

**QUAKERISM IN NUMERICAL DECLINE:
THE WAY FORWARD?**

An Essay Submitted for the 2009 Prize Essay Competition

On the Subject:

“The Future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain”.

Introduction.

This essay begins by describing two periods in Quaker history in which the Religious Society of Friends found itself in numerical decline. The first occasion is centred about the middle of the nineteenth century when it was realized that Quakerism was losing the membership numbers it once held. An essay competition was advertised in 1858 in *The Friend and News of the Churches* which began with the words:

A GENTLEMAN¹ who laments that, notwithstanding the population of the United Kingdom has more than doubled itself in the last fifty years, the Society of Friends is less in number than at the beginning of the century; and who believes that the Society at one time bore a powerful witness to the world concerning some of the errors to which it is most prone, and some of the truths which are the most necessary to it; and that this witness has been gradually becoming more and more feeble, is anxious to obtain light respecting the causes for this change. He offers a PRIZE of ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS for the best ESSAY that shall be written on the subject, and a PRIZE of FIFTY GUINEAS for the one next in merit.

The essay competition was won by John Stephenson Rowntree of York and within a decade of his views being published Quakerism was once again increasing in numbers.

About one hundred and forty years later, having reached a numerical peak in 1958, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was once again in decline. Naomi Stillhere, a lifetime Quaker, recognized that her beloved Religious Society of Friends was in difficulties, noted the loss of membership and was prepared to do something about it. Her remedy, totally different from that of Rowntree's, was to encourage people, but children in particular, to become acquainted with the Quaker ethos and the Quaker way of life. Naomi Stillhere² became a Travelling Minister. She set about this in a novel way. She sank all her resources into the

¹ The concerned donor was probably the wealthy Birmingham Friend George Sturge (1798-1888). T. Kennedy. *British Quakerism 1860-1920*. 2001. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [40].

² See: Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, *Epistles and Testimonies May 2002*. 2002. London.

purchase of a narrow boat and, using the boat both as a home and a rallying point, toured the inland waterways of Britain. Naomi brought the Quaker message to children and to anyone who ever had a childhood using as her theme the words from Mathew Chapter 18. vv 2 & 3:³

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".

Naomi called her ministry 'The Celebration of Childhood.' This novel approach to Ministry was successful in bringing the 'Quaker message' to children of all ages.

Section one shows the condition of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the mid-nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twenty first century when the completely different ministries of John Stephenson Rowntree and Naomi Stillhere *et al* one hundred and forty years apart were working towards the same end – the preservation of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Attention is given to the disparate positions of the two Quakers in the social structure of the Religious Society of Friends and the effect that it had on the two ministries, both in form and efficacy.

Section two deals principally with a statistical analysis of the changes in Quaker membership since 1861 to the present time. This predicts that unless radical changes are made within the Religious Society of Friends it will cease to exist by the year 2040 which, by four years, is later than that predicted by Stroud.⁴ The decline in membership is not a phenomenon peculiar to Quakerism. This experience has been mirrored in other religious and non-religious

³ *New Testament and Psalms*. New International Version. Hodder and Stoughton, London. 1983.

⁴ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline*. MPhil. Thesis. Department of Theology, Birmingham University. 2008. [3]. [175 *et seq.*].

organisations. Stroud,⁵ Chadkirk⁶, Stroud and Dandelion⁷ and Stevens and Heathfield⁸ all predict the demise of British Quakers. Bruce⁹ predicts the collapse of Christianity in Britain and Sawkins¹⁰ foretells the end of Methodism. Dr. Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth¹¹ and Wasserstein¹² prophesy the imminent disintegration of Judaism in Europe. Organisations such as the Scouts, the Guides, The Salvation Army, the Ancient Order of Foresters, Labour Party membership, and that of the Conservative Party are all in major decline¹³. It would appear that there is a trend in the populace as a whole which rules out coincidence in favour of a general disaffection with communal life and a change to insularity. Grace Davie¹⁴ disagrees with this conclusion asserting that :

It is not the case that graphs which point downwards never change. Cinema going and attendance at football matches are now growing after decades of decline. A similar upturn could easily happen in the churches - indeed it already has in some dioceses. Truro, Chichester and London offer good examples of rising attendance.

Perhaps a similar upturn could happen in the churches, but so far there is no evidence of it.

The third section draws conclusions from the data presented in the earlier sections and argues recommendations which, if implemented, could reverse the trend towards extinction of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

⁵ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline*. [175] *et seq.*

⁶ W. Chadkirk. 'Will the Last (Woman) Friend to Leave Please Ensure That the Light Remains Shining?' *Quaker Studies* 9/1 2004, [114-19].

⁷ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. 'British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy'. *Quaker Studies*, 2004. 9(1): [121].

⁸ M. Stevens and M. Heathfield. 'Still Shrinking'. *The Friend*. April 4th. 2003.

⁹ G. Davie, P. Heelas, L. Woodhead Eds.: *Predicting Religion*. 2003. Aldershot: Ashgate. Chap 4. [53-63].

¹⁰ J. Sawkins. *Church Affiliation Statistics: Counting Methodist Sheep*. 1998. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

¹¹ J. Sacks. *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* 1994. Ilford: Vallentine Mitchell.

¹² B. Wasserstein. *Vanishing Diaspora*. 1996. London: Hamish Hamilton.

¹³ B. Knight and P. Stokes. *The Deficit in Civil Society*. 1996. Foundation for Civil Society, 200 Bunbury Road, Birmingham B31 2DL

¹⁴ G. Davie. Professor of Sociology and Director of the Centre for European Studies at Exeter University. Writing for the Church of England 2005. www.ChurchStatisticsChurchofEngland.htm Accessed 19 April 07.

Section One.
The Condition of Friends in the mid 19th Century
and the beginning of the 21st Century.

1.1. Introduction.

This chapter compares the 'condition' of the Religious Society of Friends at the time of the ministries of John Stephenson Rowntree and of Naomi Stillhere in terms of how any individual could influence the workings of Yearly Meeting. Both John Stephenson Rowntree and Naomi Stillhere faced the demise of the Religious Society of Friends. Rowntree, partly by virtue of gaining the first prize in the 1859 essay competition and partly because of his and his family's standing in the Religious Society of Friends, was in a position of influence which he was able to use to secure the changes he advocated. Naomi Stillhere had no such advantage – she had to rely on the intensity of her faith and her determination to bring children back into the Quaker way of life.

1.2. The Religious Society of Friends in the mid-Nineteenth Century.

In its first period, the Society of Friends had no formal organisation. It was held together by the personal charisma of Fox, but it soon became clear to him that some organisation was necessary if the movement was to survive.¹⁵ Some of his followers opposed this development bitterly, as contrary to the genius of Quakerism, but most, like Penn, realized its necessity.

In 1675, Penn

. . . raised the whole question of Church discipline, contending that if the Church were silent it would be overrun with lukewarm hypocrites and loose walkers . . . Church order was no doubt a new thing, which had come through Fox, but it came in its due season . . .¹⁶

Although the need for organisation was recognised, tension remained to trouble Quaker consciences - especially in periods when 'Light Within' theology was emphasized. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this type of theology was revived.¹⁷

The inconsistency was alleviated, however, by the adoption of 'Quaker democracy'. This is a system which was designed to answer criticism of the democratic method by lending due weight to minority opinion.¹⁸ In a Quaker business meeting, decisions are made, not by majority vote, but by 'taking the sense of the Meeting'. In this process, the Clerk, who also acts as chairman, tries to formulate a decision which represents a basic consensus of agreement; if deep disagreement exists, no decision is made and the matter is postponed. All

¹⁵ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [184].

¹⁶ W. C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961, [299].

¹⁷ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [184].

¹⁸ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [184].

present are free to speak and the 'sense of the meeting' is based on a qualitative as well as a quantitative estimate: *'Every contribution counts as one, but some as more than one.'*¹⁹

Penn made an excellent statement of the Quaker ideal of decision-making:

...in these solemn assemblies for the church's service, there is no one who presides among them after the manner of the assemblies of other people; Christ only being their President, as he is pleased to appear in life and wisdom in any one or more of them, to whom, whatever be their capacity or degree, the rest adhere with a firm unity...²⁰

There is an obvious criticism of this method, which applies to all procedures employing fervour. It is how to distinguish between the divine influence, and the working of imagination. In mid nineteenth century Quakerism, however, the sharp and paradoxical contrast between group authority and private judgment was moderated by a generally held belief in the paramount authority of the Bible.

If we look at Quaker business meeting's deliberations and decisions at a time of fierce debate, when the issues at stake were deemed to be more important than the preservation of mechanisms for reaching agreement, it may be possible to learn how this system worked in practice.

The period between 1850 and 1860 is a particularly suitable period for such a study,²¹ for the matters under discussion then were thought to affect the very existence of the group, and the nature of its relationship to the wider society. Essentially, the conflict took place between

¹⁹ R. Davis, quoted in L. H. Doncaster, *Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings*, London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1958, [68].

²⁰ W. Penn, *The Rise and Progress of the people called Quakers*, 1834 edition, [44].

²¹ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [185].

'conservatives', who thought of the Society as a 'gathered remnant'²² which should live in the greatest possible isolation from its environment, and those who sought to break down the barriers protecting the Society, which were seen as 'crippling restrictions',²³ affecting its life and work in the wider society. The most important practical issues at stake were whether or not to abolish the group's two main protective policies - the distinctive modes of dress and speech (peculiarities) and compulsory endogamy.²⁴

Men's Yearly Meeting, which assembled annually in May, held the seat of power and authority. Its meeting place, until 1905, was always London, which in itself had important effects on the distribution of power.²⁵ Men's Yearly Meeting stood at the peak of an elaborate organisational pyramid. The Preparative Meetings, which formed the lowest layer of the pyramid, were simply the local Meetings for Worship acting as business meetings - their function was to send delegates and information to the Monthly Meeting. Monthly Meeting, which covered a wider area, was an important administrative unit, dealing with 'marrying out', for instance. Monthly Meetings sent delegates and information to the Quarterly Meeting, which usually corresponded with a county or group of counties. The Quarterly Meeting, in its turn, sent delegates to Yearly Meeting, with information about the 'state of the Society' in their region, and, in some cases, proposals for change.²⁶

In practice, attendance at Yearly Meeting was not confined to Quarterly Meeting delegates - anyone with sufficient leisure, piety and financial resources to make the journey to London

²² E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [185].

²³ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [185].

²⁴ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [186].

²⁵ In 1905 Yearly Meeting was held in Leeds.

²⁶ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [186].

could and did attend.²⁷ There is no official estimate of the numbers who attended, though all accounts suggest that in the 1850s attendance was fairly constant from year to year.²⁸

The Quakers have always rejected a professional ministry,²⁹ and looked towards the spontaneous ministry of laymen. By the mid-nineteenth century there had evolved within the Society a conception of ministry which went some way to being, if not professional, then at least a distinctive status group among Quakers.³⁰ In England, the former idea of spontaneous inspiration had been modified, to guard against idiosyncrasy or sacrilege, by the practice of officially 'recording' ministers. A man or woman who spoke fairly often in meetings for worship, and proved acceptable, was officially recognized in this way. Recorded ministers sat separately in the minister's gallery, facing the rest of the congregation.³¹ There was no prearranged pattern of speaking, and in theory, the unrecorded were equally free to speak, but in practice recognized ministers tended to speak frequently, and perhaps automatically, while the unrecorded member who wished to speak had to cross a difficult psychological barrier.³² The obituary notice of Joseph Hopkins provides one illustration among many: *'The call was now made still more plain... but to give up and speak as a minister before his neighbours, seemed impossible.'*³³ The practice of recording was abandoned in 1924, for this reason.³⁴ There were two other types of status in Quakerism - that of the Elder and Overseer. Elders supervised ministry, and Overseers watched over the conduct of the membership in general. Eldership was, however, more honorific, and tended to be regarded as a compensatory status symbol for affluent and socially eminent Friends who did not speak in ministry:

²⁷ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [186].

²⁸ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [186].

²⁹ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [188].

³⁰ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [188].

³¹ P. Dandelion. *An Introduction to Quakerism*. New York.: Cambridge University Press. New York., 2007.

³² E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [188].

³³ Obituary in *Annual Monitor*, 1882, [93].

³⁴ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [188].

'The Eldership used to be looked on as a "status" to be acquired by Friends not "ministers", who through social position and a comfortable income had weight in Society...'³⁵

Both types of status were mirrored in the composition of Yearly Meeting, not for any necessary or organisational reason - because the role of ministers in business meetings was unaffected by their ministerial status - but because the personal pre-eminence and status which were reflected in the positions of minister and elder were also reflected in Yearly Meeting. Of the one hundred and forty one individuals whose status was known and who are recorded as speaking in Yearly Meeting between 1852 and 1859, sixty nine were recorded ministers and forty three were Elders.³⁶

In theory, proposals for change had to come from an unanimous Quarterly Meeting. While this proposal had the merit of filtering out frivolous or ill-considered suggestions, it introduced an undoubted bias against change, for even a traditionally radical Quarterly Meeting, such as Yorkshire, reproduced in microcosm the divisions which split Yearly Meeting. Thus when Joseph Rowntree persuaded Yorkshire Friends to sponsor his proposal to liberalize Quaker marriage rules, conservatives tried to block discussion of the proposition on procedural grounds, because it came from a divided Quarterly Meeting.³⁷ In this case the Clerk waived the objection, but it became a real problem when Joseph Sturge attempted to introduce discussion of the 'peculiarities' (the distinctive modes of dress and speech) on his own initiative. *'A long discussion arose as to the propriety of introducing the question, as it did not come through the usual channel of a subordinate meeting.'*³⁸ The popularity of the proposal and Sturge's personal standing won the day, but the incident was significant for it showed that institutionalised arrangements, which in effect held in bounds the pressures for

³⁵ E. Grubb, *Eldership a Definite Service*, London: Society of Friends, 1934, [4].

³⁶ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [188].

³⁷ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [190].

³⁸ *The Friend*, 1858, [99].

change, could be by-passed only when particular unplanned circumstances occurred - in this case the personal appeal of a well-esteemed man, and the popularity of the proposal which he was submitting. Proposals which lacked the revolutionary implications of those sponsored by Rowntree and Sturge passed through the organisational channels smoothly, whether or not they were finally successful.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the information obtained by this laborious process was almost useless. The key reason, as the elder Joseph Rowntree realized, was that they asked the wrong questions.³⁹ They dealt with the conduct of members, but omitted the crucial question of the numerical state of the Society, how many left it each year, and for what reason. By recording the number of conversions to Quakerism and ignoring the much larger total of disownments and resignations, they managed to produce a positively misleading impression of growth. There were other weaknesses - the questions which were asked tended to be abstract and general which led to conflicts in Yearly Meeting about the accuracy of the answer returned.⁴⁰ Finally, the practice of answering the Queries region by region was numbing and confusing - even those who were not particularly radically disposed could be persuaded of the folly of reading aloud sets of statistics for almost every county in England.⁴¹

The inadequacy of this procedure had several important implications. They introduced a bias in favour of conservatism by promoting a false sense of optimism, or at least concealing the Society's numerical decline.⁴² Reformists had two possible courses of action - to by-pass the formal procedure and produce their own statistics, or to press for organisational change and a revision of the official Queries. Both techniques were adopted - Joseph Rowntree senior, his

³⁹ *British Friend*, 1854, [145].

⁴⁰ See: *The Friend*, 1856, [97].

⁴¹ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [192].

⁴² E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [192].

son John Stephenson Rowntree, and William Thistlethwaite each compiled figures about 'the state of the Society'.⁴³ Similarly, the advocates of reform pressed year by year for a revision of the Queries, but even then success was partial and delayed. The Queries were revised in 1860, but the practice of returning written answers continued until 1905.⁴⁴ The method of circulating fixed but imprecise questions as a system of obtaining information had nothing to recommend it. It was a method which, although it did not furnish the information which the Society needed to have, nonetheless effectively discouraged the creation of more effective procedures. To reformists the situation was intensely frustrating, for they realised that a comprehensive supply of information was essential for sustained and consistent policy.⁴⁵ As the younger Joseph Rowntree realised, inadequate knowledge led to disjointed and inconclusive deliberations:

No clear statement of what the condition was, of what the evils were, of what was wanting in the discipline or constitution, and on the other hand no general plan, no broad view of the remedy, but a number of excellent fragments.⁴⁶

In considering the real place of power in Yearly Meeting it is crucial to remember that decisions were shaped exclusively by what was said in the meeting. A Quaker assembly is perhaps unique in that power equals eloquence (or perhaps the other way round!), for the sense of the meeting is revealed exclusively by speeches. In Quakerism, those who were present but silent made no contribution to decision making, so it is possible to discover the identity of those exercising power by the simple method of listing the names of speakers in Yearly Meeting.⁴⁷

⁴³ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [193].

⁴⁴ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [193].

⁴⁵ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [193].

⁴⁶ Joseph. Rowntree (Jr). 1857 Yearly Meeting, [15-16].

⁴⁷ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [193].

There was another difficulty which was implicit in the very structure of Quaker democracy, which introduced a further conservative bias. This was the long-established and characteristic Quaker practice of respecting minority opinion, a practice which made it very difficult to reach a decision at all.⁴⁸ The typical Quaker answer to the problem of divided opinion was procrastination - this often had the desired effect, and the records yield a number of instances of Friends who changed their mind, influenced by a convincing argument, or by a desire for harmony. An obstinate minority of 'weighty' Friends could delay a decision for years, as they did in the case of the Yorkshire proposition to liberalize the marriage rules, first introduced in 1856, but deferred year by year until 1859, when it was finally adopted.

Sturge's proposal to abolish the peculiarities experienced a parallel process. Reformists realised clearly the way in which minorities could delay decisions, and the knowledge sometimes brought them very near to an advocacy of majority rule.

Quakers tended to take domination by a small group pretty much for granted: all the allusions to this in Quaker records and correspondence are either neutral and incidental or come from the disgruntled opponents of some specific decision, complaining that it is the work of a powerful minority (often identified with the senior Friends who sat at or near the Clerk's table).⁴⁹

In 1854, J. S. Rowntree wrote of James Backhouse, Josiah Forster, John Hodgkin and Samuel Gurney as the 'princes' of the Society; five years later he made incidental mention of 'the principal Friends, who take an active part'.⁵⁰ It is clear that Friends accepted this situation, without asking how the government by a small group of people developed in an

⁴⁸ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [199].

⁴⁹ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [201].

⁵⁰ J. S. Rowntree. 1854 Yearly Meeting, [34]; 1859 Yearly Meeting. [20].

assembly where all were free to speak, and without making a conscious recognition of the relationship between eloquence and power. The paradox which lies at the heart of the Quaker polity has an interesting economic correlative.⁵¹ The rejection of a professional ministry and secretariat⁵² meant that all ministry and administration had to be conducted in the leisure time of members - which meant that active participation in church affairs was largely the preserve of the leisured and prosperous.⁵³

A society which is administered in the leisure-time of its members tends - as long as differences of social status persist among its members - to become dominated by a leisured class. As a consequence, the expense of a journey to London and a week's accommodation there automatically made a certain degree of prosperity a requirement of attendance at Yearly Meeting. This remained true well into the twentieth century.

This dominance of the prosperous has several implications. It was more than the fact that only the prosperous have sufficient leisure to participate in the Society's government, for there is much evidence to suggest that wealth was an independent source of status and prestige within the Society. This point was made clearly in an anonymous letter to *The Friend* in 1844:

And whatever else we do or do not, I suspect that if we do not succeed in providing for ourselves and our families reputably, we shall only be lightly esteemed in the Church; nay I even believe that some of our members are ready to think that the poor man's wisdom is very apt to be despised, and that to get rich is one important part towards 'a good degree' in the Society.⁵⁴

⁵¹ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [201]. It is possible to discover the socio-economic characteristics of the group by collecting data from biographies, memoirs, the *Annual Monitor* and so on. One would assume that there is a bias implicit in this procedure, since more is written about the wealthy and distinguished, but information was available on a sufficiently large number to minimise this possibility - when information is not available it is usually because it is impossible to determine which of several Friends of the same name is referred to. Unfortunately it is impossible to determine the identity of silent attenders of Yearly Meeting, except for Quarterly Meeting representatives who did not speak in the Meeting, and who are a small and perhaps atypical group.

⁵² E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [202]. During this period the Recording Clerk was the only paid official; the development from this situation to the elaborate secretariat now housed in Friends House is a suggestive sociological phenomenon.

⁵³ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [202].

⁵⁴ *The Friend*, 1844. [277].

Early retirement had an obvious part to play in a group which had neither a professional ministry nor a permanent administrative office and so made heavy inroads into members' time. Within the small group of Yearly Meeting speakers during this period, there are listed nineteen cases of early retirement for specifically religious reasons, at an average age of about forty four, and the actual number was probably much higher. The frequency of early retirement provides an interesting index of the piety and prosperity of the group. Not all early retirements can be explained in this way, some were due to ill-health, or to a simple distaste for business, but many were prompted by uneasiness about the morality of a life devoted to the accumulation of wealth⁵⁵ and a desire to devote some years to the ministry or to philanthropy.⁵⁶

The very high life expectation of this group of Yearly Meeting speakers has an obvious connection with the dominant role of retired men. Their average age at death was 84, an extraordinary figure, even when the prosperity of the Society is remembered.⁵⁷

Contemporaries often complained that business meetings were dominated by the old - as does a chance comment from John Stephenson Rowntree: *'The appearance of the meeting when standing is remarkably impressive, such a number of grey heads.'*⁵⁸ One writer on the reasons for the Society's decline blamed, between themselves,

The existence of a morbid conservatism . . . arising chiefly from an over-preponderance of those advanced in life among the members'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [204]. cf. the words of Joseph John Gurney in 1821 (there are many parallels): 'I suppose my leading object in life may be said to be the bank. It sometimes startles me to find my leading object of such a nature, and now and then I doubt whether it is quite consistent with my religious pursuits and duties . . .', A. J. C. Hare, *The Gurneys of Earlsam*, 1895, Vol. I, [341].

⁵⁶ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [205].

⁵⁷ The average life expectancy in the Society as a whole would be much lower, because of the (then) shorter life expectancy of women, and the high incidence of infant mortality.

⁵⁸ J. S. Rowntree. 1854 Yearly Meeting [22].

⁵⁹ *Manchester Friend*, 1872. [186].

If we analyse the average age of Yearly Meeting speakers when contributing to the meeting's proceedings, it becomes clear that men 'in middle life' dominated it.⁶⁰ The power elite of Quakerism were also dominant in other spheres, such as politics and local government, or in philanthropy.

At least twenty-five of those who spoke at Yearly Meeting in this period played an active part in national or local politics. They included six past, current or prospective members of parliament among whom Bright was pre-eminent, and at least eleven men who played some part in local government, most commonly as Poor Law Guardians.⁶¹

In the 1843 Yearly Meeting two opposed views of politics came into fierce juxtaposition, when a phrase in the Yearly Meeting epistle, expressing the hope that Friends would *'always be found among those who are quiet in the land'* roused Bright to an energetic and apparently successful defence of his hobby.⁶² Forty years later, it was a truism among Quakers that political action was a form of Christian service.⁶³

It is seen here that in the mid-nineteenth century the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was effectively 'run' by a wealthy elite who had the resources, piety and leisure to do so.

⁶⁰ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [205].

⁶¹ E. Isichei. 'Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59'. 206.

⁶² E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [207]. Quoting: Anne Ogden Boyce, *Records of a Quaker Family: The Richardsons of Cleveland*, 1889. [210].

⁶³ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [207].

1.3. The Religious Society of Friends at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century.

Twentieth-century Quakerism developed a large professional permanent administrative office. It is noteworthy that many Friends regarded this development as ominous.⁶⁴ Soon after the opening of Friends House in 1929, Horace Fleming⁶⁵ questioned whether the Society was transferring responsibilities, which were the proper concern of its members, to this permanent administrative office. The ideal of government by the Society's members was still strong however and Quakerism still made demands on the time of its devout members.⁶⁶

However, as Kathleen Slack asserts in her 1967 Swarthmore lecture:

...in the Society of Friends there are neither leaders nor rank and file. All Friends are equal and, unlike Animal Farm, none are more equal than others. They may never have signed a document as the founders of the community on the island of Tristan da Cunha did that '*no member shall assume any superiority whatever but all to be considered as equal in every respect*'. But Friends have, with occasional lapses, endeavoured to live and order their affairs in that spirit.⁶⁷

She continues to assert further that:

Authority resides in the decisions of the group and the group alone and finds its ultimate expression in Yearly Meeting of the Society. It follows that no one Friend nor any elite can reach decisions on matters of policy; make or change rules of government; exercise any form of judicial control; or pronounce finally upon principle or practice. Only the corporate body meeting as it does today in open session, for all members to attend, all to confer, all to address, can do these things and then only in the light, Friends would say, of the leading of a spirit greater than themselves.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [209].

⁶⁵ E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [209]. Quoting: Horace Fleming. *The Lighted Mind*, London: Friends Book Centre, 1929. [3-8].

⁶⁶ L. H. Doncaster. *Quaker Organisation*. [80] ... the "good Friend" might attend twenty-nine such meetings in a year, viz., rather more than one a fortnight, apart from committees set up by any of them. It needs little imagination to realise the strain in resources of time and money that this may involve ..."

⁶⁷ K. M. Slack. *Constancy and Change in the Society of Friends. Swarthmore Lecture 1967*. 1967, London: Friends Home Service Committee, Friends House, Euston Road, London. NW1. [23].

⁶⁸ K. M. Slack. *Swarthmore Lecture 1967*. [23].

The Religious Society of Friends abandoned the practice of recording ministers in 1924. The intention was to encourage all members to feel that they shared responsibility for spoken ministry. It was, of course, many years before the last few ministers recorded before 1924 died, so they continued to make their contribution, albeit on a diminishing scale, across the Yearly Meeting.

No new system took its place - with a predictable gradual consequence. The desired one – that anyone present at a Quaker meeting for worship should feel free to rise and speak, but as Heron ⁶⁹ tells us - also the undesired one – that there was no need to feel themselves inwardly moved by the Spirit of God.

Dandelion ⁷⁰ generated a table (Table 1.1. below) which shows how at the end of the twentieth century there was a reluctance to minister in Meeting for Worship. Dandelion asked in a survey: *If you have ministered in Meeting for Worship, about how long was it before you did so after you started attending regularly?* ⁷¹

⁶⁹ A. Heron. *Quakers in Britain a Century of Change*. 1995, Kelso: Curlew Graphics, Kelso, Scotland. [8].

⁷⁰ P. Dandelion. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, The Silent Revolution*. Studies in Religion and Society. Vol. 34. 1996, Lampeter.: Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter. [254].

⁷¹ P. Dandelion. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers*. [254].

Table 1.1.

Length of Time Between the Beginning of Regular Participation and First Vocal Ministry. ⁷²

Less than two months	3.6%
Two to four months	5.7%
Five months to a year	13.2%
One to three years	21.4%
Over four years	23.8%
Can't remember	9.1%
Haven't ministered	23.2%

From this Dandelion concludes: ⁷³

Only around 1 in 5 group members ministered within a year of their regular anticipation. Nearly a quarter of the sample had never ministered.

These data suggest that there is a parallel between this reticence and a) the learning curve, b) the fear of getting it wrong. 15 per cent of Attenders felt other Attenders might not formally join because they did not feel 'good enough'. Embarrassment exists as a continual threat to participation and a connection might be found between fear of inadequacy and the rules surrounding silence and speech.

Isichei's data on the domination of Yearly Meeting proceedings by a handful of Friends in the 1850s provides an extreme parallel with the empirical data of the 1990s on the present-day influence of weighty Friends. The free ministry is not utilised by all and is more likely to be used by those with a longer affiliation with the group. Self-confidence plays a large part in being prepared to act as a channel for God's word.

The duty of elders, first to identify and then encourage ministers after they had been recorded, disappeared with the abolition of recording. ⁷⁴ In relation to the spoken ministry, therefore, the duties of the elders began to be defined as part of the overall responsibility for the meeting. This is set out in the 1995 *Quaker Faith and Practice* -

it is 'laid upon elders... to foster helpful vocal ministry, seeking to discern the needs and gifts both of the individual contributors to the vocal ministry, and of the meeting

⁷² P. Dandelion. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers*. [254].

⁷³ P. Dandelion. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers*. [254].

⁷⁴ A. Heron. *Quakers in Britain a Century of Change*. [46].

as a whole; some Friends may hesitate to risk speaking in meeting because they lack confidence in their own call to speak – they will need encouragement ; others may too easily rise to their feet without being clear as to the helpfulness of the message; sometimes it may be necessary to restrain unsuitable ministry.’⁷⁵

Elders are appointed by the Monthly Meeting (for a period not exceeding six years without a break) to take responsibility for the spiritual life of the Meeting. They determine the end of Meeting for Worship, and encourage Friends to offer appropriate vocal ministry, whilst also restraining inappropriate ministry.⁷⁶ In practice, elders often find it difficult to determine what constitutes ‘unsuitable spoken ministry’, and tend to confine their interventions privately to speeches of excessive length (five minutes is considered an appropriate maximum in many Meetings for Worship) or speeches having a week-to-week predictability.⁷⁷ The verb ‘to elder’ is commonly used to refer to instances where a Friend is publicly, or privately, told that his/her behaviour has been inappropriate. It is considered very undesirable indeed to be ‘eluded’ and this is usually sufficient to keep ‘unsuitable spoken ministry’ at bay. Some Meetings combine the role of Elder with that of Overseer, other Meetings have attempted an experiment of corporate eldership.⁷⁸

The period between 1920 and 1945 was a time for slow and relatively uneventful internal development for Quakers in Britain. This contrasted with the troubled and uncertain times in the wider society. However, it started with a prolonged exercise on the revision of the part of its *Book of Christian Discipline* concerned with doctrine. The outcome established the

⁷⁵ *Quaker Faith and Practice*. 1995. [12.13].

⁷⁶ A. Heron. *Quakers in Britain a Century of Change*. [46].

⁷⁷ A. Heron. *Quakers in Britain a Century of Change*. [46].

⁷⁸ A. Heron. *Quakers in Britain a Century of Change*. [46].

acceptance of the 'liberal' position. By 1945 most of the previous leadership had gone and a new wave of men and women with different backgrounds and experience had come in.⁷⁹

The 1947 Swarthmore Lecture by John W. Harvey under the title *The Salt and the Leaven*, challenged Quakers in Britain to be more outgoing. Having examined with care the nature of 'silence based worship' including the sentence:

'We are straying from the plain forthright way if we come to attach too much importance to 'thought about' God, when in our worship we should be seeking 'knowledge of' and 'communion with' Him.'⁸⁰

Harvey then arrives at a clear statement of his own conviction that:

'...if worship is to be, as it admittedly must be, the core of our religion, then it must be concerned primarily with the divine Being whom we worship, and very much less with ourselves and our states of mind.'⁸¹

This was probably a factor contributing to the revision of Parts 1 and 2 of the Discipline in 1959. London Yearly Meeting approved a revision of what had been 'Christian life, faith and thought' and 'Christian practice' in the form of a unified '*Christian Faith and Practice*'.

Birthright Membership was abandoned also in 1959⁸² arguably the single most influencing factor in the decline in Quaker Membership.

Only eight years later in her Swarthmore Lecture of 1967 Kathleen Slack tells us:

'...it may be that less than 40 per cent of Friends today are birthright Friends and their number will continue to diminish.'⁸³

And diminish they have.

⁷⁹ A. Heron. *Quakers in Britain – a century of change 1895-1995*. [48].

⁸⁰ J. W. Harvey. Swarthmore Lecture 1947 *The Salt and the Leaven*. 1947. [76].

⁸¹ J. W. Harvey. Swarthmore Lecture 1947 *The Salt and the Leaven*. 1947. [79].

⁸² Religious Society of Friends. *Yearly Meeting Minutes*. 1959. [6-8, 214].

⁸³ K. M. Slack. *Swarthmore Lecture 1967*. [44].

From time to time revision of parts of the Book of Discipline had been made and considered by the Yearly Meeting. In 1994 a revision exercise was made that was without precedent in more than a century, in that the whole book was dealt with in a single operation.

There was a general sense that the 1994 Yearly Meeting went well⁸⁴ and it was recognized that there was a widespread sense of thankfulness that ‘we have a new Book’.⁸⁵ The new single volume is called *Quaker Faith and Practice* with the sub-title ‘*The book of Christian discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*’. It is perhaps most significant that a decision was also made to give up the name ‘*London Yearly Meeting*’ replacing it by ‘*The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*’ (abbreviated to *Britain Yearly Meeting*).⁸⁶

Today, Liberal Friends take the idea of being ‘open to new Light’ as being the norm.⁸⁷ It is enshrined in the current British discipline as being ‘open to new light, from whatever quarter it may come.’⁸⁸ The 1931 Yearly Meeting invented it⁸⁹ and it accommodates corporate as well as individual innovation.

Here, then, in the mid 1990s Quakerism had reached the point where the individual was paramount. No longer was the Society dominated by an elite class of wealthy members, but rather by a mass of members who have re-organized themselves by means of a new book of

⁸⁴ A. Heron. *The British Quakers 1647 – 1997*: [40].

⁸⁵ A. Heron. *The British Quakers 1647 – 1997*: [40].

⁸⁶ A. Heron. *The British Quakers 1647 – 1997*: [40].

⁸⁷ P. Dandelion. *An Introduction to Quakerism*. 2007. Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 8RU. [131].

⁸⁸ *Quaker Faith and Practice*. 1995. Advice 7.

⁸⁹ P. Dandelion. *An Introduction to Quakerism*. 2007. [131].

discipline.⁹⁰ They do not, of necessity, have to profess themselves 'Christian'. It is quite possible to meet individuals who would describe themselves as 'Buddhist Quakers' as by any other description. This would seem to be an example of being '*open to new light, from whatever quarter it may come.*'⁹¹

At the beginning of chapter 5 of her 1994 Swarthmore lecture Margaret Heathfield in describing the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), invokes Newton's first law of motion from the scientific community:

A body will continue ...

Newton's First Law of Motion suggests that 'a body will continue in a state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line unless acted upon by a force'; and so it has been with us (the Religious Society of Friends). The trend from closed group to open group has continued in the latter part of this century, though relatively slowly.⁹²

Continuing the Newton's First Law of Motion theme she advises us that:

The practice of testing our promptings and our concerns with our local group does not always hold good, and when Friends find a lack of sympathy or spiritual fellowship within their local Meeting, they look outside the Quaker circle to find support, or they find other Friends from further afield who share their interest. This wandering to find soul-mates has encouraged a fascinating range of Special Interest Groups to be set up, as well as much ecumenical and other joint activity...⁹³

Margaret Heathfield goes on to say that:

...a new corporate structure has grown up, containing most of the elements of modern institutional management, with familiar groupings of work, lines of accountability, financial control systems and office procedures. In many ways, this way of organising our work makes us indistinguishable from other similar organisations - Churches, for example, Trade Unions, some political parties, many charities, and so on. This has the advantage of making us able to undertake joint work more easily, since all such organisations have people doing similarly defined tasks, who can communicate easily with one another...⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See P. Dandelion. 1996. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, the Silent Revolution*. Chap. 5. for more on leadership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the late twentieth century.

⁹¹ P. Dandelion. *An Introduction to Quakerism*. 2007. [131].

⁹² M. Heathfield. *Swarthmore Lecture 1994. Being Together. Our Corporate Life in the Religious Society of Friends*. 1994., London.: Quaker Home Service and Woodbrooke College, c/o Quaker Home Service, Friends House, Euston Road, London. NW1 2BJ. [67].

⁹³ M. Heathfield. *Swarthmore Lecture 1994*. [69].

⁹⁴ M. Heathfield. *Swarthmore Lecture 1994*. [74-75].

...But not necessarily with others - thus if a person experiences a leading or perceives a need for a change then she/he must wrestle with the corporate structure - a task akin to persuading the local council that introducing a non-profit making parking charge is a futile exercise. Coupled with the concept of Newton's first Law of Motion is the definition of inertia. In this case the metaphor extends to the Quaker corporate resistance to change.

...unless acted upon by a force. ⁹⁵

Procrastination may have cost the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) dear in terms of staunching the loss of members from the Society. Naomi Stillhere's ministry was tragically brief, but it is possible, considering her level of commitment to her cause, that by beginning just one more year earlier the turning point for Quaker membership could have been achieved.

Compare this with J. S. Rowntree, who only had to speak to be listened to, as Isichei shows, although his reforms were not immediate. ⁹⁶

This writer has come to the conclusion that to persuade Quakers to accept more orthodox viewpoints in the 1990s *et seq.* was proving much more difficult than in the time of J. S. Rowntree. Then, at least, (*if* one was a member of the wealthy 'elite' of Quakers, a group missing in late twentieth century Quakerism,) all one had to do to get one's viewpoint accepted was to be loquacious.

⁹⁵ M. Heathfield. *Swarthmore Lecture 1994*. [71].

⁹⁶ See: E. Isichei. *Organisation and Power in the Society of Friends 1852-59*. [201].

Section 2. Statistical Analysis.

2.1. Introduction.

In this section data from the Tabular Statements is used to predict the future membership figures for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and the results are compared with similar work by other researchers in this field. Conclusions drawn from the results are examined in section three.

2.2. Statistical Analysis.

With the provision of membership records from 1861 being readily available from the Tabular Statements published by the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Quakers) it is possible to plot the progress of the membership for the one hundred and forty six years between 1861 and 2007. These are tabulated below in **Table 2.2.1.** **Chart 2.2.1.** below offers a line of best fit (where $R^2 = 0.9458$) using a polynomial (cubic) regression, for the period 1861 to 2007, which indicates that Quakerism would have no members by about 2040. This correlates extremely well with the date (2036) projected by Stroud and Dandelion.⁹⁷ These challenge Dandelion's⁹⁸ previous prediction (2108) in terms of its naïve approach to membership statistics and offer more sophisticated and probable alternatives. Chadkirk⁹⁹ bases his research solely on adult membership and argues that a distinctive and uniform trend began in 1990. This trend offers an almost straight-line regression pointing to the loss of all members in 2032.

⁹⁷ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. *British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy*. 2004. 9(1): [121].

⁹⁸ P. Dandelion. *Those Who Leave and Those Who Feel Left: the complexity of Quaker disaffiliation*. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17 (2002) [213-228].

⁹⁹ B. Chadkirk. *Will the Last (Woman) Friend to Leave, Please Ensure that the Light Remains Shining*. *Quaker Studies* 2004 9(1), [114-119].

Table 2.2.1. Quaker Membership: 1861-2007. ¹⁰⁰

Year	Membership	Year	Membership	Year	Membership	Year	Membership
1860		1898	17,031	1936	20,404	1974	20,297
1861	13,844	1899	17,153	1937	20,444	1975	20,063
1862	13,809	1900	17,346	1938	20,563	1976	19,754
1863	13,761	1901	17,476	1939	20,824	1977	19,557
1864	13,755	1902	17,617	1940	21,005	1978	19,161
1865	13,756	1903	18,221	1941	21,377	1979	18,845
1866	13,786	1904	18,332	1942	21,502	1980	18,549
1867	13,815	1905	18,466	1943	21,604	1981	18,391
1868	13,894	1906	18,677	1944	21,736	1982	18,303
1869	13,995	1907	18,860	1945	21,812	1983	18,131
1870	14,013	1908	18,019	1946	21,819	1984	18,045
1871	14,021	1909	19,348	1947	21,847	1985	18,076
1872	14,050	1910	19,522	1948	21,888	1986	18,071
1873	14,085	1911	19,612	1949	21,969	1987	18,087
1874	14,199	1912	19,785	1950	21,988	1988	18,010
1875	14,253	1913	19,942	1951	22,056	1989	18,070
1876	14,441	1914	19,962	1952	22,244	1990	18,084
1877	14,604	1915	20,007	1953	22,385	1991	18,072
1878	14,710	1916	20,059	1954	22,497	1992	17,934
1879	14,984	1917	20,052	1955	22,701	1993	17,802
1880	14,981	1918	20,028	1956	22,871	1994	17,579
1881	15,113	1919	20,014	1957	22,979	1995	17,518
1882	15,113	1920	19,994	1958	23,107	1996	17,327
1883	15,219	1921	20,047	1959	23,094	1997	17,189
1884	15,381	1922	20,069	1960	22,724	1998	16,978
1885	15,380	1923	19,076	1961	22,704	1999	16,729
1886	15,453	1924	19,039	1962	22,752	2000	16,468
1887	15,531	1925	19,081	1963	21,194	2001	16,243
1888	15,574	1926		1964	21,154	2002	15,953
1889	15,836	1927	19,044	1965	21,125	2003	15,775
1890	15,961	1928	20,256	1966	21,066	2004	15,576
1891	16,102	1929	20,252	1967	21,040	2005	15,374
1892	16,244	1930	20,337	1968	20,966	2006	15,147
1893	16,369	1931	20,351	1969	20,910	2007	14,907
1894	16,412	1932	20,328	1970	20,807	2008	
1895	16,476	1933	20,383	1971	20,680	2009	
1896	16,674	1934	20,430	1972	20,561		
1897	16,854	1935	20,453	1973	20,440		

¹⁰⁰ Source: Yearly Meeting Minutes – Tabular Statements.

1860: no data.

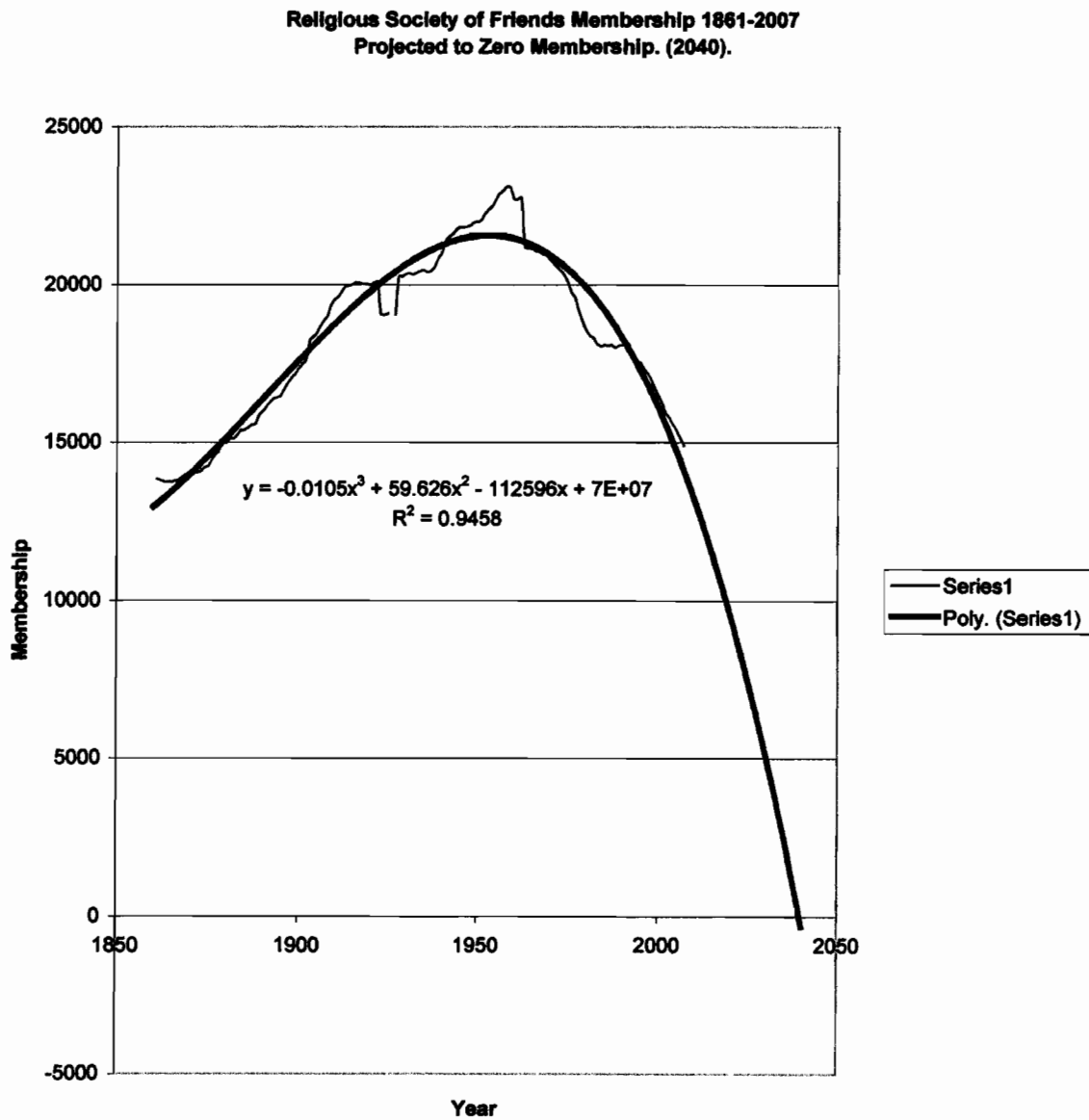
1926: no data.

1947: Successive books give 21,377 and 21,374; 21,374 used.

1953: Successive books give 22,358 and 22,385; 22,385 used.

1963: Successive books give 22,717 and 21,194; 21,194 used.

Chart 2.2.1. Quaker Membership 1861-2007. Projected to Zero Membership (2040).¹⁰¹



¹⁰¹ Source: Yearly Meeting Minutes – Tabular Statements.
 $y = -0.0105x^3 + 59.626x^2 - 112596x + 7E+07$
 $R^2 = 0.9458$

Quaker Membership in Britain rose to a high point of 23,107 in 1958, before declining.

Factors other than secularisation that affect this numerical decline are that:

- a) In 1959 automatic membership of new children was abolished, and
- b) In 1963 figures for Australia and Canada were no longer included in the British totals.

However, even allowing for the “hiccups” these changes have produced, the last forty years have been ones of declines. From 1962, the decline of combined adult and child membership has been largely constant except for a period of stability in the 1980s. There has been a more marked decline in the last forty years than the decline observable by comparing the figures for 1900 and 1998. Stroud also has produced figures predicting that Quaker membership of boys and girls under sixteen will reach zero in 2020.¹⁰² Quaker membership (men) projects to zero in 2018¹⁰³ and Quaker membership (women) in 2019.¹⁰⁴ These predictions are concerned wholly with membership statistics and do not in themselves signal the end of Quakerism in Britain, a point Dandelion also fails to mention in his earlier work.¹⁰⁵ It is possible to be blinded to the spiritual health of the Church by the arithmetic aggregation of its membership. However, the number of Attenders in British Meetings is fewer than that of members and has also started to fall (derived from the tabular statements in Yearly Meeting Proceedings).

Equally, the end of Quakerism in Britain may come ahead of the loss of all members. Whilst there is about one hundred paid staff working for the Yearly Meeting as part of a £6M annual budget,¹⁰⁶ British Quakerism relies heavily on voluntary labour.¹⁰⁷ Local meetings require

¹⁰² C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [194].

¹⁰³ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [200].

¹⁰⁴ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [201].

¹⁰⁵ P. Dandelion. ‘Implicit Conservatism in Liberal Religion: British Quakers as an “uncertain sect”’. 2004. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 19, [219-229].

¹⁰⁶ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. ‘British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy’. 2004. 9(1): [121].

¹⁰⁷ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. ‘British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy’. 2004. 9/1: [121].

Clerks, Treasurers, Elders, and Overseers. The extensive committee structure of the priesthood, of all believers, as practiced in Britain, is all run by volunteers. It is difficult to find members or attenders to fill the posts and in 2005 Yearly Meeting considered proposals to radically restructure the organisation, although without reaching clear conclusions.

If there is a level of membership critical to the continuation of the Yearly Meeting of say 5000 members, Stroud gives a date of 2026,¹⁰⁸ and Chadkirk's figures would suggest a date of 2024¹⁰⁹. However throughout Europe there are a number of perfectly viable Yearly Meetings with fewer than 5000 members. There are eight with fewer than 160 Members which include three with fewer than sixty Members (*e.g.* Finland Y.M. has 20 Members and Denmark Y.M. has 35 Members only).¹¹⁰ As Meetings closed there would be a further deficit of time and energy in winding up local affairs but as Chadkirk¹¹¹ suggests, the present pattern of falling donation income could become boosted by huge amounts of income generated by the disposal of fixed assets. It is then likely that more people may be employed to help manage the affairs of a dwindling but ever-wealthier group of Quakers. A fate shared by, for example, the Panacea Society in Bedford whose five members oversee an estimated balance sheet of £30,000,000.¹¹² Whatever the scenario, it seems certain that from predicting the end of the world in the 1650s, present-day Quakers will find themselves increasingly preoccupied with the end of their own world.

¹⁰⁸ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [187].

¹⁰⁹ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [189].

¹¹⁰ M. P. Abbot, M. E. Chijioke, P. Dandelion, J. W. Oliver. *Historical Dictionary of the Friends (Quakers)*. 2003. [320, 321].

¹¹¹ W. Chadkirk. 'Will the Last (Woman) Friend to Leave Please Ensure That the Light Remains Shining?' *Quaker Studies* 9/1 2004, [114-19].

¹¹² The Panacea Society had existed as a religious organisation for seven years, prior to its formal constitution under a declaration of trust dated 24th July 1926. It was subsequently granted charitable status on 7th September 1926. The trustees of the Society (known as Council members) administer the affairs of the Society in accordance with both its Trust Deed and internal governing document - the Rules and Regulations of the Panacea Society as revised in 1943. As of 2004 there are five trustees of the charity. Source: The Panacea Society's web-site published 2004, visited by this researcher September 2006.

Section 3. Conclusions.

In this final part the arguments and data presented here and in the previous sections are brought together and show just how fragile the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is. It is not unique in this fragility and it has been shown ¹¹³ that the Jewish nation in Europe, the Church of England, Catholics and Protestants in Scotland are similarly fragile and may share extinction at the same time.

In 1859, almost one hundred and fifty years ago, Rowntree became the prime advisor to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) when he won one hundred guineas for his essay. ¹¹⁴ In it he highlighted what he reasoned to be causing the demise of the Society. The principal reason he opined to be endogamy – as did Hancock ¹¹⁵ (whose essay was judged to come second) - a practise that the Society abandoned in short order. This, and other measures determined to be contributory to Quakers' decline were addressed and Quaker membership rose again. That is until 1958. In 1959 (automatic) birthright membership was abolished, and Quaker membership decreased. Indeed, although Rowntree at first advocated the removal of birthright membership at the time of writing his essay, he later advocated its retention ¹¹⁶.

Statistical analysis of membership figures from 1962 - 2005 has shown, in fact, that the number of children under sixteen years old in membership with the Religious Society of Friends has plummeted exponentially, ¹¹⁷ leading to the prediction that there will be NO children in membership by 2020 (currently only eleven years away). It may already be too

¹¹³ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [208 - 214].

¹¹⁴ J. S. Rowntree. *Quakerism, Past and Present*:

¹¹⁵ T. Hancock. *The Peculium*: Book 3. Chap. 4 ix, x. 119 – 123.

¹¹⁶ J. S. Rowntree. 'Membership in the Society of Friends'. *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*. Fourth Month, 1872. [249-273].

¹¹⁷ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [193-195]

late to reverse this trend. By treating total membership figures in a similar fashion it can be forecast that Quaker membership could reach zero between 2036¹¹⁸ and 2040.¹¹⁹ Chadkirk predicts 2032.¹²⁰ A less reliable (due to few data points) treatment of population figures of the Jewish nation in Europe nonetheless arrives at almost the same date for extinction.¹²¹ In another report Knight and Stokes¹²² advise that almost all voluntary bodies in Britain are showing a marked decline in numbers – with the exception of the followers of Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism.

Bruce¹²³ (delivering the opinion of Sawkins¹²⁴) advises us that the Methodist Church in Scotland expires in 2031. That *all* these groups should show similar extinction characteristics goes beyond the possibility of co-incidence. Bruce and Glendinning¹²⁵ come to the conclusion that:

... 'irrespective of personal faith, the older people grew up in a world in which religious ideas and institutions were sufficiently powerful to permeate the general culture'.

Perhaps we should consider what it is that has kept them 'in business' so long!

¹¹⁸ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. 'British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy'. 2004. 9/1: [121]. 2004.

¹¹⁹ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [187].

¹²⁰ W. Chadkirk. 'Will the Last (Woman) Friend to Leave Please Ensure That the Light Remains Shining?' *Quaker Studies* 9/1 2004, [114-19].

¹²¹ The date for 'Jewish' extinction is 2034; for 'Quaker' extinction 2036.

¹²² B. Knight and P. Stokes. *The Deficit in Civil Society*. 1996

¹²³ S. Bruce. *God is Dead secularisation in the West*. 2002. Oxford.

¹²⁴ J. Sawkins. *Church Affiliation Statistics: Counting Methodist Sheep*. 1998. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

¹²⁵ C. Bromley, J. Curtice, K. Hinds and A. Park. Eds. *Devolution – Scottish Answers to Scottish Questions?* 2003. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Ch. 5. [110 –113].

‘Birthright membership’¹²⁶ has been the mainstay of Quaker numbers, and in former times Judaism was a proselytising religion with large numbers of converts. No-one can accuse the (Scottish) Methodists of lacking in zeal or evangelism.

So to what, then, can we attribute this decline in membership of religious and other groups? There is a great deal of evidence that ‘liberal’ thinking in Britain today is becoming a major factor in the decline of Christianity and Christian-based religions.¹²⁷ Some politicians in Britain are becoming super-sensitive to the whims of minority ethnic groups and will bend over backwards to avoid ‘offence’. ‘Christmas’ becomes the winter holiday, Christmas cards become Seasonal Greetings cards, Christian symbols – crucifixes *etc.* – are being removed from graveyards and crematoria. Additionally, gravestones are being knocked flat in the name of ‘Health and Safety’. When the leader of a right wing political party is accused of stirring up race hatred and acquitted there is instant talk of changing the law.¹²⁸

In December 2006 several firms announced that they were prohibiting staff from hanging tinsel and Christmas decorations (both incidentally, pagan customs) for fear of offending customers, minority groups or even attracting law suits.¹²⁹

Bruce and Glendinning¹³⁰ tell us that because both Scottish Catholics and Protestants have achieved considerable upward social mobility and at the same time lost a great deal of their personal piety; that by the end of the (20th) century, religion was of pressing importance to very few Scots. In fact most Scots are no longer involved in Christian organisations.

¹²⁶ J. S. Rowntree. ‘Membership in the Society of Friends’.

¹²⁷ L. Woodhead, P. Heelas and D. Martin. ed. *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*. Chap 7.

¹²⁸ ITV Television News. 10th November 2006.

¹²⁹ BBC Radio 4 News. Nine o’clock news 5th December 2006.

¹³⁰ C. Bromley, J. Curtice, K. Hinds and A. Park. Eds. *Devolution – Scottish Answers to Scottish Questions?* 2003. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Chap. 5. [110-113].

But perhaps their most telling observation is:

...and that the problem is not one of adults giving up their faith; it is a matter of young people never acquiring one. Decline mainly occurs because churches failed to recruit the next generation in sufficient numbers to replace natural attrition.

Rowntree made a similar comment quoting Dr. Ash's *Seven Letters to a Friend*, p. 37.

...disownment was the penalty inflicted on those Friends who continued to pay tithes or church-rates. ...its tendency was to alienate their own affections, *and still more those of their children*, from the Society. ¹³¹

Hugh Montefiori ¹³² explains that it is extremely difficult for a non-Jew to become Jewish thus putting people off from joining. Is this carrying exclusivity too far? Dr. Sacks suggests that 'marrying out' and hence losing the matrilineal continuity, is the principle cause of the decay of Judaism in Europe. That and losing the will to survive. This contrasts quite dramatically with the Quaker marriage experience - but he could be right. Perhaps in the 21st Century endogamy is the answer to falling numbers for, as Voas and Crockett ¹³³ have discovered, religiosity declines in generation steps.

However, Heelas and Woodhead claim that religion is giving way to 'spirituality', ¹³⁴ defined by the authors as embracing the ideas of 'holism', 'New Age', 'feng shui' and 'chakra'. This has the effect of 'diluting' the pool of available adherents to the more 'conventional' God-based beliefs. In addition, there is the knock-on effect that the younger generation are not encouraged into following a theistic way of life.

¹³¹ J. S. Rowntree. *Quakerism, Past and Present*: [27].

¹³² H. Montefiori. *On Being a Jewish Christian Its Blessings and Its Problems*. 1998. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

¹³³ D. Voas, and A. Crockett. 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging'. *Sociology*. 2005. 39(1): [11-28].

¹³⁴ P. Heelas and L. Woodhead with B. Seel, B. Szerszynski and K. Tusting. *The Spiritual Revolution. Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. 2005, Oxford: Blackwell.

In May 2006 a 'snapshot' census was organized by the Religious Society of Friends to try to determine the current strength of the Society attending Meeting for Worship. Nicknamed 'SuperSunday', Preparative Meetings were asked to record how many, and of which category, people attended Meeting for Worship. The results are as follows: ¹³⁵

'SuperSunday' was more a 'VeryGoodSunday' since a significant minority of meetings provided returns for the near as possible Sunday rather than the day itself.

However, taking all current returns together (including those not on the actual day) there were 1,563 men Friends and 2,705 women Friends, 820 men attenders and 1,162 women attenders, 184 men visitors and 266 women visitors 241 boys and 252 girls in children classes. That is, very roughly, a quarter of the possible 15,000+ members were at Meeting for Worship. There were 386 responses of a possible 474 – a return rate of 81.4%

Chadkirk, having performed an extensive statistical analysis on the attendance figures he had amassed, expresses the opinion that: ¹³⁶

...the presence of individual attenders at meeting for worship is more random while the presence of members is being influenced by some non-random factor, though the effect is slight. I don't know what that is but obviously it is closely connected with being a member - otherwise it wouldn't be apparent. Could it be that members feel a greater sense of responsibility (given the proportion who hold official positions) and hence do not feel the same 'freedom' to worship as relatively responsibility free attenders?

The figures above reveal a ratio of 1.7:1 of women Friends to men Friends attending Meeting for Worship and overall the ratio of women members to men members over the past fifty years has changed from 1.33:1 to 1.58:1. ¹³⁷ It can be projected that there will be twice as many women Friends as men Friends by the year 2026 (but there will be precious few of either). This disparity is thought to be caused by the increase of 'mixed faith' families. In 'single faith' families both adults would attend their common religious observance.

¹³⁵ W. Chadkirk. Private communication. September 2006.

¹³⁶ W. Chadkirk. Private communication. October 2006.

¹³⁷ Source: Yearly Meeting Minutes – Tabular Statements.

In her introduction to chapter six of her PhD thesis Judy Frith ¹³⁸ tells us that:

Friends' attitude to marriage is liberalized, and the Society has not held tight to the notion that marriage is for life, heterosexual and entirely economic in its function. The current diverse constructions of family life contrast with the endogamous and dynastic style of Quaker families in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...

...(her) chapter considers the social capital held and shared by families, and its role in keeping a Quaker tradition in a family though it also finds evidence of fracture and loss of the tradition. It identifies clear gains from provision of children's activities, both by those who are parents and those who grew up in a Quaker family, though transition into Quakerism in adult life is inconsistent and uncharted...

Voas and Crockett ¹³⁹ have made a study of religion in Britain. They examine the idea embodied in the phrase 'Believing without Belonging' which has come to symbolize the religious trends in the UK identified by sociologists. ¹⁴⁰ They conclude that 'belief' has eroded in Britain. They deduce that this erosion in belief is linked directly to a parallel attrition of religious affiliation and attendance. They consider the effect of the era in which we are living, the effect of peer pressure and of the ages of the people under review and conclude that the decline in belief proceeds in generation steps.

They assert that transmission of religiosity to the next generation happens in only fifty percent of cases whereas the absence of religion is almost always passed on. What this means is that the more religious the parents the greater the chance the children will be religious also. Their assertion that the absence of parental religiosity results in no religiosity in the children, does not, however, take into account the influence of grandparents. This is something Sacks is concerned about when he asks '*Will we have Jewish Grandchildren?*' ¹⁴¹ and Bruce and

¹³⁸ J. Frith. Private communication. 2007.

¹³⁹ D. Voas and A. Crockett. 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging'.

¹⁴⁰ L. Woodhead, P. Heelas and D. Martin. Eds. *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*. Chap 7.

¹⁴¹ J. Sacks. *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* 1994. Ilford: Vallentine Mitchell.

Glendinning¹⁴² indicate when they say that ‘...the older people grew up in a world in which religious ideas and institutions were sufficiently powerful to permeate the general culture’.

Voas and Crockett conclude that Christianity in Europe is not as widespread as formally, it is not as personally significant as before and it is not as socially significant as it used to be.

Their conclusion continues to assert that unorthodox belief *e.g.* Holistic or New Age¹⁴³ views – a conclusion that Heelas *et al*¹⁴⁴ also arrive at - are replacing orthodox beliefs and that:

Such moves away from Christian convention may mediate rather than deflect the transition from faith to secularity, and in any event the gains in alternative belief are not sufficient to replace the orthodox losses.¹⁴⁵

Dandelion¹⁴⁶ believes, however, that Quakerism is a ‘point of entry’ into religious life for the following reasons:

Theories of recruitment are relevant to the study of the Quaker group as 84.7% came into the group as adults. Thus the majority of Quakers are recruits...¹⁴⁷

If the recruit is a religious seeker, s/he may feel more comfortable with the Quaker emphasis on continuing revelation than a Protestant doctrine based on the Bible. It is quite plausible, indeed, that present-day Quakerism is theologically so liberal that for many agnostics, and atheists, it represents the only possible step into the greater seriousness of organized religion. The demands on the participants are initially minimal and the form is so distinct from traditional church services that Quakerism may appear, to some, as exotic as some of the new religious movements...¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² C. Bromley, J. Curtice, K. Hinds, and A. Park. Eds. *Devolution – Scottish Answers to Scottish Questions?* 2003. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Ch. 5. [110 –113].

¹⁴³ P. Heelas and L. Woodhead with B. Seel, B. Szersznski and K. Tusting. *The Spiritual Revolution. Why religion is giving way to spirituality.* 2005.

¹⁴⁴ P. Heelas and L. Woodhead with B. Seel, B. Szersznski and K. Tusting. *The Spiritual Revolution. Why religion is giving way to spirituality.* 2005.

¹⁴⁵ D. Voas and A. Crockett. ‘Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging’. [25].

¹⁴⁶ P. Dandelion. ‘A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, The Silent Revolution’. 1996. *Studies in Religion and Society.* 1996. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.

¹⁴⁷ P. Dandelion. ‘A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, The Silent Revolution’. 1996. [331].

¹⁴⁸ P. Dandelion. ‘A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, The Silent Revolution’. 1996. [332].

Gill ¹⁴⁹ gives a method of predicting membership decline in the Methodist Church known as the Jones/Butler formula. For the period of twenty years from 1967-1986 the 'formula' gave results with a high degree of accuracy. This 'formula' was based on four assumptions:

- (1). That the elderly membership would have an attrition rate of 2% per annum.
- (2). That lapsed members would account for an attrition rate of 3% per annum in the 21-60 age group.
- (3). That new membership would increase at the rate of 2.5% per annum: half in the under 20 age group, a quarter in the 21-30 age group and a quarter in the 31-45 age group.
- (4). That within any group the number of members is the same at each single age.

Applying these rules we find that there is net attrition of 2.5% per annum. This is made up by deaths, lapsed members and a failure to recruit from without. However, it is thought that the reason the Jones/Butler formula for predicting membership decline in the Methodist Church proved so accurate was because it assumed that recruitment was growing or originating from within ¹⁵⁰.

If a 2.5% per annum reduction in membership is applied to the Religious Society of Friends over the same period in time starting with a membership figure of 21,040 in 1967 ¹⁵¹ the predicted figure for 1986 would be 12,681. The true figure is 18,071. This not inconsiderable difference in the predicted and actual membership figures is accounted for by the idea that the Religious Society of Friends is an 'entry point' into religious life. ¹⁵² and that unlike the Methodist Church, recruitment is not reliant on recruitment from within. However, if recruitment of the unchurched is a growing pattern within Quakerism, this trend counters the 'circulation of the saints' hypothesis of Bibby and Brinkerhoff. ^{153, 154, 155}.

¹⁴⁹ R. Gill. *The 'Empty' Church Revisited*. 2003. Aldershot: Ashgate. [159].

¹⁵⁰ R. Gill. *The 'Empty' Church Revisited*. 2003. Aldershot: Ashgate. [204].

¹⁵¹ Source: Yearly Meeting Minutes – Tabular Statements.

¹⁵² P. Dandelion. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, The Silent Revolution*. 1996. [331].

¹⁵³ P. Dandelion. 'Those Who Leave And Those Who Feel Left: The Complexity Of Quaker Disaffiliation'. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 17/2. 2002 [213-228].

¹⁵⁴ R. W. Bibby & M. B. Brinkerhoff. 'The Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People Who Join Conservative Churches'. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12, 1973: [273-283].

Dandelion ¹⁵⁶ indicates that there is a body of convinced religious people who migrate from one church to another (for whatever reason).

Those who join leave something else to become socialized in their new identities; those who leave have also moved on to a new identity. This logic is confirmed by authors of the 'circulation of the saints' hypothesis ^{157, 158} who assert that most conversions—as claimed by churches who like to count these things—are of those already 'converted' in faith terms, but who are 'switching' the location of their commitment. ¹⁵⁹

It could be that part of the attraction of the Society is the lack of attraction in other denominations: do people come to Quakers *faute de mieux*. This may be something for the Society to consider in its discussions over membership and falling numbers. ¹⁶⁰

Gill ¹⁶¹ in *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* offers one (but not the only) explanation for dwindling church attendance to the fact that the churches – the buildings themselves – are becoming empty. This would indicate that people are uncomfortable in sparsely occupied buildings. They would 'rattle like peas in a drum'. In this researcher's observation such a thing is unlikely to be a contributory factor for declining attendances in Quaker Meetings, for there the seats are arranged (and sometimes re-arranged) such that those who attend are within 'handshake distance' of one another.

¹⁵⁵ R. W. Bibby & M. B. Brinkerhoff. 'Circulation of the Saints Revisited: A Longitudinal Look at Conservative Church Growth'. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, 1983: [153-162].

¹⁵⁶ P. Dandelion. 'Those Who Leave And Those Who Feel Left: The Complexity Of Quaker Disaffiliation'. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 2002. 17/2. 213-228.

¹⁵⁷ R. W. Bibby & M. B. Brinkerhoff. 'The Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People Who Join Conservative Churches'. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* .12, 1973: 273-283.

¹⁵⁸ R. W. Bibby & M. B. Brinkerhoff. 'Circulation of the Saints Revisited: A Longitudinal Look at Conservative Church Growth'. 22, 1983: 153-162.

¹⁵⁹ R. D. Perrin & A. L. Mauss. *Saints and Seekers: Sources of Recruitment to the Vineyard Christian Fellowship*. *Review of Religious Research* 33, 1991: 97-111.

¹⁶⁰ P. F. Burton. 'An active and united body: change in the Society of Friends in Scotland, 1800 – 2000'. PhD Thesis, University of Strathclyde. 2005. [234].

¹⁶¹ R. Gill. *The 'Empty' Church Revisited*. 2003. Aldershot: Ashgate. [204].

One is drawn to the conclusion that it is no longer endogamy or peculiarities that is draining the lifeblood out of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and other similar organisations. It is that they have failed to recruit the rising generation ¹⁶² in sufficient numbers to replace natural attrition and resignation. That they have underestimated the importance of their children is certainly one of the causes for their decline. The abolition, in 1959 ¹⁶³, of automatic membership of new children to the Religious Society of Friends, which Stroud and Dandelion dismiss as a ‘hiccup’ ¹⁶⁴ but at the same time cite as a factor affecting the numerical decline in the membership of the Society, has proved to be an event of great significance. This is demonstrated by the graphs produced by Stroud which show an exponential decline in children in membership since 1962. ¹⁶⁵

There is perhaps another factor which points towards the loss of children in membership being a contributory cause for dwindling Quaker membership overall. This is evidenced by the Quakers themselves. In 1996 when Naomi Stillhere voiced her ‘Leading’ to her Monthly Meeting it was tested at several ‘Meetings for Clearness’. It was determined initially to be a ‘nascent concern’ Ultimately, with the aid of a committee of Elders to assist Naomi Stillhere, Worcestershire and Shropshire Monthly Meeting agreed that indeed there was a ‘Concern’ to be addressed and in May 1998 presented Naomi with her ‘Travelling Minute’.

It must be recognized, however, that there remains the fear in peoples’ hearts that

indoctrination and proselytisation of the young could occur. In 1991, five years before Naomi

¹⁶² Concise Oxford Dictionary Ninth (electronic) edition: *Generation* n.

1 all the people born at a particular time, regarded collectively (my generation; the rising generation).

2 a single step in descent or pedigree (have known them for three generations).

4 the average time in which children are ready to take the place of their parents (usu. reckoned at about 30 years).

¹⁶³ Yearly Meeting Minutes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). 1959. [6-8, 214].

¹⁶⁴ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. ‘British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy’. 2004. 9(1): [121].

¹⁶⁵ C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [194-195]

Still here began her Narrow Boat Ministry, the Society of Friends was beset by the so-called Orkney 'Satanic Abuse' affair.¹⁶⁶ In this several young children had been taken into care in dawn raids, two of whom were from a Quaker family. This put Friends House into a state bordering on paralysis when the family appealed to them for help.¹⁶⁷ A key social worker claimed to see the image of the devil in postage stamps and accused the people involved of Satanic worship in the form of ritual dancing in a gravel pit.¹⁶⁸ The children's cause was successfully fought by Friends who established a 'Concern' with their Monthly Meeting's support.¹⁶⁹ Subsequently, Friends viewed with extreme caution anything which could be remotely interpreted as 'indoctrination' of children. It is true, also, that there has been a major decline in piety in adults, principally it seems as a result of increasing 'upward mobility'.¹⁷⁰ Voas and Crockett¹⁷¹ and Heelas *et al* both claim there is a switch away from religion towards spirituality.¹⁷²

With these points in mind perhaps the Religious Society of Friends should reinstate automatic 'birthright membership'. What would be the effect of this? Instantly, of course, there would be a large increase in the membership figures particularly if it were done retroactively (sixteen to eighteen years, perhaps) and not limited to single faith families. It is argued that this would only be a 'paper' increase in numbers. This researcher would argue that far from being paper members, children and young people would achieve a sense of belonging and be willing, therefore, to participate in the affairs of the Society. This in the long term would produce

¹⁶⁶ See Simon Risley. 'Acting under Concern: My Own Experience'. 2007. *The Friend*. 2 February 2007. [6].

¹⁶⁷ See Simon Risley. 'Acting under Concern: My Own Experience'. 2007. *The Friend*. 2 February 2007. [6].

¹⁶⁸ See Simon Risley. 'Acting under Concern: My Own Experience'. 2007. *The Friend*. 2 February 2007. [6].

¹⁶⁹ See Simon Risley. 'Acting under Concern: My Own Experience'. 2007. *The Friend*. 2 February 2007. [6].

¹⁷⁰ C. Bromley, J. Curtice, K. Hinds, and A. Park. Eds. *Devolution – Scottish Answers to Scottish Questions?* 2003. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Ch. 5. [110–113].

¹⁷¹ D. Voas and A. Crockett. 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging'. [11-28].

¹⁷² P. Heelas and L. Woodhead with B. Seel, B. Szerszynski and K. Tusting. *The Spiritual Revolution. Why religion is giving way to spirituality*. 2005.

further members in the form of grandchildren if they stay in membership – even if, as Voas and Crockett ¹⁷³ advise, only fifty percent of parental religiosity is successfully transmitted.

Additional tactics may also be required. Perhaps the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) should consider dropping the ‘Religious’ description of the Society and become simply The Society of Friends (Quakers), thereby making themselves available to men and women of good will but who are of no particular religious conviction. This may entail a relaxation of the entry requirements for membership. However, such tactics have been discounted already, as paragraph seven of the 1989 report of the Membership Committee states: ¹⁷⁴

There is very little support for the proposal that there should be more than one way for adults to acquire membership of the Society. The proposal had been made on the ground that there are valuable potential members who, for one reason or another, feel they cannot make use of the present way of entry ‘by conviction’. Friends overwhelmingly responded by arguing that such difficulties could best be dealt with by sensitive encouragement of such people by overseers, and by positive action to include attenders in as many aspects of the life of local meetings as possible.

It can be argued that this paragraph refers to Quaker ‘administration’ rather than ‘theology’, however, in paragraph nine of the same report the Committee consider that: ¹⁷⁵

The proposal that there should be more than one way to acquire membership offered the prospect of a way round the difficult administration problems of children's membership, though of course it could not dispose of underlying theological problems. Rejection of the proposal leaves the whole matter of children's membership where it was. Some responses omitted to deal with this point altogether. Others did express opinions, but there was no unity among them. All possible arrangements received support, from ‘birthright membership’ (although it seems likely that some who use this phrase actually mean membership acquired on the application of parents), to total abolition of membership for children. There was no sign that Friends generally had grasped how deeply held are the mutually opposed convictions on this matter.

Nevertheless, the responses show a very lively wish to nurture all the ‘children of the meeting,’ whether in membership or not, and to recognize and accept the unique

¹⁷³ D. Voas and A. Crockett. ‘Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging’. [11-28].

¹⁷⁴ Yearly Meeting Minutes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). 1989. [61].

¹⁷⁵ Yearly Meeting Minutes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) 1989. *Membership Committee Report*. [62].

spiritual development of each of them individually—not least during their transition to adulthood. We are encouraged by this to believe we can see a way forward.

In the light of the responses made to their enquiries the Membership Committee made several proposals regarding the membership of children. The significant paragraphs, twelve and thirteen, give us:¹⁷⁶

When we came to consider the apparent impasse arising from the diversity of Friends' views on children's membership, we discovered that the present regulations (see particularly section 859(d) in Church government) actually permit individual Friends to act in accordance with any of the 'philosophies' of children's membership.¹⁷⁷ Not only can parents choose whether to apply for membership for their children or not; children who acquired membership by their parents' application can decide at the appropriate time whether to keep it as it was given to them, or to confirm it, or to resign it and apply for membership by conviction, or simply to resign. But although Church government permits all these alternatives, it certainly does not make clear that all of them are permitted—still less that each of them is supported by a strong tradition within the history of the Society. What is needed, therefore, is not any change in regulations, but a much more positive, comprehensive, and encouraging explanation of the options, to augment section 835 of Church governing (for parents) and 836 (for those admitted as children). We offer drafts Appendices A and B to this report.

Meeting for Sufferings or Yearly Meeting Overseers might also consider whether there is need for clearer advice to overseers about approaching parents and young people on this subject.

Naturally, this proposal cannot remove the possibility that a child (may) come to think its parents exercised the wrong choice about its membership, but it may help child and parents in those circumstances to know that the Society recognizes unreservedly that quite different views on the matters can be held in good faith, and with good reasons.

These are two paragraphs of considerable significance. It appears that there is no bar to what amounts to 'birthright membership' - except that it is not automatic. All that has to be done is for the parents to 'register' their children with the Society. Perhaps the trouble all along has been a lack of communication (or inertia) amongst Quakers with children. Children, by default, are effectively 'robbed' of a sense of belonging which in turn reduced the likelihood

¹⁷⁶ Yearly Meeting Minutes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) 1989. *Membership Committee Report*. [62].

¹⁷⁷ Yearly Meeting Minutes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) 1989. *Membership Committee Report*. [62].

of them becoming adult members in later life.¹⁷⁸ 'Robbed' is a very emotive turn of phrase and there are those who would object to such emotion. It is argued, however, that as Quakers are of the opinion that membership of the Religious Society of Friends is a thing to be desired, then the very act of denying membership as a right (which they held until 1959) to the children of Quaker parents cannot be a good thing. Children, may, of course, elect to leave (or join) the Society at any time, but fewer join of their own volition than leave. Furthermore, some of those who apply for membership may (at the Monthly Meeting's discretion) be turned away. There are limited options to expel members once they have joined.

A report commissioned by Kingston and Wandsworth Monthly Meeting¹⁷⁹ discovered that 37% of those who responded to the questionnaire were the only Quaker in the family (SQIF). Using the results of Voas and Crocket's investigations as a guide, there is potentially a (guaranteed) loss of people (18.5% of total membership) from the next generation of this group who attend meeting for Worship, either as Members or Attenders. This would be in addition to other forms of membership attrition. If this result is representative of the structure of Quakerism as a whole it can be foreseen that membership figures will fall dramatically as a result within one generation.

An unlikely, unattractive and overly legalistic, but potentially productive, scheme could be to go against Rowntree's reforms and re-introduce endogamy into the Quaker way of life thereby making both parents Quakers and religious. This would have the effect of reducing

¹⁷⁸ A Testimony Of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting Of The Society Of Friends, Concerning John Stephenson Rowntree, A Minister, Deceased : J. S. Rowntree was known to observe that with one exception the conclusions expressed in the essay were those of his maturer thought, that exception being the views regarding birthright membership. The intervening years had brought to him a family of eight children, and the close association with young life in his home and in the schools of the Society had led him to believe in the value to children of feeling themselves as a part of the Church, welcomed by it to service and privilege at an early age.

¹⁷⁹ Kingston and Wandsworth MM. *The Future of Kingston and Wandsworth Monthly Meeting*. Report of the Questionnaire Group. 2002.

the incidence of 'Single Quaker in Family' (SQIF), countering Voas and Crockett's ¹⁸⁰ findings of how faith transmission (or the lack of it) occurs.

One perhaps unforeseen effect of Rowntree's reforms was that plain dress ceased to be a requirement. This had the effect of making Quakers LESS visible than before. The Quakerly habit of wearing plain (grey) dress set them apart from the rest of the population – it could be regarded as a uniform. Take away the uniform and Quakers melted into the background.

Naomi Stillhere set about restoring the visibility of Quakers. At each stopping place her brightly painted narrow boat, just like the 'Rosie and Jim' boat on children's television, would be decked out with posters depicting panels from the Quaker Tapestry (to which she had contributed a few stitches). People would stop and ask what the display was all about and over a cup of tea would be regaled with stories and demonstrations of what Naomi's ministry was out to achieve. People were invited to see over the boat. Children were presented with soft toys and visitors signed the 'Teddy Bear Journal' visitors book. Over four hundred people signed the 'Teddy Bear Journal' in the first year – and not all the visitors signed! Naomi was open about Quaker belief.

Dandelion ¹⁸¹ reports that when asked whether they advertised their Quakerism Quakers would reply: ' I don't like to tell people I'm a Quaker in case they think I want to convert them'.

At a time when Yearly Meeting was being ambivalent about outreach it is small wonder that Naomi Stillhere felt so passionately about her Narrow Boat Ministry 'The Celebration of

¹⁸⁰ D. Voas and A. Crockett. 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging'. [11-28].

¹⁸¹ P. Dandelion. *A Sociological Analysis of the Theology of Quakers, The Silent Revolution*. 1996. [305].

Childhood' and strived so hard to promote Quakerism and to bring children and others into the Religious Society of Friends.

Both Naomi Stillhere and John Stephenson Rowntree were working in the same direction – but the contexts are very different. The paradox is that Rowntree's reforms, particularly on marriage, which arguably may have contributed to the existence of 'mixed faith' families, may have ultimately contributed to the decline. In some ways it is possible that Naomi had to overcome the inadvertent fruits of Rowntree's reforms as well as secularisation of society. Naomi was not as immediately influential as Rowntree, but *Quaker Quest*¹⁸² etc may show that her ministry has been taken up by Quakerism more widely... and it may stem the Quaker struggle against secularisation. However, both Rowntree and Naomi Stillhere thought that the real loss is the loss of a vibrant Quakerism.

As British Friends head again towards the 1859 level of membership figures, it will be interesting to see what reforms are proposed. Unlike the 1850s the decline is voluntary rather than supported by Quaker practice such as disownment, and the structural solutions open to Quakers today are more limited.

Clearly it is seen that whatever the reasons are for the decline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) the figures presented in section 2 reveal that the day of extinction may not be far off, and that urgent attention to the matter is needed.

¹⁸² 'Quaker Quest' is an 'outreach' initiative. Details may be accessed on the internet by means of the 'Google' search engine or by using the current (September 2009) web address: www.quakerquest.org/

Summary.

With the exception of Davie¹⁸³ who optimistically compares football and cinema attendances with church membership and Burton¹⁸⁴ who examines Quaker membership on a regional basis and reports that in some areas Quaker membership is on the increase, notably in Scotland the overwhelming opinion of scholars is that church membership in Britain is now falling rapidly.

The 'Gentleman'¹⁸⁵ who initiated the prize essay of 1859 recognized that Quaker membership was in major decline. Rowntree, who won the prize essay, determined the causes for the decline and was able to put reforms in place which resulted in Quaker membership increasing once again; reaching a peak membership of 23,107 in 1958.¹⁸⁶ Less than four decades later, by 1996, membership had *fallen* by 5780 (25%) to 17,327.¹⁸⁷ Naomi Stillhere, having recognized that the Religious Society of Friends was again in numerical decline began her Travelling Ministry in an attempt to reverse the trend. She attributed the decline in membership to be insufficient numbers of children being brought into active contact with the Society.

In 2003 Michael Stevens and Margaret Heathfield warned the Society of Friends 'There has been an acceleration of the decline in membership during the past decade.'¹⁸⁸

Dandelion¹⁸⁹ had previously predicted that Quaker membership would decline to zero by the year 2108. In 2004 Chadkirk¹⁹⁰ predicted that Quaker Membership would tend to zero in

¹⁸³ G. Davie. Professor of Sociology and Director of the Centre for European Studies at Exeter University. Writing for the Church of England 2005. www.Church Statistics Church of England.htm Accessed 19 April 07.

¹⁸⁴ P. F. Burton. 'Keeping the Light Shining? The End of British Quakerism Revisited'. 2005.[249-256].

¹⁸⁵ The concerned donor was probably the wealthy Birmingham Friend George Sturge (1798-1888). T. Kennedy. *British Quakerism 1860-1920*. 2001 [40].

¹⁸⁶ Source: Yearly Meeting Minutes - Tabular Statements.

¹⁸⁷ Source: Yearly Meeting Minutes - Tabular Statements.

¹⁸⁸ M. Stevens and M. Heathfield. 'Still Shrinking'. *The Friend*. April 4th. 2003. [10, 11].

2032 and Stroud and Dandelion¹⁹¹ offered an end date of 2036. Stroud¹⁹² predicted that there could be NO children in membership by 2020. Using membership figures from 1861 to 2007 the loss of all members is predicted to lie in the region of 2040. Clearly this is a serious situation for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and if they are to survive the matter should be addressed with some urgency. Belatedly, perhaps, at the beginning of the twenty-first century Quakers have come to realise that they are in crisis and the seeds sown by Naomi Stillhere are beginning to bear fruit. Britain Yearly Meeting has begun to promote Quaker visibility. 'Quaker Quest' is up and running in Camden in London all the time and in Manchester and Edinburgh on an occasional basis in an attempt to advertise Quakerism more widely.

This researcher recommends that the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) give the following measures priority attention:

- That initiatives such as Quaker Quest be extended nationwide in order to increase the profile and 'visibility' of the Society.
- That the automatic membership for new children (abolished in 1959) be reinstated.
- That wherever possible, people are once again encouraged to 'Travel in the Ministry'.

¹⁸⁹ P. Dandelion. 'Those Who Leave and Those Who Feel Left: the Complexity of Quaker Disaffiliation'. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17/2. 2002 [213-228].

¹⁹⁰ W. Chadkirk. 'Will the Last (Woman) Friend to Leave Please Ensure That the Light Remains Shining?' *Quaker Studies* 9/1 2004, [114-19].

¹⁹¹ C. A. Stroud & P. Dandelion. 'British Quakers and A New Kind of End-time Prophecy'. *Quaker Studies*, 2004. 9(1): [121].

¹⁹² C. A. Stroud. *The Preservation of a Society: Quakerism in Numerical Decline* 2008. [215]

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