

THE STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH QUAKERISM: FROM RUFUS JONES TO LARRY INGLE*

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ABSTRACT

This brief study of writing on eighteenth-century English Quaker history begins with an assessment of Rufus Jones's contribution in his *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (1921). It goes on to supplement the views of the century expressed by Larry Ingle in 'The Future of Quaker History' (1997) by surveying concisely a major proportion of the relevant published work between 1921 and 1997. It refers also to Ingle's identification of gaps and weaknesses in the published literature on the subject.

KEYWORDS

Quaker, England, eighteenth century, Rufus Jones, Larry Ingle, historiography

Rufus Jones wrote, among a large number of other publications, what is still the most substantial single work covering English Quaker history in the eighteenth century and after. His two-volume survey *The Later Periods of Quakerism* was published in 1921 as part of the series of 'Rowntree Histories'. In 1997 Larry Ingle gave his Presidential Address to the Friends' Historical Society entitled 'The Future of Quaker History' (Ingle 1997). This article will deal almost exclusively with English Quakerism of the eighteenth century, covering mostly (but making no claim to do so comprehensively) work published from Jones to Ingle. In places the boundary lines of date and location will be somewhat fuzzy.

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Certainly a lot, but by no means all, of what follows may hold equally true for the Quakerism of Wales, Scotland, Ireland and sometimes North America.

It is perhaps surprising that in 1999 the starting place for those looking for a general history of eighteenth-century Friends is Jones's work of 1921. In almost a thousand pages he covered the period from 1725 to the foundation of Woodbrooke, and Quakerism in Britain, Ireland and North America and (to a very limited extent) other countries. His earlier collaborative work in the series of Rowntree histories, *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, also refers to the eighteenth century (Jones, Sharpless and Gummere: 1911). There has been no subsequent overview on the same scale. The picture for the eighteenth century has to be completed for the period up to 1725 by part of W.C. Braithwaite's *The Second Period of Quakerism* (1961[1919]). Of the subsequent general histories, John Punshon's *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (1984) is significant in that it devotes about 120 pages to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Larry Ingle, known for his study of George Fox, *First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (1994), and for an important book on later Friends, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (1986), gave an overview of the current state of Quaker history in his Presidential Address to the Friends' Historical Society. My aim here is to examine what he did and did not say about the eighteenth century in Britain. I am not assuming here that the eighteenth century is anything more than a reasonably convenient while arbitrary chronological period. Braithwaite's *The Second Period* is not the only work about Friends to run from the late-seventeenth century well into the eighteenth. The introduction of the Rules of Removal and Settlement in 1737 or the issue in 1738 of the manuscript *Christian and Brotherly Advices Given Forth from Time to Time by the Yearly Meetings in London Alphabetically Digested under Proper Heads*, the first national book of discipline, are among landmarks which could be taken to show the beginning of a new period. And that period might perhaps end with the growth of evangelicalism among Friends in the early decades of the next century. The rise of Quietism, the growth of preparative meetings or the movement for the revival of the discipline from the 1750s might arguably be defining moments too. For the identification of the end of the period, the beginning of anti-slave-trade activity in London Yearly Meeting might be relevant. Of course history books need starting and finishing points, but a comparison

between old and new volumes in the *Oxford History of England* shows that periods are not fixed.

There is, I think, a perception of Rufus Jones's work as overwhelmingly biased in favour of the mystical elements of Quakerism. Certainly mysticism figures significantly in his account of the eighteenth century. It features much more significantly in his two other volumes in the Rowntree series, covering what might be called the pre-history of Quakerism: *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1909) and *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1928). These have been subjected to a revisionist criticism that has not been attempted on any scale for *The Later Periods*, or at least not for the portion dealing with the Quakerism of the eighteenth century (more work has been done on the nineteenth century). Geoffrey Nuttall raised doubts about Jones's desire to see the roots of Quakerism in mediaeval European mysticism in his *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Nuttall 1946). In the United States reservations about Jones's understanding of the relationship between mysticism and Quakerism began to be expressed after his death in 1948. That does not mean of course that the work in *The Later Periods* is fundamentally untrustworthy or flawed, but it does suggest that it should be approached with caution. Jones's beloved mysticism must not be confused with the Quietism that was such a distinctive feature of the eighteenth century. Jones saw that Quietism as timid, exclusive and negative, 'content with the cultivation of a remnant and the making of a peculiar people', unlike the mysticism of the founders which was characteristically positive. The earlier form sprang 'out of a rich and exalted conception of the immeasurable depth and worth of man'; Quietism, he maintained, was 'built on a pervading sense of the wreck and ruin of fallen man' (Jones 1921: 33). Jones's account of Quietism is well worth reading but does not seem to do it justice. Punshon certainly sees major differences between continental and Quaker Quietism (1984: 120). Jones's view led him to argue in the introduction to *The Later Periods* that Quakerism was fundamentally mystical towards the end of the eighteenth century. He had, after all, originally intended to write a history of mysticism while John Wilhelm Rowntree wrote the history of Quakerism. Had Rowntree lived to do this we might have had a very different starting point. But it would be unfair to suggest that Jones overlooked or ignored other aspects of Quakerism. Nor indeed does he seriously undervalue them. In his introduction to *The Later Periods* he stated:

It would be a mistake to imply that religion of the historical evangelical type has been, as revealed in lives, less dynamic and transforming than has mysticism. Both these types have been mighty spiritual forces in the day of their freshness and vitality, and they have both been as weak and ineffective as the shorn Samson in the cooled stage of crystallization and white ash (Jones 1921: xix).

The traditional picture of the changes in what might be considered the third period of Quakerism is summed up in Jones's words:

Security, ease and privilege did what persecution could never have done. They eliminated the electric enthusiasms of the movement and made it a different type of thing... Already by the middle of the eighteenth century the most deeply concerned Friends of the time felt that the glory of Quakerism had passed away. They were conscious of a painful contrast between the existing present and the glowing past. They idealized somewhat the period of their forefathers and of their own youth and they were over-critical of their age, but it was an unescapable fact that a profound change had taken place, and that the Quakerism of 1752 was quite unlike the dynamic Quakerism of 1652 (Jones 1921: 2).

There is a hint of Jones's realism in the words 'they were over-critical of their age' and perhaps a mild rebuke to those who write off the eighteenth century too readily.

Given his introductory remarks, how then did Jones go about recounting the history of the eighteenth century? Because he saw the Society's mission as mystical and prophetic he said that it was

a difficult one to interpret. It does not lend itself to the usual historical method. It cannot be brought out by a description of events or by a detailed account of facts. It can be told only in terms of life and personality. It can be appreciated and translated only through the persons who have been the bearers and organs of it (Jones 1921: 5).

While this approach through the lives of individuals is welcome to an extent and contains some excellent material it is not sufficient, nor did Jones actually confine himself to it. He sought to justify his dislike of institutional, administrative, minute-based history by writing that:

eighteenth-century Quaker history as an external affair seems to many dull and uninteresting. Its warm and quick inner stream, however, is a precious thing, and if we can discover it and suggest its quality through the life and spirit of its most characteristic men and women, that will tell the story in the truest way (Jones 1921: 5).

Accordingly, the first chapter of *The Later Periods*, 'Typical Leaders During the Eighteenth Century' (Jones 1921: 1-31) offers an excellent account of the Fothergills, Bownas, John Churchman, John Griffith and John Richardson, among others, for the period up to and including Woolman. However, Jones's preoccupation with major figures of eighteenth-century Quakerism may cause modern readers of his work to long for some account of the vast and increasingly silent majority, those who were really the most characteristic Friends or those whose energies were applied to achieving success compatible with Quaker standards in commerce, industry, education or science.

In taking this initially biographical approach Jones tells us about Quaker journals and their value and limitations as sources, a theme that has attracted further interest in recent years. He describes his view of the continental influences on Quaker Quietism, applying much more concisely his earlier approach to mysticism, supported by the concrete evidence of eighteenth-century English Friends translating and publishing the devotional works of continental Quietists or their forerunner Thomas à Kempis. Given that Jones's work is now 80 years old, it is appropriate to ask: Has this subject been written about more recently, other than in John Punshon's brief expression of his reservations?

In my opinion Jones also makes a valuable contribution with his examination of the Quaker literature of the period. His assessment of *The Grounds of a Holy Life* (1702) by the Bristol schoolmaster Hugh Turford is important. This short work was printed at least 25 times in the eighteenth century and another 10 before 1850 (with various extracts also being published). Quite a few of those printings were North American. Jones says that:

There is abundant evidence that Turford's writings were highly appreciated and that they silently worked upon the lives and spirits of Friends through the entire period of Quaker Quietism (Jones 1921: 61).

If only that statement were supported by a footnote with some details of the evidence for it. Jones dismisses more briefly Benjamin Holme's *A Serious Call* (1725) which had at least 20 English printings in the eighteenth century, appearing also in Dutch, Latin, French and Welsh translations. He sees Holme's work as a mild attempt at interpreting the ideals and message of Quakerism, revealing no original insight. Further examples could be mentioned and it does seem to me that Jones's appreciation of the continuing importance of the printed text needs to be taken seriously. In part this may come from my awareness of the rise of the

history of the book, and now too of the history of reading, as interdisciplinary subjects that we should not ignore. The problem is, however, that while all sorts of fascinating questions crop up it is not clear that sufficient evidence can be found to answer them. It is reasonably clear what was potentially available for Friends to read and a thorough perusal of minute books can demonstrate too the use made of various texts for distribution to non-Friends. Establishing the actual use of individual texts by individual Friends is far more challenging. The same applies too of course when trying to assess the impact of more official literature, such as the quite widely distributed printed Epistles of Yearly Meeting. More knowledge of the books owned by individual Friends would be helpful.

While Jones's heart is clearly not in administrative history he does draw out in some detail the evolution of the roles of Elder, Overseer and Minister as they became formally defined. His account of the Elders is a classic (Jones 1921: 125-27) and it serves as a reminder that these functions were generally established earlier in North America. He writes, perhaps not correctly, about the beginning of formally recognized membership (which he sees as clearly defined by the 1737 Rules of Removal and Settlement) and provides an account of the queries (which can be supplemented by Richard E. Stagg's valuable contributions in the *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*). Jones also describes the movement for the reform of the discipline in the mid-eighteenth century and John Griffith's role in this on his return from America. He comments on the place of testimonies to individuals in the Society, as they appeared in 1701-1829 in the continuing *Piety Promoted* or in the 1760 *A Collection of Testimonies*. He moves on to analyse and define the testimonies in their more general sense, the distinguishing features of the Society to many, using the minutes of Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings as major sources. His account of itinerant ministry is based on extensive reading of published journals and it remains of value, with helpful references to the parallel American sources.

Jones does in fact go well beyond the biographical approach he endorsed so strongly. He includes a good deal of material that is relevant to the general history of eighteenth-century Quakerism even if he does not provide that in a way completely to the satisfaction of the modern reader. I will discuss some of the areas left untouched or discussed only briefly by Jones in my review of subsequent publications.

When I began the preparation of this article I mentioned my inten-

tion of rereading a substantial part of *The Later Periods* to another Quaker historian, who expressed surprise that I should think this worthwhile. His point was that Jones placed too much emphasis on the spiritual life and wished that he had written something more along the lines of *The London Friends' Meetings* (Beck and Ball 1869). That is still a valuable book, based substantially on minutes and with some statistical tables including occupational analyses for London Friends in 1680 and 1780 derived from marriage records. This was in the tradition of the ground-work undertaken by John Stephenson Rowntree and found later in a more sophisticated form in the work of Richard Vann and David Eversley.

It is too easy to forget that William C. Braithwaite also contributed to the history of the eighteenth century, and yet his *The Second Period* must not be overlooked. It too was part of the Rowntree series whose origins are described by Thomas Kennedy in his article 'History and Quaker Renaissance: The Vision of John Wilhelm Rowntree' (Kennedy 1986). Perhaps we need to be reminded that Rowntree had for a long time

believed that a real key to realization of his work for the revitalization of the Society of Friends might be the rescuing of Quaker history from the obscurantism and neglect in which it had languished for nearly two centuries (Kennedy 1986: 43-44).

On the other hand Joseph Bevan Braithwaite had viewed the establishment of the Friends' Historical Society in 1903 with real anxiety and dismay. When Braithwaite's volumes (he was, incidentally, the eighth child of J.B. Braithwaite) were reissued 40 years after first publication the original introductions by Jones were dropped, no explanation being offered in *The Second Period* other than the statement that the new introduction indicated 'some of the changes in perspective which recent studies of seventeenth century England have brought about in the past four or five decades' (1961: vii). Braithwaite's account is essential scene-setting for the eighteenth century, clearly indicating how its opening decades can be regarded as a rounding-off of the seventeenth century with the death of Penn in 1718 and George Whitehead in 1723. He recounts in detail the political and internal struggle for the continuation of affirmation which went on until the passing of the 1722 Act. Some of the divisions and problems of the late-seventeenth century continued into the next, with the last embers of the Wilkinson-Story controversy, the works of the anti-Quaker authors Charles Leslie and Francis Bugg, the Keithian troubles. There are accounts of important ministers, Luke

Cock, Thomas Story and Samuel Bownas, and of tithe difficulties. But Braithwaite's view of the rest of the century is simplistic: 'when the Georgian years of ease came, they would be years of outward respectability and inward spiritual decline' (Jones 1921: 179). His concern remained predominantly the period from the Restoration to the Toleration Act of 1689.

Larry Ingle in his Friends' Historical Society address attempted an overview of the state of the whole of Quaker history and tried most usefully to identify the current gaps. In paying tribute to Braithwaite, Ingle pointed out that he concentrated on institutions and control: 'Hence he seldom considered the roads not taken or the people who travelled on them' (1997: 6). As we have seen, Jones's concerns were rather different. Looking at broad studies of Quaker history Ingle is not satisfied by either John Punshon's *Portrait in Grey* (1984) or *The Quakers* by Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost (1988). He sees hope for the future of Quaker history particularly in the growing study of women Friends. He identifies seven areas that need greater attention from historians while not claiming that his list is exhaustive.

One area is social history. Ingle cites J. William Frost's *The Quaker Family in Colonial America* (1973) which should not be ignored by those looking at the English scene. While he clearly cannot mention all the published literature, omissions may give a false impression that little secondary material is available. While Arnold Lloyd's *Quaker Social History 1669-1738* (1950) is more limited than its title implies, it is still of use; similarly, despite the fact that Richard Vann's *The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755* (1969) is less satisfactory on the eighteenth than the seventeenth century, it too is important. So too is *Friends in Life and Death: The British and Irish Quakers in the Demographic Transition, 1650-1900* (Vann and Eversley 1992). Ingle is happier about another area, the histories of local meetings, pointing to a strong and mostly amateur tradition. These histories are very variable in quality and to my mind quite often of limited value for the appreciation of eighteenth-century Quakerism. Too many of them display a lack of understanding of the more general Quaker history of the period.

Having discussed the topics of social history and the history of local meetings, topics that span the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Ingle recognizes the need for further study of these two centuries. He refers to the view expressed by Nicholas Morgan in his study *Lancashire Quakers and the Establishment 1660-1730* (1993) that no one had satisfactorily

written about the eighteenth century as a whole. Ingle describes Morgan's work as path-breaking. Ingle admits to being one of the historians who have accepted the earlier thesis that the decline in vitality of Quakerism in the eighteenth century was the result of continuing efforts to erect a hedge containing Friends and keeping out the world. Morgan suggests that his evidence does not support this assumption for the earlier decades of the eighteenth century. So Ingle feels justified in suggesting that: 'from the end of the seventeenth century to the very end of the nineteenth, English Quaker history is pretty much a void' (1997: 10). Of course Ingle is here referring to the lack of a substantial general history. There is material in the more specialist monographs mentioned and, to an extent, also in journal articles.

One area that has received some attention is the aspects of economic history. While Paul Emden's *Quakers in Commerce* (n.d. [?1939]) covered a large field, by contrast Arthur Raistrick's *Two Centuries of Industrial Welfare: The London Quaker Lead Company 1692-1905* (1977[1938]) or Humphrey Lloyd's *The Quaker Lloyds in the Industrial Revolution* (1975) were devoted to single enterprises. Raistrick's other main works are really major contributions to the same theme: they are *Quakers in Science and Industry* (1968[1950]) and *Dynasty of Iron Founders: The Darbys and Coalbrookdale* (1989[1953]). Raistrick said in *Quakers in Science and Industry* that the work was 'presented only as a tentative outline study on which might be based many detailed accounts by other workers' (Raistrick 1989: 9). We are, I think, still waiting for those detailed accounts to become many. Two works on William Cookworthy should be mentioned, John Penderill-Church's (1972) and A. Douglas Selleck's (1978), the latter covering Cookworthy's intellectual, family and religious connections. Two of the three generations of the dynasty bearing the name of Thomas Goldney were covered by P.K. Stembridge in his *A Bristol Merchant Dynasty* (1998) and are relevant to the period under discussion. James Walvin's *The Quakers: Money and Morals* (1997) contains a good deal about the century in a very readable narrative, not only covering some of the ground of the works just mentioned but also behaviour, standards and education, important aspects of Quaker life that I have consciously neglected in this paper. Education should certainly occupy a chapter in any new history of the eighteenth century. Two studies of the political aspects of eighteenth-century nonconformity are still of value: N.C. Hunt's *Two Early Political Associations: The Quakers and the Dissenting Deputies in the Age of Sir Robert Walpole* (1961)

is mostly concerned with the campaigns surrounding the Affirmation Act and the Tithe Bill campaign, while B.L. Manning's *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies* (1952) has some relevance.

Sheila Wright's *Friends in York: The Dynamics of Quaker Revival, 1780–1860* (1995) touches upon the end of the eighteenth century and presents a picture of a major Quaker centre which turns out to be surprisingly untypical because of both the revival and York's demography. Perhaps a similarly analytical study of a different location with a large Quaker population would produce equally surprising results. If the generally accepted picture of steady numerical decline was upset a good deal of rethinking would be necessary. Pearson Thistlethwaite's *Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting 1665–1966* (1979) seems to me insufficiently known or used among students of Quaker history. Local studies as substantial as this are of great value to those looking at other areas or trying to build up a view of what was going on in the country as a whole. It is, as Russell Mortimer suggested in the introduction, 'a quarry for future research in an approach to a revision of Quaker history for a generation still to come' (1979: v).

While the above review is selective—being based almost entirely on works found on my own shelves—it is sufficient to demonstrate that the study of eighteenth-century Quakerism has not been dormant since Jones's day. However, it does not demonstrate that enough has been published to make possible the replacement of Jones based on his original sources and more recently published material. Of course more exists—Ingle does not mention the periodical literature or contributions to collections of essays or to the Ecclesiastical History Society's conference proceedings, *Studies in Church History*. I will mention just two important examples from these categories: Jean Mortimer's 'Quaker Women in the Eighteenth Century: Opportunities and Constraints' (1996) and the contribution by Jacob Price to *The World of William Penn*, edited by Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, entitled 'The Great Quaker Business Families of Eighteenth-Century London: The Rise and Fall of a Sectarian Patriciate' (Price 1986). Price's fascinating paper shows the complex inter-relationships of Quaker families in business, a section of the Society especially prone to departures, disownment for marrying out or for failure to meet debts, or simply as a consequence of increasing wealth and upwards social mobility. It demonstrates quite a large amount of involvement with trade related to naval and military matters. Of the 14 families studied by Price, in 1730 none were

inter-related—by the early nineteenth century, however, the situation was completely reversed.

Locating journal articles is not always an easy task. However, a cursory examination of the contents of two publications, the *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* and *Quaker History*, in 1999 yields interesting results. Of the 70 articles appearing in the last 15 issues of the *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 28 dealt with the seventeenth century, 10 were essentially about the eighteenth, 22 concerned themselves with the nineteenth, and 10 the twentieth century. Of the 54 articles published in 20 issues of *Quaker History*—a journal concerned primarily, but not exclusively, with North American Quakerism—15 articles focused on the seventeenth century, 10 dealt with the eighteenth, 16 dealt with the nineteenth, and 13 with the twentieth century. While this simple quantitative analysis supports Ingle's claims about the eighteenth century it shows also that more work is being done on the nineteenth. While there may have been a problem in the past in tracking down periodical literature—particularly for those without ready access to major academic or specialist libraries—the computer age is changing all this not just with regard to current literature but, with the advent of the on-line British originated *Periodicals Contents Index*, also retrospectively.

I have not as yet mentioned published meeting records. The publication of more of these records would help scholars (and I would argue that this really means more in print, not simply on microforms). Some excellent publications only begin to touch the eighteenth century. In printed form there are the *Leeds Friends' Minute Book 1692–1712* edited by Jean and Russell Mortimer (1980), the *Gainsborough Monthly Meeting Minute Book. III. 1669–1719* (Brace 1951) or the *Minute Book of the Men's Meeting of the Society of Friends in Bristol, 1686–1704* (Mortimer R. 1977). Are there others? And what local records are also available on microform away from their main places of deposit?

Ingle mentions another separate area of study—biography. He identifies the outstanding gaps among the modern lives of earlier Friends. Indeed, apart from Thomas Story (1670–1742) and John Woolman (1720–72) there are no other eighteenth-century names. Who should there be? Would the material exist to write worthwhile biographies of Friends not already treated? David Sox's account of John Woolman has now appeared (1999). Letters rather than lives include the impressive fourth volume, covering 1701–18, of the *Papers of William Penn* (Horle *et al.* 1987) and a real treasure in the letters of John

Fothergill, *Chain of Friendship* (1971). Rachel Labouchere's biographies of Abiah and Deborah Darby (Labouchere 1988, 1993) supplement Raistrick (1989[1953]) and add a good deal to the information available about the women of the dynasty and their Quakerism. Each has an appendix giving dates and brief details of the individuals mentioned in the text, useful for the less well-known in the absence of a biographical dictionary of English Friends outside the typescript at Friends' House Library. An important eighteenth-century diary has recently been edited by Angus Winchester: *The Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood, Cumberland, 1756-1781* (1994). For Irish Friends about 70 eighteenth-century Friends are included in Richard S. Harrison's *A Biographical Dictionary of Irish Quakers* (1997).

In a few years' time the *New Dictionary of National Biography* being prepared by Oxford University Press should be some help. None of the names appearing in the current edition of the *DNB* are being dropped and some will be added. While there are more than 80 eighteenth-century Friends in the present *DNB* over 50 of these are not there primarily as Friends but because they are notable as, for example, doctors, botanists or industrialists. As an Associate Editor responsible for the revision of articles for the other 30 or so eighteenth-century Friends appearing in the *New DNB* I was able to suggest the same number of new names. The brief was to improve the representation of women, the Irish and North Americans. While I recognize that the content and context of the lives of those Friends not included should not be overlooked, the onus lies with other specialist editors. I doubt that any of those I have considered for inclusion in the *New DNB* would merit full scale biographies if the material existed.

Where then does all this leave the state of eighteenth-century English Quaker history? Ingle observed of Quaker historical writing in general that it is 'in a period of transition, one that both promises to liberate it from too much of an "in-group" historiography and also lead those who read our work to a higher level of understanding of the past' (1997: 1-2). But could someone now write a good history of the century or does much more groundwork need to be done? Can new work dispel the image of the eighteenth century as generally dull, quiet, uneventful or even unimportant? I think that perhaps much of the more recent work I have referred to will contribute to such a change in our perception and there must also be new work currently in progress. Anyone engaging seriously with eighteenth-century Quakerism is unlikely to subscribe to

the older viewpoint. There remains a need for a new synthesis aimed at the general reader interested in the history of the Society, longer than the fifty pages John Punshon usefully devotes to the century. Beyond that, a work on the scale of Jones's original and covering broader ground might have to be collaborative and could scarcely hope to be exhaustive.

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