Mid-Somerset Friends in the 18th Century

A Study in the Administration of Discipline

Presidential Address to the Friends' Historical Society, 1971

This address is based on a study of the minutes of the Middle Division of Somerset Monthly Meeting housed at the Friends' Meeting House, Street, Somerset. References are given in the text, within square brackets [ ], to the dates of the minutes.

Women's Monthly Meeting and Somerset Quarterly Meeting minutes are indicated similarly, but with the addition of the letters WM or QM before the dates. Somerset Quarterly Meeting minutes are deposited at the Somerset County Record Office, Obridge Road, Taunton.

THE Middle Division of Somerset became a separate monthly meeting in the Autumn of 1691. Between 1668 and 1691, the large number of meetings in the centre and south of the county had formed Ivelchester, now Ilchester, monthly meeting. The county prison was at Ilchester; a number of influential Friends were usually incarcerated there, which made the decaying town a convenient centre for both quarterly and monthly meetings. Following the passing of the Toleration Act few Friends remained in prison, and it was decided to separate the monthly meeting into a Southern and a Middle division, to avoid unnecessarily long journeys on horseback. The new monthly meeting of the Middle Division [QM 18.iv.1691] comprised six particular meetings, Street, Shepton Mallet, Lydford, Brewton, Polden Hill and Burnham; the last two named were transferred from the Western Division. In 1721, Frome meeting was added.

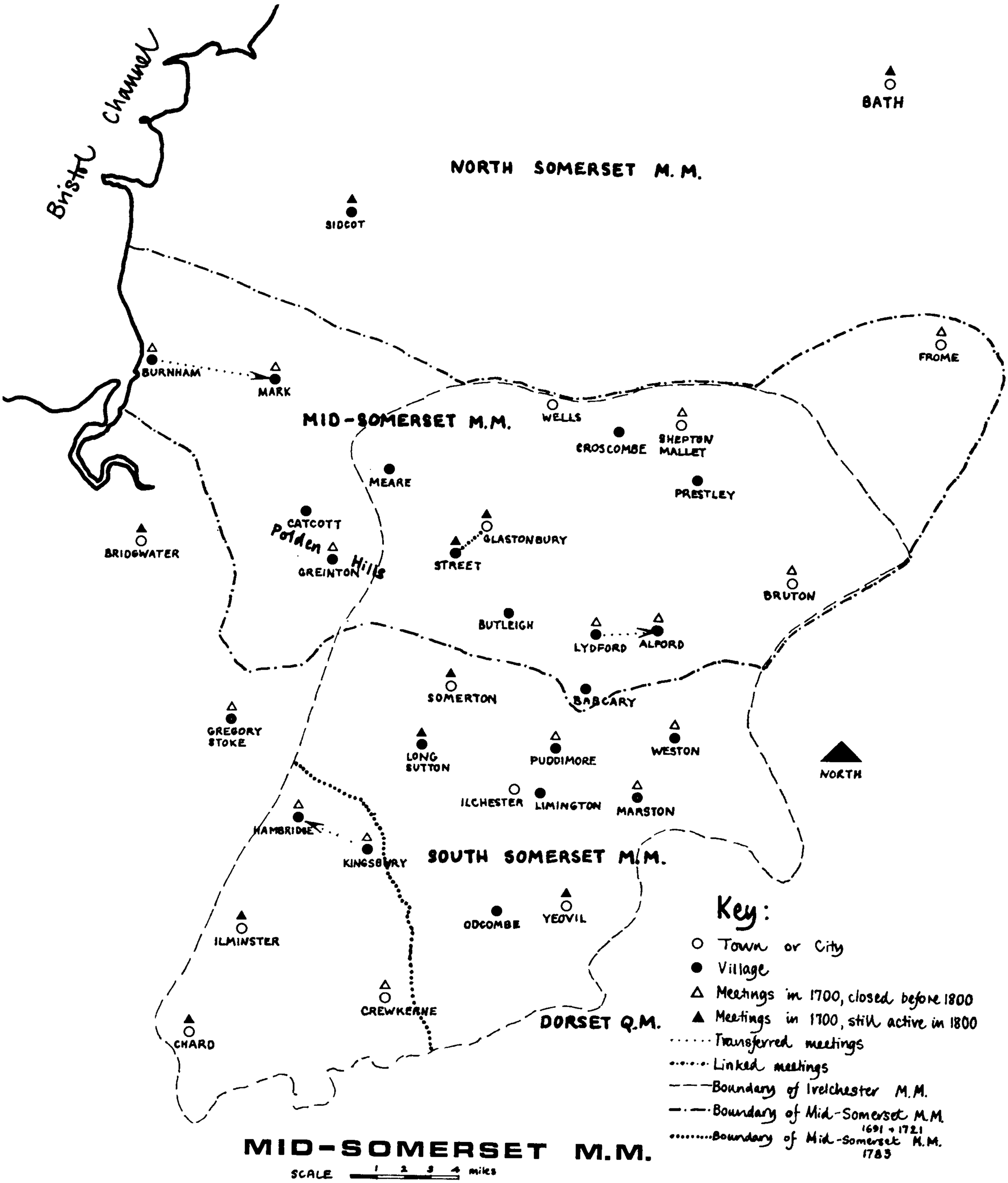
For more than 300 years, Street, which was regarded as one meeting with Glastonbury, has been the strongest meeting in the area: the other six named all died out during the eighteenth century. At Street a number of farming families were Friends; at Glastonbury they included shopkeepers, tradesmen and stocking makers. Frome and Shepton Mallet were centres of the cloth trade, declining during the eighteenth century. Lydford, Burnham and the

Polden Hills were farming areas; at Brewton John Whitehead was a clothier, and Philip Allen a farmer.

In the early days two well-known public Friends were members of the monthly meeting. Jasper Batt of Street who once "fed on husks among the Baptists", was described by a Bishop of Bath and Wells as "the greatest seducer in all the west and the most seditious person in the county!" He was at the yearly meeting in 1695, and reported triumphantly to Quarterly meeting that George Keith's errors had been repudiated by Friends; in a letter describing the yearly meeting he wrote of Keith that "his behaviour was very proud, arrogant and uncivil". Jasper Batt took a leading part in monthly and quarterly meetings and was also one who testified at the graveside at George Fox's funeral.

John Banks became a Quaker, in Cumberland, in 1654, at the age of 16; he had "learned well, both English and Latin; and could write well". He also learnt his father's trade of fellmonger and glover, but spent much time in missionary journeys in England and Ireland. His work was somewhat restricted during his six years in prison in Carlisle where, his powerful voice being audible in the street outside, to the great annoyance of the jailers, he continued to preach. In 1696 he married Hannah Champion, a widow of Meare, and settled in Somerset. He was himself a widower.

Their marriage was not accomplished without difficulty. In 1st month 1695/6, Hannah had appeared at Quarterly meeting [QM 19.i.1695/6] concerning her clearness from other ties, and it had been concluded that she was under no obligation to Thomas Hymans of Bridgwater, against whom the meeting had testified, six months before, on account of his being unable to pay his debts [QM 26.vii.1695]. In 4th month [QM 18.iv.1696], Thomas "came to the men's meeting, at Abraham Gundry's to claime Hannah Champion to be his wife . . . and trueth was against him". It was in 5th month [29.v.1696] that John and Hannah made their proposal of marriage for the first time to the monthly meeting of the Middle Division. Quarterly meeting minuted in 7th month [QM 24.vii.1696]: "Tho. Hymans came to this meeting in a rude and clamorous maner and demanded a hearing touching his claim to Hannah Champion for his wife, which this meeting unanimously refused." John Banks' own certificate of clearness from Brigham Friends was lost in the post, but



MID-SOMERSET M.M.

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by 8th month [9.viii.1696] a glowing testimony had been received from them describing him as "a faithful labourer in the Lord's service", and also as a grocer, not a fellmonger and glover; the marriage was allowed to proceed.

John and Hannah Banks lived at Meare until 1708, when they moved to Street to be nearer the meeting house; he was in bad health, ill of gout. A minute of 1706 [9.x.1706] shows his part in oversight; "John Banks being one ordered & chosen to oversee the walking of Friends and professors of truth in Glaston and Street meeting and now being under long weakness, as not fitt to perform that service, this meeting doe choos Thomas Hopkins in his steed". John was said to be so tall that a hollow was cut in a beam in the meeting house to allow him to stand upright when preaching. After the move to Street, monthly meeting, which he had been unable to attend for some years, was held at his house. In 1710 he rose from his bed and made his last journey, preaching at monthly meeting at Somerton, visiting Friends at Long Sutton, Puddimore and Yeovil, and staying with Samuel Bownas at Limington; shortly after his return home, he died. He had been of immense service, in spite of ill-health, in preaching, in administration, and in maintaining Friends' testimonies.

Samuel Bownas was the young man at whom Anne Wilson pointed an accusing finger in Brigflatts meeting, saying, "A traditional Quaker: thou cometh to meeting as thou went from it, and goes from it as thou came to it but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?" What he did, among much else, was to become an active and sympathetic preacher with great spiritual insight. He lived for some years at Limington near Ilchester, in the Southern Division, and was sometimes applied to by the monthly meeting of the Middle Division for help and advice in times of difficulty. He was appointed clerk of Quarterly meeting, jointly with Robert Banton of Long Sutton, in 1716.

During the eighteenth century the number of Friends in the monthly meeting declined. There are no lists of members, but some measure of the extent of the decline is shown by the number of marriages proposed. During the nine years, 1691–1699, 23 marriages were minuted, and during the next decade, 28. The number dropped to four in 1760–1769 and three in 1770–1779. In 1783 the Southern Division was

broken up and Yeovil, Somerton, Puddimore and Long Sutton were added to Street and Greinton (once Polden Hill) the only meetings then surviving in the Middle Division. Surprisingly the number of marriages from the old Middle Division rose to 15, between 1790–1799, but dropped again to five in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Apart from those born into the Society, some who consistently followed the Quaker way of life and accepted its disciplines came to be regarded as Friends, without any minute recording their acceptance. Towards the end of the century, a few applications for membership were received, and treated with the utmost caution. One form of outreach, circular Yearly Meetings held in different towns in the western counties, and attended by large numbers of those interested, ended in 1786 through declining effectiveness.[1] Visits from Friends travelling in the ministry, of the greater value in the earlier days of the Society, were again becoming more frequent as 1800 approached; Thomas Clark was beginning his own journeys in which before his death in 1850 at the age of 91, he could claim to have visited almost every meeting in the British Isles, many twice and some three times.

It is not quite true to say that only a few devoted families remained in membership, Clothiers and Clarks at Street, Metfords and Paynes at Glastonbury, and in the Southern Division, Palmers at Long Sutton, Gilletts at Somerton, Salters and Isaacs at Yeovil; but without the devotion of these families, Quakerism could hardly have survived here.

The first alphabetical list of members was made in 1812. They then numbered 93 of whom 25 were men. The average attendance at the men's monthly meeting during that year was over 14, and only one man failed to attend at all; he was old and possibly ill. The business of the Society had clearly ceased to be the concern of a select body of leading Friends; of the men almost all members were involved. With a very much larger membership, the average attendance had been 7 in 1692 and 12 in 1702.

Meeting Records

The quality of the records reflects the state of the Society. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, minutes were

[1] See *Journal F.H.S.*, 39 (1947), pp. 33–44.

full, vigorous, and often written into the book month by month. By 1740 attendance at monthly meetings had dropped, and some particular meetings were sending no representatives. In 1741, after some delay [12.viii.1741] the minute book was produced, and the record reads: "The monthly meeting Book being brought here we find that nothing has been transcribed therein since the 10th of the 2nd month 1727, from which time to the 5th month 1736 it appears that several of the minutes are lost or mislaid . . . James Clothier is appointed to begin at the 3rd month 1727 & transcribe as much as can be found." Actually two years were missing. At three meetings in 1748 and 1749 no business was done because no-one had brought the minute book; there was very little transacted when the book was available. Important matters were not always minuted, nor were decisions reached always clearly stated.

From 1759 onwards the minutes are usually more careful, better written, fuller, and more formal. In that year, Yearly Meeting asked for greater care to be taken in registering all marriages, births and burials, and in 1760, for plain and explicit answers to queries. Friends were appointed to visit monthly and quarterly meetings to exhort members to greater devotion and regularity.

Discipline was the responsibility of the monthly meeting from about 1700 onwards; before then, final action when all else failed, was usually left to Quarterly meeting. Friends believed that their spiritual welfare depended on unity in the truth. The first concern of the meeting when a Friend was "walking disorderly" was, by visits and discourses, to bring him back into unity by repentance. The second was to clear truth of the scandal and reproach his conduct had caused. The erring member was asked to sign a paper acknowledging his sin, expressing his sincere and unfeigned repentance, and hope for better future conduct. This paper was read at the close of the meeting for worship which he attended, a shaming experience for the person concerned, and might even need wider publicity. In 1724, Matthew Stower Jnr., was instructed "to fasten up" the paper he had signed "at the publicke cross in Glaston" [15.iv.1724]. He refused to do so and was disowned [13.v.1724]; he had "given himself up to commit gross evills by getting his maid with child" and had been married to her by the priest. In 12th

month 1726 [13.xii.1726] a full statement of repentance, signed by him, was read in his presence in Glastonbury meeting, and he was apparently received again into unity.

When in 1695 Quarterly meeting [QM 26.vii.1695] heard that, after repeated persuasion, John Peddle and Robena his wife had signed a paper condemning their actions after a finally successful visit by Edward Blenman, the minute is cautious: they were "left to be owned by us, as they shall manifest in their conversations the reality of what they have written".

If no satisfactory paper of acknowledgement and sincere repentance was forthcoming, or if the sin was too blatant for visits and discourse, the meeting prepared a paper of disownment to clear Truth; this was also to be read at the close of meeting for worship formerly attended.

No collection was to be received from the person concerned, nor could he be relieved in the manner of poor Friends, nor admitted to sit in meetings of discipline, until restored into unity.

That hope for a return to unity was sometimes realized is illustrated by the case of Hannah Merrett. In 1722 [9.v.1722] refusing to condemn her disorderly action, she was disowned for her marriage by a priest. She was disowned again in 1738 [10.viii.1738] for marrying her first cousin Thomas Marriott; they were both "deemed members of our society" and Friends disallowed the marriage of first cousins.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century, disownment by the monthly meeting for a number of offences became almost automatic; reinstatement, after a decent interval, was possible on formal application to the same monthly meeting.

In fourth month 1695 [3.iv.1695] monthly meeting minuted the appointment of two Overseers for each meeting, who: "if any friend or friends shall at any time walke disorderly and bring reproach upon the holy way of truth . . . may gently reproove them . . . that they might take more care for the time future; and if any one shall reject the reproofe . . . that they give an account of their names at the monthly meeting." There were further appointments of two overseers for meetings in 1698, 1727, and 1730. In 1757 [15.viii.1757] no Friends were willing to be appointed, but within a year John Hackett for Frome, James Clothier for

Street and Samuel Clothier Bryan for Shepton Mallet had accepted the office. Appointments of one for each meeting were again minuted in 1784 [3.xi.1784], but it is clear that appointments could not always be made, and some that were made were not minuted.

Among the many disorderly walkers that the monthly meeting attempted to guide back into the straight and narrow path, was John Hellier of Mark. He had been dealt with in 1686 by West Somerset Monthly Meeting for taking up arms for Monmouth, but living in the area of Burnham meeting, he had become the care of the Middle Division. When, in 1692 [31.viii.1692], he was in trouble for not paying a debt, it was found that he had given Friends no satisfaction for his part in the rebellion. Thomas Burnell reported after a visit that John "were sorey for that his miscarriage . . . and acknowledges God's great mercy to him in that his life was preserved, and hoped it would be a warning to him so long as he should live". It was the danger to his life rather than bearing arms for which he was sorry. Friends expected a paper of condemnation from John Hellier, but none was received. In second month 1694 [2.ii.1694], it was reported that he was going with a woman, not a Friend, with intention of marriage, and Friends were appointed to visit and warn him, in love, to desist. In 4th month [4.iv.1694] "John Hellier hath of late, come into a meeting of friends at Sydcot, where unto he did not belong, and took the said woman to be his wife". His regrets were inadequate, the paper he signed was not acceptable; his offence was referred to Quarterly meeting which disowned him for his disorderly marriage [QM 20.x.1694]. After many disagreements he had remained so much a Quaker that it was to a meeting that he went to take a wife.

No other case of a member taking arms is recorded until 1800, when Isaac Dennis "acted contrary to the Rules of our Society in enlisting himself a Soldier" [2.i.1800]. Three Friends appointed "had an Opportunity with him, and not finding him at all sensible of his mis-conduct", it was decided "to draw up a few lines as a Testimony of disownment" which were to be read at the close of meeting at Somerton.

Shepton Mallet Meeting

The two Overseers appointed for Shepton Mallet meeting

in 4th Month 1695 were Edward Blenman, then over 70, and Thomas Bryan, a young man of 23. In 7th month of the same year [2.vii.1695] it was reported that Katharine Bryan, aged 18, a sister of Thomas, had been married by the priest "to a man not professing truth", and that Lydia Nicholls, aged 32, also of Shepton Mallet "was got with child before married (if she yet be)". Edward Blenman had already visited her; both women had sent papers acknowledging their errors, though Lydia's "mencons no particulars"; naturally Friends wanted to know whether she was indeed married [30.vii.1695]. An obscurity clouds the consideration, month by month, of the cases of these two women. A minute fifteen years later [13.ix.1710] "ordered that Richard Coopper, Philip Watts, Samuel Clothier, Robert Meker and Thomas Freeman doe look over the old monthly meeting book & to race out such things as are not fit there to remain". In 1710, Samuel Clothier and Robert Meker were leading Friends in Shepton Mallet; Edward Blenman was dead, Thomas Bryan had gone; among the things thought not fit to remain in the book were the minutes concerning Katharine and Lydia, those concerning John Tucker who had married at Shepton Mallet church during the same year and those referring to an attempt, initiated by Edward Blenman, to persuade poor members receiving charity to ease the expense to Friends by applying to the parish overseers for relief. These minutes were very carefully scribbled over, but as the ink has faded to a slightly different shade of brown from the original writing, parts of the latter can be read. Why these particular matters were selected for oblivion is unexplained.

From what can be read through the scribbling [3.iv.1695], it appears that in 9th month, Katharine Bryan seemed to be willing to submit to Friends' judgment. In 1st month 1695/6 [2.i.1696] she had been visited again by Edward Blenman and Jonas Nicholes (Lydia's father) and was very penitent.

She appeared at the next meeting [30.i.1696] where her brother Thomas was also present "and weeping saies she is sorry for what she hath done, but friends proposing whether she could draw up a condemnation against what she had done & fix it at the Presente [?] publick view [?] she says [?] The thing is soe publick, which she saies is so hard as she

can not doe it". Further patient visits still found "her saying she can not doe it against her selfe", and in 4th month [1.iv.1696] it was decided that the matter should be referred to Quarterly meeting.

Lydia Nicoles was repeatedly visited by Friends. She refused to come to the Monthly meeting in 9th month [8.ix.1695], was very penitent in 1st month [2.i.1696], but the paper she had signed gave no satisfaction. The minute in the 4th month [1.iv.1696] refers to her "marriage with one of the world, if not worse"; Edward Blenman was asked to visit her again, and failing satisfaction was asked to report to Quarterly meeting on the matter of Katharine Bryan, Lydia Nicoles and John Tucker.

Quarterly meeting met on the 18th of the 4th month 1696 at Ilchester; Shepton Mallet was well represented by Edward Blenman, Francis Hand and Jonas Nicholes; but Edward did not raise "the matter touching them of Shepton" [29.iv.1696], and apparently neither did Lydia's father nor Francis Hand. Edward may still have hoped that further visits would procure true repentance. Monthly meeting probably considered his explanation and what further action should be taken in 5th month 1696, but the censors of 1710 were more effective at this point; half a page of the minute book was cut out.

A minute of 1726 [16.iii.1726] does something, but not much, to explain why the minutes of 1695 were not fit to remain in 1710: it begins: "Complaint being made to this meeting that Joan Whiteing, Daughter of Samuel Whiteing, Butcher, of Shepton Mallet, have had a Bass child, notwithstanding she have had her Education amongst Friends and as she goes under the name of a Quaker." Joan was disowned forthwith, but the testimony against her ends with a hope of "unfained Repentance" and a return to unity with Friends. Samuel Whiteing was the man Katharine Bryan had married in 1695 in Shepton church; Joane Whiteing, her daughter, had been brought up as a Friend. Katharine's death in 1724 was registered by Friends. I have found no later record of Lydia Nicoles, but John Tucker may also have returned to Friends. The wife to whom he was married by the priest in 1695 was buried by the priest in 1712; a John Tucker of Croscombe, near Shepton, who married Tamson Wason, a widow, in 1729, and attended monthly meetings until

1772, might well have been his son. The minutes of 1695 may have been thought best forgotten if Katharine Whiteing and John Tucker or their children were accepted as Friends in 1710.

Returning for a moment to Joane Whiteing: she married her man, Thomas Batt, in Shepton church in June 1726; their baby Jane was baptised during the same month; Joane was baptised herself a year later. The hope of her "unfained Repentance" was vain. Katharine Whiteing, probably a sister of Joan, married John Osmond of Prestley at meeting in 1721, and was buried at Street in 1731. A minute of 1747 [9.ix.1747] suggests a hardening attitude towards sin: "Bastard" is written in the margin. "Catharine Ozmond being lately brought to bed of a Bastard child, we no longer Esteem her a member of our Society." But in fact this did not quite end the responsibility of the meeting towards her and her child. The copy of registers of births at Friends House includes the entry sandwiched between two lines as if those making it had at first thought it unfit to appear, "Osmond Elizabeth, 1747.9.1:" parents given as "——— & Jane". Those responsible for making the entry have even signed their names to it in the margin. But why was Catharine miscalled Jane? The death of Katharine Osment of Street was registered by Friends in 1751. So a daughter and a grand daughter of Katharine Bryan were in similar trouble with Friends.

Having become involved in the troubled history of Shepton Mallet meeting, it may be best to continue with those Friends already mentioned. Thomas Bryan did not attend monthly meetings after his sister's case was considered. In 4th month 1699 [12.iv.1699], Francis Hand and Samuel Clothier were desired to let him know "that this meeting expects him to be at next meeting" [10.v.1699]. He was not; he had absconded, but in a letter to John Banks "he gives account of his debts and what he is worth, and makes himself worth more than he owe by £100 and upwards, and that he will satisfie every body to a penny; which if doth prove friends will be glad". He likewise [11.ix.1700) "doth accuse Francis Hand of behaviour contrary to truth". Nothing further is heard of Thomas Bryan's debts, but in 9th month 1700 the monthly meeting had received a letter from him "on which he desires of this meeting a certificate"

of clearness with regard to marriage, and adding almost offensively "or on refusall the reasons why it cannot be" [9.x.1700]. No reasons were found and a certificate was "signed to be sent him with a letter to be shown to friends concerned" [10.xii.1700]. The terms of the certificate or letter did not please him; he wrote again but "this meeting being satisfied in what they have all ready don; doe see no grounds to give another".

Thomas and Katharine Bryan had a brother Nathaniel who married Samuel Clothier's sister Hannah in 1694. In 1705, Nathaniel was "often at set drinkings and keeping loos company" [11.xii.1705], but gave forth a paper condemning himself and promising to reform [13.ii.1706]. He did not keep his promise [9.x.1706]; his disorderly conduct continued, and a Testimony was drawn up against him and read in Shepton Meeting. This did not apparently involve disownment, as his children continued to be recorded as Friends, and his son, Samuel Clothier Bryan, born in 1712, was a valuable and devoted minister. When S. C. Bryan moved to Glastonbury in 1772 or 3, Shepton Mallet meeting came to an end. He died 6.iii.1805 at the age of 93, and a blank page in the minute book was left for a testimony to his life and service, which was never copied in. The testimony was properly recorded by Quarterly Meeting.

Francis Hand, accused of "behaviour contrary to truth" in 1699 by Thomas Bryan, denied this "except his puting him in court" [11.vii.1699]. He and Samuel Clothier had [11.xii.1705], in their own keeping, certificates for meetings in their own dwelling houses; he had been in prison and had attended Quarterly meetings, and should have been a Friend in good standing. But 13.xi.1706, Samuel Clothier was ordered "to take some other friend with him & speak to Francis Hand concerning his conversason . . . for friends are jelous it's not well". Consequently, Francis attended the next monthly meeting [10.xii.1706], where "Edward Stower spake after this manner. . . . 'we are saff none of us no longer than wee keep to the infalibel guid, the spirit of truth', Whereon Francis Hand denied that infalibility, and persisted in a long confused self-contradictory discours, and after much baring with was desired to give the meeting satisfaction for his opposing such a fundamental scriptural truth." He was allowed until next meeting to satisfy Friends. It is odd that,

summoned to monthly meeting to answer various charges, he should take the opportunity to involve himself in theological argument.

In 1st month 1706/7, Samuel Clothier reported on the previous complaints; "some of what he hath been accused he denies, but as to his speaking you to a single person, and puting off his hat at a buriall to serve about wine and calling men master and sir, all which are repugnant to our profession, and this meeting is hearwith dissatisfied and advises that Francis Hann doe come and give friends farther satisfaction to the next meeting" [10.i.1706/7]. This request was repeated month by month as he did not appear, and he was sometimes from home when Friends wished to visit him. On 9.xii.1707 it was decided "that Thomas Hopkins doe writ some lines for him to set his hand too in condemnation." He refused to sign: "its now abreviated, and sent to him again" [15.i.1707/8]. The last reference to these matters was a note on 6th month 1708: "Remember Francis Hann's business his false judgment about infallability anwsered" [16.vi.1708]. If it was remembered or answered, there is no record: he remained a Friend [10.viii.1715].

Edward Blenman had been listed by Jasper Batt among "the first receivers of those that first Published the Gospel in Somerset" and by John Whiting as one of the first that "Received the Truth" here.[1] His later years were full of trouble. A long difference with his sons Edward and Thomas was settled by arbitration in 1701 [9.xii.1701]. He left Shepton Mallet and was living at Butleigh, apparently with Thomas, when it was reported to Quarterly Meeting that the latter had lost £193 by fire. The minute of 4th month 1705 [QM 21.iv.1705] reads: "In remembrance of the respect they have for Edward Blenman his father (now living) desire that a collection be made . . . William Reeves, Robert Banton and Philip Watts . . . to give advice to the said Tho Blenman how to manidge his affaires for the future and to furnish him with said monies as they shall think necessary." This was help in a very practical form. A sheet from the monthly meeting book is missing, with the record of meetings between 2nd and 8th month that year. In 9th month [12.ix.1705] Edward was asked to satisfy William Reeves to whom he owed money, and promised to pay Mary Young

[1] *First Publishers of Truth*, 1907, pp. 224, 227.

in one or two weeks. In 10th month, Edward and Thomas applied to Quarterly meeting [QM 10.x.1705] to extend the collection to Friends in Bristol, and Thomas Hopkins was appointed by monthly meeting to prepare the necessary "few lines" for Bristol [14.xi.1705]. At the same meeting it was reported that "Edward Blenman hath not yet satisfied Mary Young, but hath broke his promiss from time to time". She was allowed to "doe as she please" to collect her money. At the end of the next year he attended Monthly meeting for the last time. He had been asked to come, and gave "account that his tithes hath been paid by a neighbour for 2 years as supposed, they two having much concerns together; so that this meeting doe advise him to caution his neighbour to the contrary & show him his reall dislike and prevent it for the future" [10.xii.1706/7]. A sad old man, probably approaching his ninetieth year, in financial trouble, unable to maintain his testimonies as a Quaker, he died in 1709. Three years later his son Edward was insolvent.

With Edward Blenman's move to Butleigh, leadership in Shepton Mallet meeting seems to have passed to Samuel Clothier. Samuel held a licence in 1705 for meetings in his dwelling [11.xii.1705]. Ten years earlier he had been reported to monthly meeting for refusing to pay his mother £3 per annum [3.vii.1695]. In 1715 he was involved in a complicated dispute with other Friends; he was accused of having burnt two deeds [10.viii.1715]. Quarterly meeting arbitrated and Samuel Clothier accepted their award: but monthly meeting still wanted him to sign a paper condemning his action [15.viii.1716]. All they could get from him was two lines: "I Samuel Clothier do think that I have given full satisfaction in referring the difference to Friends" [12.ix.1716]. At the same meeting was produced "a lease for 2,000 years from Samuel Clothier to Friends for the Burying ground in Shepton Mallet". A burying ground for 2,000 years, in the view of the monthly meeting was no substitute for a signed paper of condemnation, so Quarterly meeting was asked for advice and appointed a committee [10.x.1716], "which committee would not let us have their answer in writeing, but were desirous we should drop it" [14.xi.1716]. They may have been wise: five years later he was "building a meeting house at Shepton at his own charge" [14.vi.1721]. It has sometimes been difficult to discipline our wealthier members.

BENJAMIN METFORD

The Metfords at Glastonbury produced one very inconvenient member, from whom the later generations of this family were descended. Benjamin Metford's marriage to Mary Lambert was reported in 1st month 1700 [11.i.1700]. In 5th month monthly meeting heard "that Benjamin Metford & his wife doth not agree, but hath quarled & fight" [15.v.1700]. They were asked to sign a paper "to clear truth" [12.vi.1700]. They refused. Eighteen months later, "there being a matter of difference betwixt Benjamin Metford and his mother in law Mary Lambert", they chose four Friends to arbitrate, "and doe agree to be bound in bond to stand to their award" [13.ii.1701/2]. When it was reported next month that the award had been made, but that he would not abide by it, John Banks and Samuel Clothier were appointed "to goe and speake with Benjamin from this meeting" [11.iii.1702]. They found him "stubborn and willfull" [15.iv.1702], and two more Friends were appointed to warn him that "according to the order of truth", Friends "will be constrained to testifie against him". In 7th month 1702 is the minute: "Agreed in Relation to the Case in difference betwixt Benjamin Metford and his mother in law that John Banks and Thomas Burnell goe to them and signifie the judgment and sence of friends therein" [14.vii.1702]. There is a blank space in the minutes of the next meeting, and Benjamin Metford disappears from Friends records until 1712, when he had a daughter Elizabeth. Perhaps the "judgment and sence" of Friends in 1702 had been to suspend his membership for ten years. The register of baptisms in the parish church of St. John the Baptist at Glastonbury includes the entry: "Joseph the son of Benjamin Metford was born May 25th 1704": "Born", not baptised: even when out of unity, Benjamin remained a Quaker. And re-united with Friends Benjamin remained Benjamin: there are a series of minutes in 1713 and 1714 about 20/– which he was accused of detaining. In 7th month 1714 was a further complaint "for useing much abusive language, and beating a mare, contrary to Truth which he makes profession of" [13.vii.1714]. He was told "that friends cannot have unity with him, unless he promise to amend his actions and leave of his abusive language" [15.ix.1714]. In reply "he saith he thinks he shall not do the like again" [13.x.1714]. The

sufferings of the mare were forgotten. He died in 1728 without any further miscarriage recorded against him. (In my own childhood, as my mother told me, a member of Street meeting was disowned for beating a horse. He thought this most unfair: the wealthy friends in the meeting, who were so hard with him, could afford to treat their horses kindly: he, a small farmer, had to make his animal work.)

FRIENDS' WRITINGS

The Second Day Morning meeting in London examined and considered the writings of Friends before publication was allowed: monthly and quarterly meetings were also involved in this censorship. George Keith's attacks on Quakerism increased the need for this procedure. John Mabson of Glastonbury was not a regular attender at meetings for church affairs but was the Friend asked "to draw the deed of Glastonbury meeting house on Stampt parchment" [9.xii.1701], and to copy into the minute book the Particulars (Advices) agreed at Quarterly meeting in 1st month 1697/8 [16.iii.1699]; for this last he was paid 2/– [12.iv.1699]. His writing was not always acceptable to Friends and in 12th month 1702, Monthly meeting received a letter from Quarterly meeting saying that John should: "deliver in all his papers that he hath wrote against Friends" [15.xii.1702]. Monthly meeting was unable to persuade him to do so, but in 4th month 1703, Quarterly meeting minuted: "person concerned hath delivered up all his papers into the hands of two friends, and they alsoe are to take up all other Papers of the like tendency . . . The said two friends to do therin as they in the wisdom of God shall think fitt" [QM 17.iv.1703].

The next year John Banks submitted to Quarterly meeting [QM 22.iv.1704] a manuscript of his travels, sufferings and exercises: in due course these were approved.[1]

Following an enquiry from Second Day Morning Meeting in 4th month 1704, Quarterly meeting appointed John Banks, John Mabson, Jonathan Tucker and Roger Jewell "to seek out records of faithful labour and travels not yet in print" [QM 22.i.1704/5]. This may have been a peculiar choice of Friends for the purpose. Quarterly meeting con-

[1] The printed edition of John Banks' *Journal* appeared in 1712, after his death.

sidered a testimony against John Mabson received from Monthly meeting, again for his writings, in 1st month 1707/8, and appointed friends "to heare what he hath to say and persuade him to submit himself to truth" [QM 18.i.1707/8]. Monthly meeting minutes omit any reference to this. John was not alone, as a minute of 4th month 1707 reads: "Whereas Jonathan Tucker hath brought a paper to this meeting which is reflicting on friends testimoneys & to advise him to desist such writings that is repugnant to Truth" [9.iv.1707]. In the margin is written: "to be burnt".

At this time a separatist movement was still causing trouble among Bristol and Wiltshire Friends which may indicate the tendency of John Mabson and Jonathan Tucker's writings.

Marriage "Out"

As the eighteenth century proceeded, an increasing proportion of disciplinary cases involving Monthly meeting concerned marrying out of unity with Friends. In 1704, John Burrow of Burnham "had made attempt to take a woman of the world to wife in that meeting", but Friends "stopt him in his proceedings haveing no unity therewith" [13.i.1704]. He was advised "to signifie to the woman before two witnesses, that he was too forward in conserning himself with her upon the account of marriage, being contrary to the truth he made profession of". He did nothing of the sort, and when visited after they had been married by the priest: "they find him in a dark hardy state not like to be in a sence of condemning his action" [11.x.1704]. John Banks was asked to write a testimony against him which was read in Burnham meeting.

Fifteen years later when Mary Moore was married by a priest, she gave "something under her hand for the clearing of Truth" [9.iii.1720] which Friends ordered to be read at the next monthly meeting at Mark, to which Burnham meeting had migrated. (This reference to a monthly meeting was to a periodical, probably circular, meeting for worship.) When "some further misstep" was reported, three women Friends were desired "to have some conference with her about it" [15.vi.1720]. Two men Friends "drew a paper which Mary Moore signed with her own hand, and it was read

in the last monthly meeting at Mark" [12.x.1720]. She remained in unity.

There were others who would give the meeting no satisfaction, who would sign no paper that was acceptable, or whose conduct was otherwise unQuakerly. With Prudence Wason, a girl of 16, daughter of Tamson who married John Tucker, it was "her too complicent deportment" [12.iii.1729]; Elizabeth (Gane) Rogers "doth not as yet manifest much sorrow" [13.viii.1729]; but others did satisfy the meeting and remained in unity.

That the question of disownment much exercised Friends is shown by a minute of 1739 [27.vii.1739], when an adjourned monthly meeting met at 8 in the morning of the Quarterly meeting at Minehead, only John Burrough and James Clothier being present. It reads: "Inasmuch as we are in the Practice of Disowning of persons (that have been in Unity with us) for going to the Priest to be married, & upon enquiry we find that others is not in the same practice, its therefore agreed to by this meeting to apply to the Quarterly meeting, about the same." Quarterly meeting made no reply. Two years later, Yearly meeting of 1741, with Samuel Bownas as clerk, defined Quaker practice on the lines I have outlined earlier in this paper. Quarterly meeting considered that the minute of Yearly meeting involved no change in practise [QM 14.i.1743]. The Monthly meeting occasionally ignored the rules.

After John Clark (1680–1758) had reported on his visit in 1745 to Ann Risdon, who had been married by the priest, the minute reads: "it is the mind of this meeting for severall reasons that the same shall be dropt" [13.xi.1745]. No paper was signed, but her brother [?] Abraham was the mainstay of Mark meeting.

In 1755 John Clark (1724–1793), son of the John who had visited Ann Risdon, married Jane Bryant in Greinton church. Jane was one of the three orphan children of Thomas Bryant, a neighbour and friend of the elder John, who were brought up in the Clark family at Greinton. An attachment grew up between the younger John and Jane, to which James Clothier (1687–1759) refers in a letter which has survived. He wrote: "loving Friend John Clark, I heard very lately by a certain friend the party was afraid that thou would go to the priest for a wife . . . Thou mayst prevent

it if thee will, and therefore I would have thee desert from proceeding any further with the giddy girl of Grenton at present, and waite, have patience, who knows that in time she may come to join the Friends . . . I hope thou have all along refused to pay Tythes or [the priest's] demands that way, and now to go or fly to him for a wife is a sort of contradiction . . . and remember thy dying sister's words and put them in practice, which was to be dutiful to thy Father . . . thy loving friend, James Clothier.

P.S. It may be thou may think some person or other have put me upon scribbling, but I can assure thee that thy Father nor yet any other person in the world hath said anything to me about it."

"John Clark's irregular marriage" was reported to Monthly meeting in 7th month 1755 [14.vii.1755], and his testimony "in which he condems his said act, & show a hearty repentance of the same", was received and accepted at the same meeting. He wrote: "That what I did was even then much contrary to my mind, & what I do now (so far as being married by a priest) sincerely Condeme . . ." He expresses no regret for marrying Jane—something she could have resented—but for going to the priest for the purpose. Within six years she was attending the women's monthly meeting [WM 13.iv.1761], and she and John were both appointed elders in 1787 [3.i.1787].

In 8th month 1755 it was reported that John Hackett (Junior) of Frome had been married by the priest [11.viii.1755]; his father was a leading member of Frome meeting. Following only a month after John Clark, John Hackett Jnr. was also treated with the greatest tenderness and sympathy, possibly undeserved. In 11th month he attended monthly meeting and expressed his sorrow, "but do hope that his conduct for the future will be such, as will be more satisfactory to Friends" [10.xi.1755]. The meeting suspended action "until Report be made, by some Friends of Froom meeting, of his future conducts". In 4th month 1756, "he not behaveing to the expectation he gave Friends", two Friends were asked to write to him "a few friendly & cautionary lines" [12.iv.1756]. In 10th month, John Budd and William Thatcher were desired "to be particularly Thoughtfull and Observing of the said John Hacketts conduct, and conversation, and make report to

our next meeting" [11.x.1756]. No report was made for six months; then his "Conduct and Behaviour of late seems more orderly . . . so that affair is dropt for the present" [11.iv.1757]. Frome meeting was already weak. William Thatcher became insolvent in 1762; the John Hacketts, both father and son, died in 1764. Friends appointed to visit Frome in 1767 reported that the meeting "is nearly dropt scrace [!] any Friends there to atend the same" [7.xii.1767]. The meeting house needed repair, which was authorized.

The Clothier Family

From the earliest days of Friends in Somerset, there had been Clothiers at Shepton Mallet, Street and Lydford meetings, probably unrelated. The Street family, who have up to the present day given service to the meeting for more than three centuries, had a series of difficulties with Friends, but were always able to retain or regain their membership. In 1740 [10.xii.1740], John Clark read a testimony in Glaston meeting against William Clothier, who had been married by the priest and had acted "greatly to the reproach of Friends". It was his third marriage. Nearly 20 years later [12.ii.1759] he returned to Street from Philadelphia where he had been living, and made an acknowledgment of his disorderly conduct "in a manner that seem to demonstrate a sincere Repentance with a desire of being Reunited" [12.xi.1759]. Assurances having been received from America "that as far as they know his life and conduct was orderly and agreable to Friends and truth whilst among them"; he was re-admitted, and certificates were forwarded to Philadelphia for which he had left with his younger children. The firm of Strawbridge and Clothier in that city was established by his descendants.

William Clothier left behind him a daughter by his first marriage, Love, who had already been helped by Friends' charity for the seven years since she was 21 [13.i.1752]. I find it a little surprising that a young woman could not support herself, and that her family left it to charity to support her. Sometimes it was her Uncle James Clothier who passed on to her money received from Quarterly meeting for "our poor objects" [15.vii.1754]. When she was 37 she was married by the priest [14.xi.1768]; she acknowledged that "she had

acted contrary to the rules of our Society" [13.iii.1769], but hoped that her "future conduct will be such as is agreable to truth". Her letter: "no Friend making any objection to the same, [it] is by this meeting accepted." She received no further help from Friends' charity, and died a Friend in 1771.

The affair of James Clothier (1730–1801) son of James last referred to, was very much more serious (15.viii.1774). He had lost his second wife, when in 8th month 1774, he had "by his own confession contracted too great an intimacy with, & seduced his late servant & is since married to her by the priest which seductions is greatly to the scandal of the Christian name as also the whole of his conduct in this affaire being contrary to the Rules Established amongst us".

At the next meeting [12.ix.1774] a paper was received from him "condemning his late conduct but it being without date and not to the satisfaction of this meeting the same is returned". William Hucker was appointed "in the room of James Clothier as an Elder or overseer of this meeting". A month later [17.x.1774] a second paper was not accepted in full satisfaction, although "this meeting believe he is in som measure sincere". William Hucker reported in 11th month [14.xi.1774] that "Friends appointed have treated with James Clothier and he have sent here another paper of Condemnation for which his late conduct which with a lietle alteration is accepted". James Clothier read the paper himself "at the close of a meeting of worship at Glaston, the same being to the sattisfaction of Friends" [12.xii.1774].

Within two years [10.xi.1776] James Clothier was again attending Monthly meeting. His wife was admitted to membership 12 years after their marriage [6.xii.1786], and four of their children three years later [4.xi.1789], following a minute from Quarterly meeting asking meetings to "enquire into the State of Friends children who have been maried out of our Society".

In 1804, Martha, one of James Clothier's children, was disowned; she "has suffered herself to be seduced" by William Gillett, a widower, a leading Yeovil Friend, who was also disowned [2.v.1804]. She was re-admitted 10 years later, satisfactory particulars having been received from Friends in Bristol where they were living [6.iv.1814]. He had to wait another six years for re-admission, but became a

regular attender at Monthly meetings after they moved to Street [3.v.1820].

Arthur, a younger son of James Clothier, was disowned 6.v.1812 for marrying out, and re-admitted three years later. His wife and three children were admitted in 1818. Arthur Clothier was very active in the meeting, and was one of those instrumental in building the present meeting house at Street in 1850.

The records show that James Clothier in 1774 was the last member of the Monthly meeting for many years who married out and was not disowned. The earlier belief that such a marriage was a sin that God alone could forgive, but for which sincere and unfeigned repentance and a public testimony to clear truth, could be accepted by Friends, was changing. It came to be accepted that marrying out was a breach of the rules for which disownment was the penalty. In the minute of 1774, it was seduction that "is greatly to the scandal of the Christian name": both this and marriage by the priest, were "contrary to the rules Established among us". But the rules had not been applied too rigidly. Members of the Monthly meeting were often neighbours, sometimes closely related, and their virtues and failings must have been well-known to each other. Consequently the esteem with which the offending member was regarded, his value to the Society, the depth of his interest in it, and the particular needs of his meeting, can all have influenced the decision of Friends. Factors which were never reflected in the minutes were the character and feelings of the other party to the marriage, the man or woman of the world. Altogether about 60 Friends in the Monthly meeting were accused, between 1691 and 1774 of going to the priest for a wife, or worse.

Drunkenness

Drunkenness was occasionally a cause of complaint against a Friend, but there was often hope of reform. "Deborah Nichols being at Clark's Ale its reported she was overgon with liquor to be spoken to by Philip Watts." That was in 1707 [9.iv.1707]: no further action was recorded.

George Ham of Glastonbury in 1722 "hath run out into a disorderly behavior, & loose conversation often drinking to excess, & then behaveing himselfe very foolish & un-

becoming", and was disowned and denied "to be one of us while he continued in so doing" [4.xi.1722]. Robert Champion in 1729, "hopes for the future to be more orderly" [10.i.1729].

In 1738, Thomas Clark, uncle of the John who later married Jane Bryant, was accused of intemperance [18.v.1738], and when he could be persuaded to attend Monthly meeting, was "advised and admonished, to take care to avoid keeping bad company, & excess in drinking" [12.vii.1738]. A testimony was drawn up against him, but not read; his brother John explained a year later "because of late he seem to behave more orderly" [15.viii.1739]. The improvement, if it existed in any eyes but those of his brother, did not last; eventually, nearly two years after the first complaint, John Hackett and James Clothier were appointed to read the testimony in Greinton meeting [9.iv.1740]. There is no record that they did so.

In 1794, after six years intermittent visiting and support from the charity, women Friends reported having visited Eleanor Gillett a widow at Glastonbury, "on account of her having of late again fallen into excess drinking and that their visits have been unsatisfactory" [4.vi.1794]. A joint visit with men Friends was equally unsatisfactory, and she was disowned [6.viii.1794]. Twenty-five years later she was re-united with Friends.

Altogether, in more than 100 years, only four members, including Nathaniel Bryant, were testified against for excess in drinking. One or two others were guilty of undefined disorderly conduct.

Tithes

Friends' testimony against payment of tithes was a most inconvenient burden laid particularly heavily on those who were farmers. When imprisonment for non-payment ceased, the seizure of goods or crops usually resulted in the cost of sale and other charges being added to the legal demand from the rector. In 1697 John Banks and Abraham Gundry were ordered to go and visit four Butleigh Friends "who make a profession of Truth, but walke contrary thereunto in not bareing their testimoney against payment of tythes" [10.x.1697]. They made various excuses and failed to appear at the next monthly meeting as desired. Possibly as a result of their unfaithfulness, "This meeting desires

Butleigh friends to joyne them selves with Street meeting for worship" [8.iii.1698]. They seem to have begun to regard themselves as a separate meeting [8.ix.1695]. It may be remembered that Edward Blenman was living at Butleigh in 1705, when he too was unfaithful regarding tithes.

Bruton meeting was never strong; Philip Allen was one of its older members, appointed overseer in 1695. In 1704 [10.v.1704] he admitted paying tithes, but, "so far from condemning his action therein, that he rather pleads for the payment of it . . . friends . . . are grieved that a man of his age both as to yeares and profesion of the Truth, should let fall his Testimoney against that great oppression of tythes . . . if he doe not condemn his action herein friends will be constrained to testifie against him." When visited again, he "seemed concerned for what he had don and hoped should have strength to withstand it for time to come" [14.vi.1704].

In 1761, six Friends "appointed by the yearly meeting to visit the Monthly and Quarterly meetings were present here and there Company and seasonable advices have been well accepted" [17.xi.1761]. "As there apear some unfaithfulness in the Testimony against the paying Tythes and those called church Rates it is left to next Meeting to appoint some Friends to treat with those that are remiss therein." The misconduct of some members and the visiting of families were also left to the next meeting but were not then dealt with, "the minutes of last meeting being misled" [8.iii.1762]. It was later reported that those unfaithful regarding the payment of tithes and Friends of Glaston in relation to misconduct had been admonished, but "as to visiting of Familys, we find none that is willing to undertake that service".

It appeared in 1796 that as William Moxham "dos not stand clear in oure Testimony against an Higherling Ministry it appears right unto us not to apply to him as usual for collections" [1.vi.1796]. Four years later the meeting was informed that he now declines the payment of tithes and all similar demands, and "this meeting is of the opinion his collection may be again accepted" [4.vi.1800]. This case of moral pressure may not have been as successful as Friends were informed. We have a volume of Sufferings, recording distraints on Friends for non-payment of tithes during this

period, where William Moxham's name does not appear. The tender treatment he received may have been influenced by other factors. In the *Universal Directory* for 1792, Glastonbury Friends are described as shopkeepers, stocking makers, a baker and a carpenter; William Moxham alone of the meeting was a gentleman, he was also an old man.

When Jonathan P. Newman was disowned in 1805, his payment of tithes and absence from meetings were mentioned [6.iii.1805, 1.v.1805]. He had in fact no interest in remaining a Friend; quite to the contrary: once freed from his Quakerism he was able to become mayor of Glastonbury.

The record of Sufferings shows the contrasting burden on tradesmen and farmers. William Metford, a shopkeeper, was liable in 1801 for a Wardens Rate of 6s. 3d. with 10s. charge for collection; an Elm Tree, valued at 23s. was taken, and 9d. returned. In the same year James Clothier was liable for £21 11s. 6d. with 10s. charges: they took 16 sheep valued at £24, and returned nothing. Some farmers' names appear year after year; manufacturers were occasionally assessed for the Militia or Navy. The largest single seizure in the book was from James and Samuel Salter, sailcloth makers of Odcombe, who lost in 1808 sundry pieces of cloth valued at £108 17s. 4½d. to meet a claim for £74 13s. 6d. The goods were sold under value and only £16 2s. 4d. was returned.

Insolvency

When a Friend was insolvent, true repentance and practical steps to help the creditors were demanded by the meeting. One of the overseers appointed for Lydford meeting in 1695, was Thomas Cooling of Babcary. In 1st month 1710/11 [12.i.1710/11] Monthly meeting heard that he "hath run himself into debt far beyond (as tis said) what he is able to pay". Joseph Moore, appointed to tell him that "Friends expect he should give forth a Testimony against his so running into debt", failed to find Thomas, whose wife said that "he hath undone her and her sisters" [9.v.1711]. In 10th month "by what he saith, [he] hath been much abused by some of his creditors", but hoped to make up his accounts and satisfy them. In 2nd month 1712 the "death of his Wife and two Sisters delayed his coming to Glaston" [14.ii.1712]. "We have a further account that he's

gone over Sea." More than a year later a letter was received from him and with the reply a testimony against him was enclosed [11.iii.1713].

I have already referred to the insolvency of Edward Blenman Junior in 1712. Friends' advice to him was "that he doe speedily offer up all that he hath to his Creditors" [15.vii.1712]. They would not accept it. He was again "advised to satisfie his Creditors to the utmost of his ability by offering up all that he hath (if it can not be done within), and not to give occasion to Friends to give forth a publick Testimony against him" [15.x.1712]. Samuel Clothier gave account in 12th month "that he hath spoken to Edward Blenman and he signifies that he hath offered up all to his Creditors, and some have accepted it and others will not" [9.xii.1712]. There is no further record of the matter.

In 1736 Robert Gundry and Mary Stower of Street were in financial difficulties and Monthly meeting received a letter wherein Robert condemned his proceedings. He was advised that he "ought if possible to make some reinbursement to his creditors out of the wages which he may receive, which will be certain proof that what he writes is real" [3.iii.1737]. He found it difficult "to comit any mony as yett", and he and Mary Stower were informed "that if they can not see freedom publickly to disown their wrong steps, this meeting will find themselves under obligation to do it, and that if Robert will comitt something to his poor creditors, this meeting will supply him so far in case he should have the small pox, if need require" [12.vii.1737]. Without explanation, the next reference is: "The case of Mary Stower and Robert Gundry is dropt" [14.ix.1737].

When William Thatcher of Frome became insolvent in 1762, "he seemed inclinable to take Friends Advice in delivering up his all to his Credittors and if that won't do his Body also" [9.viii.1762]. The last phrase means, I suppose, that he would work for them, or at least contribute from any wages he might earn. At a later meeting, "finding no tokens of sorrow or repentance for his outgoings" [4.x.1762], he was disowned. At this time there was clearly no rule that insolvency must necessarily be followed by disownment.

In 1783 the four meetings from the Southern Division which was then too weak for separate existence as a Monthly

meeting, were added to the Middle Division. Street, Glastonbury and Greinton made a compact area where interrelated families of quite well-to-do Friends were strengthened by mutual support. The four meetings added included some valuable and active Friends, Isaacs, Palmers, Gilletts, Salters, but were straggling and struggling often unsuccessfully, bringing a great variety of problems with them. Friends were too scattered for some younger members to form attachments for other members of the society: this particularly applied in families less comfortably circumstanced. Fifteen members were disowned by the monthly meeting between 1783 and the end of the century; 10 had married out; one misconducted himself with his father's woman servant; two had no interest in the Society and did not intend to come to meetings again; Eleanor Gillett drank to excess, and Samuel Rowsell was simply said to be disorderly. Of these fifteen, thirteen were from the Southern Division meetings, and only two from the Middle Division. Four were re-admitted eventually.

In 1804 Somerton and Long Sutton Friends asked for men and women to meet together for Preparative Meetings, a sure sign of weakness [12.vi.1804], and in 1805 Puddimore meeting house, being dilapidated, was sold.

Women Friends

The monthly meeting for women met usually at the same place and on the same day as that for men. The range of their work as recorded in their minute book for 1761 to 1793 does not support the view that women and men had an equal status in the Society of Friends, except perhaps in purely spiritual matters. God's guidance was sought by men in their meetings for church affairs in many matters affecting property, charitable funds and their distribution, membership, discipline, and the wider interests of the Society. His guidance for women was looked for in a more restricted field. Both the men and women considered and answered the Queries: women also inquired into the clearness from other ties of women Friends intending marriage to a Friend, visited those walking disorderly or contemplating doing so, and reported thereon to their Men Friends for them to take action. As to charity, in 1792 for instance, the men brought from Quarterly meeting £30 in 1st month and £20

in 7th month for distribution to those once called "our poor objects". The women distributed about 20s. every three months, which they had brought with them to be collected at their meetings.

By a men's minute of 10.xii.1706, four Friends were appointed "to advise the women friends to be carefull in distributing their charity from the meeting to such as walk deserving". Men's guidance as well as God's was available for the women.

After 1783 problems arising from the Southern Division occasionally gave women Friends some visits to arrange and report; otherwise I suspect that after a time for prayer and for answering the queries, they were able to prepare food for their men.

A touching note appears in a minute of 1785: "The epistle from our Womon friends of America and likewise from London was read at this meeting which being the first of the kind we have had rather cheerd some druping spirits that was almost ready to faint for want of bread" [WM 7.vi.1785].

Conclusion

I have found the study of these records most rewarding. We shall never know what was decided about Katharine Bryan and Lydia Nichols, nor why the matter of Mary Stower and Robert Gundry was dropped. What appears from the minutes is that a devoted and determined body of concerned men and women, often at fault themselves, and to modern ideas sometimes very narrow minded, kept Quakerism alive and vigorous in Mid-Somerset. If they and others like them had not maintained their testimonies, inconvenient and restricting as they were, the probability is that what was good in the Society of Friends could have disappeared with what was distinctive. These men and women preserved the Society as a foundation for later Friends to build on. What was the Quakerism that they practised?

That active minister Thomas Clark (1759–1850) in his later years wrote a brief autobiography[1] in which he describes his life and spiritual growth. When an apprentice he was

[1] Thomas Clark's autobiography was copied into an exercise book by my grandmother Mary (Clark) Morland. I do not know whether other copies have survived.

present at a crowded yearly meeting in about the year 1775, at Bristol, attended by persons of different creeds: the meeting was very unsettled. "Then Samuel Spavel [Spavold] stood up and said: 'I must leave disputable points of Doctrine to those who have capacity to handle them to Edification. I feel nothing but Love, and my desire is, that all my Fellow Creatures of every Creed, and what ever their Religious Notions may be, that all may be delivered from the Wrath to come and out of the Stronghold of the Adversary, and this cannot be unless we come to Christ . . . .' This and much more brought the meeting into a state of Solemn stillness not soon forgot."

He admits his parsimony, for which he is still remembered. I will finish with one further quotation from his writing: "Religious minds sustain great loss when wholly depending on immediate supplies of Spiritual aid as saith the Prophet, 'My people have committed two Evils they have forsaken me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'."

STEPHEN C. MORLAND