Quaker Studies

Moore, R., 'The Development of British Quaker Governance to c. 1700', *Quaker Studies* 29/1 (2025): pp. 1–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/quaker.18954

Open Library of Humanities

The Development of British Quaker Governance to c. 1700

Rosemary Moore, Independent Researcher, US, dandrmoore99@gmail.com

The history of the development of Quaker governance during the seventeenth century has been well researched. The purpose of the present paper is to look at the most significant turning points, identifying the circumstances and persons involved, and to consider why these events happened. Much of it relates to the ideas and activities of George Fox, but developments after his death are also examined.

The history of the transformation of Quakerism from the small charismatic groups of the late 1640s into an organised body has been well researched, and most of the factual content of this paper can be found in W.C. Braithwaite's *Beginnings of Quakerism* and *The Second Period of Quakerism*, published early in the last century. Therefore, this article will not repeat the detailed story, but will consider its most significant turning points, looking at the particular circumstances of each, and attempting to answer the questions as to why these things happened.[1] It will look at the relations between the key figures, and the interactions between them and the nascent Quaker institutions. Much of it relates to the ideas and activities of George Fox, and so is particularly appropriate in the present circumstances.[2]

The key events were the establishment of Quakers at Swarthmoor in 1652, the development of a strong Quaker presence in London from 1653, the move of the administration to London in 1657–8 together with the related setting-up of county (later quarterly) meetings, the reorganisation which took place in stages between 1667 and 1679, and the subsequent growth in the importance of Meeting for Sufferings. The key people, besides Fox himself, included Elizabeth Hooten, Thomas and Margaret Fell, Thomas Aldam, George Whitehead, Alexander Parker, Ellis Hookes, and a number of London Quakers, among whom one might single out Amor Stodart, Gerard Roberts and Gilbert Latey.

Quakers were distinct among English separated churches in that they had a centralised structure almost from the beginning. The free churches that ultimately crystallised into Congregationalists and Baptists have a history going back to the separatist movements of the sixteenth century, and were extremely varied, but all held to the belief that authority lay with the body of members in each congregation.[3] Churches might and did meet together locally for fellowship, and on occasion nationally for consultation, but authoritative regional and national organisations were not to be thought of.[4] In contrast, there was nothing in Quaker theology to discourage

---

[1] For a useful survey of early Quaker governance see Dobbs, J. P., *Authority and the Early Quakers*, Frenchay: Hartog, 2006, especially Part 3.

[2] This paper had its inception as a follow-up to my work *George Whitehead and the Establishment of Quakerism*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, when it became clear that there were potential lines of investigation, relating to the development of Quaker governance as a whole, which needed further consideration. An earlier version was read at the celebration in honour of Thomas Hamm, in the summer of 2022.

[3] Cooper, T., 'Congregationalists', in Coffey, J., ed., *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions vol. I, The Post-Reformation Era, c. 1559–1689*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 88–112; Haykin, M.A.G., 'Separatists and Baptists', in Coffey, *Protestant Dissenting Traditions* vol. 1, pp. 113–38. The Separatist Confession of 1596 is summarised in White, B. R., *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, Baptist Historical Society, revised edn 1996, p. 17. Still worth consulting is Nuttall, G. F., *Visible Saints: the Congregational Way 1640–1660*, Oxford, 1957.

[4] Watts, M., *The Dissenters from the Reformation to the French Revolution*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 166–68, gives a list of joint

centralisation, for the church was the whole body of believers. Circumstances were such that the first Quaker national organisation came into being during the course of a few months in 1652 and 1653. Within a short time of George Fox becoming established at Swarthmoor Hall in the summer of 1652, most of the elements of the central institutions of a church were in place. Swarthmoor was the headquarters, where Fox with Margaret Fell as his assistant could plan the expansion of Quakerism. There was funding for this, mostly provided by Margaret. Discipline, when necessary, was handled by Margaret. It is necessary to distinguish between the two Fells, for Thomas was equally essential to Quaker success, in that he allowed his home to be used for Quaker purposes and did not prevent his wife from spending a great deal of time and money on Quaker activities. All this was happenstance, but it set the scene for the shape of the Quaker movement. Muggletonians, contemporaries who were similar to Quakers in their reliance on a single charismatic figure, had no Swarthmoor Hall, and developed quite differently.

Another distinctive element in early Quakerism was its intensive use of publicity, to the point that it affected the shaping of the movement. The original source of the inspiration that caused this to flower and flourish so rapidly is not certain, but George Fox, Thomas Aldam, and Richard Farnworth were all involved in the earliest stages. Regular printing arrangements were soon established, largely managed by the Yorkshire Friend, Thomas Aldam, though the Fells were also involved, for, at the request of his wife, Thomas Fell assisted with putting Quaker pamphlets through the press. Many early pamphlets came from 'one whom the world calls Quaker' or some such term, while some pamphlets with no individual author were issued by 'Quakers' as such, indications of their developing consciousness as a discrete group. Pamphlets were normally printed in London, where Thomas Aldam had a contact, Captain Amor Stodart, who saw to the printing.[5]

Quakers, led by the travelling ministers sent out from Swarthmoor, spread over most of England and Wales during 1654, following a preliminary campaign in the north during 1653. Most of the converts had previous experience in separated churches, so Quaker groups became similarly organised round a church meeting, self-governing and normally looking after itself. This aspect of Quaker organisation pre-dates Quakerism. But Quaker meetings had no single minister, normally a necessity for an independent church. Instead, there were the travelling ministers who

---

arrangements between groups of churches from 1626. Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, pp. 94–99 for close relations by correspondence, especially in East Anglia. Morrill, J. 'The Puritan Revolution', in Coffey, J. and Lim, P. C. H., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 67–88 at p. 78, states the covenanted congregations were 'networked but not organised, with an impressive web of information and regular exchange of communication and advice'.

[5] Peters, K., *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 50–55.

had founded the local meeting, and who kept a general watch over their designated area. These travelling ministers were in regular contact with Swarthmoor. The separated churches likewise might be cared for by travelling ministers, but they had less authority than the Quaker ministers, and no Swarthmoor to report to.[6] Thus the Quaker meetings were never as fully congregational as the independent churches. The bulky correspondence between the ministers and Swarthmoor, which has survived, demonstrates how the system worked.[7] Before long, where Quakers were well established, regular general meetings were set up, where several local meetings might come together, the first being recorded in County Durham in 1653.[8] Later in the decade the duties of the business meetings were codified and put into writing, the first of several such documents being an epistle to 'the brethren in the north', 'given forth at a general meeting of friends in truth at Balby in Yorkshire in the ninth month 1656.' It is generally known as the 'Epistle from the Elders of Balby', and contains twenty clauses detailing the duties of the Quaker business meetings, and how to proceed if they ran into difficulties.[9]

Developments in London, an enormous city compared with any other British town, need special attention. Quakers were present in London from 1653, and soon there were several meetings around the city. In 1654, Francis Howgill and Edward Burrough arrived to take charge.[10] Their centre was the large meeting room of the Bull and Mouth tavern, and before long it became the custom, as William Crouch wrote in his memoir, that 'the ancient men Friends of the city, did sometimes meet together, to the number of eight or ten...in an upper room belonging to the place, there to consider and consult about the affairs of Truth.'[11] In a paper written early in 1663 shortly before his death, Edward Burrough described how these arrangements were formalised about two years after his arrival in London. A meeting was to be held every two weeks, or weekly if necessary, to take care of matters such as the keeping of records, relief of poverty among Friends, and anything else relating to 'the well-ordering of the affairs of Truth in outward things,

---

[6] Called 'Messengers' by the Baptists. White, B. R., *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, Didcot, Baptist Historical Society, 1996, pp. 30–31.

[7] The Swarthmoor Manuscripts, in LSF, mainly volumes 1–4.

[8] Braithwaite, W. C., *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, London: Macmillan, 1912, revised edn Cadbury, Henry J., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955, p. 140.

[9] Text of the epistle Moore, R., ed., *Friends Quarterly*, January 2001, pp. 215–18, and in Barclay, A. R., *Letters of Early Friends*, London: Harvey and Dalton, 1841, pp. 277–82, where it lacks date and attribution to the Balby Meeting. See *Letters of Early Friends*, pp. 282–92 for other early disciplinary documents.

[10] Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, pp. 156–57, 159–64, 182–84; Beck, W. and Ball, T. F., *The London Friends' Meetings*, London: Bowyer Kitto, 1869, repr. with new introduction by Dixon, S. and Daniels, P., London: Pronoun Press, 2009, pp. 18–24.

[11] Barclay, *Letters*, p. 293.

among the body of Friends.'[12] This meeting, which became known as the Two Weeks Meeting, was the foundation of much that followed.

Burrough's paper indicates that preparing publications was the work of ministers, but with Quaker pamphlets running at the rate of two or more a week in the mid-fifties, the work of preparing them for the press must have been considerable. Amor Stodart had put the first pamphlets through the press, and it would probably have been he, helped by other London Friends, who took charge of the pamphlets after the ministers had checked them – somewhat cursorily, judging by the poor quality of most of these early pamphlets. London Friends themselves answered some of the early printed attacks on Quakers. *Slanders and Lies being cast upon the Children of Light* and the related *Declaration from the Children of Light* dealt with allegations made against named London Quakers, and the dates of 1655 indicate that London Quakers may have been organising themselves before their regular Two Weeks meeting was set up.

So, by 1656, the Quaker movement was taking shape. The travelling ministry was organised and funded from the Swarthmoor headquarters. There were established church meetings in much of the country, especially the north, and some of the travelling evangelists had developed special relationships with particular areas. Uniformity of practice was encouraged by the general, or area, meetings, and notably by the Balby meeting and its associated epistle. There was a strong meeting in London which managed the practical side of the publishing.

The next milestone in the history of Quaker governance was the removal of the administrative centre to London together with the establishment of regular county (later known as quarterly) meetings. The evangelism of Britain was more or less complete, so there was no longer a need for a travelling ministry directed from Swarthmoor. With the Quaker centre of gravity settling in London, it became difficult to manage the movement from the North, and problems arose, particularly in regard to financial matters.[13] Quakers were very sensitive about the proper management of their funds, possibly because of the number of Quakers who were business people with reputations to lose. The proper recording of money matters is always a prominent part of the surviving minutes of meetings. The Nayler affair in late 1556 would also have acted a trigger for change, in that it highlighted the dangers of disunity among Quakers.[14] In 1657 and 1658, Fox instructed Friends to set up county meetings to collect

---

[12] Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 294–310, quote at p. 306.

[13] Moore, *Light*, pp. 141–42.

[14] Most readers of this paper will be acquainted with the circumstances. James Nayler, by many considered co-equal with Fox, had ridden into Bristol in apparent imitation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and was condemned by Parliament, after a famous show trial, to be flogged, branded and imprisoned. Nayler had a good deal of support among Quakers,

reports of sufferings and send them to Gerrard Roberts' house in London.[15] Financial contributions were also to be sent there, and a letter from a meeting of northern Friends in 1658 states that a collection for work overseas was to be committed 'to the care of our dear brethren of London, Amos Stoddart, Gerrard Roberts, John Boulton, Thomas Hart and Richard Davis.'[16] The amount of work necessitated the appointment of a paid clerk, Ellis Hookes.[17] Later correspondence shows that he was made responsible for putting books through the press and it is noticeable that from this time the quality of Quaker pamphlets was much improved.[18] Thus British Quakerism assumed its permanent shape, a London centre with peripheral gatherings. The London meeting had become *de facto* a body with national responsibilities, and the tendency for the Quaker movement to be managed by comfortably off Londoners was already becoming established.

The Restoration and the events that followed caused much disruption. In the early 1660s the leading Quaker ministers based in London were Richard Hubberthorne and Edward Burrough. Both were imprisoned following the passing of the Quaker Act in 1662. Hubberthorne soon died, and in February 1663 Burrough also died, the loss of the man who was effectively second to Fox.[19] This left George Whitehead as the senior minister available in London. He was obviously capable but only recently coming to prominence and still in his twenties. He needed reinforcement. From this time Alexander Parker was based in London.[20] Parker was an experienced Quaker who had often travelled and worked with Fox, not brilliant but thoroughly reliable and an excellent correspondent who could be relied on to keep Fox informed of what was going on. It is not an unreasonable assumption that Fox was setting up the best team he could get in the circumstances.

Over the country, the relationship between the erstwhile travelling evangelists and the local meetings was still much as it was in the 1650s. But in London, the size of the

---

but Fox and most of the leaders were appalled by his conduct. Braithwaite, *Beginnings* pp. 241–78 has all the detail, but his interpretation would now be considered rather dated. Shorter account in Moore, R., *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646–1666*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, 2nd edn 2020, pp. 37–45. There is an extensive and ever-growing literature on Nayler, see Moore, *Light*, p. 252 n. 38 for a summary, probably now out of date.

15 Moore, *Light*, pp. 141–42.

16 Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 286–87. This is not listed in the table of contents, being a late addition to the text.

17 Leachman, C.L., 'Hookes, Ellis (bap. 1635, d. 1681), Quaker administrator,' *ODNB*, accessed 10 Oct. 2020. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-69087.

18 Moore, *Light*, p. 49.

19 Moore, *Light*, pp. 185–86.

20 Greaves, R., "Parker, Alexander (1628–1689), Quaker preacher and author," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* 2004, accessed 10 Oct. 2020. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21291. Letters from Parker dated from London in 1663 and 1664, Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 119, 124.

meeting, and its position in relation to the national affairs of the Quaker movement, led to what was effectively a rebalancing of power and resulting problems, with Ellis Hookes uncomfortably in the middle. Hookes was paid by the London meeting, but it is clear from his letters that he felt a primary loyalty to Fox and Fell. At one point he was dismissed but wrote to Fell that he was able to support himself by publishing Quaker books.[21] A letter from Whitehead to Fox in 1664 tells of an acrimonious dispute between the London meeting and the ministers, concerning the publication of a book about Quaker sufferings. Burrough's letter of 1662 had reserved the handling of publications to ministers, and Whitehead was most indignant: 'Before I saw them they were gotten into the hands of some of these wise men of this Citty (who would willingly enough assume to be Judges over us in such things). [H]how EH [Hookes] ordered the business in letting them have them to judge of, I know not, but divers of them being intended to meet about them wisht me and A. Parker to be present with them which we (and S. Fisher) were.'[22] Whitehead, Fisher and Hooke 'did in simplicity and truth vindicate the Book against their objections.'[23] It may be that London Friends were more inclined to argue with Whitehead and Parker than with the likes of Burrough, Howgill and Hubberthorne, especially at a time when Fox was unavailable. Signatories to a pamphlet of 1666 gives another indication of the relationships. It was an appeal to *The King and Both Houses of Parliament,* and again concerned Quaker sufferings. The first section has a number of signatories, headed by the veteran Amor Stodart and followed by Gilbert Latey, a leader of London Friends for the rest of the century. The others were Ellis Hookes, George Whitehead, some travelling ministers who presumably happened to be in London, and London Quakers including Gerrard Roberts and William Crouch. It was a joint enterprise, but one where London Friends took the lead. State papers also record the names of leading London Friends, notably Gerrard Roberts, in several appeals to the Council of State.[24]

Then in the autumn of 1666 Fox was released from Scarborough castle and set about a major reorganization of Quakerism, starting with setting up monthly meetings in London before going on tour round the country. Effectively, it completed the changes

---

[21] Moore, *Light*, pp. 189, 225.

[22] Whitehead to Fox, 4 May 1664, Swarthmore Mss vol.4, item 96, MS vol. 355, LSF. See Barclay, *Letters*, p. 299. 'S. Fisher', Samuel Fisher, Church of England priest turned Baptist minister turned Quaker, the most learned Quaker of this time. He died of plague in 1965.

[23] It was most likely *For the King and Both Houses of Parliament, Being a Declaration of the present Suffering and Imprisonment of above 600 of the people of God, in scorn called Quakers*, London: s.n., 1664. The preamble, unsigned but by Fox according to Whitehead, makes the points that Whitehead said caused the disagreement. Moore, *Light*, pp. 189, 225, for a similar problem in 1662.

[24] Moore, *Light*, p. 142, referencing Penney, N., *Extracts from State Papers, 1652–1672*, London: Headley, 1913, pp. 31, 39, and the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic 1650–1665*, pp. 147–48.

begun in 1657–8. Monthly meetings for business were not new, and had existed from 1653 onwards where Friends were well settled, but when extended over the whole country and linked into the county quarterly meetings, they provided a strong structure for resistance to persecution and also made dissidence easier to control.[25] Quakers had never been entirely re-united after the Nayler affair, and had been plagued by the schism led by John Perrot which had been supported by many of Nayler's followers.[26] Fox spent most of 1667 and 1668 travelling throughout England, Wales, and Ireland, setting up the monthly meetings within the various quarterly meetings, and sending written instructions where he could not visit personally. To Fox these meetings had become something more than a convenient way of managing business. He settled the monthly meetings in 'the joyful order of the joyful gospel: the comfortable order of the comfortable gospel: and the everlasting order of the everlasting gospel: the power of God which will last for ever and outlast all the orders of the Devil and that which is of men or by men.' Monthly meetings were to be part of the 'gospel order', integral to the eternal purposes of God.[27] As guidance to the meetings, Fox issued a paper of advice, 'Friends Fellowship must be in the Spirit', which was often copied into the new minute books that the meetings were instructed to keep.[28]

In London there were to be five, later six, new monthly meetings, and in addition, Fox also set up the Six Weeks Meeting in 1671, its remit being the overall care of the London meetings.[29] So there was a question as to how the monthly meetings would operate alongside the existing leadership of George Whitehead and Alexander Parker. What happened was a change in the status of Whitehead and Parker. Whether this was in fact intended as a means of solving the problem of the relationship between the ministers and the new meetings, or not, cannot be known for sure, but it is worth serious consideration. Up to now Whitehead and Parker had not kept themselves by a regular occupation. It was the custom for the travelling ministers to be entertained by local Friends. Then, in the spring of 1669, Whitehead and Parker both got married,

---

[25] Moore, *Light*, p. 229.

[26] See Chapter 15 in Moore, *Light*, pp. 195–205. Perrot was an Irish Quaker who returned to England in 1661 after suffering a long and severe imprisonment in Rome. He contended that the Quaker custom that men should remove their hats during prayer was an empty form that should be discarded like other traditional practices, and he became a focus for discontent with Fox's leadership. He died in Jamaica in 1665, but his followers continued to make trouble for mainstream Quakerism.

[27] Fox, G., *The Journal*, Smith, N., ed. London: Penguin, 1998, pp. 371–88, quotation at p. 388. Compare Fox's Epistle 316, written Swarthmoor December 1675, in *The Works of George Fox*, Philadelphia: Gould and New York: Hopper, 1831; new edn Wallace, T. H. S., ed., Pennsylvania: New Foundation Publications, George Fox Fund, 1990, 8 vols, vol. 8 p. 76, which has similar language.

[28] Most conveniently accessed in Beck and Ball, *London Friends Meetings*, pp. 47–52.

[29] Beck and Ball, *London Friends' Meetings*, pp. 46, 91–102, and a chapter on each monthly meeting.

a month apart, to widows.[30] Whitehead married Ann Downer Greenwell, a highly competent woman and well known in the London women's meeting, and set himself up as a grocer.[31] Parker set up as a haberdasher.[32] They lived in separate but adjacent central London monthly meetings. In Whitehead's case, his wife ran the shop to provide an income, leaving her husband free to attend to Quaker business. Whether the same was true of the Parker ménage is not known, but it is not unlikely. These events can hardly be coincidence, and could hardly have happened by the route of normal courtships. There can be no proof, but it could well have been a part of Fox's reorganisation. Fox's London deputies, Whitehead and Parker, needed to be integrated into the new system. What better way than to get them set up in business with suitable wives, ready to take their part in the new monthly meetings, Six Weeks Meeting, and also the Second Day Morning Meeting, which is to be considered below.

Over the rest of the country, the surviving travelling ministers also became part of the new structures, and it is worth considering whether encouragement of marriage played a part in other places besides London. Settling down and taking a wife now became something of a pattern for those early ministers who had survived and were still unmarried. The most noted Quaker marriage was that of George Fox and Margaret Fell in 1669, and served as an example of the way Quaker marriages should be conducted.[33] Ambrose Rigge married a fellow prisoner while in gaol in 1664, continued as a schoolmaster and settled in Surrey and Sussex till his death in 1705, becoming sufficiently well respected locally to be commemorated by Ambrose Rigge Walk in a housing development near Chichester.[34] Thomas Salthouse, formerly land steward to Thomas Fell, had his ministry mainly in the south-west, marrying in St Austell in 1670 and dying there in 1690.[35] John Whitehead, a Cromwellian soldier, settled first in Yorkshire and then in Lincolnshire, and is known to have married before 1682. He died in 1696 having been clerk to Lincolnshire Quarterly |Meeting for the last ten years

[30] Moore, *George Whitehead*, pp. 33–34.

[31] For Ann Whitehead see Gill, C., 'Whitehead [née Downer; other married name Greenwell], Anne (c. 1624–1686), Quaker organizer and writer'. *ODNB*, 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 21 Oct. 2020. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-69080.

[32] See Greaves' article in *ODNB*.

[33] Ingle, H. L., *First among Friends: George Fox and the creation of Quakerism*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 225–27.

[34] Greaves, R. L., 'Rigge [Rigg], Ambrose (c. 1635–1705), Quaker preacher and writer', *ODNB*, 23 September 2004, accessed 26 October, 2023, https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23648. The reference to 'Ambrose Rigge Walk' turned up serendipitously when googling 'Ambrose Rigge'.

[35] Leachman, C. L., 'Salthouse, Thomas (1630–1691), Quaker preacher and writer', *ODNB* 23 September 2004, accessed 26 October 2023, https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24577.

of his life.[36] John Burnyeat, a north-country farmer, continued to travel extensively in the ministry until marrying in Ireland in 1683, where he appears to have settled, being buried near Dublin in 1690.[37] Travelling ministry continued, but no longer organised from Swarthmoor. It originated in local meetings, for the cohort of ministers, or 'public Friends' as they came to be called, now mostly consisted of Friends who had joined the movement subsequent to its beginnings in 1652–3, and whose gift of vocal ministry had been recognised by their meetings. There is a report of expenses being paid in Bristol and York for Friends engaged in this service.[38] George Whitehead himself continued to feel a special responsibility in East Anglia, his former field of operations.

But something remained of the original standing of the survivors of the 'Valiant Sixty', as the first Quaker evangelists have been called.[39] Those mentioned above all continued as local leaders. Especially this applied to George Whitehead and Alexander Parker. Throughout the rest of their lives, they were frequently consulted by Friends from all over the country. Whitehead, having greater capabilities, clearly became the senior partner, and as the years passed often acted independently from Parker, but they also acted as a pair. A problem from Bristol was addressed to one, and the other replied. They wrote jointly to Fox over the Wilkinson-Story affair, on this occasion differing from Fox as to the best course of action, and he invited them to try and sort out the problem themselves.[40] James Claypoole, himself a well-established Friend, wrote to Whitehead and Parker (and also to Fox) for help when he needed to sort out a problem with William Penn.[41] Sometimes Parker took the lead, answering a query from northern Friends about the best way to deal with sufferings.[42] There is some indication that Parker continued to be the main link with Fox and Fell, for several of his informative letters survive, particularly in relation to the Wilkinson-Story controversy.[43]

---

[36] Greaves, Richard L., 'Whitehead, John (c. 1630–1696), Quaker minister and preacher', *ODNB* 23 September 2004, accessed 26 October 2023, https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29290.

[37] Soderlund, Jean R., 'Burnyeat, John (1631–1690), Quaker minister', *ODNB*, 23 September 2004, accessed 26 October 2023, https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4082.

[38] Braithwaite, *Second Period of Quakerism*, London: Macmillan, 1919, second edn Cambridge: University Press, 1961, p. 357.

[39] From Taylor, E. E., *The Valiant Sixty*, York: Sessions, 1947, 3rd edn 1988.

[40] The Wilkinson-Story dispute, named for the two original Westmorland leaders, was triggered by opposition to women's meetings, especially their involvement in marriage arrangements, but came to involve other issues in dispute. Details in Braithwaite, *Second Period*, pp. 290–323, Summary in Moore, R., 'Gospel Order' in Allen, R. C. and Moore, R., *The Quakers 1656–1723*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018, pp. 66–69.

[41] Dunn, R. S. and Dunn, M. M., eds. *The Papers of William Penn*, 5 vols, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981–87, vol. 3 p. 136.

[42] Gibson Mss 3.17, Parker to John Blaykling et al., 19 January 1687, in LSF.

[43] Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 160–62, 200–02, 247–56; Gibson Ms. 2.11; Portfolio 33.89 in LSF.

Continuing the account of the reorganisation of the 1670s, the Second Day Morning Meeting, which consisted of ministers, was set up by Fox in 1673. Itwas made responsible for worship in the London area and also for vetting publications, thus continuing with the functions described in Burrough's 1662 paper, but with the difference that any conflicts would now be contained within the meeting. The Morning Meeting also took on the function of a national executive committee when one was required, dealing with the preliminary arrangements for the conference which resulted in the setting up of Meeting for Sufferings considered below, with early attempts at negotiation when the Wilkinson-Story dispute erupted later that year, and even with advising Friends as to their votes in the expected election of 1675.[44]

The early history of the women's business meetings, another feature peculiar to Quakers among dissenting churches, is not clear. The active part taken by women in the Quaker movement dates from the very beginning, probably deriving from George Fox's respect for Elizabeth Hooten.[45] Quakers, with their unconventional approach to the Biblical text, were unlike other churches in having no ideological objection to women taking a part in church meetings.[46] There had been a women's meeting in London since the mid-1650s, and the three accounts of its founding indicate that it was set up to meet a perceived need for assistance with traditional women's concerns to do with the relief of poverty, and that Fox willingly endorsed it.[47] References in the minutes of the Bristol men's meeting show that there was a women's meeting in Bristol, one of its duties being to keep the register of members properly updated.[48] Several rather unclear references in Fox's Journal suggest the possibility that there were others, and Fox's 1671 epistle, encouraging the establishment of women's meetings, indicates that they were already known, and not a complete novelty.[49] They were further encouraged at the 1675 yearly meeting, at which Fox was present, but there was no attempt to make them mandatory, and no official suggestion that their duties might include a share in the authorisation of marriages. Margaret Fell was an enthusiast for women's meetings, and her activity in this connection was one of the causes of the Wilkinson-Story separation.[50] It appears

---

[44] Morning Meeting minutes, 31 May and 18 Oct. 1675 (LSF, YM/MfS/MOR/M/1).

[45] Moore, *Light* pp. 6–7, 20–21.

[46] The difficult text is 1 Cor. 14:33–5.

[47] Elson, M. and Whitehead, A., *An Epistle for True Love, Unity and Order*, London: sn, 1680; Crouch, W., *Postuma Christiana*, London: Assigns of J Sowle, 1712; Fox, G., *The Journal of George Fox*, Penney, N., ed., 2 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911, vol. 2 pp. 342–43.

[48] Mortimer, R., ed., *Minute Book of the Men's Meeting of the Society of Friends in Bristol 1667–1686*. 2 vols, Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1971. First mention of the women's meeting p. 4, October 1667.

[49] Penney, *Journal*, 2.111, 116, 119; Fox's letter in Eddington, A., 'The First Fifty Years of Quakers in Norwich', typescript 1932, in Quaker libraries, pp. 273–74.

[50] Kunze, B., *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*, London: Macmillan, 1993, pp. 147–51.

that the spread of women's meetings was aided by the strong support of George Fox, and also that a sufficient weight of men Friends favoured them, recognising their value. In many cases this included approving the women's share in authorising marriages, which formed a considerable part of the duties of Quaker business meetings.[51] But the women's meetings were not part of the Quaker power structure, often they did not have their own funds, and their functions were limited.

The national Yearly Meeting also took shape during the 1670s, and developed in a rather *ad hoc* manner as different arrangements were tried out, some being representative and some for ministers only.[52] Yearly meetings had their origin in several large-scale gatherings during the 1650s, beginning with the Swannington meeting in 1654 but which had been discontinued after 1660 because of the political situation.[53] These had been largely 'top down' occasions, with Fox and his chief assistants giving advice and producing recommendations for the conduct of Friends. In 1668 a meeting of ministers decided to meet once a year 'to see one another's faces' and to see 'that all walk as become the order of the gospel, which is the comely order in the power of God.'[54] Probably due to problems related to the passing of the Second Conventicle Act in 1670, the next meeting was not held until June 1671, and it issued a document containing important provisions for the management of funds. It was noted above that national funds had been held in London since 1657, but there is no record on how they were administered. The General (Yearly) Meeting now took charge: 'If any collection be seen meet for the service of Truth, the same to be ordered by the General Meeting.' Established London Friends, whose names reappear in various contexts, were to 'receive the collection from the various counties, and they to keep books of accounts of the particular receipts and disbursements of the same, and to give an account every General Meeting, how the money was disbursed.'[55] Epistles from the yearly meetings in the seventies were usually signed by a number of leading Friends, and the same names recur frequently, Whitehead and Parker as might be expected, but also, on every recorded occasion, John Whitehead of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire and Jasper Batt of Somerset, and on several occasions Ambrose Rigge, William Gibson and Thomas Rudyard. The regular business, besides the presentation of accounts, included proposals for relieving

---

[51] Moore, 'Gospel Order', p. 69.

[52] Braithwaite, *Second Period*, pp. 275–8 has all the details. *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends*, London: Edward Marsh, 1658, pp. xv–xxvii; Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 324–42. The word 'national' is needed as there were also some regional yearly gatherings.

[53] Moore, *Light*, pp. 29–30 for the Swannington meeting. Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 283–93 and Braithwaite, *Beginnings*, pp. 310–35 for other such meetings.

[54] *Yearly Meeting Epistles*, pp. xiv–xv; Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 324–25.

[55] *Yearly Meeting Epistles*, p. xvii.

suffering, with repeated instructions regarding the need for Friends to supply complete and accurate information about their troubles. Gradually, it became established as the central governing body, regulating the accounting procedures, establishing Meeting for Sufferings and defining its powers, becoming the forum for deciding the Quaker reaction to James II's policy on toleration, and in the 1690s dealing with George Keith. All this could not have been anticipated in 1668.

To complete this survey of Quaker governing structures it remains to consider the Meeting for Sufferings. It had become clear that although Friends had methods in place for recording their sufferings, ameliorating them was another matter. The possibility of setting up a legal defence committee had been considered by the 1668 meeting of ministers, but not followed up at the time.[56] Difficulties in obtaining the release of Fox from Worcester prison after his arrest in 1673 probably concentrated minds. Plans for a special conference to consider the way forward were going on in the spring of 1675, possibly set in motion and no doubt encouraged by Fox, who was in London at the time. The Morning Meeting made the preliminary arrangements, and proposed a date in October, so all was prepared in time for Yearly Meeting in June. The paper sent out from Yearly Meeting made no exact proposals, the meeting was to 'consider and advise together for the help ease and relief of such friends as are or may be in Sufferings and to endeavour to stop and prevent the persecutors and destroyers by such lawfull means as shall be found.' Those attending the conference would gain information about legal proceedings that would assist them. They were to bring with them exact details of the current sufferings in their area. During the summer plans went forward, and the October meeting agreed a plan for what became Meeting for Sufferings, which only required slight modification before being accepted at Yearly Meeting 1676. Fox was in Swarthmoor this summer, recuperating after his imprisonment, and would therefore not have been involved in the detailed planning, which would most probably have been the work of Ellis Hookes together with George Whitehead and maybe some other London Friends.[57]

There was one more important administrative matter to be settled. Although named Friends had been appointed to manage Friends' funds, and arrangements made for the examination of their accounts, there was no explicit provision for authorising individual payments. Presumably the Friends concerned were expected to use their best judgement in these matters. In 1679 the Yearly Meeting gave Sufferings the responsibility of paying

---

[56] Yearly Meeting Minutes, YM/MfS/M/1, in LSF, pp. 61–62, cited by Horle, C. W., *The Quakers and the English Legal System*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, p. 173.

[57] Horle, *Quakers and the English Legal System* pp. 173–75. Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 346–53 for Meeting for Sufferings as finally set up in 1676.

expenses of attending on government bodies, and for book production, and this was soon interpreted as taking charge of all payments from the national stock. The Book of Extracts gives the date 1679 to the provision, 'disbursements out of the national stock to be such only, as shall be agreed by the meeting for sufferings in London.'[58]

The organisation was now complete, and it seems to have settled down without much trouble. Early minutes of monthly and quarterly meetings, where they exist, suggest a smoothly working system.[59] At a national level, Whitehead is regularly mentioned in the minutes of Six Weeks Meeting, the Morning Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, and to a lesser extent this is true of Parker. If there were any disagreements like those of 1664, they do not appear in the records.

Meeting for Sufferings soon began to stretch its remit. Particular cases made up the greater part of its work, but it soon began to look at what might be done to improve the position of Friends in general.[60] As early as 26 August 1676 it asked George Whitehead to see the King or the Duke of York, or some other person at Court, about the use of writs against Friends.[61] Many such references follow. Named Friends were asked to attend Parliament, or to prepare papers to present to the King.[62] As it took over financial matters, there are references to book reprinting and to the payment of the clerk's salary.[63] It checked on the development of the Devonshire House site.[64] It is unlikely that when Meeting for Sufferings was set up in 1676 it was foreseen that it would develop in this way.

The same names recur in the minutes of all these meetings. Although Sufferings was fully representative, distant members could rarely attend, so substitutes were appointed. Most of the work, in all central meetings and to an extent at Yearly Meeting, was performed by a dozen or so London Friends, who had the resources to give much of

---

[58] YM minutes 1679, YM/M/1672–1683, in LSF, pp. 70–71; *Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends*, London: Phillips, 2nd edn 1802, pp. 13, 117.

[59] These are deposited in regional archives and consequently inconvenient of access. The set most likely to be available in print is probably Saxon Snell, B., *The Minute Book of the Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends for the Upperside of Buckinghamshire, 1669–169*, High Wycombe: Records Branch of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 1937.

[60] Unfortunately, circumstances prevented a full examination of Meeting for Sufferings minutes and other relevant documents. The discussion that follows rests on references already in the public domain, together with others that were to hand, together with those found in a selection of documents very kindly photocopied for me in Friends House Library by Penelope Cummins, to whom I am most grateful.

[61] YM/MfS/M/1 in LSF; Moore, *George Whitehead*, p. 45 n. 142 for explanation of these 'qui tam' writs, by which informers received a portion of any fines levied.

[62] E.g. Meeting for Sufferings minutes, YM/MfS/M/1 and 2, 7 January and 11 March 1678, 22 August 1680, 3 Aug 1683 for which c.f. Whitehead, G., *The Christian Progress of that ancient servant and minister of Jesus Christ, George Whitehead*, London: Assigns of J. Sowle, 1725, pp. 539, see also pp. 374–75.

[63] Meeting for Sufferings minutes, 30 Sept. 1680, July 1683, YM/MfS/M/1 and 2.

[64] Meeting for Sufferings minutes, 11 April 1678, YM/MfS/M/.1.

their time to Quaker duties. A Morning Meeting minute of 27 September 1680 suggested that Meeting for Sufferings might be held in the afternoon of the 6th day (Friday), for there were three meetings on the 5th day which caused difficulties.[65]

Undoubtedly there were individuals who had special influence, notably George Whitehead.[66] Given his overall importance, William Penn needs a mention. He attended Morning Meeting regularly in the early days, and took his share of the work, but less regularly when he became preoccupied with Pennsylvania. He could sway a meeting on occasion, as in 1687, when seeking support for James II's policy on toleration. He was active in the debates over George Keith in the 1690s. But overall he was not an important influence in the development of Quaker governance, owing to the periods when he was preoccupied, absent, under suspicion of treason, or in financial difficulties.

Fox, having set up the system, left it to work. Over the years, the administration's dependence on Fox decreased. In 1656, when the Nayler affair erupted while Fox was imprisoned in Cornwall, there was complete disarray until Fox was released and in a position to take action.[67] Only Fox could deal with this situation. By contrast, ten years later, with Fox incommunicado in Scarborough Castle, a group of leading ministers did their best to handle the aftermath of the Perrot schism, resulting in the compilation of the major disciplinary document known as the 'Testimony of the Brethren'.[68] Even then their efforts were not fully tested, as Fox was released shortly after, and took the situation in hand. In the 1670s and earlier 1680s Fox, as before, spent much time in spreading his message by travelling, and the complex system he had set up worked without obvious glitches. On rare occasions he intervened, as in 1684 when he advised the Morning Meeting to take a look at the writings of Mercury van Helmont, which he said led to 'Ranterisme and Atheisme'.[69] In his later years, when he lived mainly in London, he frequently attended meetings. In the crisis years of 1685–87, he took a full part. At the accession of James II in February 1685 there was a flurry of meetings which he seems to have orchestrated, similarly in March 1686 when James II declared a General Pardon to

[65] Dixon, S., 'The Life and Times of Peter Briggin', *Quaker Studies* 10 (March 2006), pp. 185–202, for an account of how a prosperous London Quaker managed his business, domestic and religious responsibilities. The time is the early eighteenth century, but unlikely to have been much different from the end of the seventeenth.

[66] Moore, *George Whitehead*.

[67] Moore, *Light*, p. 41.

[68] Moore, *Light*, pp. 226–28. Text of the 'Testimony' in Barclay, *Letters*, pp. 318–24.

[69] LSF MS Portfolio 10.3, Fox, 'Memorandum for the Friends of the Second Days Meeting'. For Van Helmont and his relations to Quaker and other seventeenth-century thought, see Coudert, A. P., *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The life and thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698),* Leiden: Brill, 1999. For a brief account see Moore, R., 'Quaker Expressions of Belief in the Lifetime of George Fox' in Allen and Moore, *The Quakers*, pp. 162–65.

Dissenters for breaches of the penal code.[70] On the knotty question of Friends attitude to the King's toleration policy, at Yearly Meeting he seems to have acted as a restraining influence on Penn.[71] In May 1690, only a few months before his death, he took Six Weeks Meeting to task very forcibly and in some detail (Epistle 263). Yet his death caused hardly a ripple in Friends' management of their affairs. After the funeral, Friends moved straight on to consider the publication of Fox's Journal, and all their other activities continued as normal. Fox was no longer essential to the Quaker organism.

Things might not have gone so smoothly without George Whitehead. Parker had died in 1689, but Whitehead, acknowledged leader and with a history going back almost to the beginning of the movement, was still there to provide continuity. The main preoccupation of Meeting for Sufferings during the 1690s was the need to obtain relief from oath-taking, and Whitehead took a major part in the debates and parliamentary lobbying.[72] Also at this time, Friends were continually under attack for their allegedly unorthodox beliefs, and their right to be included in the Toleration Act was frequently queried. A series of pamphlets attributed to Whitehead were issued explaining and defending Quaker beliefs, some definitely authored by him, some anonymous, and some signed by a number of leading Friends.[73] It had been hoped that this paper would include an enquiry into the background to these statements, whether there is any evidence for preliminary discussions as to their content, and who should sign them. Unfortunately, this was not possible, and it would be an interesting subject for future study. A major disruption was caused by the defection of George Keith, and the absence of Fox and Robert Barclay, who had died in 1691, almost certainly made this schism more bitter and prolonged.[74] It was fortunate that at that time Penn was in good standing and on hand to take part in the prolonged proceedings at two yearly meetings.

Whitehead died in 1723, by which time the Quaker movement had outgrown the need for a strong leader. The transformation from amorphous groups to an organised, complex and self-sustaining body was complete. The distinctive shape of British Quakerism, a strong centre balanced and sustained by regional and local meetings,

---

[70] Harris, T., *Revolution: the Great Crisis of the British Monarchy* 1685–1720, London: Allen Lane, 2006, p. 206: 'The Itinerary Journal', in Penney, N., ed., *The Short Journal and Itinerary Journals of George Fox*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1925, pp. 73–222. See also Meeting for Sufferings minutes, 1685–7 (YM/MfS/M4–6).

[71] Braithwaite, *Second Period*, pp. 144–45.

[72] Braithwaite, *Second Period*, pp. 181–204; Frost, W. J., 'The Affirmation Controversy and Religious Liberty', in Dunn, R. S. and Dunn, M. M, eds, *The World of William Penn*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, 310–11; Frost, W. J., 'Adjusting to New Conditions in Britain and America' in Allen and Moore. *The Quakers*, pp. 194–97; Moore, *George Whitehead*., pp. 53–56.

[73] Moore, *George Whitehead*, pp. 73–76.

[74] For the Keithian schism see Ward, M., *The Christian Quaker: George Keith and the Keithian Controversy*, Leiden: Brill, 2019.

resulted from a number of factors. Some were external, the nature of the independent churches that provided most of the early converts, the availability of Swarthmoor, the political situation as it changed over the years including especially the long-standing persecution, and the fact that one city in England, London, is disproportionately influential compared with the rest. Some came from the ethos of Quakerism, belief in the unity of the faithful, rejection of a professional ministry, a tendency to dissension, the recognition that women had a part, albeit limited, in church governance, and the need for organised publicity. But in this year celebrating the quadricentennial of George Fox's birth, it is appropriate to recognise his unique leadership. At the beginning it was Fox who developed the original network of travelling ministers and who ordered the move to London in 1657–8, which enabled the later development of the central organisation. He had the vision of the 'gospel order' and the force of character to implement it. He encouraged the active participation of women. He carried his ideas beyond Britain to the Americas and the continent of Europe, and he set the shape of the Quaker movement for many years to come.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.