

The Society of Friends

in **Mid-Wharfedale** and Craven

1650 - 1790

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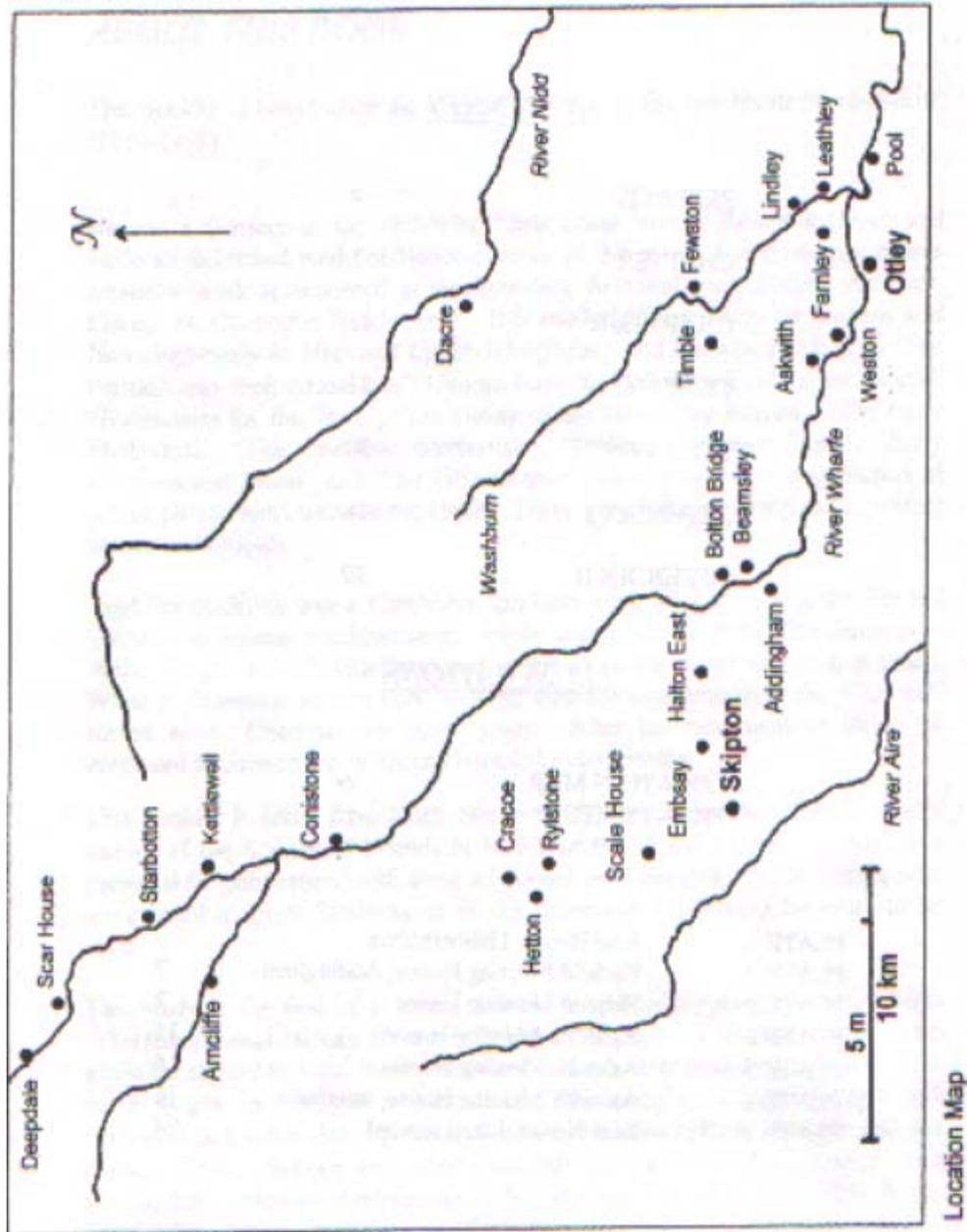
MID-WHARFEDALE LOCAL HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

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PREFACE

The seventeenth century was a time of religious turmoil; some people held firmly to the traditional religious practices but others sought new ways of worship and new expressions of spirituality. Even though Wharfedale and Craven were remote from centres of power and debate, the ordinary people of these dales, farmers, craftsmen and their wives played a significant part in the establishment of a new and enduring religious movement, the Society of Friends.

This study traces the development of the Society of Friends in mid- and upper-Wharfedale, from Otley up to Amcliffe, and in the old parish of Skipton which included many surrounding townships. At first the Quakers met in each others' houses or bams and only began to build their characteristic meeting houses towards the end of the seventeenth century. Some of these can still be seen today in Wharfedale and Craven and are shown in Plates 1 to 7.

The first part of this study outlines the growth of the Society of Friends in our area; the second part, which is based on contemporary accounts of their sufferings, describes individuals and their families and shows how the practice of their beliefs affected their daily lives and how frequently it cost them dear in material terms.

Appendix I gives the Probate Inventories of some of these early Quakers and Appendix II gives a detailed list of known Friends' meeting places and burial grounds which will provide a valuable resource for local historians.



CHAPTER I

The Origins of Quaker Dissent in Wharfedale and Craven

The historical background

In order to understand the origins of the Society of Friends it is necessary to look back to the sixteenth century. Henry VIII separated the English Church from Rome in 1535 with the first Act of Supremacy, declaring himself to be the sole head of the Anglican Church. His motives were a mixture of marital, political and religious.

For the rest of Henry's reign there were few changes in the liturgy. However, in Edward VI's reign the first Act of Uniformity and the first Book of Common Prayer were introduced and were important steps away from the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Edward's reign, however, lasted barely seven years and with Mary came a return to Rome for six years. After her death her half-sister, Elizabeth, re-established the independence of the Anglican Church, and asserted her personal authority in all matters religious as well as political. She took decisive action against those who disputed, or appeared to dispute, her authority whether they were inclined to the Roman faith or to the extremes of Puritanism. The Puritans got their name from their desire to purify the usages of the Anglican Church

and rid it of Popish practices and worship accordingly. They asserted the authority of the scriptures and the sanctity of the human conscience.

Because the north of England provided most of the impetus behind the two main attempts to restore the links with Rome, the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 and the Rising of the North in 1569, puritan practices here were encouraged by the Church but open defiance of its authority was discouraged. However, by 1630, Puritanism began to be seen as a greater danger to the state and Charles I and Archbishop Laud wished to suppress puritan practices. In this they were supported by Richard Neile, the Archbishop of York who insisted on Laud's uniformity of worship, much of which seemed to many observers to be a return to practices little different from those of Rome. The Civil War, which began in 1642, turned both the political and religious world upside down and left many, already puzzled by the changes of recent years, earnestly seeking spiritual succour and security in a new faith.

One such faith was provided by the Society of Friends, founded by George Fox and his disciples in the 1650s. The ground upon which the new faith was to grow so successfully had been prepared by earlier religious thinkers and preachers such as Roger Brekeley, perpetual

curate of Grindleton (near Clitheroe) in 1610, curate at Kildwick in 1623 and Rector of Burnley in 1631. A central theme of his teaching was that God's grace was more important than any church ceremony.

One of his disciples was John Webster who became curate at Kildwick in 1634; during the Civil War he became a chaplain in Cromwell's New Model Army and then Vicar of Mitton in 1648. Like Brekeley, Webster emphasised that salvation came from following the spirit of Christ rather than the forms and conventions of the Church. He maintained that 'the light of God is within thee, if thou wouldst let it shine out', a belief that George Fox was to preach so effectively. Followers of Roger Brekeley, who were sufficiently numerous to be referred to as 'Grindletonians', and of John Webster remained in the Craven area and it is known that after the end of the Civil War there were small groups of people known as 'Seekers' in this area who were actively looking for a new religious inspiration.

George Fox in Yorkshire

Their expectations were realised in 1652 when George Fox traveled through the Dales on his way to the north-west. He came from Leicestershire and had been apprenticed as a shoemaker, but in 1643 he had experienced a religious revelation which drove him to embark on a spiritual pilgrimage in search of perfection. He was in his late twenties when his journeying brought him towards Craven and it is probable that he had already heard of groups who might be inclined

to hear his message in this region. Quaker tradition and Fox's own *Journal* which, however, he wrote more than twenty years after the events which it describes, tell of his arrival at **Pendle Hill**. He describes how he climbed a 'steep and high' hill and says 'the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered'.¹ Fox identified the hill as Pendle and this passage has been seen as a prophetic vision of his later successes. This interpretation has recently been questioned in an article which argues that it was more likely that Fox climbed **Pen-y-ghent** on his way from Bradford to **Sedbergh**. There appear however, to be arguments against this interpretation of Fox's account and it is by no means clear, whether it was Pendle or Pen-y-ghent which he climbed.² It is agreed though, that as Fox travelled through Craven and the Dales he made contact with people who were known to be sympathetic to his teachings and it is probable that many of these were former soldiers of the Parliamentary army.

One such meeting which was of great importance for the later development of the Society of Friends in **Wharfedale** was with James **Tennant** of Scar House near **Hubberholme** (Plate 1). Fox describes the meeting in the *Journal* as though it were a chance encounter but it seems very probable that James Tennant was already a man of unorthodox religious beliefs. The basis for this is that two years before his meeting with Fox, he had leased a small plot of land near

his house for use as a burial ground. Tennant became one of the leading Friends in Wharfedale and his house was one of their principal meeting places. George Fox returned there to address a great meeting in 1677.

After his meeting with Tennant, George Fox travelled to Sedbergh and then to **Firbank Fell**, near **Kendal**, where he addressed a great crowd as his vision had foretold. It was this period of preaching in the north-west which laid the foundations of the Quaker movement



Plate 1. Scar House, near **Hubberholme**. Enid Sheldon

There was great enthusiasm for Fox's teaching but it also aroused strong opposition in some quarters and Fox was attacked physically

several times as well as being charged with blasphemy at Lancaster. Following upon the success of his preaching in the north, Fox sent out small parties of traveling missionaries to spread his teachings and consolidate links between different groups. These became known as 'The Valiant Sixty' and this way of 'Publishing the Truth' was to become a characteristic method of the Society of Friends.³

Growth of local meetings

It was from these informal contacts that a number of local meetings became established. In addition to those at Scar House and its neighborhood, active groups of Friends developed in and around [Skipton](#), and in [Lothersdale](#) and [Addingham](#) in the sixteen fifties. One of the earliest groups was centred on Scale House near [Rylstone](#) where the [Watkinson](#) family lived. Their house became a meeting place for the Friends and there were also groups in [Bradley](#), where one of the younger [Watkinsons](#) held land, and at [Carieton-in-Craven](#) where there were links with Thomas and Christopher [Taylor](#), earlier 'Seekers' who were convinced by Fox and were among the first 'Publishers of Truth'.⁴

Anthony [Myers](#) of [Bolton](#) Abbey was visited by the early Quaker missionaries and became a convinced Friend. He was tenant of [Hesketh](#) Farm at Bolton and then moved to [Farfield](#) in [Addingham](#). Again, a group of Friends came together around Farfield and other houses in the neighborhood were used for meetings. Anthony's son

George later became an important and influential figure among the [Wharfedale](#) Quakers.

Records show that the [Skipton](#) area held a position of central importance during the early years of the Society of Friends. Skipton was accessible from many directions since the [Aire](#) gap provided a main [routeway](#) from Yorkshire to Lancashire and Westmorland and there was a sufficient nucleus of Friends to provide support and accommodation for a series of 'general' meetings which were held between 1657 and 1660. For example, the general meeting held at Scale House in 1658 was attended by forty Friends, drawn from groups all over the country, which included fifteen from Yorkshire meetings. A collection was taken which amounted to £257 11s. 8d, a very large sum for this date. In 1660 the first General National Meeting of the Society of Friends was held at Skipton, an indication of its importance in the early period of the movement, but later National Meetings were held in London while York became the centre for Quarterly Meetings.⁵

An entry in Fox's *Journal* confirms the importance of the Skipton area; 'And so the National Meeting at Scale House about the Church's affairs did continue from 1657 to 1660'. In 1657 Fox 'was moved of the Lord....to set up men's meetings where they were not, House or [Starbotton](#), [Litton](#) and [Amcliffe](#) in Upper [Wharfedale](#), Scale House, [Skipton](#) and [Bradley](#), [Hetton Rylstone](#) and [Cracoe](#) in

Craven and in mid-Wharfedale, at Beamsley, Bolton Bridge, Addingham, Embsay, Halton East, Fewston, Famley, Askwith, Leathley, Pool and Otley (see Location Map).

In spite of the persecution, some advances were made by the Friends in these years. Although they were not able to build permanent meeting houses, they were able to acquire and use their own burial grounds. Probably the earliest was the garth at Scar House, already mentioned, which James Tennant leased in 1650. He was buried there in 1674 after his death in York (Plate 7). The burial ground at Rylstone is said to date from 1657 and was used by Friends from Skipton, as a reference in the Skipton Parish Burial Register for 1662 shows. A meeting house was built later in the same plot (Plate 4). Similarly at Farfield (Addingham) and Askwith it seems that the burial ground was established before it was possible to build the meeting house (Plates 2 and 5).

Women played a significant part in the development of the Society of Friends and separate meetings for women were set up. The Knaresborough Women's Monthly Meeting book dates from 1677 and shows that the meeting was usually held at Askwith; its first letter to the meeting at York was signed by seventeen women. Meetings mentioned later include ones held at Skipton, Beamsley,

Gatecroft and Farfield in Addingham, and Askwith; meetings after 1689 were held at Askwith, Farfield, Gatecroft and Skipton.

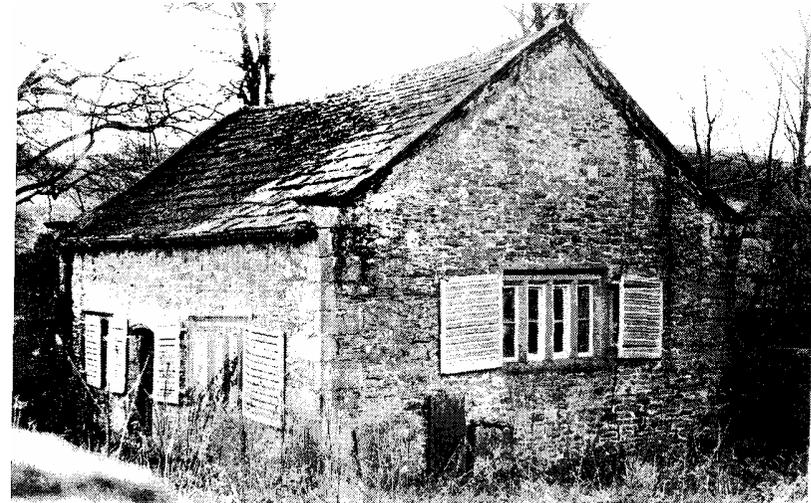


Plate 2. Farfield Meeting House, Addingham. EnidSheldon

Toleration Act 1689

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Toleration Act of 1689 signalled another important change in the development of the Society of Friends. They were still liable to prosecutions, as the next chapter shows, because they continued to refuse to pay tithes and would not swear on oath in the courts, but a measure of freedom in worship had been granted by the Act. This meant that they could now obtain

licences to worship in specified houses and also build their own meeting houses.

The Farfield Meeting was very quick to take advantage of the new Act. A licence was issued for the house of George Myers, Farfield, on October 8 1689. The stone meeting house built in a plot behind his farmhouse at Farfield bears the date 1689 on its lintel (Plate 2) and is the earliest purpose-built meeting house in our area. In keeping with their religious philosophy it is very simple and plain, avoiding all ostentation and ornament; in fact it is very similar to the farms and barns in which they had been accustomed to meet. The only fixture, as in other meeting houses, is a panelled bench across one end of the building (Plate 6).

Other houses quite near to Farfield were also licensed for meetings: one was at Gatecroft on Addingham Moorside, which lay on a 'gate' or packhorse route from Wharfedale over the moor to Silsden and Keighley; another, a farm occupied by Ingram Holmes, at Deerstones, in Beamsley was again close to a routeway, in this case from Skipton through Bolton Bridge and Pace Gate to Nidderdale.



Plate 3. Skipton Meeting House.

Enid Skeleton

Also in 1689, two houses in Skipton, those of John Hall and Abigail Stott, were licensed for meetings. The home of Abigail Stott had been used in the 1680s for meetings which had been violently broken up by the authorities. In 1693 John Hall and another Skipton Friend John Cowper bought two cottages in Skipton. These were demolished and a meeting house, very similar to that at Farfield (Plate 3) built there. This is the only one of the meeting houses in our area which is still in regular use. There was also a burial ground attached.⁷ Several Friends lived in Askwith in mid-Wharfedale and another meeting house was built here in the early eighteenth century. A plot of land in the village had been bought by a group of Friends in January 1666 for use as a burial ground. The vendor, Edmund Greenwood, was himself a Friend and his house was one of a group

in Askwith and [Weston](#) which were licensed for worship in 1689. The meeting house at [Askwith](#) was built on the same plot in 1705 and appears to have fallen out of use about 1840. (Plate 5).

The fourth early meeting house in our area is that at Rylstone, though this is not now immediately recognisable as a Quaker Meeting House as it has been converted into a dwelling (Plate 4). It stands alone, just off the road from Rylstone to [Hetton](#) encircled by the wall of the burial ground. The [datestone](#) by the gate in the wall is, in this case, modern. The Rylstone meeting was a successor of the meeting at Scale House which played such an important role in the early days. In 1675 it was noted that 'the Scale House Meeting should be known hereafter by the name of Rylstone Meeting'. It may be significant that George [Watkinson](#) of Scale House had died in 1670. The burial ground was already in use there but it was not until 1711 that 'the newly erected building of Chris. Foster in Rylstone' (the Rylstone Meeting House) was licensed (Appendix II). It is likely that the original meeting house was a single storey building like the others but it is clear that much rebuilding has taken place here. Before the meeting house was built, houses in Hetton, [Cracoe](#) and Rylstone had been licensed for worship.

In many cases individual houses were licensed in villages where no permanent meeting house existed; for example in [Otiey](#), [Timble](#), [Fewston](#) and [Lindley](#). Presumably these Friends would consider that

they belonged to the Askwith meeting. However, a meeting house was built in [Otiey](#) in 1776. It stood on Cross Green and was let to the Plymouth Brethren in the mid-nineteenth century. At the head of [Wharfedale](#), houses were licensed at [Blismires](#) in [Littondale](#) and at [Starbotton](#), where a burial ground had been acquired by 1720. There is a small ruined building here, in the grounds of Bridge House which may have been the Starbotton Meeting House.

By 1700, the structure of meetings in [mid-Wharfedale](#) and Craven was well established; the [Knaresborough](#) Monthly Meeting contained seven Particular Meetings, Knaresborough, [Netherdale \(Dacre\)](#),

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[Rawdon](#), [Askwith](#), [Farfield](#), [Skipton](#) and [Keighley](#) while the [Rylstone](#) and Scar House meetings had joined the Settle Monthly Meeting.

Thus, at the beginning of the eighteenth century Friends were established throughout our parishes: eight of the eleven parishes had one or more houses licensed for meetings, and it is likely that all the parishes and most of the townships had Friends living in them. The valley of the [Wharfe](#) had places from [Otiey](#) to [Deepdale](#) where Friends met; the same can be said of the part of Craven between [Aire](#) and [Wharfe](#), north and west of [Skipton](#), from [Halton East](#) to [Hetton](#);

and the Washburn valley north from Otley, from Lindley to Fewston. The Quaker families in Wharfedale and Craven also had wider links with other Quaker communities, through marriages and travelling missionaries. These contacts extended through Lothersdale to Lancashire and Westmorland on the west and eastwards to Nidderdale and York.



CHAPTER II Wharfedale and Craven

Friends

Testimonies for the truth

Members of the Society of Friends in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were often persons of remarkable and rare quality. Their testifying for the truth frequently brought them into direct conflict with the law, and, in consequence, they were subject to much ill-usage and suffering. In the early days especially, Friends were full of missionary fervour and their unorthodox beliefs, scorn of all convention and passionate zeal alarmed and frightened people even in that tumultuous time when 'the World turned upside down'. Many were looking for the Second Coming. Although the millenarian atmosphere, expressed by Cromwell in his address to the Assembly of Saints 'when Jesus Christ should be so owned as he is in this day in this work', helped to prepare men for Fox's message, it also supported the common view that Friends were dangerous revolutionaries, to be classed with Ranters and Levellers, with whom they were often popularly confused.

Until the Restoration the Friends were protected, in some parts, by the army and kindly justices, but the very success of the movement

made it feared by the authorities. The well-organised radical movement had political as well as religious intentions and made the gentry and clergy very nervous with the result that many Friends were fined and imprisoned. After the Restoration magistrates usually preferred to prosecute Friends rather than the less radical Dissenters, and the ubiquitous system of paid informers indulged the cupidity of many who no doubt pretended to be rooting out heresy and sedition. Testifying for the truth, however, did not always involve such extreme behaviour or arouse such fears. Many Quaker views on testifying to the truth were concerned with general decorum and seemly conduct in every day life. There were, for example, recommendations on dress including the avoidance of long 'rufes', gatherings of coat skirts, an excess of unnecessary buttons, fancy hat bands and even an excess of harness splendour and trappings. Their furniture too, it was thought, should be plain 'as becometh the truth'. Neither was it thought consistent with the truth for Friends to observe Christmas time and other days set up in the time of darkness and ignorance, nor to marry outside the faith, or give way to sleep in meetings. Continued disobedience in these and other relatively minor matters could result in a Friend being disowned.¹

The Friends

So, who were these persons of rare quality whose 'testimonies for the truth' in matters great and small set them apart from all others?

Wharfedale and Craven Friends were for the most part like Friends everywhere. They were the 'middling sort of people'. They came neither from the parish gentry nor yet the very poor. In terms of riches, however, a few possessed wealth above the average level for the period. Their probate inventories show that in some cases considerable sums were 'owing to the deceased' at the time of death, perhaps in the form of bills or bonds or even mortgages (Appendix I). Banking, as understood today, was not established until the eighteenth century and the better-off often negotiated loans for the poorer people.

Many of the local men, whose sufferings we shall describe, were substantial yeomen, men of good sense, resource and sound judgement.

Many Friends made their living from the land; others were artisans and traders; and some are known to have practised a dual economy. For example, in 1683, there were assembled for worship in an Askwith house, a yeoman, a husbandman, a clothier, a cordwainer, a linen webster, two labourers and one other, described as a mason. This man, on other evidence, is known to have worked an Askwith small-holding of 37 acres.²

Their houses, where they held their unlawful meetings, were exceedingly small. Most were known as 'single-hearth' houses, occasionally two-hearth and exceptionally, as at Anthony Myers' house in [Addingham](#), three-hearth.³ Nevertheless, it was in these small-roomed dwellings, probably in the downstairs parlour, that the Friends gathered to testify to the truth, on one occasion upwards of twenty persons being assembled. They must sometimes have been very crowded, as probate inventories show that frequently the room already contained the 'best bed', tables, chairs and other 'hustlement of the house.' The distance travelled to the meetings either on foot or horseback may be judged from an [Askwith](#) meeting which drew Friends from neighbouring villages including [Weston](#), [Leathley](#), [Otiey](#), [Denton](#), [Lindley](#), [Swinsty](#), [Haverah Park](#), [Beckwithshaw](#), [Yeadon](#), [Buriy](#) and [Addingham](#).⁴

Testimonies for the truth, where these concerned points of personal behaviour and decorum, seem not to have troubled local folk over much. Their [disownment](#) for misdemeanours of this kind is seldom found in the monthly Meeting records relating to our parishes. It was rather their continued defiance of the law in cases where the law was in direct opposition to their beliefs that caused the local Friends such hardship and distress.

Their Sufferings

Friends' records of sufferings date from 1654 and are usually divided into four categories of offences; non-attendance at Church of England

worship; attendance at Friends' Meetings known as Conventicles; non-payment of tithes. Steeple-house taxes and Easter Reckonings; and various other offences of which the most important was the refusal to swear on oath in the courts.

The following descriptions of the trials of local Friends are based on contemporary records and the language of the period has been retained to some extent.⁵



Plate 5. Askwith Meeting House.lent by M.F.Pickles

For absenting himself from the National Worship in 1666 Henry Thompson of [Weston](#) was seized by John [Wardman](#) and John Stead of eight pairs of shoes worth one pound. Henry Thompson is known

to have been a shoe-maker by trade and a member of an extended family of Thompsons whose sufferings for conscience sake must have been legendary in the district, so numerous were they.

More often recorded than non-attendance at Church, are sufferings for unlawful attendance at Meetings. In 1654 Christopher Taylor of Otiey was going to a Meeting to wait upon the Lord amongst God's people on the first day of the week when a man met him on the way whose name was Thomas Nailor of Akensaw (*sic*) near Bradford. Nailor struck the said Christopher very sore with a great staff and broke his cheek bone with the force of his strokes, and almost took away his natural life; and as was supposed had thought to have 'muther'd' him had he not been prevented by some person(s) coming by who kept some blows off himThe person(s) then went away.

Perhaps the injured Christopher Taylor never arrived at his Meeting but usually it was at the Meeting that most Friends were taken, later imprisoned and possibly fined. John Stott of Skipton was taken out of his house along with Edward Watkinson, James Booth, young Ambler, Peter Taylor, Christopher Kitchen and John Colling in or about the year 1660. They were removed before the Justices who committed them to the Castle in York where they continued prisoners for eleven weeks.

Sometimes Friends meeting together in an unlawful assembly would be fined rather than imprisoned or fined in addition to imprisonment.

At Scale House near Skipton a peaceable meeting for worship of the Lord was held in the house of William Watkinson in April, 1663. Cubert Madesat [?] a Captain and a Justice of the Peace came and broke up the Meeting and caused most of the Friends to be carried to Skipton where they were kept one night. They were then carried before the Justices of the Peace who committed them to prison for about three weeks. They were later brought to the Sessions held at Skipton aforesaid about the fourteenth day of May where they were fined forty shillings a man. Thomas Cappin of Hetton, constable, Christopher Brayshaw, bailiff and William Jenkinson, bailiff 'made great spoile of distress and about the distress none of them proffering to make a return of the surplus.'

Also Richard Smith of Bolton Bridge was fined for being present at a Meeting at Ingram Holmes' house in Storiths in 1664 by Christopher Clapham and others. The fine was two pounds but he had taken from him on that account one cow worth three pounds. Two pounds may have been the prescribed fine for this offence but Friends were clearly taken advantage of and apparently had no means of redress.

Above all, Quakers were particularly exposed to persecution by reason of their refusal to pay tithes. In 1658 out of 123 Quakers in prison, 60 had been committed for this cause. John Jackson of Famley who committed the offence in 1654 was distrained of one mare worth five pounds by Edward Barker, bailiff of Oiley, at the

prosecution of John Dade, Nicholas Dunwell, John Fawkes and Thomas Dunwell, who pretended to demand ten shillings. Other local examples include Joshua Tennant of Beamsley in 1693, Thomas Ward of Catgill (Bolton) in 1694 and 1695; from 1705 onwards the records show many more fines for non-payment of tithes.

The vulnerability of Friends however, is perhaps most keenly demonstrated in their refusal to swear an oath of allegiance. Brought before a magistrate they would be asked to swear to keep the peace or merely to appear when summoned to the Sessions, but their inability to swear any oath resulted in imprisonment even when they were later found not guilty.

James Tennant of Scar House in the parish of Amcliffe in Craven was prosecuted for non-payment of tithes in the Exchequer in the year 1655. However, because for conscience sake he could not swear to his answer in the Bill exhibited against him, he was committed prisoner to the Castle in York where he remained forty-five weeks. A year later James Tennant was again summoned, this time by John Simondson, to appear at Richard, Earl of Burlington's Court to be of a jury; but because he appeared in the open court with his hat on and would not swear, he was fined 6s. 8d. by Henry Wriglesworth of Long Preston, Steward of the Court. John Simondson however, distrained a horse worth £6 6s.8d. and kept it a year for his own

service.

Complaint was later made to the lord of the court when the horse was returned but was now of very little worth, being much abused. Anthony Sympson of Yokenthwaite was also summoned to be on the jury at the same court but because he could not swear was fined 1s.8d. for which he had a brass pan taken, worth about 2s.4d.

Finally an example from Addingham where, in 1663, Thomas Smithson, Thomas Myers, Edward Dodgson, William Judson, Ingram Holmes and George Pearson being met together in a peaceable manner to worship God at the house of Gervase Benson were apprehended and taken to Skipton where they were kept close prisoners three days. When, later, the Friends were brought before Colonel Padsey they were committed to York Castle for denying to swear, remaining close prisoners there for the space of three weeks. From the local records consulted, one could be forgiven for supposing that some Quaker families were more prone to suffer for conscience sake than others. The Thompson family of Weston parish is a case in point. The first mention of a member of the Thompson family falling foul of the law is in 1654. Henry Thompson of Weston was beaten by Thomas Pretious, priest of the said parish for 'reproving the said priest *forspeaking* that which was not the truth, which the priest, not

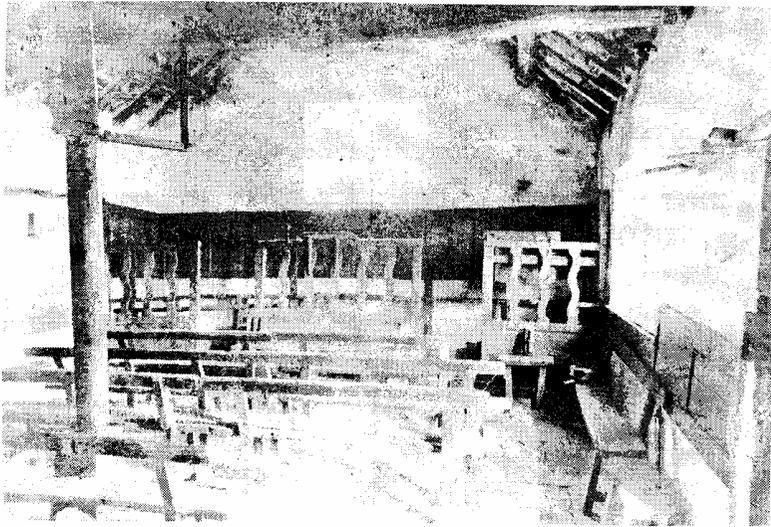


Plate 6. Interior of Askwith Meeting House, lent by M.F. Pickles able to defend, revenged himself upon the peaceable man with strokes.' Some time later the same Henry Thompson was apprehended by William Vavasour of Burley for non-payment of tithes. William Vavasour sent his servant, Edward Barker, bailiff of Otley, with Henry Thompson to York Castle where Henry Thompson remained prisoner for about three weeks. It was either this Henry Thompson, or possibly his son, Henry, bom 1640, who, because of his absentiong himself from the National Worship in 1666, was distrained of eight pairs of shoes (see above). Another Henry Thompson, also a shoemaker and known as the elder, lived in neighbouring Askwith. He dwelt with his wife Elizabeth and

son Edward who continued in his father's trade. Besides making shoes Henry Thompson worked a mixed farmhold paying rent to Lord Fairfax of Denton. In 1670 his goods were distrained and ravished away and sold; 'two pewter dishes, 5 cows, 2 stears, one gelding, 35 sheep, 12 days ploughing of barley, 2 cows and one ox' were distrained and in all worth £67 8s.8d.

Henry Thompson was not alone in his sufferings, for he is only one example taken out of a list of sixteen Askwith Friends whose combined fines in 1670 totalled £170 7s. 4d. It could be that poor Henry Thompson never recovered. When he died in 1691 his probate inventory shows him to have been virtually bankrupt (Appendix 1). Among his creditors were Lord Fairfax of Denton, his landlord, and Richard Smith a known Quaker of Bolton Bridge; and among his debtors, a certain Henry Thompson of Weston who owed for one horse valued £3 10s.Od. There were other Thompson family prosecutions noted in the Quaker records but, as we shall see, their distrained goods were sometimes bought back and returned by good-natured friends.

The Thompson family, in incurring so many punishments, may have been exceptionally zealous or otherwise plain unlucky. But it is also not improbable that the frequency and severity of some prosecutions depended as much, if not more, upon the attitude of the local incumbent rather than on the justices of the peace.

The vicar of Weston, Thomas **Thwaite**, for example, appears to have been exceptionally severe. Thomas Thwaite might well have been a frustrated Papist. In November 1698, the occasion when Thomas Thwaite was ejected from the vicarage of Weston, he is said to have been of 'Papist principles'.⁶ If this is true it may well explain some of his more vindictive acts against members of the Society of Friends in Weston parish. The records note that when the constables were sent to investigate unlawful assemblies Thwaite accompanied them for fear of their connivance. It is also alleged that he offered substantial bribes to any informant (church wardens included) who would be willing to apprise him of Friends' unlawful Meetings. On one occasion it was alleged that **Thwaite** broke down the wall enclosing the **Askwith** burial yard for he had been seen in possession of tools such as a **gavelock** (crowbar) and hammer suitable for the task.

Thwaite was not always as successful in his ways as he might have wished, for a kinder side of human nature seems sometimes to have intervened. In October 1683, Henry Thompson, the elder, of Askwith, William **Bradley** of Little **Timble** and Walter **Fawcett of Haverah** Park were fined £20 in goods, 'but most of the goods so distrained were bought back by some well-wishers and part returned again to the sufferers'. In 1685 Elizabeth Smith, widow, could not pay her fine of

ten shillings to the bailiff, her neighbor did so, but without her knowledge. Similarly, Henry Thompson of Askwith had four hides of undressed leather distrained but these were bought by a young man for £1 5s.0d. and returned to the owner again.

We do not know where in Askwith any member of the Thompson family lived but the burial ground where no doubt some members were laid to rest and the Meeting House close by are easily identified (Plate 5). The site of the vicarage, home of the notorious Thwaite, is known too. It was still 'part-built of lath and plaster and thatch' as late as 1770.⁷

Thomas Thwaite was not the only vicar holding prejudiced views against the Friends and other non-Anglican parishioners. Thomas **Sutton** vicar of **Skipton** from 1665 to 1683 is on record as having indicted several Quaker parishioners for absence from church and to have had them imprisoned some months in York Castle in 1683. He is also said to have been involved in a drunken brawl in a Skipton alehouse, yet on the Sunday he preached and ranted against **drunkenness**, notably against Presbyterians. His epitaph in the parish register however, reads 'Mr Thomas Sutton vicar of Skipton and **Carleton** ye best of preachers and a very peaceable good man.

CHAPTER III

Growth and decline

The early years

Why was Quakerism so successful, so quickly? In attempting to answer this question many scholars point to the lengthy period of Puritan thought and debate which preceded the coming of George Fox. Quakerism, they argue, was very much the development and extension of a number of Puritan ideas and in many respects the Friends were the heirs of the radical Puritans. Perhaps more importantly, the Quakers closed the gap between profession and practice.

Locally, one is tempted to ask what caused all those yeomen, husbandmen, tradesmen and others to become Friends? We have read how George Fox himself 'convinced' James Tennant in that lonely farmhouse which looks down on the swirling waters of the Wharfe and on the squat secure shape of St Michael's, Hubberholme. Why did William Watkinson open his Scale House home as one of the first national meeting places of the Friends? And why did the Thompson family embrace a faith which caused them so much suffering and loss?

We have already suggested that the ideas of Roger Brereley, John Webster and others inspired groups like the Seekers, of whom Braithwaite remarks, 'on them often the Quaker message proved like a spark falling on prepared timber', and who were already 'waiting in silence' for God. To such people George Fox seemed to be the man they had been seeking to lead them. Why did Fox choose to stay at Scar House in the summer of 1652? Could it be, as modern writers are tentatively suggesting, that there already existed a network of dalesfolk ready and eager to welcome George Fox and his message of liberating truth? Such speculation is strengthened when we learn that in 1650 (two years before the arrival of George Fox) James Tennant had taken a long lease of a plot of land across the foldyard from his farmhouse, for burials. Later, this was given to Friends on trust as a burial ground for Quakers of Scar House, Starbotten and Kettlewell.*

No doubt there were many reasons why these men joined the Society of Friends: dissatisfaction with the Established Church or with their local parish priest; the soul-searing anxieties of Calvinistic belief; the experience of the recent past of 'The World turned upside down'; the hope of the Millennium and the power of zealous evangelists offering a faith obviously attractive to independent minds. After conversion their faith was sustained by group life, strong fellowship, and the

vital forces of personal conviction buttressed by regular meetings for worship, the united waiting upon the Lord.

The later years

Yet, it has to be said that in less than 100 years the movement had largely run its course, at least in our parishes. An [Archiepiscopal](#) survey of 1743 records just 44 Quaker families living in our parishes at the time.² This meagre number suggests a very considerable fall in numbers from the earlier period when Friends welcomed the teaching of George Fox, regularly attended forbidden conventicles, suffered persecution for their beliefs, and, after the Toleration Act, continued to gather in their newly built Meeting Houses.

The declining interest in the Quaker form of Dissent is not peculiar to the [Wharfedale](#) and Craven Friends. Firm figures are hard to come by, but among the national records it is significant that Quakers registered 3530 fewer births, 3349 fewer deaths and 1118 fewer marriages in the 1740s than in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Moreover, in every decade from the 1670s to the 1790s the number of registered Quaker deaths exceeded the number of registered births.³ The remarkable decay in Quakerism and other forms of Dissent occurring nationally from the early 1700s onwards has been ascribed to many causes. Of the Friends it has been said, for example, that by the 1740s they had turned inward, become 'a peculiar people set apart', losing members by their strict adherence to

forms of dress and speech, and, above all by their insistence on 'marriage within the Faith'.

There is, however, another major possible cause of Quaker decline in the local parishes during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. According to local demographic sources the [Wharfedale](#) parishes lost some 3,000 souls during the period marked by the dates 1664 and 1743.⁴ The cause of the spectacular loss of numbers has been ascribed to emigration. Throughout Yorkshire many thousands of families were forsaking agriculture to find fresh forms of employment in the towns and other early developing centres particularly the industrial valleys of the [Aire, Calder, Deame](#) and [Don](#).⁵ Wharfedale, like many other farming regions, was depopulated at this time. It is also known that some Friends emigrated to America and that some Meetings actively helped members to make the journey.

Some Quaker families

To trace individual migrant Quaker families to their ultimate destinations would be extremely rewarding but such an undertaking is beyond the scope of the present study. Instead it seems appropriate to end this short history of the Society of Friends in Wharfedale and Craven with a few brief comments on some of the more prominent

local Friends, their Meeting Houses and burial grounds which they built and created in those early times.

James **Tennant**, whom George Fox first met in 1652, died in York gaol in 1674, apparently in putrid conditions.⁶ His body was brought back for burial to Scar House and his family erected a small flat stone at the head of his grave inscribed with the letters '**JT**'. At a later date

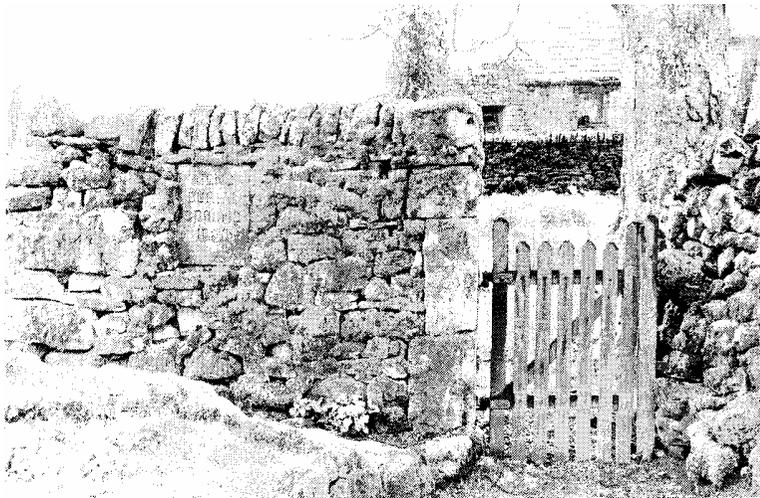


Plate 7. Burial ground at Scar House.

EnidSheldon

when gravestones became unacceptable, the stone was taken indoors where for many years it served as a larder shelf, and, more recently as a book-shelf in a room now known as the 'snug'.⁷

James **Tennant's** son, another James, died in 1680 and yet another James, grandson of the first, died in 1719. All three were buried in the little burial ground at Scar House as were several later **Tennants** including some from **Deepdale**, a little further up the **Wharfe**.

The third James is known to have been a man of some substance for he left an estate valued in 1719 at £246 **10s.Od.** (Appendix I). The bulk of his wealth was in signed undertakings to repay him money he had loaned amounting in all to £190 **0s.Od.** His livestock and 'farming gear' totalled £14 8s.0d. and his household goods, £42 2s.0d. When it is remembered that the average value of a **Wharfedale** estate in the 1680s was £38 it will be appreciated that James **Tennant** was rich for his time.⁸ His house was of above average size with two main rooms downstairs, three on an upper floor and most unusually, one room on a third floor. It is worth drawing attention to the number of chairs recorded in the inventory. As well as two casual mentions of

unspecified numbers of chairs, there were one half-dozen in the parlour, one half-dozen of cane in the buttery chamber and one dozen

in the **bodystead** chamber. This is an abnormal number for a house of this size and may well reflect the house's special use for meetings. A significant sign of the owner's status is that James and his wife no longer slept in the parlour downstairs as most people did, but in the

best chamber on an upper floor. James [Tennant](#) was clearly no longer primarily a farmer.

Anthony [Myers](#) of [Farfield](#), founder of the Meeting there died in 1698. His house, Farfield, has already been described as of above average size when valued in 1672 for taxation purposes. This is evident from his probate inventory which describes a house with ten rooms, five on the ground floor and five on an upper floor and this at a time when most houses contained no more than four or five rooms in all. Anthony Myers was well-off by the standards of the day leaving an estate of £84 18s.0d. including debts owing to him of £42 [Os.Od.](#) The value of his farm stock was twice that of his household goods suggesting that he was a working farmer (Appendix I).

His son, George Myers, holder of the prestigious office of agent to the Earl of Burlington was a devoted worker in the cause of Friends, especially in the courts; he died in 1714. He left a very considerable fortune of £1,552 4s.0d. and, like James Tennant, a large proportion, in this case £1,000 of the total, was in 'moneys due and owing upon mortgage, bills and bonds'. His probate inventory describes a house of some thirty rooms and outbuildings and appears to be a much improved version of his father Anthony's house though it had not yet reached the grandeur and proportions of the present Farfield Hall.⁹ Unlike his father, the value of George's household goods was substantially greater than that of his farm (Appendix I).

As for the Thompson family, outspoken stalwarts of [Askwith](#) and [Weston](#), who suffered severely from the distraint of their goods and stock, some members left Weston parish in the late 1690s. We find them mentioned in the [Brighouse](#) Monthly Meeting Record of Sufferings in 1698 as living in [Carlton](#) in the parish of [Rothwell](#). Perhaps they were part of the early movement from village to town observed in many agricultural parishes at this time.

Little can be said about the rest of the [Wharfedale](#) and Craven Friends. George [Watkinson](#) of Scale House died in 1670; Joshua [Dawson](#) of [Addingham Moorside](#), about 1690; James [Conyers](#) of [Rylstone](#) in 1696 and another James (his son?) was given £4 5s.0d. to assist him to emigrate in 1700. [Ingram Holmes of Beamsley](#) Meeting married Mary Booth also of Beamsley in 1694. Ingram Holmes lived at [Deerstones](#), in the township of [Hazelwood](#) and [Storiths](#) and there is still a farm at Deerstones. Holmes drops out of the records in the second decade of the eighteenth century when his son (?) John appears; Mary, his widow, died in 1729. We do not know when John [Stott](#) of [Skipton](#), a victim of Thomas [Sutton](#), vicar of that parish, died but his wife Abigail was a widow in 1682. John Hall of Skipton died in 1719; Robert Smith who farmed a 37 acre holding in [Askwith](#) but is described as a mason in the parish register, died in 1744; Phoebe [Tillotson of Starbotton](#) died in 1745 and was buried in the little stone-walled burial ground between the river and

the road. Lastly David Hall, who kept a school in Skipton for more than fifty years, died in September 1756 'in the seventy-third year of his age and the forty- sixth of his ministry as a Friend'.

Meeting Houses †

Some of the places that were so important to the early Friends can still be seen today. The Friends Meeting Houses at Scar House and Deepdale were farm houses, and the latter still is. Scar House was much altered in the nineteenth century and in 1988 was bequeathed to the National Trust and very recently opened as a holiday cottage. The little burial ground, the first of many throughout the world, is still to be seen guarded by its wall. Starbotton's burial ground is still identifiable, and a small ruined building in the grounds of Bridge House may be the remains of the Meeting House there. The Farfield Meeting House and burial ground lie just off the Addingham to Bolton Bridge road: it is good to learn that the Historic Chapels Trust has now taken over this early example of a purpose-built Meeting House. Skipton Meeting House is where it always was, tucked away in the Ginnell; it has recently been the subject of an excellent short history by Richard Harland in celebration of its tercentenary.¹⁰ The early eighteenth-century Meeting House at Rylstone has recently been converted into a private house as has the nearly contemporary Askwith Meeting House; both have graveyards nearby.

Epilogue

As we have seen, support for the Society of Friends had declined markedly by the mid-eighteenth century. However, this did not mean that the spirit of dissent which had responded to the teachings of George Fox had entirely died away for, into the quietism and respectability of the eighteenth century, came a new awakening of the spirit. It came this time not as a 'Whirlwind out of the North' but from the flat lands of Lincolnshire in the person of John Wesley, 'the brand plucked from the burning.'¹¹ Wesley and the Methodist movement appealed strongly to the same kind of people as had George Fox, and whereas the seventeenth century had seen the rise of the Society of Friends and the building of their Meeting Houses in the Dales, the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the spread of Methodism and the construction of their chapels in the same area.

NOTES

Chapter I

- 1 N.Penney, ed., *The Journal of George Fox*, vol. I, (1911), 40.
- 2 Susan H.Bell, 'George Fox's Hill of Vision', *The Friends' Quarterly*, vol. 29, (1995), 306 and David Boulton, 'Which Hill of Vision? The Case for Pendle', *The Friends' Quarterly*, vol. 29, (1995) 364.
- 3 Donald A.Rooksby, *The Man in Leather Breeches*, (1994), 22.
- 4 Richard Harland, *The Living Stones of the Skipton Quaker Meeting*, (1993).
- 5 J.and R.Mortimer, eds, *Leeds Friends' Minute Book, 1692 to 1712*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, CXXXIX, (1980), xix.
- 6 Mortimer, 1980, xi.
- 7 Harland, 1993.

Chapter II

- 1 Mortimer, 1980, xiii-xxxix.
- 2 J.H.Tumer, ed.. *Nonconformist Register, Oliver Heywood and T Dickenson, 1644-1752*, (1881) 136; and M.F.Pickles and J.Bosworth, 'Farmhold Structure in a District of Piecemeal Enclosure', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 63, (1991), 117.
- 3 Public Record Office, E 179/210/418.
- 4 Turner, 135, 136, 138.
- 5 Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, Carlton Hill Meeting House Archives.
- 6 J.Singleton, ed.. *Register of the Church of All Saints, Weston, 1639-1812*, Yorkshire Parish Register Society, LIV, (1916), 20.
- 7 Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York. Glebe Terrier, 1770, Old Ainsty Deanery.

Chapter III

- 1 Richard Harland, 'George Fox and the Tennants of Scar House', *The Upper Wharfedale Field Society*, vol. 16, (1995), 16-19.
- 2 S.L.Ollard and P.C.Walker, eds. *Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns, 1743*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, vols LXXI, LXXII, LXXV, LXXVII, LXXIX, (1927-1931).
- 3 M.Watts, *The Dissenters*, (1978), 387.
- 4 M.F.Pickles, 'Mid-Wharfedale 1721-1812: Economic and Demographic Change in a Pennine Dale', *Local Population Studies*, no. 16 (1976), 12-44.
- 5 M.F.Pickles, 'Labour Migration: Yorkshire c 1670-1743', *Local Population Studies*, no. 57 (1996), 30-49.
- 6 Harland, 1995.
- 7 Helen Pickles, 'The Meeting House', *Country Living*, February, 1996.
- 8 M.F.Pickles, 'Agrarian Society and Wealth in Mid-Wharfedale 1664-1743', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, vol. 53, (1981), 65.
- 9 Buried in the walls of the present Farfield Hall is part of the structure of the previous house.
- 10 Richard Harland, *The Living Stones of the Skipton Quaker Meeting*, (1993).
- 11 This phrase was popularly applied to John Wesley because as a child, in 1709, he was rescued from the burning rectory at Epworth where his father was the incumbent.

Appendix I - Four Probate Inventories

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HENRY THOMPSON, Askwith (Weston Parish, Old Ainstie Deanery, 1691)

Inventory appraised 18 April, 1691, proved May, 1691.
Imp. His purse and Apparrell £1 5s. Od.

In the HOUSE one cupboard, two long settlers, one table with faure chaires prized att £1 10s. Od.
All the brass and pewter in the house with one rainge, rack hooks and tongs, one dripping pan one fire shovell, one iron backston with all wood vessell in the house, one clocke with all other huslement in the said room £3 3s. Od.

In the PARLOUR NEXT THE HOUSE one cupboard, one table, one great chest for come, one Side Cupboard prized att £2 Os. Od.
Two bed steads with bedding thereon, curtains and valence and the chest for clothes. Two little chests and one deske all prized att £3 13s. 4d
One forme. Two buffitt Stooles and one chair withall other things in the said roome except one chest sett apart for Elizabeth the wife of the said Henry Thompson standing att table and apprized att 5s. Od.

In the CHAMBER OVER THE SAID ROOMES Two bedsteads with bedding thereon. Two Kimlins, Three Chests or Desks, one little Table with all huslement in the said roome prized att £2 5s. Od.

In the BACKHOUSE one cupboard, one dishbench one brass pott, Two little tables, one Chesetrough one tub, one chume, one old rainge with all huslements in the said room prized att £1 10s. Od.
One boy of drawers, one chest prized att £1 Os. Od.
In the SHOPP all shopp geare and working tooles with one old cupboard prized att 3s. 4d.

In the BARNE one cart, one coupe, two paire of bound wheels and one paire unbound with all husbandry geare what soever prized att £1 Os. Od.

Two stocks of bees and two swarms prized £1 Os. Od.

QUICK GOODS two kine, one auld gelt nagg one colt and three sheepe prized att £7 Os. Od.

One day plowing of hard come sowne 10s. Od.

Owing by Henry Thompson of Weston for horse £3 10s. Od.
The lease land prized besides the rents charged upon it att £10 Os. Od.

TOTAL.....£39 14s. 8d.

Debts owing by the Testator

Imp. to Robert Taylor of Denton £13 13s. Od., Richard Smith of Bolton Bridge £5 6s. Od., Anthony Foster £1 14s. Od., Widdow Hachridge of Burley £4 4s. Od., George Booth of Askwith 15s. Od., Edward Hanson £2 10s. Od., William Carr £1 12s. Od., John Snowden 12s. Od., Richard Batley £1 10s. Od., Christopher Marshall 16s. Od., Barnard Banks 13s. Od., Thomas Lord Fairfax for rent £1 5s. Od., John Parkinson 10s. Od., John Taylor of Denton £2 15s. Od., Sampson Barber of Otley 8s. Od., Item funeral expenses £3 Os. Od.
TOTAL.....£41 3s. Od.

Granted to Jacobi Dade, Askwith, Cordwainer

Granted to Edward Thompson, Askwith, Cordwainer - his son

(The above stated on enclosed sheet.)

JAMES TENNANT, Scar House, (**Amcliffe** parish. Craven Deanery) 3 November, 1719

A true and perfect inventory of the goods **chattells** and **personale** effects of James **Tennant**, late of Scar House in **Langstrothdale** in the Parish of **Amcliffe** and County of York..... apprized and valued by us whose hands are subscribed this day and year above

Impris his purse and **apparell**, £20 5s. Od.

Item two **kine** and **caife**, £5 Os. Od.

Item two horses with **sadles** and horse furniture, £3 13s. Od.

Item in the **BODYSTEAD** OF THE HOUSE one clock, chairs, table etc., £2 10s. Od.

Item in the PARLOUR one square table and **haife** a dozen **ofchaires**, 10s. Od.

Item in the PARLOUR CHAMBER one bedstead, table, press and chairs, £1 10s. Od.

Item in the BUTTERY CHAMBER one bed and bedding, one haife dozen of cane **chaires**, £3 15s. Od.

Item in the BODYSTEAD CHAMBER one round table, one dozen chaires and chest drawers, £4 7s. Od.

Item in the BODYSTEAD **GARRETT** 3 beds and bedding and..... £3 Os. Od., Item wooden...of dairy...£1 Os. Od., Item three brass pans, one brass pott £1 6s. 8d., Item pewter dishes and candlesticks 13s. 4d

Item cartwheels and husbandry gear, £1 5s. Od., Item hay £3 Os. Od. Item and other iron ware, £1 Os. Od.

Item one pocket watch, £2 Os. Od.

Item iron **tooles** in the **CLOSSETT**, 10s. Od., Item poultry, 10s. Od. **Itembookes**, 10s. Od., Item..... and5s. Od.

Item debts owing the **dec'd** by Benjamin£9 Os. Od., Item by George Brown suppose desperate, £21 Os. Od., Item 2 bills at **Wakefield** the sum not yet known. Item one bond of one Ann... desperate, £105 Os. Od., Item one bill of one **Chipendale**, £19 10s. Od., Item one bill of one..... desperate, £8 Os. Od., Item one bill of one Jackson desperate, £27 10s. Od.

TOTAL.....£246 10s. Od.

Apprized by us
George Mason, Christopher **Simpson**, Joseph Mitten

ANTHONY MYERS, yeoman, **Farfield**, (**Addingham** parish. Craven Deanery 1697/8) Appraised 14 February 1697/8, proved 13 July, 1698.

Apparel, purse and money, funeral **expences** deducted, £5 Os. Od.

IN THE **HOUSEBODY** one iron range, reckon, jacks and **strikening** knife, 5s. Od., 5 brass pans, one little brass pot, 15s. Od., One old cupboard, a square table, 1 Is. 6d., 8 pewter dishes, 3 **pottingers**, one salt, one candlestick, 6s. Od., 3 chairs, one **longsettle**, 2s. Od., 5 shelves, 2 window curtains, one sieve. Is. 6d.

IN THE BUTTERY, 16 wooden bowls, 2 water gallons, and a **piggon**, 4s. Od., One little table, one **forme**, one little board, 3s. 6d.

IN THE WASH HOUSE one dashboard, a **crattch**, one pott, one brewing **tubb** and other odd things, 2s. Od.

IN THE **MILKHOUSE** 2 **butterkitts** and the butter therein, £1 5s. Od. One **chim** and one stand. Is. Od.

