

The First Publishers of Truth in Norway

ONE of the most striking aspects of early Quakerism is the explosive missionary effort that characterized its opening years. Within eight years of its 1652 start, the apostles of Quakerism had almost reached the ends of the earth—having made their ways from the north of England into Scotland and Ireland in 1654, on to the mainland of Europe and into the West Indies by 1655, to Maryland and New England by 1656, to Constantinople in Turkey and Surinam in South America by 1658, and to Norway, Egypt, and even to the East Indies by 1660.

Although we do not possess as much information about any of these developments as we might like, it is still possible to say—for the most part—who the “First Publishers” were in many of these places. To the 1970s student of Quaker history, the biggest question marks about early Quaker missionary activity have been in connection with the early work in Surinam, Norway and the East Indies (where some unknown Friend was active for three years prior to 1661).¹ Only recently the picture of early Quaker activity in Surinam has been brought more fully into focus, so that we have been able to date John Bowron’s work there in 1658 and also have seen that this was followed up shortly thereafter by the religious labours of Henry Fell and several Barbados Friends.² In this brief paper, I would now like to offer some suggestions about the identities of the earliest Quaker missionaries to Norway.

Over thirty years ago, Henry Cadbury produced a very thorough article on Christopher Meidel and early Norwegian contacts with Quakerism.³ Recently, I had my first occasion to read this work and—after completing it—decided that

¹ William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, second edition with notes by Henry J. Cadbury, Cambridge, 1961, pp. 217, 668–669.

² Kenneth L. Carroll, “Early Quakers in Surinam (1658–1659),” *Quaker History*, 62 (1973), 83–89, and “Henry Fell, Early Publisher of Truth”, *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 53 (1973), pp. 113–123.

³ Henry J. Cadbury, “Christopher Meidel, and the First Norwegian Contacts with Quakerism”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 34 (1941), 7–23.

there was nothing more to be said on the subject. It was my thought at that point that Henry Cadbury was probably right when he noted that our earliest references are only to 1659 and 1660 lists that include Norway¹ and that our first-named Quaker to appear in Norway was Mary Fisher's husband William Bayly, who was there in 1674.² Even more recently, however, while searching through my research notes of the past fifteen years, I discovered to my astonishment that I already possessed two bits of information that throw some light on the origins of early Quaker contact with Norway. Perhaps making known what little I have discovered will open the way for someone else to uncover some other clues.

Thoughts on proclaiming the Quaker message in Norway appear to have been quite strong on the minds of two well-known Quaker apostles, Richard Clayton and James Lancaster, about 1657 or 1658. Clayton [Cleaton] and Lancaster, each of whom had made earlier visits to Ireland, returned together to Ireland in 1656, drawing upon the Kendal Fund for this work.³ They probably remained in Ireland until the summer of 1657, returning to England later in that year. It seems quite possible that they were once more in Ireland in 1658.

In a letter from Dublin, dated only 10th of the 4th month [June], Clayton reports that their work had been largely in the northern part of the nation where there had been some real success. In May, they had gone to Dublin, where James Lancaster had been imprisoned for speaking in the street and at a meetinghouse. Then they had gone north again—*hoping to get a ship to Norway*. This had proved impossible, so that they had once more returned to Dublin, where Lancaster had been to speak to *Deputy* [Henry] Cromwell. They were now thinking of going on to Waterford.⁴

This letter bears no year in its dating, so that we cannot say with certainty just when it was produced. Henry Cromwell arrived in Ireland in July 1655, but Lord Deputy

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³ Friends House Library, Swarthmore MSS I, 267 [Transcripts III, 587] and I, 295 [Tr. III, 647].

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 28 [Tr. I, 558].

Fleetwood did not leave until September (and retained his title for two more months). Henry Cromwell, although the chief figure in the government of Ireland after the departure of Fleetwood, did not succeed to the title "Lord Deputy" until November 1657. If the title had actually been conferred on Cromwell (as seems likely) before this letter was written, then the letter should be dated 1658.¹ It seems possible, however, that the title may have been used somewhat loosely even before it was actually made official.

Did James Lancaster and Richard Clayton (individually or as yoke-fellows) ever make a religious journey to Norway? It seems quite possible that they may have done so, for there are several "silent" years for these two following 1657-58. There is, however, no known evidence that suggests that they actually did go, even though both of them travelled rather extensively in the ministry in the 1650s. James Lancaster (d. 1699), who was in Ireland many times, travelled widely in England (often accompanying George Fox) and even joined Fox in his visit to America in 1671-1673.² Richard Clayton, who made at least three visits to Ireland, was also very active in England in the 1650s.³

A second piece of information, taken from the Kendal records for 1659, is of much greater significance. On the 18th of 6th month, 1659, a sum of thirteen shillings from the Kendal Fund was given to Thomas Shaw "*at his Coming out of Norway through Scotland towards London*".⁴ Quite clearly, Thomas Shaw, if not the first Quaker to have laboured in Norway, is at least the first "Publisher of Truth" known to have been active in Norway whose name has come down to us.

Who was Thomas Shaw? How much can we really know about him? Shaw today seems to be a very shadowy figure, with only a few facts known about him. What little infor-

¹ Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Early Quaker Letters*, No. 445 (p. 249), gives a date of 1658 for this letter.

² George Fox, *Journal*, ed. by Norman Penney, Cambridge, 1911, i, 409, and *passim*. Cf. Norman Penney, ed., *First Publishers of Truth*, 1907, 6, 33-36, 43, 45, 46, 52, 55, 61, 72, 302. Lancaster was first in Ireland in 1654 and visited it once more in 1655.

³ Fox, *Camb. Journal*, ii, 395; *First Publishers of Truth*, p. 97; Besse, *Sufferings*, London, 1753, i, 144, 315, 319, 487, 658, 660.

⁴ Minutes and Records, Kendal "and Meetings nearby", p. 18. This volume, covering the period 1656-1699 and numbered volume 93, is in the vault of the Friends' Meeting House at Kendal.

mation we do possess is marked by numerous contradictions—so that today even the place of his birth, his occupation, and the scene of his death cannot be stated with certainty.

One early source says that Thomas Shaw was a weaver, either from Cheshire or Lancashire, who travelled widely in England and Ireland and suffered much persecution. According to this early note, he “laid down his body” in Ireland about the time that Charles II became king [1660].¹ Still another testimony, signed by Robert Wardell of Ireland,² tells us that Shaw was a shoemaker from Durham (where he was convinced early) and that he was a faithful labourer in England and Ireland.³ An even earlier Irish document, produced in 1660 shortly after Charles II came to the throne, records that Thomas Shaw, who had suffered much in Ireland, died in Wales after leaving Ireland.⁴

Shaw’s sufferings, which are not recorded by Besse, were much more than we have any record of, so that only a rough outline of what he experienced can be recovered. An early paper, addressed to Judge Corbet, notes that

Thomas Shawe in the publique meeting house at bandon bridge for propounding (2) Questions to a priest, after he had ended [his sermon] was sent to Corke prison, & there kept about nine weekes & after[wards] sent to bandon againe, & tryed by the Law, of which there could be noe breach against him be proved. Yett was he committed to the bridewell, where he was kept so close that his

¹ Portfolio 5.60, Friends House Library, London.

² William Edmundson, *Journal*, London, 1774, p. 32, refers to Wardell as just a “boy” in 1655.

³ Portfolio 16.76, Friends House Library, London. Cf. Henry J. Cadbury, *Narrative Papers of George Fox*, 1973, p. 159, for a 1679 document that connects Shaw with Durham. Also it might be noted that Thomas Shaw was one of the eighteen Friends who signed the decision to organize a monthly meeting in the County of Durham (Bishopric) in 1653—cf. *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends Held in London*, London, 1858, vol. i, pp. vi–vii.

⁴ Heare is A Brief Roll presented to the King of England, that he may see how the servants and people of God suffered in Ireland, In the dayes of Oliver Cromwell and his sonnes . . . [a manuscript found in the Public Record Office, London] (SP 63/344), p. 2. Cf. *To the Parliament of England, Who are in place to do Justice, and to break the Bonds of the Oppressed (A Narrative of the Cruel, and Unjust Sufferings of the People of God in the Nation of Ireland, Called Quakers)*, London, 1659, p. 3, which notes “Thomas Shawe, for propounding two Questions to a Priest in the Steeplehouse at Bandon Bridge, was imprisoned nine weekes in Corke, and after kept seven weeks more in Bridewell, where he received about thirty stripes”.

friends & acquaintances were denyed to visitt him or to administer to his necessityes; Yea, bread and water was by the keeper denyed to be brought to him, three weekes was he there kept, in which time he was put into their whipping stockes where he received in cruell manor with a knotty Corded whipp about 36 stripes at one time.¹

It seems quite possible that Thomas Shaw may have been the brother of William Shaw, who was also very active in Ireland, making his first visit there in 1656 and a second one in 1657 (the year in which he died).² Richard Richardson's list of deceased ministers has William Shaw as number 16 and "W. Shaw's brother" as number 17. At the end of this list there are to be found a dozen or more unnumbered names, including that of Thomas Shaw. Several of those whose names surround Thomas Shaw's died in 1679 and 1681, but there is no strict chronological arrangement to Richard Richardson's list. On the reverse side of this list once more is found the name of Thomas Shaw with a date of 1660 and the note that he had travelled with William Fallowfield.³ The fact that Thomas Shaw's name has been added to the end of Richardson's list does not mean that he could not have been listed earlier as William Shaw's brother. Richard Richardson's list contains several duplications or repetitions—such as the double-listing of Margaret Killham (99 and 114) and Margaret Robertson (125 and 132).⁴

Although Richard Clayton and James Lancaster may possibly have been in Norway after their departure from Ireland in 1657 or 1658, it seems much more probable that it was Thomas Shaw's visit to Norway early in 1659 (perhaps starting at the end of 1658) that gave rise to the inclusion of that country's name in the two lists that Henry Cadbury pointed out in his 1941 article. As a postscript to a general epistle in 1659, Fox added "And so, if any Friends have Friends (or Relations) beyond Sea, send them Books or Papers, and be diligent to spread the Truth; and send them Latin Books, or French Books, or other Books to Leghorn,

¹ Swarthmore MSS VI, 18 [Tr. VII, 499].

² Swarthmore MSS I, 10 [Tr. I, 101]; IV, 99 [Tr. IV, 131].

³ Portfolio 5.60, Friends House Library, London. Cf. Cadbury, *Narrative Papers of George Fox*, pp. 152–155.

⁴ Cf. Cadbury, *Narrative Papers of George Fox*, pp. 152–153, which shows this double-listing, as well as the repetition by error of two numbers (114 and 115).

France, Poland, Italy, Norway, Low-Countries, etc.”¹ In a 1660 epistle, sent out from the general meeting held at Skipton, note was made of

the great work and service of the Lord beyond the seas in severall parts and regions as Germany, America, Virginia, and many other Islands and places as Florence, Mantua, Pallatine, Tuskany, Italy, Rome, Turkie, Jerusalem, France, Geneva, Norway, Barbados, Bermuda, Antego, Geomeca [Jamaica], Serenam [Surinam], Newfoundland, through all of which friends have passed in the service of the Lord, and divers other Countries, places, Islands & Nations: Over & amonge many Nations of the Indians, in which they have had service for the Lord.²

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¹ George Fox, *A Collection of Many Select and Christian Epistles*, London, 1698, p. 140, Epistle 181.

² Portfolio 16.3, Friends House Library, London. This epistle is dated 25th of 2nd month, 1660. Cf. *Epistles From the Yearly Meeting*, vol. i, p. xxxv.