

Quakers in the Diocese of Salisbury, 1783

Extracts from the written answers to the Visitation Queries of Bishop Shute Barrington on his primary visitation

IN the Salisbury Diocesan Archives (Diocesan Record Office, Wren Hall, The Close, Salisbury. Assistant Diocesan Archivist: Miss Pamela Stewart) are three volumes of written returns to questions on the state of the church in the parishes of the diocese (the counties of Berkshire and Wiltshire), and the following short notes concerning Friends are reproduced here by kind permission of Mr. Alan Barker, the Diocesan Registrar.

Shute Barrington (1734-1826), youngest son of the 1st Viscount Barrington, was bishop successively of Llandaff (1769), Salisbury (1782), and Durham (1791). The answers of the clergy to the questions asked before his primary visitation in the diocese of Salisbury in 1783 are the only records of this type for the eighteenth century which survive in the Diocesan Archives.

The eighth question read as follows:

Are there any Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, or Quakers in your Parish, or Chapelry? and how many of each Sect? and of what Rank? Are there any other Places made use of for Divine Worship, than such as are used by the above-mentioned Sects? What are the Names of their Teachers, and are they all licenced as the Law directs? Is their Number greater or less of late Years than formerly, according to your Observation, and by what Means? Are there any Persons in your Parish, who profess to disregard Religion, or who commonly absent themselves from all public Worship of God?

A glance through the answers reveals that the clergy were not all equally particular and specific in their answers to this question, so the following notes on Quakers cannot be taken as comprehensive evidence on the extent of Wiltshire Quarterly Meeting in 1783, but they have value as evidence of the Church of England's estimate of Quakerism in the district at that time.

Some answers however were made in general terms, as for instance:

BRADFORD-ON-AVON: "Of almost every Denomination under Heaven, innumerable";

BRINKWORTH: "Our Parish a few years ago swarm'd with Sectaries, at present they are few in Number."

CHIPPENHAM: "A few of each Sect."

DEVIZES, ST. JOHN: "There are many in the Town of each Sect, have each a Meeting House, are not of high rank."

A similar return for Devizes, St. Mary.

Berkshire parishes also fall into this category, as:

BRAY: "A great many [of all sorts] in the town of Maidenhead which is half in the parish of Bray. Their numbers I cannot possibly ascertain. . . tradesmen and people of an inferior sort."

NEWBURY: "There are many of each Sect, & of almost all Ranks; their Numbers seem much as usual, without any sensible increase or diminution, & in general they are sober, honest, & well-meaning People."

SHINFIELD: "A Vast Number of Schismatics of the Lowest Class."

It may have been in the interest of the clergy making the returns to minimize the incidence of dissent in their parishes and to lay some emphasis on the fact that the sects had little following save in the lower classes. As regards Quakerism, we know that Friends in Wiltshire had been declining during the eighteenth century and it is regrettable that a similar series of answers for some time early in that century is not available for purposes of comparison to measure the decline. On the other hand the growth of Methodism is remarked upon in several parishes and was fairly widespread.

In the following extracts the name of the parish is followed by the page number in the bound volumes where the entry appears

WILTSHIRE

BREMHILL (224): There is a Quakers' Meeting House now disus'd; about 3 or 4 Quakers in ye Parish.

BROMHAM (256): . . . and but four Quakers who are poor people. There is a place erected for their worship to which the[y] resort from other places.

CHILTON FOLIATT (364): [None] . . . except one Quaker and his Family consisting of nine Persons.

CORSHAM (1375): I do not know of any Dissenters excepting some few reputed Quakers.

FISHERTON ANGER [SALISBURY] (700): Two or three Quakers.

GRITTLETON (788): Of Quakers there are only one Family which consists of three Persons.

HILMARTON (834): I know but one Quaker and he is Superannuated.

HULLAVINGTON (882): . . . but there are a few Quakers, who have a Meeting House here, which was built about the end of the last Century, at which time I have been inform'd, there were many more of this sect in this Parish, than at present.

LACOCK (960): There is one Person of the Sect Called Quakers, Mr Ezekiel Dickinson, a Gentleman of considerable landed Property in this Parish, a quiet Man & a good Neighbour.¹

MARKET LAVINGTON (1016): . . . but one family of Quakers consisting of 3 Persons (viz.) two brothers & a sister. There is a Quakers' Meeting house also in the parish but the number resorting thither on Sundays &c. are only the 3 persons above mentioned, their number, in this place, has, of late years, considerably decreased.

We have no other sect excepting Quakers.

MARLBRO' S. MARY (1110): There are about 30 Presbyterians & as many Quakers in the Parish. There are no other Places of Divine Worship, than such as are used by those Sects. As I have but very lately undertaken the Care of this Parish I cannot affirm any Thing concerning the Increase or Decrease of the Number of those Sectaries from observation.

MARLBRO' S. PETER (1118): There are 4 or 5 Families of Quakers, which Sect is declining apace.

MELKSHAM (1142): There are some Anabaptists and Quakers.

¹ Ezekiel, son of Caleb and Sarah Dickinson, of Monks, parish of Corsham, was born 28.v.1711. His wife Frances died 1.vi.1762. He died 21.v.1788 (age given as 77) at Bowden Hill, near Lacock, and was buried 30.v.1788 in the family vault at Pickwick. (Wiltshire Monthly Meeting registers.)

POTTERNE (1323): One Farmer a Quaker removed out of the Parish . . . I found too many of these & none more obstinate than Mr Sutton's Bailif a Large Farmer.¹

SALISBURY, ST. MARTIN (1126): There is an Anabaptist Meeting House in my Parish, but those who resort to it chiefly if not altogether come from other Parishes . . . There is also a Quakers Meeting House under the same Predicament.

SALISBURY, ST. THOMAS (1675): There are twenty one Quakers . . . Their Numbers have not encreased according to my Observation.

GREAT SOMERFORD (1475): There is nothing of that kind in my Parish, except two men of no consequence who are calld Quakers.

SUTTON BENDER (1608): A few Quakers, only about seven in two families of low degree. No Meeting in the Parish, Nor is there any other Meeting house.

WARMINSTER (1749): One or two Quakers.

WILTON (1813): . . . a few Quakers.

BERKSHIRE

ABINGDON, ST. STEPHEN (4): But few Quakers and Independents, without any regular teacher.

ALDERMASTON (*bound in the Wiltshire series*, 20): There is only one Family of Quakers, a Mother, Son & Daughter, (Bakers by trade). They have no place of worship in this Parish.

COOKHAM (255): There is a great number of Presbyterians and some few Quakers of the lower rank—there are other places made use of for divine worship as it is termed, viz. in the private houses of cottagers.²

LAMBOURNE (467): There are a few Quakers.

READING, ST. GILES (580): . . . the Dissenters are principally Quakers, their number I believe to be from twenty to thirty, & they have a place of meeting.

¹ In the Potterne entry the first four words of the first sentence quoted, and all after the first six words of the second sentence quoted, have been crossed out.

² Maidenhead town was divided between the parishes of Bray (see above) and Cookham.

- READING, ST. MARY (586, answer on loose sheets attached):
 There likewise appear to be 8 Families of Quakers. All these sects consist chiefly of Trading & Labouring People.
- SULHAMPSTEAD BANNISTER (692): There are a very few Anabaptists & Quakers in these Parishes, of the lower Rank.
- THATCHAM (706): Two families of Quakers, the Mistress of one is a Shopkeeper, the Master of the other is a Shoemaker. But there are no places of worship in my parish for any besides such as are of the Church of England.
- UFFINGTON (730): There are in my Parish four Quakers— Three Women & one Man. They have a place of worship in which they meet, but seldom or ever are joyned by any others of that Sect from other Parishes. Some years past there were three or four whole Families of that Sect.
- WALLINGFORD, ST. MARY (762): One or two Quakers & Anabaptists of middling station.
- WALLINGFORD, ST. PETER (770): There are seven Quakers in the Parish. The Family of Stephen Green, a Saddler.

R. S. MORTIMER