

'GAINING A VOICE': AN INTERPRETATION
OF QUAKER WOMEN'S WRITING 1740-1850

Sheila Wright

University of York

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to suggest ways in which Quaker women Ministers, in a period of considerable doctrinal and secular change, used their journal writings as a tool to maintain their position within the Society of Friends. Expanding on previous work on Quaker women's spiritual autobiography, it suggests that these writings were not only written for spiritual purposes but also had a temporal dimension, providing women with an authorized 'voice' through which to express their concerns. The paper explores how in these writings Quaker women represented themselves, their work and their struggles when confronted with a male hierarchy, which for both doctrinal and temporal reasons, was progressively more determined to reduce their role and influence. Using both published and unpublished journals, this study suggests that Quaker women ministers knowingly promulgated their views and concerns through their journals to a wider audience and that their writing provided a useful and powerful medium for consciousness raising, ensuring that their readers were not only alerted to the women's concerns but were also encouraged to maintain the position of women within the organisation of the Society.

KEY WORDS

Journals, representation, Inner Light, discipline, Evangelicalism, gender.

Quaker women have a long, often controversial, tradition of writing both for public and private consumption, and this paper explores how these women used their journals to voice their concerns and how they represented these anxieties through their writing. For the purposes of this paper, the journals used were either published or written between 1740 and 1850 and are not limited to any specific group of Quaker women but the majority, if not all, Quaker journals were written by, or contain the writings of, deceased ministers.¹ These journals were writ-

1 The Society of Friends has no formal ministry. Male and female could minister if called to do so by divine inspiration. To be 'recognised' as a minister, a Friend stood up and ministered in

ten in the expectation that Friends would read them as an example of a godly life lived and that they may, as Elizabeth Dudley wrote in the introduction to her mother's journal, 'though dead, continue to speak instructively to the hearts and understandings of those who are alike 'called to glory and virtue'.² They were a source of encouragement to develop a steadfast faith, as Ann Dymond noted '[they] afforded renewed encouragement to press forward, in faithfulness to Divine discoveries', and were an articulation and reinforcement of the writer's beliefs.³ The act of writing or confessing to a journal encouraged and enhanced personal progress in the search for a stronger personal faith. But it is unsatisfactory to contend that journals were written solely for spiritual purposes: they had a further important function as tools for the education of the next generation and provided women with an authorized 'voice' through which to deliver their message. This allowed them to proclaim their solidarity as a group and to reinforce, maintain and promote their position within a patriarchal Society.⁴

Over the past twenty years most of the publications, which include work on Quaker women's spiritual autobiography, have concentrated on the autobiographies of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Linda Peterson's recent work on Victorian women's autobiography, although it does include a section entitled 'Women Writers and The Traditions of Spiritual Autobiography', nevertheless only considers Quaker women's writings between 1670 and 1775.⁵ Several of these writers have noted that journals in this period became formulaic in style, containing common features such as descriptions of the conversion experience

Meeting and if the ministry was deemed suitable by Friends, he/she would then be approved a minister by the Meeting of Ministers & Elders. All ministers could in theory travel, so long as the desire to travel was divinely inspired and was approved by their Meeting. Travelling ministers were issued with a Certificate of introduction and recommendation to the Meetings they were visiting.

2 *The Life of Mary Dudley*, (London, 1825) p. iv. Mary Dudley (nee Stokes) was born on 8 June 1750 in Bristol. She was not a birthright Quaker but became a Friend in 1773 at Friars Meeting House, Bristol. She became a minister in 1771.

3 A. Dymond, *Some Account of Ann Dymond late of Exeter* (York, 1820), p.106. Ann Dymond was born in Exeter on 10.2.1768 and died 28.6.1816. She became a minister in 1799, lived in Exeter all her life and never married. Mary Ann Gilpin had a sixteen point checklist of self-examination which she used to review her daily spiritual progress. See M. A. Gilpin, *Memoir of Mary Ann Gilpin of Bristol* (London, 1842), pp. 54-55.

4 I am using 'patriarchy' here as meaning a system of government by the father or fathers or the eldest male/males of the family or community. Anna Deborah Richardson wrote in her journal that at her Quaker school all novels had been prohibited and they were given the lives of Quaker ministers to read. These, according to Richardson, were 'Dreary works, which I used to devour for the sake of the thread of narrative which ran through them'. See A. D. Richardson, *Memoir of Anna Deborah Richardson* (Newcastle upon Tyne: J. M. Carr, 1877), p. 5. For a discussion of the spirituality of Quaker women's writings, see H. Plant 'Gender and The Aristocracy of Dissent: A comparative study of the beliefs, status and roles of women in Quaker & Unitarian Communities 1770-1830 with particular reference to Yorkshire', unpublished University of York D.Phil. thesis, 2000, pp. 38-60.

5 K. Peters 'Patterns of Quaker Authorship 1652-1656', *Prose Studies*, 17 (1994), pp. 6-24; M.A. Schofield, 'Women's Speaking Justified': The Feminine QuakerVoice 1662-1797', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6 (1987) pp. 61-77; F. A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender & Ideology in Eighteenth Century England* (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 154-177. C. Levenduski, *Peculiar Power: A Quaker Woman Preacher in eighteenth century America* (Smithsonian Institute, 1996), pp. 100-108. C. Edkins, 'Quest for Community: Spiritual Autobiographies of eighteenth century Quaker and Puritan Women in America' in E. Jeleneck, (ed.), *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*

rience and/or a struggle to achieve a stronger, deeper Quaker faith, including the need to lay aside the 'world' and its vanities and temptations. They were also deeply contemplative, soul searching and self-denying in their construction, while very little of the writer's self was allowed to break through the formalised structure of the journal. A further important ingredient, which framed the way in which Quaker women constructed their relationship to the hierarchy of the Society, was the repeated emphasis on the struggle to eradicate the self and to be totally submissive to God and his demands. Maria Fox wrote 'Let me then, a poor feeble worm, endeavour, more and more, to trust to gracious Providence in all things; resigning myself completely to the disposal of a faithful Creator.'⁶ That this submission was to a male God who was the paramount, patriarchal figure in their lives is an important element in the construct of these women's writings. As Hilary Hinds has suggested 'if the language is God's, then the self constructed in that language is, likewise, of divine origin, defined and safeguarded by the word of God'.⁷ Quaker women authors of spiritual journals consistently denied that their actions originated from themselves and this emphasis on denial of responsibility for actions can be linked to gender.⁸ Whilst Quaker women's journals have been considered as a part of the autobiographical tradition, they have not been used as a means of establishing how Quaker women might have used their writings to represent themselves, their actions and activities or as a voice of protest. In this study I hope to show that Quaker women used their writings to promote and promulgate a message of resistance to the dominant male hierarchy to a wider audience, albeit, an audience largely consisting of members of the Society of Friends. I will also suggest that these women were not only expressing their spirituality but were voicing concerns relating to the organisation and doctrine of the Society.

The journals are a problematic source of evidence for the historian. To some extent the rationale for publication was to show the Society in a good light as well as to encourage an 'ideal' of spirituality. Indeed, the continued existence of manuscript journals bears witness to signs of doctoring or an editorial pen at some time. For example, the journals of both Margaret Woods and Anna Braithwaite are extant in the original and in a printed version.⁹ The original

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) pp. 39-52; L.H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics & Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville & London: U.V.P, 1999), pp. 5-16. Peterson has drawn her evidence from the collection of spiritual memoirs published by William and Thomas Evans in *The Friend's Library* published in 1837. Although Peterson recognised that these are a 'homogenized' version of the journals, I would suggest that as a source they have the disadvantage of having been edited at least twice, in some cases three times: once by the writer's family, again by the Society of Friends' Morning Meeting, and also by the Evanses. The chances of an 'original' voice being heard and retained through these processes has to be doubted.

⁶ M. Fox, *Memoirs of Maria Fox* (London, 1846), p. 48. Quaker women to reduce any accusations of vain-gloriousness, which might derive from their writings, used the imagery of the 'worm' repeatedly. For a discussion of this, see H. Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 89-91, 94-7.

⁷ Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, pp. 89-91, 94-97.

⁸ Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, pp. 138-9.

⁹ M. Woods, *Extracts from the Journal of the late Margaret Woods* (Hoare) 1771-1821 (London, 1830). For the unpublished version of her journal in seven volumes, see Library of the Society of

manuscript of Margaret Woods' journal has nevertheless had pages removed and sections defaced. It is unknown who was responsible for this initial editing, while the printed version also has large sections of the original manuscript omitted. Most of the omissions are of a personal nature, detailing holidays, housekeeping and childcare and it is evident that the editorial process has been used to emphasise the spiritual life of the author rather than her everyday concerns. Anna Braithwaite's journal has undergone a similar editorial process, and in each case editing has not only distorted the 'character' of the writer by omission, but has also altered the nature and emphasis of the original journal.

Most Friends' published journals went through a rigorous editorial process: first, by the editor who was often a family member (husband, brother, sister, son or daughter), and second, by the London Morning Meeting committee for publications.¹⁰ James Jenkins, a member of the Morning Meeting, writing in the eighteenth-century was highly critical of its work, finding it officious. He 'apprehended' when John Richardson's journal was published that 'an original copy of this journal is not now to be purchased' as the Morning Meeting had 'entirely suppressed the account which he left behind him'. He went on to comment further that 'Perhaps they mean well but their office appears to me, to be that of restraining the press.' Jenkins alleged that the Committee customarily suppressed or returned works to authors in a deplorable, mutilated condition, and called the Committee a 'set of literary and mechanical workmen, with their hatchets, and saws, & bill-hooks, and planes both rough and smooth of edge, to chop off and shorten, and lop, and pare down to a thin state, whatever comes before them'.¹¹ As a consequence of this savage editorial process, the

Friends, London (LSF) MS.03. *Memoirs of Anna Braithwaite by her son J. Bevan Braithwaite*, (London: Headley Bros., 1905) and manuscript version from 1803 housed at LSF. Anna Braithwaite (née Lloyd) was born 27.12.1788 and died 18.12.1859. Anna was brought up in a liberal Quaker household in Birmingham, and in 1810 married Isaac Braithwaite of Kendal, Cumbria. Her brother, Charles Lloyd, was an author who lived in Ambleside, and they were friends with Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Charles Lamb and Scott. Her sister, Priscilla, married Wordsworth's brother Christopher, who was Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, having been Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Her journal begins in 1803 and ends just before her death. Margaret Woods (née Hoare) was born 27.11.1747 and died 5.7.1821. She married Joseph Woods in 1769 and was a member of Stoke Newington Meeting. Her journal starts in 1771 and ends with her death in 1821.

¹⁰ The Morning Meeting editorial committee was established in 1673 originally to edit and publish George Fox's works, in particular his journal. It consisted of ministers who were in London at the time the committee met. In theory, the Committee vetted all manuscripts published under the auspices of the Society. The Minutes show that many manuscripts were either refused or severely altered by the Committee. For example, 17.7.1775 the manuscript of William Reckitts' journal was 'to be abridged' and corrections made to letters to his family. LSF, Morning Meeting Minute Book, Vol.6 (1765-1783), pp. 234-259.

¹¹ For a transcript of James Jenkins's writing, see J. William Frost, *The Records and Recollections of James Jenkins*, (Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1984). D.J. Hall has noted James Jenkins's extensive criticisms of the editorial work of Morning Meeting and those of his like-minded Friend, William Rathbone. Elizabeth Dudley similarly described the process when attending a Select Meeting of Yearly Meeting in 1817 dealing with the publication of Jane Pearson's memoirs. See D. J. Hall, 'The Fiery Trial of their infallible Examination': Self Control in the regulation of Quaker

editorial production we inherit may well represent a serious misrepresentation of the author's intention and result in the originality of the diary or correspondence being distorted, if not lost.¹² Yet, despite this editorial process, Quaker women's published journals still retain enough of their raw originality to contain explicit messages and Quaker women authors continued through these writings to declare their intransigence.¹³

The writing and publication of a journal provided Quaker women with an outlet for expressing a legitimate public, political 'voice' which could be raised in opposition to prevailing gender norms. Sidonie Smith has argued that a woman writing an autobiography 'unmasked her transgressive desire for cultural and literary authority', and became an interloper into a male sphere once she 'chose to enter the public arena'.¹⁴ While it is surprising that evidence of these women's intransigence can be found in these edited journals, given that most were edited by men, it is possible to suggest that two factors contributed to the retention of the originality of their work. First, Quaker women ministers were sanctioned, as part of their spiritual embodiment, to maintain and retain their 'voice' and 'place' within the Society and to encourage future generations; second, publication of the journals in question typically took place several years after the death of the writer, thus elevating their writings to a position of veneration and allowing a certain tolerance of idiosyncrasy.

REPRESENTING THE 'CALL' TO MINISTER AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF DISCIPLINE

The most frequent descriptions of conflict between the male authority of Meetings and Quaker women ministers were connected to the enforcement of discipline or the need to fulfil a divine call to minister. The latter was the case in 1747 when Mary Peisley Neale arrived in the village of Amenbridge, near Carlisle. Rather than the usual welcome, Friends refused to allow her to use

publishing in England from the 1670s to the mid-nineteenth century' in R. Myers and M. Harris (eds.), *Censorship and the Control of Print in England and France 1600-1910* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1992), pp. 76-82; C. Tylor, *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley* (London, 1861), pp. 48, 53-54. See also p. 135 for a description of Elizabeth Dudley's editing of her mother's journal in 1835. Thomas Shillitoe also left strict instructions that his journal was not to be amended.

12 Mrs Greer noted that the Morning Meeting 'unsparingly curtailed of all matter, which it is thought desirable to cancel from public view, they are but partial records.' See J.R. Greer, *Quakerism or the Story of my Life by Mrs J R. Greer* (Dublin: Samuel B. Oldham, 1852), p. 2. Sarah Strangman was born in 1806, the daughter of John and Dinah Newsom Strangman Wilson of Monkstown, Dublin. She married John Robert Greer who was also a Friend. She was a birthright Quaker but left the Society of Friends after forty years of membership. At the time of publication, her book was considered to be a scurrilous attack on the Society of Friends. Despite its shortcomings it should not be dismissed as a source of inside information on the workings of the Society.

13 Female intransigence is further discussed in R. Smith, 'Female 'Intransigence' in the Early Quaker Movement from the 1650s to About 1700, with Particular Reference to the N-W of England', unpublished University of Lancaster M.A. Thesis, 1990.

14 S. Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 50-52.

either their houses or any other building in the village to hold a meeting. They informed her that they did not dare to 'for fear of [their] landlord who was a priest' and fear of the local village authorities. Whilst she admitted that she 'could not force their hearts or houses', she invoked Fox's field preaching and the leadings of the Spirit, saying 'I dare not go in my own will to have meetings where I pleased but where truth led me... then, said I we may go to the fields.'¹⁵ By presenting her response as a renunciation of the 'self' in obedience to the leadings of the Spirit, she could rejoice in her ability to defy the local Meeting.

Diana Caroline Hopwood of Leeds writing at the end of the eighteenth century, is one of the few Quaker women who gives us details of her early life and search for a 'church' which satisfied her spiritual needs.¹⁶ As Christine Levenduski has said of Elizabeth Ashbridge's journal, this gives Hopwood's narrative 'a multivocality that transgresses the generic limits of spiritual autobiography'¹⁷ and sets it apart from other more typical Quaker writers. Like Ashbridge, Hopwood struggled to find her identity and her 'place' within society and her conversion to Quakerism far from providing the spiritual sanctuary she desired, increased her troubles as she came into almost continual conflict with the authority of her meeting. As an 'attender' she transgressed the accepted rules by speaking in meeting in 1772 and was immediately visited by two male elders. The first visitor in the morning was not entirely repressive or hostile in his attitude telling her that 'Friends were not pleased with my speaking in Meetings because I was not joined; but he desired me not to go away burdened [*sic*]. In the afternoon, another came and desired I would not attempt to speak in meetings, for he did not believe it was required of me and Friends disapproved.' She continually denied responsibility for speaking observing that 'I never had to my knowledge spoken' and told these weighty Friends, that 'when I apprehend it my duty and when that was the case, I certainly should do it and therefore could not promise anything to the contrary'.¹⁸ In the following year, she became a full member of the Society of Friends but was again warned that

15 M. Neale, *Some Account of the Life & Religious Exercises of Mary Neale (formerly Mary Peisley)*, (Dublin, 1795), p. 27. Mary Peisley was born in Dublin in 1717 and married Samuel Neale on 17 March 1757. She died suddenly, probably from peritonitis, three days later. Neale was exercising her duty and divine calling as a visiting minister to hold a meeting for both Friends and the public in general. Rebecca Jones notes in her journal that she met these English women and how their ministry affected her. See William J. Allinson, *Memorials of Rebecca Jones* (London, no date), p. 6.

16 D. Caroline Hopwood and her husband, Thomas, first applied for admission to Leeds Monthly Meeting on 23 October 1774. Admission was refused, but on 12 February 1775 Caroline Hopwood, not her husband, was admitted to membership. Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. Leeds Preparative Meeting Minutes, 1749-92 (unpublished). There is no mention in Leeds Monthly Meeting minutes of any disciplinary action taken against her. Her journal also includes a collection of her prose and poems. See D.C. Hopwood, *An Account of the Life and Religious Experience of D. Caroline Hopwood of Leeds* (Leeds: Bains, 1801).

17 Levenduski, *Peculiar Power*, p. 68.

18 Hopwood, *An Account*, p. 24. An 'attender' was a person who regularly attended the meeting for worship on first day (Sunday), but was not in membership. Elders, usually venerated and well-established members, were appointed to regulate the meeting. Their main areas of responsibility were the business and organisational concerns of the meeting.

whilst she might speak she would have to 'be careful to do it from a right call'. Her relationship with the authority of the meeting continued to be contentious as he noted that 'I spoke a few words once or twice in Meetings but felt a rejection from the people', and her ministry was challenged '*he* [my italics] believed I was not called to the ministry'. Again she invoked the same defence:

if I was wrong I did not doubt but the Lord would shew it me. I believed that it was permitted for my further purification and that the Lord's power would open or shut the hearts of the people to receive or reject me according to the purpose of his own will; that I must be wholly and entirely dependent on Him, the creature having no part in it but submission.¹⁹

Like Mary Piesley Neal, Hopwood represented her actions as a return to early Quaker standards of spontaneous ministry, allowing her to deny primary responsibility for her words and actions.

Her journal continues by describing her defiance of her Meeting and how finally she absented herself from Meeting claiming that since her ministry was not considered appropriate she remained 'burdened'²⁰ while Friends:

began to be uneasy at my staying from Meetings... I told them I could not bow to outward membership contrary to the power, or out of the power, nor return in obedience to the will of man,²¹ but when the Lord was pleased to shew me His will in it, I should return immediately. They replied I was deluded, and led by a wrong spirit. I answered, if I was wrong, I had such confidence in the Lord, I believed He would set me right... One of them said, the apostle Paul had recommended not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. I answered, we are not to follow him implicitly but the inward teaching of the spirit.²²

Caroline Hopwood represented her defiance of the Meeting as a matter between herself and God, emphasising that it is the leading of the Inner Light that dictated her actions. Whereas the Inner Light bestowed sanctity on the individual as a recipient of its leadings, her denial of personal responsibility undermined the authority of the Elders of her Meeting who had to respect the higher authority of the Light. Although shunned by Friends, she eventually returned to Meeting and again claimed her actions were divinely inspired, finding 'certainty in all I did, and have a testimony in my heart that my ways pleased the Lord'.²³ Hopwood's depiction of her behaviour as a renunciation of

¹⁹ Hopwood, *An Account*, p. 31.

²⁰ 'Burdened' in the Quaker sense means that the 'movings' of the Spirit have not been allowed to spill forth.

²¹ Echoing 2 Pet. 1.21.

²² Hopwood, *An Account*, p. 38.

²³ Hopwood, *An Account*, p. 39. Absence from meeting was a disciplinary matter, and all members were counted into and out of meeting by overseers appointed for that purpose and positioned at the door of the meeting-house. The overseers visited any members who were consistently absent from meeting to establish why they had been absent. Continual absence could ultimately result in disownment, i.e. expulsion from membership of the Society of Friends.

responsibility for her actions, reinforced by the divine inspiration of her utterances and as a 'vessel' for God's words, emphasised the dislocation she experienced from the community and authority of her Meeting. As Phyllis Mack has suggested, Caroline Hopwood's authority 'was grounded in her total rejection of self' which allowed her to believe absolutely in the divine correctness of her conduct.²⁴ Hopwood's journal is unusual as it contains not only traditional descriptions of conversion and inner spiritual struggles, but also her denial and defiance of the authority of the Meeting. Whilst she was certainly not the only Quaker woman to defy so vigorously the male authority of her meeting, she does appear to be one of the few female ministers to have written about it.

As travelling Quaker women ministers, the overseeing of discipline was an essential element of their responsibility and Quaker women writers consistently represent themselves as defenders and enforcers of Quaker discipline. In 1749, Ann Mercy Bell of York was ministering in Cornwall and warned John Allering of Liskeard against the temptation of paying tithes to keep favour with his neighbours. She informed him that if 'a trial of that sort should be laide before him that he whould be careful how he acted and not do anything in his own will either for favour or affection'.²⁵ Similarly, Ruth Follows ministering in Pen-y-Bont, North Wales in 1763 warned the Elders about the laxity of meetings. She advised John Goodam, a recognised minister, that he had no right as one of the leaders of the meeting to deny his Ministry, and 'what a pity it was, that thou, who art a father, should withhold anything'.²⁶

The status bestowed by overseas travel further enhanced these disciplinary powers and in South Carolina and Virginia in 1754, Mary Peisley Neale and Catherine Phillips worked hard to reinforce discipline in the meetings they visited.²⁷ They write frequently of their need to warn meetings and to encourage them to mend their ways. In Charlestown, Mary Piesley found that

²⁴ P. Mack, 'Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism 1650-1665' in E. Potts-Brown and S. Mosher Stuard, (eds.), *Witness for Change: Quaker Women Over Three Centuries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 50.

²⁵ York Friends Archives. York Monthly Meeting Microfilm Reel 173, p. 133: Journal and Correspondence of Ann Mercy Bell 1745-1786. This journal was never published which in part may be due to the scandal which rocked the York Monthly Meeting in 1786 concerning the illicit relationship between her son, Nathaniel and Judith Heron. As a result of this scandal, despite her success as a minister, Ann Mercy Bell's ministerial journeys were severely curtailed by the Meeting of Ministers and Elders.

²⁶ S. Stansfield, *Memoirs of Ruth Follows* (Liverpool, 1829), p. 56. Although Quaker men had no official equivalent to the 'Mother in Israel' appellation often applied to women, there are references to men as 'fathers' of the church, and it was recognised that men could have a nurturing role and were responsible for the spiritual welfare of their meeting. The construction of the 'Mother in Israel' archetype was recently discussed at the Women in Religion Conference, Chichester, May 2000. The author wishes to acknowledge the work of Camilla Leech and her unpublished paper entitled "'Mothers of Israel'" and the Battle of Evangelicalism 1780-1830' given at this conference.

²⁷ C. Phillips, *Memoirs of the Life of Catherine Phillips* (London, 1797), pp. 65-70. Catherine Phillips was born Catherine Paynton in 1726 to Henry Paynton and Ann Fowler of Dudley Worcestershire. She first spoke in Meeting in 1748, and in 1772, aged 46, married William Phillips of Swansea after a courtship lasting seven years. James Jenkins described her as an 'autocratrix', implying that she was a forceful and occasionally a contentious woman who often overstepped what was considered, by men, to be the 'correct' demeanour for a Quaker woman.

'the discipline was quite let fall... and I found it my duty to endeavour to revive it', and, in spite of a hostile reception, they defend their actions emphasising the necessity to advise the Meeting against a 'certain lightness of disposition which greatly obstructs its progress [Truth]... and if it is not carefully watched against will infect the minds of persons who converse with them.' Having dealt with the temporal defects of the Meeting, they turn to its spiritual laxity which they perceive is leading to 'an ignorance of spirituality of religion, a high professing spirit in some and a libertinism both in principle and practice in others'.²⁸ In Virginia, things were worse and they issued an Epistle to Virginia Yearly Meeting berating them for their lack of discipline and slackness, warning:

[We] hereby inform you (as we have done some of you heretofore verbally) that our hearts have been pained, on account of the state of the Church in your Colony. And we earnestly desire that such as have been called to, and in some measure qualify the work of the Lord, and through a desire of some kind or other of filthy lucre, of which there are many, are become formal, blind and unfaithful, may repent, and do their first works, seeing from whence they are fallen, lest the Lord come to them quickly.²⁹

The numerous instances when Quaker women write about their involvement in disciplinary action suggests they were using their journals as a legitimate medium through which to voice their concerns, and to represent themselves as the guardians of discipline and purity within the Society. They frequently comment on the failure of men to instil and maintain discipline in meetings. This suggests a real tension and anxiety with regard to what men felt was appropriate Quaker female behaviour in relation to their authority and what often occurred in reality.³⁰ This tension is evident in a testimonial to Mary Peisley Neale written by her husband in which he commends her for her judgement, endorsing both her ministry and her writing and in effect defending her activities, writing that she gave 'her judgement impartially; neither did the favours or frowns, the riches or exalted stations of any professing membership with her, cramp or obstruct a steady compliance with what she believed to be her duty'.³¹ He counters any suggestion of unseemliness by praising her modesty whilst emphasising the performance of her duty to God.

28 Neale, *Some Account*, p. 81; Phillips, *Memoirs*, p. 66.

29 Neale, *Some Account*, pp. 95-99. Once a member had been disowned, or if a person was not a member, they were not allowed to partake in the business of the meeting.

30 In Settle Monthly Meeting in Yorkshire there is evidence that the testimony against tithes was not rigorously upheld in the period 1780-1853. There are many years when distraints or fines for non-payment were too small to record. This might suggest that Friends were not called upon to pay their dues, but a more likely explanation is that Settle Friends were paying the tithe. See LSF, *Great Book of Sufferings* Vols: 21-43. See also P. Mack, 'In a Female Voice: Preaching and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Quakerism' in B.M. Kienzle and P.J. Walker (eds.), *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), p. 252.

31 Mack, 'In a Female Voice', p. 253.

REPRESENTING THE STRUGGLE FOR A WOMEN'S YEARLY MEETING

For nearly forty years, Quaker women campaigned for the right to hold their own Yearly Meeting but were met with a variety of excuses from the Men's Yearly Meeting. Finally in 1784 they assembled a formidable group of leading ministers from both sides of the Atlantic to again try to persuade the Men's Meeting.³² Rebecca Jones of Philadelphia appears to have been the main champion of their cause, and her journal describes the procedure and the struggle the women endured.³³ The petition was approved in the Women's Meeting and taken by the women to the Men's Meeting where it met considerable opposition, one male Friend said that he thought it would be 'preposterous to have a body with two heads'. In her reply Rebecca Jones laid emphasis on the androgynous nature of God in Quaker doctrine, pointing out that 'there was but one HEAD to the body which is the church and that is Christ Jesus, male and female are one'.³⁴ Writing that Martha Routh had to 'silence David Barclay... who surrendered very unwillingly', she described her companions as brave and vigorously defensive in the face of male opposition. Her emphasis on this verbal battle suggests that she considered this confrontation to be connected to the women's gender, seeing it as an attack on Quaker women's position within the organisation of the Society and on their equality within the Inner Light.³⁵ In recalling

32 The establishment of women's meetings had a long history of male opposition. In 1671, George Fox sent out a circular letter recommending that women establish separate women's meetings based on the model already in use at the London meetings. Fox's edicts on women's roles met with considerable male opposition and men became adroit at avoiding putting his ideas into practice. Success was only ensured when Margaret Fell became involved and wrote extensively on women's role in the society, as well as touring the country championing these innovations. But even in the early eighteenth century there was still sporadic opposition, and in 1706 Katherine Winn of Leeds Meeting wrote that there was 'great opposition and scofings [sic] then met with'. See Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends; George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 252-255. Five English women, supported by four American women, delivered the petition to the Men's Meeting. The English women were Esther Tuke, Martha Routh, Christiana Hustler, Mercy Ransom and Tabitha Middleton; the American women were Rebecca Jones, Rebecca Wright, Patience Brayton and Mehetabel Jenkins.

33 Allinson, *Memorials*, pp. 366-367. Rebecca Jones was born in Philadelphia on 8 July 1739 and brought up in the Church of England. In 1757, she became a member of Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and in 1758 a minister.

34 For a discussion of the 'feminine' attributes of God in Quaker doctrine, see J.C. Gadt, 'Women and Protestant Culture: The Quaker Dissent from Puritanism', unpublished University of California Ph.D. thesis, 1974.

35 Allinson, *Memorials*, p. 65. In 1746, Lydia Lancaster from the Lancaster Monthly Meeting and six other prominent women ministers supported the need for a national women's meeting. The matter was raised again at Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting in 1753 by William Brown from Philadelphia Meeting and supported by Susanna Morris, another visiting American Minister. He took the proposal to London Yearly Meeting but was defeated, while in 1766 the women of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting asked for the support from the Philadelphia Men's Meeting to help the women of the London Yearly Meeting establish their own Yearly Meeting. The men were not, however, prepared to challenge the London Meeting. For details, see M. Hope-Bacon, 'The

the equality of all in the sight of Christ Jesus, she reinforced the spiritual equality of Quaker doctrine. She suggested that a Society, which had no spiritual inequality, should also have no gender distinctions within the structure of its organisation. By using a fundamental of Quaker doctrine, she was proposing a legitimate foundation for her resistance to the men, although as an American she was possibly advocating a somewhat liberal interpretation of the Society's doctrine. Gender was an essential aspect of this struggle, and it can be argued that she was using her journal to warn her female readers to maintain their position, which Anna Price felt was still under threat in 1793 when she wrote, '[how] painful is the jealousy of men Friends' after attending the Men's Yearly Meeting.³⁶

REPRESENTING THE STRUGGLE OF EVANGELICALISM

Another and more serious conflict between some Quaker women and men was the gathering influence of evangelicalism within the Society. While it has been convincingly argued that the evangelical influence on the Society led to the development of opportunities for Quaker women in the external world, within the Society it became a source of division between those who supported evangelicalism and those who wished to retain the original doctrinal emphasis of early Friends.³⁷ As evangelical doctrine laid emphasis on the scriptures as the foundation of belief it brought into question the pre-eminence of the Inner Light, challenging the foundation of Quaker doctrine.³⁸ Several women, including Mary Capper, Lydia Barclay and Sarah Lynes Grubb used their journals to articulate their response to this perceived threat by describing their confrontation with the evangelical enthusiasts of the Men's Yearly Meeting.³⁹ In 1815, Mary Capper was one of the first women to point out the dangers of greater scriptural

Establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting: A Transatlantic Concern', *Journal of Friends Historical Society* (JFHS), 57. 2 (1993), pp. 151-163.

36 J. E. Mortimer, 'Quaker Women in the Eighteenth Century: Opportunities and Constraints', JFHS, 57.3 (1996), p. 233.

37 S. Wright, *Friends in York: The Dynamics of Quaker Revival 1780-1860* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1995), pp. 21-30, 69-83; A. van Drenth and F. de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999). The split between evangelical Quakers and quietist Quakers was most pronounced in America. For a discussion on the effects of evangelicalism on American Quakers, see T. Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

38 In accepting evangelical doctrine, Friends had to disavow Proposition III of Robert Barclay's Apology which stated that the Scriptures, although divinely inspired, were not the chief arbiters of faith, but were 'esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit'. He refined this statement, suggesting that 'the Scriptures' authority and certainty depend upon the Spirit by which they were dictated... Therefore they are not the principle ground of truth.' See R. Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: Being an explanation and vindication of the principles and doctrines of the people called Quakers* (London, 1841) pp. 5, 66. For a discussion of the tensions caused by evangelicalism, see: M. Grubb, 'Tensions in the Religious Society of Friends in England in the Nineteenth Century', JFHS, 56.1 (1990), pp. 2-14.

39 L.A. Barclay, *A Selection from The Letters of Lydia Ann Barclay* (Manchester, 1868).

knowledge, suggesting that it might lead to a reduction in the 'love of silent waiting'.⁴⁰ A little over a decade later in 1827, Sarah Lynes Grubb echoed this concern suggesting that changes in the Quaker style of ministry could mean losing its distinctiveness and the 'glory of true, living gospel ministry, may withdraw more and more... instead of spreading and prevailing amongst us'.⁴¹ In a series of letters to Mary Capper included in her published journal, she continued to warn of the dangers of doctrinal change and her fear that the Society was becoming increasingly 'worldly':

It seems to me to be a day of perplexity and of treading down; a day of gloominess and of thick darkness; a time wherein opinion takes the place of faith to an alarming degree; which is manifest in the want of unanimity respecting our testimonies... It is indeed a trying time in many ways, and puts me in mind of that scripture, 'If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?'⁴²

She depicted herself as a defender of the original doctrinal beliefs of Friends. Concerned that they were being drawn away from their unique and hard won beliefs, Grubb placed herself amongst the quietists within the Society and those who were 'ranged conspicuously on the side of primitive Quakerism'.⁴³ She despaired that 'this Yearly Meeting has exhibited much thou wouldst grieve to see... Some of us thinking with thyself, that we see a sorrowful departure from primitive or godly simplicity... even Christian doctrine.' She also feared 'that many of the most active among us, are going back into things which our community, in the beginning, suffered much in coming out of'.⁴⁴ Between 1830 and 1835, Sarah Lynes Grubb continued to comment upon her conflicts with the evangelicals within the Men's Yearly Meeting, and how she harangued them on the dangers of evangelicalism. Aware that her views were not appreciated, she noted 'sometimes I tell my sorrow publicly... but I am told again and again that my views are not correct'.⁴⁵

Grubb's arguments were not directed at female supporters of evangelicalism,

40 K. Backhouse (ed.) *A Memoir of Mary Capper* (London, 1847), p. 175. Mary Capper was born in March 1755 in Rugley, Staffordshire, and brought up in the Episcopal Church. She became a Friend in 1785, a minister in 1794, and died on 23 May 1845, aged 91.

41 S. Grubb, *A Selection from the letters of the late Sarah Grubb* (Sudbury, 1848) p. 232.

42 Grubb, *A Selection*, pp. 269-70. In 1833, she again points out how the Society is 'fast levelling us with the world at large!' (p. 291). Quaker women had a long tradition of writing letters, not simply to pass on news and information but in the sure knowledge that they would be included in their journals. As such they frequently concentrated on both spiritual matters and importantly on voicing their opposition to both external laws and the internal organisation of the Society. For a discussion of seventeenth century Quaker women's letters, see J. Sutherland, 'Obedience to the Inward Oracle: An Analysis of some Early Quaker Women's Publications', *Quaker Studies*, 6.2 (2002), pp. 135-158.

43 Grubb, *A Selection*, p. 291.

44 Grubb, *A Selection*, pp. 288-291. Lydia Barclay supported Sarah Grubb noting that 'now we are going back (as it were) to the beggarly elements and throwing away the testimony delivered to our worth predecessors, in the morning of our day as a religious Society'. See Barclay, *A Selection*, p. 51.

45 Grubb, *A Selection*, p. 291.

but were focussed on the power and the influence of a high-profile, influential male elite, which included Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, Joseph Sturge, William Allen and J. J. Gurney. She considered that they were drawing the Society away from its original roots and opening it up to a wider Christian audience. She was especially concerned that their ability to influence or change doctrine disregarded those who opposed such changes, especially if they were women. In both the direction and tone of her writing, Sarah Lynes Grubb explicitly links this conflict to both gender and quietism. She suggested that some men thought quietist women were ignorant and out of step with current theological ideas: 'We who do not profess to see further than our first Friends did... I say, we are styled "ignorant", "prejudiced", and "uncharitable"', and tells how she had been told by the Men's Yearly Meeting to keep 'in the quiet'.⁴⁶

Quaker women's denial of the self did not allow public acknowledgement of personal feelings or personal responses to a situation, and consequently their writings contain no direct allusion to their fears regarding the effects of doctrinal change. It is nevertheless implicit in their writings that they recognised that emphasis on the scriptures, especially the words of St. Paul, could have undermined their authority to minister. Although it is too crude to suggest that they used the issue of evangelicalism to deliberately gain a voice, it was the articulation of these concerns in their journals that gave them an opportunity to voice their fear of marginalisation and having their preaching considered insupportable. These fears become more legitimate when consideration is given to how this Quaker male elite expressed increasing concern over the 'feminisation' of the Society.⁴⁷ J. J. Gurney was alarmed that 'the ministry of women is found rather to preponderate in the society over that of men; such a circumstance can by no means be deemed a favourable sign', and he feared that

it is far indeed from being an indication of life and soundness in the body at large, when the stronger sex withdraws from the battles of the Lord, and leaves them to be fought by those whose physical weakness and delicacy have an obvious tendency to render them less fit for the combat'.⁴⁸

46 Grubb, *A Selection*, pp. 300, 306.

47 This was not without justification. Figures from the York Meeting show that between 1780 and 1860, women ministers outnumbered men by 2:1, and it has been suggested that a similar figure was repeated nationally. Although by 1877 the ratio of female to male in York had dropped to 1:1, by 1890 it had reverted to nearly 2:1. See Wright, *Friends in York*, pp. 31-49 and Appendix II. Mrs Greer's figures for England and Wales in 1839 are 76 male ministers to 141 female ministers. See Greer, *Quakerism*, p. 333.

48 J. J. Gurney, *Observations on the Religious Peculiarities of the Society of Friends* (London: J & A Arch, 1824), p. 227. His comments have to be considered with reference to changes in ideas about the role of women in wider society at this date. Attacks on women's ministry had been frequent throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For a non-Quaker attack on the ministry of women, see *Candid Reflections on some doctrinal errors lately advanced at a Quakers Meeting held in Ludlow: in a letter addressed to Mrs Darby and others of that Sect* (private publication, 1799). For Friends' defence of women's ministry, see Abiah Darby, *An Epistle to the Inhabitants of Hereford*, (1775), and Henry Fry, *A Brief account of the lately intended visit of two female preachers of the people called Quakers to the inhabitants of the Borough of Overton, Hants* (London: For Edmund Fry, 1810).

Women were warned to yield to the superior presence of male Ministers and to observe 'a decent and modest behaviour in the exercise of their ministry and not entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, that they may the better answer the holy warfare in which they are engaged'.⁴⁹ Individuals, such as Samuel Fothergill, issued discriminatory warnings to women on the dangers of unsuitable Ministry: 'I have seen a danger (especially in your sex) of being taken by the passions; the passionate preacher hath affected the passionate hearer; both have been in raptures, and neither of them profited' - comments he was unlikely to have addressed to a male minister.⁵⁰

By the end of the eighteenth century and in the first decades of the nineteenth century, there was a gradual change in the style, tone and content of journals being published by the Society. Descriptions of conversion and the searching for a deeper faith remained but intransigence became replaced by compliance, if not submission. The language became less biblically metaphoric and 'plain' English was increasingly used. The conventional, intimate, confessional, contemplative journals relating daily spiritual growth were superseded to include correspondence to friends, children, husbands, brothers and sisters.⁵¹ Sarah Stephenson's journal published in 1795 is one of the first to show these revisions. This is not to say that later journals were devoid of spiritual or religious commentary, but increasingly this was combined with extracts from a personal travelogue and diary detailing ministerial work undertaken and experienced, news of Friends, and even such prosaic matters as the weather, the state of the roads and scenery. At the same time, even though these women's lives are still to an extent concealed from view, the writer's 'self' was less likely to be buried under a layer of Biblical symbolism, and women writers were allowed to 'speak' directly to their readers.⁵²

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have explored how Quaker women through their writings represented some of their concerns and confrontations with the male hierarchy

49 Extracts from the Minutes & Advices of Yearly Meeting of Friends held in London (London, 1783) pp. 142, 149, 211. This may be linked to female Methodist preachers whose charismatic, enthusiastic often noisy style of preaching may have alarmed Friends who had resorted to a quieter, more decorous style by this period, and fears that Quaker female preachers could, by implication or association, be accused of similar disruptive behaviour. For a discussion of Quaker women's preaching, see S. Wright 'Quakerism and its Implications for Quaker Women: The Women Itinerant Ministers of York Meeting 1780-1840'. *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990), pp. 405-407. J. Walsh, 'Methodism and the mob in the eighteenth century', *Studies in Church History*, 8 (1972), pp. 213-227.

50 Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York. Tuke papers, Box 75. Samuel Fothergill to Susanna Hatton, dated 27.6.1760.

51 Writing or publication dates for these journals are: Susanna Boone (1773-1789); Sarah Tuke Grubb (1776); Mary Waring (1810).

52 A brief list of journals with publication dates would include: Elizabeth Fry (1847); Sarah Lynes Grubb (1848); Mary Dudley (1825); Elizabeth Dudley (1861); Hannah Backhouse (1858); Mary Capper (1847); Mary Alexander (1811); Martha Routh (1824); Mary Jessup (1842).

of the Society of Friends in this period. Their defence was to represent themselves as an 'instrument' of God's authority, absolving themselves from responsibility for their actions and shifting their obedience to the ultimate, inviolable authority of God which enabled them to defy or deny the male authority of the Society. I would not wish to cast doubt on the sincerity of Quaker women's beliefs but would suggest that repetition of phrases such as 'fear and trembling', being a 'vessel', a 'channel' through which God spoke, indicates that these brave, chaste, modest women were negotiating their 'place' and 'voice' utilising the paramouncy of God's authority. This shift of responsibility allowed them to continually reinforce their right to warn, silence and chastise male members and to have a highly developed sense of their own worth and spiritual equality. These women knew that they were involved in a struggle to maintain their 'place' within the Society and were strong and courageous in the face of considerable opposition. They were also aware that the male hierarchy of the Society could diminish their power by removing or reducing their spiritual authority. Whilst these journals were clearly a medium for the encouragement of spiritual devotion and guidance, they were equally a secular tool which could provide temporal steadfastness, encouragement and even, defiance. In a period when declining Quaker membership and increasing internalisation was placing pressure on the Society to maintain its restrictive rules and unique doctrine, the journals provided Quaker women with a medium through which they could express their concerns regarding matters of organisation and doctrine. Since the main readership for these journals were other Quaker women, the concerns expressed were spread to a female audience encouraging them to maintain existing Quaker discipline and reinforce the position of women in the Society. It is paradoxical that it was the approval of the male dominated Morning Meeting which enhanced these writings, authorizing them as an official channel for the dissemination of their message, and endowing Quaker women with a powerful 'voice'.

AUTHOR DETAILS

Sheila Wright teaches eighteenth and nineteenth century history in the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of York. Her publications include *Friends in York: The Dynamics of Quaker Revival, 1780-1860* (1995). Her current research interests include Quaker women's writings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and women's social and political activities in York in the late nineteenth century. (She is a member of the International Advisory Panel for *Quaker Studies*.)

Mailing Address: Keskadale, 4 Birkhills, Burton Leonard, HG3 3SF, England.
Email: sheilawright@keskadale18.freeserve.com