

Records of Quaker Interest in Lambeth Palace Library

FRIENDS in the past may have rejected the Church of England, but a historian of Quakerism would be most unwise to neglect her records. The Church of England archives contain a wealth of information which may not throw up any startling discoveries, yet will lend colour and balance to our understanding of the Quaker past. Lambeth Palace Library¹ has a valuable collection of records illustrating the initial flourish and gradual decline of Quakerism into a relatively small sect tolerated by the Established Church. There is little unity within this miscellaneous group of records though the more interesting items belong to the periods in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries when Friends' activities posed a vital challenge to society. It is not pure coincidence that there is a marked absence of references to Quakers in the nineteenth century manuscripts and archives.

Of all the records in the archiepiscopal library perhaps the most rewarding for the Quaker historian is the 1669 Survey of Conventicles² which was designed to gauge the strength and extent of nonconformity and dissent that had flourished during the Commonwealth. A searching enquiry was undertaken to determine the numbers, social status and "Principal Abettors, Preachers and Teachers" of these heretical beliefs. Copies of the returns have survived for the majority of the dioceses in England and Wales and confirm our picture of early Friends: of their surprisingly large numbers, their itinerancy, their low social origins, their subjection to persecution and even the institution of business meetings. At Wymondham, Norfolk, it is recorded that there were "sometimes 500, 400, 300, 200 sometimes but 30 or 40 when they meete to Communicate letters which they receive from others of their party in foreine places." Their teachers and heads were described as "mostly persons unknowne from all

¹ The Library is open on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Any *bona fide* reader is welcomed on the production of a letter of introduction.

² Ms. 639. Transcribed in *Original Records of Early Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence*, by G. Lyon Turner, 1911.

parts of the Kingdome such as Fox, Duesbury, Greene, Whitehead & one Allen, a Barber in Cambridge."¹

A few years later in 1676 another survey, the Compton Survey,² was held to assess the comparative strength of recusants and dissenters. This time the ecclesiastical authorities seemed to be far less concerned about the different strands of dissent, and were more interested in the total numbers of "dissenters refusing or absenting themselves from the Holy Communion of the Church of England". Used in conjunction with the earlier survey and the churchwardens' presentments,³ it may be possible to identify some of the non-communicants as Quakers, and thus gain some idea of the fluctuation in their numbers at this period.

No further national census of nonconformists was undertaken although individual bishops kept an eye on these groups through their practice of visitation. The visitation articles and returns vary for each diocese and betray the changing attitudes of the episcopate to the old and new onslaughts against the comprehensiveness of the Church of England. For the diocese of Canterbury, the articles of Archbishops Secker (1758)⁴ and Moore (1786)⁵ include a whole series of questions on Quakers:

Are there any Quakers in your Parish, and how many? Is their Number lessened or increased of late Years, and by what means? Have they a meeting House in your Parish duly licensed, and how often do they meet there? Do any of them, and how many in Proportion, pay your legal Dues without Compulsion? If not, do you lose such Dues? Or how do you recover them? and what Facts do you know, which may help to set their Behaviour towards the Clergy or that of the Clergy towards them in a true Light?

In spite of the thoroughness of the visitation articles, it is clear from both their nature and the answers that Friends

¹ Ms. 639, f.230.

² Ms. 639. Also transcribed by G. L. Turner, and original returns for the Archbishop's Peculiars of Arches, Croydon and Shoreham which have only recently come to light (VP IC/9). A more complete series is in the William Salt Library, Stafford.

³ Churchwardens' presentments for the Peculiars of Arches, Croydon and Shoreham (VP II/4).

⁴ Ms. 1134/1-6. Secker had used the identical articles as bishop of Oxford. See *Articles of Enquiry Addressed to the Clergy of the Diocese of Oxford at the Primary Visitation of Dr. Thomas Secker, 1738*, by the Rev. H. A. Lloyd Jukes, 1957 (Oxford Record Society, Vol. XXXVIII).

⁵ VC II/1.

were not viewed with the same degree of alarm as that of the previous century. The incumbent of Folkestone was voicing a commonly held belief when he replied that "their number is lessened of late years", though he ventured his own well informed interpretation of their decline, putting it down to Friends' "Intermarriages with People of our Communion" and observed that "the Quakers are not so industrious to make Proselytes, as others are".¹ Possibly the clergy were more concerned about their refusal to pay tithes, though in some cases individuals preferred to come to terms with the parson. There appears to have been a spirit of compromise at work on both sides. Some of the clergy "chose rather to lose them [their dues], than to be at the trouble and expence of a Lawsuit".² However, in other parishes a certain aloofness characterized the relations between the Quakers and the parishioners. The vicar of St. Mary's, Dover, remarked that "they seem extremely bigotted to their own Opinions and hold their Neighbours in great contempt as if for want of their light, everybody else was in the dark".³

These Canterbury visitation articles were unusually detailed and may have been the result of Secker's non-conformist background. For the diocese of London, the eighteenth century visitation articles⁴ make no specific mention of Quakers on the assumption possibly that they would be covered by the questions "Are there . . . any dissenters from the Church of England, and of what denomination? Have they any meeting Houses? are they duly licensed, and are their Teachers qualified according to Law?". On the whole, by the later part of that century, the attention of the episcopate was focused more closely on the Methodists than on the older forms of dissent and nonconformity. The last visitation articles in the Library to include any questions on these groups belong to the years 1806 for the diocese of Canterbury, and 1810 for London. Thereafter the articles were concerned exclusively with the needs of the parishioners and their incumbent.

The picture of Friends gained from the visitation articles is that of a tolerated and declining sect within a society

¹ Ms. 1134/2, f.101.

² Ms. 1134/5, f.73.

³ Ms. 1134/2, f.31.

⁴ Fulham Papers: 55, 56(1766); 54(1770); 82-4(1778); 81, 85-7(1790).

dominated by the all pervasive Church. Their activities were hedged round with certain restrictions. They were forbidden entry to the universities and some of the professions open to them still required the sanction of the Church. The application of Joseph Sherwood to the Faculty Office for a licence to practise as a public notary was a test case which reveals the surprisingly wary approach of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to "this seemingly peaceable and inoffensive sect" in 1760.¹ Archbishop Secker would not have chosen to license a Quaker "unless refusing him would raise a Clamour: for they are extremely apt to be perverse in everything. Yet I know not that this office will give them any peculiar opportunities of being so". The Master of the Faculties expressed similar misgivings, fearing that "refusing this or any other Quaker would be productive of much clamour which most probably would be spread and propagated with all that Art & Industry they have too much practised on some other occasions".

That a *modus vivendi* operated is suggested by many of the Library's records bearing on Quakers. No clearer case of this is seen than in the report to the Bishop of London that Friends in Lacovia, Jamaica, "are so moderate, as to permit their children to be christened by Ministers of the Church of England, when desired by your regulations".² Quakers, like other officially recognized dissenters, were required to have their meeting houses licensed by the local bishop. However, at Deal, Kent, the meeting house was not only licensed by the Archbishop, but was also on his property. In the leases of these premises its use as a Quaker meeting house was clearly recognized by the Archbishop.³ At the beginning of the nineteenth century we find Archbishop Manners Sutton employing a Quaker surveyor on his estates.⁴ At the same time and earlier, Quakers took their turn in the office of churchwarden.⁵

The spirit of compromise was momentarily shattered by the 1914-18 War when once more Friends posed a vital challenge to society. The papers of Archbishop Davidson

¹ Secker Papers 14/6-14. Also Faculty Office Fiats, F II/1760 Sherwood.

² Fulham Papers, vol. 18, f.231 v.

³ Temporalities: Deal Leases no. 266.

⁴ Abraham Pursehouse Driver of Kent Road, Surrey. See Temporalities: Lambeth Enclosure Award, 1810, and Surveys of the Estates.

⁵ Affirmations of Quaker churchwardens in the Archbishop's Peculiars of Arches, Croydon and Shoreham. VP II/5b.

dealing with conscientious objectors reveal his opposition to their absolutist stand. Although he was entirely against their maltreatment and punishment by the military authorities, he nevertheless "had painfully to realize how impossible it is to be helpful to men who, while they are ready to accept the security and privileges afforded by the ordered government of the country to which they belong, refuse to undertake any of the responsibilities of citizenship."¹ There is a wide gap between these sentiments and those expressed by Bishop Bell of Chichester whose sympathetic understanding of Friends' position in the Second World War was reflected in his co-operation with them over relief work.²

This article does not claim to be an exhaustive account of Quaker material in Lambeth Palace Library; it is intended only to encourage Quaker historians to look beyond their own records, to gain an understanding of the ecclesiastical hierarchy's changing attitudes to them: from fear of their threat to an appreciation of their individual contribution to society. Perhaps the enquirer may come to share the thrill which I felt on unearthing an almost complete series of Yearly Meeting Epistles, 1682-1740, in our collections of Papers of the Bishops of London.

MELANIE BARBER

¹ Davidson Papers: War/Conscientious Objectors, 12 Jan., 1918.

² Bell Papers: German Church Papers, particularly Famine Relief.