

Quakerism in a Country Town

Burford (Oxon)¹ and its Meeting House

BY ROGER H. M. WARNER

IN 1700 the site of Burford Meeting House and burial ground formed part of an orchard belonging to the Bull Inn, just then refronted with red brick specially brought into the town to catch the eye. To this day the Bull is the only brick-built building in the High Street of this grey Cotswold stone town, which was at the height of its prosperity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In 1700 Burford was still prosperous and famous for its saddle making, five years previously two saddles had been given to William III which he specially ordered to be kept for his personal use. At this date a small Quaker group must have existed in Burford and there were Meetings at Barrington, three miles west up the Windrush valley and at Milton-under-Wychwood, three miles to the north.

In Witney Division Monthly Meeting Minutes for 1677 mention of Burford first appears with a payment of 2s. 6d. a week rent for Ann Cook. Some years later comes the following minute: 1701, 10th of 12th month; "Proposed of Building a Meeting Hous at Burfut desering the consent of this Meeting. And the Meeting consents that they may goe on in building when they pleas." Ten months later Burford Friends found they needed more money and Monthly Meeting "Orders them to take care and get a just Estamite of what more may be wanting and propose it to the next Q.M. in order to have their consent to have a collection amongst Friends throughout the County." Consent was not forthcoming and the Quarterly Meeting ordered every Particular Meeting in Witney division to make a collection for the same. In December, 1709, Burford Friends were £37 9s. od. out of pocket and another collection was made; but in 1713 money

¹ In Friends House Library there is a typescript volume of "Minutes relating to Burford Meeting, Oxon," transcribed and indexed in 1939 by Nina Saxon Snell from the Minute books of Witney M.M. (1731-1854), Oxford M.M. (1675-1731), with notes from Witney Women's M.M. (1752-1806).

was still short and further amounts were subscribed. Total sums raised by surrounding meetings were:

Witney, £11 4s. 6d.;	Milton, £11 4s. 6d.;
Chipping Norton, £3 7s. od.;	Charlbury, £2 17s. od.;
Oxford, £3 3s. od.;	Alvescot, £1 9s. od.

Forty years later Burford and Milton Friends were in a position to subscribe £15 15s. od. towards repairs to Witney Meeting House.

Burford Meeting House is situated in a quiet lane parallel to the High Street. In its original form, it was a high barn-like room with an elders' gallery at one end, and with galleries on two sides approached by a staircase. Fairly soon,¹ however, a floor was made across the beams, and another small stairway taken up from the gallery to a small upper room. It is this upper room which Friends now use for meeting for worship during the winter months as it is easier to heat. Tradition says that it was for the use of Visiting Friends, and might perhaps have been used by the Women's Meeting. There is no record of the opening of Burford Meeting House, but this must have been in 1708 or 1709, as by midsummer, 1709, the Meeting at Barrington had closed and had been transferred to Burford, from which a Register was received by Monthly Meeting.

In 1716 two Friends are noted "that have proposed to send borders towards furnishing a skolle for an Incuragement of a skollemaster," and two years later Milton and Burford contributed £1 16s. 6d. to the schoolmaster's salary. In 1722 they again subscribe 50s. towards the rent of Nicholas Marshall, the master, for his encouragement. About 1750 Thomas Huntley became the schoolmaster and continued running the boarding school for more than 50 years.

The Monthly Meeting was held at Burford in November, 1741, on account of smallpox in Witney, but throughout the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was little to report. In 1768 a small additional piece of adjoining ground was bought as burial ground, and in 1842 repairs to the walls of Burford burial ground are the first repairs noted by Monthly Meeting.

In 1813 Milton Meeting was discontinued, and a decline in Burford Meeting must also have begun, for in 1841

¹ The exact date is not known.

Quarterly Meeting agreed to discontinue preparative meetings at Burford, and in 1854 Quarterly Meeting was informed that the Particular Meeting of Burford was closed as all the members had removed from Burford. A few very elderly Friends had died in Burford in the previous five years. Minute books for the next fifty years have not been consulted, but meetings were again being held by the early 1900's but again ceased during the 1920's. Mention of Burford crops up 27 times between 1931 and 1947 in Monthly Meeting Minutes. In 1932 a committee was appointed to consider disposal of the meeting house, but the sale was not recommended. At this time the building was in use by the town band, Girl Guides, and Rover Scouts. In 1939 it was considered for use as a Government emergency food store, but not actually used. Then briefly it became a club room for evacuee mothers and babies, and was visited by Queen Mary. From 1941 Meetings for Worship were again held twice monthly by Friends and attenders then working in the district, and the building was also used as a boys' club. A youth club was set up in the building in 1947, when the ministers' gallery was removed, and this continued for a few years.

In 1955 with the arrival of more Friends in Burford, the meeting house was restored, and regular meetings were once again established.

Quakerism in an Industrial Town

Some Notes on Wolverhampton Meeting,

1704-1903

BY J. CLEMENT JONES

QUAKERISM in Wolverhampton goes back to 1704. It was in that year that Robert and Joan Hill gave to the trustees of Wolverhampton meeting, two cottages in what was once called Lower Lichfield Street. Later it became known as Canal Street and now is Broad Street. With the two cottages which Robert and Joan Hill gave to Friends was a small patch of land, the burial ground which remains today. The trust deed of 1704 states that the trustees "shall permit and suffer forever hereafter the dead bodies or carcases of all such persons who shall die in the parish of Wolverhampton aforesaid in the profession or religion of the people