

Quakerism in Lincolnshire

QUARTERLY Meetings have been held in the City of Lincoln for 265 years, the first being held there on 25th of 1st month, 1668.

In 1651 George Fox came to Lincolnshire and visited Friends. One 1st day he went into steeple houses on both sides of the river Trent declaring the word of Life to the people and directing them to their Teacher, JESUS CHRIST. In 1654 he was again in the county and tells us in his Journal that "there were great Meetings and a large conviction."

Elizabeth Hooton was imprisoned that year for "bearing testimony" at Beckingham, and John Whitehead, who was convinced when he was a soldier at Scarborough Castle, first came to preach the "Light within" and "bore testimony" in the high place called the Minster at Lincoln—"that it is the light of the glorious gospel that shines in man's heart and discovers sin."

The story of the sufferings of the Quakers in Lincolnshire during the years of persecution, 1650 to 1689, is tragic reading. So many Friends were imprisoned in Lincoln Castle that arrangements were made with the gaoler for them to have a special room apart from other prisoners for which a yearly rent of £6 was paid by Friends. A loom was also provided by the Monthly Meeting so that those in confinement might earn a little money to buy necessities.

In 1666 George Fox came again after settling Monthly Meetings in Nottinghamshire, and had a gathering of men Friends of all the Meetings in this County at the house of Robert Craven, a former Sheriff of the city of Lincoln.

In the following year on the 25th of 10th month, 1667, the county was constituted a Quarterly Meeting, and divided into four Monthly Meetings, viz. : Lincoln, Spalding, Gainsborough and Mumby. Quarterly Meetings were held at the house of William and Susanna Morrice in Lincoln, until a Meeting House was built in 1689.

At the first Quarterly Meeting held in the city in 1668 a contribution was brought in amounting to the sum of

£12 12s. 4d. to supply the needs of several Friends who were in distress.

John Whitehead succeeded Robert Rockhill as clerk in 1685, and continued until his death in 1696 ; he was followed by Thomas Robinson of Brant Broughton, who in 1684 recounted unto the Quarterly Meeting the charges of himself and other Friends of £5 13s. 5d. on their journey to Winchester with an address to King Charles II.

In 1686 a minute or paper was read from London Yearly Meeting showing that the National Stock (now known as Yearly Meeting Fund) was applied to the relief of sufferers, and other general services of the Truth, beyond the sea and in this nation, and it was ordered that a free contribution should be collected throughout the county and brought up to the next Quarterly Meeting. The amount from Lincolnshire Friends was £20 12s. 2d. that year.

The first Quarterly Meeting gathered in what is now the "Old Meeting House" in 1st month, 1690, when Isabel, daughter of Judge and Margaret Fell, was present as the bride of Abraham Morrice, a silk mercer in the city, who in 1669 had bought the plot of ground for a burying place for the Quaker prisoners who died in the Castle and the City Gaol, and afterwards had the Meeting House built thereon.

In 1703 it was decided to hold the mid-week Meeting for worship on the day after the Quarterly Meeting so that any visiting Friends "who had freedom" could be present, but in 1758 a minute was passed that as no Monthly Meetings were then held in the city it was agreed to call the Monthly Meeting "Broughton" instead of "Lincoln."

On the 16th of 6th month, 1779, we find that, "in compliance with the minute of Yearly Meeting relating to the school intended to be established at Ackworth, this Quarterly Meeting desires the several M.M's. to appoint a suitable Friend in each of them to apply to such Friends as are of ability for subscriptions towards the said Institution, and what they receive put into the hands of the correspondent for their Monthly Meeting for him to remit to London agreeable to the instructions of the Meeting for Sufferings, and John Massey is by this Meeting chosen to join with the Committee to be appointed by the Meetings for Sufferings in the management of the School to be opened at Ackworth

and be present at the Meeting to be held for that purpose as it may suit his conveniency."

The School was primarily intended for the education of children of Friends who were not "in affluent circumstances"; and in 1780 Elizabeth Pearson, of Spalding, was sent from this Quarterly Meeting, the Fee of £8 per annum being provided from the Meeting Funds.

The names of Burtt, Hutchinson and Massey appear with great frequency in the Quarterly Meeting minutes, and members of all three families served for long periods as Clerks and as members of the Ackworth School Committee.

When Lincolnshire joined Notts and Derby, two Quarterly Meetings only were held at Lincoln, namely, in June and December; later still, Mansfield took the Winter Meeting, but the June Meeting has been kept up continuously at Lincoln.

Quaker weddings appear to have been solemnized in the City since 1658, when William Willows married Ann Lammin at the house of Martin Mason.

For many years no Friends gathered at Lincoln Meeting House on 1st day until the Meeting for worship was re-established in 1893, and has continued to be held ever since. When more members resided in the City the accommodation was felt to be inadequate, and in 1910 the new Meeting House was built; but the old one still serves a useful purpose.

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