

BRIEF HISTORY OF HALLATROW QUAKER MEETING

The Society of Friends traces its beginnings to 1647, when a young George FOX (1624-1691) started preaching in the North of England, in particular in North Lancashire, West Yorkshire and Westmorland. Many of his early converts were members of other non-conformist sects, who did not take kindly to "poaching". By 1650 the activities of the Friends had become sufficiently well known for Parliament to pass an Act, which rendered them liable to charges of blasphemy. In one court hearing of such a charge a magistrate described the defendants as "quakers", which name stuck with them.

The Quakers had a conscientious objection to the payment of tithes, which they regarded as anti-Christian. The Great Tithes of High Littleton and Hallatrow, which were given to the Abbey of Keynsham in the early 14th century, had been sold off to William ROSEWELL in 1544, after the dissolution of the monasteries. In due course the High Littleton tithes ended up in the hands of the HODGES family and the Hallatrow ones with members of the DANDO family. Having paid good money for his investment the "Impropriator" would contract out the physical collection of tithes each year to a "Farmer". Having Quakers in the parish was bad news for Impropriators and Farmers alike, who had the cost and delay of using the courts or having to distrain to get their money.

A large number of Quakers had their goods seized in lieu of tithes, whilst others spent long periods in prison. In the mid 1650s the London Friends started to record their "sufferings" in a book. This was expanded to cover the whole country and several Friends from Hallatrow are included.

The first record of meetings dates back to 1654 but it was not until 1666 that the Friends established a national organisation with a hierarchy of meetings. In 1656 the first Quaker missionaries were sent to America and it seems astonishing that it was only 26 years later that William PENN founded Pennsylvania as a Quaker state.

From a paper written by Jasper BATT in 1683 is "An Account of some of Those who were the First Publishers of Truth in the County of Somerset, And alsoe of some of Those that First Received Them, which was in & about the year 1656 and some Times since."

..... John DANDO [*of Hallatrow*] in the same County had a Testimony For the truth & have Laboured in the same County & sometimes in other Counties adjacent.

..... Peter WALTER [*of Hallatrow*] of the same County being timely convinct, had also a testimony for truth committed to him & have laboured faithfully therein in this County & some other parts of this Nation.

..... And as for Those That were the first Receivers of Those that first Published the Gospell in the said County of Somerset, Take this Accountt of some of them: John DANDO of Hollowtrow Received them there & yielded up his house For meetings for the service of truth.

John WHITING records "John AUDLAND & Tho. AYREY of Westmorland came first to Bristol in ye 5th month 1654". "And into Somerseshire also came Tho. BRIGGS, Tho. SALTHOUSE, Miles HALHEAD & Jo. SCAIFE, who had meetings at..... [including John DANDO's at Hollowtrow].

In the year 1656 George FOX was at Weymouth, where there were also Jasper BATT, John DANDO (*of Hallatrow*) & Richard ADAMS. ("The First Publishers of Truth" edited by Norman PENNEY). George FOX subsequently stayed in Hallatrow at John DANDO's house.

"Amongst Extracts from State Papers" dated 23rd of the third moneth 1659 is a list of 13 friends, including – John DANDO of high Littleton – fitt – which Friends of the County are redy (for Truthes sake) to serve the com'onwelth to the uttermost of their ability

From the "Book of Sufferings" one can see that many Somerset Friends ended up in Ivelchester (Ilchester) Gaol, to the extent that meetings were held there, as there were sometimes more Friends in prison than there were outside. Following the end of the Commonwealth and Restoration of the Monarchy more than 4,000 Friends were released from prisons around the country, in a temporary relaxation of regulations.

1662 saw the introduction of the Quaker Act, which empowered the authorities to break up unlicensed meetings or conventicles as they were called. This Act was strengthened by the Conventicle Act of 1664 and the second Conventicle Act of 1670, which made Quakers prey to informers.

In 1666 the Friends established the chain of organisation, which was to stand to the present time, namely:

The local worshipping group, usually known as a particular meeting and sometimes with a meeting for church

affairs known as a preparative meeting.

A monthly meeting for business usually comprising a number of particular meetings. This was the principal administrative unit of Quaker government.

A quarterly meeting, initially for a county but later for several counties, which comprised a number of monthly meetings.

The national yearly meeting, also known as the London Yearly Meeting. (the first of these was held in 1668).

The list of meetings in 1668 give a useful picture of the varying strengths of the Quaker movement in North Somerset. Brislington and Keynsham had 15 men Friends, Portishead, Frome and Publow had more than 6 each and 11 were scattered between Backwell and Cheddar. Hallatrow had 4, which consisted of John DANDO, Peter WALTER, John COLE and Thomas DANDO. Chew also had 4, Freshford 2 and Bath and Bathford together had 3.

In 1669 John DANDO and 93 others attended the marriage of George FOX and Margaret FELL. It was the custom at all Quaker marriages for all those attending to sign the register.

In 1672 the first Test Act came into force, which required all holders of public office to swear an oath of allegiance. Quakers refused to swear any kind of oath although they were quite prepared to declare their allegiance. This and later Test Acts were not repealed until 1828-9, after which Quakers were permitted to take up public office and affirm instead of swear oaths.

Quarterly meetings at Ivelchester continued to include the Quakers, who were in prison there. A report of the meeting on 23rd September 1680 says: "On this occasion Henry WALROND, a Justice, supported by a troop of Horse, prevented visiting Friends from joining those in prison for their usual Meeting in the Friary Hall and the Meeting was held at The George, kept by Robert ABBOT. He was fined £20 for a Meeting in his house, 43 were fined 5s. each for attending it (*including Peter WALTER of High Littleton*) and one Friend refused to give his name."

After the Monmouth Rebellion there was a purge on all those who had provided assistance to the rebels in whatever form. Collaborators were sought out, tried and, if found guilty, hanged or transported. There were strong rumours that Quakers in Somerset had secretly aided Monmouth, probably started by those who would have been glad to see the back of them. Parish officers were required to report on the situation in their particular area. Fortunately for John DANDO and the Hallatrow Quakers nine of the principal inhabitants of High Littleton and Hallatrow certified on 3rd August 1685 that to the best of their knowledge the Quakers of High Littleton parish "were not in the least manner assisting, aiding or abetting the late James, Duke of Monmouth in the late rebellion with arms, ammunition or money."

The Toleration Act of 1689 effectively ended the persecution of Quakers for not attending Church. The houses of Thomas DANDO and Mary Hill in Hallatrow were duly licensed in that same year to hold Quaker services. However, Quakers were still liable to pay Tithes and they continued to be prosecuted for non-payment.

Because Quakers were only permitted to marry Quakers, most of the leading Quaker families ended up being related to each other. Those, who chose to marry non-quakers or who were married in a steeple-house by a priest, were inevitably "thrown out" but not before the most extraordinary and long drawn out measures were taken to persuade the persons concerned to repent. Records report the problems that Peter WALTER had with his granddaughters in this respect.

For over 30 years John DANDO and to a lesser extent Peter WALTER were the leading lights in Hallatrow Meeting and they travelled throughout the Westcountry in support of their beliefs. However, they were other members of Hallatrow meeting, who were more passive. The first period of the history of Hallatrow Meeting was all over in 50 years. John DANDO died in 1699, followed by Peter WALTER a year later. Over the next 20 years other Quakers died, left the district or found it too hard to uphold the rigid beliefs. For several years Hallatrow Meeting house was unused and it was sold in 1726.

Thirty years later the meeting was revived, thanks to the tireless work of Joseph CLARK of Cameley, who was responsible for the building of a new meeting-house. Once again this lasted less than 50 years. From the start of the 19th century more non-members than members attended the meeting. The meeting gradually dwindled and the second meeting-house was sold in 1817.

QUAKER SUFFERINGS

“An account of sufferings for Truth in the County of Somerset for not paying tythes” includes incidents involving some Hallatrow Quakers. BESSE recorded the same sufferings in his 1st Volume of “Book of Sufferings of Friends” in slightly different words. Where appropriate both records have been transcribed hereunder.

1656 **John DANDO and Peter WALTER** of Hollatrow, being att the steeplehouse att Camely, where one Richard BATCHELOR is priest, to beare witness against their false worship, standing there peaceably, att the instance of the said priest some of the rude people, before the priest had ended his exercise, tooke the said Peter and hale him away and threw him into a brook of water. And the sayd John DANDO, standing there untill the priest had ended, in moderation spake unto him but he with rayling words provoked the rude people to thrust & hale him and much abused him by beating & kicking him, in w^{ch} action one Thomas DOWLAS was very forward, and the said Peter, running out of the water towards the said John, the same DOWLAS several tymes swore desperately that he would stop their mouths with his staffe and often struck the said Peter in the face, indeavouring to strike them in the mouth. And in a short tyme after, the same Thomas DOWLAS, having but one eye, as he was about his labours, a stick struct in that eye and put it out likewise and so he remains blind.

BESSE records the same incident thus: 1655 John DANDO and Peter WALTER, standing peaceably in the Steeple-house at Camely, the People, at the Instigation of their Priest, pulled out the said Peter and threw him into a Brook of Water. John DANDO tarried till the Priest had done and then spake to him the Words of Truth and Soberness; but the Priest reviled him and excited the People against him, who kickt and beat him sorely. One Thomas DOWLAS was very active in those Abuses and most desperately swore that he would stop their Mouths and with his Staff often struck the said Peter DANDO [WALTER] on the Face. This DOWLAS was a Man who had but one Eye and it was observed that, shortly after, that Eye was struck out with the Blow of a Stick so that he was quite blind.

John DANDO of Hallotrow in the yeere 1656 had one cove taken fro' him by one Thomas ROUSWELL, Tythingman in the same place, for Thomas HODGES, Impropiator, for Tythes, by order from Richard JONES & John HIPSLEY, called Justices of the Peace; the balance of Tythes demanded was 17s. 10d. for which they took the value of £1.17.10.

Note: That this ROUSWELL in short time after, boasting w^t would he doe to the Quakers, fell into a Coalepitt & there dyed, even the same day that he boasted of his wickedness.

1656 **John COLLE** of Farrington by warr't from John HYPSEY & Wm. SMITH (called Justices) had one brasse kittle taken from him by Thomas ROUSWELL valued worth 6s. because he refused to pay towards the repayinge of the Steeplehouse.

And, about a moneth after the taking of the said kittle, the said ROUSWELL, being drinking att an Inne, he boasted (as was reported by some of the company then with him) that he would order the Quakers; and as he was going to the place of his dwelling he fell into a Coale Pitt and the next morning was there found dead.

Upon the seventeenth day of the second in the yeare **1657** there being a meeting of the people of God called Quakers at the house of Thomas BUDD in the parish of Martock, There came to that Meetinge five men, who called themselves Ministers, and one of them named Thomas LYE said they weare gentlemen and their names weare Thomas LYE and Mr HALLETT, Mr STEVENSON, Mr DUKES, Mr COLLINS. And with them came a great company of rude people with long staves and Pikes and other such weapons and, when the said Thomas LYE had spoken to them to dissolve the Meeting, calling of us a company of silly, seduced, bewitched people, with other such language, They fell on us with loud outcries, beating pullinge and halling and tearing our cloathes, their spirits being exasperated and hands strengthened by the said Ministers (so called). And, had not the power of the Lord bine much Manefested that day for our preservation, many of the Lord's people might have lost their lives by that daye's uproare. Witnesses **John DANDO** & 11 others.

BESSE records the date as 7th of the Month called April and says:Meeting at the House of Thomas BUDD in the Parish of Martock, to which five Priests came, attended by a Rabble furnished with Staves, Cudgels, Pitchforks and such like rustick Arms. They rushed into the Meeting with so much Confusion and Noise that the Preacher could not be heard: Their Coming made it indeed a riotous Assembly, which the Moment before was a Congregation of grave and serious Christians of sober and virtuous Conversations, and some of them of considerable Estates. However the Priests, who brought the Mob and caused the Riot, complained to the Magistrates that the Meeting held at Thomas BUDD's was a riotous Assembly, to the Disturbance of the publick Peace. Whereupon one Captain RAYMOND with his Soldiers was ordered to disperse the next Meeting that

should be held there. Accordingly he came thither on the 23rd of the same Month, when Thomas SALTHOUSE was Preaching and took him, together with Thomas BUDD, into Custody etc... [SALTHOUSE said 7 or 800 at 1st Mtg. and 2-300 at 2nd.]

BESSE records – 1657 At the Quarter Sessions in the Month called July great Endeavours were used to have found him [*Thomas SALTHOUSE*] and others present at the same Meeting, namely Thomas BUDD, William BOATMAN, John PITMAN, **John DANDO**, Christopher PITTARD, George TAYLOR, John COLLINS, Samuel CLOTHIER, Richard ADAMS, John CLOTHIER, Jasper BATT, Robert WASTFIELD, Henry GUNDRY, Edward TAYLOR and Arthur GUNDRY, guilty of a Riot. But those Attempts were frustrated by the concurring Testimonies of all the Witnesses produced against them unanimously agreeing that all the Quakers were unarmed and did not make any Resistance.

John COLLE of Farrington on the 5th day of the 9th moneth 1659 was arrested for Tythes to the suite of Richard KINGSMELL, an impropiator, and for the space of about 4 houres kept prisoner, the value of Tythes being about 16s.

Richard HILL of Farrington the 13 day of the 9th mo. 1659 had five beasts worth about £20 attached by a bayly to the hundred court, to the suite of the said Richard KINGSMELL for Tythes, the which as demanded came to £2. 7.10; the wh. suite after 2 or 3 Court dayes was lett fall.

John SAIGE of Chewton & John COLLE & Richard HILL aforesd. were on the third day of the twelveth moneth 1659 [1659/60] subpena'd to appear in the Excheq'r to the suite of the said Richard KINGSMELL for Tythes, where in obedience & authority they did appeare about 100 miles from their outward being, John SAGE his Tythe being but 7 or 8s. value.

1660 **John SAGE** of Chewton, aged about 66, was Imprisoned the 20th day of the 7th moneth that yeare at the sute of Richard KINGSMILL, Impropiator, for about 12s. Tythes, Discharged the ... of the third moneth 1663, upon the death of the persecutor. – 2 years & 8 mo. Prisoner.

1660 **John COLE & Richard HILL** of Farrington was Imprisoned the 20th day of the 7th moneth that yeare at the sute of the said Richard KINGSMILL, Impropiator, Discharged the day of the third mo. 1663 upon the death of the persecutor. – the like.

John SAGE of Chewton being sued to the exigent by James DRYALL, farmer of the Tythes there, upon his appearance at the County Court the 22nd of the 3rd moneth 1665 was by war'nt from John BERESFORD, the under sheriffe, detained prisoner because for conscience sake he could not pay the tythes. And on the 17th day of the 5th mo. Following was againe set at liberty on the death of the sd. DRYALL. This was the third time of this man's imprisonm't for not paying tythes & only time have bin delivered by the death of his adversaries.

John COLE & John SAGE of Chewton being sued to the exigent & proclaymed in the County Court in order to be outlawed to the suite of Ann KINGSMELL, viz'et for non paym't of Tythes, did on the 8th day of the 8th moneth 1666 render themselves prisoner to the sheriff & were committed to prison to prevent the spoylers of their antichristian oppression & havocke upon them for w'thholding tithes w'thin good conscyence they could not pay, Christ being come in the flesh & having putt an end to these things. The Tithes demanded of John SAGE worth about 9s. or 10s. And his adversary Ann KINGSMELL owes him 18s., w'ch he laid out for her husband S'r Richard KINGSMELL.

John DANDO, Tho. DANDO, Richard HILL brought to prison by Richard HODGES, a bayliffe, on the 22nd day of the 11th mo. 1668 [1668/9], upon a ?Lattitat, To the suite of Thomas HODGES, an Impropiator of the Tith of High Littleton, for not paying Tythes. The said HODGES, being a kind of Presbyterian by his profession & persecutor. And att the same time the said HODGES said that, as for John DANDO, of tithe he did believe that his withholding of Tythes was matter of Conscience to God & yet sent him to Gaole. Tho. DANDO, not long after his Imprisonment, was sett at Liberty againe, one of his brothers, being not a friend, having compounded for his Tythes without the said Thomas DANDO's Consent. Richard HILL, also not long after his Imprisonment, was sett att Liberty againe, his son in law or some other relations having compounded for his Tythes & his testimony betrayd, as it hath been severall times before; and its probable by & w'th the secret consent or connivance of the said Richard HILL, he being a man of noe good labour while he was a prisoner, but a covetous, earthly minded man, w'ch eats out the savour of life & destroys god's testimony.

Ilchester Monthly Meeting 29 2 1669 – Friends judging it not clear and well the payment of Richard HILL's Tythes and there being aspersions and reproach cast upon truth, touching the payment thereof and his going out of prison, as if there were hypocrisy and deceit it is therefore thought meet he give them a true account and cleare himself if he can for truth requires playne dealing; And friends are unsatisfied touching his former silence and not giving forth a testimony and his now hasting out of Towne and would not stay to the meeting And they expect an account from him att the next quarterly meeting for he hath gone out of Towne and hath left a stinke and ill savour behind the

In the yeare 1684 John COLLIER & his son Joseph in the moneth tooke at severall times hay out of the grounds of **John DANDO** of Hallowtro for tythe, as much as was worth 15s. And in the 6th mo. as much barley as was worth about 10s., in all £1. 5. 0, which they took without any leave of the sd. Jo. DANDO, they being farmers of the parsonage there to one Tho. HODGES & Joane DANDO.

And in the yeare 1685 the same men took from the sd. **John DANDO** for tyth as much hay as was worth about 10s.

1688 Taken from **John DANDO** of Hollowtrow by John COLLIER, farmer of the Imp'riation, in Hay & Corne worth £1.16. 0. Wit. John DANDO.

1689 Taken from **John DANDO** sen'r of Hallotrow by John COLLIER, Farmer of the Imp'riation there, of Hay & Pease worth one pound or more. Wit. Jo. DANDO.

1690 Taken from **John DANDO** in Hay, Apples & Peares worth £1. 0. 0 by John COLLIER, farmer of the parsonage. Wit. John DANDO.

[from BESSE] 1690 Summary of Tithes taken in Corn, Apples, Wool, Fruit etc. from the Years 1686 to 1690 At Hollowtrowe from **John DANDO** £6.17. 0.

1691 Taken from **John DANDO** of Hallotrow by John COLLIER, farmer of the Imp'ation, for Tythe Hay worth 20s. Wit. John DANDO.