Quaker Studies 10/2 (2006) [185-202]
ISSN 1363-013X

The Life and Times of Peter Briggins*

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Abstract

This article draws attention to a little known and rarely used historical source, the diary of the early eighteenth-century London Friend Peter Briggins. Four areas of Briggins' life are examined: his business, religious, family and leisure activities. It is suggested that the examination of sources such as diaries and personal correspondence can shed new light on the nature of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Quakerism. In particular, such material can enable the development of a more subtle picture of the relationships that existed between Friends and the communities in which they lived.

Keywords

Peter Briggins, London, business, family, society, diaries

On the occasion of the death of her husband Peter, on 27 September 1717, Mariabella Briggins wrote the following inscription in the front of her Bible:

> My dear and very loving Husband Peter Briggins departed this life to all our Greate grefe to loose such an affectionate Husband and father and such a good Companion to us. Our loss is very great but have no cause to Doubt at all But his gain is much greater.[1]

By the time he died, at the age of 51, Peter Briggins had become a respected member of the Quaker community in London, and had also accumulated considerable personal wealth. At various stages of his life, he had been a member of virtually all of the main Quaker administrative Meetings in London. He was also a successful businessman, bequeathing to his wife and five daughters a total fortune of approximately £10,000. He was not, however, someone who has ever held a particularly prominent place in the history of Quakerism in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England. His importance to the movement in London was as an administrator and bookkeeper and not a preacher or pamphleteer. Despite being possessed of competent

literary skills he never produced any published work, and seems not to have been inclined to speak during Meetings for worship. Why, then, should we be interested in his life?

What saves Peter Briggins from being just another name mentioned in the minutes of the administrative Meetings of London Quakers is the fact that, from 1703 onwards, he kept a diary. This immediately marks him out from his contemporaries, since virtually no London Quaker diaries survive for the seventeenth century and only a handful survive for the early eighteenth century.[2] Unfortunately, only one volume of the diary now survives, that covering the years 1706 to 1708. Extracts of two other volumes are available in a late nineteenth-century publication produced by one of Briggins' descendents.[3] From these extracts it appears that in later life Briggins came to record far more incidental information regarding everyday life in London than he had previously. Nonetheless, at no point was the diary used by its author as a vessel for his innermost thoughts, and for most days contains just the bare essentials of his day-to-day routine. Thus, he records where he has been and with whom he has met, what his business dealings were, which Quaker Meetings he attended and other routine information. He also kept an almost daily record of the weather, and noted down the changes in the market value of the commodities in which he traded. The diary is entirely devoid of gossip, and also absent is the kind of introspective contemplation found in godly diaries of the early modern period.[4] The most likely explanation for its existence is that it served the purpose of an aid to memory, and the careful recording of the subjects spoken of in Quaker Meetings was either for him to refer back to, or to enable him to pass on what had been said to other members of his household.

This article considers four main areas of Briggins' life: his business relationships, his religious activities, his family life and his social engagements. It considers the relative importance of his religious and business activities, and the extent to which he moved between the worldly and spiritual realms of his life without any apparent sense of contradiction. In order to obtain as detailed a picture as possible, one year (1707) has been subjected to particularly close scrutiny. For this year, separate indices of names and places were created in order to determine which locations and which individuals were particularly important to Peter Briggins in the different areas of his life.[5] The discussion is placed within the context of recent debates on the extent of the social integration of early modern religious dissenters. It considers the evidence of Peter Briggins' diary and life in relation to Richard Vann's argument that Quakers after 1670, and especially after 1689, had become increasingly sectarian in terms of 'the completeness of their separation from their culture and particularly from other religious organisations'.[6] In contrast to this, historians such as Adrian Davies and Bill Stevenson have used local archives to argue that Friends 'at no time saw themselves as being divorced or separated from the communities in which they lived'.[7] The central question I address, therefore, is whether Briggins sought to live his life as part of an isolated Quaker community, only venturing into 'the world' where necessary, or whether he can be seen as an integrated member of the wider London society.

BUSINESS LIFE

The range of Peter Briggins' business activities is revealed by his diary. Sometimes described as a tobacconist and occasionally as a merchant, he dealt in a number of commodities other than tobacco, although it is not clear whether he actually engaged in overseas trade.[8] More accurately, he appears to have belonged to the ranks of wholesalers who have been described as, 'the pump which...circulated England's blood to and from the heart that was the metropolis'.[9] Hops, honey and wax were among the commodities which he bought from producers and sold on to merchants; for example, on one occasion we learn that, 'In the Morning I w[en]t to se[e] Taylors hon[e]y and w[en]t to se[e] abo[u]t the wax'. Two weeks later we read that, 'in the aft[e]rnoon I went to Change and call[e]d of Rickits and sold my wax to him'.[10] Like many other middling businessmen of the time, he invested a great deal of his money. The value of stocks was a constant concern during the diary period, and he bought and sold bonds in the New India and the Royal Africa Companies.[11] Another area of investment was property, his will recording the bequests of at least eleven separate houses and the ground rent of the Kings Head Inn, Southwark. These provided him with a rentier income, the diary recording the regular receipt of rent from tenants in Briggins' houses.

The geographical scope of these business activities was relatively narrow, and most transactions took place at various locations within the commercial centre of the ancient City. The location mentioned most frequently during the sample year of 1707 is the Royal Exchange in the City of London, which Briggins visited 103 times. The exact nature of these visits is unclear, since only small amounts of information are provided. The entry for 17 May 1707 is typical, noting that, 'In the morning I w[en]t to the Castle Inn and aftr[noo]n w[en]t to Change'.[12] Occasionally a meeting with a specific person is noted, but this is unusual. Visits to the Exchange were not made on regular days, with some weeks containing as many as five references and others none at all.[13]

The Royal Exchange at this time was the primary arena for trade in London, where bargains were sealed and gossip, news and advice exchanged.[14] Peter Briggins would have been one of just under 1000 businessmen who filled the Exchange in any one session.[15] Given the very public nature of the venue, gossip could spread rapidly among the regular traders. It was the place in London where business reputations were made, lost and saved.[16] It was also an arena in which information was circulated more generally. Merchants could receive letters there, details of subscription demands for the Bank of England were posted in the central quadrangle, and the price of stocks and currency exchange rates established at the Exchange were published and sold in the area around the building.[17] In 1714, when the health of Queen Anne was a cause for public concern, Briggins went to the Exchange, 'to Inquire abo[u]t the news but could hear but little certaine'.[18]

Aside from conducting business at the Royal Exchange, the diary also records regular visits to the coffee houses and inns of London. The popularity of coffee houses in late Stuart and early Hanoverian society has been seen as evidence of growing political engagement during this period. The nature of 'coffee house culture' was

diverse, with different establishments associated with specific occupational, status or interest groups. Their role as venues for debate and the exchange of information has been interpreted by Jürgen Habermas as central to the development of a 'public sphere' in England.[19] Coffee houses at this time also provided the venue for many of the key functions of business.[20] Thus, Briggins generally visited them to meet with a business acquaintance, for instance the occasion on which he met with Philip Nichols at Scott's coffee house to receive rent for a house in Threadneedle Street.[21] The importance of coffee houses to the functioning of London commerce is reflected by the fact that most of those visited by Briggins were in the immediate vicinity of the Royal Exchange. In particular he made 41 visits to Eteridges coffee house in Birchin Lane, often after he had been at the Exchange.[22] There are five references during 1707 to visits to Jonathan's coffee house, described in the *Tatler* in 1709 as the, 'general mart of stock jobbers'.[23] As with his visits to the Exchange, the details of Briggins' trips to coffee houses are often obscure, but it seems clear that this was where he met many of his business associates. On one occasion he visited Fellow's coffee house in Aldersgate Street to meet with one Pledwell,[24] and another time he was paid fifty shillings for wax at Jonathan's.[25] As with the Exchange, the role of coffee houses in the circulation of information in London can also be seen in Briggins' reaction to news of the Queen's ill health. On 31 July 1714 he recorded, 'In the morning w[en]t to the coffee hous[e] to inquire about the news and the report was the Q[ueen] was dead and it continued till noon the same reported, tho' with some not believed'.[26] In July 1715 we find a similar reference – this time he visited the coffee house for news concerning the Pretender's landing in Scotland.[27]

The final main area of business activity evident in the diary is a thriving trade in hops. This area was the cause of most of his longer distance travelling around the metropolitan area, taking him to Stoke Newington and to Southwark.[28] As in his other business activities, Briggins' forays into the hop market generally involved speculative buying and selling of the commodity. In this, he relied upon his nephew, William Tibbey, who seems to have had a greater involvement in the hop trade than Briggins himself. Tibbey regularly travelled on business as far afield as Wickham Fair, Canterbury, Maidstone and Worcestershire. From these places he would write to tell his uncle how the hops were looking, and the prices they were commanding.[29] When buying and selling hops in Southwark, Briggins regularly did so in the company of his nephew; for example we read that, 'In the Morning I w[en]t Cross [th]e water w[i]th W[illiam] T[ibbey] and bo[ugh]t 8 bags of hops and p[ai]d for them at change'.[30] From around March each year he began making regular visits to Newington Green to inspect his own crops. The size of his own crop is unclear, but it seems unlikely to have brought him a major income. Indeed, in the light of Erin Bell's observations elsewhere in this issue, it may be that Briggins' regular visits to the rural outlying area of Stoke Newington were in part an attempt to retreat from the worldliness of City commerce.[31]

In the context of the relationship between dissent and society, Briggins' business activities make interesting reading. Taking the sample year of 1707, a nominal index of all apparent business acquaintances mentioned in the diary was produced. The total number of separate individuals mentioned is 56, of whom 19 can be confidently

identified as Quakers and a further two were probably Quakers. Some of these, such as his nephew William Tibbey, were also family members. On another occasion he records having visited the Royal Exchange with Thomas Farmborough, his wife's brother.[32] Other business acquaintances who can be identified as Friends include George Conyers, a possible relative with whom Briggins made a number of visits to the hop fields of Stoke Newington, and George Harman, a Quaker grocer of Aldersgate Street who appears twelve times in relation to business dealings, Briggins buying hops, wax and honey from him.[33] At least one of Briggins' properties was let to a fellow Quaker, Captain John Bowry.[34]

Those business associates who cannot confidently be identified as Friends are more difficult to identify. The name appearing most frequently is that of Philip Nichols, who rented Briggins' house in Threadneedle Street, and who is mentioned a total of 28 times during 1707. Some of these meetings were for the collection of rent, but since rent was charged by the quarter, it seems unlikely that all of the meetings were for this purpose.[35] Nichols was a scrivener by trade, and his name appears on Briggins' will as a witness, suggesting that he had been employed to produce the document.[36] The services provided by scriveners often extended beyond the writing out of wills and other legal documents, and it is possible Nichols could have had some role in managing the property owned by Briggins and may have provided some financial services.[37] There is no evidence to suggest Nichols was himself a Quaker. He does not appear in any Quaker sources and his own will provides no indication of his religious beliefs. When he died in 1739, his death was not recorded in the Quaker burial registers for London.[38] While this hardly proves that he was not a Quaker, it does suggest that this was the case. In total the religious persuasions of 36 of the business associates mentioned in the diary cannot be determined. While it would be wrong to conclude that none of these were Friends, it seems likely that at least some of them were not. In particular Major (later Colonel) Gower, with whom an account was settled, seems unlikely to have been a Quaker given his apparent military rank.[39] Two other regular acquaintances, men named 'Rickets' or 'Rickard' from whom Briggins' bought honey and to whom he sold wax, and Shaw, from whom he bought India bonds, are also difficult to pin down.[40] The most that can be said is that neither can be plausibly identified in the Quaker records.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Alongside all of these records of Peter Briggins' worldly affairs are the records of his religious activities. These have much to tell us about the nature of early eighteenth-century Quakerism in London, and the patterns of Meeting attendance that can be observed in the diary are revealing. During the sample year of 1707 he attended Meetings for worship at seven different meeting houses in and around the London area. Some he attended only a small number of times – for example, he made four visits to Westminster Meeting and one visit each to Stoke Newington and Wapping Meetings.[41] The most frequently attended Meetings were at the Bull and Mouth Meeting House in the City, which appears 74 times, and the Peel Meeting within the boundaries of which he actually lived, mentioned 52 times.[42] In total, during 1707

alone Briggins recorded 145 visits to meeting houses, an average of three per week, for reasons other than business Meetings.[43] Attendance at Meetings for worship on the first day was always a family affair, Briggins attending with his wife and at least some of his children. On any given first day the family would attend two Meetings, usually at the Bull and Mouth in the morning and at the Peel in the afternoon. Occasionally, a third would be fitted in; for example, he notes having spent one first day morning at a Meeting at the Bull and Mouth, followed by one at Gracechurch Street Meeting House and then a third back at the Bull and Mouth.[44]

One important point raised by the religious activity illustrated in the diary is the extent to which Quakerism in London consisted of one homogeneous community, and how far it consisted of a series of separate localised communities, centred around a particular meeting house. This second model essentially views the Quaker communities as functioning in a similar fashion to the parish, with the role of the parish church fulfilled by the meeting house. What the Briggins diary suggests is that the institutional boundaries of Quakerism in the capital as embodied by the different Monthly Meetings did not represent community boundaries. If Peter Briggins is in any way typical of Quakers in early eighteenth-century London, then it must be assumed that Friends living in different areas of London near to different Meetings had a considerable amount of contact with one another. Certainly, as far as the area falling within the jurisdiction of the City of London is concerned the diary suggests a high degree of integration between inhabitants of the different Quaker colonies that centred around the meeting houses. If Briggins regularly attended Meetings at both the Peel and Bull and Mouth Meeting Houses, and also made occasional visits to the other City Meetings at Gracechurch Street and Devonshire House, then it seems likely that other London Quakers would have done the same. Moreover, his periodic trips to Meetings at Stoke Newington and Westminster suggests that in the context of the area to the north of the River Thames and to the west of the Tower of London it is possible to talk in terms of a Londonwide community of Quakers.[45]

Briggins' conduct at these Meetings for worship is worthy of some comment. Despite having been a respected and committed member of the London Quaker community, there is no evidence from his diary that he ever spoke in Meetings. However, although he probably did not speak, he most certainly listened and, more significantly, noted down what he had heard. Thus, for the period of the diary, we have concise accounts of the subjects spoken of during Meetings by a number of Friends of varying degrees of national importance. It is not possible in this article to undertake a thorough analysis of the subjects of the sermons recorded by Briggins, but such a study would be of great value in deepening our understanding of the type of theology conveyed to the hundreds of Friends who attended Meetings in and around the capital at this time. In particular, certain biblical passages are referred to repeatedly at the Meetings Briggins recorded. During the period of the diary, there are 21 references to the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-22), and 13 to the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1-13). Such regular reference to the same sections of the Bible suggests that particular messages were deemed appropriate for Meetings in London. The parable of the talents could be interpreted in terms of the Lord having bestowed each person with a degree of spiritual wealth, and that it is the

responsibility of Quakers to deal wisely with this wealth in order to reap spiritual reward. Alternatively, for Briggins and the other wealthy London Friends engaged in trading activities who heard these sermons, the parable could be interpreted more literally as guidance to invest their wealth wisely.

A close reading of the accounts of each Meeting contained within the diary would shed further light on the nature of what might be termed popular Quaker theology at this time. However, the subject of this article is Briggins himself, and his recording of everyday life. Here then, it is worth considering exactly why he chose to write down the subject of every ministry he heard in such brief but consistent detail. Noting down the contents of sermons in pocket diaries and notebooks was a part of seventeenth-century puritan piety that has been taken as evidence that sermons were, 'like an addictive and intoxicating drug'.[46] Indeed, memorising, recording and repeating sermons was an integral part of the voluntary religion of post-Reformation puritans.[47] Quite why Peter Briggins felt the need to write down what he had heard in Meetings is unclear. It is possible that the time spent writing his diary was a quiet time of reflection during which he could meditate upon what had been said. Certainly, he does not seem to have taken notes during the Meetings themselves, and each diary entry reads as if it was written in one sitting. This suggests that Briggins would sit down at the end of each Sunday and recall what had been said during the Meetings he had attended during the day. The process of writing out the subjects of sermons gave them a permanence they would not otherwise have had. This in turn would have enabled the diarist to refer back to them and recreate them, either in his own mind or in the company of members of his household who may not have been present at the original Meeting. However, keeping a written record of what was said in a Quaker Meeting might not have been approved of by all Friends at all times. For example, Richard Farnworth listed writing down and repeating sermons as one of the errors of his pre-Quaker days. Nonetheless, by the later seventeenth century, the recording of sermons for posterity seems to have become accepted, with the publication of several printed collections.[48]

While the focal point of the week in terms of religious activity was always Sunday, Briggins also attended numerous business Meetings and Meetings for worship during the week. The Meetings for worship were usually at the Bull and Mouth, presumably because of its location within the City walls where most of his business activities took place. The fluidity of his movement between the spiritual and business spheres is illustrated by one occasion when he heard George Whitehead speak at the Bull and Mouth in the morning, before moving off to the Royal Exchange and a coffee house in the afternoon and the Meeting for Sufferings in the evening.[49] This last engagement indicates the other aspect of Briggins' Quaker activities – namely, his involvement in various business Meetings in the capital.

By 1696, Peter Briggins had become heavily involved with the work of the Peel Monthly Meeting.[50] From 1697 until 1701 he also served on the Meeting of Twelve[51] and he became a member of the Six Weeks Meeting in February 1701/02.[52] During the sample year of 1707 he attended 71 business Meetings of various descriptions, including the Meeting for Sufferings and the Six Weeks Meeting. Within his own Meeting at the Peel he was involved in various activities, such as the relief of the

poor and disciplinary matters. His business and financial expertise were utilised to the full, the Monthly Meeting minutes indicating that he held a position something akin to that of treasurer.[53] He was also involved in the lobbying tactics of the movement, accompanying Daniel Quare and William Widowson to meet with the Bishop of York on behalf of three suffering Friends.[54] In 1707 he was considered a weighty enough member of the movement to be detailed to speak with the controversial and frequently wayward Friend James Jackson, 'ab[ou[t his pu[t]ting out his latter book in favour of the Camisers [i.e. *Camisards*]'.[55]

The case of Peter Briggins lends support to the picture of the development of Quaker business Meetings painted by Richard Vann. Vann has observed that despite their theoretical openness to all Friends, in reality the Meetings for church business, just like the public ministry, made discriminations that had not existed in the early days of the sect. By the early eighteenth century, the members of the business Meetings had come to form a sort of elite within the movement.[56] That these business Meetings had a decidedly more 'bourgeois' complexion than the movement as a whole was the product of two factors. First, the literary and business skills required for the exercise of church government tended to be the preserve of wealthier Friends. Secondly, the commitment of time necessary to play a fully active role in the business Meetings of the movement meant that there was a *de facto* wealth qualification imposed upon what might loosely be described as Quaker 'officeholders'. Thus, Peter Briggins, with his business expertise, his literacy and his numeracy was well qualified to serve the movement in an administrative capacity. Moreover, his relative wealth enabled him to spend considerable time away from his business activities, in order to devote his energies to serving the Quaker community.

FAMILY LIFE

The details of the daily routines of family life within the Briggins household are mostly obscure. The main group activity engaged in by the family was weekly attendance at Meetings for worship. Outside of this, it appears that much of the work in raising the five Briggins daughters was left to Mariabella, and to a lesser part their Grandmother Mariabella Farmborough. This would seem to be in keeping with the general picture of childhood among the London middle classes.[57] This is implied both by the busy schedule Peter records in his diary, and by his records of his wife's trips to her mother's with the children. For example, he notes in October 1707 that, 'I at home a foar n[oon] after[noon] went to Blaxtons and to P[hillip] Nichols and after Rickits and so home in the morning my w[ife] and 3 Child[re]n w[en]t to the Gravilpits and left Mercy at hir Grandmothers'.[58]

That Briggins took a great deal of interest in the education and development of his daughters is shown in the letters he wrote to them. By 1709 the two eldest girls (Mercy and Susanna) were away at school in Plaistow. On 25 January 1709/10, he wrote to them from Bartholomew Close, encouraging them to, 'live in love and be ready to assist and direct each other and strive which of you to love the other best, and then your buisness will goe on with cherefullness'.[59] In a postscript to the same letter Briggins notes that he has bought for the two girls, '2 prity ½ pint mugs', and

has sent them some chestnuts. In a second letter written in February 1710/11 there is tantalising evidence of why Briggins may have noted down what he had heard at the Meetings he attended with such regularity: 'I desire you may retaine in you[r] minds *the good advise* that we hear at Meetings: the friend spoake yesterday concerning that we all come to know a labouring in the Lord's vineyard'.[60] Thus, what emerges is a picture whereby the principal responsibilities of supporting and running the Briggins household were broadly divided along gendered lines. There is no evidence that Mariabella Briggins contributed in any way to Peter's business activities and her responsibilities lay predominantly in the management of the household and raising the five children. Yet Peter was also an attentive father, and the contents of his letters to his children suggest that he was particularly concerned with their spiritual education and well-being.

This last point is further borne out in a letter he addressed to all his children in January 1710/11. This was a letter of advice that the girls may read often, 'and keep coppies of this by them so that they may never forget my advice therein'.[61] Briggins' advice to his children was partly spiritual, and partly practical. He begins by counselling them to, 'Live in a true fear of offending all mighty God', and urging them to resist all potential temptations as he had done in his life. He asks that they spend time reading from the Scriptures and other 'good books', and that they go to Meetings for worship. Conscious of the material wealth he has acquired during his lifetime, he writes that, 'I desire you may not be puft up in Pride and vain glory but be rather humble for the Lord resists the Proud but gives grace unto the Humble'. Thus, they must be sure not to live beyond their means, for he has seen many who have come to ruin that way. He moves on to give several pieces of practical fatherly advice, noting, 'And as to marriage have most regard to one that truly loves and fears God and is of good parentage and hath had a good education and of pretty equal fortunes to yours as to the world'. The girls were to be supportive of one another, and loving and affectionate to their mother. Thus, the three central themes of Briggins' advice to his children are to serve God, to exercise prudence and sobriety in their lifestyles and to maintain close family relationships. Given what we have been able to deduce from the diary, it would seem fair to say that Peter Briggins expected his daughters to live according to the example of his own life.

LEISURE AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES: PETER BRIGGINS AND POPULAR CULTURE

The relationship between Quakers and what might cautiously be defined as 'popular culture' has generally received little attention from historians.[62] Where this has been discussed, it has generally been in terms of that which divided Friends from the rest of society, such as their much commented upon modes of dress and physical deportment,[63] and focused on those aspects of popular culture from which they absented, such as the alehouse.[64] However, by focussing on sources such as Monthly Meeting minutes, it is possible to place too much emphasis on those aspects of popular culture of which Friends strongly disapproved. There are far fewer sources that provide an indication of the activities they did engage in.

There is certainly some evidence in the Briggins diary that he did follow the directions of the movement to avoid leisure activities that might be deemed vain or worldly. According to John Strype in 1720, the most popular pastimes for Londoners included football, ninepins, cricket, ringing of bells, bull and bear baiting and drinking in alehouses.[65] There is certainly no evidence from the diary that Peter Briggins engaged in any of these activities. He did make occasional visits to inns, yet these would have been a world away from the less salubrious alehouses or even the taverns of London.[66] Further evidence of disapproval of some of the more unpleasant elements of early eighteenth-century London life can be found in an entry from December 1703, when Briggins refers to seeing Moorefields, 'very full of rude people flinging at Cocks'.[67] This was a reference to the activity of cock-throwing more generally associated with Shrove Tuesday, that involved the tethering of a cock to a stake and throwing stones and cudgels at it until it was dead.[68] More generally, Quakers have been identified by Keith Thomas as belonging to a puritan tradition of opposition to sports that involved animal cruelty.[69]

The main indications of recreational activity are occasional walks, often to Stoke Newington where a walk in the countryside could be combined with a check on the condition of hops. An entry recording that, 'in the aftr[noo]n I w[en]t with my wife and children and PC and W[illiam] T[ibbey] to Nuington Sp[ring] G[ardens] and walkt at Nuington town', is not untypical.[70] On another occasion he refers to calling, 'with my W[ife] and Child[re]n at the Chery Gardin and at the spring gardin', adding that, 'the hops looked prity well at Sp[ring] Gard[e]n'.[71] These were probably examples of the various pleasure gardens situated on the peripheries of the built-up area of the city frequented by middling and working families in search of fresh air, tea, swimming, fishing and other pursuits that would have been deemed suitable by Quakers.[72] Indeed, fishing was another pastime that Briggins appears to have enjoyed occasionally. In October 1703 he noted having been, 'to Hornsy and fished about 2 hours and only caught about 8 minnows [and] stone roaches'. On another occasion he visited a Quaker family named Sheen at Edmonton and fished in their brook, but 'c[augh]t little'.[73] It is significant that for Briggins and his family, leisure activities invariably involved escaping from the urban environment in which they lived into the more rural outlying part of the metropolitan area.

The diary contains other glimpses of London life during the early years of the eighteenth century that suggest some engagement with urban culture. On 3 January 1704/05 Briggins went with his wife, 'and saw the stand[a]rds and coullers taken by the D[uke of] Marlbro'. Three days later he took his three eldest daughters to see the Queen's coach at Goldsmith's Hall. In general, he was a keen observer of London events, taking an interest in all that was out of the ordinary. In May 1705 a whale was washed up on the beach at Deptford 'ab[ou]t 48ft long'. He travelled with his wife and man servant Thomas Barber to see the creature, and 'cut a piece of whalebone out of the jaw'.[74] In 1713 the Peace of Utrecht was celebrated by Londoners, Briggins recording that, 'There's great preparations in Smithfield with many great Images Representing Gog and Magog is to be illuminated next 3rd day being the day called Thanksgiving Day on acc[oun]t of the peace with France'. The next day he took his daughters to see preparations being made for fireworks on the Thames.[75]

Other social activities are difficult to discern from the diary. We find the occasional reference to the family having welcomed guests into their home, but entries such as that recording that, 'Wo[man] Adson F[ather] and Mo[ther] and bro[ther] and G[eorge] C[onyers] Dined with us' are rare.[76] It is possible that some of the visits to coffee houses and inns were for social rather than business purposes, but this is difficult to determine from the diary. In terms of the question of neighbourliness, it is possible to draw some slightly more positive conclusions. On one occasion we find Briggins meeting with his immediate neighbour Joshua Lock at an inn, and other liaisons with Lock are also noted.[77] The nature of these meetings is unclear, but some thirty years later a tobacconist named Joshua Lock was still living in Bartholomew Close, suggesting that there may have been a business element to the relationship.[78] Whatever the case, these meetings do indicate a relationship of some form with one of his neighbours who appears to have been a dissenter of sorts, but not a Quaker. A separate register of births of dissenters' children kept by the parish of St Bartholomew the Great during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries records births of several children to Joshua Lock, 'next doore to Mr Briggin[s] the Quaker', none of which appear in the Quaker birth registers.[79] The evidence that Lock was not a Quaker, but still had dealings with Peter Briggins, supports the developing understanding that religious dissent did not necessarily undermine the communal fabric of the parish.[80]

This last point raises the question of Briggins' relationship with his fellow parishioners. On this the diary is silent, and elsewhere slightly contradictory evidence can be found. Much has been made of the fact that early modern nonconformists often held parish offices, and London Quakers were no different in this respect.[81] Peter's father had served as scavenger for the parish of St Bartholomew the Great during the last year of his life,[82] and in 1695 Peter himself was appointed to the office of constable for the parish.[83] The fact that he opted to pay a £20 fine to secure exemption from this, and any future service to the parish, might be interpreted as a lack of community spirit and unwillingness to participate in local governance. However, the office of constable was universally unpopular and the payment of a fine in lieu of undertaking this and other offices was a luxury enjoyed by all wealthy Londoners. Therefore, it would be unwise to read too much into the fact that Briggins opted out of the responsibility.

Evidence from charitable bequests to the poor of the parish by Quakers and other dissenters has led one historian to the conclusion that, 'such men and women at no time saw themselves as being divorced or separated from the communities in which they lived'.[84] In London, a number of Friends left money to the poor of their parish of residence, and sometimes to their parish of origin too. Peter Briggins evidently shared in this sense of responsibility to the welfare of the poor, as his will records a legacy of £5 to the poor of St Bartholomew the Great.[85] However, what we also find is that he left ten times that amount to the Quaker poor of the Peel Meeting. Such disparity was not uncommon, for example William Tillit, another Peel Quaker, bequeathed a total of £220 to the Quaker poor and £10 to the poor of St Bartholomew the Great.[86] Such behaviour suggests that while Friends such as Briggins

and Tillit felt some responsibility towards the poor of their parish, they considered the Quaker poor to be more deserving recipients of relief than non-Quakers.

FAMILY PORTRAITS

A final element of Quaker activity to have received little close examination from historians, yet which the Briggins family can shed some light on, is the Quaker attitude to portrait painting.[87] It is generally accepted that in the very early years of the movement portraiture was viewed by the sect with hostility. George Fox called on Friends to,

> pluck down your images, your likenesses, your pictures, and your representations of things in heaven. I say, pluck them out of your houses, walls, and signs, or other places, that none of you be found imitators of his Creator.[88]

There is also evidence from the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that portrait painting was a controversial issue among Friends. Thomas Clarkson wrote of portraits as being evidence of pride and self conceit that were not displayed in Quaker homes. During the mid-nineteenth century *The British Friend* repeatedly expressed hostility to portrait painting. However, this controversy was generated in part by the fact that Quakers did have portraits painted, a number of which are known to exist from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[89]

While attitudes to portraiture during the early period of Quaker enthusiasm and the later period of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been discussed, little has been said of the intervening period.[90] Nonetheless, whatever the general feeling among the Society in the early eighteenth century, the existence of family portraits depicting Peter and Mariabella Briggins indicates that this was something engaged in by London Quakers at this time (Figures 1 and 2 [next page]).[91] The whereabouts of the original portraits is not known, so no comment can be made on any colours that may have been worn by either of the subjects. However, both husband and wife appear to be well dressed after the fashion of the time. The ornate buttons on Peter's coat and the simple, but seemingly high-quality, dress worn by Mariabella provide both an indication of the couple's wealth and a certain removal from the plainness of dress that might be expected of prominent Quakers.

The artist of both paintings is unknown, but the fact that they are both finely executed suggests that their acquisition was relatively expensive. Nothing can be discerned from documentary evidence of where in the Briggins household they might have been hung. Nonetheless, portraits were undoubtedly a symbol of wealth and status for the owner; an outward expression of social standing that would seem to have less to do with a Quaker lifestyle and more with the social aspirations of a City businessman.[92] A letter in Friends House library notes that the portrait of Peter Briggins had the following written on the reverse:

> Peter Briggins the merchant of Bartholomew Close married Mariabella daughter of Thomas Farmborough of (torn).[93]

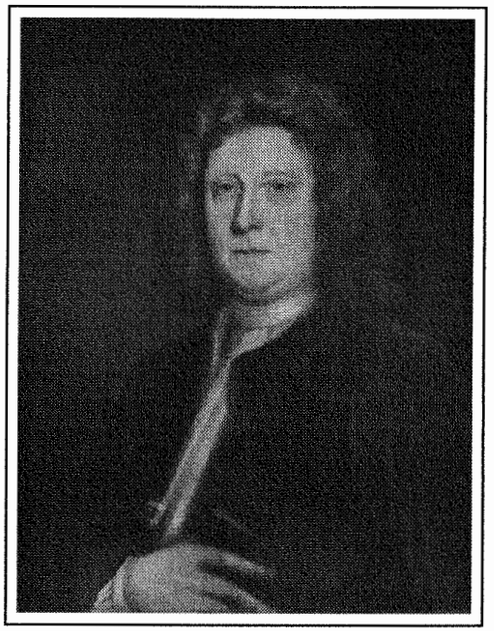

Figure 1. *Portrait of Peter Briggins* (artist and date unknown).

Figure 2. *Portrait of Mariabella Briggins* (artist and date unknown).

Assuming that this inscription was of contemporary origin, and was not added after Peter Briggins' death, the description of him as 'the merchant of Bartholomew Close', compared with all other sources describing him as a tobacconist, does suggest a desire to be recognised as being of a higher social status. This increases the sense that the purchase of the portrait was an expression of wealth and standing. Once again, then, we can see how Peter Briggins moved between the religious and the worldly areas of London life without any evident sense of contradiction or incompatibility between the two.

CONCLUSION

So, what can the life of Peter Briggins tell us about Quakerism in London half a century after the first Quaker mission arrived in the capital? First, it suggests that the argument of one London historian that Friends were too preoccupied with their own concerns to take much notice of the political, commercial and financial developments of the wider society presents too simplistic a picture of the relationship between Quakers and the world around them.[94] His constant interest in the fluctuations in the hop market and the prices of East Indian and African bonds underlines the extent to which the fortunes of Quakers could not help but be bound up with the underlying economic trends that effected the whole of society. Early modern London consisted of a variety of divergent but interconnected communities brought together by such factors as locality, trade and religion.[95] The reality of life within the hustle and bustle of the ever expanding metropolis was that no matter how strong an individual's allegiances to one particular community it was impossible to cut ties with all others.

Thus, Peter Briggins moved effortlessly, and without any apparent sense of contradiction, between trade and commerce and religion. While he managed to build up business relationships with a number of Quakers, the evidence of the diary, though far from conclusive, suggests that he probably traded with non-Quakers as well. At the Exchange and in coffee houses and inns he would have rubbed shoulders with merchants, wholesalers and shopkeepers of various religious persuasions. The third area of activity, of which we learn very little from the diary but can find information on in other sources, was his family life and the life of his household. Here we find him to have been a conscientious and caring father to his five children and loving husband to his wife, Mariabella. Finally, there is some evidence of a relationship with his neighbours that crossed confessional divides, and a sense of responsibility to the poor of the parish of St Bartholomew the Great. Thus, while his involvement in the Quaker community around the Peel Meeting and in London as a whole assumed a greater importance than most other areas of his life, he clearly did not consider himself to have been entirely isolated from the business community of the City of London or the local neighbourhood of St Bartholomew the Great. Therefore, sources such as diaries and letters are of great importance in creating a more nuanced impression of the relationship between Quakers and society than is possible from either the internal records of the movement, or the evidence of office holding and probate records.

NOTES

* This article makes extensive use of the diary of Peter Briggins. Briggins generally wrote his diary in note form, abbreviating many words and place names. Where quotations have been given, every effort has been made to reproduce the original text as faithfully as possible. Therefore, where abbreviations have been expanded, this is indicated by the use of squared brackets. However, for more common abbreviations such as '&', 'ye' and 'yt' this was not felt necessary. All dates are given in the old style.

I would like to express my thanks to Oliver Howard, Mara Uzzell, and other members of the Howard family, descendents of Peter Briggins, for their generous assistance in tracking down a number of items that have been of great use in researching this article.

1. London Metropolitan Archive (LMA) Acc/1●17/4, Mariabella Briggins, nineteenth-century copy of her entries in the family Bible.
2. Creaton, H. (ed.), *Unpublished London Diaries: A Checklist of Unpublished Diaries by Londoners and Visitors with a Select Bibliography of Published Diaries*, London Record Society publications, 37; London: London Record Society, 2●●3, pp. 23-25, diary numbers 21, 29, 31. Diarist number 32, Edward Belson, was also a Quaker.
3. Howard, E., *The Eliot Papers*, 2 vols.; Gloucester, 1893–94. Since this article was written a further volume has been brought to light at the London Metropolitan Archives covering the period 1711–16. At the time of publication, the volume was with the LMA's conservation department and could not be consulted. I am indebted to Jordan Landes for this information.
4. Walsham, A., *Providence in Early Modern England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 2●, 66; Macfarlane, A. (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616–1683*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
5. This approach is modelled on Archer, I.W., 'Social Networks in Restoration London: The Evidence of Samuel Pepy's Diary', in Shepard, A., and Withington, P. (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2●●●, pp. 76-94. The actual period analysed was taken from 1 March 17●6/●7 to 29 February 17●7/●8.
6. Vann, R., *The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655–1755*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univeristy Press, 1969, p. 2●1. I have interpreted this comment as arguing that Friends were increasingly seeking to segregate themselves from the rest of society.
7. Davies, A., *The Quakers in English Society 1655–1725*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2●●●, pp. 191-215; Stevenson, B., 'The Social Integration of Post-Restoration Dissenters, 166●–1725 in Spufford, M. (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520–1725*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 36●-87, quote from p. 375.
8. Glaysier, N., 'Merchants at the Royal Exchange, 166●–172●', in Saunders, A. (ed.), *The Royal Exchange*, London: London Topographical Society, 1997, p. 2●●, describes him as a 'hop and honey merchant'. A photograph of a portrait in the possession of the Howard family describes him as 'Peter Briggins the merchant of Bartholomew Close'.
9. Earle, P., *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660–1730*, London: Methuen, 1989, pp. 4●-41.
10. LMA, Acc/1●17/2, Peter Briggins' Diary, 16 Sept. 17●7, 3 Oct. 17●7. Hereafter, references will simply be to Diary.
11. Diary, 25 Oct. 17●6, 25 Apr. 17●7. For references to fluctuating prices see 1● Jan. 17●7/●8, 2● Mar. 17●7/●8.
12. Diary, 17 May 17●7.
13. Diary, weekending 3 May 17●7 has five references to 'Change', whereas the weekending 29 Mar. 17●7 has no references.
14. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 4●.
15. Glaisyer, 'Merchants at the Royal Exchange', pp. 198-99. See also Glaisyer, N., 'The Culture of Commerce in England, 166●–172●', PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1999, pp. 58-68.
16. Glaisyer, 'Merchants at the Royal Exchange', p. 2●2.

17. Glaisyer, 'Culture of Commerce', pp. 63-64.
18. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 57.
19. These comments are based on Harris, J., 'The Grecian Coffee House and Political Debate in London 1688–1714', *London Journal* 25 (2000), pp. 1-13, esp. pp. 1-2, and Berry, H., 'An Early Coffee House Periodical and its Readers: The *Athenian Mercury*, 1691–1697', *London Journal* 25 (2000), pp. 14-33 (16-17). I am grateful to the anonymous reader of this journal for drawing these two articles to my attention.
20. Klein, L.E., 'Coffeehouse Civility, 1660–1714: an aspect of post-courtly culture in England', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 59 (1996), p. 31.
21. Diary, 18 Apr. 1707. There was a coffee house near St Dunstan's Church, Fleet Street called Scott's, see Lillywhite, B., *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1963, p. 520. Briggins' will mentions 'my house and ground in possession of Phillip Nicholls in Threadnedle Street', Public Records Office (PRO), PROB/11/560/184.
22. For example, Diary, 25 Jul. 1706, 20 Aug. 1706 and 31 Aug. 1706.
23. Quoted in Lilywhite, *London Coffee Houses*, p. 305.
24. Diary, 11 Dec. 1706.
25. Diary, 1 Feb. 1706/07.
26. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 57.
27. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 62.
28. Briggins' dealings in the hop trade are analysed in Mathias, P., *The Brewing Industry in England 1700–1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, pp. 504-506. This paragraph is based on Mathias' account.
29. Diary, 23 Jul. 1706, 17 Apr. 1707, 5 Jul. 1707.
30. Diary, 26 Sept. 1706.
31. The Stoke Newington association may also have been related to the fact that the Meeting established there in 1698 came under the care of Peel Monthly Meeting. Beck, W., and Ball, T.F., *The London Friends' Meetings*, London: F. Bowyer Kitto, 1869, pp. 211-13. See also Daniels, P., 'Quakers in Stoke Newington, to the Mid-19th Century', *Hackney History* 8 (2002), pp. 3-11.
32. Diary, 26 Oct. 1706.
33. Diary, 27 Sept. 1706, 29 Nov. 1707, 3 Oct. 1707.
34. Diary, 22 Oct. 1706. PRO, PROB/11/492/21, Will of William Tillitt, refers to 'my loveing Friends John Stringfellow and Captain John Bowery'. Tillitt's death on 22 January 1706/07 and burial two days later are noted by Briggins, Diary, 22 and 24 Jan. 1706/07.
35. Diary, 14 Sept. 1706. Briggins agreed to Nichols withholding rent for one quarter in exchange for him making repairs to the house.
36. PRO, PROB/11/560/184.
37. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, pp. 48-49; Earle, P., *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650–1750*, London: Methuen, 1994, pp. 86-87.
38. PRO, PROB/11/700/138; LSF, London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting, Digests of Burial Registers.
39. Diary, 22 Mar. 1706/07.
40. Diary, *passim*.
41. A further visit to Stoke Newington Meeting was made in 1708. Diary, 4 Jul. 1708.
42. For the boundaries of Peel MM in 1708 see Beck and Ball, *London Friends Meetings*, p. 197.
43. Burials and marriages have been counted as ordinary Meetings for worship for this purpose.
44. Diary, 11 May 1707.
45. Briggins does not seem to have attended Meetings at either Wheeler Street or Ratcliff Meetings in Stepney, or Horsleydown or the Park Meetings in Southwark.
46. Walsham, *Providence*, p. 61.
47. Collinson, P., 'The English Conventicle', in Sheils, W.J., and Wood, D. (eds.), *Voluntary Religion*, Studies in Church History, 23; Oxford: Basil Blackwell for The Ecclesiastical History Society, 1986, pp. 240-43: Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991 [1971], pp. 193-94.
48. Farnworth, R., *The Heart Opened by Christ*, repr., London, 1655 [1654], pp. 2-3; Braithwaite, W.C., *The Second Period of Quakerism*, repr., York: William Sessions, 2nd edn, 1979 [1919], pp. 450, 550-52. For an example of published sermons see Crisp, S., *Several Sermons or Declarations of Mr. Stephen Crisp*, London, 1693. The success of this publication is implied by successive reprints and the production of subsequent volumes.
49. Diary, 26 Mar. 1708.
50. LSF, Peel Monthly Meeting, men's minutes, vol. 1696–1709, *passim*.
51. The Meeting of Twelve was a 'sub-committee' of Six Weeks Meeting responsible for financial matters. White, W.A., *Six Weeks Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends 1671–1971*, London: Six Weeks Meeting, 1971, p. 7. See also Beck and Ball, *London Friends Meetings*, pp. 112-14.
52. LSF, Peel MM, men's minutes, vol. 1696–1709, 28 Apr. 1697, 25 Feb. 1701/02.
53. LSF, Peel MM, men's minutes, vol. 1696–1709, 28 Sept. 1709.
54. Diary, 20 Nov. 1707.
55. Diary, 27 Sept. 1707. In 1706 three French Prophets, or Camisards as they were known in France, escaped to England creating something of a stir, particularly in London, attracting up to four hundred followers. See Francis, R., *Ann the Word: the story of Ann Lee, female messiah, mother of the Shakers, the woman clothed with the sun*, London: Fourth Estate, 2000, pp. 28-32. See also Louis, J.H., 'The "Desert" Society in Languedoc (1686–1704) as Popular Culture and the Roots of French Quakerism', *Quaker Studies* 9 (2004), pp. 54-67.
56. Vann, *Social Development*, pp. 120-21.
57. Earle, *Making*, p. 237.
58. Diary, 18 Oct. 1707.
59. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 73. I have not been able to locate the original copies of this, and other letters written to the girls at school.
60. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 74.
61. Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service, How White Papers, HW/87/8, Peter Briggins to 'My Dear and Tender Children'.
62. Bell, E., '"Vain, Unsettled Fashions": The Early Durham Friends and Popular Culture c. 1660–1725', *Quaker Studies* 8 (2003), pp. 23-35, is a valuable recent exception to this. See also Mullett, M.A., 'Catholic and Quaker attitudes to Work, Rest, and Play in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England', in Swanson, R.N. (ed.), *The Use and Abuse of Time in Christian History*, Studies in Church History, 37; Woodbridge: Boydell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 2002, pp. 185-209 (198-209).
63. Davies, *Quakers and English Society*, pp. 43-63; Bell, '"Vain, Unsettled Fashions"', pp. 26-32.
64. Bell, '"Vain, Unsettled Fashions"', pp. 32-35.
65. Inwood, S., *A History of London*, London: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 306-307.
66. In 1691 London Yearly Meeting instructed Friends to 'avoid unnecessary frequenting taverns [and] alehouses'. Mullett, 'Catholic and Quaker Attitudes', p. 198.
67. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 31.
68. Thomas, K., *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 7, 147, 153, 158, 185.
69. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 153-54, 158-59, 180. Mullett, 'Catholic and Quaker Attitudes', p. 200, notes that later in the eighteenth century wealthier Quakers were advised against engaging in hunting or shooting as pastimes.
70. Diary, 31 May 1707. Briggins notes that the weather on this day was 'fair and hot' until the evening.
71. Diary, 20 Jun. 1707.
72. Inwood, *London*, pp. 313-16.
73. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, pp. 30-32.
74. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, pp. 34-35.

75. Howard, *Eliot Papers*, II, p. 55.

76. Diary, 29 Oct. 17●7.

77. Diary, 6 Nov. 17●6. Briggins also refers to 'Nr Lock' or 'Nabr Lock' on 24 Sept. 17●6, 31 Dec. 17●6 and 1 Jan. 17●6/●7.

78. *The Directory: containing an alphabetical list of the names and places of abode of the directors of companies, persons in publick business, merchants and other eminent traders in the cities of London and Westminster, and borough of Southwark*, London, 1736, p. 3●.

79. Guildhall Library (GL), St Bartholomew the Great, register of births of dissenters' children, records the births of five children to Joshua and Mary Lock/Locke between 1696 and 17●5. LSF, London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting, Digests of Burial Registers.

8●. Davies, *Quakers*, pp. 2●1-2●4.

81. Stevenson, 'Social Integration', pp. 369-72; Davies, *Quakers in English Society*, pp. 2●4-2●7. My forthcoming PhD thesis will consider office holding by London Friends.

82. GL, Ms 399●, St Bartholomew the Great, vestry minutes, 1662–171●, vol. 1, 21 Dec. 1687, 3 Aug. 1688.

83. GL, MS 399●/1, 21 Dec. 1695.

84. Stevenson, 'Social Integration', p. 375. See also Davies, *Quakers*, pp. 2●3-2●4.

85. PRO, PROB/11/319/26.

86. PRO, PROB/11/492/21.

87. Although see Pointon, M., 'Quakerism and Visual Culture 165●–18●●', *Art History* 2● (1997), pp. 397-431. Pointon deals with portraiture on pp. 412-14.

88. Nicholson, F.J., *Quakers and the Arts*, London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1968, p. 51.

89. Nickalls, J., 'Some Quaker Portraits Certain and Uncertain', *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, supplement no. 29 (1958), pp. 1-3.

9●. On the later period see Beck, B.S., '"A Witness Lasting, Faithful, True": The Impact of Photography on Quaker Attitudes to Portraiture', MA thesis, London Institute, 2●●●, esp. Chapter 4.

91. Extensive enquiries have failed to reveal the whereabouts of the original portraits. However, early twentieth-century photographs of them exist in LSF. The copies used for this article were made from those in the possession of the Howard family kindly provided by Major Oliver Howard. From similar copies owned by the Howard family, it is clear that portraits also once existed of Mariabella Farmborough Briggins, Philip and Rebecca Eliot, and Theophilia Bellars.

92. Pointon, M., *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 14.

93. LSF, Temp MSS 143, Eliot Howard to Norman Penney, 4 Feb. 1915.

94. de Krey, G.S., 'Trade, Religion and Politics in London in the Reign of William III', PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1978, p. 145.

95. Archer, 'Social Networks', p. 9●.

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