

AN ACCOUNT OF EVENTS

regarding

THE LANCASHIRE CENTRAL AND NORTH AREA MEETING OF THE  
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)

and their response to

MY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

by

ROBERT POWELL

2 Mountain View, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA10 5SE  
robert@robpowell.co.uk  
Tel: 015396-20482

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## FORWARD

It is with a heavy heart that I bring this complaint against an organisation that I have supported for over three years and amongst whose members I count a number of friends. However I believe this action to be necessary, not just in terms of dealing with my own position with regard to the Religious Society of Friends, but also in relation to the long term good of The Society nationally and to the public interest that it serves.

## BACKGROUND

In order that the Commissioners can fully understand the nature of my complaint I offer the following description of some aspects of the way in which the Society of Friends operates:-

**The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)** has three main organisational levels.

- The **Local Meeting** (formerly known as Preparative Meeting) is a congregation that normally meets for **Meeting for Worship** once a week in a particular place, usually a Quaker Meeting House. Its members also meet together every few weeks to discuss the affairs of the Meeting in what is usually called a **Local Business Meeting**.
- The **Area Meeting** (formerly Monthly Meeting) is an umbrella group for a number of Local Meetings. Every few weeks there is a gathering (also referred to as Area Meeting) at which representatives of the constituent Local Meetings discuss and decide upon various matters of concern. Until fairly recently Area Meetings were, as I understand it, unincorporated associations in which each and every member was responsible for the right ordering of the Area Meeting's affairs. However, over the last few years, Quaker Area Meetings have converted to charitable status. Quaker Area Meetings have **Trustees** like any other charity. Like some other charities, they also have **Members**.
- **Britain Yearly Meeting**, is the umbrella group for Quakers in England, Scotland and Wales. I understand that it is also a registered charity.

Decision making by Quaker institutions tends to be carried out using **Quaker Business Method**. This is a process designed to 'seek God's will'. This term, which has its origins in the Christian roots of the organisation, is still used today despite the fact that many Quakers are agnostic, non-theist or atheist. On the face of it, Quaker Business Method looks a lot like seeking consensus. Votes are never taken and decisions are arrived at through a process that is designed to achieve unity among all those taking part.

Apart from Members of the Society, there are also **Attendees** to be found at Meeting for Worship. These are people who have attended a particular Meeting for some time, possibly many years, but who have either not applied for membership or, occasionally, have been denied membership.

The Main officers of a Quaker Area Meeting are the Clerk, the Elders and Overseers. The role of the **Clerk to the Area Meeting** is rather like that of chair and minutes secretary combined. It is his/her role not to lead the Meeting, but rather to gauge the feeling of the Meeting and help it to express its views and decisions in writing, usually as a **Minute**.

**Elders** have a particular responsibility for the spiritual life of the Meeting. **Overseers** are more concerned with the general wellbeing of members and attendees. Sometimes these roles are shared in some way. If individual Elders and Overseers are appointed, then they are appointed by, and are responsible to, the Area Meeting, though their service may principally relate to the particular Local Meeting where they themselves worship.

An **Application for Membership** is made in writing to the Area Meeting Clerk who then brings it for consideration to the Area Meeting. The usual procedure then is that Area Meeting appoints two **Visitors** who come to see the applicant and then report back to Area Meeting. Currently various Meetings have been trying out a variety of different approaches to membership, but it is to be noted that **Quaker Faith and Practice** (a nationally produced compendium of writings about what is perceived to be wise, or good practice) states “An individual becomes a member of their area meeting, and through it of Britain Yearly Meeting, by a simple process agreed and adopted by the area meeting.” (Quaker Faith and Practice, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 11:04). Please note the phrase ‘simple process’. This idea of simplicity in the application process seems to me to be in accordance with the guidelines that the Charity Commission publishes on its website.

### SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT

In the Summer of 2008 I applied for Membership of The Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, which I shall refer to hereafter as the Area Meeting.

My experience of applying for membership of this meeting has been very far from 'simple'.

Since applying for membership over three years ago I have been obliged to attend several lengthy and sometimes difficult meetings to discuss matters surrounding my possible membership. What is worse is that I have been slandered and libelled by two particular, rather influential, individuals who effectively blocked my membership application for a considerable period of time, and for reasons which were clearly personal. Not only did the Area Meeting consistently fail to properly recognise or deal with this situation, it has itself libelled me. Despite many attempts on my part to get it to withdraw, or in some way express regret for its libel, it has so far failed to do so. (In consequence of this I eventually asked the Area Meeting Clerk to suspend my membership application until matters were sorted out).

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

In early 1999 I began attending meeting for worship at Brigflatts Meeting House in Sedbergh. This meeting was, and remains, part of Kendal and Sedbergh Monthly Meeting. I later became a member of that meeting and was briefly an elder. However I felt it necessary to resign my membership in rather difficult circumstances in April 2004.

Over the next four years I mainly worshipped at the Methodist Church in Sedbergh. However I also worshipped at various Quaker meeting houses from time to time including, on a couple of occasions, Yealand, which is one of eight local meetings within the Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting.

In June 2008 I started coming to worship at Yealand on what turned out to be a regular basis. After about four weeks I felt that my presence at the meeting was 'right', and I applied for membership.

My application was brought to Area Meeting in September 2008. As a non-member I was barred from the discussion regarding my membership, but I understand that members had two concerns:- 1) that I had not been coming to worship for very long and consequently no one knew me or could vouch for me and, 2) that my having resigned from another meeting could indicate possible problems. As a result of these concerns it was decided to appoint two particular individuals as my 'Guides Towards Membership'. One was Rex Ambler, an elder of the meeting. The other was Marion Dadds (now known as Marion Mills), one of the Assistant Clerks at Yealand Local Meeting. Both these individuals worship at Yealand Local Meeting.

Rex Ambler, Marion Dadds and I met to discuss my membership four times between October 2008 and May 2009. Then in December 2009, six months after the last of these meetings, I was presented with their draft report on the process. I felt that this draft report needed much clarification and correction, and the three of us met for a fifth time on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2010 to discuss this.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2010 I received the second version of the report, which was in fact a very substantial re-write. I was much happier with this version, but could not help noticing one particular sentence, about an important issue, that was rather ambiguous.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2010 I e-mailed and telephoned Marion Dadds and Rex Ambler to request a small change to the wording that would resolve the ambiguity. Both agreed with me that the sentence was ambiguous and Marion Dadds agreed that it should be changed. Rex Ambler refused point blank to change the wording.

To this day I do not know for sure why Rex Ambler adopted this position. It is particularly odd in the light of what he wrote in January 2010 in relation to the first draft of the report: "We recognise that we might have unwittingly misrepresented the facts at some point, and if you make this clear to us we will amend the report". Why he would feel so differently about the second draft, after so many other changes had already been agreed to, and when I was asking for one single sentence to be changed, I simply cannot imagine.

My telephone conversation with Rex Ambler on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February ended soon after he started calling me names. Why he should have resorted to ad hominem criticism of me rather than trying to address the issue in hand I do not know. My best guess is that his anger was caused by the fact that I had firmly but politely contradicted him on a point of grammar. Whatever the reason for his anger and personal comments, this conversation was the moment from which all the subsequent unpleasantness was to follow.

There followed an exchange of e-mails between Rex Ambler, Marion Dadds, Alastair Thomas (who was by now the Area Meeting Clerk) and myself. In essence, Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds wanted to have further discussions with me so that we could examine my alleged aggression. I wrote to Alastair Thomas about what had occurred and told him I was withdrawing from the 'mentoring' process. ([Appendix 1](#))

In the end, Marion Dadds and Rex Ambler revised their report again (now the third version thereof, which they sometimes call the second version for some reason, and which is attached hereto as [Appendix 2](#)), remarking on my alleged aggression and how it was not the right time to pursue my application for membership. This report was submitted to Area Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2010, along with my response to it ([Appendix 3](#)). Area Meeting passed a minute that 'received' the two documents and 'accepted' Rex Ambler and Marion Dadd's report, including the allegations of 'aggressiveness'. This report was attached to the minutes of the meeting and widely circulated with it to all the local meetings within the area. Subsequently, and further to a request from me, my response was also circulated but, as I now know, not as widely.

I was then asked to attend another meeting (the sixth) to discuss my application, this time with Roy Stephenson (who had been Area Meeting Clerk at the time of my original application two years previously). This was a perfectly pleasant meeting, but it was all about me (again), as the question about the accuracy of Rex Ambler's and Marion Dadd's report to Area Meeting was not a matter that the Area Meeting had asked Roy Stephenson to look into.

Following this meeting, Roy Stephenson reported back to Area Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 and two members were appointed as Visitors to come and discuss my membership in the usual way. These Visitors agreed two dates with me for meetings, but both had to be cancelled due to bad weather. These delays were quite unavoidable but they gave me time to ponder my situation: I was now well on the way to possible membership – but of an organisation that had in its written records a libel against me that had its origins in personal animosity. I decided that this position was untenable and I decided not to pursue my application further until such time as the Area Meeting expressed regret for its treatment of me and for accepting and circulating a libel against me. I wrote to Alastair Thomas about this on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2010 ([Appendix 4](#)).

At Area Meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 my letter was discussed but no offer was made to resolve the matter.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2011 I met the Overseers at Yealand to explain my difficulty. They then asked the Area Meeting to take the matter up again.

As a result Area Meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 asked the Convenor of Elders to appoint a small 'Clarity Group' to help move things forward and suggested that this group might seek help from the General Secretary of Quaker Life. This group reported back to Area Meeting



on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May. They did so without ever meeting with me or, as I understand it, with Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills. The Clarity Group was asked to look further into the matter.

The Clarity Group then had meetings with Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills and later with myself on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. They then reported to Area Meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2011. This report expressed much concern but did not point to any likely resolution. It was however agreed that Rex Ambler, Marion Dadds, Alastair Thomas (Area Meeting Clerk), Rachel Malloch (a member of the Clarity Group) and I should meet again to consider a means or forum for reconciliation between myself, Rex Ambler, Marion Dadds and the Area Meeting.

After a few days I received copies of correspondence to and from Marion Dadds/Mills. These e-mails led me to seriously doubt if the issues in hand would ever get resolved.

As a consequence of my pessimism I began looking into the possibility of making a complaint to the Charity Commission regarding the way in which my membership application had been handled. I realised that the Trustees of the Area Meeting would have to be involved. I therefore phoned Malcolm Edmunds to confirm that he was, as I believed, Clerk to the Trustees. He confirmed this and then we got into conversation about what had happened. He said he would speak to Alastair Thomas (Area Meeting Clerk) about the matter.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2011 I received from Alastair Thomas a proposed minute for the next Area Meeting. This quoted the minute from the Area Meeting of the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 (which had accepted Rex Ambler's and Marion Dadds/Mills' report) and then went on:- "We now place on record that the report by Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds and the response by Robert Powell represented the opinions of the authors and that Area Meeting could not affirm the accuracy of statements in either of them".

This proposed minute, coming as it did from Malcolm Edmunds and Alastair Thomas, struck me as a breakthrough. In a few short words it effectively removed the Area Meeting's libel against me. And it did so without taking a view about Rex Ambler's and Marion Dadds' truthfulness, which allowed us all to have our own personal opinions. It was diplomatic and truthful at one and the same time. Problem solved, or so I thought.

However, Marion Dadds/Mills e-mailed Alastair Thomas to oppose the proposed minute as it stood and an additional paragraph was suggested that began with the sentence "This is in no way to cast doubt on the integrity of Rex, Marion, or Robert". To my mind this made a complete nonsense of the proposed minute and its purpose.

I later received an e-mail from Alastair Thomas saying that he had decided not to propose the suggested minute at Area Meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, as clearly there would be much heated debate and little prospect of a good outcome.

I can't say I blame Alastair Thomas for his decision. However it was now clear to me that there was almost no chance whatsoever of my getting satisfaction from Area Meeting regarding this matter and that lessons had not really been learned by the Area Meeting as a whole.

I now felt that the meeting previously agreed upon to seek reconciliation would be a complete waste of time. A date had been fixed for it (Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of November) but I gave notice that I would not be attending. I gather that the meeting went ahead in my absence and on a different date (Friday the 18<sup>th</sup> of November). Alastair Thomas sent me a report of this meeting. On reading it I was confirmed in my view that the Area Meeting would never, of itself, find a solution to this problem that was both fair and truthful.

Earlier this year I spoke to two senior officials of Britain Yearly Meeting. Both were naturally concerned at what I had to tell them. However they made it clear that they were unable to get involved in the matter without being first invited so to do by the Area Meeting, (which is of course autonomous and a self-governing legal entity in its own right). Whilst I fully appreciate the position of Britain Yearly Meeting with regard to this, it does mean that any redress must now be sought outside Quaker circles and in the civil society.

On at least two occasions Area Meeting did suggest to groups that it appointed (the 'Clarity Group' and the group that met on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November) that they consider getting some sort of outside mediation. This idea appears not to have been taken up. Had I attended the meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November I could have raised the matter but, in the event I could not bear the thought of yet another long and intense meeting in the position of being a minority of one, with the majority being both judge and jury in their own case.

Given the lack of involvement from Britain Yearly Meeting, and given the lack of outside mediation, I feel that the only option left to me is to make a formal complaint to the Charity Commission about the Area Meeting's membership procedures and the way in which they have been applied to me.

## THE EFFECT OF THIS AFFAIR ON ME AND OTHERS

Quakerism is a very important part of the lives of those involved. I personally find that the weekly meeting for worship sets me up for the rest of the week in a very powerful way, spiritually and emotionally. There is also a very coherent set of 'Testimonies' that give structure to ideas about how to live that might otherwise be less well thought out.

When I applied for membership I did so out of a need to state something about who I was and out of a desire to help and be helped in a certain kind of quest.

When the two people who had been appointed as representatives of the Area Meeting suddenly turned on me and began to vilify me personally, dishonestly and very publicly it was quite a shock (We had been on good terms for over eighteen months). What has shocked me even more has been the willingness of others to allow the abuse and, in some instances, add to it.

At Area Meeting in May 2010 it sounds rather as though Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds succeeded in whipping up something akin to hysteria against me – this without their being able to offer any evidence to support their allegation that I had been aggressive. During the meeting it was suggested by somebody that I might sabotage the website that I had constructed for the Area Meeting. Although this particular person has since apologised to me it seems that the idea obviously took root in the minds of others. Many months later the Area Meeting Clerk felt it necessary to ask me for assurances about the meeting's ownership of the website. He got them.

At a later area meeting, when the appointment of Visitors was being discussed, I am told that one woman suggested that it might be safer to send a man as one of the Visitors and not two women. This particular person had previously given me a lift home from a social event at Yealand and then come into my flat for a cup of tea, all without showing any fear of violence from me that I could discern.

It is clear that after Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills submitted their report to Area Meeting, quite a number of people who had once trusted me no longer did so to quite the same extent.

Give a dog a bad name.

Hardly surprisingly this horrid business has not just wasted a great deal of my time (and money) when I should have been trying to earn a living but it has also upset me a great deal.

I recognise that others too have been greatly upset, but the untruths told by Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills have been clear to see for all of eighteen months by anyone willing to look at the evidence. And Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills have throughout this time totally failed to present any evidence for their allegation, for the simple reason that there is none. It was Area Meeting that appointed Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills as my 'guides'; it was Area Meeting that accepted their libellous report; and it has been Area Meeting that has consistently failed to rectify the situation. All I have done is to protest frequently and persistently at being personally vilified.

## WIDER CONCERNS

### 1) Exclusivity

Although I regard my experience of applying for membership as being extreme, I feel that my sufferings at the hands of this Area Meeting are almost certainly indicative of a widespread attitude among many British Quakers, to wit that one has to be a rather special person to be a Quaker.

It would be nice to think that my own experience has been peculiar to this particular Area Meeting. It is however clear to me, going on the basis of conversations I have had with a number of Quakers in various places, that difficulties are sometimes put in the way of applicants for membership in other Area Meetings as well. Sometimes these difficulties have been resolved with help from mediators from outside the relevant Area Meetings, but I am sure that this is not always the case.

In this meeting and elsewhere over the last twelve years or so I have often asked Attenders why they have not applied for membership of The Society despite the fact that they have often been coming to worship for many years. I have always received one of two answers:- 1) that there was no point in applying for membership because, even without joining, they could still participate in most of the activities of The Society, and/or 2) that they “did not feel good enough (to be a member)”. I believe that this second answer is totally contrary to what being a Quaker is all about and that it is totally contrary to the principles underlying charitable status.

Unfortunately, for some reason or another, a number of established Quakers seem to actively encourage, by word and/or deed this attitude of inadequacy on the part of attenders.

Shortly before the Area Meeting in May 2010 (at which Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds/Mills submitted their report on me) a member of Yealand Meeting asked Rex Ambler why I was being given a “hard time”. His response, so I am told, was: “Because he needs it”. There is clearly something about The Society that allows this kind of attitude to flourish.

Exclusivity among Quakers has a long and deep history. It has its roots in a response to the persecution of the early Quakers and also in the need for trustworthiness when each and every member of an Area Meeting was financially and legally responsible for the affairs of the meeting. However I do not believe that exclusivity with regard to membership is appropriate in this day and age, whether spiritually, morally or legally in terms of charity law. I regarded my application for membership as an important stage on a journey, not a declaration that I had arrived, and certainly not as an excuse for others to raise themselves up in judgement over me. I believe that my attitude is consistent with charity law and that it reflects a widespread view among most, but clearly not all, Quakers.

The Society of Friends has something very wonderful to give the world. Its dwindling membership should not be trying to keep it just for themselves – especially when their meetings have charitable status.

## 2) Secrecy and The Right to Hear and Be Heard

Throughout Britain Yearly Meeting applications for membership are discussed behind closed doors and in the absence of non-members including applicants.

In May 2010 I was allowed to send a written reply to the report made about me, but I was not permitted to hear what was said during the meeting or, of course, respond to what was being said about me. When applications for membership are discussed, any member of The Society can say anything he or she wishes without the applicant knowing anything about it. Anyone being tried in a civil or criminal court in England has the right to hear his accusers. But it seems that this is not the case among Quakers. Natural justice is not well served here.

On a couple of occasions, after I asked for my application for membership to be suspended, the Area Meeting Clerk judged that I might take part in discussions about the report that had been made about me. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September this year I attended Area Meeting to hear the second report of the 'Clarity Group'. The convener of this group had refused to circulate their report in advance of the meeting so it was impossible to give it any consideration before the meeting. When it had been read, and after a few minutes reflection, I did get up to speak to it. I had barely started to speak when a member stood up and said "Our friend has been heard", which is Quaker Speak for "Sit down and shut up". The Clerk did in fact allow me to continue but I found it very difficult to do so after this interruption and in front of what was clearly a none too sympathetic audience. Quakers frequently talk about respect for others and their opinions, but they don't always practice what they preach. I feel that Quaker Business Method may be partly to blame for this.

## CONCLUSION

The events following my application for membership have highlighted within this Area Meeting a lack of respect for both truth and natural justice. In some instances decisions have been driven by personal animosity; in others they have been the result of an overarching desire for unity between existing members.

A decision needs to be made as to whether the Area Meeting is to be allowed to run its affairs as a private members club from which outsiders may be blackballed on the basis of personal dislike or whether the principles outlined in Quaker Faith and Practice about membership, and the guidelines of the Charity Commission are to be followed. At the moment the procedures regarding application for membership to the Society of Friends nationally are supposedly intended to be fair. It is clear however that they are intrinsically open to abuse.

Membership issues within The Society of Friends should never be decided on grounds of personal dislike. Nor should they be decided on the basis of allegations, honestly made or otherwise, about a person's character.

As it says in Quaker Faith and Practice: "Our membership . . . is never based upon worthiness. (QFP, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 11-02).

Quite.

2 Mountain View,  
Sedbergh, Cumbria,  
LA10 5SE  
[robertpowell@cix.co.uk](mailto:robertpowell@cix.co.uk)  
[www.robpowell.co.uk](http://www.robpowell.co.uk)  
Tel: 015396-20482  
Mob: 07971-500825

2/3/10

Alastair Thomas,  
Clerk to Lancashire Central and North  
Area Quaker Meeting,  
Address Redacted

cc: Marion Dadds and Rex Ambler

Dear Alastair,

#### My Application for Membership

As you are aware there is now a problem with the 'mentoring' process involving Rex Ambler, Marion Dadds and myself, and we seem to have reached something of an impasse. It is time, I think, for me to state the position as I see it and then ask where you and the meeting feel led in the matter.

Area Meeting received a letter of application for membership from me in September 2008 (Minute 5, 13/9/08). Its response included the appointment of Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds as 'guides towards membership'. The word 'mentors' has subsequently also been used.

The three of us met initially four times between October 2008 and May 2009. Then in December 2009 I received Rex and Marion's 'draft report on a process of mentoring'. Despite the many hours that had been spent discussing my spiritual journey in general and my involvement with Brigflatts Meeting in particular, I felt that this draft report needed much clarification and correction.

Responding to my concerns, Rex and Marion agreed to a fifth meeting which took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January this year. We had a difficult but productive meeting during which I made a number of suggestions about how the report might be changed.

The issue which I recall as being the most important to me at the time was that whereas I felt that Rex and Marion were free to state whatever personal opinions they wished about me or my journey, on those occasions where they were purporting to quote my views or feelings they had an obligation to get it right in ways that I could recognise or own. I have, over the course of my professional and private life, gone out of my way to represent other people's views fairly, most especially when I have disagreed with them. I saw no reason not to expect the same consideration for myself.

As a result of this meeting the report was substantially re-written and then presented to me by Rex after meeting for worship on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. At the time Rex made it clear to me that

this was the 'final' report and that there would be no further re-writing or changes made at my behest. I was rather taken aback by this but said little about it, hoping to myself that I would be content with what had been written.

When I came to read the report later that day, and again a couple of days later, I wasn't entirely happy with every word but I felt it was, for the most part, good enough, hugely better than the first draft that I had been given, and a genuine attempt to be fair. There was however one short sentence that seriously concerned me. It was ambiguous and it misrepresented (quite unintentionally, I am quite sure) my feelings about the crucial issue of my actions at Brigflatts.

On Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of February I first telephoned Marion about the matter, then e-mailed both Rex and Marion and finally spoke to Rex. This is the e-mail:-

From:\* "Robert Powell" <robertpowell@cix.co.uk>  
\*To:\* mariondadds@address-redacted, rexambler@address-redacted  
\*CC:\* robertpowell@cix.co.uk  
\*Date:\* Tue, 9 Feb 2010 11:04 +0000 (GMT Standard Time)

Dear Marion and Rex,

It's Tuesday morning. I have just spoken to Marion and failed to get hold of Rex so, as my point is essentially quite simple, here's an eee.

I think your report as a whole is vastly better than the original draft. Much fairer, much more nuanced, very much something that we can share even if I do not own any part of the authorship. There is however one particular point I feel I must take issue with.

In the second paragraph of the third page there is the sentence (in relation to Brigflatts) which I feel is both ambiguous and important: 'He feels that he tried to do the right thing in difficult circumstances and failed'. Do you mean that I failed to do the right thing, or that I failed in what I was trying to do? Since this sentence is about what I am supposed to feel (and not your opinions), then I think I am entitled to ask, especially when the Brigflatts business is historically the root cause of my applying for membership of this meeting and a major cause of concern for Friends at area meeting.

I suggest the alternative wording: 'He feels that he did the right thing in difficult circumstances, but that ultimately his efforts ended in failure'. That would fairly reflect what I actually feel and what I believe I have said to you during the course of our meetings.

In friendship,

Robert

It is fair to say that all three of us found the telephone calls difficult. For some reason both Rex and Marion were initially reluctant to change the wording of the report at all. This despite the fact that both of them agreed with my contention that the sentence in question was



in fact ambiguous. I found this extraordinary then; and I find it extraordinary now. Apart from this shared early reluctance to change the report, the reactions of Rex and Marion then evolved very differently.

Marion was not happy on the phone with me, but agreed to make the change subject to Rex's agreement. She then sent me this e-mail a little while later [I am reluctant to quote the first paragraph of this e-mail. It is however crucial to what follows]:-

From:\* MARION DADDS <mariondadds@address-redacted >  
\*To:\* robertpowell@cix.co.uk  
\*CC:\* rexambler@address-redacted  
\*Date:\* Tue, 9 Feb 2010 14:39:41 +0000 (GMT)

Dear Robert

Thank you for this and I hope you'll accept my apologies for the very uncharacteristic way I responded this morning. I'll mull it over and see if I can explain it to myself but perhaps it can be put down to winter blues for the time being.

I agree with your point about the sentence you've identified. In my bid to represent you as faithfully as possible by drawing on your own words, I failed to see the ambiguity that you so rightly point out. There was no intention to suggest that you failed to do the right thing by your own lights. It was an authorial error on my part.

I don't want to leave it open to the wrong interpretation so will be happy to replace the sentence with your suggestion. I'll contact Rex and sort it out with him. I'll also suggest that we change the bit about 'as a young adult' to read 'in his thirties'.

In Friendship

Marion

I turn now to Rex and his telephone conversation with me on the same day. He said that he was not willing to change the report as I had asked. He did admit however that the sentence in question was ambiguous. He said that it wasn't actually quoting me. I said that it was indirect reported speech and that he was quoting me. He then said that I was being precious. I said something to the effect that calling me names wasn't going to help much. He then went on to question my integrity. At this point I had a strong sense of something evil going on (That is the way I have described it before, and that is how I feel). I asked Rex to confirm that he would not agree to changing the wording of the report, and he did. Rex and I have not communicated about the matter since, apart from my e-mailing him on the 17<sup>th</sup> asking him for a response to my earlier e-mail (above).

Since then I have received an e-mail from Marion with an attached letter from 'Marion on behalf of us both':-

Dear Robert

Thank you for your phone message and for the call on Monday. I'm very sorry it was not a good time for me on Monday and I thank you for your understanding.

Rex and I have had two very lengthy discussions about the position we have reached in respect of our report. Whilst we were of a mind in submitting the final draft and had, indeed, sent it to the clerk, the difficult phone calls we both had with you about it last week have raised concerns for us. Before proceeding any further with the report, therefore, we feel that we should explore these with you within the context of the mentoring process and in a genuine spirit of love and friendship. Rex is asking the clerk to hold back the report for the time being.

We are, thus, inviting you to agree to a further meeting to deal with this difficulty with us, being open, at the same time, to the possibility that there may be further need arising. This does mean that we shall be going back into a process that we all believed had reached some conclusion and we are sorry about that. But we feel that exploring the key concerns thoroughly should take priority over some bureaucratic expedient.

As you know, this is the first time Rex and I have undertaken this kind of spiritual friendship and mentoring and we have been learning through the experience of doing it. There is an obligation on us to be faithful to the request of Area Meeting to undergo this process on their behalf and also to be faithful to you and your needs in your application. We hope that we have found a way, here, to serve both those obligations, having talked at great length about the options available to us.

Once you've responded, I'll go ahead and fix a meeting between us if you are able to agree to our new suggestion.

In friendship

*Marion*

*On behalf of us both*

I understand that Rex has in fact asked you to hold back the report, as per above.

So, where do we go from here?

Throughout my adult life I have striven to find and express truth. If I have quoted people in the course of my work as a writer or broadcaster I have always tried to do so fairly, not just picking out the word that suits my own thesis but in the spirit of what they would themselves have said. When I resigned from Kendal and Sedbergh Meeting, it was for a number of reasons, but the last straw was when I was admonished by several influential Friends for publishing a letter from a prominent attender who had controversial views (That man, whose right to be heard I upheld, is now in membership). On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, when Rex gave me the report, he mentioned that he would not be attending the Area Meeting in March. My immediate and instinctive reaction was to suggest that he present the report in May instead so that he might have the opportunity to speak to the report himself should he so wish. It seemed only fair. In asking Rex and Marion not to misquote me in their report, I am asking no more of them than I have done for them and for others throughout my life. That this request for a

greater truthfulness should be controversial amongst Friends is something I find deeply disappointing.

Since receiving the above letter I have had a lengthy conversation with Marion regarding its contents and implications. Most particularly I asked Marion what it was that she and Rex felt they needed to discuss with me in further meeting(s) before submitting a report.

Apparently their concerns relate to what they both feel is my 'aggression', particularly on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, when I phoned them both, and also in an earlier meeting.

Marion's assertion that I was being 'aggressive' on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of February does not in my view sit well with the first paragraph of her e-mail of later that day. I quote it for the second time in this letter:-

. . . . I hope you'll accept my apologies for the very uncharacteristic way I responded this morning. I'll mull it over and see if I can explain it to myself but perhaps it can be put down to winter blues for the time being.

Marion has tried to explain to me that there is no inconsistency between this and her allegation of 'aggression' on my part, but I am unable to agree with her.

As for Rex, though he has not discussed this matter with me, I can only say that if he has expressed the view that I am 'aggressive' (and I have no reason to doubt Marion's report of this), then I take it very much in the spirit in which he accused me of being 'precious' and then questioned my integrity.

I think that Rex and Marion should both give very careful thought as to the reasons for their collective refusal to change their report in a way that would have made it a little more truthful. I think they also need to consider precisely why it is only now that they find it necessary to raise the issue of my 'aggressiveness'.

I am in my own peculiar way very fond of Rex and Marion. They have both been welcoming and kind to me (and others) on many occasions and in a variety of ways. I think it tragic that we are so out of unity on this matter. However it would be an irony too far if I were to pay for any possible membership of the society, or indeed for their friendship, by compromising on a testimony that Friends are so swift to claim as their own.

I have been a little uneasy about this 'mentoring' process for quite a while. In many ways it has been both useful and enjoyable. But I have to say that in spiritual matters I only really recognise one mentor. It is sometimes given to all of us to guide, mentor, teach, help, uphold each other at different times, in different places and in different ways. But I do rather wonder if 'mentor' is a word that should be used in Quaker circles as a verb only and not as a noun, as is usually the case with 'minister'. Perhaps that is something to think about on another occasion.

In conclusion, I do not intend to continue with this mentoring process. If Rex and Marion feel that they cannot submit a suitable report after five long meetings with me, not to mention all the telephone conversations and e-mails, then so be it.

Friends at Area Meeting must now do with my application as they are led.

I for my part intend to continue in worship at Yealand for as long as I am welcome and able. However, any time that I might have spent this year in further deep and loving contemplation of my navel, will now be spent trying to earn a living, developing our website, visiting friends, working on my tan and trying to repair my friendship with Marion and Rex. And I don't intend to be writing any more epistles like this, which should at least be of some comfort to all concerned, not least yourself.

In friendship,

Robert G.J. Powell

**A report to Lancashire Area Meeting on a process of mentoring with  
Robert Powell**

**INTRODUCTION**

We have met Robert Powell a number of times over the past year, in response to the request from Area Meeting to offer him some 'spiritual friendship' to help with his application for membership (see Minute 5 for 13 September 2008<sup>1</sup>). As was made clear in the Minute and in the letter the clerk sent to Robert to explain it (16 September 2008), and copied to us, the Area Meeting had three difficulties with Robert Powell's application for membership:

- 1 He had been a member before, but then resigned.
- 2 He was (re)applying for membership in an Area Meeting outside the area in which he lives and where he had previously belonged to Friends.
- 3 He was applying so soon after beginning to attend a Meeting in our area (at Yealand) that he was not well known to Friends there.

It was therefore felt that his application could not be dealt with in the normal way. There were issues to be explored here that could not be discussed with the sensitivity and thoroughness required in the context of a single, formal visit. Much of what was said would also have to be guarded by confidentiality. So we, as mentors, were asked to have a series of conversations with Robert to see, and to help him to see, how best to proceed with his application. We were then expected to report to the Area Meeting when we had reached some clarity on the issue and could make a proposal. It was not for us to report formally on the application itself, so that Meeting could then discern whether to accept or reject it. It was only for us to discern, with Robert, whether and how to proceed with the application.

This report is presented in two parts because our view of Robert has changed as a result of recent events. We are, therefore, presenting the report that we wrote before these events in Part One. This report had Robert's approval with the exception of one contentious sentence, a factor which we discuss in Part Two of the report. Part Two reports on difficulties that arose from this point of contention. These events affected our views and, as a result, our recommendation to Area Meeting.

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1 It reads as follows: 'A letter has been received from Robert Powell, of Capplethwaite Flat, Killington, Sedbergh, Cumbria Tel :015396 20482, applying for membership. The Assistant Clerk has read this to the meeting. We are aware that Robert Powell has been in membership before, and that he still lives within the area of a different Area Meeting. Given that his time in Yealand has so far been brief, and Yealand Friends feel that they do not know him well, we decide to ask Marion Dadds [subject to consent] and Rex Ambler to act as his guides towards membership, in this or another Area Meeting. We request the Area Meeting Clerk to contact him and tell him of how we would wish to proceed.'

## **PART ONE**

We have had many deep conversations with Robert about his spiritual quest, his troubles at Brigflatts Meeting, his desire to belong to the Society, and some of the conflicts he feels about Quakers and Christians in general. Our questions to him were often searching and demanding, because we wanted to understand what had really been going on for him in these difficult years, and what he was really thinking and feeling now. Understandably, he did not always find this probing easy and he was not always able to respond directly and simply to the questions we put. But he told many stories of his life from which we were able to discern his answers. We found that he has had a serious and long-term engagement with spirituality, especially in the last twenty years or so, when he has suffered many personal and professional setbacks, and has felt in need of a sound moral and spiritual basis for his life. Robert feels he was a Quaker at heart long before this period and before his formal introduction to Quakers. He spoke of a Quaker school teacher who had a great influence on him as well as ‘an epiphany’ experience way back in his early adulthood which brought him to a sense of worship. This is still with him today. He also feels at one with the Quaker approach, although his sympathy was at first with the Quaker form of worship, and less with the Quaker life outside the Meeting. He can get upset when Friends do not observe their distinctive practices, or when they give inappropriate ministry, if the consequences are hurtful to others. So, while happy with the Quaker way of life, as he perceives it, he can be less happy with the way Quakers actually live! We sense that this tension between beliefs and human actions is one of the factors that led to the conflicts at Brigflatts and his eventual resignation from the Society. On leaving the Society, Robert still felt himself to be a Quaker at heart and didn’t feel he had left the ‘essence of Quakerism’ behind.

After his break with Brigflatts, Robert started attending services at his local Methodist Church since he wanted to continue worshipping with friends and neighbours, which he considers important. Whilst not always in harmony with some Methodist practices and religious beliefs, he continues to attend because of his commitment to local community worship and to some of the good relationships he has established, though as his involvement with Yealand has evolved, so too have his spiritual needs. This experience with his Methodist community has, nevertheless, offered Robert friendship, a place to worship and some spiritual transition after his difficult time at Brigflatts - and continues to do so. He therefore

sees no incongruence between this attachment to his Methodist community and his commitment to the Society.

We raised a number of times the question of his present relationship to Brigflatts Meeting. We have asked specifically if he felt he had reached some resolution about the conflicts that had existed. The answer was, no, and Robert thinks it unlikely that there will be resolution. We also asked whether or not he could see the possibility of reconciliation. He feels that there are things that could help reconciliation though he feels they are 'very very unlikely' to happen.

Robert was, and still is, out of unity with the Brigflatts Meeting. What has happened has happened, in Robert's view. There was little to be gained by going over it again, especially as he has discussed and analysed the case on very many occasions with a variety of friends. We asked him if he saw room for forgiveness here. He replied that forgiveness was a complex issue embedded in experiences of reconciliation, the implication being that, if reconciliation is very unlikely, so, too, is forgiveness. The feelings that had been stirred by that unhappy time were obviously still there with Robert. He feels that he did all he could at the time, though he didn't, and still doesn't, want to 'close the door' on the future.

Difficult as it may be for him to deal with such feelings, and with the challenging behaviour that even Quakers can produce (!), we did not find him arrogant or self-satisfied, though Robert claims that some people do. Whilst Robert gave us the impression of frankness about past mistakes, he also asserted that he regretted little of what he had done and said at Brigflatts. Whilst we gained the impression that he had learned by experience to be much more humble and attentive to others, Robert himself knew he had acted out of love but feels that he is now much more cautious. There were many ways, he felt, that he had been attentive, as an Elder, to the needs of some Friends at Brigflatts, yet this had sometimes been a source of conflict. He feels that he tried to do the right thing in difficult circumstances and failed.<sup>2</sup> Yet he has few regrets. He believes he did the best that he could. Alongside his negative feelings and memories, he has positive views of some Friends and actions from that time. He still has affable relationships with some members when he meets them out and about.

Robert is in the middle of a difficult journey and his desire to share it with Friends, and to learn from them, is sincere and well-grounded. From the outset of our discussions he

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<sup>2</sup> This was the contentious sentence. Its meaning could be taken in two different ways. To resolve this ambiguity we would follow Robert's later phrasing and make it read, 'He feels that he tried to do the right thing in difficult circumstances but that ultimately his efforts to improve things ended in failure.'

has been certain that re-applying for membership is the right thing for him to do. Nothing arising from our conversations has changed him in this. Robert has also shown interest in what is going on at Yealand (which is also our meeting) and has taken part in a number of activities in addition to the Meeting for Worship. He is in fact very engaged in both formal discussion and private conversation. We think Friends at Yealand would be able to speak about him with confidence at Area Meeting, should the occasion ever arise. His relationship with Yealand Meeting has certainly deepened during the course of our spiritual friendship with him.

## **PART TWO**

The experience we have undertaken together has been challenging and not without its difficulties. These have, we believe, been part of the searching process and have been conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and friendship.

We had extensive discussions at a meeting with Robert about our first version of the report and we made several changes in the light of his response to it. We took pains to represent Robert's truth about himself alongside our own and we incorporated additional insights about his thoughts and feelings that this discussion raised. However, a disagreement arose about some particular wording in one sentence to which Robert took exception. This was a direct quote from what he had said in our conversation but it read ambiguously. Whilst we agreed with the point, Robert did, unfortunately, bring this, and other critical comments on our reporting, to our attention in what we both experienced as an aggressive, somewhat hostile and condescending manner.

This mode of challenge then, and in subsequent communication, has revealed aspects of Robert which we had only glimpsed previously, showing attitudes and behaviour which concern us in as much as they seem to be inconsistent with a Quaker way of being. Robert continued to claim that we were deliberately misrepresenting him and has remained adamant in this, a view which, to us, is unsustainable. We invited him to try to resolve this issue with us but he declined, as he said that his trust and confidence in us had broken down. We cannot, therefore, see the process through to the conclusion we had hoped to reach. Robert has a quite different perspective on the issue from ours and, in the absence of an opportunity to explore these differences together with him, we have not been able to find a resolution and unified closure to date. The good relationships we believed we had developed have been severely



tested and, unfortunately, seem to have broken down such that any communication from us to Robert is being met with the same kind of hostility and vehemence with which he responded to the issue of the final report.

Robert will probably put his own perspective to Area Meeting alongside our report. To this end, we are sending him a copy in time for him to make his decisions about this. We do not feel that the report is the place to rehearse the full details of this conflict, as they are complex and numerous but we are willing to share these if and as appropriate.

In the light of these continuing difficulties, we feel, confidently but sadly, that the time is not right for Area Meeting to proceed with the application. We have been saddened and worried by this turn of events and we know that Robert, too, has been badly affected by it. Given Robert's current unwillingness to try to resolve this conflict with us, the way forward is not clear at present. Nevertheless, we hope that the situation is redeemable and that some resolution and unity can be achieved ultimately. We trust that Area Meeting will be guided on how best to proceed.

Signed

Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds

April 2010

A Response from Robert Powell to the Report from Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds, to be  
Given to Area Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010

Area Meeting received a letter of application for membership from me in September 2008 (Minute 5, 13/9/08). Your response included the appointment of Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds as 'guides towards membership'.

The three of us met four times between October 2008 and May 2009. Then in December 2009, over six months after what was supposed to be our final meeting, I received Rex and Marion's 'draft report on a process of mentoring'.

I felt that this draft report needed much clarification and correction. Responding to my concerns, Rex and Marion agreed to a fifth meeting, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January this year.

As a result of this meeting the report was substantially re-written and then presented to me by Rex after meeting for worship on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. I wasn't entirely happy with every word of this second, and apparently final, version of the report, but I felt it was good enough, hugely better than the first draft and a genuine attempt to be fair. There was however one short sentence that concerned me. It was ambiguous and it misrepresented (quite unintentionally I am sure) my feelings about the crucial issue of my actions at Brigflatts.

On Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of February I telephoned both Marion and Rex about the matter, and also e-mailed them. I asked them to change one sentence from 'He feels that he tried to do the right thing in difficult circumstances and failed' to read as 'He feels that he did the right thing in difficult circumstances, but that ultimately his efforts ended in failure'. It was on the face of it a small change, but one that would have better reflected what I actually felt about an important matter and what I believe I had said to them during the course of our meetings.

Marion agreed that what they had written was ambiguous, that it would be right to make the change, and that she would recommend this to Rex.

Though he too admitted that the sentence in question was ambiguous, Rex refused point blank to change it. He went on to say that it wasn't actually quoting me. I said that it was indirect reported speech and that he was indeed quoting me. He then said that I was being 'precious'. I said something to the effect that calling me names wasn't going to help much. He then went on to question my integrity. At this point I had a strong sense of something evil going on (That is the way I have described it before, and that is how I still feel now). In any event, this was more or less the end of the conversation.

A couple of days later I received an e-mail from Marion saying that she and Rex had asked the Clerk to hold back the report they had submitted to him and that they wanted me to have yet further meetings with them. Further correspondence revealed that they were concerned about my 'aggression'.

I felt that if Rex and Marion were unable to submit a factual report, without misquoting me, after five meetings and several telephone conversations and e-mails, then they would probably never be able to. I had been called 'precious'. I had had my integrity called into question. I had been accused of being aggressive. And I had had enough. I declined their offer of further discussions and wrote at length to the Clerk about the matter. (Much of this

Response is taken from that letter to Alastair Thomas. If any Friend wishes to read it, you are most welcome to do so).

There has been quite a to-ing and fro-ing of e-mails over the last few weeks, and now at last you have heard Rex and Marion's report to you. There are two things in their report that I particularly wish to draw to your attention to.

Firstly there is the matter of the footnote at the bottom of page three: “. . . . To resolve this ambiguity we would follow Robert's later phrasing . . . .”. You might imagine reading this, or hearing it, that Rex and Marion had offered to change the wording of their report as I had asked. However, this footnote has only appeared now, in this, the final version of their report. It is the very first indication ever that they would both be willing to remove the misquote I was objecting to in the first place. Considering that all the unpleasantness of the last few weeks had its origins in their persistent refusal to make precisely this change, I find it extraordinary that it should now appear as this footnote.

Secondly, in the third paragraph of part two of Rex and Marion's report, they write “Robert continued to claim that we were deliberately misrepresenting him and has remained adamant in this”. This is an untruth. Right up to the time of my phone call to Rex on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, I believed that Rex and Marion were acting entirely in good faith, and I made this very clear to them on a number of occasions. When they refused to make the change I asked for, I made it very clear that they would be *knowingly* misquoting me because of their refusal to make the necessary edit; that is not quite the same as *deliberately* misquoting me. There is a huge difference of intention, as I made very clear to them on several occasions.

That said, it is now clear to me that since the 9<sup>th</sup> of February Rex, supported by Marion, has been indulging in what I can only call spin. In various communications my requests have been referred to as ‘demands’. My quest for truthfulness has been described as ‘precious’ or ‘pedantic’. My anger (which I believe has been both controlled and fully justified) has been described as ‘aggression’. When my views have been misquoted, I have variously been told that it wasn't a quote at all or that it was just a question of ‘grammar’. When I have protested at being misquoted I have been ‘assuming editorial authority (I) did not have’. In reacting strongly against a persisting untruth, I have apparently revealed ‘maybe an old psychic wound’. And so the smokescreen has billowed forth. The one thing Rex has consistently refused to do is to admit that he made a mistake – except at last, by implication, in the little footnote tucked away at the bottom of page three.

What a horrid waste of time this has all been.

One final point. Throughout my adult life, as a journalist and in politics, at work and in my private life, I have striven for fairness and truthfulness. This is far more important to me than membership of any worldly organisation.

I remain, in friendship,

Robert Powell - 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010

2 Mountain View,  
Sedbergh, Cumbria,  
LA10 5SE  
[robertpowell@cix.co.uk](mailto:robertpowell@cix.co.uk)  
[www.robpowell.co.uk](http://www.robpowell.co.uk)  
Tel: 015396-20482  
Mob: 07971-500825

9/12/10

Alastair Thomas, Clerk,  
Lancashire Central & North Area Quaker Meeting

cc: Hester Willink, Rachel Rogers,  
Roy Stephenson, Overseers at Yealand

Dear Alastair,

### **My Membership Application**

Yesterday a second attempt by Hester Willink, Rachel Rogers and myself to meet up for my 'visit' was again thwarted by the weather. Both ladies phoned me to explain the situation, which of course was entirely beyond the control of any of us.

In the course of our conversation, Rachel mentioned that we might need to meet more than once. This entirely reasonable comment had the effect upon me of raising various ghosts, so sensitive am I now to the time and effort that has gone into this membership business, and the upset it has caused. I have come to feel like a latter day Sisyphus endlessly rolling his stone uphill, not as punishment for offending the gods, but because he questioned an over-sensitive man's grammar. Much as I am looking forward to meeting Hester and Rachel, these are not the circumstances I would have chosen.

This weather-induced delay has however given me the opportunity to consider something that has clearly been on my mind, but which I have suppressed, for some time: the circumstances in which this visit has been arranged.

Neither Hester nor Rachel have ever read the report that Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds presented to Area Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, or my response to it. Furthermore they do not wish to read these documents or, if at all possible, discuss their contents with me. This has bothered me ever since Hester first contacted me to set up our meeting and its parameters. Whilst I can appreciate how Hester and Rachel feel about this, it strikes me as being really rather optimistic to imagine that they can enquire into, and discuss, my spiritual life, or my feelings about the Society, without going into what has happened to me at Yealand and in the Area over the last two and half years. They, and other Friends in the Meeting, really do need to have a clear understanding of what has happened; I fail to see how they, or anybody else, can come to any sort of meaningful judgement about the rightness or wrongness of my

application without giving any consideration to of one of the most important and formative incidents in my time as a worshipper at Yealand.

The very clear idea coming from you, from Roy Stephenson, and now from Hester and Rachel, is that I must leave behind me the unpleasantness of what happened with Rex and Marion, and at Area Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, and move on. I am afraid that I cannot do this. I am being offered what I consider to be a fudge, not a resolution. This is the classic situation of Quakers avoiding conflict rather than creating peace.

I cannot move on, because there remains on record, an attachment to Area Meeting minutes of the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, and given wide distribution to local meetings and members, a report from Rex and Marion that I regard as deeply dishonest and a slur on me.

It is time that this Area Meeting applied the principles of Truth and Justice, that it so vociferously proclaims to the world, to the management of its own affairs, and deleted that attachment from its records. Only then will I truly be able to trust the meeting and move on as you wish me to do.

I have received much help and support from particular individuals. However, in dealing with my application for membership, Area Meeting as a body has so far behaved more like a gentlemen's club in London than either a Quaker meeting or a registered charity. I have effectively been blackballed for several months because my request for truthfulness offended the cosy self image of two members who had a sort of power over me and an influence with the membership. It is the Achilles heel of The Society that many members find it impossible to imagine any wrongdoing by their own, and would rather hold to a convenient belief in the wrongness of others.

There are some interesting ideas about membership to be found both in Quaker Faith and Practice and in the advice on membership matters given by the Charity Commission. For example (and there is much else):-

- “Our membership . . . is never based upon worthiness . . . .” – F&P 11.02

Somebody should have explained this to Rex and Marion before our first four meetings. (The fifth meeting was all about me trying to convince them that you couldn't just go round mis-quoting people; I declined to attend a sixth or further meeting after that, as you know).

- “. . . no one should hesitate , from a sense of unworthiness, to apply for membership . . . .” – F&P 11.42

And this worries me more than almost anything else. Over the last two years or so, I have often enquired of attenders at Yealand, and elsewhere in the area meeting, if they have ever thought of joining the society. I have always received one or both of two particular answers. Firstly that they didn't see the point, given that they could be fully involved in the meeting anyway. Secondly that they did not feel 'good enough'. I almost literally weep when I hear this latter response. But can you blame them when you have established members fluffing themselves up insistently offering mentorship, guidance and so forth. Of course it makes attenders feel inadequate. People often gravitate towards Quaker meetings when they are feeling low or vulnerable, and some Friends exploit this, very possibly unconsciously, to satisfy their own emotional needs. The treatment meted out to me has been extreme, to say

the least. Fortunately I have been given the strength, largely through the support of Friends and attenders, to deal with it. However my experience has undoubtedly been off-putting to some others who might have been tempted to apply for membership.

- “Powers to exclude from membership . . . . must . . . satisfy the rules of natural justice.” – Charity Commission, RS7 – p.34.

Decisions about membership are made behind closed doors, with the applicant unable to hear, or reply to, many of the accusations made against him or her. This is not natural justice. It is a licence to gossip. Even the magistrates who tried Fox normally allowed him to see his accusers, hear what they had to say and respond to it.

Much good has come out of all this unpleasantness. Had I not been abused by two people who were supposed to be helping me, I would not have been so aware of the love and support of other Friends and attenders at Yealand. Nor would my ideas about the nature and importance (or otherwise) of membership be as developed as they now are.

However, difficult though it may be, Friends at Area Meeting need to revisit the report submitted by Rex Ambler and Marion Dadds on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May and remove it from the records, at Area Meeting and in the Local Meetings. Not to do so would be to oppose natural justice, compound the abuse that I have already suffered and stand as a warning to anyone else so foolish as to apply for membership under the present system.

Yours in friendship,

Robert G.J. Powell