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## Hamm's "The Quakers in America" and Dobbs' "Authority and the Early Quaker" - Book Review

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ordering of the evidence. Nevertheless, there are occasions where terms are not used with sufficient clarity and create ambiguities. Is it not misleading, for example, to talk of the 'liberal Quakerism' of John Bright and his aunt Margaret Wood (p. 66) given that the term has come to mean something quite specific in the context of the later nineteenth century? And I would have liked to see further explanation of the (unreferenced) point that Helen 'identified herself with the "the liberal party" within the Society' (p. 125). The use of the term 'Inner Light' (instead of 'Inward Light'), is also glaringly anachronistic, especially when applied to Quakers' understanding from the later seventeenth century of 'something quite separate from human nature' (p. 11). If indeed Margaret Bragg (1761–1840) was sustained at her death by 'her Quaker belief in the "Inner Light"' (p. 72, and it is placed in quotation marks here whereas an earlier reference, on p. 11, on the 'doctrine of the Inner Light', is not), then it could predate the known period of general use of this term by decades. However, neither the source nor date of the evidence is entirely clear.

Sometimes, then, a paucity of references makes it difficult to follow up individual points. Certainly, to overload a narrative with references can be intrusive, and the 'light touch' in this respect does help the flow of the writing. But one of the glories of this book is its potential to inspire further study, so although it may seem churlish to point out problems, it is also testimony to what I would regard as its enormous importance to students of Quaker history. Overall, this is a book which should serve as a benchmark for other studies of 'networked families' in this period. To produce such a sustained, coherent and carefully nuanced account from a potentially overwhelming body of source material is a remarkable achievement.

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HAMM, T.D., *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. viii + 293. ISBN 0-231-12363-9, Paper, \$40.00.

DOBBS, Jack P., *Authority and the Early Quakers* (Gloucestershire: Martin Hartog, 2006), pp. 269, Paper, £10.00.

These two books are based on scholarly research: one is an attempt to explain the nature of modern Quakerism, which involves a journey into first principles; the second is a detailed study of the development of the early Quaker movement that originally saw the light of day as an Oxford University DPhil. Thomas Hamm clearly wishes to explain how the modern Quaker life is derived from the early history of the movement, but he is essentially a scholar of the more modern world. Dobbs' premise is less modern-world focussed, but nevertheless contributes to understanding how the Quakers moved subtly from being wholly inner-light focussed to accepting external authorities, in a complex balance which allowed them to continue to exist.

Hamm is concerned with diversity. He argues that amongst the 100,000 Quakers in the United States there are several distinct strands of belief within the Quaker

movement, which he sets out to explain as an historical issue. The very essence of what constitutes a Quaker is in dispute between them. It is a potentially bewildering diversity encompassed in such a small group, which he argues, is no greater in number than the Catholic population in a smallish US diocese. To find out the origins of this potentially damaging diversity, Hamm goes to the early years in England, and covers the same period as forms the focus of Dobbs' book. But chiefly, Hamm argues, it is in the eighteenth century that crucial and major divisions were appearing within the movement, between reformists and those who had met with commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic. This led in the next century to more important divisions between largely rural Quakers and the more urban-centred groups. The split was devastating and continued up until the civil war. Although the war was followed by the Great Revival, essentially the movement remained divided. Hamm then takes a different approach to the narrative track, and from this point the book provides an analysis of those fragmented segments, examining the distinct debates and practices within the broad 'movement'. The result of this diversity is probably reflected in the size of the movement: there are about the same number of Quakers in the United States as there were at the American Revolution, but their proportion is now minute rather than small. Nevertheless their voices are heard, argues Hamm, and they are associated historically with some of the more positive parts of American history, such as the anti-slavery movement. However, the depressing conclusion Hamm comes to is that their fragmentation and re-fragmentation over first two centuries of Quaker American history has condemned them to being a small group.

Dobbs is less openly concerned with the present-day Quakers in his book, although the analysis has important resonance with Hamm's work and present-day Quaker survival. His mission was to look at the reaction of Quakers to external authority. In a religion that centred on inner light and the very personal relationship with God, external authority has traditionally been a major problem. The book is unaltered from a doctoral thesis and is printed in a limited run due, it is said, to the belief that people in the movement might find it of interest, rather than just the scholars who access it through libraries. The book looks first at religious authority in the seventeenth century as a background to the rise of Quakers in the 1650s. This is a swift excursion through the Church of England regimen to the revolutionary period, when structured authority collapsed. From this point on, Quakers have considered themselves free of authority. Naturally, this notion may not have led to longevity: other groups, particularly the Ranters, fade from view precisely because they had no authority structure to create stability and permanence. That the Quakers had realised or recognised this is revealed by the debate over whether or not they had become too authoritarian by the 1670s. In the end there were four authorities which the Quakers had to acknowledge, that of the spirit, of the bible, of the church and of doctrine. That acceptance of these four authorities was not universally smooth and to some extent accepted in degrees is apparent and the sort of divisions that afflicted Hamm's American Quakers can be seen in Britain too. Dobbs argues that in the end even if the spirit was theoretically the main influence on the Quakers, this inner light had to be tempered by external forces—it kept the Quakers in existence long after their contemporary radicalism disappeared, even if that existence was not always

marked by togetherness. The claim in Dobbs' book that it might prove of interest to Quakers is too modest. This is an important examination of the development of the Quaker movement and is of broad scholarly importance. Both books add materially to understanding the diversity of the present-day movement on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

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BURTON, P.F., *A Social History of Quakers in Scotland, 1800–2000* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. vii + 370. ISBN 978-0-7734-5452-1, Cloth, £74.95, \$119.95.

BURNET, G.B., and MARWICK, W.H., *The Story of Quakerism in Scotland 1650–1950* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2007), pp. 230. ISBN 978-0-718-89176-3, Paper, £17.50, \$37.50.

The history of the Society of Friends in Scotland, while it mirrors the history of the Society in England in many respects, nonetheless differs in a number of significant ways. Despite this, little has been written on Scottish Quaker history and historians frequently make assertions about 'British Quakerism' which are based solely on evidence from England. It is a pleasure, therefore, to have two books on Quaker Scottish history, one new and one a reprint of a 1952 text.

Paul Burton's book is a social history, not a theological or institutional one, although as he puts it: 'both theology and the Society as institution will necessarily be considered at times, for all three are intimately bound up with one another' (p. 27). It describes and analyses the changing social history of Quakerism in Scotland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a period of significant change for most, if not all, churches in Scotland.

Burton examines a number of features of the Society and its members—occupations, class, changing social structures, gender and the role of women, the complex interrelationships of Quaker families and the wider contribution of a number of prominent members, whose work has ranged from art and economics to electrical engineering. He sets this detailed analysis of Scottish Quakerism within the context of developments in the wider society within which it was located, including the spread of evangelicalism, the hotly debated secularisation of British society and the relationship between class and religion.

While much has been written about the complicating factors associated with 'insider research' (research carried out within a group of which the investigator is a member) in relationship to sociological and anthropological research, less work has been done on the implications for historical research projects. Paul Burton is himself a Quaker and was personally known to many of those studied for the latter sections of the book; it is good, therefore, to note his sensitivity to those issues within his work.