

EARLY QUAKER RECORDS IN COUNTY ARMAGH

BY ROSS CHAPMAN



Friends house - Moyallon built 1736

In these parts, the 1600's were a time of turmoil, unsettled lands being resettled, new laws and ways of worship being introduced, land ownership being changed. The seeds of discord were being sown. A century later when Poyntzpass was coming into being, its three main streets tell us of the three strands that make up the character of Ulster. These streets are Church Street, Chapel Street and Meeting Street, representing the English Protestant (Church), the Irish Catholic (Chapel), and Scottish Presbyterian (Meeting) roots. In Armagh City, the three strands are named English, Irish and Scotch streets and they are good reminders of the way that those identities grew up side by side.

But history is not as simple and tidy as that! For among those who came from the north of England and settled in County Armagh were some who did not fit into any of the three main categories. At that time in the 1650's this county was part of a Republic under Oliver Cromwell. Church and government were developing in a way which left some unsatisfied and disillusioned. A few men and women preachers came, travelling through towns and villages, to give a different slant on Christianity, distinct from each of the three main strands. They called themselves 'friends', as Christ said to his followers, "*I call you not servants, but friends*", (John 15:15) so these pioneers took up the calling of being 'Friends'. Later they were nicknamed 'Quakers'.



GEORGE FOX

George Fox Founder of 'The society of Friends

Handwritten document listing seizures from Quakers:
 Luke Peell had taken from him for tithes by William
 3rd Christian John O'Leary & Charles in 1688 for want of said
 priest 20 stacks of oats 40 stacks of barley 15 stacks of barley five
 stacks of wheat & one sack of hay all worth £ 19-0
 Thomas & Henry Toppin had takⁿ from them for
 tithes by Robert Hethers & Patrick in 1689 tithes taken under
 the said priest 10 loads of hay 16 stacks of wheat 33 stacks of
 barley two stacks of oats 25 stacks of barley & for milch tithes and
 other dues so called 15 stacks of wheat & six stacks of oats
 all worth two pounds 15n shillings
 Thomas Christy had taken from him for tithes by the
 John O'Leary servant to J^r Priest 4 loads of hay 14 stacks of
 oats & 5 stacks of barley all worth two shillings
 William Clark had taken from him for tithes by J^r
 Patrick in 1688 the said J^r Offhand & his servant 14 stacks
 of oats & one stack of barley all worth 5-2 pence
 John Scott had taken from him for tithes by Patrick
 in Court tithes taken under J^r Priest 17 stacks of oats two
 loads of hay and for milch tithes 4 stacks of oats all worth
 0 8 0
 Francis Hobson had taken from him for tithes
 by William Cullen tithes taken under J^r Priest 12
 stacks of barley 6 stacks of bars and 32 stacks of oats all
 worth one pound and out of some land he had both
 in J^r gift of Ardماغ by Patrick Branagin tithes
 taken under Edward Benn tithemonger under Pollox
 Drillingcourt called Duns of Ardماغ 6 1/2 stacks of
 wheat 15 stacks of bars & a stack of Rye worth is all worth
 1 13 0
 William Hobson had taken from him for tithes by
 W^{illiam} Hays J^r W^{illiam} Hittington & other servants to J^r Edward
 Benn tithemonger under J^r Doan 14 stacks of bars and 42 stacks
 of oats all worth one pound 4 shillings
 1 4 0

Extract from Document - Listing seizures from Quakers

hardship and endurance would inspire future generations? I do not know. It is likely that those early Friends used their records to impress on magistrates that they were law-abiding people who only broke laws for conscience sake. In 1680 each meeting in Ireland collected from their members, men and women, witness statements individually written, explaining why they could not pay tithes. 130 adult Friends from County Armagh sent their testimonies to Dublin where they were transcribed into a big volume. It is there available to read today. Here is what one man wrote:

"This is my testimony against tithe, that I never payed or consented to pay them since I was convinced of god's truth, for Christ being come who brought a free ministry, who said to his disciples, freely you have received, freely give, wherefore I dare not pay tithes for it is contrary to my conscience, wherefore I give my testimony against them." John Starr.



Friends Meeting House Bessbrook

Social historians have found these Friends' records a good source for getting a picture of life in those times. For example, the list of crops taken for tithe includes: wheat, barley, oats, rye, maslin (a mixture of grains), peas, apples, potatoes, hay, turf and flax. The list of household items which were easy to lift and carry away included: web of cloth, wife's gown, weaver's gear, wimble-brace (for boring holes), chamber pot, skillet, pair of ounces (scales); but what is a caddow, can anyone tell me? We can assume from this list that residents around Poyntzpass would have had similar losses when the tithemongers called to collect on behalf of the priest of the parish of Ballymore. (In those days the rectors of the established church were known as priests; the term was not reserved for Roman Catholic clergy as it usually is nowadays)

Williamite War 1688-92

Upheaval and devastation affected County Armagh Quakers during the War of the Two Kings, William and James, 1688-1692, along with the rest of the Irish people. Again, Friends took out the quill-pen and the home-made ink and carefully made their lists of sufferings and sent these to Dublin. The saga of the war has been recalled many times. Derry, Aughrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne grab the headlines but what was it like in the quiet townlands where men and women were struggling with their crops and rearing their families largely unaware of the historic events taking place nearby? Armies in those times did not have a proper supply chain for the feeding and housing of troops. It seems that both the Irish army under King James and the Williamite army lived off the land, commandeering whatever they wanted. The Ballyhagan (Loughgall) meeting-house was taken over as a base for soldiers. They broke up the benches, using them for fuel for brewing. Here are some examples of what was taken during those years:

"In ye year 88 Ann Marsh had taken from her by ye Irish plunderers one cow, one feather bed, 2 ruggs and other household goods to ye value of £6-10-0.

John Bell had taken from him by ye English army before ye siege of Derry, a Mare & by ye English army had stolen & plundered from him bed clothes & other goods in all to ye value of £6-4-6.

Thomas Greer had one mare taken from him by ye Irish raparees, & himself shot to death at ye house doore: ye mare was worth £2-0-0. [What was Thomas worth?]

Mark Wright had stolen from him by ye Irish one horse worth £2-10-0: & in ye year 1690 one horse and a heifer & other things stolen in all with ye aforesaid £2-10-0 to ye value of £4-17-0 And had forcibly taken from him by Duke Schomberg Gards one mare, two heifers and some moneys in all to value of £6-12-0

In 1690, as King William made his way to the Boyne, resting at Scarva en route, and then passing through Loughbrickland, let us picture the scene. One of his soldiers is riding a mare from John Bell. Another important figure, the Duke's bodyguard, trots along on a mare formerly owned by Mark Wright.

The Society of Friends in Ireland has never had clergy, instead, relying on its own members, men and women, to be the channels of God's truth and grace. For this reason it has been essential for its members to be literate and have a basic education. The schooling of boys and girls has been a necessary feature, as has a lending library

in each Friends' meeting house to encourage self-education. Literacy allowed members to read the Bible and other writings for themselves, and to keep records, keep minutes of their decisions, write letters and petitions.

Before 1700 each meeting appointed one or two to attend the County Assizes and Quarter Sessions to keep a watching-eye on the judgements which magistrates were handing out. Also one or two from each county would attend Parliament in Dublin to see if laws could be amended to alleviate the oppression felt by Friends and others. One of our deeply-held elements of faith is an optimistic view of human nature; that people will do right if treated right. That is what gave Quakers the wisdom and backbone to appeal to the better nature of magistrates, bishops, landlords and law-makers, expecting them to listen and to follow through on those limited human-rights which were available, even in the late 1660's. This patient lobbying slowly bore fruit so that by 1721 there was an Affirmation Act which allowed Quakers and Moravians to affirm rather than swear oaths on the Bible. Quaker Meeting-houses were registered as places of public worship in 1719, giving them legal status. Down the years there have been gradual extensions to democracy and human-rights for all people. We believe that these have been achieved more by documentation and friendly persuasion than by angry threats and gunpowder.

Emigration

Despite these gentle easings of oppression, many in County Armagh and in the rest of Ireland felt the urge to escape by emigrating. Quakers and others were well aware that across the Atlantic was a land free from the tyranny of King, Bishop and Landlord. In the state of Pennsylvania there was a Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey. William Penn, himself a Friend, created a haven to which many immigrants flocked. At the same time he made a treaty with the resident Indian tribes to

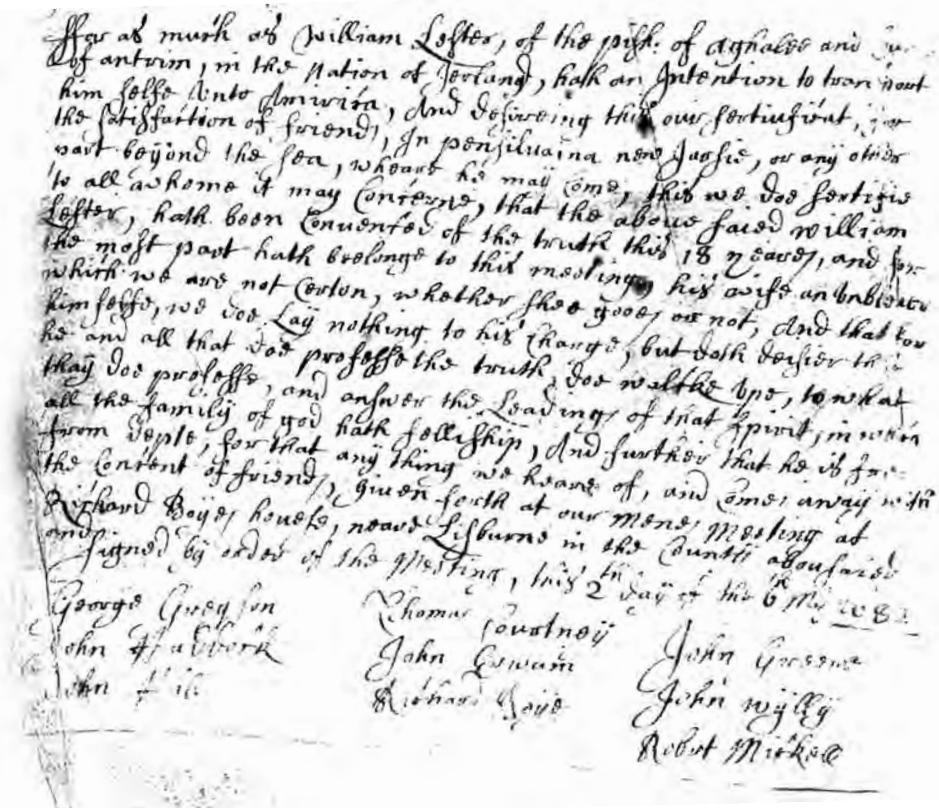
show them decency and respect.

Friends started to emigrate from Ireland to Pennsylvania in 1682 and a set procedure was followed. A Friend or family told their local meeting of their intention and asked for a certificate. Enquiries were then made about the behaviour of the applicant:- Was he in debt? Was he beholden to some woman regarding marriage? Was he faithful in Friends' practices? If all was satisfactory a certificate was drawn up, signed by his fellow-members and handed to the emigrant to take with him. This gave the emigrant status as a trustworthy member when it was presented to a Friends' meeting in Pennsylvania. This helped to get the new arrival settled and get his feet under him.

Emigration depleted the numbers of Friends in the county. Overly strict rules also took their toll, especially the practice of expelling those who married one of another branch of the Christian church. There never were more than a few hundred Quakers in County Armagh. Now in the 21st century that is still the position.

Written records give a measure of objectivity to our study of history. They save us from relying too much on the word of mouth anecdote which tends to get distorted with frequent telling. There is a Latin saying: *Scripta manet* – that which is written down survives. Often it does not survive, it crumbles into dust. So the efforts of our Local History Society to preserve and catalogue our papers and documents are to be commended. They are good examples of seeing to it that future generations have plenty to rummage through and scratch their heads over.

Those Quakers of 300 and more years ago hardly dreamt that their writings would open a window for us on local life in those times. Despite leading fraught lives they took time to write down what was of crucial importance to them. By doing so they put into practice what they believed – *The pen is mightier than the sword.*



Here is one such certificate for William Loftor in 1682: