

Quakers in Co. Carlow. By John Smyth

When I was asked to make this presentation to you tonight on the Quakers in Co. Carlow, my first and immediate impression was to marvel at the innovation, charisma and magnetism of their rather better known title '*The Religious Society of Friends*' – what a charismatic, affable, virtuous and all embracing name for a religious group – The Society of Friends, after all who wouldn't want to be a part of a Society of Friends. So at the outset I must compliment their founder George Fox and my dear friends, indeed all members on such a fabulously evangelical name.

However, it has to be said that it was neither a coincidence nor a dichotomy that when George Fox initiated his '*friendly*' crusade in England in the mid seventeenth century it was at a time of great stress and strife. When the civil war broke out in England Fox refused point blank to fight on either side and in 1644 he left home in search of a religious crusade and began preaching his new ideology in England, Europe and America. He was frequently imprisoned for his beliefs. Fox believed in an "*inner light*" representing the spirit of Jesus Christ, which was his principal tenet and it still remains the central belief of Quakers today. Fox and his followers believed that direct experience with God was accessible to all people without the involvement of a priest, minister or sacraments. The term Quaker is believed to have originated when Fox told a judge in court "*that he should tremble at the word of the Lord*" to which the judge sarcastically replied by calling him a quaker. Therefore the origins of the Society lie in the political and civil turmoil of 17th century England. The Civil War began in 1642 between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians, culminating in the execution of Charles 1st in 1649 and the appointment of a Lord Protector, in the all too familiar name of one Oliver Cromwell.

Consequently, a number of non conformist religious groups emerged such as the Seekers, The Levellers, The Fifth Monarchy Men, The Ranters and of course The Puritans under Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell's role is well known to us here in Ireland with his campaign of massacre and destruction. He played a significant part in ensuring that there is one word in the global vocabulary that has contributed to the most trouble, strife and mayhem and bloody wars,-- that word is **religion**. Religious conflicts have been at the heart of millions of deaths, human suffering and distress. It has been central to the great injustices of bygone massacres, atrocities, executions, acts of devastating and detestable deeds of barbarism, torture and cruelty – all done in the name of a religious belief – all disturbing and distressing remnants of a tragic past that, unfortunately has greatly and grossly affected our psyche and at times our very belief in a God. Religion was central to the cause of the 100 years war, it was at the heart of our own Anglo Irish battles and wars and furthermore it continues

to dominate world news for all the wrong reasons; we have jihads, Al Keida and Isis committing abominable crimes in the name of religion.

Central to any worthwhile religion and certainly to all Christian faiths is the dogma “*Love thy neighbor as thyself*” and “*do unto others as you would wish them to do unto you*”. I am speaking to you tonight about Quakerism, a religion/sect that not alone espouses these biblical and divine aspirations but also forbids war and strife – The Religious Society of Friends espouses so many virtues that are central to the Christian message. So this is fundamentally the historical backdrop to George Fox founding the Society of Friends. Before I go on to the central theme of tonight’s presentation may I say that I do not see myself as an authority on Quakerism but merely one who has a passing interest in the historical nature and evolution of the Society.

Fox’s friend and college William Edmundson (1627-1712) is credited with introducing Quakerism to Ireland when the first recorded meeting took place in Lurgan, Co. Armagh in 1654. By 1659 the Edmundson family had moved to Rosenallis in Co. Laois where they settled and it is pertinent to note here that Edmundson’s move to nearby Laois was significant in terms of Carlow Quakerism.

Edmundson, a former soldier in Cromwell’s Army together with their founder George Fox toured Ireland in 1668 and 1669 when they set up the structure of monthly and quarterly meetings. At the core of their message was their mantra “*that all Friends, whether young or old be weighty and solid, not airy and light*” and “*in essentials unity, in non essentials liberty, in all things charity*”. Fox and his followers rejected the Established Church, which meant that they refused to pay tithes and they also refused to swear any kind of oaths even of loyalty or allegiance. They were truly non-conformists – they insisted on business as usual on holidays as they believed all days were God’s days. Quakers also referred to weekdays and months simply by number. They refused to remove their hats in court or as a mark of respect. They used the singular ‘*thee*’ and ‘*thou*’ rather than the more polite ‘*you*’, all of which was part of the Quakers insistence on plainness and simplicity in speech, dress and behaviour. These were the fundamental characteristics which distinguished them from other beliefs. Perhaps we could say that they were somewhat eccentric in their mannerisms and behaviour.

The Society of Friends, sometimes called the Society of Light were and are totally opposed to war and strife and the taking up of weapons, instead maintaining a position of non-cooperation. Their refusal to pay tithes or swear oaths and their neutral war stance and generally their non-conformist stance brought them into direct conflict with the authorities. They were seen as a

potent force and a threat to the supremacy of the Established Church in Ireland, as a result many of them were imprisoned and suffered persecution. One such local Carlow example of Quaker persecution made it way onto the pages of the Times Newspaper on January 13th 1819 under the heading Outrage on Quakers in Carlow and I quote *“As a number of females of the Society of Friends were lately coming out of their meeting house at Carlow, they were assailed by a vial rabble, who, not content with using such missiles as fell directly in their way, raked the very kennels for filth and odour to heap on the persons of these respectable people”*. And furthermore an extract from *“A Compendious View of some Sufferings of the people called Quakers”* printed by Samuel Fuller at the Glove in Meath St 1713, showed that Carlow members, *“Thomas Weston, Thomas Chaunders, Henry Rose and nine more Friends in Catherlough were apprehended and committed to prison, -- brought before judge Alexander who reviled them calling them Rouges, Rascals, Villains etc. and on foot of a Bill of Indictment for meting together they were fined £300”*.

It should be noted here that Quakers, by definition, were overwhelmingly of English origin with very few of Irish descent, and they were seen locally as a non conformist breakaway from Protestantism.

While Quakers brought a new religious creed to Ireland they also brought with them a strong sense of a trade class, which soon became very apparent among their members. For a comparatively small group of people they boxed way above their weight in terms of philanthropy and entrepreneurial initiative in trade and commerce and the merchant class generally. Think of chocolate and you instantly have all well known Quaker names such as Cadbury’s, Fry’s, Terry’s and Rowntree’s. It is not known if Jim Figgerty was a Quaker but his boss certainly was as Jacob is as well known for their biscuits, as similarly, the Quaker Lamb brothers are famous for their jams, as were Bewleys for their tea and coffee. In banking terms Quakers were seen at their entrepreneurial best as both Lloyds and Barclays’ bank were established by Quakers.

Here in Ireland many Quakers also, were at the forefront of banking – Pike’s bank, Lecky’s bank, both in Cork, and Watson’s bank in Clonmel, pertinently all three Pike, Lecky and Watson all had very strong Carlow connections, of which we will hear more anon, shipbuilding was another area where Quakers excelled, as was milling, linen and railway construction. The Quaker prominence in banking, trade and merchant class is perhaps best explained when one considers that by their refusal to take up arms, or swear oaths they effectively excluded themselves from military service, from the medical profession and from a legal career, leaving them primarily to focus on trade, banking, farming and commercial interests. As outlined, the Quakers excelled themselves in these areas.

The Society of Friends were pioneers in the area of non-denominational schools and in fact the school which Abraham Shackleton founded in Ballitore in 1726 was a classical example and its many illustrious pupils included Edmund Burke, Henry Grattan, Napper Tandy and Paul Cullen who went on to become Cardinal of the archdiocese of Dublin. Ballitore village became an important hub and centre of immense influence due to the foresight of the Shackleton family. Before setting up the school in Ballitore Abraham Shackleton came to Ireland from the village of Harden in West Yorkshire to take up the post as a tutor to the Quaker Cooper and Duckett families who lived at Coopershill, near Carlow town and at Duckett's Grove. The school became so successful that it attracted pupils from France, Norway and Jamaica. Many of the Quakers from Co. Carlow attended school in Ballitore, which is a short distance away. It should be noted here that the first Quakers to settle in Ballitore were John Barcroft and Abel Strettel who bought lands there in 1690. (Shackleton – An Irishman in Antarctica P.12&13). Abraham's son, Richard later took up the running of the school and his daughter Mary married another famous Ballintore name in William Leadbeater who was also a teacher at the school.

At this time the United Irishmen had become a potent force and with their former Ballitore pupil Napper Tandy as their secretary they organised a rebellion in 1798 during which Carlow, Kildare and particularly Ballitore were targeted, and the bloodshed and loss of life resulted in the closure of the school in 1801. The school reopened again five years later.

The Carlow Quaker connection was to have a major impact on global exploration when Henrietta Gavan, whose mother was the daughter of John Fitzmaurice of Carlow, married Henry Shackleton in 1872 and they leased a large tract of land and set up home at Kilkea, having leased the lands from the Duke of Leinster. On 15th February 1874 Henrietta gave birth to her second child Ernest Henry (Athy heritage centre). The same Ernest Shackleton, with his mother Henrietta's Carlow background, went on to become famous in the annals of exploration, heroism and with his attempts to reach the South Pole. His attempts to do so on the ship Endurance have been rightly hailed as the most remarkable and heroic in maritime history. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that in particular, the Shackletons, the Leadbetters and their school and base at Ballitore played a significant role in the evolution of Quakerism in South Leinster. All of which begs the question as to why the Society of Friends did not replicate the nature and obvious success of their enclave at Ballitore at other locations. One would have thought that such an approach would have led to the proliferation of Friends nationally. Apart from Ballitore, Quakerism and their members remained a somewhat disjointed, fragmented and isolated group. Perhaps, one possible explanation being the fact that unlike other religions

Quakers did not have a leadership structure, as each member was seen to be of equal importance, and therefore no single individual or select group was able to spearhead a structured approach to Quaker leadership, management or development. We see from the Province Men's Meeting at Carlow on 21st December 1701 that eleven members from Newgarden, Carlow attended, twelve from Louth, Dublin and Wicklow, nine from Wexford and seven from Moate Co Westmeath.

As I alluded to earlier, William Edmundson, who introduced Quakerism to Ireland, moved to Resenallis in Co. Laois where he and many other Quakers secured land leased in Laois, Carlow and Kildare. Primarily Carlow Quakers were granted land and many of these were ex-Cromwellian soldiers while many other refused a land grant as it was acquired through bloodshed and, instead, due to their religious beliefs settled on barren, uncultivated land. However, in such circumstances many Quakers were unable to make a living and many like Henry Rose an early Carlow Quaker settler and also John White left for Pennsylvania. Interestingly here it is worth noting that the influx of ex-Carlow Quakers resulted in a Meeting House in Pennsylvania being called Newgarden after the one in Carlow. The conclusion then is that Quakerism failed to make any worthwhile progress in the early period in the Carlow monthly meeting district.

However, things were to improve for the Religious Society of Friends in Co. Carlow. Quaker records show, that from the period of 1675 to 1700, a dramatic increase of recorded births took place – a rise from the original figure of 98 to 274 which represents the highest ever recorded for Carlow Monthly Meeting's records. Two well known much decorated and documented gentlemen were responsible for this dramatic rise in Quaker numbers in Co. Carlow, the men in question being Mr. John Watson and Mr. Robert Lecky. For example John Watson's father, who was a member of the Established Church, purchased the entire towns land of Kilconner near Fenagh, which amounted to 354 acres, 2 roads and 39 perches, which he later divided into lots of between 20 to 85 acre farms. These farms in turn were let out to fellow Quakers who came from Donegal, Tipperary, Wicklow, Kildare and Laois – all of which would have been of English origin. John Watson, came with his father from Crosadit Cumberland in England in 1658 as a 'planter'. Robert Lecky, shortly after arriving and settling at Kilnock, the 24-year-old married Mary Watson, daughter of the above mentioned John Watson of Kilconner. Before settling in Kilconner John Watson resided and farmed briefly at Ardristan, close to Tullow. At the age of 23 John Watson became 'convinced' and became a member of the Quakers, much to the displeasure of his father. On inheriting his father's house in Kilconner in 1675 he used it for Meetings of Worship, and later erected a designated meeting house in the court yard at Kilconner. He attracted the hostility of the bishop of Leighlin and Ferns which led to his imprisonment

for two years, yet another example of Quaker persecution. So incensed was Watson, that on release from prison, together with his fellow prominent Carlow Quaker, John Burnyeat, published a book to stymie and counteract the animosity directed at the Quakers and to extol the virtues of Quakerism. The book, *The Holy Truth and its Professors Defended*, was written and published as a direct response to a letter published by the then priest of Staplestown, Rev. Lawrence Potts. Rev. Potts took grave exception to Watson and his colleague Robert Lecky (Lacky) leaving the Established Church in favour of their belief and conviction as a 'Friend'. Aside from Kilconner members of the wider Watson Quaker families lived at Rathrush, Ballydarton, Carlow town and Clonmacshane all in Co. Carlow. From their settlement in Kilconner in 1658 the Watsons became the second largest family in the meeting area with 82-recorded births on the register of births, which represented 5.2% of all Quaker births from 1650 to 1850.

It should also be noted here that Isobel Watson married Fielding Lecky – adding another famous double barreled name to the Carlow gentry – and in 1922 they took up residence in Altamont House with their two young daughters Diana and Corona – and it is Corona who will forever be endearingly credited with the magnificent horticultural paradise that is Altamont Gardens. The very mention of Lecky-Watson brings us to the other gentleman who together with John Watson is credited with the dramatic rise of Quakerism in Co. Carlow from the mid 1600's to the mid 1700's. That man is non other than Mr. Robert Lecky. Between them John Watson and Robert Lecky successively fostered, nurtured and promoted the growth of Quakerism in Co. Carlow. The Lecky family, accounted for 4.3% of the total number of Quaker births, making the combined Lecky Watson total of 9.5% of all Quaker births in Co Carlow.

It is entirely fitting that these two Quaker families played such a prominent role in Carlow Quakerism because the Leckys and Watsons were intermarried, as James Lecky from Ballykealy married Mary Watson at Kilconner in 1699. See the accompanying Lecky-Watson crest, which gives an indication of the importance and significance of the Lecky-Watson's and is symptomatic of their status in the landed class. Similarly when John Lecky, from Kilnock married Mary Pike from Co. Cork another well-known double-barreled name Lecky-Pike became another prominent name in the annals of Carlow Quakerism. It is worth recalling here that the Leckys, Watsons and Pikes were one of approximately sixty gentry families to reside in Co. Carlow, which in terms of size made Co. Carlow one of the most if not the most, anglicized counties in Ireland. The British planters obviously had their homework done and saw the potential and prosperity of Carlow as a fertile location in which to locate some of their favoured sons. One can only guess what impact 60 Big Houses had on

an otherwise bleak and barren Carlow landscape in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The Leckys, being a Quaker landed family had an obvious liking and preference for Co. Carlow. Aside from Ballykealy other family members settled at Kilnock, Rathrush, Kilmeaney, New Gardens and Staplestown.

The Lecky family roots began in Stirling in Scotland and Thomas and his wife Dorothy were the first family members to settle in Ireland when they pitched their tent at Ballylin, Co. Donegal in the early 1600s. Their son 24 year old Robert moved to Carlow and settled at what was later known as Kilnock House. At this point Ballykealy House and its then 708 acres was owned by John Dawson Borrer Coats – a Scottish planter who in turn had the farm let to Roberts uncle John Lecky who was later to become the first Lecky to actually own the estate in the late 1790's. Similar to his Watson in-laws Lecky brought in vast numbers of fellow Quakers to his workforce from all over the country. In 1830 Lecky built his mansion at Ballykealy to the design of noted architect Thomas Cobden who also designed Carlow Cathedral. At the height of their power Lecky owned almost 1,500 acres of the most fertile land surrounding Ballon village. Again similar to the Watsons whose Quaker graveyard at Ballybromhill was sited on their own land, the Lecky's also had their own private graveyard on their lands, as well as the R.I.C. police barracks.

The Quaker graveyard at Ballybrommel, sited about two miles from the Watson residence and meeting house at Kilconner was and is still known as '*God Acre*' and the rather serene and very apt '*The Garden of Sleep*'. This burial ground was used almost exclusively by the Society of Friends meetings at Kilconner. The architectural merit of the entrance is striking and typical of the period with its arched and mitered granite features. The present cast iron entrance gate dates back to c.1908 which was commissioned and erected by Fielding Lecky Waton as a lasting memorial to the members of the Lecky and Watson families. The most recent burial was that of the aforementioned Corona North (nee Watson) of Altamont. She ever so generously bequeathed Altamont House and gardens as well as God's Acre to the State and both are now in the loving care of the O.P.W. In stark contrast the Lecky Quaker burial ground at Ballykealy is a shambles and quite frankly is a disgrace. There are at least 36 members of the Lecky family buried there. The wall and entrance have long since crumbled and fallen and is totally overgrown with open access to cattle and horses which adds to the humiliation and lack of respect to those interred there. If there is anyone from Carlow Co Council here tonight could they ever take note. Penny Alston (nee Lecky) wrote the following in the Ballon Rathoe Chronicle 2002, "*The Quaker graveyard can still be seen to this day next to the Lecky's second burial ground at Ballykealy. The walls are tumbling down and cattle wander within*

the walls. It is a sad and dismal place and yet there are 36 people buried there. I can still remember when I was a child and walls still stood and the entrance was a large blue door, which my mother would open with a enormous key, set under a square lintel in the massive wall. Now unfortunately a tree has fallen across the gateway demolishing it completely. Quakers in the olden days did not believe in marking a grave with gravestones”.

Reproduced here is a copy of the original lease of the old Quaker Graveyard at Ballykealy – dated 2nd month 1781. Beside this graveyard is the later Lecky private burial ground which is a walled, well maintained structure with a fine cut granite entrance which features an ornate granite Celtic cross as seen from the photograph. The Lecky family abandoned their Quaker faith towards the end of the 19th century which explains the reason for their own private burial ground. Penny Alston (nee Lecky) further adds “*by the middle of the 19th century, my family were still Quakers but were very wealthy and their dress, looking at portraits of that time, certainly did not conform to the Quaker plain style. Shortly after they ceased to be members of the Religious Society of Friends instead attending the Protestant Church at Aghade”*

A feature of Quaker burial grounds is the modest and unostentatious nature of grave markings which mainly consist of small wooden crosses and later small simple headstones which is in stark contrast to other mainstream graveyards where even planning permission is now sometimes requested! However Ballykealy Quaker burial ground is unmarked. Aside from Kilconner and Ballykealy, New Garden, approximately three miles outside Carlow town on the Athy road was the other burial ground in Carlow County. It was acquired by the Society of Friends in 1665 and is still in their possession unlike Kilconner or Ballykealy. Newgarden has an impressive entrance gate leading to a circular path. Originally the Society also had a Meeting House here as well which was given to them by Thomas Weston in 1660, but after a short time this meeting house was moved to Tullow Street in Carlow town (see map). A meeting house was built in 1712 on the North side of Tullow St. at the junction with Mosley’s Lane and the land for it was leased in 1716 “*for ever*”. A sum of £78 was raised among Friends for the construction and significantly the largest contribution came from Robert Lecky of Ballykealy. The building seated 250 people. Ancillary buildings were erected in the 19th century and the premises is shown on the town plan of 1873. These new buildings blocked most of the natural light into the building leaving the meeting room poorly lit. The meeting house here in Tullow St was actively used up to 1920 but the building was sold in 1927. Most of the building has now been demolished and replaced by shop units.

The only present day reminder of this once busy meeting house are the old walls retained under a new roof at the rear of the shop. Tullow is also listed as having a meeting house but very little is known of it apart from the fact that it only convened on week-days, not on Sundays. However it is believed that the Meeting House was sited on the grounds of the present Tullow museum. The two families most prominently associated with the Society of Friends in Tullow were the Leybourne and Blair families. Mrs Blair and her daughter were known to operate a laundry service alongside the Meeting House which was known locally as The Swaddling House. The Methodists later used this building as their place of worship.

Apart from those already mentioned, the Haughton family were important Carlow Quakers. James Haughton was born in 1795 in Carlow. His father was Samuel Pearson Haughton who was married to Mary Pim from Rushin, Queens Co. James Haughton was the first boarder in the Ballitore School in 1807. He was a close friend of Richard Allen, one of the most prominent Quakers of his time. Both Haughton and Allen were activists in the Hibernian Peace Society, which agitated strongly against English military and political interference in India, China and Afghanistan. Both also played significant roles in the anti-slavery movement. They also linked up with Fr. Matthew in the temperance movement. As an aside here Richard Allen is an ancestor of my brother-in-law Clive Allen who is here tonight. So too is Thomas Weston who built and purchased The Quaker Meeting House in Tullow Street, an ancestor of Clive. So Clive, you are very welcome here tonight with your lovely wife Jo. The tell tale signs of faltering trends in Quakerism at this time is seen when Haughton discontinued as a Friend in 1834 when he joined another fringe sect The Unitarian Congregation in Dublin. Later Haughton supported Daniel O'Connell and later still he joined the Young Irelanders in 1864.

His cousin, Benjamin born in 1823 took over Barrow Mills, in Graiguecullen from his father John Haughton who in turn had been in partnership with his father, Samuel as corn merchants at Burrin St., in Carlow. Benjamin eventually returned to his roots in England and The Barrow Mills was taken over by Richard Shackleton of Moone, Co. Kildare.

As alluded to earlier, the vast majority of 'Friends' were of English origin. Many were 'convinced' from the Church of Ireland while a small number were 'convinced' from Catholicism. One such was Peter Doyle, born at Cooladine Co. Wexford who, when his mother died when he was young was looked after by a 'Friend'. He too became 'convinced'. He lived for most of his life at Ballinacarrig, Co. Carlow where he died in 1774. Another prominent Carlow connection is the well-known and popular Thompson family who have been

noted for their steel engineering business for many generations. While the following Quakers appear in the Carlow Borough List 1832 –

Henry Biskett, Tullow St., - Baker

Samuel Eves, Burrin St., - Gentleman

Thomas Haughton, Kelvin Grove – Distillier

John Morris, Graigue – Coal Merchant and

John Thomspson, John St., - Merchant

The Province Men's Monthly Meeting held in Carlow on Dec. 21st was attended by eleven members from Newgarden, Carlow, twelve from Louth, Dublin and Wicklow, nine from Wexford and seven from Moate, Co. Westmeath.

A rather intriguing Quaker marriage took place when the Carlow couple Ephraim Heritage and his bride Elizabeth Church married in 1674, thus bringing together an uncanny and quaintly unique Church/Heritage union!

Any appraisal of Carlow Quakers would not be complete without mentioning the immense humanitarian contribution made by the Quakers during the Famine. Their generosity and innate wish to help those in distress rested easily with their Quaker beliefs. In every area of relief in Carlow County a member of the Religious Society of Friends was central in providing relief when many members of the Society set up soup kitchens and raised much needed money to relieve the chronic starvation and distress of a humble, impoverished and beleaguered peasantry.

Notwithstanding the above there seemed to be double standards at play. For example while the Lecky's and their fellow gentry classes were living extravagant and opulent lifestyles, the story unfolding all around them was in stark contrast. Bear in mind that this was against the appalling backdrop of widespread oppression of the native Catholic population which was copper fastened in the late 17th to early 18th century with the introduction of the draconian Penal Laws when oppressive legislation was enacted to protect the minority ruling classes and to further suppress and already downtrodden peasant population. The warning signs of strife, poverty and distress finally found their way onto the pages of The Leinster Reformer on the 13th November 1839 under the heading "*Great distress in Ballon*". A meeting was convened with George R Keogh, Esq in the chair. Of the ten resolutions passed by far the most salient and disturbing are the lines in the first resolution "*That within the parishes of Ballon and Aghade, upwards of 150 families are in a state of great misery for the want of firing; and that humanity loudly calls for prompt assistance to preserve them from ruin*". It also seemed significant that the parish priest Rev Fr William Kinsella and his Church of Ireland counterpart Rev George Dawson were involved in the relief. It is pertinent to note here that this distress and suffering took place a mere four years after the completion of Ballykealy

House, its extensive landscaping, which included the planting of 7,563 trees, its two acre walled garden and lavish surrounds. Equally noteworthy is the fact that it was only five or six years before the onset of the great famine which devastated the countryside. On the one hand the local tenant farmers and cotters who were trying to eke out a miserable existence and trying to rear large families in shacks, hovels and cabins, while the aristocracy or gentry revelled in extravagant luxury. Support for the above observation comes from a familiar but unlikely source. In his History of Ireland in the 18th Century, the noted historian, politician and professor W.E. Lecky, a cousin of the Ballykealy landlords, wrote *“It is not the persecution of a sect, but the degradation of a nation ----- to crush to the dust the people among whom they were planted”*.

However it has to be said that John James Lecky contributed more than double the amount of other contributors when he donated the sum of £101, which obviously rested easily on his Quaker shoulders.

The gradual decline and demise of Carlow Quakers mirrored that elsewhere. For example The Watson’s and the Lecky’s two of the most powerful and prominent Quaker families abandoned their Quaker beliefs. The rules and principles, the harsh and strict discipline forced many to leave. Those who failed to uphold or live up to the Society’s demanding and challenging code of discipline and behavior were either expelled or left on their own accord. The dwindling number of Quakers in Carlow and nationally would have been hugely disappointing to George Fox and his contemporaries, whose missionary zeal was not matched or replicated by the vast majority of later Friends. It would seem that the Missionary status of the early Quakers was gradually eroded and exchanged for wealth, power and standing which would have conflicted and contrasted greatly with the simplicity, plainness and spirituality as originally expressed by George Fox.

So in conclusion Ladies and Gentlemen, it is fair to say that the remaining present day Quakers and indeed their ancestors are a justifiably proud, resilient and spiritual group who have left and continue to leave an enduring valuable, virtuous and ethical legacy behind. So perhaps when you next have a Jacob’s biscuit, with a Wedgewood cup of tea – think of those pioneering Quaker names and raise a cup in their honour.

Thank You.

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