RYLSTONE

RICHARD SCOSTHROP 1628-1661

[Throughout, ‘Rilston’ is given today’s style, and 17th century spelling, punctuation and paragraphs are modernised while preserving all words and syntax.]

A minute of Settle Monthly Meeting held on ‘11th mo. 3rd, 1704’ [3rd January 1705] records what was remembered of the time in and around 1652 when little groups of Friends came to the area as members of a band of a hundred or more who were travelling through the north of England and beyond to spread or ‘publish’ the Quaker message. These ‘first publishers of Truth’, men and women, were inspired, led and empowered by deep experience of the Light, the Spirit, or God. Their faithfulness to the experience enabled them to risk and to undergo much violence and imprisonment, from which numbers died. A modern list selects 66 of them to call ‘the valiant sixty’.

Memories were being dredged up and recorded as part of a nationwide oral history project that had been in hand for some years, and one is thankful for those with the foresight to arrange this in time to catch memories of those days first-hand, or second at most. The immediate cause for local action in 1704 was a request from the Second Day’s Morning Meeting in London, so called because on Monday mornings any ‘weighty’ Friends who happened to be in town met to consider Quaker books and pamphlets proposed for publication. If they thought this ‘first publishers’ project would make a good book, so it did, but not for another two centuries.

Settle monthly meeting’s 1705 minute was published in modern language by James Backhouse as an appendix to his book *The Life and Correspondence of William and Alice Ellis of Airton* (1849). This and similar accounts from elsewhere were finally edited by Norman Penney and published in 1907 as *The first publishers of Truth, being early records … of the introduction of Quakerism into the counties of England and Wales,* a book commonly spoken of as ‘First Publishers of Truth’ or ‘FPT’.

The process followed by Settle monthly meeting can be read in their minute book kept now in the Brotherton Library of Leeds University. Their area had six local meetings. The easternmost was Rylstone (‘Scalehouse’ till 1675) because in 1669 the nearby meetings of Skipton, Bradley, Lothersdale, Farfield, and others eastwards to the edge of York, had been put into Knaresborough monthly meeting. It seems sad that they drove this boundary between Skipton and Rylstone meetings which had closely cooperated from 1657 till 1660 to host general meetings of northern Friends and then the first Yearly Meeting of the Society. However, links between Rylstone and Malhamdale were so close that the boundary could scarcely have been drawn otherwise.

Rylstone local meeting, like monthly meeting’s other five, was asked for details. All responded. Monthly meeting then appointed a committee of four men to put the responses into one document. They were ‘to write over the said accounts, in order to fit them to be sent to the Quarterly Meeting’ and thence to London.

So, after that ‘writing over’, we cannot be sure that what we have are the very words of Rylstone Friends, but our version reads vividly authentic. It names two local members who accepted the Quaker message and travelled preaching it, John Hill and Richard Scosthrop. Though they are not named among the 66 ‘valiant sixty’, we are free to make our own list with them included.

An oddity is that Richard is commented upon under the heading of ‘Scalehouse’ and John under that of ‘Rilston’, though the name ‘Scalehouse’ meeting had disappeared in 1675 when the premises had come into non-Quaker ownership. It suggests that Friends were meeting in the two places in the 1650s and 1660s. Since they had no designated places to meet, we cannot know (and this is not the place to discuss) the homes and barns they met in, or which individuals habitually attended at each.

**John Hill** is written of in a separate paper.

**Richard Scosthrop** was born 15 of 4th month 1628, i.e. 15 June 1628. ‘Born to some estate’, they wrote of him, so his birth and inheritance are surely on record. Maybe they have not yet been found because of uncertainty over his name. It was his surname that proved troublesome. ‘Scosthrop’ is a village and township in Malhamdale, but Rylstone Friends wrote him as Scosterop, and elsewhere he became Scostroph, Costhorp and Costroppe. In an epistle addressed to Friends and attributed to him, though first published in 1663 after his death, he is named as ‘Richard Scochthrap’! Did he suffer from diffidence, or a lisp, or dialectal sounds, in speaking his name?

John Whiting 1656-1722 had a printed copy of that epistle and wrote on it: ‘This R. Sc. (as I heard Leonard Fell relate at my house in the year 1691) prophesied in the prison at London as Friends was discoursing of Friends’ sufferings, he sitting by, said, “Five and twenty years hence, and the [Quaker] church shall have rest”. And just according to the time, so it came to pass.’ The date of his saying this cannot have been later than 1660 or 1661, making his ‘prophesy’ relate to about 1685, when James II came to the throne and Quakers became beneficiaries of the King’s toleration towards Roman Catholicism. Leonard Fell 1624-1699 would be 35 or 36 when hearing Richard say that and 67 when telling John of it. See Norman Penney’s edition of George Fox’s Journal (1911), II. 380.

The account written in 1705 must be read in full -

Richard had been ‘a persecutor of Friends, but the hand of the Lord was heavy upon him so that he sought to those whom he had sorely abused and made confession to repentance, and after received mercy from the hand of God. And the Lord’s power grew strong in him, so that he was made to declare the favour of God to mankind, and became an able minister of the Gospel, and travelled into Scotland, and many other places in this nation, to turn men from Darkness to Light. And though he was born to some estate, yet for his love to the Lord Jesus Christ lost it all, and spent his day in His service, and died in his travel beyond the sea. And his memory is sweet this day amongst his brethren.’

When reading the moving tribute in those concluding words, it is well to recall that Richard’s friends at Rylstone in 1704 had not seen him since before he set sail in 1661, yet his personality remained vivid 43 years later.

On 15 April 1654 Thomas Taylor of Carleton near Skipton, himself travelling to spread the Quaker message, wrote to Margaret Fell of Swarthmoor Hall reporting on his work. We can read a 17th century copy of the letter in Friends House Library. Thomas says he had met Friends in Littondale, he had attended a ‘pretty, sweet’ meeting at Scalehouse, ‘and so came on to a place called Silsden on this side of Skipton where on the last first day [Sunday] my brother [Christopher] and I had a goodly meeting both of Friends and others [i.e. a public meeting] where the power of the Lord was so great that one of the greatest contenders and wranglers thereabout was so under that, the meeting being over, he confessed he had no power to oppose … and so we came to a place called Stubbinghouse near Bingley …’. At this point in writing his letter he sees he must break off to add that on the way past Carleton he called in home where ‘we had a little meeting amongst natural friends and former acquaintances’.

Thomas Taylor with his local contacts, and writing here as he does, surely knew already of that troublemaker who, after disrupting the meeting at Silsden, was there and then won over. We cannot prove it, but one is bound to surmise that the man was Richard Scosthrop, with his convincement occurring in April 1654.

He was soon involved in spreading the Quaker message. Later, evidently, in 1654 he was imprisoned at Chester in an inhumanly tiny cell nicknamed ‘little ease’. In Yorkshire two events, in 1655 and 1660, are recorded by Joseph Besse in *Sufferings of Early Quakers: Yorkshire* (1753), 95 and 97 as follows, but these are Besse’s summaries and a job still to do is to transcribe at the Brotherton Library the manuscript from which he worked since it may give more vivid detail.

In 1655 at Leeds he had an unusual involvement: ‘Richard Scostroph carrying William Simpson’s clothes, who passed naked though the town at Leeds, as a sign unto the people, was insulted by the rabble, and knocked down, where he lay bleeding, till some came and lifted him up, and pulled the blood out of his mouth and nose, his head and face being much bruised’. At that time it was a recognised way of demonstrating to ‘walk naked’; we believe it meant naked from waist up. William had done the same at Skipton where too the ‘rabble’ reacted violently.

On 22 January 1660 ‘Richard Scostroph and several others were sorely beaten and abused at a meeting in York, whence they were haled out one by one by the rude people and soldiers’. It was an intolerant period in York. Within a few weeks other Friends maybe provoked and certainly suffered violence, not only from the ‘rabble’ but also from ‘soldiers’, ‘the Mayor and two Aldermen’ and ‘musketeers’. At that time of political upheaval one can slightly understand the authorities in this capital City of the North becoming worried over unusual public behaviour by strangers.

Rylstone Friends in 1705 (or the four men who ‘wrote over’ their account) seem not to have known that Richard’s travels ‘beyond the sea’ form a remarkable tale that had been recounted by his friend Daniel Baker in a book published in 1662 with the approval of that same Second Morning Committee.

A new book *Daniel Baker, Quaker Extraordinary* (2010) by Molly Braithwaite of Devon reveals much about this perhaps more able and forceful companion of Richard in overseas travel. Daniel’s parents were Great Yarmouth folk but he was born in London on 17th February 1628. Thus, he was just four months older than Richard.

Few if any today have known the same spiritual exhilaration, guidance and empowerment as many of those early Friends: the sense of living together in the Kingdom of Heaven. Without that experience we can scarcely credit the compulsion that drove them to risk and suffer untold hardship and deprivation in following their leadings to publish the Quaker message. Daniel and Richard were led to speak of that message with Sultan Mohammed IV in Turkey. It may seem a ridiculous project, but it was not. In May or June 1658 Mary Fisher aged about 35 had gained audience of the Sultan, a young man aged 17, with his great men about him. As WC Braithwaite told it in *The Beginnings of* *Quakerism* (1923), 423, abbreviating William Sewell’s account in *The History of the Quakers* (1795), II, 472-4:

‘Bidden to speak her message, she stayed a while before she began, weightily pondering what to say. The Sultan told her not to fear, but to speak the word of the Lord to them, neither more nor less, for they had good hearts and could hear it. Then she spoke through an interpreter what was on her mind, the Turks listening with much gravity and attention. When she had ended, the Sultan said he had understood every word, and it was the truth. He invited her to stay in the country, saying that they felt respect for one who had come so far with a message to them from God.’

So Daniel and Richard would be following up Mary Fisher’s friendly interview. It was clearly their personal concern, but as Braithwaite saw it they were ‘despatched by English Friends’, evidently being deemed suitable for the job. For this authorised mission, if they needed help with expenses a fund was available. This brings us straight back to Scalehouse. There and at Skipton between 1658 and 1661 a series of meetings were held, gathering representative Friends from the entire north of England. Expenses incurred in spreading the message were on their agenda. A national fund was being built up, and on 24 June 1658 they issued from Scalehouse an appeal to Friends nationwide:

Having heard of great things done by the might power of God in many nations beyond the seas, whither He has called forth many of our dear brethren and sisters to preach the everlasting Gospel ... who are now in strange lands in great straits and hardships in the daily hazard of their lives … we do therefore … cheerfully agree … to move and stir up the hearts of Friends … freely and liberally to offer up unto God of their earthly substance … to be speedily sent up to London …that the hands of those who are beyond the seas in the Lord’s work may be strengthened … .

When the two set sail in May 1661 Daniel was 33 and Richard 32. They began the journey with two other young men, Henry Fell and John Stubbs, but theirs is another story. It seems all four sailed first to Holland, changing ships there.

In Friends House Library in 1989 I transcribed the relevant pages of the 1662 book mentioned above, starting at p.91. This account is by Daniel Baker and differs in detail from George Fox’s hearsay one quoted below. It should be noted that, under a treaty of Queen Elizabeth, England enjoyed extraterritorial rights for protecting its traders in Smyrna (east of the Bosphorus), exercised by our ambassador in Constantinople, and that Smyrna had an expatriate English community. The island of ‘Zant’ (today, It. *Zante*, Gk.*Zakynthos*), off the west coast of Greece, lay under Venetian rule so sailings to and from Italy called here. That Daniel learnt of Richard’s death and its date is suggestive of English speakers among its residents.

Here, then, is Daniel’s account. For clarity some verbiage is omitted.

Here followeth somewhat relating to the Travel and Service of D[aniel] B[aker] …travelling from one nation to another people with three more brethren …We set forth the 16th of the third month [16 May 1661] …from Gravesend ... and at the end of 44 days we arrived at Leghorn in Italy, where we gave a certain sound of our … message of salvation ... amongst the men of our own nation, the Jews and others …

[A]fter that we had waited upon the Lord to understand His good will and pleasure, He … ordained us to be separated, viz. John Stubbs and Henry Fell to pass on towards Alexandria, and my dear brother and companion, Richard Scosthrop, with me, to pass eastward to Smyrna and Constantinople in Asia; and after a little season we parted … [A]nd when 24 days were finished, having (in the mean time) touched a little season at the Island of Zant, we arrived at Smyrna.

But … immediately at our coming there was not a little stir ... with threatenings from the apostate Christians, especially men … (of our own nation) against us … but our living testimony was sounded in their ears notwithstanding …Their threatenings increased daily ... So they forth with sent a message from Smyrna to … Constantinople, to the King’s Ambassador of England, and besought him to expel us out from … Asia.

[The Ambassador did as requested, by warrant dated 19 July 1661 and addressed to England’s Consul in Smyrna –

Whereas we are informed that there is lately arrived with the Zant frigate one Daniel Baker, with his companion, commonly called Quakers, with intention to come up to this Court;

And because we have experience that the carriage of that sort of people is ridiculous, and is capable to bring dishonour to our nation besides other ill conveniences that may be downed to them in particular, and to the English in general:

We therefore will and require you to give a stop to the said Quakers from proceeding any further in their journey either to Constantinople or the present court of the Grand Signor, the great Emperor of the Turks, or to any other place where our authority extends, shipping them away either directly for England, or any other part where they shall choose to embark;

And we do hereby require all officers and members of the factory, and masters and officers of ships, to be aiding and assisting to you herein;

And for so doing, this shall be your warrant.]

And forthwith this Warrant was dispatched with a messenger from the Ambassador’s court in Constantinople, to Smyrna …and they put the same Warrant in execution, and sent a Turkish Janisary, and a Dragerman, that were officers under the Consul of the English nation, and they came with Harmols (viz. called Porters) with Cain’s weapons, and fetched us from our lodging before the Consul. [A]nd the man was courteous and moderate, and had his ear open to what we in the reverence and fear of the Lord then said unto him, which was his honour, …

[H]e [the Consul] desired that we might not take it ill as from him … in doing as he was obliged in the prosecution of the Warrant, which summoned all officers and members of the factory, with masters and officers of ships, to be aiding and assisting to surprise and banish two innocent, naked, harmless men …

[A]nd we let the Consul first know at our first coming, that we owned his place of authority, and were ready to submit to anything that was just and equitable ...

So I cleared my conscience … and the Consul seemed to be unwilling to use violence against us that at our departure prayed for them that hated us without a cause ….

[B]ut … the living God … did not only dispense the visitation of His love and salvation day by day among them, but he visited them also with the strokes of His displeasure, even unto death and destruction: And surely He smote and took away the chiefest and others of them daily …

And we were sent away as prisoners …

Now we had spoken for a passage by a Dutch ship, to have gone from thence to Constantinople, but before the ship departed Smyrna the Warrant came to the Consul’s hands … And … such like dealings JS and HF our brethren found at Alexandria, from whom they also were banished.

And on this wise being rejected, despised, banished out of Asia from Smyrna, in about eight days we arrived at the Island Zant, where my dear brother and companion in sufferings … was visited with sickness nigh unto death; but the word and commandment of the Lord ordered me to pass through part of Italy, and my face was set towards Venice; … yet it was so that the poor lamb was not capable in body to travel with me, by reason of weakness … [A]nd he being fully persuaded and satisfied in his own mind that I was to pass onward, in the tender love of our God he did the more constrain me, I finding some unwillingness to leave him in that condition … But in the heavenly will and peace of our God … parted asunder. [So Daniel took ship to Venice.]

[A]nd it came to pass that he laid down his body there in about two days after.

George Fox in his Journal for 1661 (dictated years later, largely from memory) tells it differently, and was scathing of Daniel for leaving Richard behind.

And in 1661 we had many Friends went beyond the seas. And John Stubbs and Richard Costroppe and Henry Fell was moved to go towards China and Prester John’s country. And so no masters of ships would carry them. And so at last they got a warrant from the King, and the East India Company would not obey it, nor the masters of their ships.

And then they went into Holland and would have got passage there. But no passage could they get. And then they took shipping to go to Alexandria in Egypt, and so to go by the caravans from thence.

And Daniel Baker and Richard Costroppe took another ship to go to Smyrna. And Daniel Baker left Richard Costroppe sick in a ship where he died. For he went with Daniel contrary to his own freedom. And so that hard-hearted man left him in his sickness, but he lost his condition.

But John Stubbs and Henry Fell came to Alexandria in Egypt. And the English consul banished them from thence … .

The statement that Richard ‘went with Daniel contrary to his own freedom’ is enigmatic. George Fox was perhaps inclined against Daniel. Norman Penney, in annotating *The Journal of George Fox* (1911), II, 380, deemed it ‘scarcely warranted by the facts’ to say Daniel Baker was hard-hearted. He cites cases in 1659 in England when Daniel offered to take the place in gaol of other Friends, and in 1661 in Malta when he bravely confronted the chief Inquisitor on behalf of two Quaker prisoners of the Inquisition there. Molly Braithwaite too (p.48) considers George Fox’s comment ‘unwarranted and unjust’.

The Consul comes out of it well, but it shames one that the masters of ships often refused to take Quakers as passengers, and that the mission was finally frustrated, not by any difficulty made by the Turks, but by fellow Christians and countrymen.