

Quakers' Mount at Bannister Green, Felsted, Essex

IN 1922 the late Charlotte Fell Smith drew my attention to a local tradition among the inhabitants of Bannister Green, Felsted, which designated a certain large mound (shown on the Ordnance Survey map as a possible barrow or burial mound) as the Quakers' Mount.¹ Knowing that seventeenth and eighteenth century parish registers sometimes have notes of Friends' burials, especially in connection with affidavits of burial in woollen, I suggested that the Felsted register might throw light on the tradition. Accordingly, we spent some time inspecting the register, the vicar allowing us to do this at Charlotte Fell Smith's house, which adjoined the vicarage.

We found that entries for Friends began in 1678 with the burial of James Belsham "at the Quakers burying place in Felsted," and continued until 1732. Of the total of thirty-three entries most are entered simply as "amongst the Quakers." Five however are more specific, two stating that burial took place at the "Quakers' Hill," two at the "Quakers' Mount," and one (1732) speaks simply of "the Hill." These entries amply confirmed the local traditional name, and explained the old coffin handles dug up on the site which the Bannister Green blacksmith had shown the vicar some years before.

In Friends' registers there are thirty-eight entries for burials at Felsted from 1657 to 1732, but none of these indicate the position of the burial ground. Twenty-one of these entries are earlier than 1678, and of the remaining seventeen, eight only are included among the thirty-three in the parish register, and the last coincides (except for a discrepancy of two days in the date) with the latest in the parish register, 1732. This means that the parish record includes twenty-five burials omitted from Friends' registers. The mound is only about thirty yards in diameter, and with sixty-three people buried there by 1732 it was obviously

¹ The mound is about one hundred yards distant from the old Felsted meeting house (built in 1687), situated in the hamlet of Bannister Green, a part of Felsted parish, though more than a mile from Felsted village.

time to find another plot, and after that time interments apparently took place at Stebbing Meeting House a few miles away.

At the suggestion of the British Council of Archæology, in 1946, Felsted School Historical Society carried out excavations with the object of determining whether the mound was a barrow. The discoveries were limited to "secondary interments at a depth of 2½ to 5 feet," and a number of seventeenth and eighteenth century iron coffin handles and nails. In the tithe map of 1844 the mound is called a mill mound, the field Mill Field, and the adjacent cottage Mill Cottage. The Society is inclined to regard the original object of the mound to be the provision of a base for a windmill, but as it was in use as a burial place from 1657 to 1732 it seems unlikely that a mill existed there after the first date.

The earliest Felsted burial recorded in Friends' registers is that of Elizabeth Childe, daughter of William Childe, 28.ii.1657. William Childe was the Friend who provided the site for the meeting house, and it seems likely that when his daughter died she was buried at the mound—a convenient site on his own land, and a spot presenting difficulties for tillage—and that he allowed the same place to be used soon afterwards (28.v.1657) when Anne, daughter of Samuel Skillingham, a landless man died. In any case this not infrequently was the origin of the early Friends' burial grounds before the erection of meeting houses with burial grounds attached.

Below are given extracts from Felsted parish register for the burials at Bannister Green which are not recorded in Friends' registers. The typical form of entry is shown in the second record: "Rebecca Bretton buried amongst the Quakers, & affidavit brought ye Seventh day of June to me yt she was buried in Woollen. Tho. Woodrooffe." A later entry reads: "1703, Sept. 8, Affidavit was made yt John Child a little Crooked Quaker was buried in Woollen." According to Friends' registers, "John Childe of Felsted, son of Sarah Childe, was buried at Felsted, 7.vii.1703", the day before the affidavit was taken to the vicar. In 1704 there are two entries; "Aug. ye 3d Affidavit made of ye Wid: Smith a quaker, being buried in woollen," and "Dec. 30 Affidavit made yt Sarah ye Wife of Robert

Tilbrooke was Buried, a Quaker." Although Friends' registers record seven burials at Felsted in the interval, no further parish register entry of a Quaker burial appears until 1732,¹ and this time there is no mention of an affidavit.

Friends Burials at Bannister Green, Felsted, unrecorded in Friends Registers at Friends House, extracted from Felsted parish register.

- 1678 James Belsham was buried at the Quakers burying place in Felsted the 23d of September & Affidavit made.
- 1679 June ye — Rebecca Bretton buried amongst the Quakers & affidavit brought ye Seventh day of June to me yt she was buried in Woollen. Tho. Woodrooffe.
- 1679 June ye —. Mary Larke of Much Waltham was buried at Felsted amongst the Quakers & affidavit brought ye 16 of June to me Tho. Woodrooffe.
- 1679 August ye —. Samuell Ramsey was buried amongst ye quakers, & affidavit that he was buried in Woollen brought to me ye 21. Tho. Woodrooffe.
- 1679 Jan. ye —. Isaac Cornwell of Much Leez Parish² was buried amongst the Quakers at Felsted, & Affidavit brought yt he was buried in Woollen. Tho: Woodrooffe.
- 1680 Dec. ye 28. Joshua Dawson was buried in woollen. It. Sarah Dawson buried in Woollen.
Jan. ye 10th. Simon Bayley of Braintree was buried in Woollen.
- These three buried amongst ye Quakers.
- 1681 May —. Ledee Joslin ye wife of Robert Joslin of Rayne buried at Felsted among ye Quakers, & Affidavit brought on ye 15th day.
- 1681 August ye —. John Smith buried among ye Quakers in Woollen & Affidavit brought on ye 10th day.
- 1681 Jan. —. William Smith buried in Woollen amongst ye Quakers.
- 1681 Jan. —. Sarah Newman buried in Woollen amongst ye Quakers.
- 1682 Octob. ye 25. Margaret Bridge Buried in Woollen amongst ye Quakers.
- 1684 Decembr. the 22th. The Widow Chandler was buried in Woollen among the Quakers.
- 1685 July the 5th. Samuell Skillingham buried in Woollen among the Quakers.

¹ James Quilter; May 22, 1732. Apparently the Act for burial in woollen, first passed in 1660, and reinforced in 1678 (when the Felsted vicar began to record Friends' burials), had fallen into desuetude, although it remained on the statute book until 1814. Its object had been to help the woollen trade which suffered from competition by linen.

² Great Leighs.

- 1686 Aprill. Elizabeth Petchee buried in Woollen among the Quakers.
- 1688 May the 22. Affidavit was brought that Thomas Child was buried in Woollen among the Quakers.¹
- 1690 May the 8th. John Emson buried in Woollen amongst ye Quakers.
- 1693 Jan. 2. John Webb of Braintree buried in woollen amongst the Quakers.
- 1694 Febr. 21. Affidavit made that Joseph Chandler was buried in Woollen amongst the Quakers.
- 1695 May 6. Affidavit made that Thomas Webb of ye Parish of Braintree was buried in Woollen (sci :) in ye Quakers Hill.
- 1695 March 14. Affidavit made that Katharine Wilbie was buried in Woollen:—Buried at ye Quakers Mount.
- 1696 April 23d. Jephthah Childs was buried in Woolen at the Quakers Hill.
- 1698 July 21. Mary ffoster Buried in Woollen at ye Quakers Mount.
- 1704 Aug. ye 3d. Affidavit made of ye Wid: Smith a Quaker, being buried in woollen.

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¹ Probably the same Thomas Childe, son of John, buried 11.iii.1688 according to Friends registers.