Genealogy
Subject guide
Organisation of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain

It will help with your research if you have some knowledge of how the Religious Society of Friends in Britain is organised. The term ‘meeting’ is used to denote both the church and, as a shortening of ‘meeting for worship’, gatherings of Quakers. Before 1967 Quakers in Britain were organised into the following groupings:

**Particular meeting**
A local worshipping group of Quakers. Also known as preparative meetings, recognised meetings, allowed meetings, or notified meetings.

**Monthly meeting**
Comprising a number of particular meetings, the monthly meeting is the principal administrative unit of Quaker church government. It handles membership, property, records, and the local meetings under its care.

**Quarterly meeting**
Initially for a county, and later for a group of counties in most cases, the quarterly meeting comprised a number of monthly meetings.

**London Yearly Meeting**
Now called Britain Yearly Meeting, this was the official name for the central organisation of Quakers in Britain until 1994. The records of London Yearly Meeting are held in the Library.

**Wales Yearly Meeting**
This became part of London Yearly Meeting in 1797. Almost all of its records for before and after this date are held locally.

**Scotland General Meeting**
This became part of London Yearly Meeting in 1786. Almost all
of its records for before and after this date are held locally.

The Religious Society of Friends in Ireland
This is a separate organisation, which includes Quakers in Northern Ireland. Its records are held in Ireland.

For more information about how Quakers in Britain are currently organised, visit www.quaker.org.uk. For more about meeting terminology and how it has changed, see the Library’s ‘Meetings glossary’ subject guide.

Meeting records
Location of meeting records
The majority of local Quaker meeting records are not held in the Library of the Society of Friends. Most are deposited in the appropriate local archives or libraries around the country. We keep a location list for these records.

The Library of the Society of Friends acts as the local repository for archives of meetings in the London and Middlesex area (Greater London, Middlesex and parts of Essex, Kent and Surrey that border London).

Minute books
The monthly meeting was the principal administrative unit of the Religious Society of Friends, so its minute books will probably be the most helpful. These can contain:

- **Removals and Settlements** – from the 1670s it was customary for Friends moving from one monthly meeting to another to carry a certificate (see below). Removals and Settlements were sometimes

![LSF MS Box L4/32 marriage certificate](LSF MS Box L4/32 marriage certificate)
recorded in the minutes.

- **Disownments** – the formal recognition that a member’s behaviour was contrary to the beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends and/or brought it into disrepute. These were usually recorded in the minutes or a separate register. Reinstatement was possible and was usually recorded in the minutes.

- **Marriages** – declarations of intention to marry were usually recorded in the minutes, sometimes with more information about the families involved than is recorded in the registers.

- **Ministers** – British Quakers have never supported a paid ministry, but in the 18th and 19th centuries Friends who were more moved than others to give vocal ministry were acknowledged or recorded and known as ‘publick’ Friends.

**Membership lists**
Printed lists of members were in general use from 1837. Some meetings kept lists from 1812. These will usually list the meeting’s elders and overseers for that year as well.

**Certificates**
Some meeting records have copies of certificates of removal (see above), or file copies of marriage certificates.

**Births, marriages and deaths**

**Registers of births, marriages and burials**
From the mid-17th century, nearly all monthly meetings, some particular meetings and some quarterly meetings kept register books of births, marriages and burials. Between 1840 and 1842, under the Non-Parochial Registers Act, the Society surrendered 1,445 registers for the pre-1837 period.
to the Registrar-General; a further 121 of these pre-1837 ‘supplementary’ registers were surrendered in 1857. These original Quaker registers are all now kept at The National Archives in Kew. The registers are not always as complete as is supposed – Friends sometimes failed to make entries in original registers, and some 17th- and 18th-century registers were lost before the surrender to the Registrar-General.

**Online access**
The Quaker registers are available to search, alongside other nonconformist records, at www.bmdregisters.co.uk. A fee is required to access full records, but the database can be searched for free. This is particularly useful as a step in establishing whether or not an ancestor was a Quaker, and to which meeting(s) they belonged.

**Digest registers**
Before surrendering its registers, the Religious Society of Friends compiled Digests from them, rearranging information from the registers by surname. The Society also made a sequence of Digest registers covering the period from 1837 to the mid-20th century.

The Library has the original Digests, and both sequences have been microfilmed. For preservation reasons the original registers are not usually produced to users, but you can consult the microfilms. Indexes in the Library list surnames in the pre-1837 digests alphabetically by quarterly meeting and can be useful in identifying which microfilm to consult.
The pre-1837 microfilms can also be viewed at the Society of Genealogists. Many local record offices also have the microfilms specific to their local area. The later sequence (from 1837 to the mid-20th century) is available only in the Library of the Society of Friends. The Library has just one microfilm reader, so it is advisable to book in advance.

**Genealogical sources in the Library**

**Getting started**


**Introduction to Quaker history and beliefs**


**On the catalogue**

Particularly in the case of early Quakers, it is worth
searching any names in both our online catalogue and our card catalogues as we may have documents relating to or by them. The card catalogues are organised alphabetically by surname; the online catalogue should be searched using both [first name] [surname] and then [surname], [first name] for best results (e.g. John Smith and then Smith, John). Search our online catalogue at http://quaker.adlibhosting.com/search/simple.

The Dictionary of Quaker Biography (DQB)
This major source of information has entries for over 15,000 Quakers and comprises unpublished research done by former staff and volunteers of this and other libraries. It can be a shortcut to the Digest registers (see ‘Births, marriages and deaths’) and to published sources of information about individuals. There are copies in the Quaker & Special Collections at Haverford College, Philadelphia, the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College, Philadelphia, and in the Library of the Society of Friends.

Annual Monitor (1813–1920)
An annual that lists Quakers who died that year, often with an obituary. The Library holds the full publication, along with an index, which covers about 20,000 Quaker deaths.

Besse’s Sufferings
During the 17th century members of the Religious Society of Friends were persecuted for their beliefs. Cases of persecution were recorded by the Quakers, and were later compiled into a published work by Joseph Besse. The first volume is available online
School indexes
Name indexes relating to people involved with the following Quaker schools are available:

- **Isaac Brown’s School** (pupils, 1829–1845)
- **Gildersome** (pupils, 1807)
- **Flounders Institute** (pupils, 1848–1874)
- **Lexden** (pupils, 1869–1903)
- **The Mount** (pupils, 1831–1931)
- **Newtown** (pupils, 1798–1891)
- **Penketh** (pupils, 1834–1934)
- **Rawdon** (pupils, 1832–1882)
- **Saffron Walden** (obits of pupils, 1900–1976)
- **Sibford** (pupils, 1842–1867)
- **Stramongate** (pupils, 1860–1926)
- **Tottenham** (pupils, 1828–1877)
- **Wigton** (pupils and staff, 1815–1953)
- **The Woodlands School** (pupils, 1873).

Conscientious objectors and relief workers during the World Wars

**World War I**
The Library holds records on conscientious objectors, including the archives of the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) and the Friends Emergency and War Victims’ Relief Committee (FEWVRC). Many of the Library records have been incorporated into the *Pearce Register of British WWI Conscientious Objectors*, which we can search on your behalf. This database, compiled by academic Cyril Pearce, includes over 16,500 records of men who refused to go to war on moral grounds, compiled from sources in archives all over the country. In the Library we have a register of those who served in the FEWVRC, with some information on where they served. The personnel cards of those who served with the FAU are available online at http://fau.quaker.org.uk.

**World War II**
The Library holds records on those who served with the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Friends Relief Service (FRS). Indexes of workers are available in our Reading Room, and the FAU service cards are available on microfilm. The Library has just one microfilm reader, so it is advisable to book in advance.

For a more detailed guide to researching this area, please see the Library subject guides on Peace, World War I and the FAU, or email us at library@quaker.org.uk.

**Quaker missionaries**

There is a name index of workers involved with:

- the Friends Foreign Mission Association (1866–1927)
- the Council for International Service (1919–1927)
- Friends Service Council (1927–1978)

**The Friend**

*The Friend* is an independent Quaker magazine, based in London. It is published weekly and has been in circulation since
1846. It can be a very useful source of information. The full run is available on open access in the Library, and we also hold the following name indexes:

- Obituaries 1894–1964
- Obituaries 1963–1983
- Marriage announcements 1950–1989
- Death notices 1950–1989
- Speakers at London Yearly Meeting as reported in The Friend 1870–1911

**Online resources and other organisations**

**The Journal of the Friends Historical Society**
The Friends Historical Society is dedicated to the study of the history of the Religious Society of Friends and associated individuals. Its journal is a rich source of information and is now available for free online. Go to [http://journals.sas.ac.uk/fhs/index](http://journals.sas.ac.uk/fhs/index).

**The Quaker Family History Society**
A non-Quaker organisation for all those with Quaker ancestry or interested in researching Quaker family history. Its website offers a more detailed explanation of the information contained in meeting records, as well as a list of meeting record locations. Go to [www.qfhs.co.uk](http://www.qfhs.co.uk).

**The Society of Genealogists**
The Society of Genealogists offers a specialist bookshop, courses, events, and a substantial library to its members. Go to [www.sog.org.uk](http://www.sog.org.uk).

**The Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives**
The Library is unable to undertake extensive family history research on behalf of enquirers. If you can’t visit the Library in person, there are professional researchers who can do the work on your behalf. The Association has a list of researchers on its website: [www.agra.org.uk](http://www.agra.org.uk).
The Library of the Society of Friends

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