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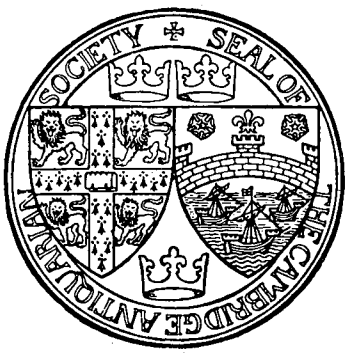

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for 1987

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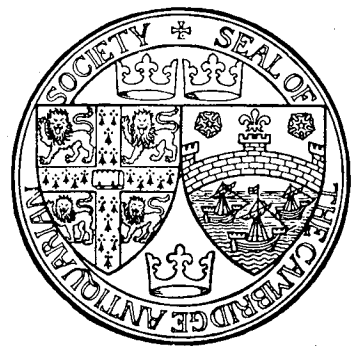

VOLUME LXXVI

for 1987

Published by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 1988

ISSN 0309-3606

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CONTENTS

Quakerism in Cambridge before the Act of Toleration (1653–1689)
LAUREL PHILLIPSON 1

Nomads in 'Waterland'? Prehistoric Transhumance and Fenland Archaeology
CHRISTOPHER EVANS 27

Ernest Greenfield's Excavations at Exning Roman Villa
C. J. WEBSTER 41

Denny Abbey: The Nuns' Refectory
JEM POSTER and DAVID SHERLOCK 67

Excavation at Riverside, Thompsons Lane, Cambridge
PAUL FIRMAN and JOYCE PULLINGER 83

Music at Jesus College, Cambridge, *c.* 1557–1679
IAN PAYNE 97

Royal Mandates for Degrees in the Reign of Charles II (1660-85):
An Aspect of the Crown's Influence in the University of Cambridge
JOHN TWIGG 105

The First Cottage of Clay Bats?
JOHN MCCANN 113

Index 122

QUAKERISM IN CAMBRIDGE BEFORE THE ACT OF TOLERATION (1653–1689)

LAUREL PHILLIPSON

INTRODUCTION

In historical terms, the formation of a new religious movement depends upon the combination of a popular enthusiasm, generally fuelled by social discontent, combined with a charismatic leadership able to give a definite form and purpose to the movement. Consolidation of that which had been revolutionary and prophetic into a new orthodoxy is a subsequent stage, generally undertaken by a young leadership grown older and more conservative or by a new generation. These strands may be seen clearly in the history of Quakerism in seventeenth-century Cambridge, sometimes picked out as separate elements contributing to the life of the Society of Friends in the area, sometimes twisted into a single skein. The absence until late in the century of a formal system of church government and the deliberate and continued absence of any clerical hierarchy or professional theology permitted the movement to reflect and respond to its intimate connection with the popular struggle for economic and political, as well as for spiritual and intellectual, emancipation.

THE BACKGROUND

> And surely, when I set before me the condition of these times, in which learning hath made her third visitation . . . as the excellency and vivacity of the wits of this age: the noble helps and lights which we have by the travails of ancient writers; the art of printing, which communicateth books to men of all fortunes; the openness of the world by navigation, which hath disclosed multitudes of experiments, and a mass of natural history; the leisure wherewith these times abound, . . . the present disposition of these times at this instant to peace; . . . I cannot but be raised to the persuasion, that this third period of time will far surpass that of the Graecian and Roman learning . . . [Bacon, 357–8].

As Sir Francis Bacon suggests, writing in 1605, the sixteenth century had been one of intellectual ferment and heroic optimism. During that century a new and radical idea first gained wide currency in England: that individuals could through observation and experiment learn truths which were not previously known. It is hard now to realize just how radical this idea was, though it was sufficient when spread about the country and taken in all its ramifications to destroy much of the authoritarian basis of traditional society. That century saw the first published English bibles, the dissolution of monasteries, and the spread to intellectuals and to the rising middle class of ideas once advocated by a few heretics. Here is not the place to trace the way the general climate of intellectual emancipation spread from the better educated to the general public, from London to the seaports and county towns, against the opposition of the traditional authorities: priests, magistrates and scholars. Nor can we do more than mention the way in which aspects of the Protestant Reformation, the 'new learning' in mathematics and applied sciences in contradistinction to the literary traditions of the universities, the translation of classical writings into English, and the wide publication of almanacs and textbooks were all closely interwoven and all contributed to the intellectual excitement and cultural instability which reached its peak at about the time of the Civil War.

By simply translating Bacon's celebration

of vivacity of wit, knowledge communicated to men of all fortunes, openness to new experiences and multitudes of experiments to a religious sphere, we might almost have a synopsis of the message of the early Quakers, so closely did seventeenth-century Quakerism reflect and give expression to the spirit of its time. It was a radical and youthful spirit; and we need not be surprised that many of its earliest advocates, including George Whitehead and James Parnell, who was active in Cambridge until shortly before his martyrdom in Colchester at the age of nineteen, were themselves young men and women. It is not a long step from the writing of Francis Bacon cited above to the countryman and weaver, George Fox's father, who, in 1654, thwacked his cane upon the ground, and said, 'I see, he that will but stand to the truth, it will carry him out' (Fox 1694, 190). Everywhere truth was becoming recognized as something separate and distinct from traditional authority, valued for its own sake regardless of its source. A single spirit was at work in the science, the politics and the religion of the time. The early Friends saw this spirit in religious terms and they insisted that God's inspiration, not formal rules and academically trained priests, should govern their lives.

Not everyone was able to appreciate the restless, striving and opinionated climate in which they lived. Many were confused by the widespread rejection of traditional values and some at all levels of the social scale resorted to personal initiatives and mob actions which led them into Ranterism, anarchy or mindless violence. It was also during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that many of the modern English principles of justice were hammered out and refined by bitter experience. While Quakers nationally bore a large share in helping to shape the country's legal system – William Penn's famous defence of the rights of the jurymen at his own trial is only one such example – this is a theme which will appear mainly by implication when we look more closely at developments in Cambridge.

In 1675 some of the collected works of James Parnell were published, prefaced by several testimonies written by prominent Friends. In one of these Stephen Crisp of Colchester refers to the situation in Essex twenty years earlier as something already of the past which all might not then recall. His comments might equally have applied to Cambridgeshire.

> For very many there was in that County, who were both weary and heavy laden with their Sins, and were as weary with running to and fro, to seek a Way out of them; and having travailed all Mountains, and all Hills and High Things, that could be travailed and tryed, and found no Deliverance; and some sate down concluding, If there was a Way God would manifest it; others concluded, There was no Way, but we must Dye in the Wilderness, and never see the Bread of Life; some others set their Wits on work, to find out and invent New Ways and Manners of Worshipping, but all was in vain; and great was the Darkness and Sorrow of those Days . . . [Parnell 1675, prelims 4].

In such times, all who spoke with an almost electric conviction, as did many of the early Friends, were bound to attract an alert audience; and their persistence in the face of real hardship could not but win them many converts. When George Fox died in 1691, Friends, of whom there were an estimated fifty- to sixty-thousand, were the largest group of nonconforming Christians in England and Wales and comprised an estimated one per cent of the total population (Rowntree 1904, 34).

Those who represented the established orthodoxy of Church and State, whatever the orthodoxy of the moment might be, recognized Quakers as advocating an independence which they could not control and which threatened their own positions in the existing social order. Staunchest of all defenders of traditional values were the universities, whose members, protected by the prevailing government, studied classical authorities in a traditional manner to prepare themselves to rule and administer the sacraments of the established church. Consequently, much of the earliest history of Quakerism in Cambridge is taken up with conflicts – not always verbal – between Friends and members of the University community. Enthusiastic Friends sometimes felt inspired, as we shall see, to denounce members of the University to their faces, while students and scholars could be extreme in their responses to what they regarded as the impudence of Friends. In

these early disputes some Cambridge aldermen and other town officials were to be found on either side, a few actively supporting Friends and others apparently remaining aloof. Townspeople and countryfolk who joined with Friends were of the same classes as generally supported the 'new learning' in all its branches. In Cambridge we know of James Allen, a barber/surgeon; William Brazier, a shoemaker; the aldermen James Blackley and Thomas Nicholson and their families; and merchants, day labourers, landowners and farmers, as well as townspeople who for a while flocked to the Quaker Meetings whether or not they actually identified themselves with the Friends.

Perhaps the earliest local popular movement with which we need be concerned was the opposition to the fen drainage schemes advanced in the second quarter of the seventeenth century by the Earl of Bedford who, together with thirteen associates, proposed to finance the drainage in exchange for a grant of 95,000 acres of the newly drained land. Had the scheme, which had royal support, been successful it would have deprived all who had no legal title to the land, but whose ancestors had inhabited and used it for more generations than anyone could remember. Not only were cottagers and fenmen threatened, but also the farmers and yeomen of the neighbouring uplands who pastured their cattle on the lush fen commons during the drier months and the townspeople who feared that drainage schemes would destroy their water-based trade. All used the fens by custom rather than by deed; and all saw their lives and livelihoods threatened.

From the late 1630s, and especially after his election to Parliament in 1640, Oliver Cromwell, who was himself a farmer renting land near St. Ives in 1633 and dependent upon fen grazing for his cattle, assisted the fenlanders in their protests against the drainage scheme, and especially against its disregard of local needs and of the rights of the poor. Probably it was largely on the strength of his position as a champion of local rights that Cromwell was able in the years 1642–44 to raise from Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and the Isle of Ely a determined body of men who opposed the king for political and economic reasons. Many of these men, the nucleus of the New Model Army, followed a local leader in a national cause for local reasons.

During the Civil War, fenlanders took the opportunity to destroy dikes and ditches and to re-occupy land from which they had been evicted, but in 1649 the drainage project on the Bedford Level was revived, Oliver Cromwell giving military protection to the engineers and prisoners of war engaged in the work and himself receiving a grant of 200 acres of the new land. The fenlanders then had reason to feel betrayed by their leader in the cause for which they thought they had fought. On a national level, too, many were learning that the new political order was for them no better than the old; and many within and without the army turned to the Levellers in their campaign for economic and social justice; and, as that movement was suppressed or outmanoeuvred, to the Quakers and their religious inspiration.

Many of the issues supported first by the New Model Army, then by the Levellers and the Quakers were identical: respect for the equal worth of every man, a desire that legal justice should apply to the poor and rich alike, mistrust of unearned wealth, opposition to tithes and to appropriations of common lands, the right to assemble at will and to have local and national grievances recognized by whatever government was in power. It is thus not surprising that some of the particular expressions given to these aims – such as a refusal to remove one's hat before so-called social superiors – were identical. Whether expressed in religious or in political terms, much of the theoretical justification of these movements was biblically inspired; and in many instances the same individuals were involved, changing from one political/religious allegiance to another, depending upon which was able to give the most effective voice to these popular concerns. John Lilburne, the staunch and radical Leveller, is perhaps the best known individual to have subscribed to each of these movements in turn, but he was one of many (Hill 1975, 379).

It happened, perhaps because their economic and social ideals were based on strong religious convictions, that the Quakers endured the longest; and to them were attracted some of Cambridge's most radical thinkers and protesters, men and women who had a passionate conviction in the divine rightness of their faith.

Evidence on the development of Quakerism in seventeenth-century Cam-

bridge is various. For the 1650s and 60s there are published accounts of the first visits of Friends travelling in the ministry: Mary Fisher, George Fox, James Parnell, George Whitehead and others. There are pamphlets of debate and controversy and some lists of the names of Friends who were sentenced by magistrates and jailed on a number of charges. From about 1670 onwards there are Quarterly and Monthly Meeting minute books (now housed in the Cambridgeshire County Records Office) whose generally terse entries record the changing circumstances of the meetings held in Cambridge and in the surrounding countryside. These make it clear that for most of the past three hundred and thirty years, the main local witness to Quaker beliefs has been made by Friends living on farms and in the villages of Cambridgeshire. Only during the seventeenth century and again since the resumption of Quaker worship in Cambridge in 1884 have Friends living in Cambridge itself been particularly active. Other valuable sources of information are the collection of Ely diocesan records and the well-catalogued manuscript and early pamphlet collections in the library at Friends House, in London. Among the Ely records, which are housed in the Cambridge University Library, are many dated instances of named individuals accused of not attending church, paying church rates and tithes, or having their children baptized, but only rarely can we be sure that the accused were Quakers, since a number of these testimonies were also held by members of other dissenting groups. The value of each of these collections is much enhanced by the knowledge and helpfulness of its custodians.

For readers wishing for more background information, the most important early exposition of Quaker theology is *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* by Robert Barclay, first published in Latin in 1676 and in English two years later. More recent summations are included in, *inter alia*, Geoffrey Hubbard's *Quaker by Convincement* and *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends*. The latter is published with periodic revisions by the London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, as is its companion volume, *Church Government*. Braithwaite's *The Beginnings of Quakerism* is the standard modern history of early Friends. The *Journal* of George Fox, Sewel's *The History of the Rise, Increase, and Progress of the People Called Quakers* and Besse's *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers*, which was compiled at the behest of Friends nationally, are among the more useful older histories.

CONTENDING SPIRITS, 1653–1659

> The Lord hath brought us to see the Education and fitting of the hireling Priests to their Ministry at Oxford and Cambridge, to be set up in the Apostacy, where there was a degenerating from the state of the True Church of Saints . . . these Priests have told us that Revelation and Inspirations from Heaven are long since ceased, contrary to Christ and his Apostles Doctrine, and therefore it is against our Consciences to sit under their Ministry, which they never received (nor had Commission for) from God [Whitehead 1661, 7–8].

The earliest event involving Friends in Cambridge, as recorded in Besse's great *Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers* was the visit of Elizabeth Williams and Mary Fisher in December 1653, when they discoursed with some scholars of Sidney Sussex College in what seems to have been more a slanging match than a reasoned debate.

> Whereupon the Scholars began to mock and deride them: The Women, observing the Froth and Levity of their behaviour, told them they were Antichrists, and that their College was a Cage of unclean Birds, and the Synagogue of Satan. Such severe Reprehensions are usually most offensive to those who most deserve them: Complaint was forthwith made to William Pickering, then Mayor, that two women were preaching: He sent a Constable for them, and examined them. . . . The Mayor grew angry, called them Whores, and issued his Warrant to the Constable to whip them at the Market-Cross till the Blood ran down their bodies; and ordered three of his serjeants to see that Sentence, equally cruel and lawless, severely executed [Besse: 84–5].

A short anonymous pamphlet published in

the following year makes it clear who was responsible for this dramatic reception: 'These are to give notice to all men, that none of the justices of the Town had any hand in this barbarous and unlawful act, saving Mr William Pickering Mayor. . . .' Subsequently, an increasing number of travelling Friends felt called to testify in Cambridge where they were received apparently with a sort of hostile curiosity. For although Friends may previously have been little known in Cambridge, many were aware of their preaching and activities in other parts of the country.

The next that we know to arrive on the scene was James Parnell, who in July 1654 posted in the market place two papers denouncing in general terms the corruptions of magistrates and priests. For these he was imprisoned for about six months before being tried by an assize court for publishing seditious and scandalous papers. The jury found that the papers bearing his name, and which he identified as such in court, were indeed his, but did not allow the charge against him. He was released by the court, but given a pass which identified him as a 'Rogue and Vagabond' and escorted from the town. According to one account, he stopped about three miles out of town, where he was visited the next day by a friendly magistrate and where he affected many conversions (Smith 1906, 40). Parnell remained in and near Cambridgeshire, preaching and holding meetings wherever he could gather an audience: in Fenstanton, Littleport, Ely (where he established a regular Meeting of about sixty Friends) and Soham, where he was arrested on a first day, the 18th of the 3rd Month (May) 1655. Alderman Blackley sent a warrant for his release the following day; and that is our first named reference to any Cambridge resident who had joined or was about to join with the visiting Friends in forming a local Quaker community.

Most conspicuous of Parnell's opponents in debate were not members of the established church, but the Baptists who were also busily seeking converts in and around Cambridge. He published an account of one of these debates, held in early 1655 at the instigation of Mr. Hind, a Cambridge tanner.

> Several times when I have come to the Town of Cambridge, I have heard a Rumour of a Boasting and Daring that sprung from the People called Baptists . . . concerning a Dispute with me . . . therefore I being in the Town, sent them Word . . . to let me know their Minds in writing, if they intended such a Thing. . . . And so it was concluded to be of the Twentieth Day, called Friday, of the Second Month, called April: So when the Hour came which was appointed, we were disappointed of the Meeting-Place which the Baptists had provided. . . . So then they would have had us to have met in the Yard, but there could be no Order for Multitude of Rude People and Brutish Schollars . . . so I passed to a Friend's House hard by, and there continued declaring the Truth, as I was moved, to the People, and there the idle Drones followed . . . with their Turbulent, Vain Contending Spirits, Opposing and Gainsaying the Truth. . . . So then word came, that the Baptists were in the Shire-House, in the Castle-Yard, and had sent for me: and so I went up thither. . . . So then I passed into the Castle-Yard, then the wild and brutish Schollars, who had plotted together (as I was after informed) to abuse me, and they flocked together about me like Wild Beasts of the Forest, and there I was tossed as amongst the Raging Waves of the Sea to & fro, and at last was hurried into a House, where I got shut of those Caterpillars, which the Nation swarms with. . . . Oh Cambridge: Is this the Fruit of thy Ministry which thou hast so long professed . . . And are these thy Professors of Divinity? [Parnell 1675, 196–207].

Also present at the time of this debate were two other Friends travelling in the ministry: Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill. These two remained at Alderman Blackley's house while Parnell went on to Castle Hill. That same evening a meeting of Friends and some others was held in a private house and, the following day, two meetings 'in a yard, at which many persons were convinced' (Blackhouse 1828, 49). As near as it can be pinned down, that evening meeting in April 1655 may represent the start of regular Friends Meetings in Cambridge. That we read of meetings being held in a private house, probably that of James Blackley, in the Shire House and in an open yard (probably in Littleport, see Burrough and Howgill 1654) implies that Friends were not yet numerous enough or long enough established to require

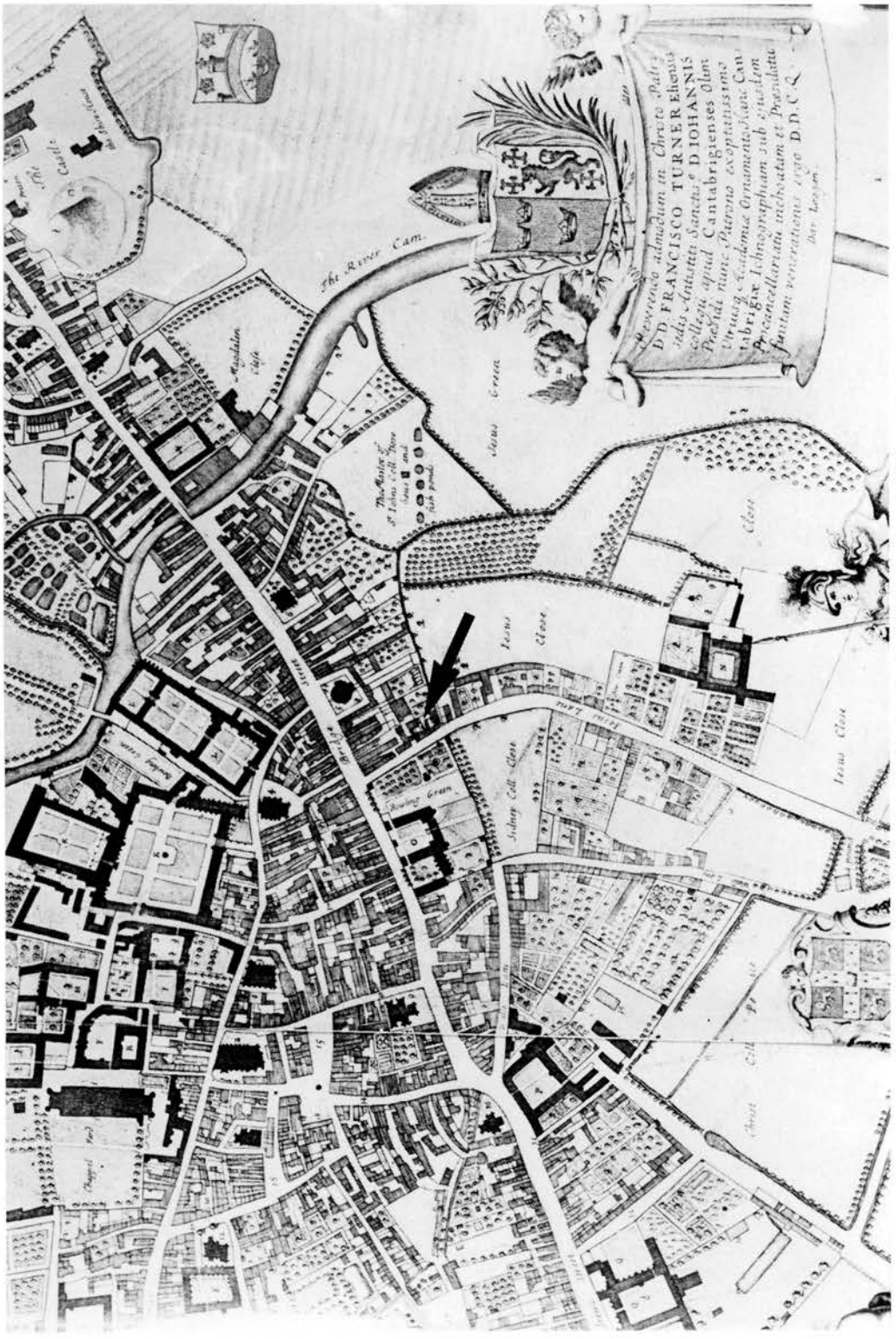


Plate 1. Part of Loggan's plan of Cambridge in 1688, showing buildings with a courtyard and a small orchard on the north side of Jesus Lane, adjacent to the King's Ditch, site of the present Jesus Lane meeting house; courtesy of the Cambridgeshire Collection, Cambridgeshire County Library.

their own meeting places. Four years later they had a hired house near Sidney Sussex College, close to Alderman Blackley's (Plate 1). Not quite fifty years later, the site of the present Jesus Lane Meeting House, opposite Sidney Sussex College, belonged to Ann Docwra and was given by her to Friends.

Among other nationally significant Friends appearing in Cambridge in 1654 and 1655, and mostly ending up in prison, were: Thomas Ayrey, Richard Hubberthorne, William Caton, Ann Wilson, Ann Blaykling (who, despite contemporary variations in the spelling of both names, was unrelated to James Blackley), Margaret Killam, Myles Halhead, James Lancaster and George Whitehead. Clearly, Cambridge was receiving much attention from travelling Friends; and they preached with considerable success. 'Here is a pritty people in Cambridge, whom ye Lord is making his power known in' (Hubberthorne 1655). It has been estimated that in the decade from 1654 to 1664 Quakers constituted about 1.6 per cent of the Cambridgeshire population, approximately twice the national average (Reay 1985, 29); future research may show that this is an underestimate. Writing to George Fox from London on the 25th of the 7th month (September) 1654, Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill said:

> Our Dear Br Ric. Hubberthorne, with James Parnell and Anne Blaklinge continues in prison yet at Cambridge. . . . They writt to us yt some comes 20 mile to se ym. . . . Myles Halkead & James Lancaster was here 4 dayes. They are at present at or towards Cambridge. . . . [*J.F.H.S.* 50, 176].

Writing from Balby a month later, Joan Killam described the reception which Halhead and Lancaster received upon their first arrival in Cambridge:

> they came into Cambridge within an hour after[1] Friends were putt forth of the towne, and the towne cryed out; they had putt forth some and there was more comed in . . . so the Mayor made a false warrant, to have sent them away, but there was a Friend who is a justice in the towne, was made to go after them three miles, and call in the warrant, and they left Friends three miles off from Cambridge; and most of the town where they lay that night were convinced. There is a great convincement through Cambridge. . . . [Brown & Peckover 1888, 1–2].

It is not clear whether Joan Killam was writing from her own observation or was relaying information that had been passed on to her; however, her sister, Margaret, was in Cambridge in the autumn of 1654 and was stoned by students after she had walked through several of the colleges denouncing them one Saturday midday (Braithwaite 1912, 295).

Richard Hubberthorne's letter to Margaret Fell dated 6th month (August) 1654, may indicate the date and circumstances of a somewhat unusual confession by a fellow of Trinity College, quoted below.

> I was moved to go from London to Cambridge, James Parnell, & Ann Blackline is there in prison, I stayed there 11 days. . . . many are convinced there of ye truth and some are brought under ye power, And into obedience, & there are severall scallars convinced . . . and doe confesse it, but stumbles at the cross. . . . We had five meetings while I was there, And many came to ye Meetings . . . but ye rage & malice is great in that Town.

One of the university scholars who, according to Hubberthorne, stumbled at the cross – that is, failed to renounce his university connections and adopt all aspects of Quaker testimony – could have been James Jollie. In an undated manuscript he wrote:

> I declared in Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge, that we in this place called Universitie were onlie keepers of the Letter of the Scriptures and might be void of the Spirit, that the scriptures bore witness of the great mysterie, Christ in us the Hope of Glorie, & that now Christ was born in those people called Quakers, where upon I cut my name out of the Butteries, which signifies a leaving of the colledge, and after a Day it came into my Mind to put it in again and to give in the following paper

1 [some other].

> 'to them of Trinity Colledge in Cambridge. . . . I deny to receive the profits of this place as formerly, namely for this end, to bring up Youth to be Ministers of the Gospell. . . . and for my necessaries I will not be idle, but as I have already declared in the Town, be ready to help any Poor Man that want necessaries with my Strength, & with my Knowledge in the Tongues or otherwise further the propagation of the everlasting Gospell revealed in the Quakers unto the whole world
> 'James Jollie'
>
> I do profess myselfe to continue in the said Colledge as a keeper of the Letter of the Scripture that it may not be corrupted . . . . till such time as the Light and Life shall find that there is no need of an outward witness . . . I am likewise ready to own any other art or science that is not curious, but necessary for the common good. . . . that which was set down in the former paper was declared to Oliver Cromwell, with a narration of my proceedings in the colledge and their dealings with mee thereupon.

Also in the late summer of 1654, 'after the harvest', George Whitehead arrived in Cambridge, having walked there from Lincoln in less than three days. He was then about eighteen years old; and on this occasion seems to have stayed only a short while before going on to Norwich.

> At Cambridge I was received kindly by Alderman Blakeling[2] and his wife, and by those few Friends there. James Parnel met me before I went thence, and we were comforted together, among those Friends when we met . . . [Whitehead 1725, 22].

As a young man, Whitehead was particularly active preaching, disputing and establishing Friends Meetings in the Eastern Counties. He returned to Cambridge for a longer stay in 1659. Despite the many contentions in which he was involved, his writings have a less excited quality than do some others of the period, which seems to make him a particularly trustworthy witness.

Most of the individuals mentioned so far were travelling Friends, or 'publishers of the Truth', whose preaching and examples were intended to stir up the consciences of their auditors and assist in the establishing of separated or particular meetings of locally resident Friends. These travelling missionaries were supported by local contributions and hospitality and, when necessary, by Friends nationally. An item in the 1655 accounts sent to Margaret Fell at Swarthmore Hall by the administrators of funds used 'in the service of Truth', was ten shillings paid to Ann Wilson in Cambridge Castle, most likely for the purchase of her food and bedding while she was imprisoned there (*J.F.H.S.* 1909b).

Prominent among the first Cambridge Friends was the alderman James Blackley, mayor of Cambridge in 1649. He was born at Ramsey, Huntingdonshire in about 1586, was a Cambridge town treasurer in 1629 and high constable in 1642. He was active in serving the Parliamentary cause and his scouts prevented arms being smuggled into some of the colleges for use by the Royalists, though he was unable to intercept the plate which was sent from them to help finance the King. In 1647 he was a Commissioner for Taxes and in 1650 served on the enquiry into 'scandalous and insufficient' ministers. According to Gray's *Biographical Notes on the Mayors of Cambridge* he became a Quaker in 1659 and was soon imprisoned in Cambridge Castle. He was still there when the Commissioners for the Reformation of the Corporation came to Cambridge in 1662 and was one of the eight aldermen then removed from office (Cooper 1845: III, 503). He died in 1666.

Other local Friends included James and Ann Docwra. He was a member of an old landed family, owning two manor estates in Fulbourn and properties elsewhere in the county. His wife, born Ann Waldegrave, belonged to another of the principal East Anglian families.

James Docwra was born 1617 and joined Friends when he was a young man. In March 1655 he leased for 500 years to his brother Thomas and to Edward Peach, acting as trustees, a modest estate of pasture and arable land in Fulbourn and in Histon. The land was to be held in trust to James's wife, Ann Docwra; and out of the rents and profits from it were to be paid yearly 'to the poor people

2 [James Blackley].

called Quakers residing in the Town of Clare in the County of Suffolk' forty shillings. An additional three pounds were to be paid annually towards the cost of 'Travelling Preachers' Horses at Cambridge' (Stevens 1966, 27–9).

Probably sometime after James's death in 1672, Ann moved into Cambridge. In 1700 she gave the Jesus Lane Meeting House Yard estate to the Society of Friends on a 1000 year lease. In her will and a codicil dated 4th and 6th May 1710, she left bequests to several Friends, confirmed her husband's previous charities and added twenty pounds towards providing a burying place for Friends. The residue of her estate was to be distributed 'For charitable uses among the people called Quakers dwelling and residing within the Town of Cambridge and no where else' (*ibid*: 30). Trustees were directed to make half-yearly reports to the Monthly Meeting of the monies received and disbursed.

The Fulbourn lands comprised about 60 acres, subsequently consolidated by the Enclosure Acts to a farm known as 'Quakers Charity', located adjacent to the Cherry Hinton parish boundary and south of the Cherry Hinton/Fulbourn road. The charity was maintained until 1949, when it was sold by the Charity Commissioners and bought by the owner of the neighbouring farm.

Neither James nor Ann Docwra's names occur on any of the extant lists of Cambridgeshire Friends arrested for practising their faith in the turbulent years of the 17th century. Neither do we know that they suffered distraint of goods or any other form of persecution. However, they were active in assisting and supporting other Friends; and Ann published a number of pamphlets in defence of religious liberty. In one of these she gives a rare visual description of George Fox as a great-boned man, grown stiff with age, eating a small piece of cold salt beef and drinking bitter beer (1689, 43).

Friends such as these would have formed part of the nucleus of a local Quaker community which was already in existence by the time George Fox first visited Ely and Cambridgeshire in the autumn of 1655. At Sutton, in the Isle of Ely, he held a large Meeting which is said to have been attended by the wife of the Mayor of Cambridge. In Cambridge he and his travelling companion, Amor Stoddard, were given a rough reception by the university students who jostled them in the street and managed to unseat Stoddard from his horse.

> And within night an alderman who was a Friend came to the inn to us, the people thronging up into the very chamber door in the inn. And after a while, I passed through all the multitude to his house, And as I walked through all the streets all the town was up, but they did not know me, it was darkish. But they were in a rage not only against me, but with him also, so that he was almost afraid to walk the streets with me for the tumult. So when I came into his house we sent for all the friendly people, and had a sweet heavenly meeting in the power of God amongst them and there I stayed all night [Fox 1694, 219].

While this account gives a good description of the general situation in Cambridge, it does present some difficuities, which are best explained by the fact that large portions of Fox's *Journal* were written or dictated by him some years after the events they describe. There are, furthermore, several seventeenth-century versions of the *Journal*, which differ from one another in some important respects. One version says that Fox stayed with the Mayor, not an alderman, of Cambridge on this visit.

In the autumn of 1655, the mayor was Samuel Spalding, who was reappointed in 1662 by the same commission which removed James Blackley and Thomas Nicholson from their aldermanships. While it may have been that Spalding was showing sympathy and hospitality to Friends in 1655 and his wife attended a Meeting in Sutton, there is no other evidence for such an interest. It is more likely that George Fox was entertained by the former mayor, James Blackley. It might also be conjectured that the account represents a conflation of two separate visits, the second of which could have been in 1658 or 1659 while Thomas Nicholson was mayor. Nicholson, who had been one of the town treasurers in 1633, acted on several occasions to protect Friends and their meetings. His wife became a Friend – it may have been she who attended the meeting in Sutton – and although he did not do so himself, he, like Blackley, was deprived of his aldermanship in 1662 on account of his religious views. Nickalls lists

the years of Fox's visits to Ely and Cambridgeshire as 1655, 1659, 1663 and 1670 (Fox 1694, 773). Independent evidence of a possible visit to the Town by George Fox while Thomas Nicholson was the mayor is provided by the claim of Thomas Smith, the University Librarian, to have debated with him in August 1659. However, George Whitehead, who was a chief participant in that debate, has recorded that it was another man, George Fox the younger, who was present.

The students' rowdiness mentioned in the above and other accounts sounds very like the 'town and gown' riots which were then not infrequent and which have broken out from time to time on any flimsy pretext until quite recently. On some occasions Friends were, it may be suspected, little more than the excuse for a riot which would have found some other object had they not been so conspicuously present, holding their public meetings very near the colleges, and already the target of quasi-legal abuse. On other occasions, as we have seen, some of the more enthusiastic Friends appear to have gone out of their way to challenge a response from members of the university community, whose training for a hired ministry they denounced in no uncertain terms. Many of the Quakers jailed at this early period were among those who travelled in the ministry and were not in fact local residents. In July 1656, Hezekia Haynes, the Major-General for Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire, wrote to John Thurloe, M.P. for Ely and member of the State Council in charge of intelligence, concerning Quakers in Cambridge, who

> have considerable meetings. . . . This gaol is soe full, that the towne is every day full of them, that come to visite the prisoners, and make great disturbance. It's earnestly desired by the magistrates of the place, that they might be sett at liberty, as judging it would conduce to more publique peace. [Haynes 1656, 147].

In this, as in several other references, we may note the general desire of magistrates and other local officers to see that peace, common sense and good order prevailed over partisan rivalries, a situation which must have benefitted all sections of the community and which allowed a regular Friends' meeting to become established in Cambridge in spite of the opposition it encountered. Without belittling the real hardships suffered by many early Quakers in Cambridge, it should be remembered that much of the students' behaviour was not so much a deliberate attack on the Quakers as an example of the extreme boisterousness typical of the years before the Restoration. For example, in November 1657 Doctor Worthington, the newly elected University Vice-Chancellor, had a squib or cracker thrown at his study window. He records in his diary that this broke the glass, entered the room and set fire to several papers lying on the floor, but he, who must have known the students well, does not take this as directed personally against himself (Heywood & Wright 1854, 582). At Sidney Sussex, the college closest to the Friends' meeting place, discipline was notoriously poor during the mastership of Richard Minshull from 1643 to 1686. According to the College's historian, drunkenness and keeping late hours were common offences amongst the students and there were more serious incidents including hurling brickbats at College windows and an attempted burglary of the Master's Lodge (Scott-Giles 1951, 64).

During these same years that Friends were holding considerable meetings in Cambridge, a national pattern of organization was developing to which local Quakers made a substantial contribution. In 1657 a country-wide collection 'for the service of Truth' – presumably the same fund as had paid ten shillings to Ann Wilson two years previously raised £443 3s 5d. Friends from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridge and Huntingdon together contributed £136 8s 1d, one-third of the total sum collected.

The years 1658 and 1659 were a time of high prices, low wages and much popular excitement and unrest. There is evidence that Friends in Cambridge were particularly numerous and lively during these years; for it was not until the Restoration in 1660 and the various acts against seditious coventicles and popish recusants that what had been sporadic clashes between various groups and individuals in the town became legally sanctioned persecution of the entire Quaker community.

In July 1659 Margaret Pryor of Longstanton brought charges against two Quakers, William Allen and Widow Morlin, whom she accused of bewitching her about two years previously, in November 1657. This was a

serious affair as a Cambridge woman had been hung as recently as 1645 on a witchcraft charge (Keynes 1956: 4). At the Cambridge assizes trial she dropped her charge against William Allen, but maintained that Widow Morlin

> took her out of bed from her husband in the night, and that she put a bridle into her mouth, and transformed herself into a bay Mare and rode upon her to Maddenly House, where she said they hung her on the latch of the door, and they went in to the Feast. . . . [Penny 1903, 67]

going on to give circumstantial evidence such as a claim that the sides of her gown were torn by the rider's spurs and a list of what meats were eaten at the feast at Madingley Hall. It seems likely that she was encouraged by John Bunyan to bring this charge against the Quakers. He published a now-lost paper or pamphlet relating her accusations (Tindall 1934, 218–22). Another, anonymous, pamphlet *The Strange & Terrible News from Cambridge. . .* was published in London in 1659, repeating this witchcraft accusation, but giving the supposed victim's name incorrectly. Either both pamphlets were published before the final verdict was given on the 8th August 1659, or their authors omitted to mention that the jury took only fifteen minutes to acquit the Friends, Judge Windham noting that the case was nothing more than a dream or a fantasy.

In reply to these two pamphlets and as part of the general ammunition in the rivalry for converts which had been going on with the Baptists for several years, James Blackley together with John Smith, George Whitehead and John Harwood published, also in 1659, *A Lying Wonder Discovered, and the Strange and Terrible News from Cambridge proved false . . .* (Plate 2). In this pamphlet Blackley says that Margaret Pryor had attended Quaker meetings for a time, but subsequently returned to the established church; and that 'In all this story she was plainly discovered to be an impudent Liar to say that they had Lamb at that time of the year, in November, or that she being a Mare (as she said) could distinguish the meats'.

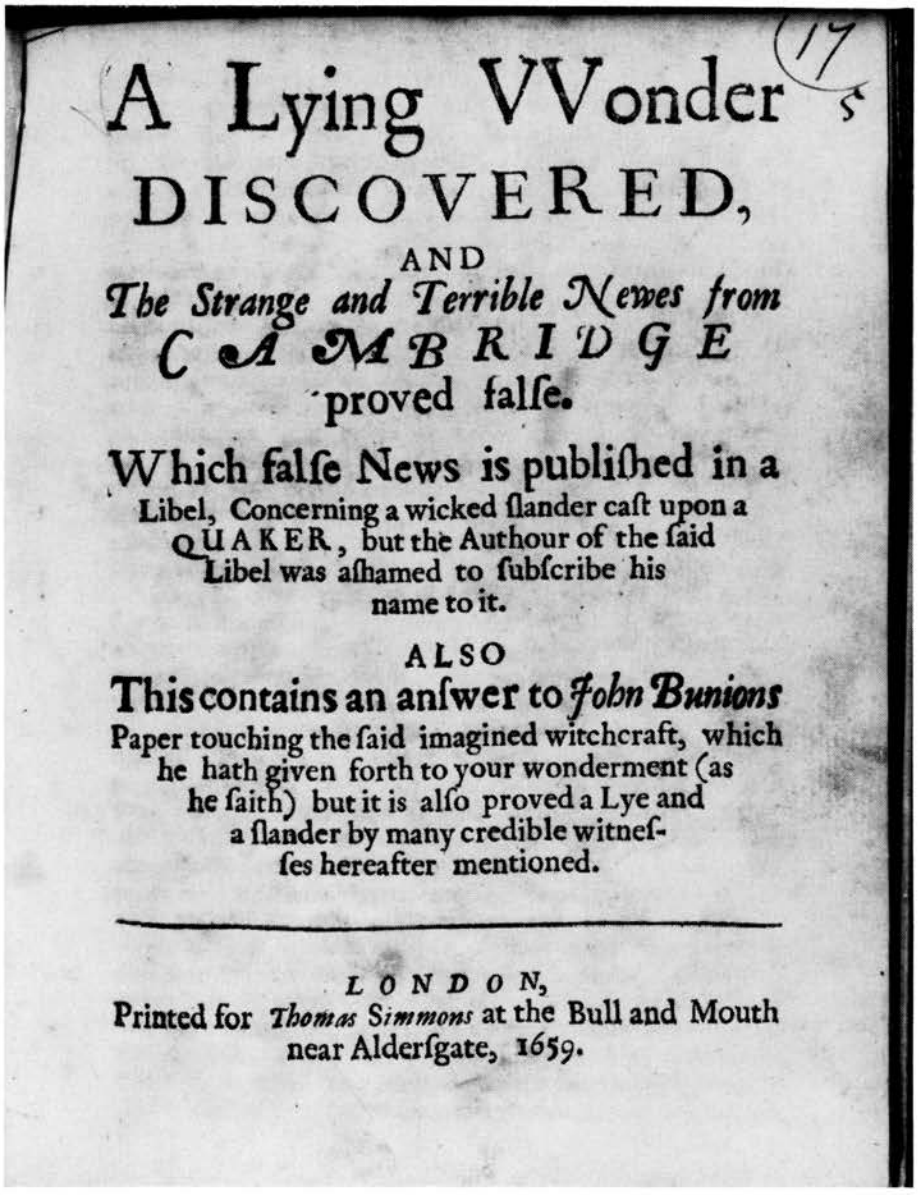
Prior or Pryor was a not uncommon name and it is possible that there was a confusion of identities between this Margaret Pryor and Widow Prior, who was a staunchly active Friend. Widow Prior signed the petition of Quaker women opposing tithes which was presented to Parliament on the 20th of July, 1659. Besse records her death in 1661:

> Of Over, an aged and religious Widow, appearing at Sessions on a Summons for absenting herself from the publick Worship, was committed to Prison, where she fell sick and died, and was buried in Cambridge Castle Yard on the 5th of the Tenth Month this year [p. 91].

Concerning Widow Morlin, there seems to be no further mention in Quaker records.

George Whitehead was in Cambridge in the middle of 1659, helping to prepare the above-mentioned pamphlet, organizing meetings, preaching and debating. He wrote two accounts of his work, a letter addressed to the elder George Fox dated the 11th of the 5th month (July) 1659 and a briefer account in his autobiographical journal.

> It was upon me to acquaint thee with some proceedings relating to Truth, chiefly about Cambridge. . . . The first meeting I had there was very serviceable . . . where there were pretty many sober people, and several were reached. But towards the latter end of the first meeting, there came in many rude scholars . . . after we went out of the room they would scarce go out, but had a desire to make disorder. Whereupon presently the mayor of the town came into our meeting room, like a lion among wolfish scholars. . . . he chased out the scholars, and threatened them with imprisonment for their rudeness; and then the mayor went into the college, which is right over against our meeting place, and he complained of the scholars to the master or proctors of the college. . . . Whereupon the scholars and the masters are much troubled, that the mayor should offer to protect our meetings; and many of them have a great spite against him. . . . Yesterday . . . we had, I think, a more serviceable meeting in Cambridge, than any we have had there yet; though towards the latter end, some of the scholars were rude, and made noises, and would have pulled me down. . . . Here is much to thunder down in this Cambridge. . . . There was John Crook in Cambridge last week, whose being there was of service: the



A Lying VVonder
DISCOVERED,
AND
The Strange and Terrible Newes from
CAMBRIDGE
proved falſe.

Which falſe News is publiſhed in a Libel, Concerning a wicked ſlander caſt upon a QUAKER, but the Authour of the ſaid Libel was aſhamed to ſubſcribe his name to it.

ALSO

This contains an anſwer to John Bunions Paper touching the ſaid imagined witchcraft, which he hath given forth to your wonderment (as he ſaith) but it is alſo proved a Lye and a ſlander by many credible witneſſes hereafter mentioned.

LONDON,
Printed for Thomas Simmons at the Bull and Mouth near Alderſgate, 1659.

Plate 2. Title page of *A Lying Wonder Discovered*, one of numerous controversial pamphlets relating to Quakers in the 17th century; courtesy of the Library Committee of the Religious Society of Friends, London.

scholars and priests are exceedingly tormented and quashed, when any such Friends come to minister against their deceits, as they look upon to be learned. . . . William Allen was with me in Cambridge yesterday; he had only leave of the gaoler at Colchester, to come a little time into Cambridgeshire and thereaway. There is great stirrings after the Truth in many places thereaways and other places. . . . [J. Barclay 1841, 229–30].

The mayor mentioned in this letter was Thomas Nicholson and the college from which the students came must have been the particularly undisciplined Sidney Sussex. John Crook was a Bedfordshire Friend and a justice of the peace, at whose house several early yearly meetings were held. He was noted to be 'eloquent, allegorical and mysterious' in his ministry (Tomkins 1789: 260). This letter provides one of our earliest references to a public meeting house on or near the site of the present one in Jesus Lane.

Sixteen fifty-nine was a year of many arrests and fierce and repeated assaults against

Friends and their meetings; and especially against the preaching of William Allen, a native of Essex resident in Oakington who had become a convinced Friend as a result of attending meetings in Cambridge about five years earlier.

> at length it was so ordered for the truths sake, that we suffer for, that we hired a House for a publique Meeting Place . . . and in the night time the Schollars threw stones and dirt against the Windows, and broke the Windows very much; and they shot Bullets into the Chambers at us, and flung great stones. . . . [The account continues with details of many assaults, some very violent and unpleasant.]
>
> And when Alderman Nicholson went into the Colledge [Sidney Sussex], and told the Proctor of the Actions of the Schollars, and spoke to him to keep them quiet, he told him in plain words, he could not nor would not. . . . And Thomas Nicholson being a sober man, who was the former Mayor, understanding some thing of their filthy behaviour at our Meetings, and being sensible of their cruelty and wickedness, was Resolved the next day to come in Person, and so he did, and brought half a dozen constables with him, and so prevented their mischeivous Ends and Intentions: and the said Alderman Nicholson very boldly and valiantly stood upon a form to the view of all the people some hours, and hasrd the Truth, which was of good service to the Lord to stop the Violent [Sammon *et al.* 1659, 5–11].

The signatories to this account, Edward Sammon, Robert Letchworth, George Clark, Thomas Edmondson, Mary Godfrey, James Blackley, Mathew Blackley, Nicholas Frost, John Peace, Joseph Coarse, John Clark, and Alexander Parish, include some of the most active Cambridge Friends of that time.

Whitehead gives a second account of these events in his *Christian Progress*. This work was completed in 1711, and so may represent the mellowed memories of someone who had survived the much fiercer persecutions of subsequent years.

> In the Town of Cambridge, I had (in those Days) divers good meetings, and effectual Service for the Truth, and the Meetings generally were peaceable, while I was concerned with them, the Scholars being more civil towards me than we could expect, for many of them would stand to hear the Truth quietly, with great Attention. . . . Tho' some time after I left them, I heard that Friends met with Disturbance, and some of them with hard Usage at their Meetings from some of the Scholars which I was sorry to hear, it being partly occasioned by some striving with them, not in the Wisdom of God. . . . Howbeit this I have observed, that when I and some other publick Bretheren have in a Meeting in that Place met with some opposition, if it was by any Person of Understanding or Learning, that would deport himself soberly, we could have some fair and quiet Discourse . . . and the Scholars present would demean themselves with Attention. . . . [Whitehead 1725, 167–8].

A public debate in which George Whitehead was involved is particularly interesting because of the importance accorded to it by the participants. At least five accounts of this dispute were published. Thomas Smith, B.D., the recently appointed Keeper of the University Library, specialist in Arabic, rector of Caldecote, and a lecturer in rhetoric at Christ's College, published *A Gagg for the Quakers* and *The Quaker Disarmed or a True Relation of a Late Publick Dispute Held at Cambridge by three Eminent Quakers, Against one Scholar of Cambridge*. Whitehead, then a young man of about twenty-three years, gave a lengthy account of the debate in his journal, *Christian Progress*, and also produced two pamphlets in answer to Thomas Smith's arguments: *Truth defending the Quakers* and *The Key of Knowledge not found in the University Library of Cambridge*. Part of Smith's account in *The Quaker Disarmed* is as follows.

> Upon Aug. 25. 1659 the same *S.* having been all the Afternoon (from one a clock till four or five) in St. Johns Coll. Library turning over Arabick and other MSS. returning home wearied his nearest way, unexpectedly saw the same Whitehead preaching in the Quakers common meeting-house. So he went in, desired leave to speak: and (when Whitehead had done) confuted his Doctrine. Next day, con-

> sidering how apt silly women are to be led away captive by such deceivers, he sent this following Note to the Mayor of Cambridge, hoping in the conclusion to reclaim his Wife, who is a Quaker. . . .

The mayor, Thomas Nicholson, was asked to sanction a public debate between Thomas Smith and George Whitehead. He at first tried to discourage this, but when he learned that the Quakers were willing to accept the challenge he replied that the aldermen did not wish it to take place in the Town Hall. It was finally arranged to be held in the Friends meeting house near the gate of Sidney Sussex College, on the 29th of August.

> Thereupon he went and found G. Fox preaching. Esteeming it not lawful to hear him, he left the room, but entered again as soon as the sermon was done. . . .

The debate was pursued in a crowded room to little apparent purpose and with much repetition.

> Here *W. Allen* a Quaker interposed and made a speech to tell the people that he did not like this way of disputing and bid T.S. dispute plainly without Logick and Syllogisms and vain terms. . . .
> *S.* My argument is this, all Papists open a door to damnable heresies, you who wrote this book[3] are a Papist, Therefore you who wrote this book open a door to damnable heresies.
> *Alderman Blackly.* This S. doth nothing but say the same thing again and again.
> *W.*[4] I am no Papist.
> *S.* You deny my minor: which I prove thus. He who refuseth to take the oath of abjuration is a Papist. He who writ this book refuseth to take the oath of abjuration. Therefore he who writ this book is a Papist.
> *W.* I deny all Popery.
> *S.* A Papist will say so too. I might charge you with many Popish Doctrines; but now I only ask whether you will take the oath of abjuration, or deny one of my propositions?
> *F.* Here Fox who had interposed several times made a long discourse to prove that 'twas unlawful for a Christian to swear. . . .
> Here the Major's wife entreated T.S. to lay aside Whitehead's book and dispute from Scripture. Well, quoth he I will for a while: so he gave the book to her, and taking a Bible said. . . .

So it continued at length, Alderman Blackley eventually intervening to bring it to a close. George Whitehead's account of the same event in *Christian Progress* is similar to Smith's in most respects, but, significantly, he attributes the discourse against swearing to himself and says that the George Fox who was present was George Fox the younger, a convert and companion of Whitehead's not related to his more famous namesake. As with many of the published controversies of the 17th century, nobody seems to have convinced anybody of anything, although both sides claim to have won the debate.

Mention should be made of a University person who may have sympathized with Friends. This was William Dell, preacher to the New Model Army and radical Puritan master of Caius College from 1649 until the Restoration in May 1660. At least Friends were in sympathy with him; and it has not been recorded that this outspoken preacher ever opposed Cambridge Friends. Several Quaker printers continued printing editions of his sermons and writings well into the 18th century. Dell trained at Emmanuel College, became a Parliamentary chaplain in 1646 and championed the Independent party against the Presbyterians. He valued lay ministry; and it is reported that he neglected to administer the sacraments or to have psalms sung, though he frequently preached at the University Church and on occasion invited John Bunyan to do likewise. He found the abstract philosophy and school divinity of the University every bit as abhorrent as did the most ardent of the Quakers and so informed the University community repeatedly, calling degrees in divinity a 'mere invention of antichrist' (Venn 1901: 122–29). A recent biographer has concluded that, in view of the similarities of Dell's and George Fox's messages and their itineraries, the fact that they never met during a period of twenty years was no accident (Walker 1970: 187–8). That neither the Cambridge Friends nor William Dell appear to

3 [Ishamel & His Mother Cast Out . . .].

4 [Whitehead].

have taken any public notice of the other must likewise have been no accident.

While the evident desire of the mayor and aldermen to maintain good order in Cambridge probably shielded local Friends from some attacks and persecutions to which they might otherwise have been subjected, it was by no means a complete protection against the actions of excited and unruly crowds, whether of students or others. Then, too, the fact that one of the most active local Friends, James Blackley, had been conspicuous in supporting the Parliamentary cause while the vehement Puritan and Parliamentarian William Dell preached something very like Quaker doctrine from the pulpit of Great Saint Mary's must have been sufficient to associate Cambridge Friends with the anti-royalist cause in many people's minds. It could well have been a factor contributing to tensions shortly before 1660 and certainly would not have been helpful to Friends after the Restoration.

As listed in Besse's great compilation, relatively few Cambridgeshire Friends were imprisoned or had goods distrained for non-payment of tithes before 1660, but in 1658 and 1659 relations with the University students were often difficult.

> In their public Meetings the Scholars insulted them by breaking the Windows, throwing great Stones, and shooting Bullets in, to the Hazard of their Lives. When William Allen, who was frequently concerned to preach in those Meetings, was declaring, they would run through the Meeting-house like wild Horses, throwing down all before them, hallooeing, stamping, and making a Noise, as if several Drums had been beating, to Prevent his being heard. . . . In like manner did they abuse others of the Assembly, pulling off Womens Headclothes, and daubing their Faces with Filth and Excrements. . . . In these two Years, for Demands of 12L.9s.11d. for Tithes, were taken by Distress from sundry Persons, Goods worth 27L.4s.5d' [Besse 1753, 86–7].

It seems likely that these rather more serious incidents are some of the disturbance and hard usage to which George Whitehead refers as having taken place in the later part of 1659, after he had left the town. If so, they were precursor to the much harder times which were to follow.

FRIENDS MOST IN PRISON 1660–1689

> Laws have been so multiplied against Dissenters from the Church of England that they clash one against another; some statutes are to compel people to come to Church, others are to Excommunicate them from it; there are Statutes also to make upon the same account, for Imprisoning them and spoiling them of their outward Estates, if they serve God publicly, in any other place but the National Church, although they be Excommunicated from her, and she her self professes in her Common Prayer, that the Service of God is perfect freedom. . . .

So wrote Ann Docwra in 1687. It is difficult to record the history of Friends in Cambridge, as elsewhere, in the quarter of a century from 1660 without degenerating into a mere catalogue of persecutions and imprisonments. Reasons for this lie in the well-known events of national history: the return of the monarchy seemed at first to give a free hand to royalist sympathizers to persecute whoever had previously opposed them; and just when it seemed that relief would be granted to peaceably inclined Independents, the insurrection of the Fifth Monarchy Men and subsequent events reinflamed old fears and hatreds. Between 1661 and 1665, and subsequently, acts of increasing severity were passed against those who refused to attend the national church, who met in groups of more than four to hold religious meetings, and those who refused to swear allegiance to the king. The various acts were nominally directed against 'Popish Recusants' and 'Seditious Coventicles', but were in fact executed largely against Quakers, who staunchly refused to follow the example of other Independents in only meeting privately and in secret places.

In these years both Church and State were attempting to reassert something like the old patterns of traditional authority. In a stable society, it was inconceivable that every common person be allowed to think and act for himself, although it might be permissable for some among the upper classes to do so. Quakers were largely drawn from the working and the new middle classes. Many were articulate preachers and prolific, if sometimes inelegant, writers; and they insisted on their God-given right and duty to obey their consciences rather than laws which would have

forced them to act in contrary ways. It was not law in general that Quakers opposed, but particular laws and customs: those which required them to abstain from their own form of worship and to attend and support the established church. They would not swear or subscribe to a judicial oath, as this was forbidden by Jesus (Mt 5:34); neither would they use the language and customs by which people generally acknowledged their social superiors.

As early as 1654, the possible danger of anarchy inherent in the common people taking up attitudes and actions which might be acceptable if confined to the upper classes had been recognized in the mandate by which Richard Hubberthorne was jailed in Norwich Castle. He relates that it included the charge that:

> the people in a great number gathered together about me, which might have proved of evil consequence, they being the under-sort of people [Hubberthorne 1663, 37].

Less than ten years later, the fear of the under-sort of people's self-assertion had become an important political factor. Almost any persecution could be justified if it might serve to save the country from the threat of anarchy. Friends' resistance to both legal and illegal impositions during these difficult years preserved the integrity of the Quaker witness, but it did so at the cost of immense personal sacrifices.

The rulers' and civil authority's fear of the common people may help to explain why large numbers of poor and uninfluential Quakers were imprisoned both in Cambridge and nationally. Distraint of goods for non-payment of fines and tithes was also much suffered by Friends. In some parts of Cambridgeshire the collection of tithes had already become the prerogative of landlords and tithe renters who could be more exacting than the Church. When Friends refused to pay these and similar impositions, any of their possessions might be seized by the sheriff and sold, often at purely nominal values, to offset the tithes and any additional fines or charges which might be levied. We read frequently of cattle and goods worth several pounds being distrained to pay relatively small sums; and many Friends were impoverished by repeated such impositions.

Before considering the effects of the Restoration and the Coventicle Acts, it will be useful to look at the organization which supported Cambridge Friends at this time. In 1658 Alexander Parker wrote from London to Margaret Fell about 'A Meeting at Cambridge for the Eastern Counties' to be held on the 14th of July that year (Braithwaite 1912, 326). Even that may not have been the first general meeting in which Cambridge Friends were involved, as some organization must have existed for gathering contributions to the previous year's collection for supporting Friends who travelled as preachers, as mentioned above. Another general meeting was held in Cambridge on the 2nd of July 1660. These would have been *ad hoc* meetings: the first regularly constituted body was the Quarterly Meeting for Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Ely and Huntingdonshire, first settled, or established, in 1667 (1668 by the modern calendar) and based in Earith. According to one account it comprised forty-five local or particular Friends meetings, these being the actual worshipping groups which met regularly in public meeting houses or in private homes (Brown & Peckover 1888). However, a 'Memorial of Meetings in the Isle of Ely and Counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon as they were kept and Established in ye yeare 1668' lists only twenty-one meetings for the whole area, including those at Over, Swavesey, Willingham, Oakington with Cottenham and Longstanton, Cambridge, Balsham, and Soham (*J.F.H.S.* 1909a). This corresponds with the meetings listed two years later in the oldest extant Quarterly Meeting minute book. In the Memorial, Thomas Edmuntson, Nicholas Frost, Thomas Lowther and William Brazier are cited as some of the leading Cambridge Friends.

Once established, the Quarterly Meeting met regularly to discuss Friends' affairs and was attended by one or two delegated representatives from each of the Monthly Meetings. Representatives to the Quarterly Meeting are not named in the oldest minute book held in the Cambridgeshire County Archives, that covering the period 1670 to 1673. The first entry in the book, dated to the 7th of the first month (March) 1670, records the state of the constituent meetings thus:

> Chatteris Meeting – things remain indifferent well

Haddenham – things all go pretty well
Over – things as formerly
Willingham – things sayd to be well there
Hoggington, Long Stanton, Cottingham – things sayd to be well there
Cambridge – Friends most in prison

Much led up to this bald statement in the minute book. In April and May 1660, and again in July of the same year the regular Friends meetings in Jesus Lane were broken up by soldiers and students. Friends and the meeting house itself were both very seriously abused during these riots. James Blackley described an incident in May in a letter to Gerrart Roberts in London.

> For yesterday, in our meeting-house when we had been together two hours, the soldiers came and set upon us with swords and great staves, and brake in upon us and gat smyth's hammers and brake the windows and doors in pieces, and with shivered boards and window-bars fell upon us and beat and wounded many Friends. . . . And when the house was emptied of Friends they brake down all the glass windows, the stairs, the forms, benches, chairs, etc., whatever could be broken in the house. The soldiers and scholars began and the rude people in the town made an end. Wm. Allen was much beaten and bruised.

A similar incident had also occurred a fortnight earlier, on the 13th of the third month (May) and is described in a statement in the *First Publishers of Truth* signed by twenty-six Cambridge Friends (Penny 1907, 13).

Twenty-nine Cambridge Friends wrote to Charles the Second to inform him of another breaking-up of the Meeting which took place in July 1660.

> Be it known unto thee, O King, that on the 2nd Day of the fifth Month, as we were gathering together to a general Meeting, at the usual Place there, being our own hired House, a Tumult of Scholars, lewd Women, Townsmen and Boys, gathered also about the Meeting-place like the Men of Sodom. . . . Some of them prepared with Excess of Drink, that they might forget all Humanity . . . suffered none to pass thither without some abuse or other . . . and not ceasing there, fell upon us in our peaceable Meeting . . . striking at those they could reach, flinging at others, and making an hideous Noise, with Scoffing, Laughing, Railing, Shouting, Knocking, drumming upon the Boards, and sometimes throwing Wildfire and Gunpowder into the Meeting . . . they brake and battered down the Doors and Walls next the Street with Bolt-hammers and other Engines. . . and ran violently upon us . . . without any Pity or Respect to Age or other Condition, with Clubs, great Splinters, and Pieces of the Doors and other Timber. . . . Twenty-two had their Blood shed; one so lamed that he was left behind unable to walk abroad, and a Woman almost killed by their cruel Usage. . . . [Besse 1753, 88].

The following January (1660 by the old calendar, 1661 by the new) 126 Cambridgeshire Friends were committed to prison for refusing to swear the oath of allegiance. According to Besse, fifty-nine were imprisoned in the County gaol, Cambridge Castle, eight in the City Tolbooth, and the remainder in Ely and Wisbech gaols. The Tolbooth Prison, a bare room of something less than fifteen by twenty-five feet, was adjacent to the common prison in the centre of the town. Until 1632 it had been the Tanners' Hall and had neither courtyard nor any amenities (Atkinson 1897, 93). Such imprisonments must have been a frequent occurrence for a while.

> This is to let thee know how it is, and hath been with us, in Cambridgeshire and Town. They have been very cruel and violent towards all Friends, sparing none, neither Widows nor fatherless children, but haled all before them called Justices, and they sent all to Prison: Many Widows about sixty, some seventy Years old, and they left some of the Houses without Inhabitant, and some little Children in the Streets, without any to look after them for several Days. . . . They brought in one Day about sixteen Women, a great Part of them Widows, and most of them all very poor in the Outward, having but little but as they did earn it by Day-labour, and they put them into the Shire Hall, where they were kept all Night without any thing to lie upon, and these Women were kept about four

> Days, and then the Gaoler came and thrust them out, not having any Order, and took from them the Bedding they had gotten in, and doth keep it for Fees. . . . [Besse 1753, 89].

The above was written on the 31st of the eleventh month 1660 (January 1661) by John Ainsloe, a prisoner in Cambridge Castle. It is a particularly interesting document as it reveals the extent to which Friends were able to keep in touch with and encourage one another even while in prison and also because we happen to have the list, preserved in Sir Thomas Sclater's notebooks, of the sixteen women and nine men imprisoned on that one day (Kenny 1923, 32). Included are the Alderman's wife, Thomason Blackley,and his son, Mathew Blackley, William and Helen Allen, Reuben Stevens, Robert Letchworth, Thomas Edmundson and some others whose names occur in several contexts as active among Cambridge Friends.

Since women's names do not usually appear on Friends documents and letters of this period it is difficult to assess how influential they may have been in local Friends' affairs. However, following hard on the events of the previous week were two further arrests mentioned in Thomas Sclater's notes for the 4th and the 7th of February:

> Thomas Clark, Quaker, committed to the Tolbooth by Rule, the Constable, being taken with John Page, a tailor, and about twenty women at a coventicle at the Quakers' house over against Sidney.
>
> . . . .
>
> Joseph Cole, Quaker, committed to the Tolbooth . . . for meeting that day in the coventicle over against Sidney, with 29 women, the women set free.

It would seem from these extracts that Quaker Meetings were held at least twice a week and were well attended by women Friends even when many or most of the men were unable to do so. Either these women were deliberately facing repeated arrests and brief imprisonments or there were very many who were willing to continue attending Friends' Meetings, knowing it to be very likely that they would be arrested for doing so.

It is interesting, even if it can only be very approximate, to speculate on the size of Meetings and the possible number of Friends in Cambridge at this time, when records and lists of Friends were not kept as it was unsafe to do so. It seems likely that the regular Meetings had an attendance of perhaps fifty or more Friends, since it would have been difficult for those who were so inclined to riot amongst a very much smaller gathering. As noted above, thirty were arrested at one Meeting; and at least twenty-two Friends were injured while attending another that year. We have three lists of Friends active in Cambridge in 1660: those who signed the letter to Charles the Second, those who signed the account in the *First Publishers of Truth*, and the list of Friends gaoled in January 1660 (1661).

Together they include the names of fifty-five men and sixteen women, with only eight names occurring on more than one of the lists. Two of the men are found on another list as well, of those who were included in the King's general pardon of May 1672 (Penny 1907, 342–7). If we make the very arbitrary and simplistic assumptions that about one half to one-quarter of all Cambridge men Friends are represented by these lists and that the number of men and women was about equal, this gives a figure of about two to four hundred active Friends, not all of whom would have lived in the town. For example, Reuben Stevens, who was imprisoned in 1660 for refusing to swear and died in prison for non-payment of tithes in 1672, was a resident of Over. The non-University population of seventeenth-century Cambridge was about 5500 (Clark & Gray 1921, 137).

Imprisonments, fines and distraints for tithes seem to have continued, though not at quite such a furious rate, for the remainder of the decade. Besse lists from five to thirty Cambridgeshire Friends who suffered on some account during each of these years, most frequently for not paying tithes and Church rates, for absenting themselves from public worship and for attending unlawful Meetings. One Friend was fined twice for opening a shop on holidays, a practice encouraged by Ann Blaykling, who had preached and been imprisoned in Cambridge Castle in 1654. She also advocated paying tithes to secular impropriators and caused some minor dissensions among Friends nationally. Four other Friends were fined for refusing to swear allegiance. It is not as serious a record of persecutions as was suffered by Friends in

some other parts of the country, perhaps because so many were already held in the gaols. A nation-wide list of Friends convicted as Popish Recusants, dated to about 1669, contains 808 names. Of all the counties listed, Cambridgeshire had the third largest number with 120, exceeded only by Westmorland with 200 names and Norfolk with 150 (Simpson 1914, 135–6). After 1660 there are no accounts of large meetings, debates or gatherings held by Friends in the Jesus Lane meeting house or anywhere else in the town or in the county. Clearly the suppression of Quakers was at least partly effective, although it was by no means total. In August 1661, the diarist Samuel Pepys rode into Cambridge in company with a Quaker hide-dealer (Whitley 1971). Outbreaks of plague in Cambridge in 1665 and again in 1666 closed the colleges and must have deterred most large public congregations for several years.

An important consequence of the wholesale imprisonments was the elimination of many of those who had been the earliest leaders and protectors of local Quakerism, so that when the structure of Monthly and Quarterly Meetings was established in 1668 several new names appear among the leading Friends, replacing those which had been familiar only a few years previously. Among those fined for holding meetings in their houses in Cambridge in 1670 we know of Nicholas Frost, William Brazier and Edward Cooke. Nicholas Frost was one of four who were kept in Cambridge Castle for six years from 1676 for refusing to pay three shillings and six pence apiece for repairs to their parish church. William Brazier, a shoemaker, was one of several against whom distress of goods was made in 1674, at which time his household goods, working tools, clothing, firewood, and even the sheets which covered the straw he used as a bed were taken from him. He was committed to prison in 1684 and released two years later; and remained an active Friend for many years, attending the first Meeting for Sufferings in London in 1676 and Quarterly and Yearly Meetings until about 1711. Elizabeth Underwood of Chesterton was also fined for holding a meeting in Cambridge and Joseph Townsend, a wealthy trader at Stourbridge Fair, was fined and imprisoned on suspicion of holding a meeting at his mother's house in the town and for refusing to swear the oath of allegiance.

In the 1660s and early 1670s hundreds of Cambridge and Cambridgeshire Friends were testified against by a few informers, who hoped thereby to collect a share of the fines or distraints levied. One such informer was Stephen Perry, a tinker.

> At the Quarter Sessions he used to give in the names of a hundred or more, to the Grand Quest at Quarter Sessions, to have them presented for not going to their Parish Church . . . which is impossible for any one man to know, much more to swear that so many belonging to thirteen Parishes and all of them absent from their Parish Church upon one and the same day. . . . Perry did swear a meeting to be at the Castle in S. Andrews parish in Cambridge, to the number of a Hundred persons; and it was proved out of his own mouth that he was not there till the Meeting was done and the people dispersed, as the Constables of the parish upon Oath testified to the major [anon. 1675, 4–7].

It may be useful to remind ourselves that Quaker meetings during the seventeenth century encompassed rather more in the way of variety, frequency and length than those to which we are now accustomed. Until about 1660 Cambridge Friends conducted public debates and preaching, or 'threshing', sessions, which were regarded by some at least of their auditors, if not by the disputants and speakers, as a form of pubic entertainment. The audiences were sometimes quite volatile and could be large when well-known personalities were involved and when the dispute was arranged in advance, as that between George Whitehead and Thomas Smith detailed above. Impromptu debates and preaching sessions occurred whenever and wherever an inspired Friend felt that he or she might gain an audience: in the market place, at a college gate, on the street, or in a church after the sermon. Although Quakers were probably their most conspicuous practitioners, these activities were not unique to Friends. John Bunyan, for instance, preached in a barn in Toft. There were also the regular meetings for worship held on First Days and during the week in the meeting house near Sidney Sussex College, open to the public, but attended mainly by Friends and their sympathizers, and similar gatherings at Hadden-

ham, Cottenham, etc. Such meetings, which generally lasted for several hours, were frequently addressed by one or several inspired Friends and sometimes interrupted by public disorder. In addition to these were frequent smaller, private gatherings of Friends attended by the more active and dedicated Quakers as the chief means by which their ties to one another and their devotion to an arduous public life were reaffirmed. It would have been such private meetings which William Brazier, Elizabeth Underwood and the others held in their homes and not, almost certainly, the larger public meetings.

In these difficult times, Friends supported and encouraged one another by an extensive, but largely informal, system of intervisitation involving both well-known 'public' Friends and local individuals. In 1670 Edwin Cook, a Newnham miller, was apprehended and charged with attending a Meeting at the home of John Adams in Haddenham (Bester 1981, 150).

No Cambridge Friends attended the Quarterly Meetings held in Earith on the 6th of the 4th month (June) and the 5th of the 7th month (September) 1671, but by the tenth month of the same year it is recorded that affairs in Cambridge are 'pretty well' and things continued so in the following year. It was in May of 1672 that the King issued a national pardon of Friends imprisoned for refusing to take the oath of allegiance. Ten Cambridge or Cambridgeshire men were included in this pardon, which must have seemed a great respite to the Quaker community (Penny 1913). One name included on this list is that of Francis Holcroft, an important local Congregationalist Dissenter who had been imprisoned in 1663 for unlawful preaching. The others were Friends. Although pardoned with Friends, Holcroft was not in sympathy with them (Carter 1676a, 1676b).

Travelling to Earith over poor fen roads was a difficulty which kept Meetings from sending their delegates to the Quarterly Meetings held there, particularly during the winter and wet spring months. Consequently, in 1673 the large Cambridgeshire, Isle of Ely and Huntingdonshire Quarterly Meeting was split, with Cambridgeshire and the Isle constituting a Quarterly Meeting based at Haddenham which included the same Cambridgeshire Meetings as were listed in 1668. The new Quarterly Meeting met first on the 4th day of the first month (March). At this and subsequent meetings, the most usual entry for Cambridge is 'things well' or 'things pretty well', although on many occasions there continued to be the entry 'none heard' or no entry at all for Cambridge and for others of the local meetings, particularly in the winter quarter.

Occasionally some less terse entry found its way into the minute books. On the lst day of the 2nd month (April) 1675 it was recorded that:

> It is desired that women Friends may meet both at our Monthly and Quarterly Meetings according to ye order of Friends.

This would have had to do with the inclusion of women in the business affairs of Friends by establishing for them separate women's business meetings to consider in particular matters of domestic conduct and the practical relief of needy Friends and their children. It was a move strongly advocated by George Fox, but resisted by some Friends nationally who felt that women ought to have no part in the church's business and organizational concerns.

At many Quarterly Meetings during the last quarter of the seventeenth century special collections were brought in from the Monthly Meetings in aid of individual named Friends who had been distressed by fire, orphaned or were otherwise in need of assistance. From Cambridge there was usually a contribution of a few shillings to each such collection, a sum about average for all the Meetings contributing. On the lst day of the 2nd month (April) 1676 it is recorded that Cambridgeshire Friends contributed six pounds, seventeen shillings and nine pence 'towards the relief of Friends that suffered by the late fire in Cottenham'. Two pounds, eleven shillings and six pence of this came from Cambridge itself. A separate collection was made at Wisbech and is recorded in their Sufferings Book;

> the 3th of ye 7th mo 1676 collected at a meeting toward the relief of Friends that Suffered by a fire yt hapnd att Cottonham the sum of sixteen shillings five pence.

By 1677 a total of almost £104 had been disbursed to fifteen named Friends who had

suffered by this fire. Other collections made in subsequent years were 'for the service of Truth' and for the relief of poor Friends in Scotland. The readiness of Friends to look after and support one another, a particularly attractive feature of their early organization, is all the more remarkable when we recall the financial disabilities under which many of them laboured when not actually in prison.

In 1680 George Whitehead and sixteen other Friends presented to the 'King, Lords and Commons in Parliament' an account of money distrained from Friends and a list of those who had died under persecution between 1661 and 1670.

> In the perusal of the following Accounts you may see what Destruction and Spoil hath been made upon our Estates within these two or three years last past, many poor Families being wholly ruined, and Tradesmen that helped to imploy and relieve others, are now so impoverished, that they are fain to shut up their shops, and to be helped themselves, and the industrious and laborious are become a prey to the rapine of dissolute and idle informers [Whitehead, Gibson *et al.* 1680].

It is recorded in this document that about £609 was distrained from Cambridgeshire, which was about average of all the counties listed.

During the later part of the 17th century, individual Friends remained active in upholding their religious testimonies against both church and secular charges. In 1678, Jasper Docwra, probably the father of James and father-in-law of Ann (there was in that family a Jasper Docwra born in 1607 and married at St. Edward's, Cambridge in 1632), was indicted at the Ely diocesan visitation to Bassingbourn

> for saying yt he is ye judge of ye whole word item yt he is ye father, yt he is ye son of man, (sometimes he sayes he is ye Shiloh, & yt all men shall fall downe on theire knees before him, yt ye next March the payment of tythes shall be all at end.

Also in that year Thomas Farrowe junior and Maria Massor of Pampisford were indicted 'for pretending to bee Married but wee know not how, neither have they pd the feese to ye Minister'. In the following year, John Currant of St Edward's parish, Cambridge was presented 'for refusing to baptize their child And for not coming to church for 3 months last past they being reputed Quakers'.

From about 1680 Ann Docwra, who had then been widowed for a number of years, became an active leader among Cambridge Friends. Hers had been an unusual upbringing, of which she relates that when she was about fifteen her father

> pointed to the great Statuet book that lay upon the parlour window and bid her read that; saying it was as proper for a woman as for a man, to understand the laws, because women must live under them and obey them as well as men. . . . I have read several law books besides the Statuet book, which was very beneficial to myself and others, in the time of persecution [Backhouse *et al.* 1850, 63–4].

In 1680 she was one of thirteen local Friends who wrote a letter to Meeting for Sufferings to say that they had signed a statement in which they did 'Solomnly & Sincerely in ye presence of god profess, testifie & declare' their loyalty to the crown, but did not actually swear or take an oath, in exchange for a promise from Judge Montague of relief from the civil penalties which were otherwise imposed on them (Emerson *et al.* 1680). She began publishing her writings in 1682 when she became involved in controversies concerning the extent to which Friends should have settled forms of church government and national leadership, with an acknowledged membership and the disownment of erstwhile Friends who married non-Friends or who by their conduct brought disrepute to the Society.

Francis Bugg, clerk to the Sutton Monthly Meeting, had for some years had a grievance concerning the extent to which rural Friends were expected to meet the expenses of those who worked more-or-less full time for the Society as travelling preachers and as administrators. He seems to have been particularly jealous of Samuel Crisp, a Littleport carpenter and labourer who, according to Bugg, was enabled to travel as a preacher. In *The Painted Harlot*, published in 1663, Bugg relates the protests he had made at the Yearly Meeting in London in 1676 and, as further evidence of popish practices crept into Quakerism, instances the disownment of John Ansloe by Had-

denham Quarterly Meeting in 1678 for marrying a non-Friend. Bugg was himself disowned by Haddenham Quarterly Meeting in 1682 for causing dissension among Friends. Ann Docwra's first publications were in support of full liberty of conscience everywhere: 'therefore I desire in the love of God, that all may beware of those that of late Years have printed and published Books to vindicate their Formalities and Directories' (1683a, 1683b). In the same year, 1683, she went to London to look more closely into the disagreement, met George Fox and other prominent Friends, and perceived that 'the differences were too wide for me to compose' (Backhouse *et al.* 1850, 67).

Eventually Francis Bugg's and Ann Docwra's viewpoints diverged as the one became more extreme and the other more conservative. *An Apostate Conscience Exposed* is Ann's repudiation of Francis's writings.

In 1686 King James the Second issued a proclamation by which many Friends, including about twenty from Cambridgeshire, were released from prison. This effectively brought to a close the worst period of persecution of Cambridgeshire Quakers, a persecution which on the whole had been felt more heavily by Friends living in the villages than by those in town and which, except in the decade immediately after the Restoration, does not appear to have been as heavy in this county as it was in some others. It may have been that the University atmosphere was one in which irrational hatreds did not flourish to quite the extent they did elsewhere, despite the University's self-interested intolerance of dissent. In 1675 or 76, Dr. Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist and friend of Anne Conway, wrote to a correspondent that:

> The Quakers Principle is the most Safe and Seasonable here, to keep close to the Light within a Man. . . . [Green 1910, 8].

In later years, Dr. More wrote a number of pamphlets opposing Quakerism, but his opposition was purely intellectual and this more creditable attitude was perhaps characteristic of other leaders in the town as well.

Records of episcopal visitations made in 1676 and in 1685 help to give some idea of the extent of dissent within and outside the town, although the numbers of dissenters listed are most probably underestimates. Neither is it generally clear whether the figures refer to all adult parishioners or to heads of households only. In later visitations, the numbers of families were counted. The visitation of 1676, recorded in Bishop Fleetwood's Book, is summarized as:

Ye whole of ye Diocese was

People	Papists	Dissenters
31021	15	1425

Of the Cambridge parishes, only St. Clement's with 32 dissenters among 300 parishioners had many listed, the others had only a few each. Dissenters were, however, more numerous outside the town. There were 40 out of 141 at Barrington, 9 out of 103 in Barton, 43 out of 271 in Chatteris, 15 out of 160 in Chesterton, 37 out of 141 in Oakington, 42 out of 500 in Over, and 14 out of 560 in Cottenham. Besides Friends, dissenters would have included mainly Baptists and Congregationalists. Francis Holcroft owned land at and was particularly active in Oakington, where he had many followers. Among the rural parishes listed above, Friends meetings were by then established in Oakington, Over and Cottenham. In view of comments made in subsequent visitation records, and of the fifteen Friends or Friends' families who had been assisted after the fire in 1676, the number of dissenters in Cottenham seems particularly low.

The visitation record of August and September 1685 is rather more useful to us in that it distinguishes between various sects of dissenters, although it does not attempt to record their numbers. Among Cambridge parishes, All-Hallows had 'Some Dissenters, Several Quakers, one Muggletonian'; Trinity Church had 'Many Dissenters'; Saint Andrew's 'Some, not many Dissenters'; Saint Giles' 'Some Dissenters Anabaptists. Some Children Unchristned'; Great Saint Mary's '3 or 4 Dissenters Excommunicated very obstinate Holdcroft's disciples. 8 or 9 will not come to Church'. Outside the town, in Haddenham 'About 100 persons ought to Communicate. Not above 30 or 40 Actually do Communicate' and the parish of Chatteris 'abounds with Quakers'. Oakington draws an especially fierce comment.

> A stranger comes every Lds Day soe that there can be noe Catechizing or Holy-days.

> This ye most scandalous Parish and worst in ye Diocese for ye people are most vile. A Fanatick Schoolmaster Robt. Richardson. 3 or 4 Quakers and their Families. Severall Excommunicated.

Other parishes in which Quakers were noted were Sutton, Mepal, Downham, Kampton and Barton (Bradshaw 1875, 323–61).

Passage of the Toleration Act of May 1689 had wide political implications. Under its provisions dissenters, not including Papists and Unitarians, were allowed to practise their forms of worship, providing that their meeting places were registered in the Bishop's or Archdeacon's court and that they either took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy or subscribed to declarations promising faithful allegiance to King William and Queen Mary. Most Friends, who had steadfastly refused to swear any oaths, were willing to sign their assent to the declarations and were thus saved from the worst forms of persecution to which they had been subjected previously. An estimated 3500 to 4000 men and women living in the Isle of Ely, the northern part of the county of Cambridgeshire, signed such a declaration in 1723. This document, which is presently being transcribed, promises to yield much valuable demographic information. Under the provisions of the Toleration Act Friends were not relieved from paying tithes or from exhorbitant distraints made against their non-payment; and other disabilities connected with their refusals to take oaths and to participate in military service remained, as did their exclusion from universities.

Preceding the Act of Toleration and giving expression to the more liberal spirit which was gaining adherence both locally and nationally was another of Ann Docwra's pamphlets, *A Looking-Glass for the Recorder and Justices of Peace, and Grand Juries for the Town and County of Cambridge*, written in 1682.

> And for forcing Conformity upon any there can be no service to god in that; for Force makes Hypocrites. . . . Men must not play the Devil for God's sake. . . . To be plain; there is no Law to compel people to Conform, if they can show a lawful or reasonable excuse; Religion being an Obligation; men bound to God, and not to mens Opinions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank members of the Jesus Lane Friends Meeting in Cambridge, who first suggested that a history of Cambridge Friends be compiled and who have met a part of the cost involved. Grateful thanks are also due to staff at the County Records Office, the Cambridgeshire Collection, Friends House Library and especially to Dr. D. Hall, of the Cambridge University Library, for his encouragement and advice.

A NOTE ON SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DATES

Until 1757 the English year began on the 25th of March: December, for example, being the tenth month and February the twelfth of the year. In some parts of the country at least, there is evidence that Friends treated all of March as the first month of a new year. This seems to me to best fit the limited internal evidence available for Cambridge, and has been assumed when interpreting the quoted dates. Thus the first first day of the fifth month would be the first Sunday in July. The problem is more fully discussed in the booklet by Milligan and Thomas (1983).

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CONTENTS

Quakerism in Cambridge before the Act of Toleration (1653–1689) 1
LAUREL PHILLIPSON

Nomads in 'Waterland'? Prehistoric Transhumance and Fenland Archaeology 27
CHRISTOPHER EVANS

Ernest Greenfield's Excavations at Exning Roman Villa 41
C.J. WEBSTER

Denny Abbey: The Nuns' Refectory 67
JEM POSTER and DAVID SHERLOCK

Excavation at Riverside, Thompsons Lane, Cambridge 83
PAUL FIRMAN and JOYCE PULLINGER

Music at Jesus College, Cambridge, *c.* 1557–1679 97
IAN PAYNE

Royal Mandates for Degrees in the Reign of Charles II (1660–85): An Aspect of the Crown's Influence in the University of Cambridge 105
JOHN TWIGG

The First Cottage of Clay Bats? 113
JOHN MCCANN

Index 122