

Friends in Bermuda in the Seventeenth Century

A SHORT period of Quaker activity began in Bermuda when Richard Pinder and George Rose, two of the First Publishers of Truth, arrived on the "24th of Februarie 1659/60" [24 Feb. 1660]. Bermuda Friends rarely received any of the harsh treatment which was the lot of early Friends in England and some of the American colonies. True, "Foraigne Quakers" were subject to imprisonment until they could be deported, and the convinced Friends of Bermuda were fined and distrained for such offences as refusal to support the parish churches, interrupting church services and refusing militia duty. A law of 1668/69, perhaps never strictly enforced, made anyone married to a Quaker ineligible to hold office.¹ In Bermuda there had been a long history of religious dissent. By 1647 there were two distinct sects on the Island, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. However "the Bermuda Independents, considered by their more unsympathetic contemporaries in England to be disturbing radicals, were in turn not untroubled by a still more radical group, the Quakers".² Despite the small number of Friends in Bermuda and the short period of activity there, religious disputations led to printed controversy.

Some account of the early ministry in Bermuda is given

¹ The present writer acknowledges his indebtedness to J. H. Lefroy, *Memorials of the discovery and early settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands 1515—1685*, Vol. 2, 2nd ed., 1932. "A large part of this volume is taken up with proceedings against the Quakers, a sect which has entirely disappeared from Bermuda. There as elsewhere, the spirit of faction assumed the garb of piety and some of the worst men in the community were foremost in loud profession; yet there is something real in the courage and devotion of several of the party." (Introduction, p. viii.) Sir John Henry Lefroy was Governor of Bermuda 1871—1877; his work includes a careful transcription of the judicial and administrative proceedings in Bermuda. Hereafter cited as Lefroy.

Babette Levy, "Early puritanism in the southern and island colonies, Chap. 3. Bermuda: Non-Conformity 'Safe from the storms' and 'prelates rage'." (*Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 70 (1960), 164—200); hereafter cited as Levy.

Harriet Frorer Durham, *Caribbean Quakers*, Hollywood, Florida, 1972, 42—49; hereafter cited as Durham.

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² Levy, 182, 193.

4 FRIENDS IN BERMUDA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

in letters of Pinder and Rose. Richard Pinder writing to George Fox in 6th mo. 1660 said:

I have lately been at Bermuda where I left George Rose—great service is done in that place for before I came away severall meetings were established at which many knew where to wait to receive the Lord's secret strength. . . . My stay there was about half a year.³

George Rose in an undated letter, probably 1660 or 1661, says he had good service and had not missed three or four meetings a week since coming to the Island. He describes his work which was "to the great torment of the priests who as the dragon waits everywhere to destroy". On 3 May 1660 the Council of Paget's Tribe (Parish) sentenced Rose to one month's imprisonment for disputing with the parish priest. As noted by Rose, "foure or five of the justices declared against it".⁴ The dissenting justices were Capt. Thomas Richard, Capt. Florentius Seymour, Mr. John Moore and Mr. Nicholas Thornton.⁵ It has been stated without verification that Florentius Seymour's wife was a Quaker. While this may have been a factor in Seymour's dissent, such influence did not prevent the passage of laws against the Quakers when he was Governor.⁶

The Bermuda authorities were not hasty in moving against the Quakers. A proclamation by Governor William Sayle on 2 January 1661 stated that he would await the action of the Crown and Parliament with respect to the Quakers; however Quakers must obey the laws and not disturb the ministers. In October 1661 Henrie Smith and his wife and daughter were brought before the Council for breach of the Sabbath. The Council voted that they "and all other entitled Quakers may have their libertyes for their meetings provided they act in conformity to the Civil Government". The Bermuda Assize of 2-6 December ordered that a "publication be speedily drawn for the observance of the Sabbath Day. . . . And that the Quakers be not molested until further orders from the Companie or the Kingdom of England".⁷

³ Friends House Library, London, Swarthmore MSS, IV, 39 (Transcript IV, 293-4).

⁴ Swarthmore MSS, IV, 39 (Transcripts IV, 294-5).

⁵ Lefroy, 132.

⁶ Durham, 44.

⁷ Lefroy, 145, 161, 183; Durham, 44.

At length, during the period of the Clarendon Code in England, laws directed against the Quakers were passed. In 1663 a £6 fine was authorised for refusal to testify under oath. A law of 1664 fixed a 12d. fine for each absence from church, after one warning. In 1666 a penalty of one shilling was leviable for absence from militia training. Laws of 1668/9 fixed the penalty for disturbing a minister as imprisonment until the next General Assize and a £5 fine; and ships' masters were required to give security not to land foreign Quakers, or to pay a penalty of £100. Quakers landing secretly were to be imprisoned "without bayle until deported".⁸

Some of the difficulties of Bermuda Friends are listed in Besse's *Sufferings*. In 1665 Capt. Dorrell of the militia took Robert Wilkinson and Francis Estlacke from a meeting at the house of William Wilkinson in Paget's Tribe. They were taken to the militia training with neck and heels tied together, as a punishment for "not appearing with them under arms". In case of invasion they were to be forced "to fight in the front thereof".⁹ In 1670 "John Bennet, a very wicked man", came to the house of Robert Wilkinson and attempted to kill Robert Wilkinson and his wife and burn their house. Since Robert Wilkinson would not swear against John Bennet, Wilkinson was fined 50 shillings and Bennet was released. Elizabeth Carter and Anne Butler, visiting ministers, were banished in 1672 for causing a disturbance in Devonshire Tribe Church. For the same offence William White was fined £3, Parnell Wilkinson 40s., and William Righton £3 10s. William White was distrained £9, Parnell Wilkinson 20s. and William Righton £6 7s. Actually William White was fined £3 for the disturbance and 15s. for refusing hat honour to the Court.¹⁰

Elizabeth Carter twice returned, to be banished a second and, in 1676, a third time. In the same year Stephen Bullock, master of a ship from Barbados, was sent to jail as were Solomon Robson and William Righton; Edward Hinsham, "a reputable trader of Barbadoes", was ordered to leave in the custody of the master of the vessel in which he came.

⁸ Lefroy, 202, 272-274, 287; Durham, 45.

⁹ Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the sufferings*, 1753, Vol. 2, 366.

¹⁰ Besse, Vol. 2, 368-9.

¹¹ Besse, Vol. 2, 368-9.

6 FRIENDS IN BERMUDA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In 1686 fifteen Friends of Bermuda signed a certificate for Mary Smith "for ye satisfaction of all friends in Pennsylvania, New Jarsie or else where" recommending her as "a maiden well reputed . . . and as concerning Marriage free of all men in this Island so farr as we know".¹² This certificate adds some names of Bermuda Friends to those given by Besse and Lefroy. Other names are given in *The Tatum narrative*.¹³

In the following list, L indicates a Friend mentioned by Lefroy for fine, distraint, etc.; B a name in Besse's *Sufferings*; C one who signed Mary Smith's certificate; and T Friends mentioned in *The Tatum Narrative*.

Eliza Bentley, Widow, Warwick	T	Sarah Murrell ¹⁷	C
Margery Day	T	John Richards, Tuckertown	L
Patience Bullock and two daughters, Warwick ¹⁴	B,T	Sarah Righton, Paget ¹⁷	C,T
Merriam Bullock, Warwick	T	Merriam Riddle	T
Maria Coates	L	William Righton, Sr., Hamilton	L
James Dorset, Warwick	T	William Righton, Jr., Paget	L,T
Francis Estlacke (Islie, Islock, etc.), Paget	L,C,B,T	Ruth Seymour	C
Margaret Estlacke	C,T	Henrie Smith, wife and daughter, Paget	L,T
Wife & Daughter of Lieut. Thomas Forster ¹⁵	L	Mary Smith	C,T
Frances Harriot	C	William Smith, Paget	L,C,B,T
William Harriot	C	Patience, wife of Nehemiah Tatum, Warwick	C,T
William Homer and Wife, Warwick	T	Dorcas, wife of Martin Taylor	T
Marie (Mary) wife of Capt. Philip Lee, Paget ¹⁶	L	Elizabeth Wetherbe	C
Bethula Laycroft	C	William White, Hamilton ¹⁸	L
Richard Laycroft	C	Parnell Wilkinson	L,B
Eliza Morgan ¹⁷	T	Robert Wilkinson, Paget ¹⁵	B
		William Wilkinson, Paget	C,B
		Thomas Woodhall, Paget	C,B

¹² This certificate has been printed in the *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, 6 (1914), 19; in the *Bermuda historical quarterly*, 4 (1947), 127; and in Durham, 49.

¹³ Richard Parry Tatum, *Tatum narrative, 1626-1925*, Philadelphia, 1926. The author of this family chronicle died in 1925, and his wife published the work in 1926.

¹⁴ At a Monthly Meeting held at the Meeting House in Flushing the 3rd of the fifth month 1681 the marriage of Nathaniel Field and Patience Bullock, formerly of the Island of Bermuda, was approved. MSS in Haviland Record Room of New York Yearly Meeting.

¹⁵ The will of Lieut. Thomas Forster, written in March 1674 and recorded in October 1674 mentions his wife Penelope, son Thomas, daughters Ann, Sarah, Miriam and Mary the wife of Robert Wilkinson. Will Book No. 1, Bermuda Archives, 192-3.

Of more than passing interest is the will of "William Wilkinson, senior, of Warwick Tribe, merchant, written the 11th day of the 11th month 1704/5, and recorded 16 October 1706". He left bequests to his daughters, Bathsheba Robinson and Mary Wilman, to his sons John and William, and to grandchildren. His religious credo is explicitly stated in his will.

I dye in the Lord in whom I have lived, moved and had my being. A true real and protestant Christian and member of the true reformed Church as was in the Apostles Days before the Apostacy was, of which church Christ Jesus was and is the Holy Head and Husband, Mediator, Redemor and Saviour, and noe pope nor false Christian by whom I have been a sufferer for bearing a true testimony to the Lord's blessed and Holy Name in whom I hope I shall rise.¹⁹

It is not easy to distinguish all the William Wilkinsons of this period. It is quite possible that father and son of the same name were both Friends. A third William Wilkinson served in the Bermuda government when Capt. Josiah Forster was governor and is sometimes said to have joined Friends. This William however died in 1657.²⁰ Almost at the same time a William Wilkinson of Rhode Island was engaged in a pamphlet controversy over baptism with John Hammett and Joseph Jenks.²¹

¹⁹ Bermuda Will Book No. 3, 216.

²⁰ Henry C. Wilkinson, *The Adventurers of Bermuda—history of the island from its discovery to the dissolution of the Somers Island Co. in 1684*, 1958, 402.

²¹ For the writings of William Wilkinson of Bermuda and William Wilkinson, of Rhode Island, see Joseph Smith, *A descriptive catalogue of Friends' books*, 1867, Vol. 2, 937-9.

¹⁶ The will of Capt. Philip Lea written 19 Feb. 1673/74 and recorded 5 Mar. 1673/74 leaves to "Mary Lea formerly my wife, but had absented herself from me, her maintenance and personal property." Bermuda Will Book No. 1, 175.

¹⁷ The will of Thomas Murrell (not Muzzell) written 9 Jan. 1675/76 and recorded 2 Feb. 1675/76 mentions wife Sarah, and daughter Sarah, now wife of William Righton, Jr. and grand-daughter Elizabeth Morgan. Bermuda Will Book No. 1, 216. William and Sarah Righton of Burlington, New Jersey, sold land in Paget in 1692, which was formerly the property of Sarah's father, Thomas Murrell. *Tatum narrative*, 48.

¹⁸ William White of Hamilton Tribe, the Somers Island, "Marrioner" bequeathed one-fourth of his estate to the people called Quakers in the Island of Bermudas. If certain legatees could not be found, their shares were also to go to the Friends. His will is dated the 25th day of the 10th month called December 1664 and recorded the following January. Bermuda Will Book No. 1, 101.

The ministers of Bermuda, themselves of radical and dissenting views, were nevertheless resolved to combat the more heretical views of the Quakers. The Friends were no less resolved to expose the theological errors of the ministers. George Rose in an early letter described a public disputation with the ministers which was attended by many hundreds of people. This confrontation lasted four or five hours until the "chief priest confessed he was weary and soon after the governor broke up the dispute".²² Three publications of Richard Pinder appeared in 1660. *The Captive*, addressed to present and future convinced Friends, and *A Loving Invitation to Repentance . . . unto all the Inhabitants of the Island of Barbadoes* were written during his ministry in the West Indies and Bermuda. The third publication of Pinder's, *The Spirit of Error*, resulted from the debates between Friends and the Bermuda ministers. The full title reads:

The Spirit of Error, Found, and Discovered, in the accounted Pastors and Teachers of the Island Bermuda, in the West-Indies; Their Principles and Practices also tryed by the True Spirit, and found to be contrary to the Scriptures of Truth, and disproved by them; though pleaded for by the strongest Arguments, the said Teachers could bring forth. In answer to some Queries that were sent unto them, by us called Quakers. Which answer was subscribed with all their Names hereafter mentioned. Their deceit unfolded for the Peoples sake of the Island; By a servant of the Truth (which searches out all iniquity, though it work in a Mystery) called, Richard Pinder. London, printed for Robert Wilson, at the sign of the Black-spread-Eagle and Wind-Mill in Martin's Le Grand, 1660. [24 pp].

The pastors mentioned here are Nathaniel White, Jonathan Burre and Brown, the latter probably Robert Browne. Jonathan Burre was licensed to preach at Hamilton Tribe Church in April 1661 and later at Devonshire Tribe Church.²³ Robert Browne received a certificate to preach from the Council in 1657; in 1658 he replaced a Mr. Righton as minister for Smith and Hamilton Tribes.²⁴

The most publicized disputation occurred in 1678 between the Rev. Sampson Bond and a group of Quakers under the leadership of Francis Estlacke. Bond had arrived in Bermuda in 1663 and had raised questions concerning the status of

²² Swarthmore MSS, IV, 39 (Transcripts IV, 294-5).

²³ Lefroy, 147, 162.

²⁴ Lefroy, 100, 122.

negroes, whether those embracing Christianity should not be given their freedom, and whether negro children should not be instructed in Christianity. He was dismissed from the ministry twice and twice reinstated.²⁵ "Sampson Bond not withstanding some deep religious feelings had the argumentativeness and tenacity of a trial lawyer and so provided, entered into practically every dispute ecclesiastical and civil to which he could gain admission."²⁶ Bond's account of the *Public Tryal* of the Quakers with its predetermined verdict was printed after some delay, in 1682.

A Publick Tryal of the Quakers in Bermudas upon the first day of May, 1678. *First* the charge against them was openly read containing these particulars:

1. That a Quaker's pretended Saviour within him, is not the true Christ, but the false Christ, the devil.
2. That the main end of the Quaker meetings, in these Islands, is to make the Lord Christ, His Holy Spirit, His Angels and Apostles, all lyars and false witnesses of God.
3. That the prime principles of a Quaker, are the same held and professed by the beasts, which Paul fought with at Ephesus.

Secondly, the whole charge being proved by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, was found by the Sheriffs, and Justices of Peace, a true and just charge.

Thirdly, being found guilty, they are here sentenced, and brought forth unto the desrved execution of the presses.

By Sampson Bond, late preacher of the Gospel in Bermudas.

Boston, in New England, printed by Samuel Green, upon the assignment of Samuel Sewall, 1682. [104 pp].

Quite needless to say, the verdict of the sheriffs and justices was not accepted by the Friends. Evidently not so well known is the printed rejoinder to Bond by Francis Estlacke, William Wilkinson, John Tysoe and Richard Richardson*, in which the verdict is emphatically reversed. This work is in five parts each with its separate title page.

A Bermudas Preacher Proved a Persecutor Being a Just Tryal of Sampson Bond's Book, entituled "A Publick Tryal of Quakers &c", Fraught with Fallacies, False Doctrines, Slander, Railings, Aspersions, Perversions and other Abuses, herein Detected, Disproved and Wiped off. And that the True Christ is Owned by the People called Quakers, plainly Made Manifest. By those that have been more particularly concerned, and

²⁵ Levy, 188-90.

²⁶ Henry C. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 362.

* R. R. in the pamphlet, but identified as Richardson in London YM Morning Meeting minutes, Vol. 1 (1673-1692), 75, 18.iv. [June] 1683.

10 FRIENDS IN BERMUDA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Eye and Ear-Witnesses in the Dispute at Bermudas: and those that have had the perusal of his Book, which manifests itself.

The wicked has digged a Pit for others, and is fallen into it himself.

Psal. 7:15

A Lying Tongue is but for a Moment. Prov. 12:19

London, Printed by John Bringhurst at the Sign of the Book in Gracechurch Street, 1683

The titles are as follows:

To the Inhabitants of these Islands Bermudus, A Testimony for the Truth and the People of God called Quakers, against the Reproaches, Scandals and Slanders of Sampson Bond: Who calls himself a Minister, or Preacher, of the Everlasting Gospel in the said Islands.

11th of 3^d Month 1678. Francis Estlacke. (pp. 1-9)

Some few Lines briefly answering some Part of Sampson Bond's Book. Entituled the Quakers in Bermudas Tryed &c. Bermudas 1st Month 1683. William Wilkinson. (pp. 10-18)

A Brief Touch of the Deceit and False Doctrine of Sampson Bond. R. R. (pp. 19-27)

Something further in Answer to Priest Bond's Lyes, Ignorance and Blasphemy, in his Book Entituled, the Quakers in Bermudas Tryed, Sentenced, Executed &c. John Tysoe. (pp. 29-44)

The Truth of Christ Jesus, with the Professors thereof in the Island of Bermudas (Commonly called Quakers) cleared from the Three Ungodly False Charges charged upon them by Sampson Bond (Teacher in the said Island) in a Book, entituled, The Quakers in Bermudas Tryed &c. In which Book are found many Blasphemies, Slanders, false Accusations, false Glosses and Interpretations, herein searched and noted in their particular Pages, and examined and confuted with as much brevity as the matter could well bear. By a Friend and lover of the Truth in the same Island, called Francis Estlacke. Written in Bermudas the 25th day of first month 1683. F. E. (pp. 45-92)

Francis Estlacke was evidently one of the most prominent Friends in Bermuda. William Wilkinson, the author, was probably the same William Wilkinson whose religious beliefs were expressed in words in his will. John Tysoe (1626-1700) was a London shoemaker, of whose presence in Bermuda I have found no record.

The group of Bermuda Friends was certainly never large and there is little indication that such Quaker activity survived into the eighteenth century.²⁷ The accounts of John Richardson and Thomas Chalkley show that there were few Friends in 1701, 1702 and 1716. John Richardson visited Bermuda in 1702 in company with James Bales. He was kindly received by the Governor, Benjamin Bennett.

²⁷ Levy, 195; Durham, 49.

FRIENDS IN BERMUDA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY II

The Governor said some of our friends would be glad to see us. I replied there were some on the Island that did own us, but how much they were of us, I could not tell. . . . We had many good opportunities among a soberly behaved people amongst whom we met with no opposition.²⁸

That merchant, mariner and minister, Thomas Chalkley, visited Bermuda in 1701 and twice in 1716, In 1701 in company with Josiah Langdale, he "found but very few Friends, yet had meetings in several places and at the houses of people not of our profession". Some opposition led to an interview with Governor Bennett which was followed by larger meetings than before. The visits of Chalkley in 1716 were equally satisfactory. "The people of the island generally received me lovingly and were very kind to me. Our ancients, who bore the burden and heat of the day met with very different treatment. . . . Divers such opportunities I had with several on this island, there being but very few of our society."²⁹

A. DAY BRADLEY

²⁸ *Life of John Richardson (1671-1758)*, Friends Library, William and Thomas Evans, editors, Vol. 2, Philadelphia, 1840, 101-104.

²⁹ *The Journal of Thomas Chalkley*, New York, 1808, 30-32, 73-76.