



Faringdon Quaker Meeting

NEWSLETTER 132 June to July 24

Meeting Affairs

Shared Lunch 2nd June 2024

Meeting for Business for Worship 7th July 2024

Area Meeting for Church Affairs

July, Saturday 13th Faringdon QMH. Starts at 10.30 am with OSAM AGM followed by meeting for church affairs. + Spiritual Nurture from 1.30 pm

Sept, Sunday 8th Marlborough QMH. Starts at 1.30 pm.

Nov, Saturday 9th Swindon QMH starts at 10.30 am + Spiritual Nurture from 1.30 pm.

British Yearly Meeting

July 26th to 30th July, Friends House, London or Zoom

Being among Quakers - A series of meeting for enquirers

June 12th, 26th, July 10th, 24th and August 7th.

In person at Oxford MH, or via Zoom.

Contact annewatson1089@gmail.com

Faringdon Peace Group

Monthly meetings on Wednesday 5th June and Wednesday 3rd July at 7.30pm

at the Meeting House.

Peace Party in the Garden

19 Coxwell Road

Saturday 6th July

Bring vegetarian food to share. With other attractions, 'Quakerleles' will be joining 'Ukes not Nukes'. Everyone welcome.

Charney Picnic

Sunday 23rd June at 12.30.

Bring your own lunch.

Folly Fest United Service

14th July in the Marketplace.

Hannington Open Gardens with the NGS.? Sunday 16th June after Midday.

Study Group

A programme will resume in September.

Collections

May to June, Christian aid

July to August, Quaker Service in Northern Ireland

September to October, Quaker Social Action

Garden rota.

The garden is both beautiful and biodiverse. Thank you to the gardeners. And please, if anyone wants to help, please speak to Val.

Reading dates.

June 2 Gill and Trish

July 7 Chris

June 9 Val

July 14 Mark

June 16 Ruth

July 21 Shirley

June 23 Paul

July 28 Sue

June 30 Simon

A Friends Passing

Janie writes,

Our Friend Jenny Buffery of Oxford Meeting died peacefully at home on 30 April, aged 84.

Jenny was a staunch Friend of this Meeting when we were very few in number (about 6 on a Sunday). She came quite often and was always cheerful and positive. If we thanked her, she would laugh and say that our Meeting was a welcome occasional contrast to the larger and more vocal Meeting in Oxford, though we knew she loved Oxford very dearly.

Daily Practice

Val asked me to mention the Quaker Daily Message which she finds a helpful support to her devotional practice. Below is an example,

The Daily Quaker Message May,14

This is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but that I feel the same spirit and life in him. “

Isaac Penington, 1660

If you want to have a daily Quaker reading in your inbox – it easy just subscribe by following this link <https://dailyquaker.com/>

Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting and the Slave Trade by Mark Dibbens (Thank You Mark)

Ann Morgan's talk 'Facing Up To Slavery' on the 8/12/23 at Oxford Meeting House (see the previous issue of No.43), on Lancaster Quakers and their direct involvement in the 18th and early 19th Century slave, trade prompted me to conduct similar research into whether and to what extent any direct links could be found between Quakers from local Meetings now associated with OSAM and the slave trade. As a retired academic, I was able to devise a methodology that would allow a systematic study. For these purposes, the Witney Division of Berkshire and Oxfordshire Monthly Meeting Minute Books from the period was the main focus; these are held at the Oxfordshire Archives in Cowley. This is because it includes the Local Meetings presently constituted under the Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting. There was a secondary focus on Vale Monthly Meeting as Faringdon (the author's own Meeting) was in Berkshire at the time. The names of Quakers found in the minute books and other relevant sources were then entered into the UCL Legacies of British Slavery Database (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/>) using the Advanced Search function and a similar search of the Slave Voyages database, particularly that part of it focusing in on enslavers since many people invested in the slave ships (<https://www.slavevoyages.org/past/enslavers>), was also carried out.

A total of 295 names of Quakers were found in the relevant Meeting materials. In the majority of cases, there was not even a surname match in either database. Where there was a surname match, I have yet to find any evidence of a Christian name match. Indeed, a search of named individuals (not just Quakers) in the Database living in Oxfordshire yields only 37 names (in Wiltshire 95 and in Berkshire 81 names; many of these were not resident within the Area Meeting boundary), and the resulting reverse search double-checking of these names against the list of Quaker names yielded no matches either. A similar scenario was encountered with the Slave Voyages database, with it being

very difficult to narrow down searches as a result of a lack of information concerning where the people mentioned on this database lived.

Faringdon Monthly Meeting and the Estate of Joseph Harris

In regard to Faringdon, this was apparently the locus of a Monthly Meeting during the time period, subsequently described and catalogued in Cowley as Vale Monthly Meeting (NQ2 in the Cowley archives). A specific search of the Vale Monthly minutes yielded the following (NQ2/A1/3; 'The Monthly Meeting Book for Faringdon, Berkshire', p.209), recorded as a minute in the Monthly Meeting on 28/4/1785, held that month at Challow:

"The estate of Joseph Harris includes [...] 11 Books Entitled 'The Enslavement of Negroes' by Anthony Benezet." Benezet, a French American, is well-known as one of the prominent abolitionists and 'founded one of the world's first anti-slavery societies, the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage' (source: Wikipedia). He gave an address to London Yearly Meeting in 1748 on this topic, which became his first publication. We may wonder why Joseph Harris had 11 copies of the book at the time of his death. Either he was removing them from people, which seems unlikely, or he had purchased a number of the books and was distributing them. Given what we know of Quaker involvement in abolitionism, the latter seems most likely.

Faringdon Responses to the 1784 and 1785 'Labour with Friends' Requests from Yearly Meeting

Further, in the Monthly Meeting held at Faringdon on 24/2/1786, there is the following Minute (NQ2/A1/3, p.216/7): "2. A Minute being read from last Quarterly Meeting requesting an Enquiry if any Friend within the [illegible] of this Meeting is Consern [original spelling] in the Slave Trade and [original emphasis] a referral to be made to the next Qrtly [original spelling] Meeting." There then follows at the next Monthly Meeting (20/3/1786), the reply – such as it is (ibid. p.217): "Answers to the Yearly Meeting Enquiry were here drawn up and after being read twice, by order of the Meeting were signed by John Snelling."

I presume John Snelling is the Clerk of the Meeting as he signs all the Answers and travels frequently to the Quarterly Meetings and undertakes other duties. It appears the above is his standard entry when drawing up any and all 'answers to Enquiries'; he never tells us what the answers are! Further, in every instance when he travels to the Quarterly Meeting and reports the Monthly Meeting answers there, there is no mention in the corresponding Faringdon Monthly Minute whether or not the answers were 'deemed satisfactory' by the Quarterly Meeting. Again, he simply never mentions it.

However, when others, such as Rob Allen or Thomas Pottinger, travel to the Quarterly Meeting, usually because Snelling was prevented, the corresponding Minute does note that the answers are satisfactory (ibid. p.224 and p.234 respectively). This means that either none of the answers John Snelling conveys are satisfactory or, far more likely, they are all satisfactory and, as Clerk, he never bothers to note the fact himself because in his mind it goes without saying. In any case, there is no follow-up inquiry about the Slave Trade following the Answers he conveys; the Minute is never carried over to a subsequent Monthly Meeting. Nonetheless, only an investigation of the Quarterly Meeting Minutes will confirm whether it felt the request was indeed answered in a manner that was 'satisfactory'.

A specific examination of the Women's Faringdon Monthly Meeting Minutes (NQ2/A2/1) and the Witney Joint Preparative Meeting (NQ3/13/A1/1), illustrates how the Women's Meetings were almost

invariably concerned with the collection and disbursement of monies for needy individuals such as widows and the poor. There appears to be no mention of consideration of Epistles. Examination of the Witney preparative Meeting Minute book (1774-1793; NQ2/A2/A1) reveals no specific mention of the 1784 and 1785 'labour requests. Furthermore, its clerk, too, prefers not to mention specific answers to Inquiries and Queries, using the same standardised format as the Faringdon clerk to note they have been agreed and are to be conveyed to the Quarterly Meeting – which suggest this was the more normal practice.

Conclusions

On the balance of probabilities and at least during the periods of key Quaker decision making in regard to Enslaved Peoples that this research has focused on, from the evidence I have been able to uncover, it seems most unlikely (though not impossible), that Quakers from Local Meetings now within OSAM were directly involved in the Slave Trade. By which I mean, had a connection that is identifiable through the UCL database Advanced Search and Commercial Legacies functions, and the Slave Voyages database.

Of course, if we were to extend our deliberations to consider the general possibility of local Quakers being shopkeepers, i.e. local folk, who retailed (i.e. sold to the general public at the very end of the supply chain, as opposed to wholesaling or factoring higher up the supply chain closer to the source) tobacco, coffee, tea, cotton clothing, sugar etc, then we would be needing to say there is probably a connection. Even more so, were we to extend our deliberations to Quakers as members of the public who bought such goods in their weekly shopping. In addition, one cannot discount the possibility that Quakers might lie to prevent their links to the Slave Trade from becoming known to the Religious Society of Friends, but that in and of itself points to the distinction between individual culpability and the culpability of Quakers as a particular Meeting; there is a limit to what investigations can find out from people during any period in history, just as there is about people from any period in history.

However, to say either of these things is to say nothing meaningful at all, frankly, beyond an already existing appreciation of the complicit unawareness of people in general as they went about their daily lives. A complicity that has arguably led to all people who have ever lived in the country from those times to this, benefiting indirectly from slavery. What we know without any doubt, on the other hand, is that Quakers were among the very first to realise the true horror of slavery as abhorrent exploitation of our fellow peoples, and importantly acted upon that realisation – for example in the way Joseph Harris of Faringdon Meeting did. Finally, therefore, it seems from this initial investigation that all may not be anywhere near as bad, what with the University's prima face proximity to OSAM, as first we feared: There is no evidence I can find that suggests Oxford or any of the OSAM LMs needs to be responding in the way Lancaster - with understandable reason - has felt the need to.

Dr Mark R Dibben: an earlier version focused on Oxford and Witney Meetings was published in the April 2024 edition of 43; both are abridged versions of a paper entitled 'Initial research into evidence of Quakers within OSAM having direct links to the Slave Trade' (19/02/24) written for the Oxford Local Meeting's Quaker Committee Concerned with Slave Trade, Colonialism and Economic Exploitation Legacies. The full paper is available on request from markrdibben@gmail.com