

York Family History Society - November 2021

An Interesting York Quaker Wedding in 1919

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As Custodian of Records for Quakers in the York area, enquiries relating to history, including family history, are usually passed to me. We don't have much that is directly useful in our archive room at Friargate Meeting House but as a family history researcher I can often add other information.

The starting point for this story was an enquiry in May 2017. A man called at Friargate seeking more information about his grandparents' wedding which was held in York on 1st May 1919. Fortunately, he had both a photograph of the wedding and the certificate signed, in Quaker tradition, by everyone present.



As the stories behind this wedding, held over 100 years ago, emerged, I realised that there were many strands that linked to my research interests and even serendipitously to my own upbringing in Kendal. These strands could be illustrated through the detail of some of the embroidered panels at Quaker Tapestry Museum, of which I am a trustee.

Quaker Tapestry was a community crafts project involving over 4,000 people in Britain and overseas in the 1980s and 90s. The outcome was that

nearly 80 embroidered panels were produced depicting Quaker history, spiritual experience and social concerns. Eventually in 1994, the panels found a permanent home at Kendal Quaker Meeting House.

On a personal level, I was born and grew up in Kendal. I attended the Quaker Meeting with my family and was eventually married at the Meeting House, 50 years ago, in June 1971.

The first interesting point about the wedding held on 1st May 1919 was that it did not take place at Clifford Street or Bootham School, but at the Retreat, presumably in the large recreation room of the Quaker Mental Hospital. A detail of the Retreat doorway appears on the Quaker Tapestry "Health" panel.

During World War 1, Clifford Street Meeting House had been used as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) hospital for wounded soldiers run by St John's Ambulance. This arrangement apparently saved the Quaker Schools, Bootham and the Mount, from being requisitioned as hospitals. York Quaker Meeting moved to meet at the John Bright library at Bootham School. Friends did not resume full use of the Clifford Street premises until later in May 1919, when refurbishment was complete.



The bride and groom were **George Fox Worsdell** (1894–1949) and **Edith May Hardcastle** (1893-1973), both from Quaker families living in York. The surname Worsdell rings many Quaker and Quaker Tapestry bells and relates to the family’s connection to the building of coaches for the developing national railway network as illustrated in the “Quaker Enterprise and the Early Railways” panel.

The groom, George Fox Worsdell, was a great-grandson of **Thomas Clarke Worsdell the Second** (1788–1862) and grandson of **George Worsdell** (1821–1912). Thomas Clarke Worsdell the Second, built horse-drawn road coaches. Although originally from the south, he and his family moved from London to the Lancashire in 1815. He designed coaches for the Liverpool & Manchester Railway which opened in 1830. George Worsdell (1821-1912) was an engineer and owned a Forge in Warrington where he produced the first rolled iron bar and many other iron items for the railway. Many members of the family continued to build railway coaches and later railway engines.

The groom's father was **Edward Worsdell** (1852–1908). He was not an engineer but became a teacher of maths and languages. He trained at the Flounders Institute at Ackworth, which was founded in 1848. He taught briefly at Bootham in 1880-81 but seems to have become a freelance lecturer and Quaker scholar.

The groom and his brother **Thomas Arnold Worsdell** (1896-1982) went to Sidcot Quaker School, and Thomas Arnold was briefly also at Bootham.

On 8 February 1884, The Western Gazette reported an entertaining talk he had given to pupils of Sidcot Friends School. Dressed as an Egyptian with other costumed assistants, he spoke about life in Egypt. The talk would have been illustrated "by means of a magic lantern, but unfortunately the bursting of a bag of oxygen only allowed a few slides to be shown". I was glad that my Powerpoint behaved well in November 2021!

The Sidcot talk was given before Edward married **Rachel Tregelles Fox** (1863–1934) in 1889 and three children had followed, of which George Fox Worsdell was the eldest. The family lived at Feversham Terrace on Wigginton Road. The family perhaps then needed a more reliable income, as by 1901 the census records that Edward was Superintendent of Offices at Rowntree Cocoa Manufacturers in York and a Minister of the Society of Friends. He died in 1908, aged only 55, and four years before his father, George, who reached the age of 91. Sadly therefore, Edward Worsdell was not at the wedding.

Rachel Tregelles Fox, born in 1863, was one of 6 daughters and 5 sons of **Nathaniel** and **Elizabeth Fox** from Falmouth, Cornwall. Nathaniel ran an ironmongery business but there were connections to railway engineering through his mother who was **Anna Peters Tregelles**. The Fox family intermarried with other local Quaker business families and with prominent Quaker mercantile families elsewhere, such as **Backhouse** and **Pease** of Darlington, **Hustler**, **Lloyd** and **Barclay**. According to the 1881 census, Rachel T. Fox was already a teacher, when only 19 and still living at home in Falmouth. She lived until 1934 and died at Meadowside, Carr Lane, Acomb.

Sister of the groom and youngest child of Edward and Rachel, was **Anna Margaret** (1898–1974), a pupil at The Mount, 1906-09. She gained a BA in History at Oxford and trained as a teacher, including at Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham. She taught in various local schools including Mill Mount, York, 1924–27, but seems to have also become a lecturer, probably at Woodbrooke, in 1944. She did not marry and died in 1974 in Birmingham at Selly Oak.

A great-aunt of Rachel Tregelles Fox, **Rachel Tregelles** (1805–1874) was the Superintendent, aka headmistress, when the York Quaker Girls School moved from Castlegate in the centre of York to the Mount in 1857. Rachel, twin of **Henry Tregelles**, was a sister of **Anna Peters Tregelles**, twin of **John**. Their parents **Samuel** and **Rebecca Fox** appear to have had 17 children including 4 sets of twins!



Of the four parents, only George's mother, Rachel T. Worsdell was alive in May 1919. Both of Edith May's parents had died, her father, **Henry (Harry) Hardcastle** (1855-1913) in 1913 and her mother, Edith Mary Gray (1866-1919) only in January that year.

The bride's father, **Harry Hardcastle**, came from a family of Master Tailors with business premises in Coney Street, York. He seems to have been the accountant for the business, his brothers being the actual master tailors. He married **Edith Mary Gray** in 1891, at Clifford Street Friends Meeting House. As the Hardcastle family were baptized and married in the Church of England, it is probable that Henry became a Quaker about this time. The Boer Wars led to some new Quakers by conviction.

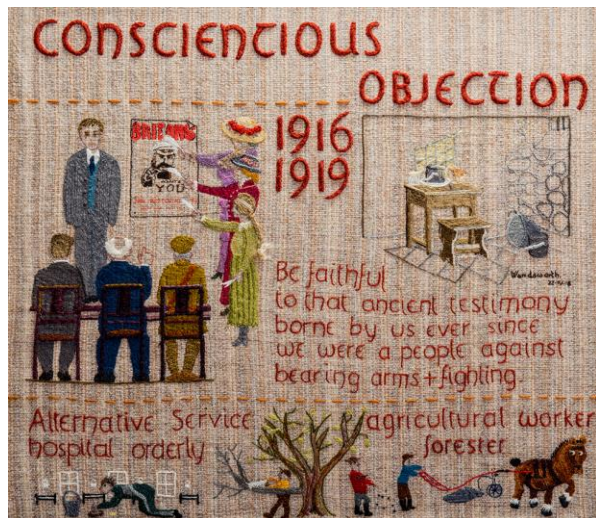
Edith Mary's father, and grandfather of the bride, was **Joseph Spink Gray**. He was a commercial traveller, later Nursery Manager, and eventually by 1890, Director, of the Backhouse Nurseries, by then located in Holgate Road. By 1881, the family were living at Mill View, two houses away from West Bank House where the owner, **James** and his wife, **Mary, Backhouse** lived. Son, **George Gray**, also worked for the Nurseries and in the 1911 census is described as a landscape gardener. Baptised at New Street Chapel in 1833, Joseph Spink Gray appears to have grown up as a Methodist. He became a Quaker by conviction and, like Edward Worsdell, was a recorded Minister.

The Nurseries were a very significant business enterprise in York, importing and propagating plants from all over the world. They were established in 1815 by **James Backhouse**, senior (1794-1869), who travelled as a plant collector and, also, as a Quaker missionary. His son, **James Backhouse** (1825-1890), ran the nursery and in 1881 was described as employer of 109 men and 9 women.

Edith May's aunt, **Charlotte Gray Lamb**, (1863-1957) was at the wedding with two of her children. Charlotte was an older sister of mother, Edith Mary Gray. A former Mount School pupil, Charlotte married fellow teacher **Charles Benjamin Lamb** ((1864-1944) from a Gloucestershire farming family. After their wedding at Clifford Street Meeting House on 20 April 1887, they moved to Ireland where they planted fruit trees and established a factory making jam, to help relieve poverty. It seems very likely that the idea and the fruit trees came from the Backhouse nursery. The Lamb family became leading members of Irish Quakers.

In 1905, Joseph Spink Gray retired as director of the Backhouse Nurseries and moved with his wife **Mary** to live near Charlotte in Richhill, Armagh. Henry and Edith Mary Hardcastle also moved to Armagh with **Edith May, Henry** and **Muriel** about the same time. They only returned to York in 1911 after the grandparents had died, Mary in 1909 and Joseph in 1910. In Ireland, Henry worked as a book-keeper for an iron manufacturer, probably the Quaker firm of Smith and Pearson. Very soon after arriving in Ireland he was asked to examine the accounts of Richhill Monthly Meeting.

In 1911: Edith May Hardcastle aged 17 living at 3 Alexandra Gardens, Duncairn, Shankill, Belfast, was at Antrim. School, run by **Margaret Jane Hanna** and her three daughters. The Irish Census entry lists all the household were listed as "Society of Friends" except two pupils who were Presbyterian. **Henry Gray Hardcastle**, (1897-1977) aged 13 in 1911, was attending the Ulster Provincial School, at Lisnagarvy, Lisburn, Antrim which had both boys and girls of mixed protestant denominations as pupils. This later became the present Friends' School in Ireland.



Another theme of the wedding is neatly illustrated by the Quaker Tapestry panel on Conscientious Objection. George Fox Worsdell was a conscientious objector (CO) and from 1915-18 was an orderly at the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) Hospital at Haxby Road, in the office & dining room of the Rowntree factory. George Fox Worsdell's brother, **Thomas Arnold Worsdell**, was also in the FAU but he was a driver based at Dunkirk. He received the Croix de Guerre.

When compulsory military service was introduced in 1916, COs serving with the FAU in York did not have to attend a tribunal, which was rather controversial.

It was a light-bulb moment when I realised that the **Henry G. Hardcastle** I had come across when studying Conscientious Objectors in York in World War 1 was Edith May's brother.

Henry's experience was very different from that of his future brother-in-law. Henry was an Audit Clerk at

Rowntree's Cocoa Works. He appeared before the local York Military Service Tribunal in March 1916. He claimed "Absolute Exemption" but was only granted exemption conditional on serving in the Friends Ambulance Unit. He appealed to the North Riding County Appeal Tribunal on 31st May 1916; where he was again told to join the FAU (his conditional exemption was confirmed).

He refused to go into the FAU and his arrest on 2 September 1916 was reported in the York Herald. After appearing in the Magistrates Court, he was fined 40 shillings and handed over to the military authorities. What happened next is not clear as records seem to have been lost. It is likely he was drafted into the Army Service Corps, from where he could easily have gone to prison for refusing orders.

Wherever he was, he was back and present at the wedding in May 1919. Henry Gray Hardcastle himself married in Reading in 1927.

At Quaker weddings, everyone present signs a special certificate. This practice dates from the 1600s when Quakers refused to marry in Church, but effectively provided their own evidence of a marriage. It was superseded by civil registration certificates but the continuing tradition provides a wonderful historical record. There are 100 signatures on the Worsdell:Gray certificate. Besides family members, there were many other friends and local Quakers present. There were at least 12 members of the



Rowntree families including elderly **Joseph Rowntree** (1836–1925), aged nearly 83, and **Arnold S Rowntree (1852-1971)**, MP for York 1910-18. He lost his seat, due to his opposition to the Military Service Act and support for rights to conscientious objection. Other COs present were **A. Neave Brayshaw**, **Robert Wilfred Crosland** (warden of St Mary's Settlement) and **Herbert Ingle Waller**.

The wedding couple, George and May, lived and raised their family in Gloucester. George was Managing Director of a Gloucester company manufacturing pre-cast concrete products. May was heavily involved in the Liberal Party and the Gloucester Council of Women. They had two children: **Edward Guy Worsdell** (1921-2000) and **Dorothy Jean Worsdell** (1924-2016). They attended Sidcot School as had their father and his brother. In 1949, Edward Guy Worsdell changed his name to **Guy Tregelles Worsdell**.

A serendipitous connection for me was that Guy Worsdell lived and worked in Kendal as an accountant. I knew his name and that of his aunt, Muriel Hardcastle (1894-1960), from growing up in the Quaker Meeting there. There had been an earlier generation, an uncle, **Edwin Worsdell** and his wife, who also lived in Kendal. Will, our enquirer at Friargate, recalled staying with Uncle Guy and his grandmother Edith May, at Kendal, with his sister **Katherine** and mother, **Dorothy Jean**.

I am very grateful to Will Unway for bringing his enquiry about his grandparents' wedding to Friargate, and the subsequent sharing of discussion and documents, and to Quaker Tapestry, for inspiration and images, ©Quaker Tapestry Ltd.

The Quaker Tapestry Museum and related educational activities are based at the Friends Meeting House, Stramongate, Kendal. The accredited Museum is described by Visit England as "a hidden gem" amongst places to visit in the Lake District. There is currently a secondary exhibition about Quaker businesses called "Money, Shoes & Chocolate".

Do visit the Quaker Tapestry Museum in Kendal. See www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk or call 01539 722975 for current opening times.

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