

EARLY FRIENDS IN NORTH CUMBERLAND

Fresh evidence has recently appeared for the remarkable extent of early Quakerism in North Cumberland, both numerically and geographically. In 1676 incumbents were requested to complete a questionnaire concerning the numbers of communicants, papists and nonconformists in their parishes. The idea came from the Earl of Danby, who hoped to persuade the King that nonconformists were too few to be politically dangerous. The questionnaire was issued on the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury and administered by the Bishop of London, Henry Compton. The incumbents' returns, or copies of them, have been located for most dioceses, with variations in the amount of detail they provided, and are now in print, in a volume of 800 pages, the magnificent achievement of many years of patient research.¹

The strength of Quakerism in the North-West in the 1650s is well known and has been much studied, but the position 20 years later, following the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672 and what William Charles Braithwaite calls 'an invaluable breathing space of three years',² has been relatively obscure. Now, for North Cumberland, we know a great deal; for in the diocese of Carlisle incumbents were so sensitive to the presence of Quakers in their parishes that in their returns they recorded the number of Quakers separately from that of other nonconformists – a distinction made in only one other diocese.

The number of Friends in a parish was often no more than two or three. What is remarkable is their dispersion throughout the area, for their presence is recorded in all four rural deaneries,³ and in as many as 54 parishes out of 113 in the diocese as a whole. In Cumberland (Penrith) Deanery there were Quakers in only nine parishes (or chapelries) out of 33, and in Westmorland Deanery in 10 parishes out of 32, with 19 Friends in the large parish of Kirkby Stephen and as many as 32 at Ravenstonedale; but in Carlisle Deanery they were in as many as 21 parishes out of 36, with 19 in Carlisle, 20 at Wetheral, 18 at Burgh by Sands and 17 at Orton (i.e. 10 or 11 per cent in these last two parishes), and in Alndale (Wigton) Deanery in 13 parishes out of 22, with 40 at Wigton, an astonishing 70 at Caldbeck (11 per cent), 30 at Bridekirk, 22 at Isell (10 per cent), 21 at Kirkbride (20 per cent), 14 at Bromfield and 13 at Dearham.

Even then, the statistics are incomplete. In *The First Publishers of Truth* (1907), documents dating from the years 1690–1720 and edited by Norman Penney, we gain information of the presence of Friends not only in Carlisle, Scotby (Wetheral), Wigton, Caldbeck, Isell and Kirkbride, but at Holme Cultram (Abbey town) and Kirkclinton, two parishes for which no returns were made in 1676. The account of Kirkclinton happens to be unusually full and mentions several houses, then the homes of Friends, which still stand, such as Stubb, Hetherside, Sikeside, Rigghead, Broomhills and Newberry.

The only other diocese for which separate statistics for Quakers were provided in 1676 is Canterbury. Here also Friends were well dispersed, but their numbers in a parish rarely reach double figures. For this diocese other 'radicals' were also identified. Kent was a Baptist stronghold, as it still is; in 1676 there were also (in distinction from Independents) Brownists in as many as 19 parishes and Muggletonians in five.

Geoffrey F. Nuttall

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *The Compton Census of 1676: a critical edition* (O.U.P. for British Academy), edited by Anne Whiteman, with the assistance of Mary Clapinson.

² W.C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 87–8.

³ For the fifth deanery in the present diocese (Copeland), which in 1676 was in the diocese of Chester, no returns have come to light.