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

QUAKERS

The name 'Quakers', according to one story, originates with George Fox, the founder of The Society of Friends, who once told a magistrate 'to quake (tremble) at the name of God'. The name "Quakers" stuck.

Others suggest that the name derives from the physical shaking that sometimes went with Quaker religious experiences.

Quakers believe that there is something of God in everybody and that each human being is of unique worth. This is why Quakers value all people equally, and oppose anything that may harm or threaten them. They seek religious truth in inner experience and place reliance great conscience as the basis of morality. For Quakers, emphasis is on direct experience of God rather than ritual and ceremony. They believe that priests and rituals an unnecessary obstruction between the believer and God.

Quakers integrate religion and everyday life. They believe God can be found in the middle of everyday life and human relationships, as much as during a meeting for worship. They are particularly concerned with human rights, social justice, freedom of conscience and peace. In both

World Wars, many Quakers were conscientious objectors.

The settlements, or meetings, of the first Friends in County Armagh were around Lurgan, Richhill, and by Knockbridge and Moyallon, on the border of County Down. Two hundred years later, Bessbrook became a meeting place, consequent on the growth of the model linen village. Later on, at Portadown and near Laurelyale, there were meetings set up.

Laurelvale, there were meetings set up. According to the Memoirs of John Quin of Acton, quoted in an article on Poyntzpass fair in an earlier edition of 'Before I forget...', Quakers attended a linen market in Poyntzpass when it was first established around 1790 and were interested in developing trade here. Quin states that because Mr Stewart, the local landlord, refused to grant them long leases, they withdrew their support for the market and moved to Tandragee.

Tithes

From the 1660's, power was in the hands of the Established Church. That may have been understandable in England where the vast majority belonged to it, but in Ireland, where Anglicans were a

small minority, it was a disastrous policy. It took two hundred years before the Church was eventually disestablished in 1869. One of the instructions of Moses in the Old Testament was that one-tenth of the produce of the land should go to the Jewish priest for godly purposes. Down the years tithes (one-tenth part) had become a useful source of income for the parish, as well as for keeping the clergy in a style of life to which they were accustomed. In an earlier edition of this magazine 'Before

I forget', No.3 1989, there is an interesting article by John Joe Sands on how the Tithe worked in the parish of Aghaderg (Loughbrickalnd). Records there show that the parish acted in community matters such as care of roads, dealing with foundlings, licensing of beggars and care of the poverty-stricken. However, Catholics and Presbyterians felt oppressed by tithing and objected to its imposition. Friends also felt the injustice but even more deeply, asserting that it was wrong that preaching the Gospel was a paid profession. I'm not aware that others kept written records about tithing details, but Quakers certainly did. Here are some examples of what was recorded in the 1660's and 1670's as being taken for Church levies or tithes:

"1663. Roger Webb, for not paying 4s. demanded for the Church-levy (so called) had two Pewter Dishes taken from him worth 7s. 4d."

"1670. Widow Bartrim, had taken from her, by Hugh Belton, Clerk of the Parish of Kilmore, and John Moor, one pot worth 3s. for burying her Husband, and sprinkling her

Child, (as they said) though they did neither: And for 1£.4s. which the said Belton and Moor demanded for Tyths, alledging it was due before her husband died, had taken from her one Cow worth 1£. 15s. she being a very poor Woman, and had a Charge of seven Children.

Thus that which was first instituted as a Maintenance for the Widows and Fatherless, is now made use of for their Ruin, and depriving them of a Livelihood"

"1673. Francis Hobson was sued in the Bishop's Court at Ardmagh for 2l. Tyths of Milch-Money, by George Walker, Priest, and by Warrant from two Justices of the Peace, upon a definitive Sentence, was taken by David Mulligan, Constable, the 2d Day of the sixth Month, and committed to the Goal (sic) of Ardmagh, and was Prisoner two Years and four Months, and about the 13th of the tenth Month, died in the said Goal." Quakers were careful that only passive resistance was made against those who came taking their crops and goods. If any hot-blooded Friend boiled over and violently objected, by word or deed, the Meeting severely reprimanded him or her. We may ask: Why did Friends keep such detailed records of their sufferings? Did they hope to get repayment some day? Did they have a sense of history, that posterity might be interested? Or was it that they thought that stories of



Luke Peell had taken from Rim for lithe by William. 3 rother ton John chief to Charlen in General Jornands to y fail priest to flook of wars 40 llooks of only to flook of barly five flook of nother to flook of homes to the sone to flook of had taken from the major tithe by Robert Holkers of Batrick in lady tithe lakes under the fair priest to bad of had to flook of the fair of solly prosent of oals of flook of for head of the flook of oals of the due to the flook of oals to flook of oals of the the flook of oals of the child the pound to so flook of solly of the flook of oals of flook of the child the flook of oals of the child the forward to for priest to look of the part of the flook of oals of flook of the child the forward to for priest to look of the part flook of oals of flook of barly all worth the firm for tithe by the all on the flook of the part of the formand of his for tithe by the formand the flook of the part of the formand of his for tithe by the firm of the flook of the part of the formand of his for tithe by the formand of the formand of the formand of the part of the formand of the of oals sons Hooks of bar of all worth in for titles by the of oals sons Hooks of bar of all worth in for titles by Patrick in Court titles lake under of prinife to the of oals had load of the of oals had load of hay and for mild titles 4 block of oals all worth ith (Francis Hobson had taken from Rim for lithes by William Cultan tithes laker under of B pris ft 12 flooks of Barly 6 looks of bars and 32 Hooks of oals all worth one pound, and out of Some land to ho Bolh worth one pound, and out of Some land to ho Bolh in I gift of Ard magh by Patrick Branagen little laker of or Edward Bond tithe mongor under Polox briling court called Dane of Ord magh of Mock of wheat is flocks of bare to a stocke of Reserveth is all worth William flotten had taken from him for tithe by William flotten had taken from him for tithe by William flotten to other sort to y De dward Bend nong und of De Soan 14 Mock of bare and 42 Mock of bare and 42 Mock of bare and 42 Mock of bars and 43 Mock of bar

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 ouncels (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 homemade 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 \mathcal{E} other goods in all to ye value of £6-4-6.

Thomas Greer had one mare taken from him by ye Irish raparees, \mathcal{E} himself shot to death at ye house doore: ye mare was worth \mathcal{L}^2 - θ - θ . /What was Thomas worth?]

Mark Wright had stolen from him by ye Irish one horse worth $\pounds 2$ -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 £4-17-0And 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 selfeducation. 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 Pennysylvania 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 Pennysylvania. 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: *Scripsit 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.

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Here is one such certificate for William Loftor in 1682: