

A MEETING-PLACE OF THE EARLY QUAKERS IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

[BY MR. G. ELAND.]

The twenty-first secular item in the parish of Weston Turville recorded by the Historical Monuments Commission in the first volume of their Buckinghamshire Report reads as follows:—

The Black Horse Inn, formerly a farmhouse, and said to have been a Quaker meeting-house, at Brook End, about 800 yards N. of the church, is a long rectangular building of two storeys and an attic, possibly of 15th century origin. The walls are timber-framed, with filling of wattle and daub, partly replaced by brick. The roof is thatched. One chimney stack is of c. 1600. Interior: In the ceiling of the ground floor are two moulded beams supported by brackets. Two large curved beams, rising from the ground and forming an arch in the roof, indicate that the house was built originally in the 15th century, and subsequently altered and enlarged; the roof has been raised, probably when the chimney stack was inserted, and the upper storey is now ceiled.

Condition—fairly good.

This description, so far as it goes, is accurate, although the word "Inn" is not correct, as it is usually restricted to a fully licensed house, and this one was never more than a beerhouse, and then only for some ninety years. The distinction is important as it fortunately underwent no structural alteration to adapt it for use as a public-house. Indeed, the chief alteration since 1600 was made when it was divided into two tenements, probably at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The licence lapsed at Midsummer, 1918, and the house has now been restored to its earlier plan; other changes were then made and will be mentioned later on, but none of them amount to structural alteration, and the building as it now stands may be taken as representing the 1600 design.

The evidence for a fifteenth century origin referred to by the Commissioners is of a difficult character; the "two large curved beams" have every appearance of being a pair of "crucks" or "forks," such as were used in mediæval houses, but they are not true "crucks," in that they do not meet so as to support the ridge of the



FRONT (NORTH) VIEW OF HOUSE.

roof, but are joined by a collar-beam over 8 feet wide, to which they are further secured by brackets. If the height of this collar-beam is any indication of the original height of the house, the re-building of 1600 nearly doubled it, for the tops of these crucks now appear quite low down in Room 7 on the plan, and in the space marked 8. The lower part of these "crucks" (visible in Room 1) is decorated with a chamfer and somewhat elaborate stop—not only on the side which is visible, but on the inner side, at present built up, and its existence was only shown upon cutting away the plaster. This may or may not indicate that the present pair of "crucks" were the central ones of three pairs in the original house, they occur in the middle of the present structure, which is 50 feet long, and might therefore be held to represent three "bays" of 16 feet each.* Measuring to the next vertical principals now the distance is only about 13 feet, and the house proper consists of four bays.

Room No. 1 contains another remarkable feature in a ceiling-room, which exactly bisects the room in the long axis of the house; it is supported by brackets which are both moulded and carved, each bracket and the centre of the beam itself being decorated with a rose, the use of which "was common throughout England during the latter part of the fifteenth century." †

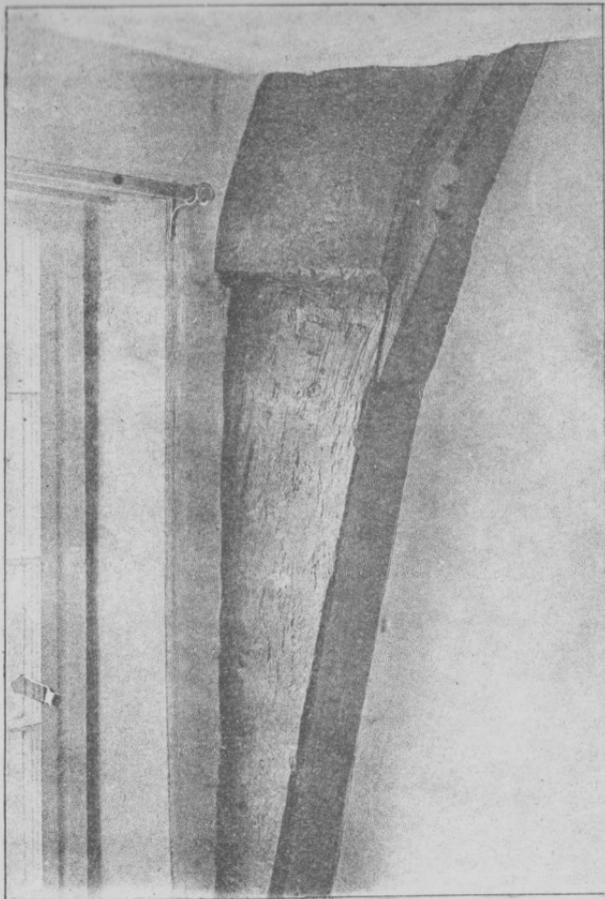
The eastern bracket rests on the beam of the fireplace, which was very likely not in that position before the 1600 reconstruction. ‡

If this ceiling beam was in the original house the upper floor must have been too low to be of any real use; on the other hand, it may have served to brace the tie-beams between two pairs of "crucks"—so long as Mr. Addy will allow the possibility of their being no more

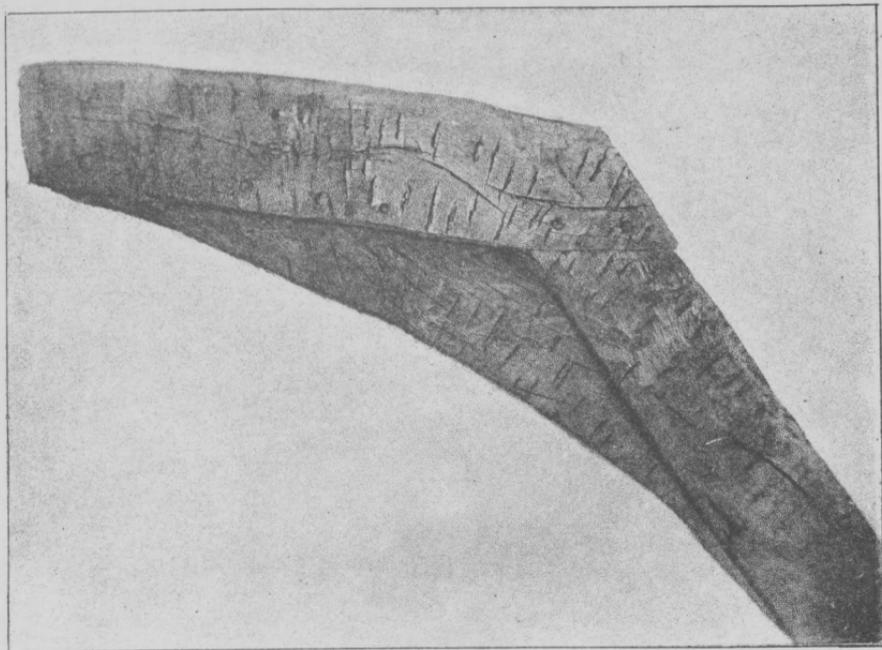
* See Addy's "Evolution of the English House, 1905, p. 32 et passim.

† "Old Oak Furniture," by Fred Roe, 1906. p. 25.

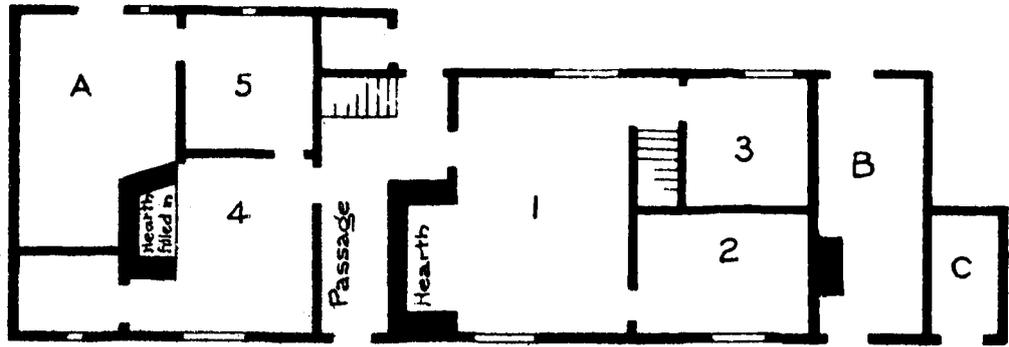
‡ This beam across the hearth cracked some 50 years ago, and has a bad flaw in it; the weight was then borne by an iron pillar, and the hearth was bricked in. The recent alterations opened out the hearth again and removed the pillar, the beam having been cleverly strengthened by two strips of flat iron on edge throughout its length, effectually bolted together right through the beam, which was then made quite rigid.



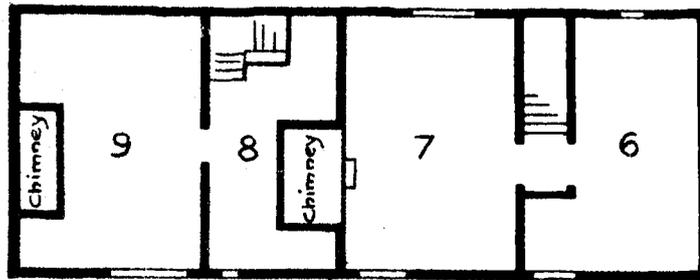
LOWER PORTION OF CURVED PRINCIPAL (in Room 1, N. Side).



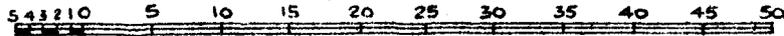
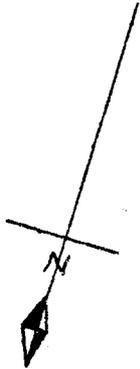
UPPER PORTION OF CURVED PRINCIPAL (in Room 7, S. Side).



Ground Floor



First Floor



Scale of Feet.

than 13 feet apart. One is inclined on the whole to doubt whether the ceiling-beam was put in before the house was enlarged, but one leans to the opinion that this enlargement took place earlier than 1600. The beam, with a simple moulding and with less elaborate supporting brackets, is continued at the east end of the house, across the passage and Room 4.

The rest of the structural timber-work of the house is typical of the early seventeenth century, everywhere massive and rudely finished. In no case does the wood seem to have been cut across the grain, and to this circumstance its excellent condition is no doubt due. The pegs of the mortices project several inches in the place marked 8 on the plan.

One of the most striking features of the house is the generous scale upon which the "outshuts" are designed; an "outshut" being the space outside the true wall of the house formed by the extension of the rafters to within a few feet of the ground. Instead of being the low, lean-to kind of sheds common to cottages of the period, they comprise in this case two spaces of 20 feet by 8 feet, and 24 feet by 12 feet respectively; in addition are some of more usual dimensions. From the fact that the walls are without plaster, and that little attempt has been made to put any ceiling beneath the thatch, it does not seem that they were ever used for anything but barns or byres.

The original walls were of wattle and daub, and the upper portion still consists of that material, though up to the level of the first tie-beams this has been replaced at various dates by brick. The photograph shows this wattle and daub *in situ*, the willow or other wood of which the wattle was made is still sound where not exposed, as was proved when a small piece had to be cut away for the enlargement of a window; the wood was still perfectly pliable. The "daub" appears to have been mixed with chopped straw, and the whole has lasted three full centuries so admirably that it might be well to consider whether its use as a building material could not be revived, if the art is not altogether lost. It seems to be an effectual non-conductor of heat, and if not exposed too much to the weather should last.

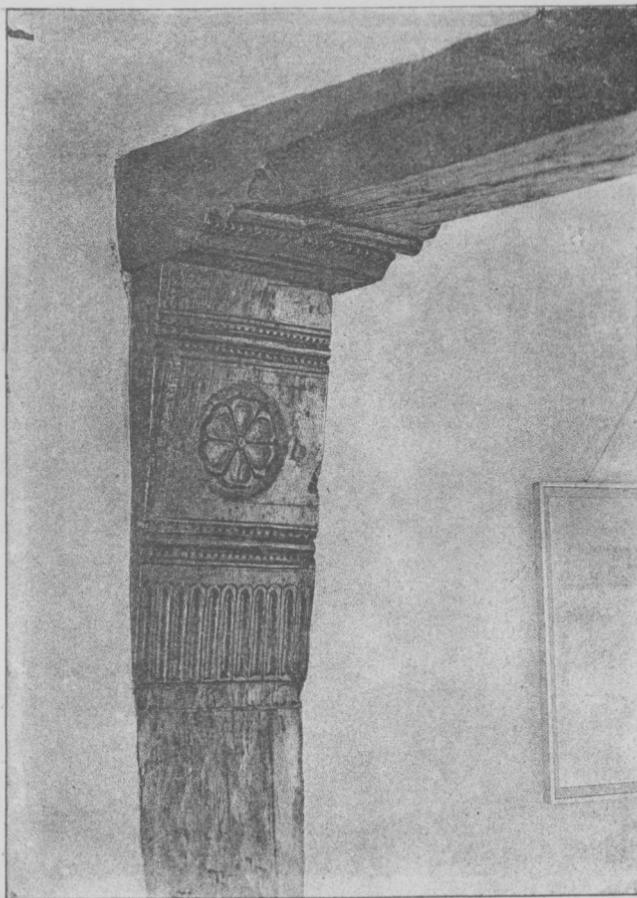
The fireplaces in Rooms 1 and 4 are both upon a generous scale, each being about 9 feet wide and nearly 4 feet deep; the hearth in Room 1 had been partially filled up and a kitchen stove inserted, the front of which was flush with the wall of the room; the space has now been opened out and the ingle-seats exposed. The chimney in this case is built into the passage, as appears in the ground-plan, the lower part is largely constructed with some soft stone, probably local "rag," or the lower chalk, or "clunch;" this is the only attempt at ashlar which has been noticed in the house. The fireplace in Room 4 has been closed to contain a kitchen stove; in this case the chimney projects partly into the room and partly into outshut A. Before it was built up the iron door of a bread-oven, which no longer exists, was observed in the splayed corner projecting into the outshut; in the room above (No. 9) this chimney projects 3 feet, with a width of 8 feet at the floor level, narrowing towards the ceiling. Room 3 contains a fireplace, the chimney of which projects into outshut B; it does not appear to have been built more than a hundred years or so. In Room 7, upstairs, there is another fireplace, now containing a grate bricked in, but originally an open hearth, the flue is curiously joined with the main chimney from Room 1, and the course of both chimneys is clearly seen in the space marked No. 8 upstairs; this space was formerly open up to the rafters, exposing the underside of the thatch; it has now been ceiled at the level of the purlins, and from the wall-plates to the purlins with matchboarding.

The ceiling-level in the other three rooms upstairs is that of the purlins, and a narrow space above this ceiling and between it and the ridge can be seen from outshuts A and B; if this is the "attic" mentioned by the Commissioners, there is no means of access to it, it is without a proper floor and nowhere five feet high, and it is not lighted in any way, so it can never have served any useful purpose.

Neither of the staircases was original, and as they were badly made and in a decayed state they were renewed during the recent alteration. The staircase



WATTLE AND DAUB WALL (in Outshut B)



CEILING-BEAM AND BRACKET (in Room 1).

leading from the door of Room 3, actually occupying part of that room and of Room 6 above it, ends at the top with the cross-beam, which joins the tie-beams of the two westernmost bays and carries the floor of Room 6. The staircase leading out of the passage replaces a very steep and awkwardly twisting stair, which was reached from the room marked 3, now used as a scullery; this was not, however, the original means of access to Room 9, as the uppermost tread of a stair can be seen in outshut A, but the brickwork filling the old entrance into that room is evidently of some antiquity. On the whole it seems probable that the stairs to the upper floors of the original house, or even of the 1600 house, were of the step-ladder type, needing little base length for their ascent.

Most unfortunately none of the original doors or windows have been preserved; the windows were replaced by wooden casements about 50 years ago; one of the early frames with a characteristic Jacobean catch was found during the recent alterations, and has been inserted in outshut B.

To summarise: the evidence for a fifteenth century origin seems to be limited to the pair of curved principals; if they were not intended to be a pair of "crucks," or "forks," there is no apparent reason why they should not have been placed vertically in position, and so rendered unnecessary the uprights which are external to them in the present height of the house—they cannot be supposed to have any structural value in the house at present existing, or they would occur in other bays. Their general appearance is so similar to that of the other timber-work in the house that one is forced to suppose that they were actually introduced at that date for some reason now unknown, or that earlier "crucks" were cut short, so as not to interfere with the chimney and the collar beam inserted towards the close of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Enough (too much, possibly,) has been said about the structure, which, as it stands, can be equalled or excelled, one is glad to think, by very many others in the same county; let us accept it as an example of

early Jacobean rural architecture which has had the fortune to be undisturbed in design since it was built.

So far the interest is general, it becomes more particular when it is known that the house has a definite history, recorded beyond all question of authenticity throughout the latter part of the seventeenth and the first quarter of the eighteenth centuries.

Before the passing of the Enclosure Act relating to this parish the house had served as a farmhouse, the land attaching to it (besides a meadow of 5 acres in the rear) being situate nearly a mile off in a north-westerly direction, thus illustrating one of the great disadvantages of the common-field system, so ably explained by Lord Ernle* and by Gilbert Slater.† The Enclosure Act award map of 1799, now filed in the County Hall, Aylesbury, describes the house as "Homestead, home close, and Quakers' Meeting House;" this supports tradition, which rests upon the evidence of Frank Brill, who was born in the house more than a century ago, and has been dead some twenty years. He used to point to a spot immediately opposite to the backdoor as the site of a structure formerly serving as a Meeting House of the Friends.‡ Mr. E. Axtell, who was brought up in the house sixty years ago, and was subsequently its tenant for 36 years, says that it was not standing in his day. We know, therefore, that it must have been destroyed in the first half, and probably in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as Mr. Axtell's grandfather (the original licensee) was tenant before him for 37 years from about 1830, and the Meeting House was not extant in his day.

The evidence that the place had been the resort of the Friends was sufficient to justify a search at the Bishopsgate headquarters, and, through the very great kindness and courtesy of the Librarian, it is possible

* "English Farming—Past and Present."

† "English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields."

‡ The property was included in a conveyance to Mr. Wm. Pursell, grandfather of the present owner, which is dated 1851, and contains a clause in which mention is made of "the site of the building lately standing thereon commonly called the Quakers' Meeting House."

to give some interesting particulars from a document which has not yet been published.

It appears that Weston Turville was adopted as the place of the Quarterly Meetings for a very considerable area, known as the "Lower Side" of Bucks; since the Meeting was attended by representatives of the Monthly Meetings from all extremes of that County, and from Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, and even from Bedfordshire, it seems improbable that "Lower" signifies "Southern;" neither was the district by any means confined to the Vale, as many Meetings held in the Chilterns sent their representatives to Weston Turville. The peculiar interest attaching to this Meeting is that the Minute Book, which so faithfully records the proceedings with a precision and businesslike method which many a modern minute-book would do well to emulate, was written from 1669 until 1713 † by no less a person than Thomas Ellwood, whose "History" has gained high rank among autobiographies, besides casting some interesting sidelights upon his still greater friend, John Milton.

In 1678 the tenant of the house was John Brown, one of those early Friends whose persecution gained repeated mention in that Quaker counterpart of Fox's "Martyrs," known as Besse's "Sufferings." In 1666, for example, "John Brown has his goods taken by Distress to the value of £15 at the suit of John Stokes of Weston Turvill, tithe-farmer;" and in 1670 John Brown was imprisoned for tithe "at the suit of William Baker, a tithe-farmer of Weston. The same John Brown for being at a meeting in Ailsbury suffered Distress of his Barley with out any account rendered by the Prosecutors, and for being at a Meeting at Tring he was fined £8, for which three cows and a bull were distrained, and valued by neighbours at £11, but Anderson afterward sent two other Appraisers, which

† The "Testimony" from the Hunger Hill Monthly Meeting (held at his own house) prefixed to Ellwood's "Life" refers to "his services in our meetings, and in the Quarterly Meetings for the County of Bucks, were very great, and of many years continuance;" and George Bowles in his "Testimony" speaks of Ellwood's activity, "especially in relation to our own Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, the writings of both of which had been under his care for more than forty years."

rated them at just the value of the fine, and then he ordered them to be driven to his own house." †

The Minute-book begins then with a record of the proceedings at John Brown's in Weston Turville; apart from the routine minutes relating to finance and so on, many subjects of very general interest arose from time to time, and appear to have been handled with considerable wisdom. Thus a report was made (26/10/1678) of bail broken by certain of the Friends who were in prison; one had died before the Assizes, it seems, and another was dangerously ill, so a committee was appointed to see the gaoler at Aylesbury about the matter.

At the next meeting they reported that the gaoler was "highly offended and disturbed," because he had paid forfeit to the Court for the non-appearance of the prisoners. The Meeting "taking this matter into serious consideration, did agree that (although Friends in Truth can in no wise consent to the payment of fees either to the Clerk of the Assize or to the Gaoler), yet inasmuch as the Gaoler is really damnified by reason of the liberty which he gave his said Prisoners, which his said prisoners received the benefit of, in justice and equity the suffering ought not to be upon the Gaoler, but some satisfaction should be made unto him so far as concerns Nicholas Steel (?), who is the only Friend now living of the said three prisoners." The gaoler still persisted that whether the other prisoners were alive or dead he had actually suffered by paying fines in respect of them, and eventually he was paid £1: 13: 8 "in full satisfaction of all dues, debts, or demands whatsoever," the original receipt dated 22nd January, 1679, and signed Nath. Birch, being inserted in the book.

The active benevolence of the Meeting towards all Friends in distress is illustrated by numerous grants, payments for the apprenticeships of orphaned children, and so on; discretion was exercised, however, for on one occasion payment was authorised in the case of a boy cured of the disease called the King's Evil—a payment which was subsequently stayed because Friends

† Besse, vol. I., pp. 78-79.

understood that "the child is not really cured, but that the distemper continues to break out upon him, and withal grows worse instead of better."

A most striking incident which bulks largely in one portion of the Minute-book was made to rest upon a slight pretext. A man named Timothy Child had a grievance to lay before the Meeting, which passed a minute to the effect that he had already received justice at the Monthly Meeting, from which he appealed. At the Quarterly Meeting (28/1/1683) which came to this decision there was one dissentient—no less a person than John Raunce, the physician, of High Wycombe, who had befriended Ellwood in 1659 and 1662. After the meeting had broken up, Raunce, in John Brown's absence, obtained access to the Minute-book, and expressed his own view of the case in a very bold handwriting, which contrasts strangely with Ellwood's comparatively neat script.

This interpellation was duly found at the next meeting and greatly scandalized the Friends, who passed a minute in which they stated that "being sensible of the evil that might ensue if such abuses should be suffered to be put upon the Meeting without reproof, did find it their duty to bear Testimony against it, and resolved it to be their sense and judgment in truth, that for anyone to write in the Meeting-book out of Meeting time and without the consent of the Meeting is a disorderly thing and not according to truth."

This was apparently signed by all present except John Brown himself, who felt that too much responsibility was placed on him by making him custodian of the book, which was therefore committed to the care of Thomas Olliffe, of Aylesbury.

John Raunce, who was among the most zealous of the early Friends, became one of the first schismatics,† and subsequently entered into a wordy and most unedifying pamphlet war with Ellwood, in which much mud was flung with the fury of polemical theology.

† He was still making trouble in the meeting on 26/7/1688, when the Minutes report: "Yet could not friends prevail with him to give over his contentious trouble, but he still persisted therein; whereby it plainly enough appeared that his design and purpose was to obstruct the Meeting."

Raunce's favourite mode of attack seeming to be sneers at the way in which Ellwood had buried his father.* The Minute-book does not explain exactly how Raunce managed to write in it, but as his second wife was Elizabeth Brown, of Weston Turville, it may be that he had access to the premises, as son-in-law—either actual or prospective.

A most remarkable case which occupied the Quarterly Meeting for a long while was that of Robert Page, who was reported (25/4/1684) to "use the trade of buying and selling Bone lace, which this Meeting looks upon as inconsistent with the testimony of truth and hurtful to him that uses it;"—they accordingly sent someone to admonish him. Since some of the early Friends beguiled their imprisonment with lace-making it is certain that all did not look upon it as so heinous an offence, and no other case of its being so designated is known to the Friends' Historical Society.

At the next Quarterly Meeting the Committee appointed reported that Robert Page "did not seem much to justify himself in, but urged his necessity for a subsistence, and alleged that he did not see the evil of it," with which explanation the Meeting was by no means satisfied.

On 24/4/1685 it was again reported that Robert Page attempted to justify himself, and "reflected upon friends for visiting him;" he was therefore invited to present himself at the next quarterly meeting; he did not attend that meeting however, and on 29/7/1686 "many exhortations and opening (?) Testimonies were given in the love of God to him." On the 29th of the 10th month he was still an absentee, and "he had more than once disappointed the Meeting after the like manner;" it was decided therefore "that a Testimony against his practice be drawn up against the next Meeting."

On 30/1/1687 the publication of this Testimony was deferred because Page was reported to be "not altogether easy and satisfied in himself in the use of that employment."

* See "Supplement" to the Life of Ellwood by J. W.

But at the next Meeting the Testimony was launched with all the solemn emphasis of a Papal Bull; it concludes thus: "wherefore we do in the name and authority of God unanimously and with one consent judge, condemn, deny, and declare against that practice and employment of making or in any way dealing in Bone lace, as a thing wholly useless in the Creation, as an hindrance and obstruction to the spreading and prosperity of Truth, and as a support to Pride and Vanity, which the fire of the Lord is kindled against."

On 31/10/1684 occurs the first direct allusion to the place of meeting, the Minute is worth transcribing in full:—

"Jane Brown acquainted the meeting that it is the desire both of herself and her daughter that the meeting should be continued at her house, as they were in her husband's time, that the testimony which her husband had faithfully borne down to his death might be kept up, and withal she desired the assistance of friends in helping her (if they can), either to a suitable tenant to take her farm, or a capable servant to oversee and manage her husbandry for her, proposing that if she did let the farm she would reserve the meeting-house for Friends and some room in the dwelling-house for herself to be there to bear (?) off from the tenant any suffering that might come by reason of the meeting, which proposal being made and she withdrawn, the meeting after due consideration thereof did send forth Henry Costard and James Smith to acquaint her that they took her and her daughter's offer of the continuance of the meeting there very kindly and in true love, assuring her that the Friends will use their best endeavours to assist her in the rest according to her desire." Whether there was any immediate outcome of this does not appear, but on 25/7/1689 we read that:

"The Meeting understanding that Jane Brown hath let her farm to her servant George Brill and that he is willing Friends should set their horses in his stables and some friends having been desired to treat with him about the price, and giving account that they have agreed with him for 40/- for the year for the use

of the stables and hay for the horses as often as meetings are here. To defray this charge a collection was made from the several meetings amounting to £2.4.6. which was put into Tho. Olliffe's hands for him to give George 10/- for the time the stables have been used until now, and 10/- by the year till it is spent."

The arithmetic seems somewhat cloudy here, or it may be that the word "quarter" should take the place of "year" in the final sentence.*

Possibly it was a very wet autumn in 1689, for on 25th of the 10th month it was minuted as follows:—

"The Friends here met observing that the weather had been in to this Meeting-house through the Roof, and thereby hurt the Ceiling, have ordered James Smith and Tho. Olliffe to speak to George Brill about it, and desired him to get it speedily mended and give an account thereof at the next meeting."

This work was duly done, and the cost reported to be 5s. 6d.

On 29/10/1697 it was placed on record "that this meeting house doth want some reparation to be done to it about the thatching, and doth recommend to Tho. Olliffe and James Smith the care thereof."

Apparently the rent had been raised at some time to £3 a year, for on 29/10/1714 "A question being raised whether George Brill be not a looser by what is paid him each quarter James Smith and Thomas Edmonds are desired to speake with him and his wife about the matter."

The next quarter this sub-committee announced that they "think it needful to add 3/- more to what hath been usually paid and then it will be 18/- a quarter beside the 2/- for servants, which this meeting agrees to."

* The matter is hardly elucidated by a minute of 28/10/1692: "Tho. Olliffe gave account of the charge of the stables beginning the 25th. first Mo: 1691, and ending 28/10/1692, amounting in the whole to £4. 6. 0., by which it appeared that he had expended the £1. 11. 0. left in his hands in the 10th. month 1690, and is out of purse £3. 6. 0." Two complete years' rent would be £4, and £4. 17. 0. seemed to be needed, perhaps other incidental expenses were included, such as 2/- a quarter "for servants" referred to later on, this would make a total of £4. 16. 0.

George Brill was apparently in trouble as a "conscientious objector" as John Brown had been before him, for he is constantly receiving payments on account of "sufferings for tithes," or "steeple-house rates." Thus, at the same meeting as the rent was proposed to be advanced, the following payments were minuted:

"George Brill for Great Tithe, £18. 3. 0.

"Steeple-house rates and privy tithe, £3. 12. 0.

On 27/5/1694 a copy of G. Fox's Journal was deposited with the Meeting, and ordered to be lent out to the various Monthly Meetings; and James Smith was instructed "to provide a leather cover for the said book to secure the lids of it from wearing, and also a Bag to carry it in, at the charge of the Meeting." The position of this volume was subsequently announced at each Meeting, and slow readers were exhorted to circulate the volume without more delay.

On 30/7/1713 Daniel Wharley replaced Thos. Ellwood, deceased; Wharley only held the secretarial position for 8 years as he died in 1721.

At various times during the 40 years we have been glancing at the meeting had been held at various other places in the district comprised in the "Lower Side," but the regular place of meeting continued to be at Weston until 1727, when the Meeting happened to be held at Sherrington (Bedfordshire). On that occasion it was noted that:

"The Friends of Ailsbury acquaint the Meeting that the Friends' Meeting-house there is re-built and enlarged whereby if this Meeting shall think fit there may be convenience for friends to hold the quarterly meeting in Ailsbury." The meeting "thought fit," and was not thereafter held at George Brill's.

The Brills seem to have occupied the farm throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, and the meadow at the rear of the house is known as "Brill's Close" to this day.

There was a burial-ground associated with the Meeting House, but now separated from it by a road and the space of a hundred yards. The register of burials has now been deposited at Somerset House, but a transcript is in the Bishopsgate archives. The burial ground is

now planted as an orchard, and has not been in the same ownership as the site of the Meeting House for the last century.

The present occupier was in ignorance of the use to which it had formerly been put until about thirty years ago, when he was digging a pit for gravel and came upon the end of a coffin at the depth of six feet; it was lying east and west, and was in no way touched.

Frank Brill, who has been mentioned before and was then alive, said that it was the last burial which took place there.

Amidst somewhat of that ultra-Puritanical spirit which can find only limited sympathy in other days, there is much in the early Friends which commands our highest respect.

Assuming absolute sincerity in the adherents to all religions, there is a good deal in ritual or its setting which is deliberately made attractive; buildings which are beautiful in themselves, and with beautiful fittings, or if not considered really beautiful by general opinion at least thought so by their designers. Again, we are told how

Light quirks of music varied and uneven,

Make the soul dance upon a jig to Heaven,

but our early Quakers—despised and persecuted, and hedged about with civil disabilities—carefully eschewed all vestige of ceremony, all the glamour of the “steeple-house,” and quietly persisted in treading the narrow path according to their own lights, cheerfully interrupting their business in order to ride long miles by bad roads in order to administer the affairs of their community—ministering to the poor, sick, and needy, aiding the fatherless, and dealing justly by all men. Though their resting-place on earth has not been wholly respected one feels that their gentle spirits are at rest (if Dr. Raunce be at rest), even though

No mitred priests swing back the heavenly portals
To let those white souls in.