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Light Within or Beacon Without?
an evaluation of the impact of evangelicalism on Quakers 1820-1840

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Abstract

This paper examines why the evangelical revival became such an important issue for the Society of Friends in the early nineteenth century. The focus is on the conflict that evangelicalism aroused between 1835 and 1840 with the Beacon controversy and the resultant challenge to the concept of the inward light. The shifting attitudes of Quakers are situated in their contemporary world, in which fundamental changes were occurring in almost every sphere. The position is taken that the wider context of economic growth and political reform provoking social action contributed to evangelicalism making inroads into Quaker belief. The close-up image compares Quakers in Manchester and Kendal and looks at their reactions to the controversy. The wealth, reputation and upward mobility of many leading Quakers by the 1830s, gives credence to my view that evangelical belief and action for them justified their social standing in the eyes of God and man. This was in opposition to the belief in the authority of an unverifiable inward light which required a certain passivity and inaction.

Keywords

Isaac Crewdson, Beacon controversy, evangelical, inward light, authority, reform

By 1835 middle class Dissenters had gained most of the religious and civil liberties formerly denied to them. Here the link is explored between that new status and the growth of evangelical belief among Quakers at the expense of the inward light. It will be shown that a tendency of assurance in more external affirmations of religious belief often accompanied a securer social status. The focal point for these issues is Isaac Crewdson (1780-1844), who provides one example of raised social standing combined with an extreme evangelical view-

point. In the short book he published in 1835 called *A Beacon to the Society of Friends*, he asserted that the authority from the external scriptures was above the uncertain delusions of the light within.

Ostensibly Crewdson was exposing the so-called 'heretical' views of the American Quaker Elias Hicks (1748-1830) who, with his followers, had separated from the American Orthodox Friends in 1827/8 (Ingle 1986). Hicks attributed all scriptural meaning to experience within the individual and regarded the inward light as the ultimate authority. Implicitly, the *Beacon* was a warning light to the Society of Friends in Britain that the views of some of its members were dangerously close to the heresies of the American Hicksites and they would thus be excluded from God's pattern of salvation. At the same time, Crewdson's aim in the *Beacon* was to light up the dazzling reality of salvation through faith in the divinity of Christ and his atoning blood, revealed by God in the Bible. This was a much more visual and substantial belief than the hazy light within.

The *Beacon* prompted a lively pamphlet controversy and much bitter dispute that lasted for about five years. The controversy challenged the status quo within the Society of Friends and exposed the underlying and recurring contention of Quakerism. Should the individual rely totally for authority on 'the light' or 'spirit' within, which is debatably either a direct leading and revelation from God, or the whim of the individual? Or, should the Bible be taken to be the supreme authority? On the other hand, is the Bible, according to the view of Elias Hicks, 'a mere written book', just words written by men, certainly under the influence of the Spirit, but open to error in translation, copying and interpretation (I. Crewdson 1835: 32)? These issues produced a rift between the newer evangelical spirit of Quakerism and the 'old school' traditional style. For evangelicals the vagueness and ambiguity of immediate revelation was replaced by biblical evidence of God's will. The more traditional Quakers believed that it was obedience to God that made salvation possible through sensitivity to the inward light which was available to all mankind. Several English Friends combined a belief in and dependence on the inward light with many of the principles of evangelicalism. To make this possible the light had indeed undergone a subtle transformation and was interpreted as the working of the 'Holy Spirit'. As such, it was more in line with the 'orthodox' Christian rhetoric of other denominations.

The so-called 'Beacon controversy' was a challenge to all these strains of belief within British Quakerism. To put this controversy into context I am going to follow Isaac Crewdson's life, which spanned the years from before the French Revolution to early Victorian times. Noting the changes in Crewdson's viewpoint, these can be related, where relevant, to underlying trends of the times. This period was one of rapid change in society due to transformations in commerce, politics and religious belief. It also coincided with the rise to prominence of the evangelical revival in the churches and chapels of Britain and America. I look at Manchester, being the centre from which the controversy of the 1830s radiated, and also at the market town of Kendal in Westmorland, which was an evangelical outpost with family links to the prime contenders in the controversy.

It is perhaps surprising to learn that Isaac Crewdson was only a fairly recent convert to evangelicalism, at least to the extreme version he upheld from the

1830s. Crewdson was born in 1780 in Kendal, into a family that descended from early Quakers and was related to the five other staunch Quaker families of Kendal, who likewise traced their Quaker ancestry to the time of George Fox. Having a mind 'stern in its requisition' (I. Crewdson 1845: 8), Crewdson adhered strictly to the Quaker discipline. His father was in the hosiery business and began what became a successful banking partnership in 1788, but he died in 1795 leaving a large family. The oldest son, W. D. Crewdson (I), was twenty-one and followed him into the Kendal banking business, and the other four sons went to Manchester to become apprentices and then manufacturers in the textile trade. Isaac was almost fifteen when he left Kendal with an older brother, and two younger brothers followed later. After their apprenticeships in Manchester they all settled there and they were successful in business.

It was reported that in his younger days Isaac read the writings of William Law, Fénelon and Thomas à Kempis (I. Crewdson 1845: 7) – all authors of inward and somewhat mystical teaching – which is interesting when it is seen how Crewdson disparaged mysticism in his criticism of Hicks in the *Beacon*. This later viewpoint shows that he had come to separate mysticism altogether from Christianity. He wrote 'Between mysticism and the religion of Christ, there is this essential difference – the former is chiefly a religion of feelings, the latter is a religion of faith ... ' (I. Crewdson 1835: 144). Faith, for Crewdson as well as other evangelical Christians, focused on the atonement and the written guidelines from the Bible, and gave a more rational assurance than what he saw as intuition and feelings, more typical of the romantic expressions of his age. Yet he, and most members of the Society of Friends, were fearful of the extremes of the age of reason: of what they referred to as deism, and Socinianism, and indeed Hicksism, which discounted all miracles including that of the virgin birth, the divinity of Christ and the resurrection. While Hicks managed to rationalise the experience of internalised Christian beliefs, Crewdson described this as mysticism in a derogatory sense.

The French Revolution, the Terror and the subsequent, long drawn out Napoleonic Wars were all events unsettling to British society. Quaker reaction, moreover, showed how far Friends had become removed from the counter-cultural ideals of early Quakerism. The popular writing of the former Quaker Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was feared by Friends because, for them, his *The Rights of Man* (1791), and other publications, gave to some of the poor and working classes a new self image and a promise of liberty and equal rights. Quakers, like the Manchester Crewdson brothers, who had worked hard for their wealth and position in society, would have feared a threat to that status by the very real possibility of rebellion and revolution at home. In fact several historians argue in different ways, that evangelicalism had made such inroads to the religious beliefs of the working classes that the Evangelical revival may have been responsible for preventing an English revolution.[1] There was, however, another sort of revolution taking place in England on a more massive scale than anywhere else at that time and largely stemming from Manchester. This was the

1 E.g. E. Halévey (1913), E.P.Thompson (1968), E.J.Hobsbawn (1957), A.D.Gilbert (1976).

industrial revolution which produced the extremes of wealth that led, on the one hand, to Britain's vast colonial domination and, on the other, to poverty with its massive social problems and political and revolutionary implications. Isaac Crewdson and his brothers in Manchester and his family back in Kendal benefited financially, like others, from the expansion of the industrial revolution, the population explosion and the extra demands on the textile and related industries from the Napoleonic Wars. Soon after the Wars ended in 1815, Isaac became a recorded minister of the Society of Friends, and at the same time W. D. Crewdson (I), his oldest brother and banker from Kendal, held the post of Clerk to the Yearly Meeting for six consecutive years and was also a recorded minister. The Crewdsons and their kin had become highly respectable and respected leaders of the Society of Friends.

This was also a time in which, it has been argued, a new self-awareness of class division occurred and with the end of the Napoleonic Wars the horizontal structures of middle and working classes came into being (Perkin 1969: 209). Class antagonism became more pronounced in the industrial towns like Manchester, whereas the smaller towns (such as Kendal) clung to the mutually beneficial system of paternalism although this underwent change as control and discipline of the workforce by employers gradually took precedence over the former commitment to welfare and protection in return for loyalty (1969: 180-2). Middle-class Dissenters in the forefront of commerce wanted parliamentary reform to allow them the vote and to have other constraints removed giving them greater control in civic affairs. They also wanted free trade in order to speed up the market flow. The working classes, who thronged into Manchester in their thousands, lived in the poorest conditions, but formed the backbone to the industrial revolution. Nevertheless, when they marched or rioted against low wages and high food prices in Manchester, the strong arm of the law and the military was more in evidence to stamp out radicalism than any effective social action, philanthropy or government intervention to alleviate the symptoms of hardship, of starvation and disease.

Quakers, supreme in their work to abolish slavery abroad, were not noted for any action to abolish 'slave labour' in the factories at home, although their influence was beginning to affect prison reform and they became increasingly engaged in education and other self-help programmes. In line with other denominations, the purely evangelical Quakers were more intent on saving the souls of the lower classes rather than actually relieving the conditions causing their stress. Of utmost importance to them was the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society to ensure the widest possible distribution of the Bible (Martin 1996: 18-19). The necessary contact with those from the various denominations, who were likewise acting out their commitment to spreading the evangelical Christian message, meant that there was increasing consciousness of other aspects of evangelicalism filtering through to the minds of Quakers. Moreover, the evangelical stream became aware of the irony whereby the Society of Friends, while promoting the Bible to the populace at large, did not sufficiently emphasise the importance of Bible study among its own members.

In the 1820s and 30s, J. J. Gurney (1788-1847), the wealthy Quaker banker from Norwich, wrote several works which became standard reading for many Quakers and may have contributed to the spread of more outward expressions of belief by Friends. He tried to align Quakerism with evangelical orthodoxy and he was convinced that the scriptures should be widely read and taught. Gurney's influence in the Society of Friends is indisputable and yet he was also a respected figure among leading figures from other denominations and he mixed socially with such evangelical Anglicans as Charles Simeon (1759-1836) and William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and the Scottish theologian Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847). His personal appeal and persuasive manner undoubtedly helped swing the main body of the Society of Friends towards a more evangelical interpretation of Quakerism. Moreover, he stressed the importance of religious instruction for young people. In 1830, for instance, Gurney visited Kendal and instigated the practice he continued in other places, of holding scriptural meetings for the young (Braithwaite 1854, I: 425; Thomas 1909: 49).

Although Gurney influenced Crewdson's thinking deeply, he wrote more positively about Quakerism conforming to Christian belief. He stated '... Quakerism, rightly understood, is nothing *more* nor *less* than the religion of the New Testament. I look upon it as Christianity without addition and without diminution' (Braithwaite 1854: 29). He tried to fit Quakerism into his evangelical understanding of Christianity and vice versa. Crewdson, on the other hand, stated later that 'the deep and painful conviction has been forced upon me, with *irresistible evidence*, that Quakerism, as set forth in some of the writings of George Fox, and other early Friends, is not Christianity, and that some of his [Fox's] delusive assumptions were of a truly awful, and even blasphemous character (T. D. Crewdson 1837, Res. 3-4).[2] It was in the 1820s that Crewdson had read, with growing concern, the unscriptural sections in Barclay's *Apology* about 'the light, seed, grace, and Word of God' (1837: 1-2).[3] He disagreed with Barclay's assertion that a measure of God's saving light and grace was in everyone. In speaking about his apprehensions of Barclay's theology to elders in the Manchester, Mount Street Meeting, and also to some influential Friends at Yearly Meeting, Crewdson realised that they shared his fears that Barclay, the recognised exponent of Quaker belief, had certain unsound views which had no scriptural basis. The reassessment by certain leading Quakers of Barclay's theology in the 1820s helped to produce a shift in their evangelical viewpoint in which scriptural authority was emphasised over that of the inward light.

In 1827 Crewdson started writing and publishing short works on subjects that concerned him closely. He had just recovered from a life-threatening illness and appears to have needed to re-examine his religious beliefs so as to ensure he was in a state of salvation in this world before entering the next. Joining the wave of interest in reformation history and the works of Richard Baxter (1615-

2 'T. D. Crewdson 1837' is one binding which consists of three parts with consecutive pagination and a fourth part in which the pagination recommences. This last part includes the letters of resignation and here cited as 'Res.'.

3 Crewdson was referring particularly to the thirteenth section of Propositions V and VI (Barclay 1841: 129-31).

1691) in particular, Crewdson read Baxter's *Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650). He was so impressed that he wrote and published a shortened form of the abridged version, in order to make it accessible to a wide readership. This small publication of Crewdson's proved to be enormously successful. Between 1829 and 1838 there were eleven English editions totalling 33,000 copies and four more editions were translated into French (Baxter 1962: 13 and 187). It is clear to see how Baxter impressed Crewdson and influenced his zeal in spreading the Gospel message. Baxter told his readers of the importance of saving the souls of others and that salvation was a serious matter. He wrote:

> Labour, to make men know that it is mad jesting about salvation or damnation, and that heaven and hell be not matters to be played with, or passed over with a few careless thoughts (Baxter 1962: 98-99).

Baxter also emphasised the correct location of authority:

> Let all your reproofs and exhortations be backed with the authority of God. Let the sinner be convinced that you speak not from yourselves, or of your own head ... (1962: 100).

Isaac Crewdson was remembered as having been one of the most actively benevolent of men (Grindon 1929: 38). He was not only wealthy but held a lofty position of authority within the Manchester Society of Friends. He was one of the largest cash contributors to the grand new Meeting House at Mount Street (completed in 1829 and still in use today), which at that time had a seating capacity for 1,500 people (Wilson 1988: 11). There was a two-tiered gallery facing and overlooking the seats occupied by up to about five hundred worshippers. Crewdson sat in the top tier with two other ministers. They were above a row of about nine elders (including Isaac's three brothers and a future brother-in-law) (Tonge 1908: 18). His prestige in the Society of Friends was in keeping with his social position and, in common with other successful middle class manufacturers, Crewdson had moved house to the suburbs during the 1820s away from the centre of Manchester and the heart of the manufacturing industries.

In 1831-2, John Wilbur (1774-1856), the traditionalist Quaker minister from America, came on a religious visit to Britain. He may have played a key role in defining and consolidating the position of the old school Quakerism in Britain as opposed to the new and ultra-evangelical approach. In fact, his friend Margaret Crosfield from Liverpool, writing to him after he left the area, told him that his visit had 'been the means of opening our eyes to things we did not know existed, and put us on our guard, for which I many times feel truly thankful' (Wilbur 1859: 172). Wilbur, and those who supported him, were loyal to their Quaker roots and drew many of their religious beliefs from the early Quakers. Wilbur emphasised the priority of what he called 'the spirit of Christ' over the teaching of the scriptures. For him, belief in Christ's divinity and outward sacrifice was essential in order to achieve that inner atonement and

redemption. Wilbur considered that his opponent J. J. Gurney over-emphasised the outward atonement, thus diminishing its inner significance. He saw Gurney as representing a growing movement among those of high standing in the Society – and who were, therefore, largely beyond the accepted methods of Quaker disciplinary reproach – who leaned 'too much to their own understanding, instead of waiting ... on Jesus Christ ... ' (1859: 137-8). Wilbur was also very wary of the harm being done to Society members who joined in the various interdenominational missionary movements and of the danger to their own testimonies (1859: 116).

In Manchester and the wider area included in the Monthly Meeting of Hardshaw East, there were considerable numbers of traditional Quakers whose theology resembled Wilbur's. These traditionalists felt they were being overruled by the ultra-evangelical stream who were leading them away from Quakerism as they understood it. Tensions grew as this party and the followers of Isaac Crewdson drifted further apart. Crewdson was supported by his immediate family, and his brothers and their families in Manchester, as well as others who were attracted to his ministry and teaching. At the same time he was resented more and more for initiating an intrusive ministry of the Gospel by the other party, who believed in the teaching and guidance from the spirit within. Crewdson's brother-in-law William Boulton held very successful scripture meetings at his own home, but it was, finally, the assumptions and teaching there of pre-destination and election, which persuaded the 'old school' Quakers to act. They were a powerful enough group within the Quarterly Meeting to elect a committee of twenty-one people with a strong traditional bias to intervene in the conflict. This Select Committee was, naturally, deeply resented by the ultra-evangelicals but it never had a chance to meet. Isaac Crewdson had by then published his *Beacon* and the problem was taken up at the Yearly Meeting that summer with the appointment of their own representatives. These made up a Committee of thirteen men with various shades of belief, who included J. J. Gurney, and they made several visits to the Lancashire Monthly Meeting at Hardshaw East in order to settle the dispute. Their task was to resolve the complaints made against the Crewdson evangelical party and appease the traditionalists by putting some restraint on Crewdson's extreme views.

The records of these meetings, and the letters and documents that passed between the Yearly Meeting Committee and Isaac Crewdson, give a vivid insight into the proceedings that took place (T. D. Crewdson 1837). The members of the numerically stronger traditionalist party were often handicapped by their convictions being directed by 'feelings' which they could not easily express in words. The Crewdson faction, on the other hand, was more characterised by demands for evidence, proof, and consistency. They wanted all verbal transactions to be put into writing and signed and they emphasised their rights and contrasted the judgement by the Yearly Meeting Committee with the standards of justice by a court of law. They plainly had experience of the harsh world outside and wanted to introduce the tactics of running a commercial business to these meetings.

The members of the Yearly Meeting Committee were in a difficult position. They were by no means united in their own theological perspectives but were unanimous in their opinion that the direction Isaac Crewdson was taking was too extreme and contrary to the spirit of Quakerism. Their task to reach the right balance was a delicate one. They therefore agreed in principle to accept that nothing unscriptural had been written in the *Beacon* but they considered Crewdson should stop its further circulation because they disapproved of its 'manifest tendency' (YMC&IC 1836: 62[4]). After he had refused to do this by the time they reconvened four months later, their next move was to recommend that he cease to speak at the meetings for worship in the capacity of Minister and that he should not attend any further Meetings for Ministers and Elders. Again, Crewdson ignored their advice and his party of loyal supporters backed him. Although much time was taken up in arguing details of principle and procedure, there is no doubt that fundamentally there were deep, underlying theological differences. The parties were divided in their opinions as to what defined Quakerism; and how it related to Christianity; and which interpretation (if any) of the Christian doctrines were integral to Quaker faith and practice.

One point, which the Yearly Meeting Committee did not completely clarify, was the position of the Quaker inward light. Although they referred to it as the Holy Spirit, several Quakers, including some of the Committee members and office holders, were not prepared to go so far as to relinquish the interpretation of the inward light as held by the early Friends or as defined by Barclay in his *Apology* by means of the 'vehiculum Dei' (1841: 129). Even most of the Yearly Meeting Committee who inclined more to evangelicalism would have been aware of the further injury likely to have been inflicted on the Society had they officially denounced Barclay's definition, and thereby reduced the importance of the essential ingredient, for many, of their Quaker beliefs. However, they made their position clear when they stated: 'While we object, as much as the Author of the *Beacon*, to a reliance, in matters of religion, on the impressions of our own imagination, we must declare that Christianity is a religion not only of *faith*, but of *feelings*. To assert the contrary, is to strike at the root of all experimental religion' (YMC&IC 1836: 36).

During the Beacon controversy much time was spent by the Society of Friends in Manchester, and extending to the other Meetings in Britain, in debating the opposing views of salvation and its selective or universal relevance. Alongside and underlying these disputes the larger world of Britain was in a flux of challenge and change. Of utmost importance was the government's achievement in economic and parliamentary reforms which took place in the 1820s and 30s, laying the groundwork for future social transformation. Middle-class Friends who had now gained the reforms they needed were in a better position to exert their influence and authority in social concerns. But in order to

4 Four sections were bound together in various formats of The Beacon Controversy between the Society of Friends and Isaac Crewdson. For information on these different publications see J. Hall (1968: 81-2). All four sections have separate pagination. The first section, 'Correspondence &c.' is cited by me YMC&IC 1836.

participate in welfare projects, local government and civic administration, serve in the City Missions and self-help institutions, it was necessary for these Quakers to turn their beliefs inside out and to face the world instead of shunning it. Those Quakers who adhered to the traditions of Quakerism and emphasised the inward spirituality were not in striking evidence among the outward activists and reformers.

Quakers in Kendal, who included many of Isaac Crewdson's relations, were prominent in the scene of the small market town's politics. As well as being leading manufacturers or bankers, they were in the forefront of Kendal philanthropy and kept control of their workforce through paternalistic involvement. Some Kendal Quakers were also active supporters of the Whig party. They were, moreover, largely of a strong, evangelical persuasion and their social positions were in ascendancy. They were altogether much more influential in the town of Kendal than their Manchester counterparts were in that vast metropolis. In fact the Quakers in Manchester did not tend to participate so much in politics or social concerns outside their own Society (Mingins 2002: 140-56, 221).

The age of reform gathered momentum between the 1820s and 1840s and went beyond politics into the religious arena. Possibly stirred by this reforming spirit, many Quakers in the early 1830s, who represented the evangelical party, were intent on reforming the Society of Friends and raising its reputation among other evangelical churches. W. D. Crewdson (I) from Kendal travelled to many different Meetings in his capacity as a recorded minister and his diary for 1835 notes his impression of the 'closed dead' meetings for worship he visited and his desire for more preaching and scripture reading (CRO(K) WD/Cr/4/I). While he was away his brother-in-law, George Braithwaite, suggested introducing the practice of reading a passage from scripture to the Kendal meeting for worship during the absence of their recorded ministers. This idea was not acceptable to some members who wanted to maintain the tradition of silent worship and spontaneous ministry (CRO(K) WD/Cr/6/81). By 1837, however, W. D. Crewdson (I) was accused by a Friend from a neighbouring Meeting of introducing readings from scripture into the meeting for worship and also initiating prayers, recommending that they should be made from a kneeling position (CRO(K) WD/Cr/4/187/4). Although the Kendal meeting was dominated by a family party, many of whom were sympathetic to the beliefs and actions of their relation Isaac Crewdson, the general tone of the meeting shows that they were not prepared to go so far as this in opposition to the traditions of Quaker worship. Anna Braithwaite, the other important recorded minister in Kendal, had, by then, realised the importance of keeping an even balance between the extremes of belief (Wilbur 1859: 170).

The early 1830s was a time when there was a proliferation of new churches, sects and movements and yet the evangelical ideal centred on greater ecumenism or, at least, a union of evangelical churches. One of the new movements was that of the Plymouth Brethren, originating from the Anglican church and influencing many who were disaffected with their own church and wanted to join together to worship in the simplicity of primitive Christianity and with

a free ministry. In Kendal, a close association was formed between some of the related Quaker families and an early leader of the Plymouth Brethren, W. S. Newton, who was linked by marriage to the Kendal Crewdsons and visited them in the early 1830s. The influence of Newton's public preaching in Kendal during his visits almost certainly affected those families. Indeed, the Kendal Quakers who resigned on account of the Beacon controversy were all from this extended family group. They represented the prestigious and wealthy members of the Society and were also influential in town affairs. The Kendal Brethren movement was founded by some of these family members after resigning as Friends and were joined and supported at a later date by others, including several of the Crewdson family (CRO(K) WDFC/F/1/1/136).

Reflecting the nature of the evangelical revival, Crewdson's *Beacon* was read well beyond the Quaker community. In response to it, several non-conformist magazines wrote reviews praising the work and rejoicing at the apparent move within the body of the Society of Friends towards embracing the truths of evangelicalism. The pamphlet controversy, following the publication of the *Beacon*, began with a concentration of articles on the early Friends, each side finding in their writings arguments to favour their own views – the traditionalists uniting with the beliefs of early Quakerism and the evangelical stream finding those beliefs very unsound. The controversy then moved to the subject of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. The evangelicals found what they saw as irrefutable evidence from the Bible to support their belief that these outward rites were a necessary process of salvation. Needless to say, the traditional Quakers took the line of their early forebears that the outward rites were unnecessary religious forms and were merely symbolic of the inner experiences of baptism and the Supper. The more extreme evangelicals were so convinced of the necessity of being baptised that by 1836 a few of them received water baptism from evangelical ministers outside the Society. After Isaac Crewdson received this rite, he himself baptised several members and ex-members. Water baptism of members was often followed by resignation from the Society of Friends, and occasionally disownment. Yearly Meeting could not reach an agreement on how the Society should react to these aberrations but they did make unusual concessions to the evangelical view in the Epistle for 1836. In this it was stated that the declarations made in the Bible are from God and are the appointed means of revealing the truths of Christianity, and claims of any higher authority should be considered a delusion (Epistles 1858: 272). Was a reformation on the way? Many of the Manchester ultra-evangelicals may well have anticipated one. If so, their hopes were soon dashed when the Yearly Meeting Committee discredited Isaac Crewdson's position as a minister.

By the end of 1836 and into early 1837, Isaac Crewdson and most of his family in Manchester had given in their resignation letters to the Monthly Meeting. An initial total of over fifty members of Hardshaw East Monthly Meeting resigned. Their letters of resignation show that they mostly disagreed with the body of the Society on their views of justification and the atonement but they also strongly resented the treatment of Isaac Crewdson by the Yearly

Meeting Committee. Crewdson and Boulton gave their supporters inspiration and guidance in devotional meetings, which they held independently from the Society, providing the scriptural direction that was lacking in the Quaker meetings for worship.

Crewdson was still convinced that he could help the Society of Friends to become reformed as an acceptable evangelical church. By the end of 1837 it is said that he had paid £3,000 for a chapel in Grosvenor Street, Chorlton-upon-Medlock (*Inquirer* 1839: 73). A substantial congregation of ex-Quakers attended services there, over which Crewdson and Boulton presided and performed the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The services consisted of prayers, Bible readings, preaching, and also, notably, periods of silence (*Inquirer* 1838: 25-26). They called themselves 'Evangelical Friends' which indicated their wish to still associate with some of the tradition of their former Society. Crewdson tried to persuade waverers from the Society of Friends throughout the country to join his vision of an Evangelical Friends' movement. He went to London at the time of Yearly Meeting in 1837 and held a parallel meeting for Evangelical Friends (Hall 1968: 62-3). He also baptised those Friends who were convinced this was necessary for their spiritual progress. By the early 1840s, however, Crewdson's health had deteriorated, but his evangelical views, tinged with the assurance of his destiny, were as strong as ever and he continued to labour for the souls of others. Nevertheless, he did not achieve his original goal in establishing a permanent party of 'theologically sound' Christians and Evangelical Friends to take over from the 'tainted' Society of Friends. By the time he died in 1844 the seceders he had gathered had scattered and their Grosvenor Street chapel had already been abandoned and put up for sale three years earlier (Wilbur 1859: 341 and 398).

The situation in Kendal was different because the Brethren church, having developed from a congregation of ex-Quakers, became well-established and is still in existence today (Stunt 1970: 18). It suited those disillusioned Quakers because they could retain their principles of a free ministry yet gain the evangelical emphasis on scriptural priority and the necessity of water baptism for believers and of receiving the Lord's Supper. Other ex-Quakers joined the Anglicans and some the Congregational church (CRO(K) WPR 94.1 and CRO(K) WDFC/C1/3). Significantly, all but two out of a total of thirty six resignations between 1836 and 1849 were from the eight connected families who included the Crewdsons. Moreover, with the exception of W. D. Crewdson (I), his wife and his brother-in-law George Braithwaite, those who seceded were from the younger generation of that extended family (CRO(K) WDFC/F/1/136). It left the Kendal Meeting depleted of many of their influential members and with very few young potential leaders. There was, however, some continuation of the family interest there owing to the endeavours of Anna Braithwaite, her husband Isaac and later the strong evangelical leadership of their son Charles Braithwaite (CRO(K) WDFC/F/1/55A) with his wife Susannah.

In retrospect, it can be seen that the Beacon controversy did have the effect

of ridding the Society of the ultra-evangelicals. Although many of them had been leading figures, this loss freed the Society from that element of strong minded individuals, who, had they had their way in reforming the Society, would probably have jeopardised its essential characteristics, leaving it scarcely different from any other evangelical church. The reformation of the Society of Friends, so much sought after by Isaac Crewdson and many others, did not happen. The transformations that did occur extended over a long time span and were different from those envisioned as necessary by the ultra-evangelicals. At the same time the Beaconite schism, and also the more moderate views of J. J. Gurney (who remained a life-long Quaker), would have been factors affecting the course of ongoing Quakerism during most of the rest of the nineteenth century, in which evangelicalism held sway within the framework of the Society's basic constitution.

Undoubtedly, the events leading up to the Beacon controversy were heralded by the forces of social and economic change, and by much questioning of religious belief among all denominations. Running parallel to this many Quakers had arrived at a secure middle-class status, which was reinforced by political reforms giving them more powers to participate in local administration. They also had money and time to spare for the promotion of philanthropic works and missionary endeavour, thereby demonstrating their faith, which was, by then, in tune with the current evangelical interpretation of Christianity. Moreover, in acquiring authority in the man-made hierarchies of power, wealth and status, they themselves needed to be able to turn to a definitive divine authority. This they found revealed through the words of scripture and not inward light, and they were thus enabled to bring their worldly position into line with their religious beliefs. Indeed, evangelical Christianity was not only more fitting for themselves but it was also a clearer message to impart to others and to those lower in the social scale.

Most British Friends did come to align evangelical Christianity with the basic tenets of Quaker faith and thereby remained loyal to the Society of Friends, thus sparing themselves the pain of separating from their traditional culture. For them the inward light had already flickered, become extinguished and transformed into the Holy Spirit, the presence of which was demonstrated, in their understanding, through explicit and external manifestations. For the many Quakers who had embraced the material benefits of the world and were trying to accommodate these with Christian principles, the spiritual basis of Christianity and Quakerism was jeopardised. This was how Thomas Hancock (1783-1849), a doctor and Quaker elder from Liverpool, perceived matters when he wrote criticising the Beacon in 1835:

> Men, governed by the maxims, and interests, of the world, have long been endeavouring to force an alliance between its grandeur, and its learning, and its pomp, and the meekness and lowliness, and simplicity, of gospel truth: and they have succeeded in establishing a connexion, in which the name of Christianity, indeed, appears; but the spirit, and the life, and the purity, are gone! (Hancock 1835: 52).

However, from the point of view of those successful Quakers who had embraced evangelicalism, social activism to promote the spiritual welfare of those less fortunate than themselves was understood to be their Christian duty. Having time and money to contribute to philanthropic causes was also seen to justify their possession of wealth. It was, indeed, precisely such Quakers with affordable time who comprised the main body of authority within the Society of Friends. For those in this category who remained Friends with a leading role in the Society after the Beacon controversy, the argument for evangelicalism had been convincing and they therefore helped steer British Quakerism towards its most 'evangelical' phase while yet allowing the retention of the traditional form of silent worship.

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