

31 March, 2005

Greetings again F/friends, and relatives—

Back in London after a major trip into the Quaker hinterlands--to Wales and back, visiting county record offices which hold most Meeting minutes outside London. Mostly they say "Job Scott was here"--but that's more or less what I expected. Letters and journals are more revealing of the "other side" of Scott's journey--that is, how Quakers here saw Scott--but these are few and far between. But I've realized that there's yet another "other side" of this journey: Scott didn't write down everything he saw going on among Friends in England in the 1790's--just some of his reactions to it. The records may not say much about him in particular--but they say a lot about the Quakers of this time. So, for instance, in his journal he rails against the "vain and oppressive ministry" of the Anglican clergy, and how they extort money (in the form of tithes) from it's "proper owners." But the records show how enormous these sums were. And in the messages he gave--as recorded by others--an almost apocalyptic streak appears. For instance, according to a summary someone wrote of his message to the London Yearly Meeting Sessions, he expected the Wrath of God to strike at any moment--and bring down the whore of Babylon, which, in his mind was more or less equivalent to the Anglican church. Why did he think that? Stay tuned!

Scott Journal, Part II.

8 March--Dreary day--typical English gray. Penn Club full of painters--lying down to do baseboards, standing up to do doors, all over to do stairwells--always a "wet paint" sign at the top of the ones I want to go down.

Huge fight in Parliament over the "Prevention of Terrorism Act"--snorting and stomping and cries of "Hear, hear!" from the back benches. (The Brits do political stomping and snorting better than we do.) A really dreadful piece of legislation and will probably be amended quickly.

Lots of news coverage of the McCartney women taking on the IRA--long needed--too much just plain thuggery has been tolerated for too long. Also a lot of silly flap over Prince Charles' wedding.

Arrived at Friends House Library without my list of dates that JS visited various places. Panic! Was forced to start reading all the records for several months at a time--and then discovered what JS was seeing among Friends that didn't make it into the journal. (Did God prompt me to leave the list on the desk last night?) Much routine--and dull. But a couple of people were disowned for debt (this was the age of debtors' prison, and the Meeting saw it as a reproach to them that a member should go into debt.)

9 March--JS was put on the Epistle Committee at London Yearly Meeting Sessions in April 1793, as were others from "foreign" Yearly Meetings--interesting idea. And he spoke near close of sessions--especially against "Babylon" (see above), expecting it would soon meet with God's wrath, and that God would raise up a highway for the redeemed (clearly not the Anglicans). Contemporary events make sense of this: JS always despised "hireling priests" and here comes the Committee for Sufferings with an

account of the value of Friends' property confiscated when they refused to pay tithes to the Anglican Church--nearly 6 thousand pounds--roughly 300,000 pounds in today's money--about \$600,000. Furthermore, war was raging in France, and news came to Sessions that communication with a small Meeting across the channel in Dunkirk was entirely cut off by the fighting between French and English troops. "Wars and rumors of wars"--fears the French would attempt to invade England. Perhaps not surprising Job expected God's wrath to fall at any moment.

Also read accounts written by Friends of Scott's long and painful death by smallpox; Reading between the lines, I see severe spiritual struggle going on as he tries to keep seeing God's dispensation at work in his dreadful suffering. Somehow all this turns Scott from a saint--as many saw him (and still do)--back into a human being--and he's still remarkable.

10 March--finished at the Archives, looking forward to the expedition, especially Bristol and south Wales--never been to either.

Interesting note from the Archives--though nothing to do with Scott. Found a poem written in the 1790's by a Quaker visiting Coalbrookdale--near Birmingham, site of the start of the Industrial Revolution in England--which was driven by money from the powerful Quaker Darby family. It became the center of iron manufacturing for England. This Friend was walking at night--came to a high point overlooking the valley--and seeing the perpetual fires going at the smelters, felt like he was looking into hell. Definitely a sense that this revolution was not going to be an unmitigated blessing. Prophetic?

11 March--new flap in the news--Cabinet Secretary John Trumbull admits the summary argument given to Parliament for entering the Iraq War was backed up by--nothing! Outrage from members of all parties! Will this news make it across the Atlantic? Will anybody care?

Visited Bunhill Quaker burial ground--site of George Fox's grave--but they aren't sure exactly where it was--no gravestones set up then. Discovered the place full of earth moving equipment--it's being redesigned as a quiet garden and a children's playground. No Meeting House there originally--Quaker Mission built there in 1881--bombed in WW II, leaving only the caretaker's lodge--now turned into a Meeting House and offices for a truly creative outreach ministry which, among others things, has set up a microbank for the largely immigrant community around it. Learned all of this from the delightful young woman who runs the office--met her through the simple expedient of knocking on the door.

Wandered off around some of my favorite parts of London, winding up at the Thames near a construction built for the millenium celebrations, the "London Eye," a colossal ferris wheel several stories high, with 20 or 30 glass capsules each carrying about 10 people very slowly around--the whole thing is suspended over the river. I understand Londoners like it. But I take a proprietary interest in the Thames, having lived in London for some significant periods of time. What are they doing to my river?!

12 March--Visited Uxbridge--clerk gave me a tour--nice Meeting House built a few years after JS visited there, but the same site. Beautifully tended garden--completely with gardener. Lots of things blooming all at once--forsythia, primroses, japonica, daffodils--but it's still cold.

On the way back to the "tube" (subway) station, walked into a Woolworth's--used to love them when I lived here--all sorts of wonderful little things not available in America. Very disappointing--all American toys (Spider Man, etc.) and Chinese everything else. If I want face cloths from China I can get them at home. Globalization is homogenizing everything. You can hardly find a decent fish and chip shop--but there's a Burger King and a Pizza hut on every corner. (PS to Woonsocket residents--Ye Olde Fish and Chips on Market Square is very authentic and better than most of what's now available here--I've been served dried out slabs straight from the freezer, rolled in cornflakes, not batter! Heresy!)

Parliament has not started operating like Congress however--Hallelujah! Marathon knock down drag out fight (32 hour session) over the Prevention of Terrorism Act--with the (supposedly) conservative House of Lords fighting tooth and nail to protect civil liberties. Sometimes having an unelected House has its plusses. Who's fighting for our civil liberties at home?

And British humor still lives: "News item: A cement mixer has collided with a prison van on the Kingston Bypass. Motorists are asked to look out for 12 hardened criminals."

13 March, Sunday--Met a young Irish cheese maker at breakfast today, here for the Lord Mayor's Irish Festival (a few days early for St. Pat's) and a big trade fair--he's from a Quaker family in Tipperary. He was heading off to set up his stall in Covent Garden, hoping to attract the mobs who would be coming for the parade and all the hoopla later in the day.

To Meeting at Westminster again today--attenders included 5 plain Friends here after a world gathering of Friends affiliated with Ohio Yearly Meeting, Conservative. (Some Smithfield friends have met Susan Smith, one of the weightiest of the American OYM Friends--ran into her earlier in the week in the cafe at Friends House.) There were three couples, one English, one Scottish, and one Finnish (whose English was more comprehensible than the Scots'.) Very blunt and plain spoken about their belief that Christ-centeredness is the only way to be a true Quaker.

Stayed for Meeting for Business: my Travelling Minute was read and endorsed. It was all very much like home--I left in the middle of an endless discussion about whose signatures ought go on which bank accounts--oh, how Quakers love to micromanage every little issue that comes along!

Walked down a block to join the milling throngs in Trafalgar Square where the fountains were spouting green water and there was a choice of watching tiny musicians belt out "Rocky Road to Dublin" on a distant stage or seeing them about 20 times life size on two colossal screens set up at either side of the Square. Perhaps there was a time when I enjoyed milling about with thousands of other people--but I don't recall it, so I fought my way out of the mob and up to Covent Garden, where I found Louie and his

cheese stall surrounded by a much smaller mob eager for free tastes. He beckoned me to come behind the counter and gave me my own personal chunk--it was excellent--hand-made blue cheese from ewes' milk. Would have loved to bring some home, but couldn't imagine its state after three months in a suit case (or, for that matter, the state of the suit case).

Monday, 14 March--Preparing to leave. Stowed the laptop with dear accomodating Friends at the FWCC World Office, since it's heavy, and it's proved so hard to find places with phone jacks.

Tuesday, 15 March--in Reading. Found a B&B very close to the train station, at a modest price--but the tiniest room I've ever stayed in--the size of a railroad compartment--very clean and freshly decorated, with en suite shower, but not enough room for a chair, let alone a desk. Curious place, Reading--long time commercial center (from the Middle Ages)--current claim to fame is what has to be the world's biggest shopping mall--took over the vast site of a former brewery; it must contain every retailer in England, and sprawls over many acres on both sides of a small river. But--and this will probably be the one and only time I will ever say such a thing--it's all beautifully done. The architecture is well designed--the mall hasn't destroyed all the little local shops--the butchers, the bakers (no candlestick makers, though) are all still on the High Street, which has been "pedestrianized"--and is well patronized. US city planners ought to be required to visit Reading as part of their training.

Cheek by jowel with the ruins of an abby dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539 is the most famous jail in literature--the great Reading Gaol immortalized by Oscar Wilde.

Phoned the co-clerk of Reading Meeting in the evening, and was invited to supper. Delightful evening, and she hooked me up with a local historian, Ted Milligan, retired from Friends House Library, who invited me to lunch tomorrow.

Wednesday, 16 March--gorgeous sunny day. Walked through the city center--alive with people--even an open air market, selling everything from cabbages to luggage. And all the cars have been sent underground, to invisible garages and below ground level streets--giving the city to human beings instead of automobiles. How very refreshing. And they didn't tear out everything old and start over. There's a wonderful visual variety of ages and styles in buildings, not a bunch of identical store fronts (all cloned at at some factory in Nebraska). And people live over the businesses.

Turned green with envy at the Berkshire County Records Office--rows of viewing screens for digitized records; spacious, well lighted tables for reading original documents--which were brought up from the nether regioes with great speed. Covet, covet.

And there was Job!--speaking at the Quarterly Meeting, and meriting a long minute stating that they were in "near [i.e.="close"] unity of Spirit" wirth his purpose of calling Friends back to the Truths from which he felt they had fallen away. Many--oh shock and horror! were even yielding to the demands to pay the Church of England tithes--which must have been terribly tempting to do, since those who kept to the

Testimony against tithes had property confiscated, sometimes worth double or triple the actual demand.

Lunch with Ted Milligan--delightful octogenarian, very lively and brisk, with a great interest in and considerable knowledge of Job Scott. Insisted on loaning me a book describing the state of affairs in Ireland at the time (messy!) with a longish passage on JS' contribution to it.

Thursday, 17 March--St. Patrick's Day! Bristol. Trudged from RR Station to Youth Hostel, passing an imposing medieval church and opposite it, a small garden with a sign indicating that it had been the first Quaker burial ground in the city. Bristol oozes Quaker history, and is still a lively center of Quakerism (7 active Meetings).

Great hostel--clean, comfortable, right on the quay in a remodeled warehouse--water sparkling right outside the door; full breakfast included in price.

Found a booklet at the tourist office--the Bristol Quaker History Trail. Spent the rest of the afternoon following it. Redcliffe St.--named for the red sandstone cliffs at the end, was the main street into Bristol in the 17th century--was the road followed by James Naylor on his famous (infamous?) journey into Bristol, preceded by his followers waving palms and shouting "Hosanna!" He claimed he was demonstrating "that of God" in himself--the city fathers disagreed (so did George Fox)--he was convicted of blasphemy and had a hole bored in his tongue. Wasn't long before Bristol became a hub of Quaker business and industry, especially pottery, metal working, and, a little later, chocolate. Several of England's most famous Quaker industrialists started here, and then moved elsewhere, spreading Quaker entrepreneurial spirit around the country--like the Darbys--the great iron manufacturers of the midlands, who even under pressure of competition declined to accept weapons contracts from the government.

Ended up at the site of the site of the notorious Newgate Prison (now a huge multi-story parking garage (still looks like a prison); it was here that when Quaker parents were jailed, the children carried on, leading worship out of doors. Behind and below this is the site still known as "Quaker Friars," place of the first Bristol Meeting House, on land that was once part of an ancient monastery--bits of which still remain. The building which housed the second "Friars" Meeting House was built there in 1747; JS worshipped there, spoke there---and the building still stands. Though it's now being used as the Bristol Registry Office, the outside has been beautifully restored--elegantly simple, with white stucco walls and stone painted a golden cream color around the windows and doors--and the use--the recording of births and deaths, and the performance of marriages, seems oddly appropriate. There have been several efforts to take it over by commercial developers, noisily claiming nobody wants to come out after their wedding and look at a parking lot and the backs of a lot of stores--but the people who actually get married there tell a different story, so it's safe--for now.

In honor of St. Patrick's day, went and lifted a Guinness at the pub down the street. Joined the crowd gathered around the band in singing loud choruses of all the most sentimental old Irish songs, and was embraced by a tipsy young red haired man who obviously mistook me for his Irish grandmother. We joined in a few choruses of one of the most poignant Irish songs I know--"The Rare Old Times," a beautiful lament for a

vanished way of life in Dublin City. And a grand time was had by all. Walked back to the hostel in the soft English night, watching the lights sparkling on the water and listening to the seagulls keening as they wheeled through the sky over the harbor.