



## Genealogical Sources

This guide contains some basic information about the organisation of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain until the mid 20th century, the location of Quaker records and describes some main sources for family history research in the Library.

## Organization of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain

It will help with your research if you have some knowledge of the organisation of the Society of Friends. Up to 1967 the Society in Great Britain was organised in the following groupings:

- ◆ the local worshipping group, usually known as a **Particular Meeting**, and sometimes with a meeting for church affairs known as a **Preparative Meeting**;
- ◆ a **Monthly Meeting** for business usually comprising a number of particular meetings (the monthly meeting is the principal administrative unit of Quaker church government);
- ◆ a **Quarterly Meeting** (initially for a county, and later for a group of counties in most cases); this comprised a number of Monthly Meetings;
- ◆ the national **Yearly Meeting**, now known as **Britain Yearly Meeting**, but known before 1995 as the **Yearly Meeting of Friends in London**, or **London Yearly Meeting**. The central records of the Yearly Meeting are held in the Library.
- ◆ **Wales Yearly Meeting** became part of London Yearly Meeting in 1797. Its records for before and after this date are almost all held locally.
- ◆ **Scotland General Meeting** became part of London Yearly Meeting in 1786. Its records for before and after this date are almost all held locally.
- ◆ The **Religious Society of Friends in Ireland** is a separate organisation. Its records are held in Ireland; the Library has some information about them.

## Location of local meeting records

Records of local Quaker meetings are not normally held in this Library (except for records of the London and Middlesex region: see below). Most are deposited in the appropriate local record offices or libraries around the country. The Library keeps a location list for local records. Details of local record offices and repositories in the UK can be found using the Discovery tool on The National Archives website: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> This Library acts as the local repository for archives of local and area meetings in the London and Middlesex area (Greater London, Middlesex and parts of Essex, Kent and Surrey which border on London).

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## Family history sources in the Library

### Registers of births, marriages & 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 to the Registrar-General 1445 registers for the pre-1837 period; 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 (TNA), as part of class RG6, and can also be searched online at <http://www.bmdregisters.co.uk/>

The Quaker 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. Also, completeness of registration varies considerably; for example, there are numerous gaps in the records of Devon Quarterly Meeting.

### Digest Registers

Before surrendering its registers, the Society of Friends compiled **Digests** from them, re-arranging information from the registers by first letter of the surname. (For lists of surnames in the Digest Registers see **Indexes**, below). 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. The earlier sequence of microfilms is published commercially by World Microfilms of London under the title *Quaker digest registers... for England and Wales c1650-1837*. These films can also be viewed at the Society of Genealogists (see **Other useful organizations** below). Many local record offices also have the microfilms for their local area. The later sequence (from 1837 to the mid-20th century) is available only in this Library. The Library has one microfilm reader; there is a charge of £5.00 per hour to consult the Digest Register microfilms and bookings must be made in advance.

### Indexes in the Library

The main biographical indexes in the Library are listed below, and these in turn may point you to other sources of information

- ◆ *Dictionary of Quaker biography* (DQB). This typescript is the only copy in the UK, and there are two copies in America - at the Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Philadelphia and the Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Philadelphia. This major source of information has entries for over 15,000 Quakers; it can be a short-cut to the Digest Registers (see above), which are a standard source for many of the DQB entries.
- ◆ Indexes to personal names in the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, vols 1-53 (1903-1975); these are particularly useful for information about early Friends.
- ◆ Lists of surnames in the pre-1837 digest registers of births, marriages and burials, arranged by quarterly meeting; they are complete for marriages, but not for all the Digest Registers of births and burials. These lists can help in deciding which of the Digest Register microfilms to consult.
- ◆ Indexes to names *Annual monitor* (1813-1920). This is an index of about 20,000 Friends' deaths noted in the Annual Monitor.

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- ◆ Indexes to Quakers mentioned in Joseph Besse's *Collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers* (1753), which cover the period c1650 to c1690.
  - ◆ Printed and typescript indexes of pupils at some Quaker schools from the late 18th century on. See Library Guide : Quaker Schools in Great Britain and Ireland for more information
  - ◆ Indexes to missionary and relief workers abroad under British Quaker auspices, from c1870.
  - ◆ Indexes to testimonies concerning "public Friends" or "recorded ministers", in London Yearly Meeting, c1700-1924, and to 'Movements of ministering Friends' as given in *The Friend* (London), 1843-1914.
- There are other indexes in the Library, which may help; please ask staff for details.

## The Quaker calendar

Quakers used plain language and dating practices to avoid using the names of months derived from heathen gods and goddesses. There is a separate Library Guide *The Quaker Calendar*, which explains these practices, and how to interpret them.

## Publications

- ◆ Two publications which Quaker family historians find useful are *Sources for nonconformist genealogy and family history*, by D. J. Steel (Society of Genealogists, 1973) and *My ancestors were Quakers*, by E. H. Milligan and M. J. Thomas (Society of Genealogists, 1999). Unfortunately both titles are out of print, but your local library may have them or be able to obtain them.

For general reading about Quaker history and beliefs *Portrait in grey: a short history of the Quakers* by John Punshon (Quaker Books, 2006) and *A light that is shining*, by Harvey Gillman (London: Quaker Home Service, 1997) are both recommended. Both are available from the Quaker Bookshop, Friends House (tel. 020 7663 1030; email [bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:bookshop@quaker.org.uk))

## Other useful organizations

It is important to contact other libraries and archives before visiting to make sure they will be able to help you and find out about their opening hours and admission procedures.

### Quaker Family History Society

Aims to encourage and assist anyone interested in tracing the history of Quaker families in Britain and Ireland. See the website [www.qfhs.co.uk/](http://www.qfhs.co.uk/) for further information; either email [info@qfhs.co.uk](mailto:info@qfhs.co.uk), or contact the Secretary whose contact details can be found on [www.qfhs.org.uk](http://www.qfhs.org.uk). The website has a lot of useful information about researching Quaker family history. They have also produced on CD indexes to the Digest Registers for Durham Quarterly Meeting, Essex Quarterly Meeting, Norfolk Quarterly Meeting, and Suffolk Quarterly Meeting

### The National Archives

Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU; tel. 020 8876 3444

The website [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) has a wealth of information for family historians, and advice about how to plan a visit there.

## Genealogical Sources

### The Society of Genealogists

14 Charterhouse Buildings, London EC1M 7BA

Its library is the largest collection of genealogical sources in the UK. Non-members are required to pay a fee to use it. Consult its website [www.sog.org.uk](http://www.sog.org.uk) before visiting.

There is also a useful Quaker Genealogist's mailing list where people can post Quaker genealogical enquiries

<http://lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com/index/other/Religion/QUAKER-BRITISH-ISLES.html>

### Paying for research

The Library is not able to undertake 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 of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives has a list of researchers on its website [www.agra.org.uk](http://www.agra.org.uk), or you can contact the Secretary at 29 Badgers Close, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 5RU; email [agra@agra.org.uk](mailto:agra@agra.org.uk)

The National Archives also has a list of researchers on its website ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/irlist/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/irlist/)).

### Further information

#### Library opening hours:

Tues.-Fri.

10.00am - 5.00pm

Please note the Library closes for one week in the spring and in the autumn. It is advisable to telephone or email prior to visiting. New readers will need to complete a registration form and show proof of permanent address. The registration form can be downloaded from our website [www.quaker.org.uk/library](http://www.quaker.org.uk/library) or requested from the Library.

For further information or help in using this Library please contact us by either emailing [library@quaker.org.uk](mailto:library@quaker.org.uk), telephoning 020 7663 1135 or writing to:

The Library,  
Friends House,  
173 Euston Road,  
London. NW1 2BJ  
[www.quaker.org.uk/library](http://www.quaker.org.uk/library)

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[www.quakerstrongrooms.org](http://www.quakerstrongrooms.org)