

TOWARDS A BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM POLLARD

William Pollard is known to us today chiefly as one of the three originally anonymous co-authors of *A reasonable faith*. This book, first published in 1884 and going through six editions, was written collaboratively by Francis Frith, William Pollard and William Edward Turner. It was an attack on evangelicalism and represents a crucial stage in the progress of British Quakerism towards the acceptance of liberal theology, which is marked by the Manchester Conference of 1895.

I have already attempted to reconstruct the mind and spirit of William Pollard as one of the co-authors of *A reasonable faith*, basing myself largely on his other writings.¹ He wrote some 18 articles for the *Friends' quarterly examiner* over the period 1867–1890. These mainly cover matters raised in Yearly Meeting and other aspects of current Quaker practice, but the last article is concerned with the Irish Home Rule question, which Pollard, unlike the overwhelming majority of Irish Friends, argued for. His other writings include a couple of early tracts – *Primitive Christianity revived* and *Congregational worship* – published by Alfred W. Bennett in the 'Old Banner' series c.1864–6, and a book entitled *Old-fashioned Quakerism: its origin, results, and future* (1887), which is a distillation of his mature thought. These writings all fit together nicely and do not reveal any striking period of change; they develop easily out of each other. *A reasonable faith* appears entirely in place amongst them.

This was not anything like the whole of William Pollard's contribution to Victorian Quakerism. Born on 10 June 1828, his boyhood was spent at Horsham, Sussex, his education at Friends' School, Croydon, where he remained as a junior teacher. In 1849 he went to train at the Flounders Institute, Ackworth, which had just been founded in 1848, and from 1851 to 1865 he was a teacher at Ackworth. Ill-health forced him to abandon teaching, and he returned south to Reigate, where he took a job as clerk and agent for Francis Frith in his flourishing photographic business, staying there until 1872. The final period of William Pollard's life, from 1872 to 1893, was spent in the Manchester area, where he was secretary and lecturer of the Lancashire & Cheshire International Arbitration Association, a branch of the Peace

Society. The Ackworth period is marked by the publication of *The Ackworth reading book* (1865), an anthology that included a good handful of Quaker extracts, while during the Manchester period there appeared a small number of pamphlets or letters dealing with various aspects of the peace question.

Such is the broad outline of William Pollard's life. It encompasses a considerable amount of different kinds of experience, at both local and national levels. He was an assiduous participant in and commentator on Yearly Meeting from year to year as well as throwing himself into the life of Friends in the diverse regions where he resided at different stages of his mortal pilgrimage. It would be interesting to fill this out in more detail, not because he is likely then to emerge as one of the great figures of Victorian Quakerism, but rather because he might stand as a representative active personality through whom various typical aspects of 19th century Quaker life could be discerned. He was brought up in a Quaker farming family, was educated at his nearest Quaker boarding school and taught there himself before going on to Ackworth. He was recorded a minister by Pontefract MM in 1866 and later occupied posts in Reigate and Manchester which enabled him to exercise his gifts of ministry and exposition to considerable effect.

What sources can be investigated for further information on these matters? There do not appear to be any extant journals or diaries that William Pollard himself kept. For the latter period of his life the columns of *The Friend* provide occasional pieces of information in the form of summaries of the contributions of leading Friends to the sessions of Yearly Meeting, as well as notices of other, local events in which Pollard took part. *The British Friend* may furnish similar material. Then there are the records of preparative, monthly and quarterly meetings. In the cases of Hardshaw East MM and Manchester and Eccles PMs the minutes of those respective meetings mention William Pollard by name in a variety of connexions, e.g. being appointed to visit applicants for membership or those wishing to resign their membership or others who had infringed Quaker practice in some way or other. A diligent sifting of the whole range of these minutes would yield information on the general pattern of Pollard's commitment, though it probably would not give much individual detail.

The printed list of members of Lancashire & Cheshire QM reveals that in 1880 the Pollard family resided at Homefield, Hope Road, Sale, which was convenient for Sale railway station and Ashton-on-Mersey meeting house, built in 1856 primarily to serve the new burial ground. The 1882 list gives a new address: Holmefield House, Clarendon Crescent, Eccles, which was close to the new meeting house in Half

Edge Lane and, again, to Eccles railway station. William Pollard's business address is given as 12 King Street, Manchester, where he worked for the International Arbitration Association. That is some five minutes' walk from Mount Street, where Pollard would have attended monthly meeting (men only), held at 10 a.m. on the appropriate day. Earlier, in 1873 at least, the Association's address had been at 6 St Ann's Square, only a stone's throw from King Street.

It is likely that the records of Ackworth School and the minutes of Ackworth PM and Pontefract MM would provide some information, likewise those of Reigate PM and Dorking, Horsham and Guildford MM, for earlier periods of William Pollard's life. If the records of the Lancashire & Cheshire International Arbitration Association are extant and those of the London-based Peace Society were available, they too would doubtless contain further valuable material on Pollard's employment and long-standing concern for peace.

Whilst I was pursuing some of these avenues into William Pollard's life, I had the good fortune, through the kindness of the late Margaret Dale, daughter of Francis Edward Pollard and granddaughter of William, to gain access to a small quantity of family papers, which shed light on a considerable number of points in William Pollard's life and activities. These documents comprise the following items:

- 1 letter from Susanna Pollard, his mother, to him when he was at school in Croydon, dated 11mo. 2. 1842;
- 3 letters from James Pollard, his father, again to him at Croydon, dated between January and September 1843;
- the sale catalogue for the second and third days' auction of Park Farm, near Horsham, ordered by the executors of the late Mr. James Pollard, 29 September–1 October 1851;
- 6 letters and 2 fragments of letters from Peter Bedford to William Pollard, dated between 1849 and 1859;
- 1 letter from the pupils of the ninth class at Ackworth following Pollard's retirement through ill-health, dated 4mo. 23. [1866];
- 5 letters from John Bright to William Pollard, dated between 1864 and 1876;
- 1 letter from William Pollard to his son William Henry Pollard, dated 30.VIII.1874;
- the notice of the presentation by the Peace Society of the fund subscribed for William Pollard's retirement, dated 21 June 1893, with a handwritten note on the back;
- a photograph of William Pollard with his form at Ackworth, date uncertain.²

These documents are chiefly of sentimental interest for the family, marking significant changes in William Pollard's and his family's circumstances. They are not concerned with major issues in Quakerism

or peace work, but represent the more ordinary texture of Quaker family life. The letters from John Bright are insignificant in regard to the life of the Quaker statesman, but they shed light on the sorts of things that William Pollard was interested in and the connexions that he had. What, then, can we fill in to the sketch of Pollard's life as present known?

Let us begin with his younger days. James Pollard, William's father (1789–1851), shows himself in his letters to be a caring and affectionate father, correcting his son's errors in writing letters home from school, but anxious not to discourage, but rather encourage William to take pains and do better (letter of 26 January 1843). Both he and Susanna Pollard, William's mother, give news of day-to-day events on the farm, which was called Park Farm and was not quite two miles from Horsham. The sale catalogue leads one to suppose it was an average-sized farm: the house sale lists the content of four bedrooms, parlour, kitchen, pantry, store room, two cellars, wash-house, as well as daily utensils, Stafford-ware and glass, linen and various items labelled 'out doors'. The west bedroom was the parents' with a 5 ft. bed, the south bedroom had two beds, one 4 ft. 9 in. and the other 4 ft. 4 in., while the middle back bedroom had a 2 ft. 10 in. French bedstead and a stump bedstead, and the men's bedroom had three stump bedsteads. The house also contained three bookcases, two in the parlour and one in the kitchen, so although both James and Susanna admit to finding letter-writing something of a task (letters of 2 November 1842 and 26 September 1843) they clearly possessed a fair number of books. What kind they were, however, we do not know, but some of James's remarks make one surmise that they would be serious, probably religious works.

James's two letters of September 1843 are a response to William's apparent discontent with his situation at Croydon Friends' School, where he was beginning as a apprentice teacher, but wanting to quit. James was prepared to see objections to William's situation at Croydon, since nothing anywhere was perfect, but his chief worry was with the decline in the testimony to plainness in speech, behaviour and dress. He is strong and emphatic on this point:

...the greatest [objection] that I can see in this is the encouragement the Institution give to the Pride of Dress which I consider to be a very great evil for I find When there is the least encouragement given at School the Children genneraly take more advantage When at Home and I would sooner follow my Children to the Grave than to see them follow the Pride of the Fashion either in Plainness of Speech behaviour or Apparel of Which I see too much in my Family but I do most sincerely hope the Almighty will be Pleased to Open the Eyes of all such that are Willing to be led by the Enemy

in any shape that they may see the error of it before it is to (*sic*) late for it is this that frequently leads into greater Sins (letter of 9 September 1843).

It seems natural enough that James Pollard should have been conservative with regard to the testimony on plainness – he was after all in his mid 50s when he was writing to the 14-year-old William – but his views testify to the struggle that Quakers were going through at this period. It was not until the Yearly Meeting of 1860 that the query on plainness of speech, behaviour and apparel was discontinued and the subordinate meetings were thus freed from the need to report the growing number of exceptions.

James's two letters to William do their utmost to persuade him to stay at Croydon. In the first (9 September 1843) he declares: 'I believe it only wants resignation to the will of thy Parents instead of thy own & then I believe thee will be favoured with ability to do thy best & remain where thee are'. In his second letter (26 September 1843) he quotes the opinion of J. Sharp, the superintendent of the Croydon School: 'William was becoming increasingly useful as a teacher & I still think that if he could give his mind fully & cheerfully to his duties & feel satisfied to remain here there is a fair prospect of his becoming an efficient & valuable Teacher'. James points out that he has no work on the farm to which William could be put, if he were to leave Croydon, 'as thee know thee are not so able to Drive Plough or fill a Dung Cart as thee are to teach a School wherein thee will be gaining some real wisdom thyself' (9 September 1843). The only possibility would be to put his name down on the list for an apprenticeship with William Manley; James gives no indication of the trade that this would be in, but Manley was a grocer at Leighton Buzzard. In the second letter James mentions that the premium required for getting William into a situation (presumably not the same as an apprenticeship) would be more than he could afford. The result of this pressure was that William remained at Croydon, where he was an apprentice and taught for a period of seven years (letter from Peter Bedford, 10 April 1851).

The chief thing that we know about the Croydon period is that during it William formed a strong attachment to the philanthropist Peter Bedford (1780–1864), who, following his retirement from Spitalfields to Croydon, took a lively interest in the welfare of the Friends' School. Peter Bedford was some nine years older than William's father, James, and nearly fifty years older than William himself. Twice in his letters (31 January 1854 and 4 December 1854) Bedford refers to an incident in which as a little boy William had run after him in the streets of Horsham and taken him to breakfast at his

father's table, mentioning in each case how much has changed in the meantime and what difficulties he has been through. The letters from Peter Bedford virtually all mark important changes in William's life, and it is clear that the latter kept him informed of what he was doing and regarded him as his mentor. Bedford is constant in his assurance of the sincere regard with which he holds the younger man, and he is always full of encouragement, enquiring about William's spiritual progress and reminding him that, amidst all the blows of life, he remains in the care of a gracious, merciful heavenly Father.

The letters permit glimpses of the stages through which William went in his religious development, from uncertainty as to his vocation at the beginning to a realization of his call to be a minister at the end. Bedford's first letter (15 December 1849) refers with admiration to William's quotation from Milton respecting his own position – 'that they also serve who only stand & wait' – but he goes on to say: 'but when the Master utters the command to go forward, if those who wait obey him not they will not receive wages'. One of the last letters (5 February 1859) is filled with words of encouragement for William's work in the Quaker ministry:

... I am free to acknowledge my belief, that, He who is the great Minister of the true tabernacle; has called thee to become a Minister of the Gospel of Christ; it is indeed a high & holy calling, & nothing short of the Divine guidance, can qualify rightly to fulfill it... I must say to thee my endeared young friend, *Mind thy calling*, be very watchful & very faithful, least that measure of the Ministry of the Gospel of Christ, entrusted to thee, should in any way become weakened, or diluted with the wisdom which is *not* from above.

This letter actually begins with a reference to a specific undertaking of William Pollard's, namely, a reading meeting with some of the poor people in Ackworth, 'poor', as Bedford says, 'in regard to the things of the World; amongst whom I would hope, thou wilt find some rich in faith, who may become heirs of that Kingdom, which shall forever abide & where no sorrow shall be known'.

William Pollard spent 16 years of his life at Ackworth, beginning with two years at the Flounders Institute training as a teacher. When he became a master at the School in 1851, his salary was £60 p.a., which Peter Bedford did not consider too high a salary after seven years serving at Croydon and the two years at the Flounders (letter of 10 April 1851). During the greater part of William Pollard's time at Ackworth the superintendent was Thomas Pumphrey (1802–62), who occupied that position for 27 years (December 1834 to early 1862). Pumphrey was not himself trained as a teacher, but he clearly had great administrative,

pastoral and ministerial gifts. Because the *Memoir of Thomas Pumphrey*, edited by John Ford, consists largely of personal letters from Pumphrey to members of his immediate family, it is difficult to gain a full picture of the impression that others had of him. These affectionate letters are full of his serious concern for the spiritual welfare of his children and continually express thanks to God, even in times of adversity; only occasionally do they reveal the lighter side of his personality. The concluding chapter of the *Memoir*, written by the editor, does admit that one at least of the Ackworth schoolboys had felt him then to be stern in character and that his sentiments towards Pumphrey 'partook more of fear than love', though as an adult his 'recent recollections of him are most delightful; he seemed to live with Christ'.³ Thomas Pumphrey was a valued friend of Peter Bedford's (see letter of 4 December 1854), and indeed Bedford's letters to Pollard usually end with a request to be remembered to various dear friends. Such details bear witness to the close-knit nature of the Society of Friends at that time. Bedford and Pollard constantly exchanged information about what was happening in the two schools, and sometimes others, with which they were involved.

A few more details about Ackworth can be gleaned from other sources. For example, an anecdote is told about Pollard and Frederick Andrews, who became superintendent and headmaster of Ackworth from 1877 to 1920. Andrews was a pupil in Pollard's class, the ninth or next to the top class, and was 'already tall and well-built. Pollard was short in stature and evidently thought on one occasion that "F.A." needed a rebuke. He reminded him that tall men are apt to be like tall houses, badly furnished in the upper storeys'.⁴ This must have occurred about 1863. Joseph Spence Hodgson, using his school diary, notes:

In 1852 [William Pollard] joined Josiah Evans in reviving the old 'Association for the Improvement of the Mind' (begun in 1821, discontinued in 1848), under the title of the 'Ackworth Literary & Scientific Association'. The members were allowed the new & special privilege of staying up an hour later than usual, till nine o'clock. Hard questions were exchanged with the Croydon School Association.⁵

He also notes:

W. Pollard excelled in the art of reading. His voice was round and clear, though not altogether free from intonation; but his style inspired his hearers with an increased interest in the subject-matter, and his turn to read aloud was always welcomed.⁶

The reference to 'intonation' probably has to do with the sing-song voice in which vocal ministry was traditionally offered.

This comment on reading is of particular interest, as William Pollard, towards the end of his period at Ackworth, set about compiling a reader, which was published in 1865 as *The Ackworth reading book*. The contents include 'Descriptive and narrative pieces' (34 items), 'Historical and biographical' (25), 'Abstract and argumentative pieces' (24), 'Conversational pieces' (12), 'Public speeches' (16). There was also a separate poetry section, including passages from Shakespeare, Cowper, Young, Pope, Goldsmith, Coleridge, Mrs Hemans, Longfellow, Wordsworth, Whittier and Byron. Amongst the prose there are four pieces with specific Quaker content or authorship. In the course of making this anthology Pollard had written to John Bright for his advice regarding public speeches that might be selected. Bright wrote a very helpful reply (letter of 7 May 1864), mentioning Gladstone, Cobden, George Thompson and H.W. Beecher of New York with approbation. Lord Derby is also mentioned as having made some great speeches, 'but generally on what we should term the wrong side in politics & opinion'. Bright indicated various of his own speeches that might provide material and offered to lend Pollard some of them 'just for examination'. *The Ackworth reading book* in fact includes Bright's 'Speech after the declaration of war, House of Commons, March 1854', relating of course to the Crimean War.

While Pollard was at Ackworth he got married. We may guess that it was through the great social gatherings afforded by Ackworth General Meeting that he met Lucy Binns of Bishopwearmouth, whom he married on 12 January 1854 at Sunderland. Within the year, on 26 November 1854, they rejoiced at the birth of a daughter, Mary Sophia. Both the marriage and the birth were the occasions of letters from Peter Bedford, while his next letter of 15 January 1859 refers to the fact that the young couple now have 'a little boy & some dear little girls'. Two more daughters had been born in the interim – Lucy on 22 January 1856 and Ellen on 14 August 1857, the latter dying in early infancy on 14 March 1858. The Pollards' first son was born on 28 December 1858 and he was named Bedford, a clear indication of the high place that Peter Bedford occupied in William Pollard's affections. Two further sons were born at Ackworth – Albert on 29 November 1860 and William Henry on 3 November 1862.

In 1865 Pollard was forced to leave his post at Ackworth because of ill-health. None of the sources give any specific details of this illness. The family moved back south to Reigate, Surrey, where Pollard subsequently gained employment as a clerk and agent in Francis Frith's photographic business. An unsigned letter, dated 23 April, but without any year, accompanied the gift of an inkstand from 'thy affectionate

pupils of the ninth class', conveyed to Pollard via a couple of Friends travelling south.

The Reigate period (1866–72) is the most sparsely documented in William Pollard's life, at least as far as personal papers are concerned. It was, however, the time during which he began his long association with the *Friends' quarterly examiner*, a contribution from him appearing in the first volume of 1867 as the first of a series of 'Colloquial letters on various subjects'. His article on 'The peace question' (FQE 5 (1871) pp.443–9) was reprinted with additions as a pamphlet entitled *Considerations addressed to the Society of Friends on the peace question* (London: R. Barrett and Sons, 1871). It represents a pointer to the final stage of Pollard's life when he moved to Manchester to be the secretary and lecturer of the Lancashire & Cheshire International Arbitration Association, a position he occupied from 1872 until 1892, shortly before his death.

The letters from the Manchester period provide evidence of a continuing link with John Bright. One is simply an acceptance by Bright of the invitation to become one of the Vice-Presidents of the Arbitration Association (letter of 2 May 1873 from the House of Commons, not in Bright's handwriting). A second (4 July 1874), written from Aulnaharra, Sutherland) responds to Pollard's questions about sources for a possible lecture on Cobden, which Bright thinks a 'good' and 'attractive' subject. As with his earlier advice on materials for *The Ackworth reading book*, Bright offers to lend Pollard a book, which he will ask his son Albert to find and take to the Friends' Institute at Mount Street.

The remaining two letters from Bright (21 June 1873 and 6 June 1876) are both marked 'private' and are concerned with contemporary political events. The earlier one gives no precise indication of subject, saying simply:

The Gov^t. are as anxious to avoid war, & cost of money & life as we are – I can only hope the officer sent out may be trustworthy & indisposed for war – if he is so, then the affair may soon end – and if not, I fear there may be trouble. His instructions are, I believe, strongly pacific.

Bright then goes on to say that as the facts are few and confused he does not see what the Peace Society could do. The later letter deals with the unrest in the Balkans and advises that

If meetings [presumably public meetings organized by the Peace Society] are held, they should declare generally their sympathy with the Christian or Non-Musselman population & their condemnation of any attempt to sustain the Turkish power in Europe.

Bright declines to give any direction as to what a particular district should do with regard to a question Pollard has asked, but says: 'the sentiments of a district must decide what a district should do'.

Bright's letters are written as one Friend to another, using plain language and, in the last three letters, addressing Pollard as 'My dear Friend William Pollard'. They are invariably helpful and friendly, but strictly to the point and without any superfluous touches that might give evidence of a particularly close Quakerly relationship. From the first of Bright's letters (7 May 1864) it appears that Pollard had sent him three tracts, probably from the 'Old Banner' series, which included two of his own, and Bright concludes his letter by saying that he has read them 'with much interest, & think them good'. The tone of the letters is always courteous, but never that of Quaker intimates.

The last private letter to be considered from the family collection takes us back into the family circle. It is, moreover, the only letter written by William Pollard himself, and it is addressed to his son, William Henry Pollard, the last of the Pollard children to be born at Ackworth. Four more children were born after him – Eliza on 15 July 1866, Constance on 5 December 1867, Arthur Binns on 2 June 1870 and Francis Edward on 12 September 1872. Constance died in infancy on 13 June 1871, the second of the Pollards' ten children so to do. Francis Edward would appear to be named after Francis Frith, whose employment William left to go to Manchester and with whom he clearly enjoyed a close friendship.

William Pollard's letter was written on the occasion of William Henry's departure to school at Ackworth (30 July 1874) and contains a mixture of family news and fatherly advice. It makes a nice counterpart to the letters that James Pollard sent the young William at Croydon. William Pollard writes encouragingly to his son, picturing the strangeness and difficulties of his new life and assuring him of his parents' concern and prayer for him. The language he uses is similar to that employed by Peter Bedford in his appeals to the trainee teacher William: 'Remember thou hast had lately a gracious Visitation of Heavenly love to thy soul, & be very careful to cherish it & obey the light that has been granted, & then more will be given'. He exhorts William Henry to keep a tender conscience and do what is right without having to be told. Above all he should keep to a regular plan of prayer. He should be cheerful, avoid grumbling, be gentle and courteous in speech, try to overcome his shyness and be punctual. He should not talk or think anything he would be ashamed for his parents to know. The letter concludes with the encouraging remark: 'I have no doubt thou wilt succeed if thou keeps a good heart'.

To a modern reader this letter may seem rather heavy. It is certainly marked by high moral and religious seriousness. But it is interesting to note that in all the letters that cross the gap of generations – James Pollard's and Peter Bedford's to William, and William Pollard's to William Henry – there is a very clear recognition that even where there is a need from time to time to chide or admonish there is an overriding need to provide encouragement of a very positive kind.

William Pollard was forced to retire from his post with the Arbitration Association late in 1892, and this was noted with regret in *The Friend* (4 November 1892, pp.727–8). The Peace Society organized a subscription fund to mark his retirement, and a presentation was made on 27 June 1893 at the Reform Club in King Street, Manchester. His health was deteriorating and he died three months later on 26 September, following a stroke 16 days before. In his last ministry at meeting for worship he quoted from the same sonnet of Milton's – 'On his blindness' – that he has used in his early correspondence with Peter Bedford, but this time the words quoted were 'who best/Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best' and not 'They also serve who only stand and wait'.

The letters and papers that have come into my hands from William Pollard's descendants provide an instructive amplification of his biography as furnished in outline by the *Annual monitor*, the Hardshaw East MM testimony and his own published writings. Like most such papers they provoke further questions over details and context. Further investigation might well contribute towards a social history of Victorian Quakerism, using William Pollard as a focus. It could explore aspects of Quaker education through the experience of Croydon and Ackworth, including the education of William's own children. It could trace the changes in Quaker practice and theology from the conservatism of James Pollard through to the eve of the Manchester Conference of 1895. It could look at the importance of the peace issue among friends and others in the second half of the 19th century. Finally, it could examine the role of what was probably a more than usually active recorded minister in the life of Manchester PM at a crucial time in that large meeting's history. These seem to me to be the main issues, but research might well throw up further questions to be explored.⁷

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ David Blamires, 'William Pollard (1828-1893)', *Friends quarterly*, vol.23, no.8 (October 1984), 376-81 and inside back cover. This number of the *Friends' quarterly* contains seven articles written to mark the centenary of the publication of *A reasonable faith*, including one each on Francis Frith and William Edward Turner.
- ² Typewritten transcripts of the letters and the Peace Society presentation notice are deposited in Friends House Library.
- ³ *Memoir of Thomas Pumphrey*, ed. John Ford (London: A.W. Bennett; York: Thomas Brady, 1864), 311.
- ⁴ Beryl Williams, *Quakers in Reigate 1655-1955* (1980), 84.
- ⁵ Joseph Spence Hodgson, *Superintendents, teachers, & principal officers of Ackworth School, from 1779 to 1894* (Ackworth Old Scholars' Association, 1895), 17.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ⁷ I am grateful to Edward H. Milligan for his help with some details of information in this paper. Further information on many other members of the Pollard family is to be found in Benjamin S. Beck, *Francis and Mary Pollard and their ancestors* (1986), which consists of excerpts from the same author's *The ancestors of Sidney and Ruth Beck* (1985), of which a copy is lodged in Friends House Library.