

The Quakers of Ravenstonedale

The Church of England was set up by Henry 8th, returned to Catholic by Mary and then re established by Queen Elizabeth. By the time of her death in 1603, there was still continued strife as to the true religion. Religious issues were certainly one of the causes of the English Civil War. At the end of the war, apart from the Puritans, there were many other protestant congregations in England.

About this time, the Religious Society of Friends began as a movement, in Lancashire. In its early days it faced strong opposition and persecution. George Fox with others pulled together the various strands and formed the Quaker movement, discovering a faith that they had been seeking. He advocated people not to pay Church tithes or pay heed to the clergy .He believed that you should talk to God directly and not by the clergy. This found a ready audience amongst the common folk.

George Fox travelled through Yorkshire in 1652, stopping in Ravenstonedale to preach. The Alderson family living there were converted. The first record of this family appears in the Protestation Survey of 1641, taken just before the Civil war. This required every adult male throughout the country to sign a declaration of allegiance to the Crown. it was designed to root out Catholics but it was not very effective. On this appears the names of James, Simon and John Alderson. They were all brothers. There was a fourth brother Richard, who was too young to take part in the survey. Their father was Ralph, who probably lived at Greenside, close to Ravenstonedale village, where all the brothers were born.

Simon, born 1602, was the eldest son. He took a lease of the farm at Narthwaite and produced two sons, Ralph, born 1632 and John born 1645. John farmed at Adamthwaite but had no family to keep the name and he died in 1683. Ralph continued to farm at Fell End and Narthwaite and had two sons, Simon born 1663 and John (b1661). John died aged 30 with no family but Simon had two daughters and a son, Ralph, born 1689. In 1720, Ralph's land included the Fell End Quaker meeting house. The meeting House continued in use until 1793 when it was decided to move to a barn at Narthwaite.

Ralph (b1689) had three sons, John, William and Simon. John died in 1764, leaving two young sons. They moved to Dent with their mother. Simon died in 1773, a year after his father Ralph. This left William to run the farm but he appeared to give up in 1781 when his land passed out of the family. He moved to Crook as a manufacturer.

The second son was John, born 1603. His name was recorded as Alldersone. He had one son Christopher who was farming in Newbiggin. He died in 1695 leaving two sons and two daughters, but we have no record of what happened to them.

The third son was George born 1609. He lived alongside his brother, Simon, at Narthwaite. He had only daughters who survived so his line finished in 1669 when he died.

The youngest son of Ralph was Richard, born 1625 at the family farm at Greenside. He took the lease of the farm at Needlhouse and produced two sons, Thomas, born 1664 and James, born 1671. Thomas had further property at Fell End but died leaving three young sons, Thomas ,Richard and John. Thomas and Richard probably remained with their uncle James at Needlhouse .They later took further properties at Fell End, but Richard died aged 20. Thomas died in 1777 but left no issue. The third brother, John disappeared off to Spain. There were no other sons with this family line.

James (b1671) sold Needlehouse, possibly when his brother, Thomas, died in 1700 and bought the family farm at Greenside. He had two sons, James and Richard. James must have been a bright lad because someone must have sponsored him to firstly attend a Quaker school and then a college for dissenting ministers. We next hear of him in Lowestoft, a practicing minister. His subsequent family were very distinguished, including the famous surgeon, John of Hull. Richard remained at Greenside until he died in 1792 leaving no issue., the last member of the family in Ravenstonedale.

We have the record of a William Alderson at Narthwaite in 1560 who may be related to Ralph, who was probably born about 1570. The Alderson connection at Narthwaite continued for the next 200 years. Ralph's family were significant residents of Ravenstonedale who fully embraced the Quaker philosophy for the next 200 years or so. While no longer in Ravenstonedale, descendants of this family are spread throughout the land.

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Based on data extracted from P-tree.