

Fashions among early Friends

DAILY LIFE FOR EARLY FRIENDS

Margaret Fell was an amazing communicator: she authored twenty-four pamphlets and books in her lifetime, and today we still have 164 of her letters. Although she played a key role as coordinator of the Quaker movement in the 17th century, this has long been ignored in favour of a single letter of hers - and that about fashion! This letter, written in 1700, decried the new trend of wearing a simple uniform of muted colours, or Quaker grey. She wrote (in the style of the time – English spelling and punctuation had not yet been standardised):

“But Christ Jesus saith, that we must take no thought to what wee shall eat, or what wee shall drink, or what we shall put on: but bids us consider, the Lillies how they grown in more Royalty than Solomon [Matt. 6:28-31]: But Contrary to this wee must looke at no Colours, nor make any thing that is changeable Collours as the hilles are, not sell them, nor wear them. But wee must bee all in one Dress and one Collour; This is a silly poor Gospell, It is more fit for us, To be Covered with Gods Eternall Spirit, and Cloathed in his eternall Light which Leads us & Guides us into Righteousness, and to live Righteously & Justly & hollyly in this profane evil world: This is the Clothing that God putts upon us, and likes, & will bless... “

What did 17th century English women wear?

In England, clothing had long been a reliable indication of one’s social status. However, under Henry VIII, a new class of merchants or free burghers began to develop, blurring distinctions of status shown by clothing. Elizabeth I’s eight (!) proclamations on fashion indicate that fashion nevertheless remained important. The proclamations were intended to prevent young men getting into debt from buying fancier clothes than were within their means. For example, a 1577 proclamation detailed who may wear what type of cloth.

Wool, linen, hempcloth...

Wool has been produced in Europe for millennia, and in England it was a main industry from medieval times. Its warmth must have been appreciated: skirts, and bodices, were made out of wool, and women wore jackets or shawls over their bodices, which would also be made from wool. Sarah Fell, one of the daughters of Margaret and Thomas Fell, kept the household accounts, and five years of her 1670s accounts have been preserved. These indicate that the wool sheared from sheep at Swarthmoor Farm might have been spun here, and then sent out for weaving and dyeing, as well as tailoring.

Wool was not used for everything: linen was used for



Paintings such as Vermeer's 'The Milkmaid' give us an idea of 17th-century dress

Quaker Week 2016 at Swarthmoor Hall

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

Sunday 2 October: Introduction day to Experiment with Light
10am - 4pm. Book your place by ringing 01229 583204

Sunday 2 October: 1.30 - 4.30pm - free entry to the historic Old Hall with tours and a chance to join a (short) Meeting for Worship.

Wednesday, 5 October: 10.30 am - 4.30pm, tour and explore the Old Hall, at no charge.

Quaker folk songs: two special performances of modern folk ballads about Quakers and their tradition by Eden Thomas. Concerts start at 7pm on **Wednesday 5 October** in the Conference Room, and at 12noon on **Thursday 6 October** in the Barn Café.



Sketches of English women by Wenceslas Hollar (1607-1677), resketched by Charles William Jefferys. Library and Archives Canada, e010999592

clothes worn next to the skin, such as shirts, shifts, and kerchiefs that were worn around the neck. It doesn't seem that flax was grown for fibres on Swarthmoor Hall land, at least not in the 1670s, as Sarah Fell recorded paying for both holland, a coarse linen for tablecloths, and Scotch cloth, a linen made from nettle fibres which is finer and silkier than one made from flax. Hemp was grown, for rope-making: Sarah recorded payments such as 1674's 'by me pd Pegg Dodgson for workeinge at hay

& about pulling hempe & Line &c: 5: weeks & 4: days'.

The choice of clothesmaking material was broader than only wool or linen. For example, silk was available, and Sarah Fell records paying a taylor for labour and silk for her mother Margaret. Black silk lace was purchased. Flannel, a soft weave originally made from wool but now associated with cotton, was first used in England in the 17th century, and Sarah records buying a white flannel coat from her younger sister Rachel in 1674, when she would have been 21 years old, for their sister Mary (wife of Thomas Lower, who at that time was imprisoned together with George Fox in Worcester). Other clothing bought for women of the Fell family included serge (probably wool); a heavy cloth called fustian which was originally woven from cotton; and calico, an unbleached, coarse cotton weave, was also acquired for use here at Swarthmoor Hall.

Fashion

The restoration of Charles II took place in 1660. Charles II was a flamboyant character who hid neither his mistresses nor his penchant for enjoyment. His desire to impact men's fashion, may have been in part to create a sense of distinction from the French. He was the king who oversaw the evolution from doublets to waistcoats under coats.

Shoes and hats

A brief look at the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, gives us a glimpse of leather shoes with one-inch heels for walking – and silk ones for indoors. Both had wooden soles and carved wooden heels, sometimes covered with leather. And a wonderful tall stove-pipe hat, which was made out of felted beaver pelts and remained a fashion for many years in rural Britain.



Women's walking shoe from the 1640s. V&A Museum.

A picture...

We can get the best ideas of what the Fell women wore, perhaps, from contemporary paintings and drawings of English women. We know that colour was not avoided: green and blue stockings were purchased, and petticoats were dyed red as well as dove and grey. As Margaret said in the 1700 epistle:

"... I see, That our blessed precious holy truth, that hath visited us from the beginning is kept under, and these silly outside Imaginary practices is Coming up, & practised with great zeale, which hath often grieved my heart: Now, I have set before you Life and Death, and Desires you to Chuse Life ([Deut. 30:19], and God and his Truth."

Have you visited Swarthmoor Hall recently and tried on the 17th-century clothes made by volunteers?

Come have a look in the Thomas Rawlinson room!

- Alexandra Bosbeer

A visit to Swarthmoor Hall in June

Reflections by German Friend Kerstin Mangels

From the railway station at Ulverston we walk along a narrow footpath to the legendary Swarthmoor Hall estate. I had read that in 1652 an itinerant preacher named George Fox came to the house where Judge Fell and his wife, Margaret, lived with their eight children. This visit had huge consequences. It caused a lot of trouble, brought great joy, and led to many people being imprisoned during the following decades. And so Quakerism came into being ...

More than 350 years ago this was the starting point for George Fox and Margaret Fell as they set out to spread their message, a message which still defines Quakers today: the possibility of a direct relationship with God without the mediation of Bible or priests; the equal dignity and worth of women and men; nonviolence; and, above all, the teaching of the “Inward Light”.

Today this “cradle of Quakerism” belongs to British Quakers. The old Hall can be viewed from top to bottom (there is also an excellent audio guide). And Swarthmoor Hall offers courses and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. You can't get closer to Quaker history than this!

During worship at Swarthmoor Hall (there is meeting for worship on Mondays and Thursdays) I realise that the very first Quakers gathered here for worship – and suddenly all the dusty history comes to life for us. On Sunday we walk down the road to the meeting house which George Fox bought and had converted for the use of local Quakers. We are greeted by local Friends as we enter. And then the meeting for worship feels very special. Meetings for worship have been held in these places for hundreds of years! And we are now part of this history!

We stayed in a lovely room at the back of the house. The dawn chorus is included along with breakfast. There is a grand view out of the window of the garden, the meadow, and Ulverston with its “steeplehouse”. The beautiful weather allowed us to take all our meals out into the garden on a tray and enjoy them there. We took time to relax. And we went for walks and days out (there are good bus and rail services). And yet we didn't get to see all of the beautiful area by any means. One week wasn't long enough. We plan to come back again....

Courses at Swarthmoor Hall this autumn:

Addressing the seed of Abraham: Margaret Fell's mission to the Jews

Friday 28 - Sunday 30 October 2016

Open for Transformation: Being Quaker

Friday 4 - Sunday 6 November 2016

Experiment with Light

Friday 11 - Sunday 13 November 2016



Apply now via the Woodbrooke website - residential and non-residential rates available

Sunbrick Burial Ground by Stevie Kraye

A ewe with her lamb, that fled
as we came in, hovers at the entrance
scratching her backside on the jamb
as she waits for us to leave.

Not that the grass in here is any richer
for the dust beneath. After all those centuries
there can't be much virtue remaining
from two hundred buried Quakers.

A straggle of trees round the boundary
form the honour guard: one nipped hawthorn
holding back its blossom, a half-dozen
unsentimental ash like old soldiers

brutally barbered by the wind,
easing tired backs out of the rock, dangling
fag-ends of bud – and one field maple
flaunting tassels and fluorescent green.

She'd have liked that, old Margaret Fox,
who loved brave colours
and scorned the uniform of Quaker grey -
A silly, poor Gospel: It's the spirit

inside that counts. She probably wouldn't
have minded that the chiselled inscription
is already half obliterated, or that some far-off day
all sign of human presence will be wiped.

So we walk up to the trig-point, up
into today's May weather and the big clean sky,
above the burial ground and the stone circle
and the Morecambe mud-flats.

High above the golf course and the chemical works,
above the nuclear power station, above
the stark-white wind turbines we take our stand
with larks and limestone and nibbled turf.



Poem by Stevie Kraye. Originally published in Stevie's collection *New Monkey* (Indigo Dreams publishing, 2014). Used by permission.

Margaret Fox, the 'mother' of the Quaker movement, is buried at Sunbrick, on Birkrigg Common in Cumbria.

Friends of the Truth and their origins

Here at Swarthmoor Hall, one might imagine that early Quaker history began with George Fox's first arrival in June 1652. However, he had already made a name for himself as an itinerant preacher, and meetings of people calling themselves Friends of the Truth or Children of the Light were already being held as early as 1644 or 1646, in the middle of the upheaval of civil war. For example, Elizabeth Hooton hosted religious meetings at her house near Nottingham, and she and others became convinced after George Fox – let's use his initials as he often did himself and refer to him as GF - visited their meeting in 1647. During the following years GF took every opportunity to preach to people along the way.

What was his message? He told everyone that they could find the inward light of Christ within themselves. He himself had discovered – at a time when he was in great despair and could find no-one to help him – that “there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition”. GF wasn't just a preacher. He “walked the walk” as well as “talking the talk”. He spoke the truth at all times and refused to swear. He refused to kow-tow to anyone and treated everyone with equal (dis)respect. He was prepared to suffer the consequences of falling foul of the authorities. Unlike so many “professors” of the Christian faith, he was authentic and therefore able to preach with authority. His preaching resonated especially with Seekers who were already accustomed to waiting in silence until God made his (or her) presence felt and inspired someone to minister.

Much of GF's message was not new at all. For example, the Lollards of the late 15th and early 16th century, who were particularly strong in the West Riding of Yorkshire, read the Bible for themselves, rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, rejected any role for clergy, and had no use for baptism. It is possible that GF encountered Anabaptists and Baptists in the 1640s, although this is difficult to ascertain as "Anabaptist" was a term used in derision for many separatist sects. Anabaptists baptised adult converts whether or not they had been baptised as children. Hence they were called re-baptisers. They believed in the equality of all believers, including women, had no ordained clergy, and rejected state control of the church. A number of other contemporary movements may have influenced GF.

The Family of love: God within each believer

Around 1580 “Familists” were especially strong in East Anglia and the North of England. They believed that the scriptures could only be understood by the spirit of God which was to be found within every believer. They were anti-clerical and opposed to tithes. Like Anabaptists, they were opposed to a state church. They asserted that both heaven and hell were to be found on earth. It is hardly surprising that George Fox and other early Quakers were sometimes accused of being Familists.

Gridletonians: Spirit underpinning the Word

The village of Grindleton at the foot of Pendle Hill produced a sect called Grindletonians. One of the key figures, Roger Brearley, was the curate of Grindleton from 1615 to 1622. In 1617, fifty legal charges were brought against Roger Brearley and his congregation. These included their “heretical” beliefs that “a motion rising from the spirit is more to be rested in than the Word itself” and that “it is a sin to believe the Word ... without a motion of the spirit”. At least one of the Grindletonians, Thomas Bancroft, later became a Quaker.

Ranters

Over the years George Fox had his work cut out distinguishing Quakers from Ranters and controlling Ranterist tendencies within the Quaker movement. Both Quakers and



A 1799 engraving said to be a copy of a 1654 portrait of George Fox.

Ranters believed in the inward Light, but some Ranters claimed that this liberated them from conventional morality. Some of them rejected Christianity altogether, and some were atheist. When the Ranter movement lost momentum around the middle of the 17th century, some became Quakers.

There seem to me to be some parallels between England in 1652 and the world in which we live today. These are uncertain times. There is a huge gulf between rich and poor. War and the aftermath of war are not far away. As Quakers we value truth, equality and peace. Many of us are convinced that, whilst GF's message was first and foremost a spiritual one, it has inevitable political implications. So we engage in political action to promote economic justice, peace, and sustainability. Some of us might see ourselves as descendents of the Levellers, the radical wing of the English revolution. But shared values are not enough to sustain us. We need to draw strength from "the life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars". And we need to depend on the guidance of the spirit. Only then can we "walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone".

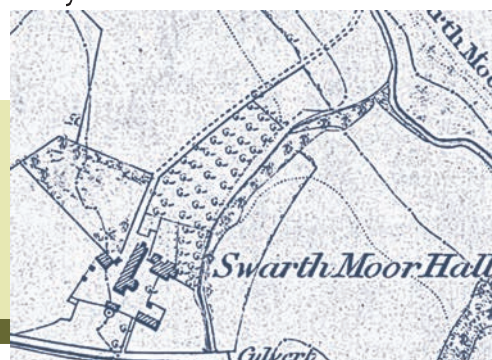
- Gordon Matthews

Further reading:

Moore, R (2000). *The Light in their consciences: the early Quakers in Britain 1646-1666*. Pennsylvania State Press.
Hill, C (1972). *The world turned upside down: radical ideas during the English revolution*. Penguin Books.

New garden guide

Have you visited the gardens at Swarthmoor Hall lately?
Do pick up a copy of the new garden guide!



Experiment with Light day at Swarthmoor Hall - Sunday 2 October

Quaker faith and life are not based on authority, but on experience. "This I know experimentally" said George Fox. But what is the experience? We shall attempt to find out in the lovely historic ambience of Swarthmoor Hall.

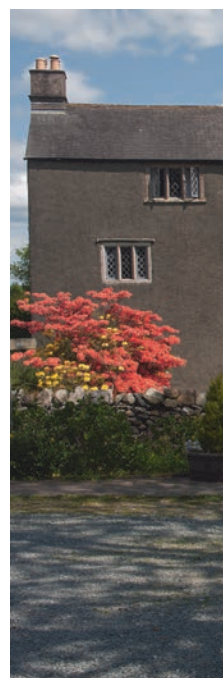
We shall look first at what the experience was, at the beginning of the Quaker movement. We shall then undertake an experiment to see whether that experience is still available to us. Part of this will be a meditation in which we try to experience the Light as early Friends understood it. This can be a searching and powerful experience. Finally, in small groups and in the larger group, we shall try to make sense of what happened and reflect on the significance of the Light for our lives today.

Rex Ambler's book, *Light to Live by*, explains how he discovered what has now become Experiment with Light; Friends have been practising Experiment with Light in Britain for twenty years and there are thought to be about 60 groups meeting regularly. To read more about Friends' responses to their practice, see the Experiment with Light Journal: <http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/resource.htm>.

The day will be facilitated by Helen Meads, Hilary Southall and Sasha Bosbeer. Helen researched the Experiment while studying for her degree at the University of Birmingham through Woodbrooke's Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies. She has been in the High Flatts Light group since 2000 and has been facilitating introductory workshops and retreats since 2007. Hilary has been in the Yealand Light group since 2008 and helped start the Kendal Light group in 2014. Sasha is currently Friend in Residence at Swarthmoor Hall.

- Helen Meads

To register for the event, please contact info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk or ring 01229 583 204.



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