

Quakerism in Connaught, 1656–1978

QUAKERISM made its way into Ireland quite early and with such vigour that it soon produced a string of meetings that stretched from Ulster, southward through Leinster, and then westward into Munster. Connaught, however, proved to be rather inhospitable to the the “Publishers of Truth,” with such small success there that today there is almost no awareness of the fact that Quaker centres actually existed in Sligo,¹ Newport,² and Ballymurry,³ and standard histories of Irish Quakerism make no mention of the Galway meeting at all.⁴ It is, therefore, with Connaught that this paper is concerned.

It was in 1654 that the earliest Friends travelling in the ministry made their appearance in Ireland. A steady stream of what were later called “public Friends” crossed the Irish Sea, carrying the “Lamb’s War” to the various *English* settlements and garrisons in Ireland. Some of them, such as Francis Howgill, made only one visit, while others like Edward Burrough were there twice. Still others, such as Thomas Loe and John Tiffin made numerous efforts to plant, cultivate, and nourish Friends’ settlements in Ireland.⁵ They also produced, quite rapidly, a rich crop of “Irish” publishers of Truth (including William Ames, Samuel Buckley, Edward and Lucretia Cooke, John Luffe, Marcus Lynch, Robert and Mary Malin, John Perrot, and Robert Turner) who joined William Edmundson in the spreading of Quakerism not only throughout Ireland but also abroad.⁶

¹ Thomas Wight and John Ritty, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers in Ireland* (Dublin, 1751), p. 350, mentions a small meeting at Sligo (1714–1717), which then moved to Ballymurray, County Roscommon.

² Kenneth L. Carroll, “Quaker Weavers at Newport, Ireland, 1720–1740,” *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 54 (1976), 15–27.

³ Wight and Ritty, *op. cit.*, p. 350. Ballymurray, Ballymurry: both forms of the name are found.

⁴ Cf. Isabel Grubb, *Quakers in Ireland, 1654–1900* (London, 1937), where the only mention of Galway is in connection with William Forster’s visit there in the nineteenth century.

⁵ Wight and Ritty, *op. cit.*, pp. 351–352, contains a partial list of those who laboured in Ireland from 1654 to 1680.

⁶ Ames was very active in the early Quaker work in Holland and Germany. Perrot and Luffe travelled widely in the Mediterranean area, with Perrot also appearing in the American colonies. Robert and Mary

The first Quakers known to have been active in Galway were Humphrey Norton, William Shaw, and John Stubbs, all of whom were there in 1656. Little is known about their work in that city. William Shaw (d. 1658) was one of the first "Publishers of Truth" in Norway. He may have made several journeys to Galway. On one occasion, perhaps his first visit there, Shaw may have been travelling by himself. After having been turned out of Limerick (where Colonel Ingoldsby would allow no "strange" Friends to enter the city to proclaim Quakerism),⁷ he was reported to be on the road to Galway when he was badly beaten by a trooper "simply for being a Quaker." On another occasion, it would seem, Shaw was travelling with Humphrey Norton. Both of them were placed under guard in Limerick and also (either before or after the Limerick experience) were taken from a meeting at Samuel Newton's house in Galway, expelled from that city, and not allowed to "fetch" their horses.⁸ Shaw, on still another occasion, was in Galway with John Stubbs. The two of them were imprisoned five weeks for speaking a few words in a "steeple-house" there.⁹ This last episode, taking place in late 1656, is the only one which can be dated with any reasonable accuracy. The "Great Book of Sufferings," probably begun in 1661 but incorporating a list of earlier sufferings, seems to suggest a date of 1655 for all of these episodes, but that assignment does not bear up under close scrutiny. Samuel Buckley very late in 1656 wrote to Margaret Fell that "John Stubbs and W. Shaw is in outward bonds at Gallyway [Galway]."¹⁰

Malin (Malins, Maylin, etc.) spent much time in the West Indies and may have reached the American mainland. The best known, William Edmundson, has left us his well-known *Journal*, which deals with his discovery of Quakerism in 1653, when on a visit to England, and his life-long travels in religious service at home and abroad. The Cookes, Turner, and Lynch were primarily active in Ireland, although several of them did visit England and Turner eventually removed to America.

⁷ National Sufferings, I (1655-1693), 7. This manuscript volume, numbered A. 11, is found in Friends' Historical Library, Dublin.

⁸ National Sufferings, I (A. 11), 7, 10. Norton and Shaw were also imprisoned in Wexford, where they were taken from a meeting for worship, carried forcibly into a "public house of worship" to hear the sermon, and then imprisoned for speaking after the sermon was over.

⁹ National Sufferings, I (A. 11), 10.

¹⁰ Friends House Library, Swarthmore MSS I, 392 (Tr. I, 177), dated 11th Month 1656 (January 1656/7).

These are the only three "First Publishers" in Ireland who are known to have been in Galway in 1655-1656. It seems certain that Burrough and Howgill did not get beyond the Cork area before they were arrested, sent to Dublin, and banished. Probably few if any of the other 1655-1656 ministering Friends¹¹ made their way to Galway. Although there are no recorded visits for 1657 (when many English Quakers were crisscrossing Ireland), there must have been some such activity—for there is the very interesting testimony from the Reverend Reuben Easthorp about continued Quaker growth there. Easthorp, writing from Galway to Henry Cromwell on June 11, 1657, attempted to give an account of the religious situation in Galway at that time. He dwelt at length on the efforts of the "Anabaptists" (Baptists) and also spoke of the Fifth Monarchists and other groups labouring in the city—thus testifying to the radical Puritanism that marked much of the Cromwellian Army in Ireland.¹² Late in this report he says that "our quakers do get[gain] ground" and further notes that a hundred soldiers and others meet together at a time "at their assemblies."¹³

Almost nothing is known of this small, but growing, Quaker community—its makeup, experiences, sufferings, etc. The only two "members" who can be identified are Samuel Newton (at whose home a meeting was kept and from which Norton and Shaw were taken prisoners) and Marcus Lynch who very early became active in the ministry (so that his name appears in an early list of Friends who visited Cork Meeting).¹⁴ Galway Quakerism appears to have drawn heavily

¹¹ Also present in Ireland in 1655 were Alice Birkett, Thomas Hill, Thomas Loe, Richard Milner, Elizabeth Holme, Lancelot Wardell, Sarah Cheevers, Elizabeth Fletcher, Elizabeth Smith, Anne Gould, Juliannah Browne, Barbara Blaugden, Richard Hickock, William Simpson, Rebecca Ward, and Elizabeth Morgan; in 1656 John Bowron, Thomas Shaw, Mary Howgill, and William Stockdale.

¹² It was on this radical Puritanism that Quakerism fed and grew. It made little or no headway in predominantly Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinistic lands.

¹³ British Library, Lansdowne MSS 822, f. 246.

¹⁴ A Catalogue of the Names of Friends in the Ministry, who visited this Nation, Since the Year 1655, Friends Historical Library, Dublin (Room 4, Shelf P, Number 26). This list, drawn up by Abraham Abell in 1756, uses an earlier list produced by William Morris who died in 1680. This "Catalogue" was published in *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 10 (1913), 157-180, 212-262. Robert Malin, also "Irish," is also included in this list, but the names of Luffe and Perrot are not to be found there.

from the Cromwellian forces, as did Quakerism in Bandon, Cork, Youghal, and Limerick. Yet, at the same time, it reached out into the native population, for Marcus Lynch was a member of that well-known Galway family which had provided numerous mayors and other officials for a two hundred year period.

It is probable that Galway Friends were visited in 1659 by Thomas Murford (Morford), who in May of that year wrote that he expected to make his way from Waterford to Limerick and Galway. He also reported that Thomas Loe had been in "the west."¹⁵ Later that same year John Bowron and John Robinson, who had been in Ulster and then in Dublin, had "drawings" toward "Connow" (Connaught).¹⁶ John Burnyeat was in Galway in 1660, but his *Journal* tells us nothing of the state of Quakerism there.¹⁷ He was accompanied by Robert Lodge on this visit.

It was in this same year, 1660, that the first *known* suffering of resident Galway Friends occurred. The "Great Book of Sufferings," which is so full of early examples of sufferings in Cork, Dublin, Waterford, and elsewhere, makes practically no mention of Galway (other than the brief experiences of Shaw, Stubbs, and Norton already noted above). Probably Galway Friends in the 1656-1659 period suffered in the same ways and for the same reasons that their brethren elsewhere did, but their troubles before 1660 were not recorded. In the spring of 1660, however, a general persecution broke out, when Lt. Col. [Francis?] Gore "The Governor" of the garrison and Gabriell King "major" ordered "Marke Lynch, Richard Blisse and the rest of the Quakers in Galway" to depart the city about the second month [April], simply for being Quakers. When this period had expired the officers of Galway took up six Friends, kept them prisoners and then expelled them from the city—commanding them not to return to their houses and families. If any of those banished dared to return to their families they were to be put in prison.¹⁸

¹⁵ Swarthmore MSS I, 26 (Tr. II, 781), dated 6th of 3rd Month, 1659. It seems very likely that Loe was active in Galway in his 1657-1660 visit to Ireland.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 90 (Tr. I, 235), dated 1st of 9th Month, 1659.

¹⁷ John Burnyeat, *The Truth Exalted* (London, 1691), pp. 26-27.

¹⁸ National Sufferings, I (A.11).

Marcus [Marke] Lynch, if banished in 1660, was back in Galway by 1661 and very possibly was imprisoned there. The Bristol Manuscripts contain the "Third part" of a discussion between Edward Burrough and some "Romish priests, prisoners in Galway."¹⁹ This manuscript was sent on to Burrough by Marcus Lynch on the 10th of the 8th Month, 1661. Had Lynch become acquainted with Burrough in 1660 during the latter's second visit to Ireland?²⁰ Did Lynch's own imprisonment allow him to facilitate the exchange of these theological disputations between "Romish priests, prisoners in Galway" and Burrough now back in England? If Lynch and other Galway Friends were imprisoned in 1661, then they must have been freed by the order which William Edmundson succeeded in obtaining in Dublin—freeing Irish Quakers wherever they might be held prisoner.²¹ Shortly thereafter Edmundson spent six weeks visiting meetings "throughout the Nation," possibly even that meeting in Galway itself.

Practically nothing else is known about Galway Quakerism during the remainder of the 1660s. John Burnyeat was among Galway Quakers again in 1664, when he took shipping from there for America about 7th Month 1664.²² In 1669 they were also visited by Solomon Eccles, who is remembered for his "signs and wonders" throughout the British Isles. Here, we are told,

Solomon Eccles being moved of the Lord to go a Sign, on the 14th day of the 7th Moneth, at that Naked, with Fire and Brimstone burning on his Head, without the Gates of the City, unto a Papist's Mass Meeting, and the Fryar and People being upon their Knees, . . . [he called them to repentance].

Eccles, accompanied by Randal Cousins, Nicholas Gribble, and Henry Bloodsworth (all Irish Friends, several of which may have lived in Galway) went into Galway, calling that city and its inhabitants to repentance. All four were then imprisoned, and Eliza Harper who came to visit them in

¹⁹ Bristol MSS, V, 99–106. A microfilm copy of this manuscript collection is found in Friends House Library; the original volume is deposited at Bristol Archives Office, SF/CI/1(a).

²⁰ The language of Lynch's note to Burrough suggests a warm friendship between the two. Was Burrough in Galway in 1660, or did Lynch meet him while both were engaged in religious travel?

²¹ William Edmundson, *Journal* (Dublin, 1715), p. 40.

²² Burnyeat, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

prison was also confined for a few days. Then all five Friends were released.²³ In this same year, 1669, George Fox may have visited Galway, when he travelled "through" the nation, although Galway is not specifically mentioned in his account.²⁴

Very few references to Quakers in Galway are found in the 1670s. In 1672 Friends there were visited by Edward Edwards (d. 1706) and John Tiffin (d. 1701). Edwards reported that "a good meeting I had there amongst friends," although there was some disturbance toward the end by a "Jangling Baptist."²⁵ In 1673 Galway Friends undoubtedly were also visited by John Burnyeat, when he landed in Galway on returning from his second religious journey to America.²⁶ This visit is the last religious visit recorded for Galway, although there probably were others in the next few years before the meeting there ceased to exist.

It was in this same year that is found the last reference to Galway Meeting in the records of National Meeting of Irish Friends. On the 5th of 3rd Month, 1673, it was minuted that

Friends of Galloway [Galway] are desired to gett a Register Book for Births, Buryalls, Marriages & Sufferings . . . and thatt some of thatt Meeting to come to the Six weeks Meetings & every time bring an acc[oun]t thither to the Men of the Births, Buryalls, and intentions of Marriages, &c . . . and that they get a burying place at Galway.²⁷

This passage shows that there still must have been a sizeable Quaker community left in Galway in 1673 for such concern to be shown about records and representatives at the Six Weeks

²³ Thomas Holme and Abraham Fuller, *A Brief Relation of Some part of the Suffering of the True Christians, The People of God (in Scorn called Quakers) in Ireland* (n.p., 1672), p. 45. Cf. John M. Douglas, "Early Quakerism in Ireland", *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 48 (1956), 11-12, and especially p. 12 where he states that Quakers in Galway were "very few" (his only comment on Galway Quakerism). Eliza Harper's name is mistakenly spelled *Hooper* by Joseph Besse. Concerning going naked as a sign, see Kenneth L. Carroll, "Early Quakers and 'Going Naked as a Sign'," *Quaker History*, LXVII (1978), 69-87.

²⁴ George Fox, *Journal* ed. John L. Nickalls (Cambridge, 1952), p. 547.

²⁵ Anthony Sharp MSS, IV, 25, contains a letter from Edwards to Sharp dated 14th of 6th Month from Mallow, reporting this earlier stop in Galway. The Sharp MSS are in Friends' Historical Library, Dublin. Edwards had gone from Galway to Limerick, while Tiffin had been sent on to Dublin.

²⁶ Burnyeat, *op. cit.*, p. 61. They arrived Galway on the 24th of 3rd Month (May). There is no further mention of Galway in Burnyeat's rather sparse account of his religious labors.

²⁷ National Meeting Proceedings, I (1671-1688), 14. This volume, numbered A. 1, is found in Friends' Historical Library, Dublin.

Meeting. The latest known references to Galway Quakers all deal with individuals who had "gone out" in their behaviour and had to be dealt with. The very fact that all correspondence seems to have been handled by Friends from Leinster suggests that Galway Meeting was too weak to discipline its "disorderly walkers" and that its demise was not far away.

Anthony Sharp (1643-1706), well-to-do wool merchant and influential Dublin Friend, wrote to Marcus Lynch on January 30, 1674/5, that he had recently encountered Lynch's cousin Peter Orinby (Ormsby) in a shop in Dublin and heard a disturbing report that Lynch "had turned from being a Quaker, and as I remember said thou wore a sword, &c." Sharp noted that he had heard some other troubling reports. In a very moving passage Sharp then expressed his hope that Lynch would soon return to his "first love" and then warns him of the affliction he was bringing upon the "righteous" as well as the woe which was to be his own "portion."²⁸ No evidence of Lynch's reclamation has been found.

Several years after the Lynch case it was reported that William Stanley of Galway had taken an oath (whether in connection with some political appointment or legal development is unknown). Friends were not satisfied with the explanation he furnished them early in 1677, so that he was written to once more.²⁹ The National Meeting in November of that year appointed Robert Taylor and Anthony Sharp to write to him once again on that matter.³⁰ In July 1678 William Edmundson was requested to correspond with Stanley, asking him to draw up a paper of condemnation and to attend the next General or Province Meeting.³¹ By September Stanley still had not appeared before the Province Meeting, but the Meeting's paper of condemnation of Stanley was still not made public—for Gershon Boate had it "in his heart" to "visit him in love and to persuade him to Condemn the said action publicly," with Stanley's own paper to be set up in a public place in Galway ("Namely the Customs

²⁸ Sharp MSS, I, 77. Lynch probably died *ca.* 1678.

²⁹ Minutes of Leinster Province Meeting, I (1670-1707), 48. These manuscript records are at Friends' Historical Library, Dublin, and are numbered as Volume B. 1. This minute is dated 21st of 2nd Month, 1677.

³⁰ National Meeting Proceedings, I (1671-1688), p. 44.

³¹ Leinster Province Meeting Minutes, I (B. 1), 65.

House").³² Two months later, in November, Stanley was present at the Province Meeting and showed himself willing to give forth such a paper.³³ Yet, by April 1679 Stanley had done nothing. It was decided, therefore, that Friends would proceed with their own paper of condemnation of his "disorderly walking."³⁴

It would appear that Galway Quakerism was quite weak by the 1670s. The very fact that Leinster, and especially Dublin, Friends were given the tasks of dealing with Lynch and Stanley suggests that the number of Friends in Galway was small. Their isolation from other Quaker communities seems to have kept them from being attached to any Monthly Meeting, that body of church government which was so important in seeing that Friends and meetings lived in "gospel order." The defection of Lynch and Stanley, two stalwarts of the Galway Meeting, must have seriously weakened the remaining group. Quite possibly some members removed to America (as many Irish Friends were doing at this very time) or to other sections of Ireland. Death itself would have removed others—both the worthy "elders" who had suffered persecution in the past and the younger members who might have taken places of leadership had they but lived. Whatever the reasons, Galway Quakerism soon disappeared. Even its very memory was soon obliterated, so that Wight and Ruddy seemed to know nothing of it,³⁵ and James Dickinson (1659–1741) was able to report that in 1701 he held meetings in Connaught where "no Friends" dwelt.³⁶

At the turn of the century there appeared a growing concern on the part of Friends (both Irish and travelling Friends from abroad) to reach out to Connaught once more—and especially to the people of Sligo. William Edmundson, travelling under religious concern, held meetings in Sligo in 1699 and again in 1701.³⁷ James Dickinson likewise was drawn to that area:

³² *Ibid.*, I (B. 1), 67.

³³ *Ibid.*, I (B. 1), 71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I (B. 1), 74. William Stanley appears to have been received back into the Society, and served on appointments in 1680 and 1681, but his name is not mentioned after the latter date.

³⁵ Wight and Ruddy, *op. cit.*

³⁶ James Dickinson, *Journal* (London, 1745), p. 136.

³⁷ Edmundson, *Journal*, pp. 210, 245.

I was concerned to travel to many Places in the Province of Connaught, several [Irish] Friends accompanying me; we had Meetings at Inns, and in Places where no Friends lived; the Testimony of Truth was freely declared, and the People directed to the Light of Christ Jesus: Some strongly opposed the Truth, and others confessed thereunto.³⁸

At a "Select meeting of concerned friends: of the three Provinces" (Ulster, Leinster, and Munster) at the time of the Half-Year's Meeting on the 9th of the 9th Month, 1703, it was noted that, "of late times it has been in the hearts of some publique friends to visit Remote places in the North, and other parts where no meetings are settled." Those going forth in this service were to be accompanied by "weighty, sound and seasoned" Friends. They should also have the unanimous consent of the Province Meeting, after having already received the consent of their own Monthly Meeting.³⁹ In 1706, it was recorded that,

as Friends of the Ministry of late years have had a Service in several places up and down this Nation by haveing meetings amongst unconvinced people where Meetings used not to be, and hath been followed time after time by other Quallified friends, And that an openness Appears to bee [present] in many places. It is thought fitt to offer it to publick friends that the consideration thereof may lye before them Answering that Service.⁴⁰

It was this "openness" to hear, united with the proclamation of the Quaker message, which brought into existence a small group of convinced Friends at Sligo—probably late in 1714. The first mention of this group dates from 1715, when it was reported that "there is an openness in several places of the three Provinces, to hear the Testimony of Truth declared, and that in Connaught near Sligoe, there are some convinced; who keep a meeting."⁴¹ The National Meeting requested that Ulster and Leinster Province Meetings remember these Sligo Friends, visit them, and report to the next National Meeting. By November 1715 it was learned that John Byrn (Burn) and Thomas Siggins, two

³⁸ Dickinson, *Journal*, p. 135-36.

³⁹ National Meeting Proceedings, I (A.1), 289.

⁴⁰ Leinster Province Meeting Minutes, I (B. 1), 391.

⁴¹ National Half-Year's Meeting Minutes, II (1708-1757), minutes for 8th to 11th of 3rd Month (May), 1715. This volume is numbered A. 3. Ulster Friends twice visited Sligo in 1715, while Thomas Lightfoot, Benjamin Parvin, and John Russell were visitors there in the summer of 1715.

of those lately convinced at Sligo, were now "close prisoners" in the Sligo gaol for their testimony against tithes. Byrn and Siggins were eventually released through the endeavours of Friends (from Dublin and Moate Monthly Meetings) and the assistance of their neighbours--with "the priest, sheriff & gaoler, etc. forgiving the payment of their demands." The two Sligo Quakers were reported to have "demeaned and behaved themselves well in their suffering and came out clear after having been Prisoners about six months."⁴²

Shortly thereafter Leinster Friends learned, through a letter from James Byrn, that both he and Siggins were having further difficulty because of tithes and were scheduled to be brought before the Bishop's Court.⁴³ Dublin Friends were asked to communicate with Sir Edward Crofton (who lived near Roscommon) about this new difficulty.⁴⁴ Also, Gershon Boate and some other Friends from Moate Monthly Meeting travelled into Connaught to meet with Sligo Friends and "to endeavour in Truth's way, to prevent the Imprisonment of the few Men Friends there." They reported to Leinster Provincial Meeting that "it's hoped [that] by the endeavours of Sir Edward Crofton who appears much Concerned to prevent the Same, their Liberty is likely to be continued."⁴⁵

By May 1717 another Sligo Friend, George Burn, was a prisoner for his testimony against tithes, and Leinster Friends were labouring for his release.⁴⁶ About this very same time the rest of the "few Friends who lived near Sligoe . . . [had] their farms whereon they lived . . . taken over their heads," so that they decided to move to County Roscommon near Friends at Moate.⁴⁷ With the help of Moate Friends, and some assistance from other Leinster Quakers, they settled in Roscommon northwest of Athlone. Thus the Sligo Meeting, which had come into being about

⁴² *Ibid.*, II (A.3), minutes for 8th to 10th of 3rd Month, 1716.

⁴³ Leinster Province Meeting Minutes, II (1708-1760), 142. This volume is numbered B. 2.

⁴⁴ Those Dublin Friends asked to intervene with Crofton were Samuel Baker, Samuel Braithwaite, Joseph Fade, and George Rooke.

⁴⁵ Leinster Province Meeting Minutes, II (B, 2), 147.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II (B. 2), 155.

⁴⁷ National Half-Year's Meeting Minutes, II (A. 3), minutes for 8th to 11th of 3rd Month, 1717.

1714 and which had been "settled" in 1715 or 1716,⁴⁸ ceased to exist in 1717. In spite of the disappearance of a Sligo Quaker community, travelling Friends were still drawn to that area for several more generations. John Fothergill (1676–1745) and Benjamin Holme (1683–1749), for example, held a meeting in the "Sessions-house" there on December 23, 1724, noting that "the Sheriff and several more of the People [present] being very loving."⁴⁹ Mary Peisley Neale (1717–1757), and her English companion, Catharine Payton (1727–1794), visited "the towns-people of Sligo in Connaught, and felt much satisfaction; she thought they were well worth visiting, and said there seemed much more openness to declare the Truth amongst those of other societies, than amongst them that go under our name."⁵⁰ Two American Quakers, John Pemberton (1727–1795) and William Matthews (1732–1792) held a meeting at Sligo in 1783.⁵¹ Mary Dudley (1750–1823), an English Friend who for a period resided in Ireland, held an appointed meeting in the Presbyterian meeting house at Sligo in 1795 and reported that "A large number of solid people attended, who seemed disposed to receive the doctrines of Truth; indeed I trust some bowed under its precious influence."⁵²

Those Quakers who left Sligo for County Roscommon in 1717 settled at or near Ballymurray (also called Mary's Town), about three miles south-southeast of the town of Roscommon and about ten miles from Athlone. In November 1717 it was reported that they had "not yet settled to satisfaction." Within six months, however, it was noted that not only were they now comfortably settled but that some other Friends from other sections of Ireland had also arrived—so that "a meeting is settled there for the Worship of God."⁵³

⁴⁸ National Book for Recording Epistles and Papers from the Provinces, etc. (A. 20), epistle from National Half-Years Meeting to London Yearly Meeting dated 3rd Month 10th, 1716.

⁴⁹ John Fothergill, *An account of the life and travels . . . of John Fothergill* 1753 p. 222; *The Friends' Library*, XIII, 409.

⁵⁰ *The Friends' Library*, XI, 94.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 313.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XIV, 332. Mary Dudley gives a lengthy description of this meeting and of her discussions with those who had attended, reporting "My very soul cleaved to some of the inhabitants of Sligo, and the remembrance of having been there is precious". (Mary Dudley, *Life*, 1825, p. 205).

⁵³ National Half-Year's Meeting Minutes, II (A. 3), minutes for 8th to 11th, 9th Month, 1717, and 8th to 10th of 9th Month, 1718.

Among those coming from Sligo were James Byrn, his father Edward Byrn, George Byrn (James' brother), Thomas Siggins, and their families. Also arriving in 1718 were Robert Sinklar (Sinclar, St. Clar, etc.), Gershon Boate, Joseph Nevitt, and their families from Montrath in Queen's County.⁵⁴ Other Friends who moved in about the same time were Gershon Boate, Jr., Henry Willson, Thomas Jackson, and their families, as well as several others named Burton and Heaton.⁵⁵

By June 1718, after most of these Friends from Sligo, Montrath, and elsewhere had settled in County Roscommon, Moate Monthly Meeting appointed John Wyly, Jacob Fuller, Josuha Clibborn, and Jonathan Robinson to speak to Gershon Boate "in order to have a convenient piece of ground sett out at Ballymurry in the County of Roscommon for a Burial place & to build a meeting house on."⁵⁶ It was not until 1721, however, that the meeting house was built.⁵⁷ Ballymurray Friends were also asked, in 1721, to "take care Duely to attend the Assizes and Sessions at Roscommon, without any further Advice of this [Moate Monthly] Meeting."⁵⁸

The records of Moate Monthly Meeting, to which Ballymurray Friends belonged, contain relatively few references to Friends in County Roscommon. Yet, there are enough for us to make some observations about the life of that meeting. First of all, there were the usual marriages—both within the meeting and with members of other meetings. Isaac Burton and Rachel Heaton, both of Ballymurray, were married at Moate in 1724.⁵⁹ Joan Jackson of Ballymurray married Thomas Sproule of Westmeath in 1719 (at Waterstown in Westmeath).⁶⁰ The first marriage at Ballymurray Meeting House was probably that of Deborah Willson of Ballymurray and Richard Church of Athy (County Kildare) in

⁵⁴ Moate Monthly Meeting Births, Marriages, Deaths (H. 1), pp. 68, 77, 89, 103. James Byrn and his family settled at Galey (Gailey, Gawley, Gayly) on the western shore of Lough Ree, while the others appear to have settled at Ballymurray.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 177, 189.

⁵⁶ Moate Men's Meeting Minutes, 1680–1731 (H. 7), p. 178b.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 199b.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192b.

⁵⁹ Moate Births, Marriages, and Deaths (H. 1), p. 189.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177. She was probably the daughter of Thomas Jackson.

1728.⁶¹ Two years later Deborah's mother, Mary Willson of Marystown (Ballymurray) married Richard Nevitt at Ballymurray Meeting House on the 16th of 7th Month, 1730.⁶²

There were also the disagreements and disturbances that occasionally mark the lives of individual Quakers, so that the Monthly Meeting was frequently called upon to arbitrate the differences and condemn the disorders that sometimes developed. A dispute between Henry Willson and Gershon Boate, Sr. (both of whom lived at or near Ballymurray) caused Moate Monthly Meeting, in 1726, to appoint a committee to meet with them.⁶³ Much more serious was the trouble between James Byrn and John Sinklar. Byrn's condemnation of his action throws some light on the problem:

Whereas there Came some Difference Between John Sinklar and mee by his threatening mee Some time agoe which Since hath occasioned us to Quarrell which Quarrell made mee Challenge him to meet & fight as wee did which was Contrary to our Profession and a Scandall to the truth we profess & is a Scandall to our Society which was don[e] & acted by & in a wrong Spirit which Scandalous action I doe Condemn and hopes Never to be Guilty of the like again and am h[e]artily Sorry that Ever I was Guilty of the Like.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197. Witnesses, mostly from Ballymurray, included the following: Gershon, Hannah, Rachel, and Susannah Boate; Abigail, Edward (2), George, James, John and Sarah Byrn(e); Jane Fenn; George Heaton; Richard Nevitt; Thomas Siggins; James, John, Mary and Robert Sinklar; and Elizabeth (2), Mary and Susanna Willson.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 202. Many members of the Boate, Bryn, Heaton, Nevitt, Nixon, Pritchard, Siggins, Sinklar and Willson families were present.

⁶³ Moate Men's Meeting Minutes, 1680-1731 (H. 7), p. 215b. Boate's first name is sometimes spelled Gershon and at other times Gershom. Both of these names are biblical, the first the son of Levi and the second the son of Moses.

⁶⁴ Moate Monthly Meeting Testimonies of Denial, 1685-1858 (H. 6), loose sheet at front of volume dated 27th of 4th Month, 1731. This volume is at Friends Historical Library, Dublin. As early as the 7th Month 1729 it was recorded that Mary Sinclair (Sinklar), John Sinklar and James Byrn "ye younger" had turned in to Moate Monthly Meeting papers respecting their quarrelling. Thomas Siggins was appointed to take the papers back to Ballymurray and to read them at a public meeting there (Cf. Moate Men's Meeting Minutes, (H. 7), p. 240).

John Sinklar's condemnation is as follows: "I do acknowledge that I have done amis[s] and Contrary to the peaceable Sprit of Truth which I profess, In Resisting when Strook by James Burn and also In answering his Challing [sic] and being so Disobedient to my Mother in not coming home with her when shee Comanded me which actions hath grieved my Dear parents and friends and brought reproach on the profession I Make for all which I am very sorry and do Condemn my S[ai]d Doings hoping for the time to Com[e] to be more Carefull and warned thereby and Desires friends to accept of this my acknowledgement". This is found on a loose sheet in the front of the same volume, dated 27th of 5th Month, 1731. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 42, for copies of these two originals.

Several members of the Boate family were testified against for their "disorderly walking." Samuel Boate was disowned in 1735 for running up bills, refusing to pay his creditors, and for "leaving the nation."⁶⁵ Gershon Boate the Younger, already noted for his fighting spirit, was disowned in 1735 for having a child by a servant. Boate, left with three small children at the death of his wife, had kept the maid in his house even after being cautioned by family and Friends—thus precipitating his downfall.⁶⁶

One of the most significant developments for Ballymurray Friends came in the winter of 1739–1740, when a small Quaker community of weavers left its former home at Newport (County Mayo) and removed to County Roscommon—settling mainly at Killarney and Galey near Ballymurray. This Newport Quaker group had originally come into existence at almost the same time that Sligo Friends were moving to Ballymurray. Starting in 1719 and coming from Drogheda and Dublin in Leinster and from Rathfryland Meeting (County Down) and Dunclady Meeting (County Derry) in Ulster, members of the Cantrell, Evans, Kelly, Maga (Magaw, McGae, etc.), Peck, Sutcliffe, Taylor and other families settled in Newport, largely at the instigation of Captain Pratt. They earned a rather precarious existence from linen weaving, so that they needed assistance from their fellow-Quakers on several occasions.⁶⁷ Some of them, in hope of a better financial future, removed to America in 1730, while others decided to continue the struggle a while longer in Newport. This small community also had its problems of "discipline." In 1720, shortly after their arrival, William Warding was testified against for causing the Truth to suffer in several ways.⁶⁸ Samuel Kennin (Kenning, Kennan) was disowned in 1723 for drunkenness and for "marrying out."⁶⁹ William Magae condemned his earlier "outgoing in marriage" at the beginning of 1727, while Susanna Cantrell did likewise at the beginning of 1728.⁷⁰ Only one Friends' wedding, that of Thomas McClung and Elizabeth Evans (in March 1726),

⁶⁵ Moate Monthly Meeting Denials (H.6), p. 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51. Gershon Boate the younger was also dealt with in 1729 for having shot his landlord's sow.

⁶⁷ See *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 54 (1976), 15–27.

⁶⁸ Moate Men's Meeting Minutes (H. 7), p. 188b.

⁶⁹ Moate Monthly Meeting Denials (H.6), p. 40.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

took place in Newport; Samuel Evans of Newport Meeting had to go to Waterstown (County Westmeath) for his marriage to Ann Hall on March 1, 1729.⁷¹ The isolation of Newport Quakers from other Friends, when added to their own small size and the fact that most of them were so closely related, created a real problem for these Friends—for, if they remained in Newport, their children (many of whom were reaching a marriageable age) would be forced into “outgoing in marriage.” This was the major reason that Newport Friends finally decided to remove from County Mayo to County Roscommon, effecting that change of residence (with assistance from other Irish Quakers) in the very difficult winter of 1739–1740. Thus, the Newport Meeting, after a brief existence of only twenty years, came to an end; however, the life of Ballymurray Meeting was strengthened by the arrival of these Friends from western Connaught.

It was probably the influx of these Friends from Newport which allowed Ballymurray Meeting to exist for another century, for there were continuing problems of “discipline” which led to many being dropped from membership (a number of whom had come from Newport, it must be admitted). Usually the charge was “outgoing in marriage” or “marriage by a priest,” including Margaret Siggins (1741), Margaret Peck (1744), James Henan (1746), Sarah Alexander (1756), Mary Henan (1758), Abigail Byrn (1759), Jacob Fairweather and Sarah Magaw (1761), John Alexander (1766), Elizabeth Byrn (1777), and Sarah Byrn (1783).⁷² There were also several other Ballymurray cases related to marriage that came before Moate Monthly Meeting. Among the more colourful examples was that of Thomas Robinson, son of Jonathan Robinson of Killarney in County Roscommon. After twice being refused permission by Nathan Nevitt to court Nevitt’s daughter, Thomas gave way to temptation and

went after a wicked Clandestine & Audacious manner, to her Uncle’s house at Gaily, where she was at that time & there being joined by a Number of armed Men did forcibly take her out of her said Uncle’s house late in the Night, & put the whole Family in great terror &

⁷¹ Moate Births, Marriages, Deaths (H. 1), p. 200.

⁷² Moate Monthly Meeting Denials (H. 6), pp. 61, 71, 77, 83, 103, 104, 108, 110, 113, 118, 120.

fear of Losing their Lives, as one of them fired a Pistol after [her] Aunt when she ran to alarm their Neighbours which they being apprehensive of Went away, & left the young woman.

Robinson was disowned for this act on the 14th of 1st month, 1770; several years later, however, he condemned his misbehaviour and sought to be readmitted into the Society.⁷³ The most scandalous case to be brought before the Monthly Meeting occurred at mid-century and involved two members of the Byrn family—Sarah (daughter of James, of Galey in County Roscommon) and her half-uncle Edward (who had attended meeting from time to time in the past but who was not counted as a member). The two of them eloped together, settled on an island in the Shannon, living as “man and wife.” and telling John Byrn that they were married. Sarah Byrn was disowned for this act of immorality.⁷⁴

There were some disownments for other reasons: John Sinklar, charged with non-payment of debts and absconding (1745), Robert Sinklar, who in his “younger years has followed the light more carefully,” was guilty of unspecified “outgoings” (1750), and John Byrn of Carronolan in County Roscommon for not attending meetings and for taking an oath (1789).⁷⁵ These disownments (although occasionally followed by an acknowledgment and a request to be received back into membership—usually several years later) both served to weaken the Ballymurray Meeting and to point up the added “snares” experienced by members of a small and somewhat isolated Quaker community. Removals from County Roscommon also outnumbered those moving in, as Friends left for more prosperous areas of Ireland and even for America, as in the case of James Hennen (Henan) in 1751.⁷⁶ Then, too, late in the eighteenth century many of the old stalwarts of Ballymurray Meeting (who had come originally from Sligo, Newport, and County Westmeath) had died—leaving that Quaker community poorer and weaker by their going.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 115. The disowning was signed by Nathan and John Nevitt, John and James Burn, Thomas Alexander, James Gaw (Magae), and Anthony Robinson (all of Ballymurray Meeting) and a number of other Friends belonging to Moate Monthly Meeting.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 82, 85.

⁷⁶ Hennen's certificate for Pennsylvania was dated 28th of 2nd Month, 1751.

Travelling "public" Friends visited County Roscommon throughout the entire life of Ballymurray Meeting. Among the first was John Fothergill who came to Ballymurray twice. In 1724 he recorded that "I went with several Friends to Bally-murry in Connaught, where a Meeting had been settled some time; and on the 15th [of the 7th Month] had a pretty open helpful Meeting there, in the reaching of the Love of Christ, yet in much plain dealing and faithful warning to keep to Truth, that so they might be blessed."⁷⁷ He returned again on the 1st of 11th Month, 1725-6 "to Mary's town [Ballymurray] to Gershon Boate's, jun., and had a good and large Meeting of Friends and others the next Day, and some good Service with the Families in the Evening."⁷⁸ Samuel Bownas was at Ballymurray Meeting in 1740, and Samuel Fothergill of Warrington was present in 1744.⁷⁹ Other visitors included John Churchman from America (who reported having "a meeting in a barn at Gailey, with a few Friends" sometime early in 1750), Ruth Follows and Anne White (1761), Joseph Oxley (1761), James Gough (1774, 1779), John Pemberton of Philadelphia (1783, 1784), Mary Ridgway and Jane Watson (1783), Patience Brayton and Rebecca Wright of America (1784), Mary Dudley (1795), Richard Jordan of America (1801), Thomas Shillitoe (1809, 1811), and Henry Hull of America (1811).⁸⁰ Many of these travelling Friends also held meetings in Athlone (on the very edge of Connaught), where Friends had lived and held meetings for worship off and on since 1660. The story of Athlone Quakerism still remains to be written.

John Pemberton reported that, in 1783, at a "crowded meeting at Ballymurray, divers people of the upper rank" were present. Concerning the meeting in 1784 he notes, "the priest as we were informed, intimidated the people; notwithstanding which, there was a pretty large meeting; considering the place, it was quiet, and many appeared satisfied."⁸¹ Mary Dudley noted that in 1795 Friends had the use of the Sessions House at Roscommon and, after having

⁷⁷ John Fothergill, *Account*, 1753, p. 212; *Friends' Library*, XIII, 406.

⁷⁸ John Fothergill, *op. cit.*, p. 233; *Friends' Library*, XIII, 409.

⁷⁹ *Friends' Library*, III, 63; IX, 120.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 436; III, 63, 122, 146; IV, 31, 187, 282; VI, 218, 313, 325; IX, 34, 38, 120; X, 456; XIII, 316, 406, 409; XIV, 331.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 313, 325.

circulated notice of the meeting, had a large attendance in the evening.⁸² Shillitoe, accompanied by William Neale, recorded that "Friends having been informed of our proposed visit, informed their neighbours, who came flocking to the meeting, which tried me not a little, my prospects being confined to Friends. The meeting, I believe, proved satisfactory to all parties."⁸³

Ballmurray Meeting appears to have reached its zenith in size and "life" in the eighteenth century, with decline setting in even before the end of the century. Weakness continued to grow, so that by 1840 Ballymurray was almost never represented at Moate Monthly Meeting.⁸⁴ Some few Friends continued to gather for worship at the meeting house, which in 1840 was repaired at the cost of £3:0:4.⁸⁵ In the autumn of 1844 Ballymurray Meeting requested the "attention and care" of Moate Monthly Meeting, so that a committee of Friends travelled to Ballymurray to meet with the few Friends still there. They met at the home of "a woman Friend" (Rachel Pellett?) near the meeting-house "which place is open for other meetings for worship on first days." It was reported that several women and children usually attend, although one woman sometimes was absent because of "attendance" on her aged mother. A male Friend and his children, living three miles away at Roscommon, had not attended for several months. One non-member, a young woman, also attended from time to time.⁸⁶ Other Friends, appointed by the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, reported to Leinster Quarterly Meeting in the spring of 1845 that

they feel for the lonely situation of the few members who are left in that remote place, some of whom thro' infirmities of age, are much confined to their dwellings; but they are still favored with ability, to use the strength afforded them, & faithfully to maintain their testimony by meeting together at the time and place appointed.⁸⁷

⁸² Mary Dudley, *Life*, p. 207; *Friends' Library*, XIV, 333.

⁸³ Thomas Shillitoe, *Journal* (1830), i. 159; *Friends' Library* III, 146.

⁸⁴ Rough Minutes of Moate Monthly Meeting, 1840-1853 (H. 21), minutes for 1840, *passim*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, minutes for 19th of 6th Month, 1840.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, minutes for 18th of 10th Month and 15th of 12th Month, 1844.

⁸⁷ Leinster Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1825-1857 (B. 5), minutes for 31st of 3rd Month, 1845.

In September 1846 Rachel Pellett, probably the mainstay of Ballymurray Meeting, requested "assistance" from the Monthly Meeting. By the end of that year she was dead.⁸⁸ With her death came also, it would seem, the demise of a Ballymurray meeting, for there appear to be no later references to it. The second edition of Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1847) gives a brief description of the village of Ballymurray and mentions the "place of worship" of the Society of Friends but makes no mention of whether or not meetings for worship were still being held there at the time of the writing of this account.⁸⁹

Shortly after Ballymurray Meeting passed out of existence, the next chapter in the story of Quakerism in Connaught began—with the coming of James Ellis and his wife from England to Letterfrack. Ellis was a native of Leicester (which his brother represented in Parliament). Moving to Letterfrack, Ellis (a former flour miller and then a worsted manufacturer in Bradford) purchased 1800 acres of land—mostly mountain or bog—on which he built a "commodious" house. Although the local wage scale was six pence a day, Ellis offered his workers eight pence and, we are told, would have paid even more had he not met with such strong opposition from those who claimed that he would cause havoc in the whole local labour market. Sophia Sturge even reports that Ellis, upon the complaint of local employers over his eight pence wage, actually raised their pay an additional two pence a day.⁹⁰ Ellis seems to have employed over eighty men—draining the bogs, planting trees, building walls, roads, gardens, cottages, a school and a dispensary and even a small "temperance" hotel during the eight years he was at Letterfrack.⁹¹ Letterfrack had been chosen by Ellis as

⁸⁸ Rough Minutes of Moate Monthly Meeting, 1840–1853 (H. 21), minutes for 18th of 9th Month, 1846, and 19th of 2nd Month, 1847. Her death took place on the 11th of 12th Month, 1846.

⁸⁹ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (London, 1847), I, 148. Ballymurry, a village in the parish of Kilmean, is described as three miles south-southeast of Roscommon, on the road from Roscommon to Athlone, with a few neatly built houses and about twenty cabins—as well as a Roman Catholic Chapel with thatched roof and the Friends Meeting House.

⁹⁰ William R. Hughes, *Sophia Sturge: A Memoir* (London, 1940), pp. 39–40. One wonders if her story is somewhat embroidered or even apocryphal.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–42.

the scene of his work largely on the advice of James Tuke who had administered Quaker relief funds in the west of Ireland during the Great Famine and had described the area as one of the most deeply suffering parts of Ireland, in which "mounds might be seen by the roadside, the resting-places of victims buried where they fell."⁹²

Several of Ellis's letters are still extant and give some insight into the progress of his work. The earliest letter, written after only five months in Ireland, tells of real progress—growing beans, peas, turnips, carrots, parsnips, spring wheat, and even strawberries (which "grow like weeds"). He reported that about one-quarter of his potatoes were already diseased, even though they had cut off the blackened tops of the vines. Also, they had completed four thousand yards of walling (including much bog fencing, about six feet high), drained about forty acres, planted five hundred willows, and built "considerable lengths of occupation roads." Ellis also wrote that "Our house looks rather more imposing than I expected, and will, when completed, be the best dwelling in Connemara." Also, he noted, that three hundred yards of "well laid down gravel walks" had been constructed in his "pleasure grounds," adding "for James Ellis must needs have such strange things in the midst of the bog."⁹³

A second letter, dated 1852, notes that the potatoes were the worst since Ellis had arrived in 1849 and that his neighbours reported that the situation was the worst since 1846. Now, however, most of the people had work and could buy "Indian meal." He also recounted that he had recently been visited by John Bright who had been "attending the Episcopalian & Romish places of worship, & had come to the conclusion that the latter were by far the most sincere worshippers." And Ellis added, "so Think I." He noted that he had already completed "our little Dispensary house" and that "just beyond it we have finished two cottages which also look neat, & are occuppied one by our carpenter & the other by Mary's washerwoman." He then concluded by expressing his hope to build more cottages the next year, noting that he was already constructing one for his foreman on the south

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹³ Letter of James Ellis to Isaac Robson, 9th of 8th (?) Month, 1849, Friends House Library, London, Portfolio B, item 59.

side of Letterfrack.⁹⁴ In the last of these letters, Ellis writes that "Our Mountain home feels very homish to me, more so, I think, than it ever did before." He also noted, undoubtedly with real satisfaction, that "our school prospers again."⁹⁵ Soon, however, not so long after this letter was written, Ellis' eight years' of work at Letterfrack came to an end, for a breakdown in health forced him to return to England.⁹⁶

A generation later Sophia Sturge arrived in Letterfrack on an autumn day in 1888, having chosen that village "as the scene of her work because of the golden memories which the old Quaker's [Ellis] loving enterprise had left in the place." Soon she started teaching the young girls the art of basket-making, and eventually produced a self-sustaining enterprise there—with much of the finished results being sold in Britain. Sophia Sturge, as a result of health problems, was forced to return home to England, but the work continued—under the direction of a manager—until 1905.⁹⁷

The final development in the story of "Quakerism in Connaught" is still unfolding. In recent years a small number of Irish Friends have established weekend or summer homes in Connemara, especially near the town of Clifden. When they and their families (and sometimes their guests) are in residence a Friends' meeting for worship is sometimes held at Erislannen in the small Church of Ireland building (for which Friends helped provide a new roof some years ago). Even more recently several Friends have settled in Connaught and attend Limerick Meeting.⁹⁸

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⁹⁴ Letter from James Ellis to Isaac Robson, dated 10th of 6th Month, 1852; Friends House Library, Portfolio B, item 109.

⁹⁵ Letter from James Ellis to Isaac Robson, dated 9th of 12th Month, 1855; Friends House Library, Portfolio B, item 104.

⁹⁶ Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-65. A very interesting account of her work is found on pp. 45-65. Sophia Sturge (1849-1936) was born in Birmingham, England, the daughter of Joseph Sturge (1793-1859) and Hannah (Dickinson) Sturge (1816-1896). She resigned from the Society of Friends in 1870 and joined the Anglican church for a time before rejoining Friends once more.

⁹⁸ Many individual Friends and families (such as Jonathan Pim near Newport) have lived in Connaught over the past century, but I have made no attempt to deal with these.