

Membership Statistics of the Society of Friends, 1800-1850

THESE notes were originally intended to be part of a survey of disownments by the Society in the first half of the nineteenth century which may still materialize one day. The figures quoted are drawn entirely from the J. S. Rowntree papers in the Library at Friends House (by permission of the Librarian), but the duplication of the figures for Warwickshire and Witham in the Hodgkin papers in the Durham County Record Office shows that John Pease had a similar interest and one may suspect that more statistics must exist in family papers of the period. Rowntree gathered these figures for use in writing his *Quakerism, Past and Present* but published only the conclusions he drew. He had considered the lack of adequate information about membership a partial cause of the Society's problems in the mid-nineteenth century (see *Quakerism, Past and Present*, pp. 135-136). The figures he did not publish, however, seem to fill some gaps in our impression of the period.

The total membership of the Society in the period was as follows:

1800	19,800	}	The first four figures are estimates made by Rowntree, based mainly on the record of births, deaths and marriages kept until 1837.
1810	18,920		
1820	18,040		
1830	17,160		
1840	16,277		An enumeration of members.
1847	15,345		An enumeration of members.
1851	14,364		Government Census of 1851, numbers attending meeting.

These figures help to place those quoted below for specific meetings in the national perspective. It should be noted that in most cases there are no explanatory notes with Rowntree's figures and therefore significant local factors may have been overlooked.

There is a great contrast visible between the number of new members by marriage (Table 2 below) and the number of disownments on grounds of marriage (see Table 1). This might be more instructive if the balance between the sexes

Table 1. Membership of monthly meetings

Meeting	No. of members		Resigna- tions	Disownments		Marriages according to rule
	1801	1851		Marriage	Other causes	
Brighouse (note 1)	—	820	—	163	112	299
Bristol	—	—	64 (note 2)	97	196	264
Devonshire House (note 3)	—	—	26	120	133	166
Frenchay	166	80	7	12	24	—
Gloucester	84	112	19	18	27	—
Marsden	—	—	—	118	59	125
Pontefract (note 4)	—	430	12	68	79	159
Warwickshire North (note 5)	—	—	—	84	86	155
Wiltshire	122	48	5	14	9	—
Witham	—	—	4	26	50	68
York	—	302 (note 6)	19	26	34	—

Notes. Figures are not available where blanks are shown. The composition of the monthly meetings is not necessarily the same throughout the period, e.g. Warwickshire North gained two meetings by transfer from Worcestershire Monthly Meeting in 1819, and united with Warwickshire Middle Monthly Meeting in 1837.

1. Period 1800-1854.

2. Rowntree's correspondent in Bristol, Joseph Davis, who supplied the figure stated that resignations had no connection whatever with marriage questions (J. S. Rowntree papers 4/19 and other figures for Bristol in 4/18 and 5/41). His figures for 1830-1852 show 586 members in 1830, 440 in 1852, 77 resignations and 89 disownments.

3. Period 1800-1853.

4. Period 1800-1845.

5. Period 1800-1850.

6. Average number of members 1837-1854.

Table 2. Admissions, removals and deaths
(for the same periods as Table 1)

Meeting	Admissions				Removals		
	Births	Marriage to a member	Rein- state- ment	By con- vince- ment	Gains	Losses	Deaths
Brighouse	229 admissions, all reasons.						
Bristol (see note)	246*	—	13	59	502*	518*	258*
Devonshire House	84 admissions, all reasons.						
Frenchay	127	13	38 with con- vincements	—	346	415	129
Gloucester	144	11	34 with con- vincements	—	347	294	141
Pontefract	414	—	20	103	—	—	415
Warwickshire North	45 admissions, all reasons.						
Wiltshire	84	10	20 with con- vincements	—	139	196	95
Witham	387	—	9	20	—	—	203

Note. Items marked * are for 1830-1852 only but are included because of their size.

was known, the impression is that the majority of those disowned for marrying out were male but in three meetings it was as follows in our period:

Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting	Men 50	Women 34.
Marsden Monthly Meeting	Men 62	Women 56.
Pontefract Monthly Meeting	Men 31	Women 37.

The turnover of membership in those meetings for which the figures are comprehensive seems very high in relation to their total membership shown in Table 1. It may be that the mobility of Friends was greater than average in the west of England but in the absence of other figures at present no answer can be advanced. Although marriage was usually the most significant numerical factor in a meeting's list of disownments the variety of other reasons for which Friends were disowned is considerable and of interest as an illustration of some of the attitudes and temptations of Friends in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Table 3. Disownments for reasons other than marriage
(for the same periods as Table 1)

Meeting	Bristol	Devon- shire House	Marsden	Ponte- fract	Witham	Warwick- shire North	York
REASON							
Non-attendance	—	48	17	—	3	24	4
Doctrine	—	—	—	Nil	—	—	—
Differences	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Immorality	35	54	14	50	16	11	13
Fraud (note 1)	—	—	2	—	—	5	1
Excessive drinking	—	—	—	—	5	1	—
Insolvency (failure)	78	31	25	12	16	26	13
Enlistment	—	—	1	—	—	7	Nil
Paying tithes	—	—	—	—	1	4	—
Miscellaneous	79 (note 2)	—	—	17	9 (note 3)	8	3
Total	196	133	59	79	50	86	34
Marriage figures from Table 1	97	120	118	68	26	84	26

Notes. The appearance of "nil" against a category on the manuscript return suggests that the compiler anticipated a disownment on this account.

1. Includes heading "Stealing and Dishonesty".

2. This figure includes some resignations?

3. One of these disownments was for "stabbing his master".

The figures presented in the above tables cover a geographically representative group of meetings (this is accidental) with a membership that could have amounted to 20 per cent of the Society's total. They have been drawn entirely from one source and local records which could fill in the blanks probably exist; for example, a detailed study of minute books of the period would be able to provide material for further statistical consideration of disownments. It is hoped that they will be of general interest as background to diaries and biographies of the period, and throw some light on an aspect of Quaker history concerning which very little has been published.

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