

“A GOVERNMENT OF WOMEN DISTINCT FROM MEN”¹

MARION HALL

A study of the Women's Monthly Meeting of 'the Upperside' (see next page); its members, their maturity, social and marital status and degrees of involvement in the work of the Meeting; practical difficulties in attendance, contemporary attitudes to women and the resultant local involvement with the Story-Wilkinson Schism 1678-1685.

Records indicate that the Quakers gained a foothold first in the North East of Buckinghamshire in particular in the village of North Crawley where the families of Marks, Mabley, Mouse and Glidswell lived. The earliest child registration is credited to the Marks family in 1645,² which must be a retrospective entry because the Quaker mission to the south did not start until 1654.³ They had probably come under the influence of the charismatic preacher, John Croke of Beckerings Park, Rigmont, near Woburn, Bedfordshire⁴ and it was at his house that Isaac and Mary Penington became convinced Quakers in 1658.⁵ Archbishop Sheldon's returns show John Croke as a 'teacher' in Wingrave in 1669 and "now cheife leader of the sect of Quakers".⁶

By 1659, seven thousand women supporters of Quakerism nationwide (they had no formal membership) put their names to what became known as 'The Handmaids' Petition', a soft name for their thunderings against Tithes.⁷ Of the seven thousand, over four hundred came from Bucks, and many can now be identified in their regional groupings. Most, of course, came from the north of the county, but there are groups discernible in the Chalfonts around Mary Penington and Gulielma Maria Springett, and in High Wycombe with Phillchristie Noy, Frances Rance, (first wife of John Raunce, physician and schismatic, credited with bringing Quakerism to parts of Oxfordshire)⁸ three Shrimpton women and

Dorothy Lucas. In Haddenham were the Ross or Rose women, White in Meadle, Brown in Weston Turville and Elizabeth Median (Meddin) in Burnham. This number of women supporters, only a few years before Thomas Ellwood was to estimate male Quaker supporters in the County at sixty, gives the lie to the view held by some historians that Quakerism was less popular with women than men.⁹

Revolutionary disorder had allowed Quakers to thrive and caused fear amongst many of their contemporaries; John Lilburne, the Leveller visionary, joined them at the end of his life.

After the Restoration came the period now known as "the Persecution". Quakers were under such suspicion of constituting a danger to the good order of the State that they alone had an addition to the generally punitive Conventicle Acts (and use of *praemunire*) called the Quaker Act of 1662; it threatened transportation to any member caught attending conventicles three times.

Thomas Ellwood, the impoverished younger son of an Oxfordshire squire, who settled in Coleshill, wrote at length of his own experience of imprisonment in London and Aylesbury.¹⁰ And Richard Clipsham, a Citizen Tailor of London was one of three hundred and eighty Quakers rounded up and jailed in Newgate in 1660.¹¹ Ten years later he and

his wife Margery followed William Penn to Chorleywood¹² and when Penn left, settled in Stone Dean Farm, Chalfont St. Giles (now Jordans).

By 1667, George Fox had outlived most of his company of joint Quaker leaders¹³ and began the process of imposing upon Quakers¹⁴ the hierarchy of order and organisation necessary for their survival; the most immediate structures being the Monthly Meetings where members from local Preparative Meetings came together to deal with matters of discipline and welfare. The area covered was called 'The Upperside' and consisted of the Buckinghamshire Chilterns, the Vale south of Aylesbury and the western fringes of Hertfordshire, notably Tring, Chorleywood and Watford.

"Foxonian" order was the consolidation of a movement away from revolutionary freedoms, away from the rule of the iconoclastic, 'anti-education' artisans,¹⁵ to rule by their "betters", from enthusiastic youth to elder, from visionary prophesy and inspirational preaching to licenced, approved preachers and from movement to settlement. This was the third period of Quakerism, the 'Quietist Period'.¹⁶

Some women, having experienced this freedom, must now resume their place at the bottom of the social hierarchy; becoming obedient wives and producers of children, not inspired preachers and prophets.¹⁷ Baptist women had learnt this bitter lesson, not even being allowed a separate meeting for prayer.¹⁸ Quaker women had advantages: Margaret Fox, formerly Fell, protectress of early enthusiasts, and drafter of the Peace Testimony;¹⁹ and the stubborn insistence of Fox himself, backed by dubious scriptural authority.²⁰

They were given their separate meetings, primarily for worship²¹ but, controversially, for 'business'. Some business was non-contentious: the succour of the poor had always been 'women's work', and they might collect money for good causes, and admonish their own sex for wrong doing. The tension lay in a woman's traditional role in a patriarchy, that of submission to men, as the fallen daughters of Eve, and the new Foxonian role of examining couples applying to marry for 'clearness',²² with its implied exercise of authority over men.

Two men, John Story and John Wilkinson set up in opposition to Fox and a bitter quarrel ensued, both personal and doctrinal, in which the existence of Women's Meetings was central. Quakers split; the Story Wilkinson Schism spread across the country from 1671 to 1683 when Story died. John Raunce and Charles Harris were the local schismatics and by 1683 High Wycombe had two separate Meetings.²³

A 'woman's place' is illustrated well by several priests' returns to Archbishop Sheldon's questionnaire.²⁴ If a dissenter was to be denigrated he was given a lowly status; John Brown of Weston Turville was called "farmer" when he was in fact a freeholder and called himself a 'yeoman'.²⁵ And the ultimate insult was to say of a Conventicle that it was attended by "syilly women" or "very indigent people mostly of the female sect (*sic*)".²⁶

The Minute Book of the Monthly Women's Meeting of the Upperside²⁷ is vellum bound, 37cm x 14.5cm; and on the first page lists the members in the frozen moment in January 1678 when they had decided to become involved in "business". All members except one, Ann Bigg of Weston Turville Meeting, have been traced. With this exception, they numbered fifty six members. (Table 1).

The clerk then wrote a brief history of the Meeting, how it had originally been set up in 1671 by Anne Stevens and Damaris Sanders, but had failed. It was set up again in 1675 "some men and many women concluded that women should have their monthly meeting". That it had been intended purely for worship "without desiring outward business til he (the Lord) prepared their waye that in unity with the men, a member of one body they might serve together."

The practical implications were that a safe haven should be found; Coleshill, in a detached part of Hertfordshire, immune from Bucks' Justices, answered well. They also needed premises close to those used by the Men's Monthly Meeting, so that they could confer when necessary.

After his marriage in 1669,²⁸ the men were meeting in Thomas Ellwood's house called Hunger Hill,²⁹ so the women chose to meet a hundred yards away in a labourer's cottage at Larkins Green the

TABLE I

First Members of the Women's Monthly Meeting 1678

Key MM = * } An asterisk under these columns indicates an individual active in these meetings
 WM = * }
 Ch = Children

NAME	Husb	Occupation	MM	WM	Age	Chn	Died
Susanna Aldridge	Rob.	Farmer	-	*	-40	2+	-
Elizabeth Ashby	Jn	Husbandman	-	-	-40	1+	-
Sarah Attaway	Abr.	Physc. Sevt.	*	-	-40	1+	-
Mary Axtell	Abr.	Mercer	*	*	-40	1	-
Mary Baker	Sam.	Clothier	-	-	40+	1+	1684
Elizabeth Baldwin	Dan.	Fuller	-	-	-40	2+	1694
Sarah Ball	Hen.	Yeoman	*	-	50+	4	1678
Susanna Belch	Geo.	Yeoman	*	*	50+	5+	-
Jane Brown	Jn	Yeoman	*	-	50+	2+	-
Deborah Brierley	Jn	Husb/lab	-	-	50+	2+	1695
Ann Child	Hen.	Yeoman	*	*	-40	12	1696
Elizabeth Child	Giles	Clothier	-	-	-40	1	1681
Margery Clipsham	Ric.	Cit. Tailor	*	*	?	-	1694
Margaret Cooper	Wm.	Smith	*	-	40+	5+	emig.
Martha Cooper		Single Servt.	-	*	?	-	-
Ann Costard	Hen.	Yeoman	*	*	-40	none	1689
Mary Costard	Jn	Mealman	*	-	-40	2	1678
Elizabeth Crouch	Thos.	Maltster	*	*	40+	6+	1707
Judith Dancer	Geo.	Tailor	*	*	50+	none	1684
Deborah Deacon	Thos.	Clothier	-	-	-40	1	-
Martha Dell		Single independent?	-	-	?	-	1684
Sarah Dell	Thos.	Yeoman	*	-	-40	9	1703
Mary Ellwood	Thos.	Gent	*	*	50+	none	1708
Hester Fleetwood	Geo.	Gent	dead	-	50+	4+	1713
Joyce Gardener		Single/servant		*	50+	-	1701
Eliza Grey	Ric.	Weaver	-	-	50+	2+	-
Martha Gressingham	Wm.	-	dead	-	50+	2+	1681
Alice Grimsdell	Wm.	Maltster	*	*	-40	3	1720

<i>NAME</i>	<i>Husb</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>MM</i>	<i>WM</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Chn</i>	<i>Died</i>
Elizabeth Harrison	–	–	dead	*	50+	2+	1687
Ann Jennings	Sam.	Salesman§	*	–	–40	6	emig.
Jane Jones	Rob.	Maltster	*	*	–40	3+	1694
Dorothy Kidder	Wm.	Mealman	*	*	–40	8	1714
Sarah Lambourn	–	–	dead	–	40+	1+	1698
Sarah Lane	Thos.	Husbandman	*	–	50+	4+	1687
Ann Mannocks	Jn	Labourer	–	–	?	–	1689
Sarah Meads	Geo.	Flaxdresser	*	–	?	1	1681
Elizabeth Meddin	Geo	Farmer?	*	*	50+	3+	–
Mary Morton	Jn	Yeoman	*	*	–40	8+	1726
Mary Odingsells	–	Single	–	+	–40	none	1734
Joyce Olliffe	–	Single	–	+	–40	–	emig.
Martha Orton	Nic.	Moneylender?	dead	*	50+	2+	–
Mary Penington	Isaac	Gent	*	–	50+	6	1682
Sarah Russell	Wm.	Yeoman	*	*	50+	5+	1691
Rebecca Salter	Geo.	Yeo/Husbdmn	*	–	–	–	1704
Damaris Sanders	Thos.	Yeoman	–	*	50+	2+	–
Katherine Sexton	Wm.	Husbandman	*	–	40+	3+	–
Ann Stevens	Jerem.	Maltster	*	*	40+	4	1712
Joan Stiles	Geo.	–	–	*	–40	–	1687
Susanna Todd	–	Single, lacesweaver	–	*	50+	–	1699
Elizabeth Tompson	Phil.	Smith	–	*	–40	–	1682
Magaret Tredway	Hen.	Yeoman	*	*	40+	1	1706
Ann Trumper	Ralph	Yeoman	*	*	50+	none	1690
Ann Vivers	Edw	Draper	–	*	50+	?	1708
Elizabeth Walmsley	Thos.	Gent Non-Qkr	–	*	50+	none	1683
Sarah Welch	Jos.	Ironmonger	*	–	–40	4+	1728
Katherine White	Jn	Yeoman	*	–	40+	2+	1718

NB = the number of children given is the total for the member's lifetime and not those alive in 1678
 § became Merchant in West New Jersey and Governor.

home of Ann and John Mannocks.³⁰

Membership distribution (Fig. 1) was widespread; but thirty one members lived within walking distance of Larkins Green and nine lived in Coleshill itself.

Of the remaining twenty five, the greatest distances to be travelled were from Aylesbury and Watford and the most difficult journeys from Tring, Meadle and Bledlow from low lying boggy ground over the Chiltern escarpment with no immediate access to main roads in the worst weather.³¹

The principal difficulties in attending meetings from a distance must have been age and fitness, including pregnancy, and access to horses and male companions at a time when women might expect to be harassed or robbed.³² A glance at Table 1 shows that thirty-one of the women were married to active members of the Men's Monthly Meeting who could act as companions.

Membership was self selective³³ as demonstrated by the dominance of the Amersham and the Chalfont Meetings. This self selection seems to have excluded a high proportion of poorer members, making the Women's Monthly Meeting (WM) unrepresentative of Quaker membership as a whole. There are no obviously practical reasons why poorer members should not have joined, five of the ten "lesser sort" lived within walking distance; and enthusiastic members were not deterred by distance or difficulties. (Table 2 lists the most active members in 'business matters')

Susanna Aldridge attended from Wooburn without her husband, probably with a horse³⁴ and twice (at least) pregnant; Susanna Belch came from Chorleywood, with her husband and had access to a horse (she was wealthy); Ann Vivers also attended alone or perhaps with a male servant. But two of the other enthusiasts probably walked from Tring: Judith Dancer and Joyce Gardener. Judith's husband was an active member of Monthly Meeting, but as a tailor it is unlikely that he could have provided horses for three, or even two, if one of the women rode pillion.

It appears that the populations close to the meeting and those living at a distance were identical and

TABLE 2
Most Active Members 1678-1685

Name	Number and Type of Activities		
	admonitions	clearnesses	other matters
Aldridge	3	3 (1*)	2
Axtell		2 (1*)	
Belch		8 (1*)	2
Clipsham	2	4	2
Dancer	1	5	2
Ellwood	1	3	2
Gardener	2	4	1
Harrison		3	1
Kidder		3 (1*)	1
Orton		2	2
Russell		4	
Sanders		2	3
Stevens		3 (1*)	1
Stiles	1	2 (1*)	
Tompson		3 (2*)	
Tredway	3		
Vivers		5	3
Walmsley	2		2

* Difficulties experienced by a member, usually caused by a male Friend refusing to co-operate with the meeting

only proximity increased a tendency to join and perhaps to attend.

Poorer women might have been deterred by feelings of social inferiority, and if this is the case, it is more evidence of the sect's movement away from its artisan roots.

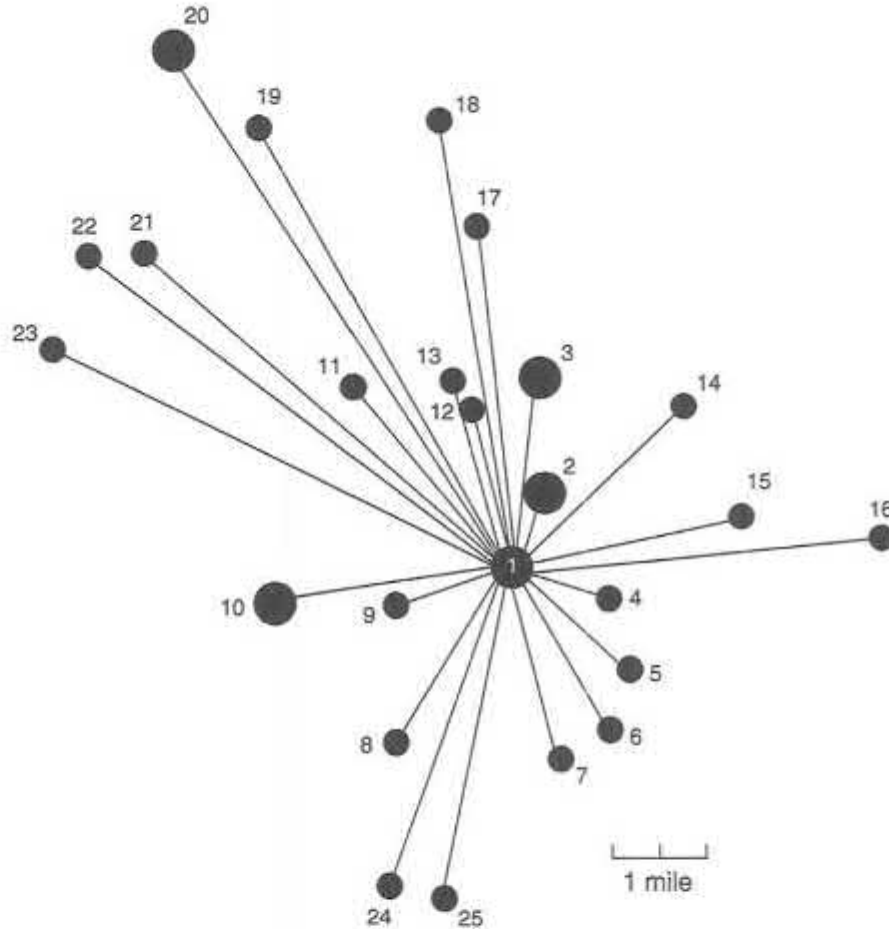
An examination of the first members set out in Table 1. shows that of the fifty six identified members, forty five were married, five widowed and seven single. The overwhelming majority, then, were *femes covert*, under the control of their husbands in law, if not in practice.

The single women included Mary Odingsells, niece to Mary Ellwood and Elizabeth Walmsley, a gentlemen's daughter,³⁵ living in the house of a gentleman,³⁶ (the term is used loosely to indicate a man who did not earn his living regardless of wealth). Joyce Olliffe (or Olive), sister to Ann Jennings, was secretly engaged to Isaac Marriott³⁷ and due to follow her sister and brother in law to West New Jersey, where Jennings became Governor.³⁸ Ann Jennings became an active member of

Membership Distribution

Towns & Villages

- 1 Coleshill
- 2 Amersham
- 3 Chesham
- 4 St. Giles
- 5 St. Peter
- 6 Bulstrode
- 7 Hedgerley
- 8 Wooburn
- 9 Penn
- 10 Wycombe
- 11 Missenden
- 12 Hyde Heath
- 13 Hundridge
- 14 Flaunden
- 15 Chorleywood
- 16 Watford
- 17 Cholesbury
- 18 Tring
- 19 Weston Turville
- 20 Aylesbury
- 21 Meadle
- 22 Owlswick
- 23 Bledlow
- 24 Burnham
- 25 Hitcham



Membership of WM

- 1 Ashby
S. Ball
A. Child
Mgt. Cooper
Crouch
Elkwood
Lane
Marnock
Tumper
- 2 Baker
E. Child
Mth. Cooper
M. Costard
Gray
Harrisoff
Morton
Penington
- 3 Astill
Attaway
Welch
- 4 Clipham
M. Dell
Fleahood
Gimodel
Odingsells
Russell
- 5 Gressingham
Solter
Walmley
- 6 Tredway
- 7 Soston
Stiles
- 8 Albridge
- 9 Orton
- 10 Stevens
Köder
- 11 Todd
- 12 Bryerley
- 13 Disoon
- 14 Tompson
- 15 Beich
- 16 Meads
Vivers
- 17 Jones
- 18 Dancer
Gardener
- 19 Brown
- 20 Jennings
Lambourn
Ortle
- 21 Sanders
White
- 22 A. Costard
- 23 Baldwin
- 24 Meddin
- 25 S. Delt

Diagram showing the distribution of members around Coleshill, with the distances they had to travel.

the Burlington N. J. Monthly Meeting in the 1690s.

Joyce Gardener and Martha Cooper were servants, the latter having been left an annuity in Mary Penington's Will³⁹ and Gardener, a constant companion to Dancer, is an example of a woman who travelled a difficult journey to WM along tracks from Tring, as long as she had a male companion. Judith Dancer died in 1684 but Gardener continued to attend as long as Roger Dancer lived and attended the Men's Meeting. Susanna Todd was one of a pair of sisters who gave up making bone lace after the Quarterly Meeting had issued a Testimony against it in 1669.⁴⁰ She borrowed £5 from the men's Monthly Meeting⁴¹ and took up the weaving of utilitarian laces instead and maintained herself until death in 1699.

Wealthy widows did not fit easily into a patriarchy, being unusually free from restraint; but none of the women listed falls into this category. Elizabeth Harrison received a Life Estate in two houses in Amersham in her daughter Sarah's Will in 1677;⁴² her position before this date is not known. Sarah Lambourn, called by Thomas Ellwood the first Quaker in Aylesbury, had helped him and fellow prisoners with gifts of food in 1665, when "no Friends but herself lived in that town".⁴³ She tried to run a business selling linen goods but was obliged to seek financial help frequently and finally went bankrupt in 1677.⁴⁴ She was obliged under Quaker business ethics to sell all that she had and settle with her creditors. The terms of her will of 1698⁴⁵ suggest that she did not settle fully and tried to make amends on death.

The widow who lost most materially was Hester Fleetwood, once the Presbyterian mistress of The Vache, Chalfont St. Giles, wife of Sir George, reprieved regicide; she ended her days as a 'sojourner'⁴⁶ with the Russells of Jordans. Ironically the Russells had once been tenants of the Fleetwoods.⁴⁷ William Russell senior had made a fortune during the Interregnum as Solicitor General, earning 6d in every £1 collected for Parliament.⁴⁸ The old man died in 1683 leaving his wife of forty years only that which she had brought to the marriage, a bed and a small legacy, demonstrating that the widows of even the wealthy were at their husband's mercy on death.⁴⁹

Of the forty five married women, twelve were married to yeomen. The status of yeoman was a badge of solid respectability just below that of minor gentry and might indicate considerable wealth or an inflated opinion of a man's own status.⁵⁰ Thomas Dell of Hitcham (later Bulstrode and then Uxbridge) was a successful man of business, moving frequently and taking on leases of property as far away as Hughenden.⁵¹ One daughter married a German merchant,⁵² and he ended his days in the fashionable village of Kensington.⁵³ George Belch of Chorleywood was able to leave each of his four younger sons £240 and his daughter £300; his eldest son inheriting the principal house and land. His widow Susanna's portion amounted to over £600 but a large part included debts some of which were 'desperate'.⁵⁴

Henry Ball, husband of Sarah, another Yeoman, left his eldest son two cottages and an undisclosed amount of land, and grandchildren legacies of £75.⁵⁵ But his farm, Brainsford Barn, Coleshill, was rented. George Salter of Chalfont St. Peter, called husbandman, and so theoretically of lower status, left his elder son a freehold farm house and buildings and an undisclosed quantity of arable land in the parish, and his younger son George, two cottages. His widow Rebecca Salter received his personal estate including any leasehold properties, and his daughter Susanna (later Aldridge) £10, the best cow and a quantity of furniture.⁵⁶

Husbands' occupations then could be misleading as far as wealth was concerned. A mercer was a mere shop keeper, but Abraham Axtell left an estate worth £1342 14s 5d.⁵⁷ Jeremiah Stevens, a Maltster of High Wycombe and husband of Ann left £1470 3s 4d,⁵⁷ and Edward Parrett, of Amersham, another Maltster and Elizabeth Crouch's first husband, left the comfortable sum of £472 8s 7d.⁵⁷

Mealmen were wholesalers, a growth activity in the late seventeenth century, and those who worked so close to London had the opportunity to make their fortunes. John Costard of Amersham, husband of Mary (the first of three wives of increasing respectability) also ended his days in Kensington. But William Kidder's business as a Mealman in High Wycombe failed; a Quaker miller's widow was implicated,⁵⁸ having been accused of fraud and theft involving losses to the Kidders. After their

downfall both he and Dorothy were indicted before the Quarter Sessions, William for acting as a mercer without having been apprenticed⁶⁹ and Dorothy for trading as a pedlar without a licence.⁶⁹

Clothiers could be wealthy, but two of the three husbands of members were poor; Deborah Deacon's husband left an estate of £1 and residue,⁶¹ Giles Child rented a cottage behind The Swan pub in Amersham⁶² and Samuel Baker and his wife associated with them.

Perversely, Abraham Attaway is described as a servant, but he was servant to John Raunce, physician, and he and his 'master' both loaned the quarterly meeting £10 apiece in 1669.⁶³ This suggests that his service was of a specialist nature.

The classification of gentleman would not have been recognised by Quakers during this period, although they were less particular by the end of the century. Vann has pointed out that it was a term applied to a tanner, a yeoman and a merchant.⁶⁴ And in Bucks, a tallow chandler was so designated in Thomas Walmsley's Will.⁶⁵

Isaac Penington, gentleman, lost his inherited wealth but was supported by Mary's prudent removal of some of her inheritance into a trust; she in turn was accused of not taking her fair share of punishment and had to defend herself with the help of her son John⁶⁶ in John Penington's "Complaint against William Rogers".

Thomas Ellwood, gentleman, married Mary Ellis, one of three sisters from Great Kimble. It is apparent from his autobiography that she was of independent means and there is no evidence that he worked after his marriage.⁶⁶ Mary's sister, Elizabeth, married Thomas Walmsley an Anglican gentleman who owned property in two parishes and, perhaps for services rendered to Parliament, an estate in Tipperary.⁶⁷ He was unusual in refusing to be persuaded into joining Friends despite Isaac Penington's letters to him⁶⁸ and his wife's close association with the family. She was the only woman capable of responding to Penington's letters in similar vein, ecstatic and at times poetic "although I am of yesterday and of very low stature..." and "I, who am I? That the Lord of life and power should vouchsafe at any time to visit me".⁶⁹

She was also referred to in a postscript to the only extant letter from Gulielma Springett to William Penn before their marriage – "Eliz. Walmsley's love to thee".⁷⁰

In 1678, forty six members had, at least pretensions of being of the middling or better sort, either by reason of birth or success in business.

Because of the drift of power away from youth to age in the last third of the seventeenth century and the insidious movement away from the church of "the priesthood of all the people" to a hierarchy, with hired preachers, and elders elevated on platforms above their theoretical peers; it seemed worth attempting to establish the age balance of WM. It may also be relevant to the men's increasing unwillingness to appear before WM, if for example, the membership were mere 'chits of girls'.

Unfortunately most of the members disappear into the confusion of badly kept records of the Civil War and the Interregnum. It was necessary to estimate most members 'ages' by using Professor Vann's table of median dates for marriage for Southern English Quakers⁷¹ and occasionally to combine median figures for two generations, if only a marriage of an adult child was available to arrive at these putative 'birth dates' for members. This resulted in the estimate that of 56 members, 33 were over the age of forty and 19 under that age; 5 are not capable of any calculation.⁷²

Numbers of children registered to members have also been collected but Vann is convinced that Quaker records were defective;⁷³ certainly very few women registered births regularly.

The strict enforcement of the endogamy rule meant that children were a precious resource as far as maintaining the faith was concerned. And one of the purposes of the women's meeting was to enable older women to educate younger ones in the faithful upbringing of children.

Financially, it was a different matter; a numerous family born to poor parents was a burden to themselves and Quakers. The Baldwins exemplify this. They retired to Chesham from Bledlow (in the Meadle preparative meeting) where, on being widowed, Elizabeth applied for financial assistance.

Chesham did not want the charge of this 'newish' member and passed the problem to her old meeting, they spoke of the cost of the Baldwins during the period when they had young children⁷⁴ but that they had gathered together savings later.

Children could also not be relied upon as insurance against poverty in old age. Dorothy Kidder's youngest surviving son, Richard, in effect cut his mother and siblings from his will in 1707,⁷⁵ when he left them a shilling each in satisfaction of any claim they might have upon him and left his estate to local male Friends. This at a time when Dorothy was in severe financial trouble.

It is not clear why some births had multiple witnesses who appear in the births registers. The practice seems random, beginning in 1669 but only applying to some births by some members. The first confinements of Sarah Dell and Gulielma Penn for example were attended by their respective midwives, mothers and servants, and by supernumerary women Friends. Margery Clipsham attended Guli. Most curiously, Susanna Todd, elderly spinster, attended John Costard's third wife (with other women Friends).⁷⁶ Perhaps if a woman was perceived to be at special risk following a troublesome pregnancy, women Friends attended prayerfully, only this would account for Susanna Todd's presence. If the women were there to act in an administrative role in registering the birth, the system failed. Far too few were registered.

Numbers of women attending WM on a monthly basis are difficult to assess because they, unlike their male equivalents did not sign a mass of documents. In the eight years studied only four 'multiply-signatoried' documents were minuted; the first being a Testimony to men Friends and was signed by thirty seven members;⁷⁷ It is probable that this document was passed from hand to hand, certainly one member who was dying asked that her name be added.

Of the others, a paper of self condemnation signed by Edmund Barton in 1680 was counter signed by nine men and seven women,⁷⁸ a certificate of clearness for Sarah Warn was signed by ten women in 1682⁷⁹ and a letter to prisoners in Gloucester jail by twelve in 1683.⁸⁰ These figures seem a more realistic reflection of attendance rates,

but they must remain uncertain.

How many of these women whose names appear on documents were literate? Professor Margaret Spufford has suggested that a higher number of ordinary women could read than has generally been assumed.⁸¹

In 1707, Mary Ellwood, as Treasurer, bought twelve copies of a book written by a local member, Moses West, condemning the evils of 'marrying out'.⁸² The depletion of precious 'stock' for items which were of little or no use cannot be considered sensible or likely. However women's use of signatures to wills and other legal documents is puzzling. A typical confusion occurs in the will of Mary Ellwood's mother.⁸³ She signed the body of the will with a mark, but when a codicil was added used her full name, written in a firm clear hand.

Similarly, Margery Clipsham was joint author of a diatribe written by Mary Ellwood against the schismatic Susanna Aldridge, yet she signed an agreement to lend £180 to the London Six Weeks Meeting with a mark.⁸⁴ Most importantly, the WM Minute book itself is written in many different hands.

It is still probable that, as Professor Mack has said, more women could and did read the Bible than could write.⁸⁵

It is curious that after the initial hysteria which greeted plots against Charles II, women were rarely arrested for breaches of the Conventicle Acts. On one such rare occasion when Frances Salter was imprisoned by Ambrose Bennet J.P., Ellwood remarked that there was 'nobody to take care of his family and business but her his wife'.⁸⁶

There must have been an unwritten accommodation with local Justices for some practical reason, perhaps a sense that women no longer constituted a threat to national security hidden away in their meetings. (Parish constables made no distinction of sex in presenting non church attenders to the Sessions, but did leave many parishes untouched; most of the North Chilterns were free from this form of persecution).

The consequences were twofold; first, most

women did take charge of their husband's businesses when they were imprisoned and secondly, the houses of single or widowed women were frequently used as meeting places because the householders were less likely to be subject to the harsher penalties inflicted on male law breakers in the same circumstances. Archbishop Sheldon's Returns show one in six illegal conventicles (all dissenters, not only Quakers) were held in women's houses⁸⁷

The Brown family of Weston Turville demonstrates this anomaly. John Brown (a priest-named 'farmer' and self-designated yeoman) started to serve terms of imprisonment under the Protectorate and thereafter appeared regularly in the Book of Sufferings, having been either fined or imprisoned, until 1678. During his absences, his wife, Jane, should have run the farm; but when he died, she asked the Quarterly Meeting to find her either a tenant or a male servant who would "oversee or manage" the husbandry.⁸⁸

Secondly, on two occasions when Brown was arrested for attending illegal meetings, he was captured in the houses of single women; first, Sarah Lambourn, widow, in Aylesbury in 1670 and secondly, Sarah Mortimur of Tring in 1671; neither woman appears in the Sufferings Register.⁸⁹

So how much did wives really undertake? Did they roll up their sleeves, or manage in the sense that they hired men capable of carrying on a man's job? Inevitably, different couples must have reached different solutions.

The unfortunate George Meads was fined five shillings for himself and five pounds for his house, when he held an illegal gathering.⁹⁰

The man with the longest run of jail attendances was John White of Meadle (the house still stands, called Quaker Farm; it has the old burial ground in the orchard) he was fined and jailed from 1657 to 1688, but not followed by his wife Katherine.

The only women members to emulate their husbands, were Alice Grimsdell who began to lose crops from her inherited fields in 1717 and Mary Odingsells similarly fined after 1702 following the death of her second husband, Richard Baker.⁹¹ For the rest, it must be assumed that they avoided trou-

ble by paying their tithes or were once more treated differently from their menfolk.

This was the composition of the Women's Monthly Meeting, the 'Government of women'; it remains to be seen how they prospered.

Primarily, women met for worship. Free from the constraint that men Friends might put upon the timid, they would have had the opportunity to minister if called upon by the Holy Spirit. The Minutes are as terse on this matter as on all else, speaking of the women being 'sweetly refreshed by the Lord', but nothing more descriptive of the experience. An exception was Mary Hoare's deathbed prayer, when she witnessed in herself 'a measure of that power that was in days past'; a sad reflection on the loss of ecstatic prayer from the days of the 'Enthusiasm'.

Thomas Ellwood's accounts of the action of the Spirit on the men is of a different order of magnitude. He wrote that 'the power of the Lord fell upon them in a wonderful manner, the Life was manifest indeed and very largely ... and the flowings of Life and breakings forth of the heavenly power, great was the travail of Friends in much brokenness of heart and tenderness of spirit with strong cries and plenty of tears'.⁹²

Susanna Aldridge shattered the female picture of sweet refreshment when she 'broke forth' like the men in 1685. But ministry was now subject to group approval, that is to say it was "tested", subjected to the feeling of the meeting; the rationale being that ministry might not be of the Holy Spirit.

Susanna Aldridge, formerly Susanna Salter, was one of the first generation to have been brought up as Friends.⁹³ She must also be presumed to have possessed some charismatic quality which persuaded men Friends of the Monthly Meeting to entrust the first admonition to her when she was still in her twenties, a task which would seem more appropriate to someone older and more experienced.⁹⁴ And she proceeded to be very active in the WM.

But during the conflict that climaxed between men Friends in 1682, she was recruited to the Separatist cause led by John Raunce and Charles Harris,

emulating Story and Wilkinson. Sarah Harris had even been a witness at her marriage in 1675.⁹⁵ She was followed into the separatist 'camp' by her husband Robert, her relations by marriage the Coxes, the William Sextons of Hedgerley (Katherine was a member of WM), the Pewseys of Beaconsfield who had received charity from WM and Timothy Child and his father, Giles, of Woodrow in the parish of Amersham.

Mary Ellwood explained her behaviour as either puerperal psychosis or inherited madness; Aldridge's mother, it was alleged, had died mad.⁹⁶

Aldridge's experience of worship harked back to the enthusiasts, with visions, revelations and attempts to recruit others to her way of seeing "Truth". She travelled to London and Bristol as women Enthusiasts of the early days had done. She said that the Lord had 'raised her as one from the dead' and exhorted others to be 'more watchful and diligent'.⁹⁷ She returned to her former friends for a time and perhaps her rebellion would have been overlooked if she had not published papers alleging that she had found "Abominations in Jerusalem".⁹⁸

She next appeared at Jordans Meeting accompanied by Sarah Harris, and spoke in "great disorder of spirit and disturbance of mind with so strange a voice and gestures". The suggestion seems to be that she was possessed and not by the Holy Spirit.⁹⁹ Her ministry was not acceptable to the meeting.

A Testimony was drawn up against her by the men in August 1685 after the 'dark night of Apostacy' as follows: "we bear Testimony agt Susanna Aldridge who hath not only spoken but published in print very perverse things against Truth and Friends" that she had been encouraged by others 'who of late have more fully manifested themselves by their open separation from Friends Meetings'. They judged, condemned and testified against her but not out of any 'personal ill will or prejudice agt her as a woman'.¹⁰⁰ She was not heard of again and so must be presumed to have joined Raunce in Wycombe.

In the 'Quietist Period', a local woman did become a licenced preacher, Mary Larcum *nee* Merrick formerly of Aylesbury. But 'licenced' in fact meant controlled.¹⁰¹

WM was also concerned with business after 1678; non-contentious business involved the gathering of a stock (savings) and disbursements to the poor and needy. This was all in the capable hands of Mary Ellwood, the Treasurer.¹⁰²

For example, in 1682, Susanna Todd laid forth monies supplied by Ellwood for a woman who had been robbed, and monies were paid to Deborah Bryerly of Hyde Heath when she took in an 'ancient' woman who had lost her home and paid for her funeral expences in 1683. The daughter of another member, Eliza Grey, became too infirm to continue in service and a collection was made for her.

In later years Ann Vivers received expensive stomach cordial from her former colleagues during her last illness. She was a most distinguished Friend who as widow Merrick¹⁰³ had cared for men Friends imprisoned in the Fleet and had gone on to marry two other leading Friends, Amor Stoddart, and Edward Vivers of Banbury, who had served a long period in jail for his faith.¹⁰⁴

Dorothy Kidder, who had gone astray and was mixing with 'people of the world' received an anonymous gift of twenty shillings 'out of pity' in 1710 and Joyce Gardener was supported by gifts of money when 'ancient' and weak.

Unmarried women needed employment and the question of finding places for servants was referred to from time to time. Of unusual interest was one of the Ellwoods servants; she was the daughter of a Yeoman of Northamptonshire, Briget Hopkins, who became mistress of Jordans in 1690.¹⁰⁵

Men Friends had persuaded women to take on the admonition of women as their first given task. Susanna Aldridge and Elizabeth Meddin admonished Mary Mitchell for 'marrying out', (the case was undertaken nine months before the Women's Monthly Meeting officially undertook business and is not referred to in their minutes).¹⁰⁶

The saddest case involved one of their own; Sarah Russell of Chalfont St. Peter (not to be confused with Sarah Russell of Jordans) married a 'man of the world', John Tredway, in 1683 and wrote a letter of self condemnation begging not to

be cast off. But her fate is not known. No child appeared under the father's name in Chalfont St. Peter's register¹⁰⁷ nor was there any reference to Sarah Tredway in subsequent Quaker records.

In the first year of business only four cases of admonition were undertaken and one in the following year. The total for the period 1678–1685 was only eight women admonished, so the meeting was not over zealous or petty in its condemnations.¹⁰⁸

The contentious business was the examination of couples who presented themselves for marriage to both men's and women's meetings.

The tension in this exercise of authority showed itself when the second couple, Joseph Pierce and Frances Goulder, appeared before WM. After being investigated by Anne Stevens and Dorothy Kidder, they refused to appear before the women again to receive their 'advice' thus putting 'a slight or contempt' upon the meeting. At this early stage, the Men's Monthly Meeting was able to exert pressure and Pierce gave in, however reluctantly, and reappeared before the women.¹⁰⁹

Table 3 shows the pattern of marriage applications to WM, the Men's Monthly Meeting and the rate of resistance to WM, the incidence of WM's objections to marriage applications and finally how many marriages were recorded and some reasons for discrepancies in the numbers involved.

One of the difficulties for both meetings was the inability of men Friends to maintain a consistent course of action when dealing with refusal to appear before the women. They must be guided by The Spirit; but as the Separatists gathered strength they alternatively tried coercion, appeasement and expulsion. (Strictly, it should be referred to as issuing a Testimony against a wrongdoer, but the effect was expulsion, even if only temporary.)

Finally, when Raunce and Harris manipulated a young couple, Timothy Child of Amersham and Mary Sexton of Hedgerley, abetted by their respective fathers, to force the Separation issue in 1682, by stubbornly refusing to appear before WM; and further, when Child insulted the women by saying that 'he could as well go to a priest for a wife as go to the women's meeting'¹¹⁰ the men spent eighteen

TABLE 3
Marriage Presentation for Clearness – Women's and Men's Monthly Meetings

<i>Date</i>	<i>Women NQ/213/1</i>	<i>Men QMB*</i>	<i>PRO RG6/1338 marriages registered</i>
Numbers of couples appearing before both meetings:			
1678	3 (1 contempt by man made to retract)	4	3 (1 married out of county= o.o.c.)
1679	8 (1 objection by WM)	13	9 (1 objection by WM upheld, not registered 2 o.o.c.)
1680	7 (1 objection by WM)	12	7 (3 did not appear at WM, not registered. 2 o.o.c.)
1681	5 (1 objection by WM)	8	6 (3 did not appear but 2 were registered and 1 was not registered. 1 o.o.c.)
1682	6	8	5 (1 expulsion, 1 o.o.c and 1 appeasement)
1683	4 (and 1 not sent to men's meeting)	5	3 (2 o.o.c.)
1684	5 (1 objection by WM)	10	7 (3 did not appear but all marriages reg. 1 o.o.c)
1685	10 (1 impediment = existing engagement)	11	7 (1 impediment and 2 o.o.c)

* Quaker Minute Book

months trying to persuade him to co-operate, before acknowledging that a schism was inevitable and expelling him.

Table 3 confirms the results of the men's pre-variation. From 1678 to 1680, WM objections were upheld, and refusals to appear were dealt with by 'private'¹¹¹ marriages, at least, not being registered. But by 1681, of three couples who rebelled, two had their marriages registered, including the particularly difficult Thomas Sexton¹¹² whose objections were almost as strong as Timothy Child's. This was the period of appeasement, which continued until the Child, Sexton, Pewsey and Meddin families and part of the Brown family of Weston Turville had set up in opposition in High Wycombe.

At its most extreme, appeasement was demonstrated by the inclusion of a 'conscience clause' in 1682 as follows: "for although the meeting be satisfied that where conscience is rightly informed, there can be no just cause for conscientious scruple in this case (attending upon the women) yet so tender a regard is had to conscience that where any through weakness, shortsightedness or misinformation, have made it really a matter of conscience not to go to the women's meetings in such cases this meeting always has been and still is ready to exercise condensation."¹¹³

1683 shows the lowest marriage application rate since Ellwood started to keep the Men's Minutes in 1676. And by 1684 WM was virtually ignored and rebels' marriages were registered except when there was a valid objection over and above a refusal to appear before them.

However, that the women had some authority is demonstrated by one case which never got to the men. In 1683, Jacob Darvill and Helen Ross were asked to await a further 'growth in Truth' and they obeyed the women and did not pursue their marriage intention by appearing before the men's meet-

ing at Hunger Hill.

By 1685, the crisis was over for the men, but WM had to endure the 'breaking forth' of one of their previously most active members, Susanna Aldridge. Marriage clearnesses seemed to have settled down.

The men Friends had debated the Separation at great length and all their troubles were recorded in their minutes until the schism occurred, then there was silence and Thomas Ellwood's autobiography ended abruptly.¹¹⁴

Because Child and Sexton had not presented themselves before the women, the Separation debate was not referred to in their minutes at all, until the matter was old history and a separatist sought to return to the fold.¹¹⁵

Women's fortunes under Foxonian authority had been mixed. Early marriage records show that few and sometimes no women appeared at marriages as witnesses. When they did appear, their names were listed separately, after all the men; until the marriage of Ann Archdale when social considerations overrode, for once, gender.¹¹⁶

When given their own meeting, they had foreseen the probability that business would cause trouble and had tried to avoid it. Having accepted business at the men's invitation, they had exercised their roles with prudence and the face that they presented to men Friends was that of a group of predominantly mature and socially worthy women.

The rejection of the women's meeting by the Separatists, despite the enlightened efforts of the unprejudiced and the authority of Fox, was purely gender based. Women could not be allowed to exercise authority in their society; they were Eve's daughters, the authors of the 'Fall' and men's inferiors.

REFERENCES

- 1 *A Novelty: Or, a Government of Women Distinct from Men, Erected among Some of the People Call'd Quakers.* William Mather. London 1694 (women had hollow places in their foreheads which they covered by wearing topknots, he said.)
- 2 Digest of Births Upperside and Leighton. Friends House Library (FHL)
- 3 W.C. Braithwaite. *The Beginnings of Quakerism* p 156
- 4 Joyce Godbet. *Friends in Bedfordshire and West Herts.* 1975.

- 5 W.C. Braithwaite *op. cit.* 333
- 6 Answers to Archbishop Sheldon's Questions to the Clergy concerning Non conformists 1669. *Bucks Dissent and Parish Life*. Bucks. Record Society p 23 (BRS)
- 7 Petition Against Tithes 1659. London.
- 8 Norman Penny. *First Publishers of Truth*. 1907. It is impossible not to consider that Frances Raunce's evangelism and freedom during the Enthusiasm and her popularity might have had an effect on her husband's subsequent misogyny. Could he have been jealous? His second wife was totally inactive.
- 9 Brian Manning 1649 *The Crisis of the English Revolution*, p 140
- 10 *The History of the Life of Thomas Ellwood* Ed. C.G. Crump. 1900
- 11 J.A. Besse. *A Collection of The Sufferings of the People called Quakers*, Vol 1 p 366 FHL
- 12 PRO RG6/1338
- 13 *New Light on George Fox*, Ed. Michael Mullett 1995 p 6.
- 14 Arnold Lloyd. *Quaker Social History*, p 25
- 15 Christopher Hill. *The World Turned Upside Down*, Ch 10
- 16 Phyllis Mack. *Visionary Women*, p 274
- 17 *op. cit.* p 279
- 18 *The Complete works of John Bunyan* Ed. H. Stebbings p417
- 19 *New Light on George Fox*, beginning p 31 Chapter by Christopher Hill.
- 20 W.C. Braithwaite Vol 2 p 314
- 21 A. Lloyd. *op. cit.* p 10 and at length in Chapter 8
- 22 "clearness" – freedom from prior engagements or other impediments to marriage
- 23 W.C. Braithwaite Vol 2, p297
- 24 *Bucks Dissent and Parish Life*. BRS.
- 25 BRO NQ/1/14/1A
- 26 Bucks Dissenter and Parish Life. pp 5 and 54
- 27 BRO NQ/2/3/1 (not paginated)
- 28 PRO RG6/1338
- 29 *Quaker Minute Book* Ed. b. Saxon Snell. BRS
- 30 A house with this name still stands. But Larkins Green was the name of a hamlet, not a house, and the Mannoaks' house, located in an area of Coleshill called Larkins Green, must have been appropriate to a labourer and much smaller.
- 31 T. Ellwood, p 50 "wet up to the ankles at least"
- 32 T. Ellwood, *op. cit.* p 158
- 33 A. Lloyd, *op. cit.* p 7
- 34 *A Calendar of Bucks Records*, BRS, p 97 Robert Aldridge was a Farmer
- 35 BRO D/A/We/37/10 Will of T. Westall refers to Gabriel Odingsells of Chesham as 'Gent'
- 36 PROB II 387 Thomas Walmsley 'Gent'
- 37 Personal correspondence 25.2.96 Susanna Morikawa; Archival Specialist Swarthmore college, P.A. USA
- 38 as above
- 39 Abstract of the Will of Mary Pennington dated 18th July 1680 appended to 'Experiences in the Life of Mary Pennington (written by herself)' Ed. Norman Penney 1911
- 40 BRO NQ/1/1/1 1687 reaffirming Testimony of 1669
- 41 *Quaker Minute Book* p31
- 42 BRO D/A/Wi/49/167
- 43 BRO NQ/2/1/2 given 50/- "because she had spared neither pains nor purpose to minister to Friends" – now grown ancient and reduced to a lower condition
- 44 Quaker Minute book p 52
- 45 BRO D/A/We/45/108
- 46 PROB II 540
- 47 A.L. Hayward. *Jordans, The Making of a Community*, 1969
- 48 A.M. Johnson. *Buckinghamshire 1640-1660 A Study in County Politics*, an unpublished thesis, Bucks County Library
- 49 BRO D/A/Wi/52/129
- 50 Personal communication, Professor Margaret Spufford believes that self designated status i.e. Yeoman is a) likely to be inaccurate and b) that the hierarchy of yeoman/husbandman/farmer was breaking down at the latter part of the seventeenth century
- 51 *Calendar of Bucks Records*, BRS p 30
- 52 PRO RG6/1338 1701
- 53 NQ/2/7/6 'The Private Register of Rebecca Butterfield of Stone Dean'.
- 54 Herts RO Wills A 25/42 09 1686
- 55 BRO D/A/We/47/19. Brainsford Barn was the largest farm in Coleshill with 169 acres in 1662. J. Chenevix Trench, *Recs Bucks.*, Vol 25 1983. Ball's Will does not indicate how much land he held freehold
- 56 BRO D/A/Wi/47/115
- 57 Bucks Probate Inventories 1661-1714 BRS
- 58 BRO NQ/2/1/2/ April 1696
- 59 *Bucks Sessions Records* Ed. W. Le Hardy, Midsummer 1688 p 266 (pardoned)
- 60 B.S.R. Michaelmas 1693
- 61 BRO D/A/We/45/148
- 62 BRO. D/A/We/46/129 Probably cousin to the schismatic of the same name
- 63 BRO NQ/1/1/1 29.10th month 1669
- 64 R.T. Vann. *The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755*
- 65a PROB II 387 Walmsley
- 65b Pennington, John. Complaint against William Rogers 1681, London
- 66 T. Ellwood, *op. cit.* p 161
- 67 PROB II 387
- 68 *Isaac Pennington's Complete Works*, pp 433 & 524
- 69 Pennington MS. MS Vol 344 FHL
- 70 L.V. Hodgkin. *Gulielma; Wife of William Penn*, 1947, *op. p.* 84 photograph of original letter.
- 71 R.T. Vann and D. Eversley. *Friends in Life and Death*. pp 88/89
- 72 Personal correspondence with R. Wall of The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.
- 73 R.T.Vann and D. Eversley p 21 "90% of burials in the Upperside escaped registration". Mary Morton registered three births and seven burials of children; the only child to reach adulthood, Sarah, was not referred to.
- 74 BRO NQ/2/1/2/ 1693
- 75 BRO D/A/Wi/62/199
- 76 PRO RG6/1406
- 77 BRO NQ2/3/1/ 7th month 1678
- 78 6th month 1680
- 79 1st month 1682
- 80 12th month 1682 (Feb, 1683)
- 81 *The World of Rural Dissenters 1520-1725* Ed. M. Spufford, p 301
- 82 BRO NQ/2/3/1 Accounts
- 83 BRO D/A/Wi/47/277 Alice Westall
- 84 Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women* p. 146 Footnote

- 85 P. Mack, *op. cit.* p 146 Footnote
- 86 T. Ellwood, *op. cit.* p 148
- 87 *Buckinghamshire Dissent and Parish Life*. BRS. shows 1 in 6 houses reported as venues for conventicles were owned by women.
- 88 BRO NQ 1/1/1 1686
- 89 BRO NQ 1/6/1 Sufferings Register
- 90 BRO NQ 1/6/1 (1683)
- 91 BRO NQ 1/6/1
- 92 *Quaker Minute Book* p 117
- 93 *The Spirit that works Abominations and Abominable Works discovered as a Faithful Testimony brought against it*. 1685. London. Cliphsham and Ellwood set out a brief history of Aldridge in their diatribe.
- 94 Her baptism does not appear in Chalfont St. Peter's Parish Register, nor her mother's burial, nor her father's remarriage. Only one brother's baptism appears, George Salter junior 1654 and 1655. The Quaker marriage Register shows her appearing for the first time as a marriage witness in 1671 when she would have been 16 years old. Her birth therefore would have occurred in 1655/56.
- 95 PRO RG6/1338 1675
- 96 *The Spirit that works Abominations*
- 97 *Ibid.*
- 98 *Quaker Minute Book* p 154
- 99 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. p 478
- 100 *Quaker Minute Book* pp 154-6
- 101 BRO NQ2/7/6 The Private Register – ref to the burial of Mary Larcum "A Minister"
- 102 BRO NQ 2/3/1 Pinned to the Account at the back of the minute book is a note in Thomas Ellwood's hand "when my wife died the old stock was £19 19s 8d . . ." 1708.
- 103 T. Ellwood, *op. cit.* p96
- 104 PRO RG6/1338
- 105 PRO RG6/1338 (1690)
106. *Quaker Minute Book* p 49
- 107 Chalfont St. Peter Parish Register
- 108 The number of women involved in business Table 3.
- 109 *Quaker Minute Book* p61
- 110 *op.cit* p 129
- 111 A 'private' marriage was one which was permitted reluctantly because of a fault in one or other of the parties.
- 112 Not the brother of Mary Sexton of Hedgerley, schismatic
- 113 *Quaker Minute Book* p 107
- 114 BRO NQ 2/1/2 and NQ 1/1/1 They virtually ignored the consequences of the Rye House Plot of 1683 which resulted in the wholesale rounding up of male Quakers and their imprisonment.
- 115 BRO NQ 2/3/1 Joseph Bartlett, son in law to Sarah Russell (decd) asked to be readmitted to the Upperside and appeared before the women.
- 116 BRO NQ 1/1/1. Early marriages recorded in the Quarterly Minute Book – 2 out of 6 had no recorded women witnesses.