

John Whiting and Sarah Hurd

AN article by Ethel Crawshaw on the marriage of John Whiting and Sarah Hurd appeared in this journal in 1915 (*Jnl. FHS*, 12, p. 90–94). John was a prisoner at Ilchester from 1679 until the general release in 1686. In his *Persecution Exposed*¹ he describes a visit with Sarah to Bristol in 7th month 1683; he had had “drawings” in his mind towards her for “near half a year” before he disclosed this to her on their way homeward, “which she in due time received and closed with” (Whiting, p. 185). This was not the only visit to Bristol and elsewhere that John was able to make during his imprisonment. Sarah’s father, Thomas Hurd, was a fellow-prisoner; she herself was in prison from the 2nd of 2nd month 1684 until 4th of 4th month. With “keepers” such as Giles Bale and Edward Davis, confinement had very fluctuating rigours.

Ethel Crawshaw quotes two minutes of Ilchester M.M., dated the last of 5th mo. and the 28th of 6th mo. 1684, which refer to the proposal of marriage between John and Sarah. In the first, “it being questioned his intimacy formerly with Eliz: David”, Elias Osborne, Richard Lincolne and Jasper Batt were asked to speak with her and give an account at the next meeting. They found “that John Whiting did give sufficient ground of expectacon to Eliz: David to have had him to her husband . . . he hath gon out of truth and dun the said Eliz: great wrong therefore he ought to acknowledge and condemne the same”. (Her surname is also written as Davies.) It was referred to the next Monthly Meeting to be held on 30th of 8th month “when Eliz: David is to be present with John Whiting, face to face, unless friends can be other satisfied in the meane tine”.

These two minutes are found on sheets in the Dix MSS. (G.54) in Friends House Library, and appear to have been first drafts of the proceedings of these two meetings of Ilchester M.M. They are in Jasper Batt’s handwriting. In the

¹ Whiting’s account (dated 1696) was first published in 1715; quotations are from the second edition, 1791. Records of Somerset meetings are found at Street Friends’ Meeting House and at the Somerset Record Office, Obridge Road, Taunton.

normal way, they would have been copied into the minute book by John Anderdon, who was in prison from 1662 to 1672 and again from 1675 until his death. He had had a legal training, and his handwriting, fine and clear, appears in the minute books of both the Quarterly Meeting and Ilchester M.M. during much of his imprisonment. He died of ague in 1st mo. 1684/5 [March 1685] after six months' illness (Whiting, p. 279). He began to copy Jasper Batt's draft of the minutes of 5th mo. 1684 into the Minute Book, but never finished. He reached the bottom of a page before he reached the item dealing with John Whiting and Sarah Hurd's proposal of marriage. The next four pages are in a handwriting that seems to me to be John Whiting's own; the two items concerning John are omitted.

The most reasonable explanation of this omission seems to be that at, or before, the meeting held on 30th of 8th month 1684, either Elizabeth had withdrawn her claim to John, or the meeting had not supported her; but John was not entirely exonerated. This may have occurred before the relevant minutes were written into the book, so these were omitted from the record. John Whiting may have offered his help as a writer because by the end of 8th month John Anderdon was ill.

Ethel Crawshaw quotes a minute of the M.M. held in 12th mo. 1684-5 [February 1685], when the proposal of marriage was again put off, and one of 28th of 3 mo. 1685 when their proceedings were allowed. This minute, in Jasper Batt's handwriting, reads: "John Whiting haveing proposed his takeing Sarah Hurd of Long Sutton, daughter of Thomas Hurd to wife, there haveing bin a stop to the receiving of this proposeall for some reasons formerly, the meeting do now permittes the proposeall, And Its referd to Anne Ousley and Susan Perris and Robt Banton to make enquireys touching the clearenesse of Sarah Hurd, And its refer'd to the monethly meeting of the northerne parte of this County to Certifie in relation to John Whiting, In order to their proceeding."

The very next day, 29th of 3rd mo. the Northern M.M. met at Hallatrow, John was present, and Friends were appointed to enquire into his clearness. It was not until the 28th of 11th mo. 1685-6 [January 1686], eight months later, that the Northern M.M. agreed "to give him a sertificate that he is Cleare as far a[s] can be found or heard from all other

women in this part of the Country". The Monmouth Rebellion may have halted matters. The certificate was in cautious terms, and did not apparently cover anything that may have happened at Ilchester during his imprisonment there. His marriage took place "in a public meeting, appointed on purpose, the 20th of the 3d month, 1686" (Whiting, p. 341).

Quarterly Meeting held at Ilchester on 24 of 1st mo. 1686/7 [March 1687] condemned irregularities in John Whiting's proceedings in a minute quoted by Ethel Crawshaw, and which she found it not easy to understand. She had not seen two minutes of Ilchester M.M. which are very relevant. The first, on 27th of 11th reads:

According to the advice of the late quarterly meeting touching the evill consequence of slighting our meetings, and that none may put a slight esteeme thereon, and thereby walke disorderly, and cause devisions amongst us, but that such be watch't over, councelled, reproved and judged as in the wisdom of God shal be seen meet, And whereas John Whittings late marriage have occasioned devision amongst some Friends, and brought a great burthen and grieffe on others, And now that the right ground of these things may be found out, This meeting do unanimously conclude, advise and order that John Whiting do not faile to be present at the next monthly meeting at Ivelchester, and that he bring with him, and produce to the meeting the Certificate of his Marriage with the names of all such as are subscribed thereunto, that the guilty may be found out, the innocent cleared, the burthened relieved, The judgment of trueth in all given and the lords name over all exalted, and that Robert Bannton or Roger Slocombe do give him timely notice hereof.

The second, of 24 of 12th Mo. 1686-7 reads:

The matter touching the manner of John Whittings marriage is referd to the next quarterly meeting and the Cert thereof being not produced according to the order of the last Monethly Meeting, it being aleadged by Jo: Whiting that his wife hath it in her custody and for severall reasons refuses to produce it to the Meeting, Its referd to Elias Osborne, Tho: Whitehead, and Robt Bannton to speake with his wife, And that the said Certificate, be produced at the quarterly meeting, unlesse his wife gives them sufficient reason to the contrary.

To this was added, after the Quarterly Meeting, "which she did". In the margin was the note: "Tho[mas] Whit[ehhead] saying that there was nothing but truth writ and did not se that they should de anything further in it and at the Quarterly meet Jno sattisfied frds."

Quarterly Meeting had not been as well satisfied as

Thomas Whitehead suggested (John Whiting should have brought his certificate of clearness from the Northern M.M. to a meeting of Ilchester M.M. who would also have heard from the Friends appointed to enquire into Sarah's clearness, so that leave to proceed could have been properly given).

The Q.M. minute [21 March 1687] reads:

Touching the manner of John Whitings marriage, and his Certificate mentioning its being published in severall meetings of the people called Quakers, and Friends signing of it, as if it were in the unity of Friends, and the occasion of offence and devision thereby given amongst friends, and going to a place at such a distance from the place, where the said marriage had bin long in debate, (but never allowed by the Monethly Meeting) Friends of this Meeting do Judge it for condemnation; And that for the future no such president be followed by any Friends, and Jo: Whiting hath given forth a paper to condemne his practise therein which is on the fyle. And that not producing the said Certificate according to the order of the Monethly Meeting is for Judgement and a violation of this order, and an evil example for the future.

The marriage does not appear in Friends' registers, but this may be because the register of the particular meeting where it took place has been lost and not because Friends refused to recognize the marriage.

Who was Elizabeth David or Davies? Very possibly a daughter of Edward Davis the Keeper. She does not appear by name in *Persecution Exposed*, but there is much about him. "This Edward Davis, the keeper, formerly professed Truth, but apostatizing from it through the corruption of his own heart, he became exceeding wicked, as the sequel will show; insomuch, that a friend, John Dando, asking him 'what he thought would become of him when he came to die;' Edward Davis told him, that 'he knew what would become of him then, and therefore he would make the best of his time now' . . ." (Whiting, p. 41).

In the Spring of 1681/2, Giles Bale "being come in keeper of the prison, who was an angry peevish man, because I did not go out of the Friary (which belonged to Davis the former keeper, where I, with others, were prisoners) to his house at Bellispool, of my own accord . . . fetched me out, (against my will I confess, it being a pleasant prison to me) and put me down into the common-gaol" (Whiting, p. 118). During the

spring of 1682-3, according to his own account, he began to feel "drawings" towards Sarah Hurd, and when Edward Davis came back as Keeper in 12th Mo. 1683/4, John was living "at a friend's (the widow Scott's) house in the town, which had a fine garden and good conveniences" (p. 220). Sarah was in prison soon afterwards and both she and John were very hardly treated by Davis. When John was to be transferred to his care, "he threatened . . . that if I was not married before I came into his hands, I should not all his year, saying, He would lay me fast enough . . . my dear friend and I were separated, one at one end of the town, and the other at the other, and both under locks and bolts; the said Davis swearing desperately, as his manner was, that we should never come out or see one another again, all his time" (p. 229). Sarah's imprisonment was soon over.

Davis came to a sad end, as did many other persecutors of Quakers. "He grew very poor, though he used to boast of giving two hundred guineas for the gaol, and then oppress the poor prisoners to get it out of them again: it all wasted away; and after his wife died, (who was an honest Friend, and so were some of his daughters, though he almost distracted them with his wickedness) he dwelt alone, for his daughters could not live with him, only one of his bastards, that used to break hedge and steal wood for him for fire; but what they did for victuals, I cannot tell" (p. 325).

Frances Davies, his wife, died a Friend in 1682. Mary Davies of Long Sutton seems to have been homeless in 1688; Joseph Gaylerd and she had 'gon to live together alone in one house"; he was told that "his duty was first to have had Friends advice before he had extended such his pitty to the maide" (South Somerset M.M., 29, ix, 1688). She married Giles Knight of Chiselborough in 1690. She may have been a daughter of Edward.

As to John Whiting, his "pleasant prison" at the Friary which belonged to Edward; Edward's vindictiveness towards him and Sarah when John's interest in Sarah was manifest; and possibly a lasting respect for Elizabeth as an "honest Friend"—all these suggest that an attachment had existed between the young prisoner and the Keeper's daughter, which he felt it unwise to reveal in his memoirs.

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