

SWARTHMOOR BLOG – IN FOX’S FOOTSTEPS – AUGUST 20-25, 2018 – PILGRIMAGE BASED ON SWARTHMOOR HALL, CUMBRIA, UK

Sheila Havard’s blog

Monday, August 20, 2018

Travel arrangements via Toronto/Manchester/Wigan/Lancaster/Ulverston went fine although the trains were a bit delayed. I had hoped to see Lancaster Castle, where George Fox and Margaret Fell were both imprisoned, from the railway line, but no such luck. The line does skirt Morecambe Sands though and the views were so gorgeous I wished I was on both sides of the carriage at once! I found the half-mile footpath from the railway station to the Hall with no problem and used the excuse of ripe blackberries in the hedgerows to put down my bags and pause a short while to recover my wind. It seemed fitting to arrive on foot though George Fox might well have done so on horseback.

The accommodation is in the old hall but modern and pleasant. My window looks over the quiet garden – one of many different types of gardens – with its wandering contemplative path. And right below me is a yew tree, possibly one of those planted by Thomas Fell for each of his children. Beyond the garden is a typical English



Swarthmoor Hall (right) and conference centre

countryside scene of hill and dale, woodlots and hedged fields. Thank goodness the mania for uprooting hedgerows and replacing them by sterile fences is a thing of the past.

Some of the group had already assembled for a very welcome cup of tea. We are from all walks of life. The leader, Gordon Matthews, is an old Sidcotian like me but I graduated from Sidcot Friends’ School before he started there. We also have a historian and recent member, his wife, a former travel agent, who is not a Quaker but interested in Quaker beliefs, and the resident Friend of Settle Meeting, who is an old scholar of Ackworth Friends’ School. That is the English

contingent.

The Germans cover a wider age range than the English: one is resident Friend in Bad Pyrmont, where Germany Yearly Meeting meets every second year. There is also a music teacher, an enthusiast with a lot of Quaker knowledge who is translating George Fox’s journal into modern German – English is his third language - a librarian from a Meeting of two members and a student in her last year of physiotherapy. The Crouches, resident Friends here in Swarthmoor, accompany us on our travels and help shepherd stray members of our group back to the flock.

Swarthmoor Hall – the Great Hall

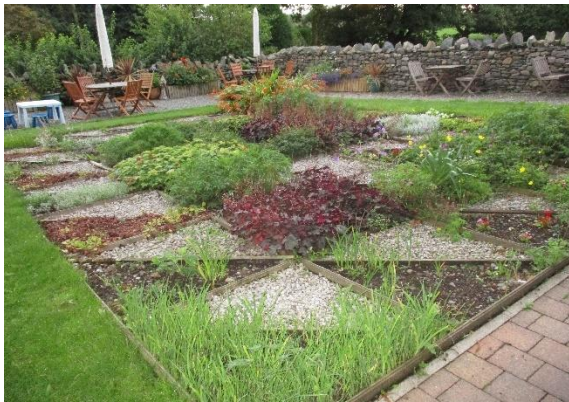
The main challenge, apart of course from jet lag and consequent sleeplessness, is language. My German stood



up fairly well on arrival in the intimate setting of the tea room but speed and volume of speech made all the contributions in German, that is, all but one of the total, almost inaudible to me when we shared our reasons for coming in a large circle.

I was able to ferret out some of the reasons later in individual conversations. They included “this is where it all began”, “I read a book on Margaret Fell and was fascinated”, theological reasons, historical interest and a desire to know more about Quaker beliefs. My reason is to understand the roots of Quakerism by experiential learning, and trying to understand a very different age, which is so hard to grasp by book learning.

Swarthmoor Hall – the quilt garden



After an excellent vegan supper – it looks as if all the suppers will be vegan - we terminated the evening with an “epilogue” in the great hall. It seems an epilogue is a semi-programmed Meeting and our leader had prepared songs for us. The hall contains little or nothing originally from the house but is furnished with furniture from that era brought in from elsewhere: a long wooden table, contributed by Swarthmore in the US, set with pewter utensils; benches; a magnificently carved sideboard; etc. The floors are covered with huge flagstones and the walls are wood panelling.

Swarthmoor Hall – sideboard and griffins with Gordon Matthews, our leader



Tuesday, August 21, 2018

After four hours of sleep, I lay awake for hours and so decided to explore at dawn. The gardens include the quilt garden, with plantings in triangular and diamond shapes, the front garden and the quiet garden. The other gardens were too wet to visit.

We drove off southeastwards towards Pendle Hill, briefly skirting the Lake District. At Clitheroe, we disembarked at the new (that’s relative!) Meetinghouse. I thought I recognized the Friend serving our tea and, lo and behold, it was Ben Pink Dandelion, plus a nascent beard. Yes, the very same Ben Pink Dandelion who delivered the Quaker Studies at Canadian Yearly Meeting a few years ago with such

knowledge, feeling and played-down British humour. He lives locally and travels to Woodbrooke to teach. I can’t say how much I enjoyed his informal talk. Of course it was a fairly elementary early Quaker history as he had no means of knowing how much we already knew. I challenged him to act out the “Quaker walk” – stern stumping along – he did at CYM and he did it beautifully and even added to it: Quakers clothed in a minimum of cloth could barely stretch their trousered legs to a full stride. His parody had us in stitches of laughter.

The Quaker movement spread so fast in the 1650s that 1% of the English were Quakers within a short time. In Bristol it was even 10%. None of the other proliferation of sects around at the time survived, only the Quakers. Quakers were outright radicals and made no bones about telling anyone of another denomination that they alone (the Quakers) had got the theology right and everyone else was wrong. In view of this overweening and

stubborn self-confidence, no wonder so many early Friends were jailed. When the initial enthusiasm and mission work petered out though, insufficient energy was put into preserving what had been created.

The Clitheroe Friends have exchanged their beloved old Meetinghouse for this more central one since 2016, a move that shows that it is possible for a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business to make a major change involving a contentious issue speedily and to the satisfaction of all. The historic old Meetinghouse with its view of Pendle Hill has been sold and what was a downtown café acquired. The old building was much beloved but was reached by an out-of-the-way lane and so cold Friends met in winter huddled in outer garments behind a curtain erected in an attempt to ward off some of the north country chill. Needless to say, few brave souls ever ventured up the lane to discover what local Friends did during Sunday Meeting for Worship. The Meeting was split on the prospect of a move after the idea was first voiced at an after-Meeting warm-up in a local café. No unity was reached on a straight question as to whether the sale was desirable. The following business Meeting, Friends were asked whether a sale and a move would be good for the future of their Friends' community. Personal preferences were set aside and unity achieved on a radically forward-looking approach. Even Friends previously expressing reservations agreed with the move in what Ben described as one of the best business Meetings he had ever attended. Emotions ran high, tears flowed and there were hugs all round – and that is quite something for Brits, Ben added.

This first step was thus enabled by a question that made it possible to put the welfare of the Meeting above individual interests. The wearying process of completing the legal requirements for the sale and for planning permission was then greatly facilitated by the appointment of a committee mandated by the Meeting and trusted to do the work, on which each member was in charge of one particular aspect of the project. The Meeting was clear it now had a social mission, and was able to more efficiently collect clothes for refugees on a Greek island. Clinging to history was now a thing of the past. Furthermore, more new faces are now seen at Meeting for Worship.

Pendle Hill - entrance

Finally, on to Pendle Hill. On this great flat-topped mound, now on the horizon, Fox had his vision of “a great people to be gathered”.

We slogged up a series of uneven stone slabs with the view below ever expanding as we went. It was not clear whether this was the route Fox took “with much ado”, but near enough! It may also have been my father's route during his peace pilgrimage with a group of Young Friends rambling through Yorkshire and Lancashire from village hall to



village hall in an attempt to promote the cause of peace prior to World War I so the hill has a double meaning to me. From the top, the view was indeed awe-inspiring. You could see in all directions for miles although the sea at Morecambe Bay, some 30 miles away, remained shrouded in mist. Farms and small settlements dotted the landscape, which was flanked by the hills of the Lake District to the northwest and the Pennine range to the north. Sheltered from the wind in a peaty dip, we briefly worshipped, perched on tufts of heather to the sound of a light breeze. After the silence was broken by Gordon's singing and the shaking of hands, we satisfied our rumbling stomachs with a packed lunch. The image of us gathered together for Meeting on the top of Pendle Hill keeps returning to me, with its accompanying stillness and peace.



The descent of the circular Pendle Hill walk is longer but less steep than the ascent, and we soon caught up with our bus driver, who then drove us to Yealand (pronounced, with typical British idiosyncrasy, “Yelland”), where we were again treated to tea and biscuits by the warden, Alan Tyldesley

Pendle Hill, going up – “a great people to be gathered”

The Yealand Meetinghouse was built in 1692 after the *Act of Toleration* permitting Friends’ gatherings was passed. The original roof was thatched and fire gutted the building so the inside panelling dates “only” from the mid-1700s. The balcony has been boarded up to save heat. There are 30 members, which is good for a village of Yealand’s size, but they are mostly retirees from elsewhere and there are few children. There used to be a Friend’s school next door but it was in competition with public schools and closed in the 1900s. Part of the property is now used as a hostel with a simple self-catering kitchen. It is frequented in particular by groups of cyclists crossing the Pennines.



Yealand Meetinghouse – built in 1692

The gravestones in the burial ground are all identical simple slabs of rock. Early Friends were against having gravestones and the Yearly Meeting twice ordered the gravestones removed. The second time they were indeed taken out. The Yearly Meeting then relented and allowed gravestones as long as they were similar and bore similar inscriptions. So the stones are not as old as the Meetinghouse.

Wednesday, August 22, 2018

Two of the German Friends came to Quakerism through pacifism, for instance, the resident Friend of the Quaekerhaus in Bad Pyrmont became a pacifist and later a Quaker after being deeply moved by an encounter with Daniel Berrigan in Central Park, New York. Our Goettingen Friend was drawn into the movement by peace activism in Bonn. Their enthusiasm is infectious and it is hard to believe there are only about 200 Friends in Germany. German Friends do seem to deeply feel their small numbers though and rely to some extent on British Friends. They use the British “Faith and Practice” and the Quaekerhaus in Bad Pyrmont received financial help from British Friends.



Today we again skirted the Western Lake District and headed northwest to Brigflatts Meetinghouse, where we held a short Meeting for Worship. Brigflatts Meetinghouse is a jewel, and the oldest purpose-built meetinghouse in the north. Like Yealand and Swarthmoor Meetinghouses, it has an upstairs gallery for the women Friends' business meeting, now boarded off. Downstairs in the Meeting room, two rows of benches around the rectangular room surround a small table set with a vase of flowers. There are the usual ministers' or facing benches on one side with a panel of wood behind them.

Brigflatts Meetinghouse - oldest purpose-built Meetinghouse in the north of England

Apparently, there used to be an enclosure near the entrance door where Friends' sheepdogs were kept during Meeting. The warden, Tess Satchel, gave us a talk on the connection of the village with early Quaker history and treated us to yet more tea. George Fox preached in neighbouring Sedbergh, not as expected in the church but under a yew tree at the biannual hiring fair. Here he convinced many people and was invited the following Sunday to preach at the chapel on Firbank Fell.

Brigflatts Meetinghouse

It was Brigflatts Friends who held the so-called "uninterrupted Meeting". Soldiers broke up the Meeting for Worship there and ordered the Quakers to follow them. After a while the militia perceived that they had not done as bidden. On returning towards the Meetinghouse the soldiers found the Quakers peacefully worshipping on the fell!



Some of these old Meetinghouses date back to before Quaker Meetings were allowed. One possible reason for this is that if Friends met in a private home, the owner was responsible and risked having his possessions confiscated or destroyed.



Firbank Fell disappeared in mist and rain! Here George Fox preached to some 1000 people and convinced many.

The road up Firbank Fell is the width of one vehicle and winds between high banks or hedges. Our brave bus driver tackled it undaunted but I dread to think how far we would have had to have reversed had we encountered a vehicle coming in the opposite direction. It was a real squeeze at times to edge the bus through narrow gaps between fence posts and walls. On Firbank Fell George Fox refused to go into the chapel but preached from a natural rock pulpit to some thousand Seekers, many of whom were convinced. This is considered the start of the Quakerism. The yew tree under which he talked for three hours, was broken into pieces when felled, and we were shown one piece in the Yealand Meetinghouse. Our visit to Firbank Fell was marred by driving rain and we quickly scrambled up the rock and even more quickly back to the bus, where we ate our sandwiches on the way to Kendal. The wild upland scenery disappeared beneath swirling clouds of mist but we soon arrived at the Kendal Meetinghouse.



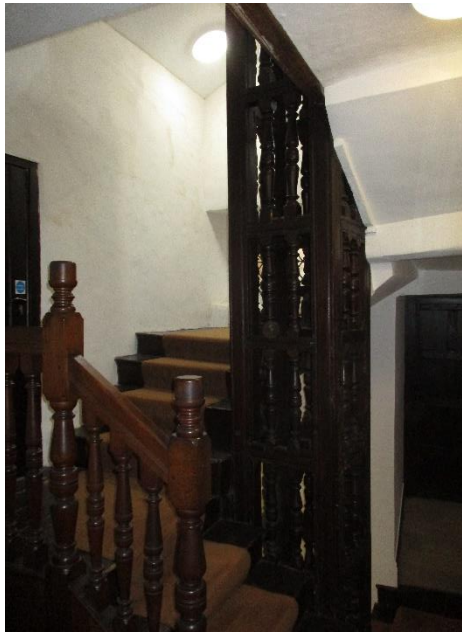
Plaque on **Firbank Fell**

Kendal Meetinghouse has a large Meeting room with a very high ceiling. Other rooms house the Quaker Tapestry. Some 50 of the 70 odd panels were on display. The project started in the 1980s and was completed in the 1990s although some panels are still being made. The idea for the tapestry originally came from Friends' children. Canada was represented by two panels, one on the Underground Railroad and one featuring Camp Neekaunis and native concerns. The beautiful stitching is done on a background of undyed natural wool of beige and brown colours. Quakers of all backgrounds are celebrated: bankers, industrialists, botanists, and more, and other panels depict themes such as the environment, peace, international work, etc.

Thursday, August 23, 2018

Three of our group are products of British Quaker boarding schools. If I have counted correctly, there are six Quaker boarding schools in the country plus one that is closing. There are two in Ireland.

Today we finally got to see the rest of the inside of Swarthmoor Hall. Gordon recounted the history of the house, which I won't dwell on as it can be found in many books (for instance "The Cradle of Quakerism: Exploring Quaker Roots in Northwest England" by Arthur Kincaid). Early Quakers were called Children of the Light because of George Fox's words during a sermon: "Art thou a child of the Light and hast walked in the Light and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?" Margaret Fell, who heard his words, responded: "We are thieves, we are all thieves, we have taken the Scriptures in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves."



Swarthmoor Hall - staircase

The lady of the house was a great organizer of the newly "settled" Quaker Meetings. Her correspondence was voluminous and she particularly kept in touch with and cared for jailed Friends. According to the official version of events, Thomas Fell, Margaret's husband, listened to the Friends worshipping in the Great Hall from his study. His important official position as a judge prohibited him from becoming a Friend but, until he died in 1658, he protected and supported the Friends. They fared much worse after he died. We visited three bedrooms upstairs, including Margaret's, a large light room, and George's. Above that is a spacious loft, which was used by servants. George's travelling chest can be seen upstairs.

Eleven years after Thomas Fell died, George Fox and Margaret Fell married in Bristol. Due to George's constant traveling and the couple's frequent imprisonment, the longest time they were ever together was less than two years. Margaret made Swarthmoor Hall into the centre of the rapidly expanding Quaker movement. George Fox only wrote his diary after two years in Worcester jail, in 1775-1777.

Margaret Fell was a lady of means and owned three estates on her death in 1702. Her eight daughters all became Quakers; not so her son George. On Margaret's death, there was a dispute over ownership of the house. In the end, Daniel Abraham, the husband of Margaret's daughter Rachel, bought the house. However in the mid-1770s the Abrahams went bankrupt and the house was sold to Captain Lidlow and rented out to tenant farmers. It subsequently deteriorated.

In 1912, Emma Clark Abraham, a direct descendent of Margaret Fell, did a great restoration job with some Quaker financial help. Recently two wooden griffins were found and placed above the beautifully carved sideboard in the Great Hall. The Yearly Meeting acquired the building in 1954. Swarthmoor Hall now

accommodates guests, and an adjacent building houses a conference centre and a kitchen. There is also a shop and a café.

Our first stop after elevenses was Margaret Fell's birthplace, Marsh Grange. It was another grey, somewhat forbidding looking house, similar to Swarthmoor Hall but with somewhat larger windows. As it is in private ownership, we could not go inside. It seems a grange was an outlying farm owned by a landowner and worked with hired labour or rented out.

On the way to our picnic, an American homeowner living in the Dunnerholme Estuary conservation area generously shared with us his knowledge of the region's lime and iron mining past in the mid-1900s.

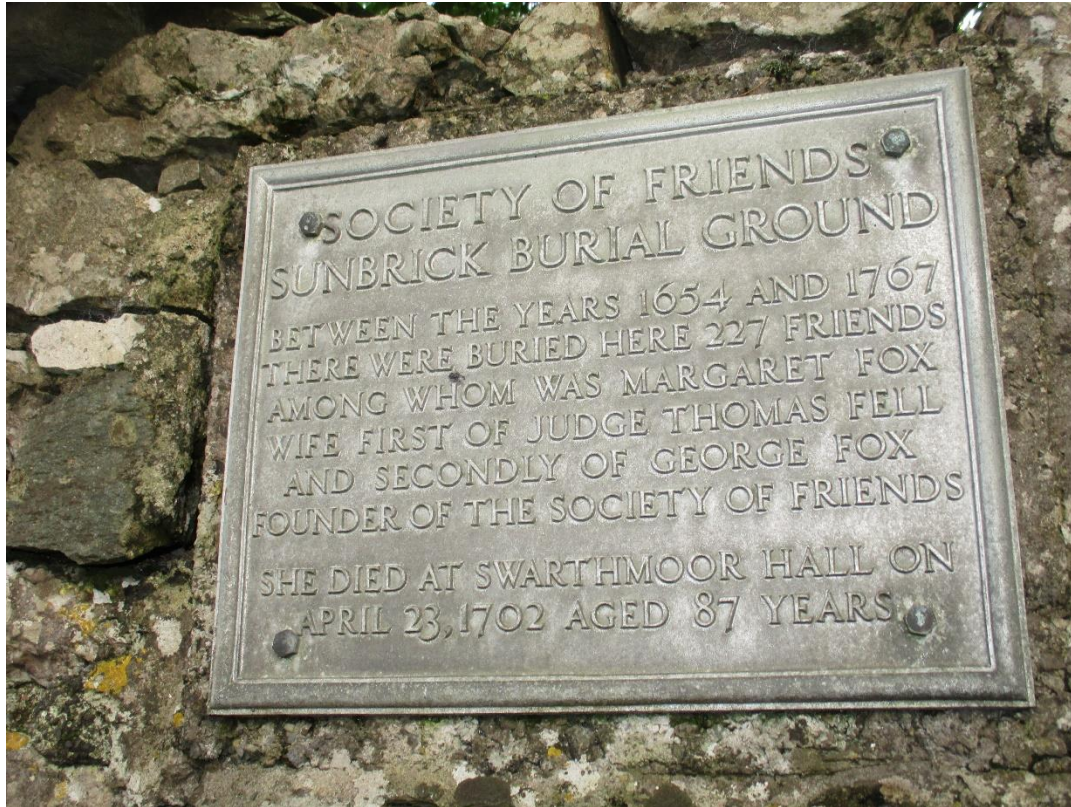


Dunnerholme Estuary overlooking
Morecambe Bay

The weather forecast for the entire week descended on us with a vengeance today but we found a sheltered spot and cowered in a hollow to avoid the gusty wind while eating. We were on a beautiful promontory jutting out over Dunnerholme Estuary. The exposed sand formed delightful ripple-like patterns and more and more of it came to light as we ate since the tide was receding. Silent grace in such a setting was special.

In the afternoon we dropped in at Furness Abbey, an impressive red sandstone structure, now semi-ruined. The influence of this Cistercian ecclesiastical establishment covered a wide area until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. Most of us were content to visit the museum, which detailed the everyday life of the monks and displayed some of the architectural features of the Abbey.

After driving through Barrow-in-Furness right past the BAE plant, where nuclear submarines are built, we passed the Heysham nuclear power station, perilously located in an area subject to storms and high winds. We had afternoon tea in the Coniston Priory café. The priory has been restored by the Kadampa Buddhists, and this is where they have established the Manjushri Meditation Centre.



Sunbrick burial ground – Margaret
Fell's burial place

After the gilded statues in the Meditation Centre, it was a joy to find ourselves in the Sunbrick burial ground, where the remains of over 200 early Friends lie in a grassy enclosure sloping down towards the nearby sea. There are no gravestones or markers of any description, just a large rock with a semi-illegible inscription explaining that Margaret Fell is buried there. Talking about burials, early Friends could not be buried in consecrated land, that is, in church cemeteries and were often laid to rest in a Friend's property. In some cases the Meetinghouse was established next to the burial ground rather than vice versa. A metal plaque above the muddy entrance to Sunbrick was the only official sign of a burial ground.



Our return journey was blessed by the sight of a beautiful rainbow. It seemed an auspicious sign and indeed the bad weather seemed to be a thing of the past.

Sunbrick burial ground, what better witness to Quaker simplicity?

Our Swarthmoor cooks are doing us proud! Today's supper was Greek-style baked eggplants and a custard dessert. Yesterday we had Greek doughnuts, which tasted of honey and found favour with all concerned.

Friday, August 24, 2018

The date over the stone porch of Swarthmoor Meetinghouse reads “1688” but that was when the property was gifted to Friends by George Fox as he foresaw that they would not be able to worship in Swarthmoor Hall for much longer. Actual building started in 1690. The three acres plus buildings cost 72 pounds sterling. Meetings have been held here continuously since 1690.



Swarthmoor Meetinghouse. Worship has been held here continuously since 1690

This Meetinghouse also had a high ceiling, a flagstone floor, deep-set windows and an upstairs gallery where the womens’ business meeting was held. A row of a sort of wooden hatches in the loft opens, revealing the meeting room below and doubtless letting heat into the gallery.

Originally a family lived upstairs but then this room was turned into a schoolroom. The original beams upstairs are preserved in the plaster and

the walls are decorated with banners depicting themes such as peace.

The gravestones are a bit newer than the building because of the original prohibition on gravestones. Some use the old Quaker numeral names for the months of the year. The graveyard is partly unmown and great clumps of rosebay willowherb (fireweed) in the corners were being buffeted by the wind as we wandered around.

Swarthmoor Meeting has an attendance of about 25 on a Sunday. Members and attenders total about 30. Most of the growth in membership comes from local people (as opposed to from retirees moving in from elsewhere). I was impressed to learn that outreach is addressed at every Monthly and Area Meeting.

We closed with Meeting for Worship in the conference room, during which we revealed insights gained and future plans to realize them during a moving worship sharing session. Gordon sang at the close of the Meeting some words of George Fox:

*Ye have no time like the present time
Ye have no time like the present time
Therefore prize your time for the sake of your soul.*

After lunch there were many fond farewells and expressions of thanks as we departed for our respective trains.

If you would like to go, visit <http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk/media/Documents/2018/Swarthmoor-Hall-In-Foxs-Footsteps-Guide.pdf>. The cost for 2018, exclusive of airfare, was £500 (slightly less if you share a room). Every few years, a group of American Friends also does a tour of the 1652 country.

Finally, I would like to thank Education & Outreach and Coldstream Monthly Meeting for facilitating my participation in this pilgrimage financially.

A somewhat reduced group of us made it to the top of Pendle Hill!



The group at Sunbrick Burial Ground

