Court no small Attention & Surprize, yet was it so ordered that she with her fellow Prisoners were then set at Liberty—which she would afterwards often mention with great sweetness of mind, & gratitude of Soul, to that divine hand, By which she was supported to hold out to ye End of her Days in a constant dependance, on that Arm of Power; which gloriously visited & wrought upon her in her young Years, so that when old Age came upon her, she retained ye Sense and Savour of Truth in as precious & lively a manner as in ye beginning, It being very frequent for her to express the same in her living Ministry amongst us: much more might be said concerning this our worthy Friend,

but we study brevity, being nearly affected by her removal from us, wch. tho' it be our unspeakable Loss we doubt not but is her great Gain & that she is center'd in the holy Mansions, with Saints & Angels, & ye Spirits of ye just made perfect. She departed this Life at her own dwelling house in Fakenham in ye sd. County on ye 1. 8 mo. 1741 & was attended to ye Grave by great Numbers of Frds. & others.

Born abt. ye Year 1666

Dyed in ye Year 1741

was a Minister about 46 Years.

(Signed by 14 Men Friends.)

(To be concluded.)