

First hundred years of Nailsworth Friends Meeting 1655 to 1755

Not a learned history - aimed at the ordinary reader both in our Meeting and passing visitors (bearing in mind those from America)

Anecdotal (chronologically)

No attempt at full coverage, but with some background historical setting

Compiled by Winifred Page



In ?1654 (?1657) Samuel Clift, a clothier of Avening was committed to Gloucester Gaol for "maliciously molesting and interrupting" the rector at Minchinhampton Church. At his trial, it came out that he had merely stood silent in the church with his hat on, and the jury therefore acquitted him.

But "the Justice, enraged at (Clift's) coming before him with his hat on struck him several times" And "an officious constable had before that, set him in the stocks without any warrant for so doing..... The innocent man patiently bore these lawless indignities without seeking to avenge himself, but committed his cause to him who judgeth righteously"

When Robert Sylvester (together with two Cirencester Quakers) made a similar silent protest in Cirencester parish church in 1657 this resulted in their being sent to Gloucester Gaol.

And Samuel Clift was himself sent to the Marshalsea prison in Gloucester in 1660 (or 1662) with two other Friends after being taken from a meeting at Shortwood for by this time meetings for worship other than those in the established Church were forbidden.

The middle years of the 17th Century was a time of great social, religious and political turmoil in England. All over the country, people were questioning the authority of the Establishment - King, Church and Parliament. Many were seeking religious freedom and turning away from the domination of the established church with its doctrines and obligatory observances coming together as Ranters, Independents, Puritans (or Baptistis) and Seekers.

On to this scene came George Fox with his unique message that the Church was a barrier between God and the individuals; that Christ had come to teach his people himself, that the light that led to

salvation was in each individual's own heart, if they would only turn to it and follow it.

Fox set off in 1648 on a lifetime of travelling round the country (and, much later, abroad) preaching "the Light of Christ within"

And in 1654 the 'Valiant Sixty' - some of them women - set out in pairs to take the Quaker message throughout the country.

It was the visit of Humphrey Smith one of this band of preachers, which brought Nailsworth Friends Meeting into being.

In about 1655 "....came the said Humphrey Smith to Naylsworth and had meeting at one William Beales, where had been a meeting for some years of a people called puritans or Independents, a seeking people to know the way of truth, and most of these meeters came to hear Humphrey Smith and were mightily affected with him, believing it was the way of truth; and many in and about Naylsworth were convinced ...And in a very short time aftermany more....who was received with great ...gladness, and a meeting was some established at Naylsworth."

At first they met in the houses of different Friends - three times a week - until around 1680 when it seems that the building which is now the Meeting House began to be used for meetings.

The exact date of this is in doubt; the Abstract of title Deeds V.26 mentions 1695 as land being acquired by Richard Wilkins and others for the purpose of building a Meeting House upon.

But there is also an entry in January 1668 referring to a Declaration of Trust of Robert Silvester and others declaring premises to be for a Meeting House for the people called Quakers

Abstract of Title Deeds

Vol.26 In May 1671 - a quarter acre, part of the ground known as Cockshoot at Shortwood was given to Richard Smith and others for a burial ground - 52 perches surrounded by a wall with an iron gate

The P.M. Minutes for 1914 - 1924 record repeatedly the need for this wall to be repaired yet again.

But in 1684 this ground was recorded as 'leased for the term of one thousand years'

In 1689 - a further piece of land was added to it on lease for 850 years. Sold to Frewins in 1715.

One of the early Friends was Richard Smith who became a highly respected member of the Meeting he "had been a soldier for many years, but soon after friends came about he was convinced and layd down his Arms, and came and dwelt at Naylesworth"

But these were difficult times for the Quakers. Over the next 30 years they were constantly under suspicion of treasonable activity, falling foul of one new Act of Parliament after another. Although they were innocent of any designs against the state their behaviour rendered them "awkward customers" in the eyes of authority.

They refused to take the Oath of Allegiance, holding that Christ taught them that their Yea should be yea and their Nay nay; they held that all men were equal in God's eyes, so addressed all persons of whatever rank as "thee" and "thou"; they refused the customary "hat honour"; they refused to pay tithes; they continued to hold their meetings for worship when the law forbad them; they inveighed against not only ministers of the established Church but also any preacher whom they believes was not guided by the 'Light of Christ within'; they roamed about the country preaching and often living rough and were arrested as vagrants; and when fined by the courts for any of these misdemeanours they refused to pay the

fines because they held that the courts were unjust. It is hardly surprising that many of them frequently landed in prison, where they were often treated appallingly and where many died.

On the 17th March 1660, a Justice of the Peace went to Nailsworth with soldiers and arrested eleven Friends "some from their houses, others from their business in the street and some from a meeting"

They refused to take the Oath of Allegiance and they were sent off to Gloucester Goal - Robert Hall, Robert Langley, Robert Silvester, Richard Smith, William Beale senior, William Beale junior, John Wakeley, Daniel Brown, Benjamin Deane, William Wilkins and William Penly.

There is an intriguing footnote to this entry "Some of the prisoners being weary in travelling to Gloucester and one of them near 80 years of age, the Constable in civility would have let them lodge at an inn the first night...but an officious man, one Captain Powell, would not suffer it but obliged them to go immediately to prison".

There is no record as to which of the eleven was the old man, or whether he survived his time in the terrible conditions of the goal. We know that some of the others eventually gained their release as their names appear in the minute-books at a later date.

And the further imprisonment of Robert Silvester, Robert Hall and Samuel Clift in 1662 is recorded in Besse's Sufferings.

A number of small Meetings were established in the district during these years - people meeting in private houses to worship together in silence. Then in March 1668 George Fox came to Gloucestershire and held a meeting at the house of Nathaniel Cripps, a Quaker magistrate at Upton just outside Tetbury and it was here that Nailsworth Monthly Meeting was set up, comprising Cirencester, Painswick, Stinchcombe, Tetbury and Nailsworth meetings.

The following year Fox visited Nailsworth and he records in his journal how he was confused with a Presbyterian preacher John Fox.

Once a month representatives from these Meetings came together at Nailsworth to "wait upon the Lord" and "inspect into the affairs of the blessed truth"

The Nailsworth Monthly Meeting minutes date from 1668. Much of the business recorded was concerned with applications for a certificate of marriage. Since Friends would not go to a priest to be married, the Monthly Meetings undertook the authorisation of marriage, and this they did with great care - enquiring into the applicant's "clearness of any other commitment", their parents; consent, and it was this carefulness which led to the government - when marriage became a matter of law - accepting marriage in the manner of Friends as a legal commitment, as it still is today.

Another matter dealt with by Monthly Meeting was the behaviour of individual Friends, who were to be 'spoke to' about anything which might bring Quakers into disrepute.

In 1673, Matthew Ball, about his taking wood that was not his; called to 'confess his fault and give satisfaction for the same'

In 1675, the widow Anne Clift for 'disorderly walking....keeping company' with Hugh Hill.

6th month 1677 'Robert Langley should speak with John Hayward and Richard Townsind and acquaint them that it is the desire of Friends of this meeting, that they should be at the next men's meeting to have a controversie ended betwixt them and Robert Silvester'

The following month 'The said controversie ...being heard by Friends it was the sense of the meeting that what had happened between them, as concerning words that had formerly passed, should all be passed by, and for the further never to be mentioned any more, unto which they gave their consent'

In February 1684 Richard Townsind was again in the minutes concerning 'a certain difference' betwixt him and a Samuel Nottingham of Nottingham' it took nearly 18 months before the meeting gave judgement that 'Samuel Nottingham should have one half of the money in controversy and bear the lost of the other half'

1695 - Two Friends to be spoken with 'concerning their entertaining lewde company in drinking too much strong water and making themselves drunk'

By the end of the 1600's in addition to Nailsworth, several other meetings had their own Meeting Houses - Cirencester (1673), Tetbury, Painswick. There is reference to a Meeting House being "settled" in Wotton-under-Edge by 1710. In 1725, Circular Yearly Meeting was held in Wotton. And in 1746 the market-house at Minchinhampton was temporarily licensed as a meeting-place for Western Yearly Meeting.

By the beginning of the 1700's, the early fire-in-the-belly of the first Quakers was dying down. Dissent was now allowed under the law; Friends no longer believed that the millennium was imminent; the second generation were not religiously educated as were their forbears. They continued to hold to their principles, but they closed in on themselves and became an exclusive people.

Their emphasis on plain clothes, plain speech, silent worship; their witness against field sports, cards and other games of chance, the theatre, paintings, novels and music - all set them aside.

They were barred from the professions, the universities and any service of the state.

In the mid-18th Century, Methodism began to draw people away from Friends, and Meetings, already depleted by the marrying-out and consequent disown.....of their members, began to shrink.

Nailsworth Monthly Meeting was having difficulty in 1822 in finding Friends to be nominated as Elders and was seeking Quarterly Meeting's assistance. And in 1839 it was reported at Quarterly Meeting that several meetings are in a 'low and reduced state'. Within the next 20 years, membership was reduced by one quarter.

1597	Vagrancy Act - permitting flogging of rogues, vagabonds and beggars
1650	Blasphemy Act - against Ranters but often wrongly used against Quakers, usually unsuccessfully
1650	Lord's Day Act - reducing people's former right to speak in church after minister had finished
1655	Oath of Abjuration - abjuring Papal authority, often tendered to Quakers who refused to swear it
1654	The 'Valiant Sixty' (some of them women) set out in pairs to take the Quaker message
1656	Marriage Act
1652-1660	Arbitrary local persecution not necessarily upheld by courts, etc.
1661	Corporation Act - Fifth Monarchy uprising, followed by much persecution of Quakers who were wrongly thought to be fellow-travellers
1662	Quaker Act - against refusal to take an oath or defending the refusal of others, also made it illegal to hold any religious meeting of more than 5 people. 1 st and 2 nd offence - fines, 3 rd offence - transportation.
1662	Act of Uniformity - impressed use of Book of Common Prayer in all churches
1664	Conventicle Act - banned all religious meetings other than in the parish church, but Quakers continued to meet openly and were sent to prison
1665	Five Mile Act forbidding 'non-conformists' to live or to build chapels within 5 miles of any corporate town.
1670	Second Conventicle Act - a single magistrate or judge had power to convict - no recourse to a jury. Meetings broken up, Meeting Houses pulled down
About this time	Dissent meant Quakers banned from universities and grammar schools so they set up their own schools
1671-2	Yearly Meeting established
During 1670s	Women's Meetings set up to deal with pastoral matters
1672	Declaration of Indulgence - suspending penal laws against dissenters
1675	Penal laws reinstated
1673	The Test Act - making it compulsory for all holding office to receive the sacrament in accordance with Church of England rites - aimed at Roman Catholics but used also against Quakers
1681	Pennsylvania established
1682	More than 2000 Friends emigrated to Philadelphia
1689	Toleration Act

Nailsworth Monthly Meeting Minutes

1668 Set up when Fox attended a *General Men's Meeting* at Nathaniel Cripps' house at Tetbury Upton. Met for the first time the following year.

Comprised:- Cirencester, Nailsworth, Painswick, Stinchcombe, Tetbury

Cirencester

1673 Meeting House built (£9.3.0 contributed by Nailsworth and Stinchcombe)

Painswick

Monthly Meeting minutes 8.4.1680

Meeting House built ? in existence 1706

Stinchcombe

Monthly Meeting minutes 8.4.1680

Tetbury

Monthly Meeting minutes 8.4.1680

Meeting House in existence 1692-3

Burial ground sold

Meeting House closed 1780

In 1680, members from Minchinhampton, Cherington and Stancombe also mentioned in Monthly Meeting minutes.

Wotton

1710 A Meeting House 'settled'

1725 Circular Yearly Meeting held here

Minchinhampton

In 1746 the market-house was licensed as a meeting-place for Western Circular Yearly Meeting.

Other possible meetings in the area from time to time:-

Avening, Westonbirt, Dursley, Woodchester, Rodborough

From Quarterly Meeting Minutes

1691 - Quarterly Meeting collecting contributions towards building Meeting House at Tetbury.

QM minutes continued

1768 - Removal of gravestones in Nailsworth burial ground

1769 - Testimony to Rebecca Smith of Nailsworth

1801 - Permission to alter inside of Nailsworth Meeting House

1822 - Nailsworth Monthly Meeting seeks Quarterly Meeting assistance in nominating Friends as Elders

1839 - Reported that several meeting are in a 'low and reduced state'.

1861 - Total number of members reduced by about one quarter in the past 17 years.

From the Abstract of Title Deeds

Nailsworth Meeting House and Burial Ground:-

1695 Land acquired by Richard Wilkins and others 'for the purpose of building a meeting house upon'

But there is also an entry in January 1668 referring to a 'Declaration of Trust of Robert Silvester and others declaring premises to be for a Meeting house for the people called Quakers'

May 1671 - quarter acre, part of the ground known as Cockshoot at Shortwood given for a burial ground- 52 perches surrounded by a wall with an iron gate'

1786 - a piece of ground in front of the Meeting House added and used as a burial ground.

1921 - Property adjoining Nailsworth Meeting House - two tenements sold for £250.

1789 There was a Quaker Meeting House and Burial Ground at Tetbury on the Bath Road. But sold by about 1800.

1854? Nailsworth Monthly Meeting and Gloucester Monthly Meeting became Gloucester and Nailsworth Monthly Meeting

1876 PM Nailsworth and Painswick 'dissolved' 30.9.1876

1890 Nailsworth PM 'constituted'

From Western Quarterly Meeting

List of members 1908 - Nailsworth PM had 22 members, 6 attenders

Nailsworth held a Mothers Meeting each Monday

Queries

Was Richard Townsend a member of Cirencester Meeting or Nailsworth Monthly Meeting? - both - Cirencester was part of Nailsworth MM.

Thomas Atkins a Cirencester Member?

Robert Sylvester of Nailsworth a Cirencester member?

Roger Townsend of Tetbury

Robert Smith clothier of Nailsworth?

Lydia Roberts of Stinchcome?

1659 one of 7000 Quaker women signatories on petition to Parliament for the tithe law to be changed.

Were early Monthly Meetings open to any Friend from the individual Meetings, or did only representatives attend?

Billeting 1942 to 1994 - receipts shown in the accounts. Who was billeted? Where?

1650 Friends gathering in William Wilkens home (now the cottages) (from Quaker Data Book 1960)

The English family - left Nailsworth for America in 1680? (History of the English family in Meeting House reference books)

A direct descendent:-

Darrel English of 2009 North Crescent Drive, Flagstaff, Arizona 86002 has visited Nailsworth Meeting House in 1990 and again in 1998.

Friend's named in minutes:-

LANGLEY, Robert - MM met in his house 1668 to 1679

SMITH, Richard - MM met in his house in 1672

(N) SYLVESTER, Robert of Nailsworth

SHARP, Anthony

TOWNSEND, Roger

BOX, John of Woodchester

MASON, John

BAKER, Stephen 1673

WILKINS, William 1673

WALKLEY, John

ARUNDELL, Richard

DANIELL, Thomas

BEALE, William

CLIFT, Jonathan

ENGLISH, Joseph 12.5.81 et al

(N) WILKINS, Stephen of Nailsworth - mill owner and cloth trader
in 18th century.

(P) LOVEDAY, Thomas of Painswick

STORY, Thomas

ROBERTSON, Thomas

(N) SMITH, Rebecca testimony to QM minutes 1769

BOX, John

YEATS, Thomas

PACE, John

GILMON, Simon

MERRETT, Richard 1699

Marriage

Much of the business recorded in the minutes was concerned with applications for a certificate of marriage.

Alcohol

1844 Joseph Sturge - letter in The Friend 1844 re dealing in barley for malting

1950s Meeting still subscribing to Friends Temperance Union.

Simplicity of dress

Discussed in The Friend 1847 and 1848

1787 Collection at Monthly Meeting for national funds -

£7.12.6 from Cirencester, £7.6 Painswick and £1.1.0 Nailsworth

Reasons or excuses for imprisoning Quakers:-

Refusing to swear tendered oaths - for Abjuration 1655

Quaker Act 1662

Not going to church

Refusing to pay tithes

Refusing to pay fines which they considered unjust

Vagrancy (under the Vagrancy Act 1597)

Holding meetings of more than 5 persons

Annoying some official by:-

Keeping hats on

Using plain language

In any other way

Refusing to pay the Poll Tax 1689

They were often re-committed to prison at the end of their sentence for continuing refusal to swear the oath

Officers of the law often acted illegally towards them or connived with those who did so.

Indictments for:-Being a Quaker, not attending Parish Church, not receiving Easter communion, not paying church rate

Sentencing in 1660's:- Admonishment, Persecution/shaming/threats, Fines

Disownment by church 1682 -1686 - imprisonment

Sources

Nailsworth MM minutes

1668 - 1854)	
1697 - 1854 (accounts))	D1548
1793 - 1854 (sufferings))	D1340
1824 - 1827 (accounts))	
1754 - 1791 (Women's Meetings)		
1812 - 1853 Lists of members		B1/2 2 & 3

Gloucester QM minutes

1670 - 1733		D1340 A1/M1
1768 - 1769		A1/M2
1785 - 1810		A1/M3
1810 - 1838		A1/M4
1833 - 1868		A1/M5
Glos. Quarterly Meetings - sufferings A1/A2/A3		D1340
Glos Monthly Meeting minutes		D1340
QM Women's Meeting 1797 - 1868		A1/M6 - M9

Nailsworth PM registers

1848 - 1864

State Papers collection

Early Quaker books in Cirencester Meeting House,

Gloucester Meeting House,

Nailsworth Meeting House,

Woodbrooke library

Quarterly Meeting Records of Sufferings (at F.K. if extract), Monthly Meeting ditto

Register of S.F. in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire births, marriages, burials and supplement 1642 onwards GRO D1340 A1/R1-4

Gloucestershire Men's Quarterly Meeting minutes

1671 onwards GRO D1340 A1/M1

(relief of distress and later Friends facing trial or in prison)

Gloucestershire Quarterly Meeting - sufferings

1678 onwards

1. Imprisonment GRO D1340 A1/A2
2. Fines, distrains

Nailsworth Men's Monthly Meeting minutes

1669 onwards GRO D1340 B1/M1

(witness, disorderly walking, marriages, burial grounds, disputes between Friends)

Nailsworth Women's Meetings Minutes

Great Book of Sufferings Friends House Library

Minutes of the Meeting for Suffering Friends House Library

Gloucester and Nailsworth Monthly Meeting GRO D1340 B4/A1

Accounts 1837 - 1900 and 1933 - 1939

Records in Gloucester Meeting House Safe

Minutes of Gloucester and Nailsworth Monthly Meeting 1963 - Feb 1991

Monthly Meeting members list 2 volumes 1837 - 1962

Monthly Meeting Marriage registers 1838 -1990

Monthly Meeting Deaths Register 1861 -1995

Burials ? - 1960

Monthly Meeting Property and Finance Committee 1963 - 1988

Abstract of Title Deeds V.26

Preparative Meeting minutes:-

Cirencester 1969 - 75

Gloucester 1964 -68 1985 - 89

Painswick 1977 - 88

Western Quarterly Meeting - list of members 1908

Abstract of Title deeds V.26 and V.58

BOOKS

Nailsworth Meeting House archive -

Besse: Book of Sufferings

Punshon: Portrait in Grey

Penney: First Publishers of Truth

Fox: Journal

Woodbrooke Library - Journal of Friends Historical Society 1946 vol.

Lindley: Wotton-under-Edge

PM Library Hawkins: Quakers in Cirencester 1655 - 1705

Stroud Local Studies Centre Stroud Library

List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest (R.O.L.B.8)

Victoria County History of Gloucester 1964 (R.O.L)

Stroud News and Journal 1971

Stonehouse Parish Library v.94

Other possibilities in Gloucestershire Records Office (GRO)

R.O.L E4. - Religion and Society in a Cotswold vale - A.M.

R.O.L H3 - List of buildings of special interest..... Nailsworth

R.O.L. 64 - history of Nailsworth

PA223/1 - 'Peace Pole'

PA 223/2 - Allis's History of Nailsworth

D4694/14 &15 - Scrapbooks

PA 223/4 - Nailsworth from 1502 - 1900

D1240/B4/P1 - Alteration of boundary of Gloucestershire Monthly Meeting

CMS 54/9 Gloucester Historic Studies VIII Quaker mill of Nailsworth p.73-6

NC 94) Dissenters in Nailsworth

NC 97)

D2052 - Notes re. S. of F.

D1548 7/1-4 Papers of Anthony Fawster - Quaker of Nailsworth

Population 1843 pag3e 223 in 3/2

DC H4/20 Planning application - H6/23 Cossack Square flats

D2219/10/1 Mass emigration to Australia 1838, 1840

See also Index to Place Names and Index to Subjects in Gloucestershire Records Office.

Compiled by Winifred Page

A Member of Nailsworth Quaker Meeting, Gloucestershire Area Quaker Meeting

Published 2016

Copyright: Nailsworth Quaker Meeting

