

Let us joint together and sing ..

Mission, Fellowship or Programmed Friends meetings were once common across the country. Many no longer meet.

Many Friends think that we have always had a tradition of silent worship and waiting for ministry from those to who the Lord chose to give a message, and generally speaking that is so although in past times we have appointed Gospel ministers who were selected as having a special gift.

Whiles this 'quietist' tradition is common it must not be taken as absolute. We have also a tradition of hymn singing! The following extract describes it well.

‘In those days, all our Friends Schools and many Meetings in this YM held, in addition to Meeting for Worship, formal Evening Meetings with hymns, prayers, Bible reading and an address, often by a visiting speaker. This was their main means of outreach, and many Friends could recall that this was their first contact with us. Wells next the Sea, among other Meetings carried on this tradition longer than most, and Pakefield still does.

When the Evangelical Revival drew Friends from their inward looking Quietism to outreaching witness and service, some Meetings found their premises too small. An extension was usually made to the existing Meeting House, as at Wells and Beccles, but unfortunately this was not possible at Pakefield so their extension took the form of a new building in near-by St. George's Road. This separation of premises has led present Monthly Meeting Friends, who lack the background history, to assume that the Mission is a separate entity, which it has never been. During those years when the Meeting House was closed, it was the vigorous life continuing on weekdays and Sundays in the Friends Mission which enabled the present Meeting for Worship to be revived.”

From a letter by Kahleen M Asfyford written in 1991 to the clerks of Norwich and Lynn Monthly Meeting

Towards the latter part of the 19th century there was an enthusiastic approach to outreach. Friends were keen to share their message with others and took a dynamic approach to meeting the people. The 1895 Manchester Conference

was part of this change. It was also realised that if we had a message it was important to share the message with others in a way that they would welcome. It was also realised that there were may be other useful types of meeting and this included evening fellowship meetings.

These evening meetings needed to respond to the local needs, the general public as well at to Friends.

The outside public may be considered (according to the Yorkshire General Meeting 1905 committee leaflet) from several groups;

- seekers – unattached or loosely attached to other places of worship
- those who appreciate simplicity and warmth of fellowship.
- regular church or chapel goers who want something else occasionally, and
- those who are opposed to many forms of religion but still wish to worship

Teaching in the evening meetings should be;

- on distinctive Quaker testimonies e.g. Peace, Worship and the ministry
 - general breath of outlook on creedal, biblical and other questions
 - the value of silence in worship
 - simplicity and lack of ritual
- For our own members there is a need to include;
- Biblical teaching
 - Quaker teaching
 - teaching on subjects and problems at home and abroad.

It will be necessary for each meeting to consider which of these or other groups they feel especially called upon to minister to and make arrangements. For example Pakefield, next to Lowestoft aimed to appeal to sailors and Barking Tye to the local agricultural workers.

Support for the work came from several sources 'Friends Home Mission' as a part of Home Service Department in Friends House where they appointed Missioners to go out and among other tasks help local friends establish fellowship meetings and on a more evangelical approach Friends Evangelistic Band.

It was also recognised that singing has an important place and there was a need for a social meeting without the formality of the morning meeting. It was also realised that among the members were those who could speak to a small informal groups but would be put off speaking in a large formal gathering.

The programme for Hartshill evening meeting is; hymn, prayer, hymn, Bible reading, hymn with the collection and notices, hymn, the address, hymn and the closing prayer.

So Friends, if your meeting house looks a bit like a mission hall, or you find a box of hymn books and Bibles in a cupboard perhaps you used to have a fellowship meeting?

Currently (known to the author in 2009) there are regular programmed Friends Fellowship meetings at Hartshill, Paketfield and South Littleton Meeting Houses. Additionally Friends House hosts a programmed Kenyan style meeting although that is not from quite the same root.

There used to be fellowship meetings in probably many more meeting houses across the country including;

East Anglia:- Beccles, Bungay, Barking Tye, Diss, Wells next the Sea.

Midlands:- Baddesley Ensor, Bournville (the only meeting house with an organ), Coventry, Farm Street, Hall Green, Hay Mills, Moseley Road, Northfield, and Stirchley.

References:

‘Spreading our Message, or Our Sunday Evening Meetings’. Pub Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting 1905 Committee. 8pp [On the resources section of www.1624country.org.uk]

‘Littleton Friends Mission’ By Philip Bayliss of Evesham and Littleton Meetings. Private publication 2005

‘The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain’ by David M Butler pub Friends Historical Society

‘Some of His Ways’ by George A Fox. A history of Friends Evangelistic Band. Pub 1948 (FEBB was renamed ‘Fellowship for Evangelising Britain’s Villages’ in 1968)

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William Waddilove Aug 2009

“May the Lord Bless and Keep you”

A brief history of some of the programmed meeting tradition
within Britain Yearly Meeting



Bournville Meeting house - The only Quaker Meeting House with an organ

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the country. Many have died out.

Perhaps now is the time for a programme of outreach?