

Five Generations of Quaker Seebohms: 1790-1990  
by Richard Seebohm

*Edited and updated version of a talk to the Hitchin Historical Society on 24 February 1994*

I start with the arrival in Pymont, North Germany, during the year 1790 of a group of Quakers travelling in the ministry. They “convinced” (converted to Quakerism) my great great great grandfather Ludwig Seebohm and two of his brothers, Friedrich and Diedrich. As I will go on to explain, Ludwig’s son Benjamin came to England in 1814, and I shall describe the family history through the following three generations, ending with the death in 1990 of my father, Frederic Seebohm, Lord Seebohm as he became. At least I said that I would end there when I was first invited to give this talk. Sadly, I must update the story with the death of his twin brother George in September 1993.

William Ransom, whose lavender distillery still functions close to the centre of Hitchin, once wrote in his diary, “I wish to please my neighbours, but feel nervous about the lecture I consented to give. Perhaps there is some pride connected with my acquiescence.” That is rather how I feel, but I am encouraged by a quotation from Oliver Wendell Holmes which reads, “We are all the vehicles in which our ancestors ride.” I hope you will agree that the ancestors in question deserve their ride today.

The Society of Friends, otherwise known as Quakers, form such an important element of my story that I must give you a bit of background to them. In 1647, during the ferment of the civil war, George Fox “heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Jesus Christ that can speak to thy condition’ and his heart did leap for joy.” This is a far more revolutionary statement than at first it sounds. Although George Fox and those he convinced – he began seriously to collect adherents from 1652 – were steeped in the Bible, it meant that religion was a matter of experience rather than teaching. If Jesus spoke to you directly, there was no need for a hierarchy of paid priests, nor a formal creed. Friends recognised the priesthood of all believers. If all life was treated as sacramental, there was no call for outward sacraments or consecrated buildings. If the faithful met to worship in silence, the Lord would move men or women among those present to stand up and say what needed to be said. If, as in the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James, your yea be yea and your nay, nay, it must be wrong to swear oaths. And Friends, who liked to speak truth to power, said to King Charles II, ‘We utterly deny all wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever.’ Furthermore, Friends should ‘walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one’. This universality made future generations of Friends concerned to counteract poverty and oppression wherever they found it.

These beliefs manifested themselves in practices such as a refusal to pay tithes or to recognise social conventions, which in turn led to persecution both under the Commonwealth and the Restoration. This did not stop the spread of Quakerism. Converts were made all over this country, and emigrants carried it to America. George Fox himself went there, and William Penn set up a Quaker colony called Pennsylvania. In case you wondered, this wasn’t named after him but after his father, an admiral, at the insistence of Charles II. You may find this the more ironic in that William Penn began the American practice of giving streets numbers rather than names so that one would not be more prestigious than another.

Things had changed by the late eighteenth century when my story proper begins. Quakers were tolerated under the terms of an Act of 1689 and allowed to affirm instead of swear oaths by an Act of 1722. The organisational structure set up by George Fox had become institutionalised as a Yearly Meeting for the whole country, some half dozen Quarterly Meetings

representing regions, Monthly Meetings corresponding roughly to counties, and Preparative or Particular Meetings where Friends met for worship on Sundays – or rather, on First-days, as pagan names were not to be recognised. Yearly Meeting had (and has) a standing committee to handle current business called Meeting for Sufferings – because in the early days persecution came first on its agenda. There were no individual positions of authority, although elders were appointed who collectively maintained spiritual discipline and overseers looked after pastoral matters. Business meetings were presided over by a Clerk, but the duty of the Clerk was to discern the leadings of the Spirit in the matter to be decided and not to steer the proceedings. Finding the will of God was (and is) incompatible with taking decisions by vote.

Insisting on their traditional testimonies and on an ostentatiously plain mode of dress and speech, and disapproving of frivolities such as art, music and the theatre, Friends were no longer attracting new convincements. In fact, the Society was steadily losing numbers without realising it, on account of disownments for engaging in military service, for defaulting on debts, for paying tithes, for sexual and other vices, for habitual absence from Meeting, and above all for marrying before a “hireling priest”. This in effect lost to the Society anyone who married a non-member.

Spoken ministry in Meetings was becoming rare, for fear that what one had in mind was not truly inspired. Those who were recognised as having something to say, however, were recorded by their Monthly Meetings as Ministers and encouraged to visit Meetings other than their own, both to give encouragement and to maintain the continuity of the Quaker faith. It became the practice for Quarterly Meetings to provide Ministers with certificates endorsing their concern to visit certain destinations. The receiving Monthly Meeting would then decide whether or not to accept the certificate, and if it did so, the local Friends would make themselves responsible for the keep of the travelling Minister. For travel overseas, the Yearly Meetings would provide and receive certificates.

I had to explain all this to account for the party which found itself in Germany in 1790. It consisted of an American recorded Minister George Dillwyn and his wife Sarah, an English Minister Sarah Grubb and her Irish husband Robert, and a fellow-Irishman, Joshua Beale. Sarah Grubb was the daughter of William Tuke of York who founded The Retreat, the first hospital for mental patients that attempted to cure and care for them as individuals. The noted American Friend John Woolman (who first led Friends to see the unacceptability of slavery) visited York in 1772. When he fell ill with smallpox and died, it was Sarah aged 16 and her mother who nursed him. She herself died some 6 weeks after getting back from the trip to Germany, aged 35.

One of the reasons for making North Germany a target was that the local princes had sent their armies to support the British in the American War of Independence – they were hired by George III who was of course Elector of Hanover. American Quakers had had these troops billeted on them and taken a view of their spiritual state. The area had remained Protestant after the Thirty Years War, but there was widespread dissatisfaction with the rather rigid and unspiritual Lutheran church. It so happened that three brothers, Ludwig, Friedrich and Diedrich Seeböhm at Pymont were the leaders of a group of some 20 persons who “were in the practice of meeting together at one another's' houses to read, sing, or pray, as and when they apprehended most right.” The visiting Quakers stayed some 5 weeks, perhaps partly influenced by the fact that in Ludwig they found a fluent English speaker – he had visited England several times and lived there for a time as a trader, probably making the acquaintance of Quakers. He had been expelled from the town of Rinteln for his religious views. Another receptive group was in the nearby town of Minden, where the visitors were welcomed by an

official of the Prussian State called Friedrich von Borries whose daughter Juliane was married to Ludwig Seeböhm. He was sympathetic but never himself became a Friend.

The Pymont group thereafter considered themselves Quakers, and behaved in the somewhat provocative way of their English counterparts. They were found working on the feast of the Epiphany, "without even arranging it with the authorities" – a very German reaction – since they regarded all days as equally holy. A policeman was sent to force Ludwig to have his first child baptised, but his wife grabbed the baby from the wet nurse and said, "Who wants to tear this child from the arms of her mother?" and he went away abashed. By early 1791 they had prevailed on the local Prince Friedrich of Waldeck, who saw them as enterprising citizens, to pass a Toleration Act which recognised and protected them. The Prince allocated them a tract of woodland some two miles outside the town called Friedensthal or Peacedale and helped them build themselves houses there. Another visiting American Friend, John Pemberton, encouraged them to apply to be linked to London Yearly Meeting. He then died, being aged 67, and this prompted the Quaker group to obtain from the Prince a burial ground in the main town of Pymont but well away from the church graveyard. More American visitors followed, and Ludwig Seeböhm travelled round Germany with some of them as interpreter.

Then in 1796 George Dillwyn came back and on his return to England organised the financing of a series of businesses to support the Pymont group. The first one, the spinning and weaving of linen, involved the sale of the products through Friends in Philadelphia. The Napoleonic wars disrupted both this export trade and the internal economy of Germany, and the business had to close after 7 years. In any case, the quality was apparently inadequate and the price too high for the American market. This was followed by a knife factory, which struggled on until 1817, a paper mill, which seems to have made an unsaleable sort of paper, and a printing press which failed because the Quakers would only allow it to print improving literature. They depended to a large extent on agriculture.

The English and American Friends continued to send financial support, quite a problem in wartime.

Another concern of the newly independent Quakers at Pymont was the education of their young. Ludwig (a dynamo of a man as one of his descendants calls him) was the initial teacher. He asked for £100 to attach a schoolroom to his brother Friedrich's house and money for a salary. The English Friends were content to pay the salary (though it came to an end in 1804), but they suddenly became enthusiastic about building a Meeting House for the Quakers in the spa town of Pymont next to the graveyard they already had. The money for the schoolroom (tacked on to Friedrich's house) had to be extracted as an afterthought.

The Meeting House was well designed and soundly built, and when it opened in 1800 some 1,000 people turned up to see it. It achieved its object of attracting the spa visitors, but they (including Goethe in 1801) looked on it and the Quakers worshipping within as a spectacle rather than as an invitation to religious renewal.

Through the first decade of the 1800s, Ludwig's family grew. It seems that he ran up trading debts when the Napoleonic blockade brought commerce to a standstill which he did not shake off until near the end of his life, in spite of well-paid employment under the Prince as manager of the Spa. It seems that his fellow Quakers disapproved of his extravagance, and he and his family gave up attending Meeting for Worship. The last visit by travelling Americans was in 1799, after which the Napoleonic wars made travel impossible. The wars were serious for North Germany. There is an account of French troops passing through Friedensthal in 1807 and ransacking the Seeböhm house for every scrap of food including the half cooked joint on

the stove, while Ludwig's wife Juliane and her children hid in the attic, Ludwig himself being away at work in Pyrmont. However he was able to get an apology from the French officers and protection for the future when he found out what had happened – which suggests a high degree of political influence. Juliane died later that year, and Ludwig for a time moved into Pyrmont, becoming further estranged from his brothers and the Friedensthal community.

We can now get to know Ludwig's fifth child (and third son) Benjamin, born in 1798. Because of an accident at the age of 4 he was lame – his own children's earliest memory was the sound of his stick. He was studious rather than athletic, and after the family moved back into the town he was well taught by going to tutors for individual subjects, each of whom had classes of a few boys. He learnt Hebrew from a Rabbi as well as English and French. The bombshell in his life came in January 1814 when he was 16 and the first of the travelling Friends was able to get back into Germany. This was Stephen Grellet, born in France and converted to Quakerism in America. Benjamin in later life edited and published his diaries. Ludwig was ill, so Benjamin was pushed into being his interpreter. To prepare himself, in his surprise that it should be worth while for such a person to concern himself with the few Friedensthal Friends, he went to see his Uncle Diedrich who explained to him for the first time the basic principles of Quakerism. Benjamin's own faith and conviction were instilled indelibly by his experience of Stephen Grellet's ministry and house visits at Pyrmont and at Minden.

He was thus well prepared when later in 1814 there arrived Elizabeth Coggeshall of New York, Sarah Hustler of Bradford, these two being Ministers, Sarah Hustler's brother John (a prosperous wool merchant), Joseph Marriage of Chelmsford and John Capper jnr of London. Ludwig was still unwell, and this time Benjamin was called on to interpret in front of the fashionables of Pyrmont, it being high season for the spa. He got on so well that he was prevailed upon to travel on with the group up the Rhine, into Switzerland, through the South of France and up to Calais. He took some pride in his prowess as a German in interpreting for the English Quakers to a French audience.

Now Benjamin, still only 16, had lost his mother some 7 years before, and Sarah Hustler, who was unmarried, obviously felt a very maternal affection for him. She got permission from his family to take him home with her to England. The Hustlers became second parents to him. Apart from anything else they made sure that he met everyone who was anyone in the Quaker movement. On the way through London for the first time he met Elizabeth Fry, who had just begun to visit prisons at the instigation of – guess who – Stephen Grellet.

Once back home in Bradford, the Hustlers had young Benjamin apprenticed alongside their nephew of the same age in the wool trade. He kept in close correspondence with his father, Ludwig, who asked almost at once for samples of cutlery so that the Friedensthal knife works could make things in the fashionable English style. Ludwig in 1814 urged Benjamin (in English) to avoid the weaknesses of his poor father, but the weaknesses must have persisted, since in 1819 he reproaches his son for not fixing him a £100 loan. His letters suggest that he caused some consternation to his existing children by remarrying in 1815. Benjamin and the Hustlers successfully dissuaded him from emigrating to England. Little information has survived about his young wife Henriette Eisel and the 4 children they had, except that she became a Quaker in 1837 and lived until 1870. Ludwig himself was reconciled to Friends in 1833 and in fact spoke at the London Yearly Meeting in that year. He died in 1835 aged 78.

Benjamin got going in the wool trade, and two of his brothers set up in Hamburg and in Friedensthal itself as sources of supply. Benjamin went back to Germany from time to time. In his account of a trip in 1819 he is fairly scathing about the lack of spirituality in Quaker observances; his own faith was becoming more deep seated, and in 1821 he first spoke in

Meeting. In 1823 aged 25 he was recorded as a Minister and from the following year he made repeated journeys to other Meetings. Under Sarah Hustler's tutelage he was closely integrated into local and national Quaker society. It so happened that the Wheelers of Cranfield and Hitchin had links with some of the Bradford families, and Joshua Wheeler was a trader in wool. Benjamin met and married his daughter Esther in 1831, giving the Seebohm family its first proper link with Hitchin. Esther's mother was born Elizabeth Tuke, younger sister of Sarah Grubb who had converted Ludwig in 1790. Esther was recorded as a Minister too, though as mother of a family she travelled much less than Benjamin.

From 1836 the Seebohm family lived at Horton Grange on the outskirts of Bradford. There were 6 children, two of whom died in infancy. Henry and Frederic were close to each other in age and in spirit, though their later lives followed very different paths. They took from Benjamin and from John Hustler a keen interest in nature. Benjamin was also an enthusiastic amateur mechanic. They went to the Quaker boarding school Bootham in York. The third surviving child Benjamin was six years younger than Frederic and also went to Bootham. Julia, 2 years younger still, went to the girls school in York which later became The Mount.

The Quakers from the earliest days set up schools for their young, since as dissenters they could not use grammar schools. The Tuke family played a prominent part in establishing the Quaker boarding schools in the North of England. Another initiative which involved the Seebohm family was the setting up in 1832 of the Friends Provident Institution. A master at one of the Friends' schools, Ackworth, died in 1828 leaving a wife and baby with no means of support. The local Friends were content to contribute to their upkeep, but they took steps to provide against such an eventuality in the future by offering life assurance. John Hustler acted as Treasurer, a local Bradford conveyancer (he would now be a solicitor) called Henry Ecroyd acted as secretary, and Benjamin Seebohm was one of the directors, trustees and founding guarantors. The Institution was able to offer good terms, since an actuarial analysis showed that Quakers were good life risks.

Benjamin does not seem to have lacked commercial acumen, though the Hustler and Seebohm business was embarrassed for a time by the debts of John Hustler's own son, described as extravagant and easily misled, who died in 1849 aged 33. However, Benjamin's life came to be dominated more and more by his mission (or in Quaker terms, concern) to travel in the Ministry. From 1836 or so, I reckon from the correspondence that he spent some half his days away from home. Esther sometimes came with him, but her letters show the burden this placed upon her. The Chartists burnt the Seebohms' haystacks along with everyone else's. She wrote to her husband in 1836: "The garden was robbed last night of cabbages and potatoes, and as if the people wanted to do us all the mischief they could, they took away the rail, and let the whole herd of cows in, who, after tramping in all directions, were found reposing near the house this morning. They have done more harm than the thieves. But I expect thou wilt go on as if nothing had happened!"

In the next year, 1837, she writes of "a very remarkable time in the commercial world...involving very serious losses of property." Then in 1840, "Heard this morning that a few poor deluded and perhaps starving creatures attempted to set fire to the savings bank, but the military, previously acquainted with their designs, defeated their purpose." In 1842 she wrote to her cousin, "...we were surprised to hear on First-day of the mob moving towards Bradford. There were very inflammatory placards in the town; and large meetings on the moor. Another early yesterday morning, after which it was thought about twenty thousand sallied forth to meet them in the direction of Halifax where they had been followed by the magistrates and a few soldiers. In the evening they approached, separating themselves into companies, and going in different directions, stopping the mills &c. A party of them came to our house and asked for bread.

Benjamin gave them a few loaves, telling them it was all he had for them at present, and they went quietly away, saying to one another, 'It's all they have.' They have sticks, but offer no violence. Poor creatures! they are much to be pitied. They have been lowering the wages in some instances at Manchester &c. It is thought that the movement has originated in the anti-Corn Law league, not the body of the Chartists; but really things are in a fearful state." The Seebomh boys, who saw at first hand the handloom weavers becoming destitute as the factories undercut them, described how on that occasion, "when loaves of bread were thrown to them out of the kitchen window, so eager were they in their hunger to grasp them that they were literally torn to pieces, and the very crumbs scraped up from the ground. The term "hungry forties" was for real; William Ransom in 1846 tells us of barns burnt in Hitchin too. Quaker sympathies were not, of course, aligned with the protection of traditional class privileges.

Benjamin's Christian faith was firmly evangelical. The quietism of eighteenth century Quakerism had not been immune to the Methodist revival and to a switch in emphasis from the inner light to a conversion experience based on the Gospel message from the Bible. Benjamin's touchstone was the atonement – the doctrine that believers are saved from the consequences of sin by the sacrifice of Christ's death on the cross. In England this revival of missionary zeal prompted many Quakers to leave the Society for the even greater certainty of the conventional pastor-led non-conformist churches. In America, however, a man called Elias Hicks was advocating a quietist, almost Unitarian approach, and between 1827 and 1828 the Society of Friends was split from top to bottom between Hicksites and the evangelically orthodox. They were not reunited until 1955, though London Yearly Meeting acknowledged both branches from 1908. Another acrimonious split, again of a group (called Wilburites) who could not go the whole evangelical hog, took place in 1837. (This was perhaps goaded by the fundamentalist preaching of an English visitor, Joseph John Gurney – Elizabeth Fry's brother.)

It was in this atmosphere that Benjamin became convinced that he should go to America, and with the consent of London Yearly Meeting he spent five years there, from 1846 to 1851, with a companion, Robert Lindsey (who later travelled similarly in Australia).

Before he went he took his family to a niece's wedding at Bad Pyrmont. Frederic aged 13 kept a journal notable mainly for his account of all 14 courses of their first meal abroad (at Ostend) and for the charming engravings on his writing pad. Bad Pyrmont is recognisably the same today.

Benjamin was powerfully affected by the slavery issue. Britain had banned the owning of slaves in its colonies in 1833, but the American Civil War was still a few years away. He describes slave auctions and conversations with the proprietors of 'slave jails'. In some States it was a criminal offence to teach a slave to read. The Quakers had for some time disowned any among their number who still owned slaves, but problems remained. Friends who bought slaves in order to free them were sometimes found legally liable for claims by the heirs of vendors. It was hard to decide how far to go in refusing to buy products arising from slave labour. It was hard also for Benjamin to find that Philadelphia Friends would not accept his mission to visit them in their homes, although he was warmly welcomed elsewhere – he convinced Sybil Jones who with her husband Eli founded the two Quaker schools in the Lebanon which to this day provide an oasis of non-violence. He regarded the Hicksites as infidels but describes many conversations with them. In some places the Meeting Houses themselves were divided down the middle and the two sects could hear each other's ministry. He saw many frontier communities and was impressed by the prosperity they were able to attain. He was somewhat baffled by the Shakers, with families living in celibacy once they had joined but seemingly not troubled by sexual tension.

The fact remains that Esther had a particularly hard time during the American trip. In 1848 she found herself almost without income. She seems to have run one of the York Friends schools for a time. Horton Grange had to be let, and in 1851 was on the verge of being sold, and the Seebohms did not go back for long. However, Benjamin and Esther's circumstances gradually improved. They sold property (though some in Bradford seems to have been inherited by the younger Benjamin), and Benjamin gained some income from his lives of Stephen Grellet and William Forster (father of W E Forster who introduced the 1870 Education Act), and from editing the *Annual Monitor*, a kind of Quaker *Who was Who*. They moved in 1861 from Bradford to Luton, where young Benjamin lived.

There are many accounts of Benjamin's compelling quality (and vocal range) as a Minister. John Greenleaf Whittier (who wrote the hymn 'Dear Lord and father of Mankind') said: "I never heard any ministry characterised by so much power and unction as that of Benjamin Seebohm. There was a depth of thought in it that appealed especially to cultivated men." (The word unction here means a sympathetic quality in speech due to deep emotion – it acquired implications of insincerity later. And you mustn't judge the quotation by today's standards of the politically correct!) One particular point I would like to stress as a Quaker phenomenon is that although he preached salvation and grieved at the consequences of sin, he never tried to instil in his listeners a feeling of guilt or fear of hellfire.

We can now turn our attention to Benjamin's four children, although you must still wait a bit longer before we reach Hitchin in earnest. Henry left school in 1848 aged 16, where he had been a keen naturalist. He seems to have been apprenticed in the grocery trade with a relative of his mother – the Robson family – at Saffron Walden. Through most of the 1850s, however, he seems to have moved between occupations in a state of continued depression and inertia, and the correspondence of other members of the family is full of an almost patronising concern for him. In 1854 his father helps him to take out a patent for a machine to comb wool, but it does not seem to have been worked. He even considers a fishing venture off the west coast of Ireland.

This is not so far fetched as it sounds, since his mother's sister Mary was married to James Ellis who had made a fortune in Bradford first by milling and malting – until he reckoned that the alcohol which was the end product was harmful – and then in wool. Seeing the consequences of the Irish potato famine, the Ellises did not content themselves with giving current relief, though many Friends did that, and saved a lot of lives thereby. They bought an estate of some 1,000 acres at Letterfrack in Connemara in 1849 and ran it so as both to improve the land and to provide 80 jobs. They upset their neighbouring landowners by paying their workers 8d a day instead of the going rate of 6d. The Seebohms made many visits to Letterfrack. The Ellises had to sell up in 1857 because of ill health. After passing through the hands of Protestant and Catholic institutions, the property without much of its land is now a recreational centre for the local community.

Henry surfaces, as it were, in 1859. He seems to have learnt something about steelmaking from a distant Quaker relative called Daniel Doncaster in Sheffield some time after 1855, but we hear of him "not being in employment" and even of him trying to write a novel – his family did not approve – but in 1859 Henry married a Yorkshire girl who must, I think, have been wealthy, called Maria Healey. He did this in a church in Manchester, so she will not have been a Quaker, and the witnesses are not members of either family. By 1865 Henry has a Sheffield tool steel business in partnership with one Henry Dieckstahl with 18 crucible steel melting holes. Business started slowly, and after 2 years Dieckstahl went overseas to collect monies owed as

a preliminary to winding up. He came back with so many orders that they never looked back, soon installing 48 crucibles.

Henry was an iconoclastic business man, giving a paper to the local philosophical society in 1869 which revealed his costs and how to distinguish between different grades of steel, and to the Iron and Steel Institute in 1884 describing his technology without reserve. His competitors were not pleased. He became chairman or a director of a number of other firms on what seems to have been a company doctor basis. All this time, however, he was becoming more and more interested in ornithology. In 1875 and 1877 he undertook two expeditions to Siberia which he wrote up as a two volume book, *The Birds of Siberia*, which is still a good read today – not only is it still quoted, but it was reprinted as a two volume paperback in 1986. I cannot resist reading you Henry's comment on the sea captain who was meant to be taking him up the Yenesi river, with his ship terminally grounded and his crew mutinous, "With all his faults, Captain Wiggins is an Englishman to the backbone, possessing the two qualities by which an Englishman may almost always be recognised, the two features of the national character which are constantly showing themselves in English private, social and commercial life, and most of all in English political and military life. One of these is an unlimited capacity to commit blunders, and the other is unlimited pluck and energy in surmounting them when made."

Henry left Sheffield and active steelmaking in 1883. He travelled and wrote about birds and became an Honorary Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, but the Royal Society eluded him, it seems because one of its Vice Presidents, Sir Alfred Newton, was Cambridge Professor of Zoology and implacably opposed to Henry's practical but amateur approach to bird nomenclature. Henry wanted familiar names preserved and not reshuffled with each new genetic hypothesis.

Henry was no Quaker in later life; he became a Freemason, revealing some of its secrets to the Sheffield Philosophical Society. His firm got itself out of difficulties by selling steel for bayonets. But he and his wife were not cut off from the rest of the Seebohm family. Indeed, his son Ted was a frequent visitor to Hitchin, described as "very theatrical". Tragically, Ted shot himself in New York in 1888 at the age of 23. We can only speculate why. Henry and Maria had two other children who died young. When Henry died in 1895 his brother Frederic insisted on burying him in the Hitchin Quaker graveyard.

Frederic was a banker, an economic historian and a benefactor of Hitchin. Although his capability and motivation were never in doubt, his start in life had parallels with Henry's. In 1849 when he was 16 he joined a grocery business in Huddersfield belonging to the same Robson family that had employed Henry. He found that the hours and the manual work left him too tired to carry on with the studying which he saw it as natural to pursue – Oxford and Cambridge universities were of course still closed to non-members of the Church of England. He toyed with the idea of the iron trade in Bradford and then got work in the office of Henry Ecroyd who ran the Friends Provident Institution; I suspect he was introduced to conveyancing as well as life assurance. He then decided to read for the Bar in the chambers of John Bevan Braithwaite, who gave a number of Quakers a start in that profession. With a Hitchin connection through his mother, Frederic took the unusual step for those early railway days of living in lodgings in Hitchin and commuting to London. To earn money, he worked for a time at the bank in Hitchin – to which I shall return in a moment – and we have a very grudging letter dated January 1855 from his kinsman James Hack Tuke (who was a partner) insisting that the appointment was only offered while he was a student and that although future employment was conceivable, his prospects of advancement might not be good.

Frederic was called to the Bar in 1856 and became engaged in that year at Hitchin to Mary Ann Exton. Her father William Exton was one of the founding partners of the bank, and had died in 1851. Her mother was Mary Ransom, a Hitchin name to which I shall return. Mary Ann's elder sister Margaret got engaged at about the same time to Joseph Gurney Barclay, a partner in Barclay & Co, which acted as London correspondent for a string of country Quaker banks and formed the nucleus of the Barclays Bank of today. Both couples married in 1857. I fancy that much of the Exton capital went with Margaret while the property went with Mary Ann. This consisted in particular of The Hermitage in Bancroft where the widowed Mary Exton lived with her daughter and son-in-law until she died in 1860. Mary Ann has been called the jewel of Hitchin and so she seemed, in more than one sense, though I have found a letter from Joseph Barclay's sister which describes his future wife Margaret as 'not pretty but very pleasing'.

It was made clear by the Exton clan that there was no question of Frederic and Mary Ann settling in Bradford, where he could have pursued what was now his first choice of career, actuary at the Friends Provident Institution. Accordingly, he found himself junior partner in the Hitchin bank, and in fact never looked back.

I shall tell its story as briefly as I can. In the early nineteenth century, there were few rules of banking. Anyone could set up a bank and issue bank notes as long as there were no more than six partners. The Quakers did well as bankers, partly because their religion made it unthinkable that they would default on debts. (Similarly, Quaker grocers were trusted not to adulterate their wares.) Accordingly, Bassett, Grant & Co was set up at Leighton Buzzard in 1812 by partners Peter Bassett, John Grant, John Dollin Bassett (aged 27) William Exton (then also aged 27) and Joseph Sharples (who was 22). Now the Sharples family completes the genealogical network I want to draw to your attention. He and William Exton married sisters, Elizabeth and Mary Ransom. Furthermore, Joseph Sharples's grandfather Isaac had married his wife's great aunt, another Mary Ransom. As a tailpiece, Joseph Sharples's sister Phebe married a Hitchin man called Travel Fuller – not mentioned by Hine, perhaps someone can tell me about him and his intriguing name – and the younger John Hustler who was in partnership with Benjamin Seebom married their daughter Phebe. Is all that clear?

Now, in 1820 the three younger partners in the Leighton Buzzard bank set up a branch in Hitchin which they called Sharples and Bassett's Hertfordshire Hitchin Bank. In 1827 the Hitchin Bank went independent as Sharples and Exton, Mr Bassett going back to Leighton Buzzard. It had branches at Ampthill (an agency in the hands of two local shopkeepers) and at Luton, which was then a village with a population under 3,000.

I must now introduce the Lucas family. Although important players on the Hitchin Quaker scene, they seem to have escaped marital or kinship links with the families I have been discussing until one of the Ransom descendants married a Lucas girl in 1891. Joseph and William Lucas were brothers running a brewing business in the early nineteenth century. In 1836, Joseph's son Jeffery became a partner in the bank and its name became Sharples Exton and Lucas. In 1852 Jeffery's brother Edward joined, and managed the Luton branch.

In the same year James Hack Tuke also arrived on the scene. He was the grandson of Henry Tuke, whose sister Elizabeth married Joshua Wheeler and was the mother of Esther, Benjamin Seebom's wife. James Hack Tuke had married an heiress, Elizabeth Janson, and I think he must have brought a good deal of capital with him to invest in the bank. That was 1852. In 1855 Jeffery Lucas died. In the next year, 1856, Francis Lucas, son of William, joined as a partner, and the bank became Sharples, Tuke, Lucas and Lucas. (Francis Lucas is lovingly described in Hine's *Hitchin Worthies*, but he left the Society of Friends in 1869.) In 1858 the Unity Bank at Hertford failed, and Francis set up a branch there, beginning with a stall in the

Corn Exchange. Then in 1859 Frederic Seebohm was admitted as a partner, presumably on the strength of the Exton family capital, so that it became Sharples, Tuke, Lucas and Seebohm.

I'll race quickly through the rest of the bank's development. Edward Lucas retired in 1871. William Tindall Lucas, son of Francis, joined in 1876. Samuel Tuke, son of James Hack Tuke, became a partner in 1880 but retired in 1886. In 1891 Hugh Exton Seebohm, Frederic's son, joined. James Hack Tuke retired in 1895, and died in the following year. In that year, 1896, some 20 country banks, nearly all with Quaker partners, merged to form a joint stock company called Barclay & Co Ltd. It had become clear that local partnerships, now limited to 10 members, could not command the capital resources needed to compete with existing joint stock banks. Frederic Seebohm became a director of the new bank. He and the remaining Hitchin partners plus Frederic's younger brother Benjamin became members of the Hitchin local board. I gather that there was some ill feeling in the Tuke family that the Seebohms were doing rather too well out of this, but I have no documentation.

In 1845 the Bank moved into the building in High Street still occupied by Barclays. In case you thought that there were no other bankers around, I should explain that it is built on the site of Pearson's Bank which failed in 1841.

I can now return to Frederic's non-banking life. Because most of it is in Hine's *Hitchin Worthies* and in my sister's book, *A Suppressed Cry*, I shall be selective. First of all, he had 4 daughters, Juliet, Esther, Wilhelmina (or Winnie), Winifred Alice (or Freda), then a son, Hugh, and finally (in 1870) another daughter, Hilda. They all lived in the sprawling and comfortable Hermitage with its 7 acres of garden. In 1874, Frederic and Mary Ann must have become self-conscious about monopolising the town centre in this way, as they gave the land for the Hermitage road which allows traffic to get from the station and the North down into Bancroft. It opened in July 1875. The stretch of garden to the East was now reached by a tunnel, and another tunnel went under the Walworth Road to Windmill Hill, which was also part of the estate. Frederic also gets credit for providing the land in Brand Street where the Town Hall stands, but he may simply have contributed to the purchase price.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century Quakers had been amongst those promoting education for all – in the first instance so that all could read the Bible. Education dominated Frederic's public work in Hitchin. He was a Governor of the British School in Hitchin, the nonconformist (or rather, non-denominational) counterpart of the "National Schools" run by the Church of England in those days before state intervention. When the time was ripe for the 1870 Education Act, he corresponded closely with W E Forster (who was also a Friend, of course) and wrote a pamphlet on the practical problems of implementing it. From 1892 he served on the County Education Committee and later chaired the local education sub-committee. He was concerned with the Mechanics Institute and the Adult School. Above all, it seems that he acted more or less single handed against local opposition in getting the Hitchin Grammar School set up in 1888, based on the ruins of a local educational charity, the Mattock Foundation, which had been deadlocked by litigation. Once the Grammar School was under way, the banking families (other than Lucases), and the Ransoms with their lavender distillery, were among those who contributed generously. Then in 1905 when the school was big enough to split the girls from the boys, Frederic donated the Windmill Hill site for the girls grammar school. Frederic was also a member for many years of the Poor Law Board of Guardians and a magistrate.

He hoped to stand for Parliament as a Gladstonian liberal, but when the time came in 1884 to seek nomination his banking partners, who had the last word because the capital was theirs, would not let him go for fear the business of the bank would suffer. One wonders how things

would have turned out if he had got in, as he could not accept the policy of home rule for Ireland which Gladstone sprung on his party two years later. Frederic wrote a pamphlet pointing out how the Irish would suffer from the withdrawal of the wisdom and common sense of the British nation. He became a Liberal Unionist (or in other words a free trade Conservative). His senior partner in the bank, James Hack Tuke, was under no such obligation of diligence, though one should not be disrespectful in the light of the concerns (in the Quaker sense) he pursued. He was a great traveller. In particular, he took relief in the form of household necessities to the starving and anarchic people of Paris in 1871 after the siege which ended the Franco-Prussian war. Before joining the Bank he had helped with Quaker relief of the Irish potato famine. He went back to Ireland repeatedly, in particular to help arrange emigration. The Quakers provided the only non-sectarian presence in Ireland as the home rule issue came to a head during the 1880s.

Frederic Seebohm's reputation rests more than anything else, however, on his work as an economic historian. He used detail, often local, to reach conclusions about the governance and law of primitive and mediaeval European societies and about the life styles these gave to their ordinary inhabitants. His key book, *The English Village Community*, set out to explain the origins of the strip system of agriculture, which in his lifetime still survived around Hitchin. His studies led him into metrology – the actual size of an acre in various cultures. At the extreme, an acre in New Hampshire was the area that would produce 10 gallons of cider. In 1877 he was canvassed for the post of editor of *The Economist* after the death of Walter Bagehot. He served on the Welsh Land Commission, a body set up by Gladstone to inquire into landlord and tenant relationships in Wales, which reported in 1896 at enormous length but reached agreement on too little for any change in the law to follow. It is interesting today for its discussion from first principles on how to protect “whistle-blowing” tenants complaining about landlords and on whether such complainants should be open to cross-examination by their landlords or by lawyers on their behalf.

He also wrote about the Reformation from a Quaker standpoint, demonstrating in particular the magnanimity and modernity of Colet, Erasmus and More, who were the precursors of Luther. In founding St Pauls School, for example, Colet insisted that the Governors should be married the better to understand the needs of the boys and that they should have full freedom to amend the statutes because it was not for him to foresee how those needs would change in the future. After the American Civil War he wrote a pamphlet on how to move away from slavery, recognising that freeing slaves and leaving them to their fate could make their condition worse instead of better. He wrote another '*On International Reform*' suggesting a form of united nations organisation to enable individual nations to spend less on armaments.

Turning more directly to his faith, Frederic in 1861 (aged 26) wrote a book on the four Gospels attempting to reconcile their accounts, for example suggesting that St John omitted stories from the other three Gospels because he assumed his readers would already know them. He wisely avoided any attempt to pull together the nativity stories. By 1876, however, he had come to a position quite close to that of the recently retired Bishop of Durham, based on a knowledge of German textual and archeological criticism of the Bible and on the hypothesis that the ultimate contribution of the evolutionary process was the development of moral sense in mankind. His book was published only in 1916 by his son Hugh, and in that fraught year the reviewer in *The Friend* (the Quaker magazine) spoke respectfully of it without really revealing its message.

Quakerism in Frederic's time was still evangelical, but in Hitchin there was no sense of mission in the Meeting itself. Hine speaks of old Benjamin Seebohm driving over from his retirement home in Luton bringing a sort of second summer into the Meeting's discontent. One gathers that in the town there was some undercurrent of resentment at the do-gooding of the still

influential Quaker families. In running Adult Schools for working people, however, they had strong followings, and the classes included religious teaching. But the Quakers of the time could not handle the transition from kindling faith in groups of this kind to accommodating these converts in their own Meetings for Worship. Hitchin Meeting had 200 members in 1750, 100 in 1850, and 50 in 1950, but a number of these were birthright members who lived elsewhere and did not think of themselves as Quakers – such as some of the later Seebohms. Numbers have now crept back to some 64.

Hine in his *History of Hitchin* reminds us that the Quakers were not the only public spirited group in nineteenth century Hitchin. There were the county families such as the Delmé Radcliffes, who did not necessarily recognise Friends as their social equals, there was the established church, and there were other non-conformist denominations, occupying a social stratification from which the Friends perhaps stood apart.

In 1863 Frederic took his father back to Pymont to see the family. They went to Meeting, but Quakerism was clearly no longer a guiding light there. Members had been disowned for marrying out and for accepting the requirement to do military service. A number had emigrated to escape this, and seldom returned. No Meetings for Worship were held after 1870.

London Yearly Meeting sold the Pymont Meeting House in 1893, keeping the graveyard. It was used as a warehouse, a riding school and a sports club house. Quakerism was revived in Germany by relief workers after the First World War, and in 1932 the Meeting House was repurchased and rebuilt. It is now the headquarters of Germany Yearly Meeting.

The Pymont Quakers, for all the official tolerance they enjoyed, in fact seem to have made no effort to attract further adherents. The Meeting at nearby Minden, treated much more harshly under Prussian rule, grew steadily in its early days, though eventually military service took its toll and by the end of the nineteenth century it had lost all its members too.

I'll tell you as much about Frederic's children and grandchildren as I have time for, but I must now switch to his younger brother and sister. Benjamin, born in 1839, went to Bootham School and in 1866 entered the Bank at its Luton branch. In 1868 aged 29 he became manager there, a post he held until the merger with Barclays in 1896, at which point he became a local director. There are no references to his earlier career in the more easily accessible documents. The family oral tradition is that he was disowned by Friends for marrying a non-Quaker. A remembered disapproving family voice has it that she was his landlady's daughter. However, this was not what happened. In 1864 he married Mary Emma Brown who came from a well-respected Luton Quaker family. We have an affectionate letter to her from Esther in the B & E Seebohm collection. In 1871 Mary died, and in 1874 Benjamin married a Friend from Bristol called Lucretia Anson Crouch. By 1879, however, Benjamin and Lucretia must have parted company with Friends; presumably they joined the Church of England, since one at least of their children was a churchgoer. In 1880 Luton Monthly Meeting accepted their resignations, recording that "under the circumstances stated it feels that it has no alternative." They were not, however, permitted to remove their children from membership.

Benjamin did a lot for Luton, as with its straw hat making and other businesses it grew from a population of 2,986 in 1821 to 57,800 in 1921. (Vauxhall Motors, of course, came later.) Towards the end of his life he moved into Hitchin, living at Highbury House, which is now the North Herts Music School.

While I am talking about the younger Benjamin I'll carry on with his children. He and his first wife had a daughter, Esther Mary, who lived a sheltered life until she died in 1954 at Torquay.

The children of his second wife were Gertrud Lucretia Anson Seebohm (Trudi), Rudolf Benjamin, and Mabel Elizabeth (Betty). Trudi looked after her mother and is remembered by the family as a rather High Church Anglican in St Albans. Betty married a man called Laurence Henry Christie and wrote a book about farming. Rudolf went to Uppingham, qualified as an accountant, and on his father's death became local director at Barclays Bank in Luton. He was an active Quaker and worked hard for the League of Nations Union. He married Sarah Georgina Waterfall of Bristol (where he did his accountancy) and in 1912 they had one son, Peter Frederic. Rudolf died in 1926 aged 47. I think it is fair to say that ill health forestalled much that he might have achieved. Peter went to Clifton, read sciences at Cambridge and taught at Wycliffe School, at Stonehouse, Gloucestershire. In his forties he joined the pharmaceutical firm Glaxo on the personnel side, first at Ulverston and then in the London head office. Peter married a Friend, Eileen Brown, and they have 5 children.

Skipping back to the last child of the first Benjamin, Julia was born in 1841, went to school in York and met the Rowntree family. In 1862 she married Joseph Rowntree who more or less created the chocolate firm we all know. His younger brother Henry Isaac had been an employee of the grocery business run by the Tuke family and had bought out its chocolate trading activity. Joseph took his capital out of the Rowntree family grocery business and joined him in 1869. He was left in sole command when Henry Isaac died in 1883.

Julia's mother noted at the time of the wedding, "Her little bark is not laden with silver and gold, but richly freight with the love and kindness of her friends." Sadly, she died after 13 months of marriage, probably from meningitis. They had a daughter called Julia but known as Lillie who died of scarlet fever when she was 6. In 1867 (when Lillie was 4) Joseph Rowntree married Emma Antoinette Seebohm, known as Tonie. She was the youngest daughter of old Benjamin Seebohm's youngest brother Wilhelm. Wilhelm or William had been the Hamburg partner in the family wool trade and Tonie had been to stay in Hitchin (to learn English) and met Joseph Rowntree there. There is a suggestion that she was not wholly at ease with Quaker ways, but she became a Friend on marriage and Joseph was devoted to her. They had 6 children, and two of them need to be brought into the focus of my talk. John Wilhelm Rowntree was both brilliant and spiritual. He began to go deaf and blind in his thirties and died at 36. But he deserves much of the credit for turning round the Society of Friends after about 1895 from a rather sterile fundamentalism towards a responsiveness to humanity in the outside world coupled with an intellectual renewal through study and discussion. Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, the second son, devoted himself mainly to the cocoa works, but his ideas on management were 50 years ahead of their time – he was in demand as a lecturer in America – and he, with his father, was one of the pioneers of the use of quantitative research to establish the extent and nature of poverty in this country. One of Joseph's practices which may interest you is that on his summer holidays abroad he would go alone with just one of his children.

I shall now return to my own line of the family. Of Frederic's daughters, Juliet at the age of 31 married Sir Rickman Godlee, who was nephew of Sir Joseph Lister (himself, of course, a Friend) and a distinguished surgeon too. They had no children. Juliet was an outstanding watercolourist. For that matter, her sisters were as well, and their father Frederic produced exquisite sketches of his childhood home, Horton Grange. Esther did good in Hitchin and when she died aged 90 left her home, Little Benslow Hills, to the Rural Music School movement. Winnie, full of promise but desperately asthmatic, went up to Cambridge for a term and then died of her asthma aged 22. Freda was much loved but she seems to have been a schizophrenic. I have to say that the family's reticence and unwillingness to discuss her condition must have compounded her problem. She was in The Retreat mental home in York for many years and until she died in 1936 the younger generation of Seebohms did not even know of her existence. Hilda, the youngest of all, lived a life similar to Esther but she was

asthmatic too and died in 1931. She did, however, have her adventure. In 1903 she bought a ticket and went round the world, writing home weekly and spending time in particular in China and Japan. She wasn't wholly unchaperoned – parts at least of the journey were with Sir Colin Scott Moncrieff, his third wife Dora and their daughter Lucy. He was an ex-Indian Army civil engineer – he got the medal awarded when the Indian Mutiny was suppressed – and had just retired from being Under-Secretary for Scotland in the Home Civil Service. Both Esther and Hilda were Poor Law Guardians – which required the worldly assertiveness of standing for election.

This leaves Hugh. He went to Rugby rather than a Quaker school, and then to Cambridge (Kings) – he was there at the same time as Winnie. He entered the Bank on something of a red carpet, but earned his promotion to the main board in succession to his father and ended up Chairman of Barclays Bank (France) and Deputy Chairman of the main bank. He also chaired Friends Provident, and was a director of the Yorkshire Penny Bank. This last meant a lot to him because it really brought banking to the people. He was involved with many local bodies, often as Treasurer, and was particularly highly valued as a governor of Haileybury School.

In 1904 Hugh married Leslie Grace Gribble. Now she was not a Friend. She came from a rather more worldly family, the father being a City merchant and the mother a flamboyant figure who was painted by Sargent – the original was available for sale with an American dealer, but the family couldn't raise the half million dollars required so the picture is in the Roanoke Museum, West Virginia. The aunts were at first censorious (“What will they talk about when they are married?”) but Frederic got to know her and approved. Hugh and Leslie had four children: Derrick in 1907, Frederic and George, non-identical twins, in 1909 and Fidelity in 1912. Then in 1913 Leslie had an ectopic pregnancy, haemorrhaged, and died. They had built and moved into Poynders End at Preston, a house very much of its time, with a ‘hobby’ farm attached to it. The family continued to live there, austere in some ways – no one spoke at meals – but very lovingly. Hugh was determined to be both father and mother to his children. Then in 1933 he married a First World War widow called Marjorie (or Mysie) Lyall who had been a good friend of Leslie's mother. Her daughter Joy had married Leslie's younger brother Philip Gribble (who wrote a racy autobiography).

Hugh was not disowned when he married – disownment for marrying before a “hireling priest” disappeared gradually after 1861, when it was made legal for a non-Quaker to marry after the usages of Friends. This reform was due in a large part to pressure from the Rowntree family; plain dress went at the same time. It seems, however, that he was ostracised by Hitchin Meeting. Another distant voice I remember: “We didn't like being told what to do by the coachman.” (However, I can find no trace of a Hitchin Quaker who could conceivably have been in service with the Seebohms.) Be that as it may, the family went to Quaker Meeting only when on holiday. Hugh used to quote from an alleged saying of Jesus in a 4th Century Oxyrhynchus papyrus:

Let him who seeks cease not until he finds,  
And finding he shall marvel,  
And, marvelling, he shall reach the kingdom,  
And in the kingdom he shall rest.

I don't know how, as nominally a Quaker, he handled the peace testimony in the first world war. He was too old to be called up. His son Frederic had to lose the nickname Fritz. This Frederic and his brother George served in the Second World War and indeed joined the Territorial Army before it started. The aunts asked Hugh what he thought about this. “I'm very proud of them”, he said. “That's all right, then”, said the aunts.

Finally, I want to complete the story of Hugh's children. Derrick was the eldest. He went to Rugby like his father, and then read geography at Cambridge. He had been to Canada and realised that although snow shoes were used, no one had introduced skis. He accordingly set up with a Canadian partner to make them over there. The venture ended with disaster. The factory burnt down and the partner absconded with the insurance money. It being then the depression, there was no question of starting again, and Derrick came home and went into Barclays Bank, spending his working life as local director at Luton. He was also a director of the Luton Water Company and the Lee Valley Water Company. He spent the war in economic warfare – stopping the Germans earning money from exports – where his ingenuity was well suited, and was awarded an American decoration. Then he inherited Poynders End and its farm, winning Royal Agricultural Society awards for an electric fence system and a silage cutter from among his patented inventions, and for his dairy herd. He was active in the National Farmers' Union. His particular field of concern was at parish level, planting trees and establishing footpaths and boundaries. He got royal recognition (a certificate from the Duke of Edinburgh) for his work with the National Playing Fields Association. He kept up the Seebohm connection in Hitchin charities. He married Patricia Peel, whose family was in Egyptian cotton growing, and had 3 daughters. He died in 1981, having moved to Sidcot near Bristol where his eldest daughter lived.

Frederic and George were fraternal or non-identical twins. They went to Leighton Park, one of the Quaker boarding schools. They came neck and neck in athletic pursuits, winning all swimming competitions by introducing the 'Australian crawl'.

Frederic went to Cambridge, but became impatient with his economics course and began work at the Cambridge branch of Barclays after his second year. He was then sent to Sheffield as what we would now call a management trainee. He saw poverty in those depression years – children without shoes – and resolved to devote at least part of his working life to social betterment. He became a local director at Sheffield, then served in the war. He was in anti-aircraft, which was one of the few army functions to have an obvious role in the Battle of Britain period. He went to Staff College and by the time of the Normandy landings he was in a liaison post with the American army. He was involved in the "liberation" of the Peenemunde rocket scientists. He was mentioned in dispatches and won the Bronze Star of America. After the war he was Barclays local director at York and became treasurer of the local Family Service Unit – this was a charity undertaking social work as we now know it, before the public sector had fully taken the concept on board. He became a director of the Bank itself in 1947 (aged 38), moved to Birmingham in 1950, and from 1955 served in the overseas side of Barclays, then called Barclays Bank DCO and later on Barclays Bank International. He moved successively from vice-chairman to deputy chairman to chairman, becoming also deputy chairman of the parent company. He travelled ceaselessly in Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world, taking the lead in appointing black bank managers – which made the student protests at Barclays' involvement in South Africa particularly galling – and negotiating frantically to salvage assets as newly-independent states nationalised their banks. When he retired from the bank in 1974 he became chairman of what was then FFI (Finance for Industry Ltd), the venture capital offshoot of the London clearing banks, which has now been floated as 3i Group plc. He was knighted for chairing the Export Guarantees Advisory Council, the body that advises the Government on country by country risks for insuring export credit. He chaired the Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services, which reported in 1969 and instituted the social services as a fully integrated local authority function. This led to a life peerage in 1972. Only delving in the archives now have I realised that the motto he adopted for his coat of arms as Baron Seebohm of Hertford is the Greek version of "Let not him who searches cease until he finds".

Among the very many charities and public bodies he served on, there are several family echoes. Remembering his great uncle Henry, I should mention that Frederic became a Freemason in Yorkshire just before the war, pulling out when he realised that applicants for jobs in the bank were making masonic signs to him. He chaired the Friends Provident Life Office (as it now is), was a governor of Haileybury, and (perhaps most important) chaired the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This started as the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust, but Rowntree, like Colet, believed that his foundations should be free to adapt to changing needs. This now finances research into housing, poverty, community care and central/local government relations, unearthing truths that successive governments would prefer left undisclosed. It is fair to say that his heart was broken when the Conservative Government mowed down the Lords amendments to the National Health Service and Community Care Bill including the one requiring local authorities to have regard to the housing needs of those released from mental institutions into the community.

In later life he rebuilt his Quaker connection. I feel, however, that he saw worship as an outcome of his principles, rather than the reverse. This may seem to be in contrast to his great grandfather Benjamin, but I suspect that they had a very similar impact on the people they met.

He married Evangeline Hurst, daughter of an MP and barrister who later became a judge. They had me and two daughters. They lived where the Bank sent them, but latterly had weekend houses at Preston (near Poynders End), then at Chapmore End just outside Hertford, and then near my own family at Dedham in Essex. Frederic was High Sheriff of Hertfordshire in 1970. The two of them died tragically as a result of a road accident in December 1990.

George was a shrewd stockbroker, working first with Gordon L Jacob and later at James Capel. In 1939 he represented the English branch of the family at a Seebohm family reunion at Bad Pyrmont, but it was a bitter experience because Nazism had superimposed itself on everything the family used to stand for. (When I went to a revived gathering in 1991 the social conscience was fully restored, though only two of us, both from the English branch, were Quakers.) George passionately hoped that the war could be averted. Serving in the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Yeomanry, he was captured by the Japanese in the fall of Singapore. As an officer prisoner he insisted on going out to work with his soldiers and doing what he could to mediate against the brutality of their Korean guards. Half dead of multiple diseases, he was dropped off at Lisbon on the way home and cared for by Alf and Audley Seebohm. She was English and he was a descendant of Ludwig Seebohm's eldest son Johann. On getting home he married Jane Strickland, daughter of a general from Norfolk, and they had four children, but the marriage sadly did not work out. In the climate of the post-war restrictions he built himself a miniature but ideal country house at Chesfield near Stevenage. He had a fine eye for painting and sculpture; his City career enabled him to collect 20th Century works and to support young artists.

It was in this spirit that he became involved when the Hitchin Quakers were planning a new Meeting House in 1959. The old Meeting House built in 1836 was magnificent but not suited to the handful of Friends now assembling for worship, and collectively they could not afford the renovation it desperately needed. The only way out was to sell the old building and to put a new one on stilts over the Quaker graveyard over the road. It seemed right to use a contemporary rather than traditional architect, Paul Mosey, but George felt deeply out of sympathy with the result. The old building is now the local authority registrar's palace of weddings, with the old Quaker elders' benches intact inside, but with the plaque describing its origin outside, since nothing religious is allowed inside a registry office.

George's feeling for conservation came into its own in his later years when he adopted the ruined church of St Ethelreda near his home at Chesfield, built in the fourteenth century and demolished in the eighteenth. He spent many hours reversing the process of looting and decay by replacing and rebuilding to the extent that original materials were there to be used. He completed his self-appointed task by installing a statue of St Ethelreda by his friend Mary Spencer-Watson. He died in 1993 aged 84 after a painful illness.

I have now one other survivor of my fifth generation to introduce. Hugh's daughter Fidelity married the Earl of Cranbrook, lives near Saxmundham in Suffolk, and for all its formative years chaired the Aldeburgh Festival Committee. She served as a magistrate, as did her sister-in-law, Derrick's wife Patricia. She has five children. There is much to tell about her and the Cranbrook family which I hope will be captured some other time.

R H S

18.11.04 version