Quakers in Limerick

imerick in the seventeenth century was a city which, like many other places in Ireland, suffered at the hands of invading armies. Oliver Cromwell landed in Dublin in 1649, captured Drogheda, Wexford and Clonmel and having gained control of these important garrison towns, he returned to England leaving behind an army under the command of his son-in-law, Henry Ireton. Ireton and his troops attacked Limerick and the long drawn out Siege of Limerick proved to be a very bloody affair. In addition to the military causalities, over 5,000 people died of a plague which swept the city. At the end of the seventeenth century Limerick was again besieged in 1690 and 1691 during the Williamite wars. However, the interlude between the Cromwellian siege of 1651 and the Williamite sieges of 1690-1 was marked by the arrival of more benign visitors. In 1655 the first Quaker preachers arrived in the city, where a Cromwellian soldier, Henry Ingoldsby, had been installed as governor and mayor.

Quakers originated in the north-east of England in a period of great upheaval at the end of the English Civil War. The intervention of Oliver Cromwell as leader of the army was welcomed at first in England by a people weary from the struggle between supporters of the King and supporters of parliament. Cromwell recruited volunteers for his army and did not rely on men conscripted from gaols, as had been the case in the past. Strongly influenced by puritan beliefs, the army provided a forum for discussion and debate. Following the execution of King Charles I in 1649, there were large numbers of men, recently discharged from the army with little or no remuneration for their services, who began to challenge authority and preach in public. Various groups emerged offering political and religious solutions to the problems of a society traumatised by civil war, the execution of the King and the establishment of a republic by Cromwell. Among the religious sects that emerged during this period were the Quakers. George Fox (1624-91), the acknowledged founder of that movement, was the son of devout Puritan parents. Fox and his fellow preachers objected to a church which was hierarchical and administered by a clergy who had to be supported by the labour of others. These objections were expressed loudly in the market place, or sometimes through unruly interventions at church services. This behaviour and their steadfast refusal to remove hats as a sign of respect in church or in the presence of authority frequently resulted in arrest and imprisonment. The public, increasingly disenchanted with Cromwell's regime,
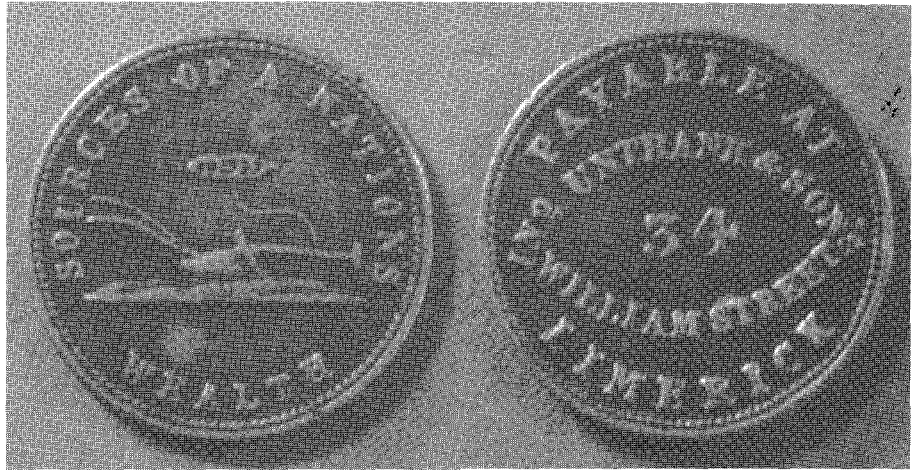
Copper token of John Unthank & Son, Staff & Cotton Manufacturer, Woollen & Manchester & Scotch Warehouse, 34 William Street, c.1850.
(Limerick Museum).

by Phil Lovett

began to flock to hear Fox and his fellow preachers and by the mid-1650s they had a following of at least 40,000 in England.[1] Working mostly in the north-east of England at first, Fox preached that the route to salvation was within each individual, needing no clergy to mediate and no liturgy and he objected to tithes for the upkeep of priests and buildings. Early followers called themselves Children of Light but after a confrontation with an official, whom Fox ordered to 'tremble at the name of God', the sect was re-named.

The word Quaker, hurled at him as an epithet of scorn, was to become the name by which the movement was commonly known for several hundred years. The custom of addressing each person as Friend led eventually to the adoption of the title 'Religious Society of Friends'. Gradually the movement began to spread southwards to London and Bristol, and later to Devon and Cornwall. William Edmondson, a former Cromwellian soldier, established the first Irish Quaker meeting house in Lurgan, County Armagh, in 1654. Soon meetings were being held in other parts of Ireland. Elizabeth Fletcher and Elizabeth Smith preached in Dublin, Robert Sandham went to Youghal, Francis Howgill went to Bandon and in 1655 he came to Limerick with Edward Burroughs. Viewed by the authorities in England as mere troublemakers, in Ireland the Quakers were suspected of having more sinister motives and were accused of being in collusion with Catholics. In reality, they had no wish to align themselves with any religious grouping and concentrated their efforts among the English-speaking inhabitants of garrison towns. Their presence in these towns was of great annoyance to the

Cromwellian authorities, who feared that their promotion of egalitarian principles would cause unrest amongst the troops. Their arrival in Limerick in 1655 resulted in the issuing of an order that they be expelled immediately.

The perception of Quakers as being in collusion with Catholics led to an official proclamation warning anyone who entertained Quakers or Irish Papists overnight would also be banished from the city. The anxiety of the Cromwellian authorities was exacerbated by the writing of Claudius Gilbert, who claimed that the Quakers had convinced large numbers of soldiers and 'infected divers of our citizens and gathered many disciples in the garrison'.[2] Physical punishment, imprisonment and orders not to do business with them were part of the pattern of treatment of Quakers everywhere in the early years. Harassed by officials and ridiculed by the general public at first, Quakers gradually were allowed to settle in Limerick. A record of seizure of furniture for non-payment of tithes indicates the presence of a Quaker meeting house in Limerick as early as 1683. In 1809 a larger meeting house was built in Cecil Street and these premises remained in use until the new meeting house was opened in Ballinacurra in 1997.

In the early years of the eighteenth century there appeared to be a growing tolerance of Quakers in the city and county. In 1725 they travelled to Rathkeale, 'where they had a meeting house among the Palatines and others'.[3] This meeting could be seen as an attempt on the part of the Quakers to identify with other settlers who, despite problems of language and other cultural differences, had established a harmonious relationship with their Irish neighbours. Increasingly, Quakers appear to have been able to go about their business of holding meetings and preaching. The value of an influential

patron was a lesson learned from the experience of George Fox. Attempts to establish a following in a district was usually preceded by a visit to an authority figure within the community. In keeping with this practice, they visited the Earl of Kerry at Lixnaw in 1725 before proceeding on their journey southwards to Tralee and Dingle. It is difficult to estimate the exact size of the Irish Quaker population in the early years, but it is suggested that there were 'six or seven hundred families'[4] in Ireland at the end of the seventeenth century. This estimate would mean a population of three thousand or more, most of whom had settled around Dublin, in Queen's County (Laois), King's County (Offaly), Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and in parts of Ulster. George Fox visited Ireland in 1669, travelling the country advising on structures and procedures. He urged that all Quaker activities be recorded, including, births, marriages and deaths. Two meetings were to be convened annually at national level and representatives were to go to the annual meeting of Quakers in London. Detailed accounts were kept of penalties imposed for non-payment of tithes and for other transgressions such as trading on Christmas day. Expressing their belief that all days were holy, Quakers defied convention and earned the disapproval of civil authorities by continuing to practice their trade or profession on days such as Christmas or Easter Sunday. The systems established from an early date provided regular contact for members of the Quaker community from widely dispersed locations throughout Ireland. The sharing of experiences strengthened their resolve, boosted their morale and promoted a feeling of solidarity within the group.
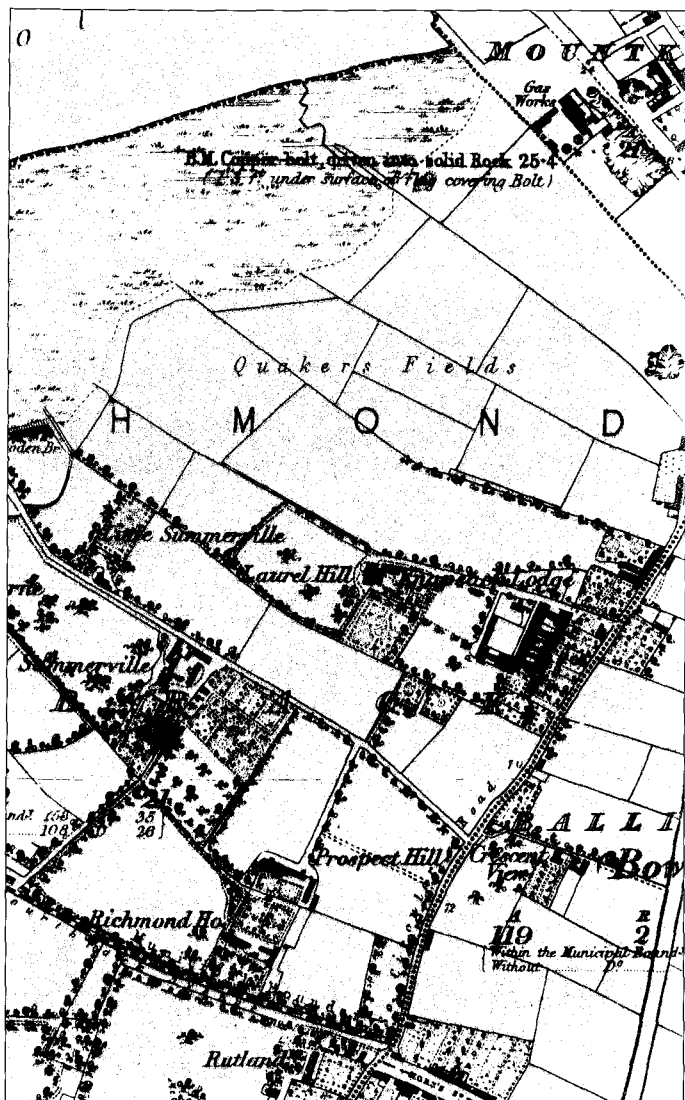
In addition to the national meeting, the provinces of Leinster, Munster and Ulster held meetings of members drawn from the smaller local groups every six weeks. At local level there were meetings for prayer, for the purpose of looking after poor members and to draw up appeals for the release of members who were in prison. Spiritual advice was an important component of every meeting and guidance was given on how best to live daily life. From the beginning of their movement in the seventeenth century, Quakers were alert to injustice of any kind. Their own experience of physical punishments and imprisonment led the early leaders, such as George Fox, to campaign and petition Parliament for an end to the more severe punishments, such as flogging, trans-portation and even public execution. Official attitudes mellowed and such extreme penalties for the transgressions of Quakers were no longer in force by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The anti-slavery movement was one of the first world-wide campaigns promoted by Quakers. The moral dilemma posed by the knowledge that products might have been produced by slave labour gave rise to much questioning and the campaign gradually built up. The Quaker network of contacts was soon involved in raising awareness of the problem, highlighting the inequities of a system which treated human beings like beasts of burden. The ultimate success of the anti-slavery movement was, in part, due to the support extended from Quakers in Pennsylvania. In addition, the overall planning of the campaign was placed on business lines and approached 'methodically, systematically with a careful recording of their transactions and finances'.[5] While Irish Quakers were unlikely to have been directly involved with the slave trade, it was a cause that enabled them to escape from their inward-looking and anti-political stand. In Limerick too, they dutifully followed the campaign, responding to epistles and collecting funds. When the abolition campaign got underway here, Benjamin C. Fisher and William Alexander were appointed to collect the subscriptions at the monthly meeting.[6] Twenty copies of a document on the trade had been sent from Dublin in 1821 for distribution to Quaker families, an indication, perhaps, of the presence of twenty Quaker households in Limerick at this time. The contribution to the anti-slavery campaign by the members present on that particular day was six pounds. The dissemination of information, the consciousness raising and the linking of Quakers all over the world enabled them to operate as a very effective pressure group. The campaign to abolish slavery brought Quakers into the mainstream of political life for a time and for many members this was a disquieting experi-ence. Coinciding with this politicising process was a rising tide of evangelicalism which was in direct contrast to their tradition. In the eighteenth century, Quakers in Ireland were mainly quietist, that is, inward looking and reflective. Philanthropy was suspect because it was feared that 'concern with the outside activities could distract the individual from life of the soul'.[7] By the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a growing awareness of the problems of the poor, the homeless and the oppressed, and some Quakers began to articulate the need to address those problems. Their philan-thropy became more open and some, like Elizabeth Fry, a member of a wealthy English Quaker family, began adopting an increasing number of causes, such as schools for the poor, visiting the sick and healthcare. She visited prisons and set up schools for the inmates who were given instruction in sewing and knitting from materials provided by other Quaker merchants. Her plans were successfully implemented in England, and in Ireland on a tour to promote similar reforms, she visited Limerick in 1828. The House of Industry had been established on the North Strand in 1774 to provide shelter for a wide cross section of people, ranging from the aged and feeble poor, infants, lunatics and young females whose situation was so desperate that there was always the danger that even inside that institution they might become the 'victims of profligacy and vice'.[8] Conditions in the House of the Industry were far from ideal and reform measures were sorely needed when Sir John Carr visited it in 1805. He found a place which had failed to provide care for the victims of physical illness, where the mentally ill were chained and where females who had fallen victim to vice were punished by being weighted down by heavy logs of wood, which not only impeded their movement but also marked them out as sinners 'to be subjected to verbal as well as physical abuse. By the time of Elizabeth Fry's visit in 1828, Quaker Launcelot Hill was the superintendent and conditions appear to have improved, as Fry's brother reported that he and his sister were very pleased.

At their yearly meeting in Dublin in 1800, Quakers were called upon to reflect on what they might do to relieve the ever growing and increasingly visible problems of the sick, poor and uneducated masses crowding into Irish cities and towns. Measures to be adopted should include the element of self-help which would afford them 'the means of obtaining a comfortable livelihood for themselves'.[9] Implicit in all Quaker schemes was the notion of self-help and this applied equally in their dealings with the poor or distressed members of their own society as well as to those encountered in the wider community. Eliza Beale was one of those Quaker members who, in 1820, was obliged to appeal for assistance in Limerick. She had left the city and gone to Cork, where she found herself unable to support herself and her two daughters. The response of Limerick Quakers was to refuse her on the grounds 'that her maintenance does not properly belong to this meeting'[10] but they decided that they would write to the Cork Quaker group on her behalf. The case was sent for arbitration to the regional quarterly meeting and eventually an allowance was agreed. By 1825 an additional allowance was being paid for the tuition of her daughter, Maria. By then the family was on its way to becoming self-sufficient. Quaker charity had maintained them for as long as necessary and they were now in a position to overcome their problems themselves. Eliza succeeded in securing employment and her daughter's education enabled her, too, to become independent. By 1826 the case was closed and further assistance was deemed unnecessary. Eliza wrote to the Limerick Quakers thanking them for their assistance and now, as she herself 'being settled in business and her daughters teaching school',[11] the family would no longer be a burden on them. This urge to self-sufficiency was evident too in the response of Limerick Quakers to another case brought before them by members of the sub-committee for the poor in 1824. The report that a member, Sarah Woods, was in need of assistance elicited a response that was in keeping with their tradition of compassion for the poor. The practical response offered would relieve her situation and allow her to achieve long-term economic independence. A decision was made to

Ordnance Survey map of the Ballinacurra area, 1870, showing Quakers Fields and the residences of some Limerick Quaker merchants.

Information obtained by the Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, Limerick, relative to Curing Fish, so successfully practised in the County Waterford.

METHOD OF CURING HADDOCK
At Ring, Helvick, near Dungarvan.

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OPEN and clean the fish carefully, cut off the head, immerse them in a tub of water, and wash away all impurities. Then take and split the fish from end to end, leaving merely the skin, and wash in a clean water; put them in pickle for 30 minutes, then put them on rods in the smoking house; if the house be full of fish, 24 hours will suffice; if not full, a longer time will be required. Larger Haddock require to be left a longer time in the pickle.

Fish thus cured will keep 14 days. Should it be necessary to hold it a longer time, let it remain one hour in the pickle.

Hardwood, as Oak, Beech, Elm, Birch, is used for smoking—turf is added, should the fire become too great; but turf causes too much dust for general use. Pine wood imparts a bitter taste to the fish and is not approved of.

TO SMOKE HERRINGS.

Pack them carefully in barrels, placing salt between every layer, till full; then fill with pickle to the top; let them remain thus three days; then take them out, and wash in fresh water, and hang them up by the gills in the smoking house.

Note—The Herrings may remain 12 months in the barrels, before smoking, without injury; but it will be necessary to steep them in *fresh water*, to remove some of the salt, should they be any length of time in pickle. The longer they have remained in the barrels the more steeping they will require.

Great care must be taken that the *fire* is not too hot, while the process of smoking goes on, as much injury may be caused in a very few minutes.—This is easily perceived by examining the Herrings from time to time, and if they become soft near the tails, or the fish rises from the bone, or they drop from the rods on which they are suspended, the fire should be *immediately* reduced.

TO CURE COD, LING, HAKE, &c.

Open and clean the fish, cut off the head, and remove the backbone, to the lower extremity of the belly, then wash away all blood, &c., very carefully, continue the cut down to the tail, close by the remaining part of the backbone, in doing this you expose to view a blood-vessel, which should be carefully opened; then wash, and remove all the black lining of the stomach, and other impurities. Pickle for a week, and dry in the sun.

In Scotland large quantities of Haddock are cured, by cleaning and splitting as before described, and laying them on the rocks, near the water's edge, sprinkling with salt water, from time to time, till perfectly cured, and then dried—this is done without using any salt, except what is in the salt water.

The Smoking House at Helvick is 32 feet long, by 14, and about 30 feet in height, with beams across, at intervals of four feet, on which the rods are supported; the perpendicular distance between those beams is not more than 14 inches, that being more than the length of the largest Haddock. The first tier of beams commence about seven feet above the floor on which the fires are.

JOHN ABELL.
ISAAC W. UNTHANK.

Limerick, 3d Month 21st, 1848.

☞ Fishermen are recommended to have this information preserved, by pasting it in their houses.

Handbill issued by the Limerick Auxiliary Committee with advice to fishermen on the curing of fish, 1848.
(Friends Historical Library, Dublin).

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appoint two members to procure a room for her 'to take in children to instruct by which means she may be enabled to make a livelihood'.[12] Sarah would therefore be in a position to utilise whatever skills she possessed and provide a service to others and no longer be a burden on the community. In the early years before the establishment of more formal structures, education was provided by a system of private tutors, small private schools and apprenticeship. This system provided an opportunity for women with a modicum of education, like Maria, daughter of Eliza Beale, and Sarah Woods, to establish small private schools. In 1825 there were 108 schools in Limerick with a total of 5,021 pupils, but many of the schools had as few as two pupils attending.[13] The desire for denominational teaching led Quakers to discuss the possibility of setting up a school as early as 1675 and in 1677 Lawrence Routh was engaged by Mountmellick Quakers to teach their children at a fee of £16 a year and diet and lodging. Three provincial schools were established in Ireland, Newtown in Waterford for Munster pupils, Mountmellick serving Leinster and Lisburn for Ulster. There were also schools in Ballitore, Co. Kildare, and in New Ross and Edenderry. Many Quakers were particularly interested in the study of science and botany, and George Fox and William Penn had advocated the garden as a practical forum for learning and instruction. Consequently, many of the great botanists associated with the development of gardens at Kew in London and Glasnevin in Dublin were of the Quaker faith. Newtown school in Waterford encouraged their pupils to pursue such studies and among its students who had assembled 'a collection of minerals, shells, and other curiosities'[14] in 1823 was William Harvey of Limerick. William Harvey (1811-1866) was later to achieve high academic acclaim for his study of the flowering plants of South Africa. He also published widely on the subject of marine algae and was appointed Professor of Botany at Trinity College, Dublin. (He later joined the Anglican Church). This awareness of the value of the study of the sciences was evident too in the petition drawn up by James Fisher and James Harvey along with two other members of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce in 1845. They were instructed by the Chamber to prepare a document to be sent to Parliament seeking funding for a University of Limerick. Making their case they wrote, ' science has now become the main spring of agriculture and commerce'[15] and furthermore it would only be through 'the judicious diffusion of knowledge amongst all classes'[16] that the vast resources of a county like Limerick, would be fully utilised. In an effort to copper-fasten the claim for the placing of such a college in Limerick they stated that, in their view, the city, with its newly developed New Town will be 'particularly conducive to the health and comfort of the inhabitants and will afford the professors and students of the college healthful and commodious residence'.[17]

Irish Quakers had contributed their share to the campaign to abolish slavery, had supported schemes for prison reform and had assisted in the work of providing schools for the poor, but they were soon to be called on to tackle problems of a scale never before encountered. Shortage of food had been experienced in Ireland on several occasions prior to 1845 when the potato, the principal food of the poorer classes, began to rot. The following summer the potato harvest looked promising until 'it pleased an over-ruling

Providence that almost the whole crop should be destroyed in one week'.[18] John Abell and William Woods of Limerick were appointed to collect information, make contacts locally and report to the central committee in Dublin. Again the emphasis was placed on self-help and no gratuitous supplies of food would be given. The Quaker network of contacts in Ireland, England and America was used to disseminate information about the situation and to solicit subscriptions. Influential English Quakers such as William Forester and James Tuke visited Ireland and reported on the ever-worsening famine situation. Soup kitchens were established and one opened in Limerick in 1846. Assistance in the form of money for clothing was given as well as 'the sum of two hundred pounds to John Abell in Limerick for encouraging the growth of flax and otherwise promoting industrial operations in the district'.[19] The committee in Limerick had responsibility for a vast district and reported that a new approach to the problems encountered outside the city was needed and that 'soup kitchens are better suited to urban areas than the open countryside'.[20] Making the case for assistance to cope with their widely dispersed territories, they described one which comprised 'over eighteen thousand acres, with six thousand inhabitants, no resident gentry, the priest is the only person to whom the poor can turn for assistance '.[21] A soup kitchen in such a setting would therefore be wholly inadequate. It is not surprising then, that Isaac W. Unthank and James Alexander wrote to the central committee in Dublin informing them of their belief that few, if any, of the boilers issued were in use and that they were not aware of more than one or two soup kitchens being in operation in the Limerick district. Limerick Quakers now looked to other means to help the poor. Among the proposals considered was clothing manufacture. Edward Fitt was in favour of this suggestion as he felt that whole donations of clothing were a short-term solution and the provision of materials would be more beneficial in the long run. By this means employment would be provided, a skill learned and 'the end result would be more satisfactory garment'.[22] When the work of the relief committee in Limerick finally come to an end they had distributed 560 tons of food within Co. Limerick and 630 tons in Co. Galway. The Quakers had made a major contribution to the relief of distress, had alerted authorities to the seriousness of the situation, organised relief schemes, and had, overall, contributed 'almost £200,000 worth of assistance'.[23] Through-out the famine period, in addition to their role in distributing aid, the Quaker relief committees at national and local level collected vast amounts of data, wrote reports, corresponded with government

Auxiliary Relief Committee, Society of Friends,

Limerick, 4th Mo., 1848.

This Committee believing that much good would result by the encouragement of the culture and manufacture of Flax amongst the destitute poor, for their own use as well as for sale, thus affording employment to many women and children, and encouraging habits of industry and cleanliness amongst them, have concluded to make grants of Flax-seed, on Loan, to approved applicants for the use of the poor in their respective neighbourhoods, such applicant to be accountable to this committee for three-fourths the amount of the grant, and to be refunded either in cash or well prepared flax, the remaining one-fourth to be allowed as a bonus to the grower for punctual payment when the crop is ready for market, and at least one-half of the produce must be spun and made up for the use of each family.

Decision of the Limerick Auxiliary Committee to encourage the growing of flax, 1848.
*(Friends Historical Library, Dublin).*

officials, analysed the underlying causes of the famine and examined the case of the landlord and the tenant. Finally, in an economic analysis of the situation of the country, they urged reforms which, if not implemented, would leave the country facing a bleak and uncertain future. Their perceptive evaluation cited emigration as a problem which would have a destructive influence on a nation 'whose people no longer felt connected to their native soil'.[24] A final report based on the accumulated information was prepared by Joseph Bewley and Jonathan Pim, secretaries to the central relief committee, with the help of Professor Hancock of Trinity College, Dublin. Hancock later withdrew because of business pressure and was replaced by Professor Wm. Hearn of Galway. Joseph Bewley died in 1851 before the completion of the report, but the work, *Transactions of the Society of Friends during the Famine in Ireland,* was published in 1852.

If the earlier campaign to abolish slavery had served as a process to politicise the Quaker community, that process was certainly completed in Ireland at the end of the famine period. Jonathon Pim (1806-85) became the first Irish Quaker Member of Parliament when he was elected for the Liberal Party in 1865, and he was re-elected in 1868. He was active in Parliament on the question of land reform, the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and Home Rule. Concerned also about the condition of the Society of Friends, he debated publicly

with his cousin from Limerick, Professor William Harvey, and both men's views are reflected in a publication entitled *Charles and Josiah, or friendly conversation between a Churchman and a Quaker.* Changes in the official response to poverty in Ireland were due in part to the Quaker analysis of the problem. They urged that reform of the landlord-tenant relationship be undertaken as a pre-requisite to any action which might alleviate poverty in Ireland. The condition of the poor was due, they said, to gross inequities in the system of land tenure and until these inequities had been removed, it would be wrong to blame the people for improvidence or want of industry. Later in Parliament the Irish land question and Home Rule were often a contentious and divisive issue for Quakers. At the fall of Gladstone's government following the failure of the Home Rule Bill to pass on the second reading in 1886, Quakers 'were to be found in both lobbies'.[25] As reforms were slowly being edged through in Parliament, Quaker philanthropists in England continued to lead the way in providing schemes to improve the lot of their workers. Families such as the Rowntrees in York and Cadburys in Birmingham built model villages, introducing welfare schemes and providing leisure facilities for them. In conjunction with the provision of the physical means to improve the lot of their workers, Quakers continued to raise awareness of the situation of the poor, researching and publishing proposals on ways to alleviate poverty. While much of this debate centred on the problems associated with the large industrial centres of England, it was relevant also for cities like Limerick, where poverty on a large scale also existed. As early as 1807 Quakers felt the need to provide a hospital for mentally ill patients in Ireland and Bloomfield Hospital in Dublin was established to provide a centre 'where treatment was to be more in unison with the ideas of Friends'[26] Bloomfield was modelled on another Quaker institution, York Retreat established in 1792 to provide humane care for mentally ill people, in a place separate from an infirmary, where they might have a chance of being restored to good health. A proposal was made in 1829 to build a hospital in Limerick in a location near the older part of the city 'where accidents generally occur and where timely assistance is most required by the poor '.[27] For the next one hundred and fifty years, until it's closure in 1988, that hospital provided a health care service to the poor and all sections of society in Limerick. There was Quaker involvement from the beginning in the new hospital, named Barringtons after is principal benefactor, Sir Matthew Barrington. Henry Newson was one of the founder members and James Harvey was one of the governors.
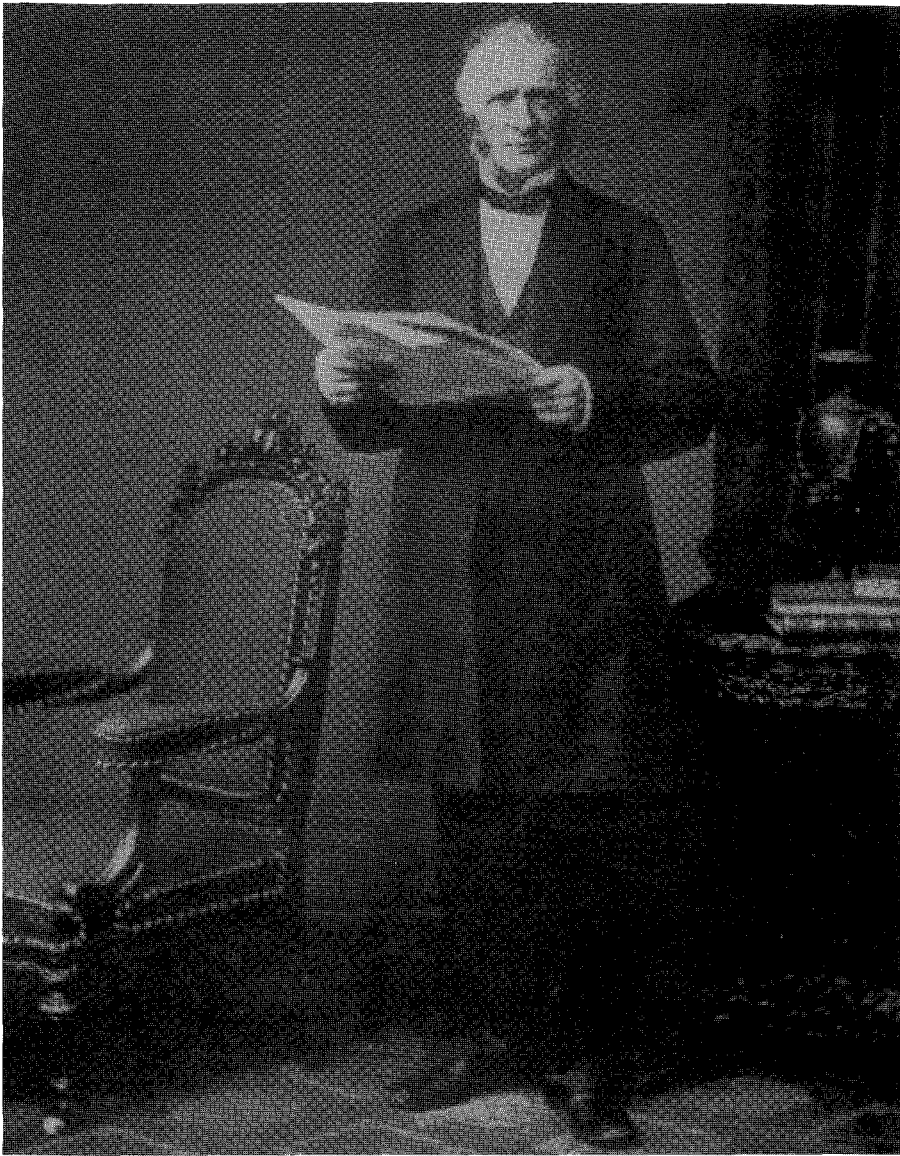
Jonathan Pim, one of the Secretaries of the Central Relief Committee.
(Jonathan P. Vigham).

James and William Alexander, whose family were members of the Quaker community in Limerick since the seventeenth century, also had close links with Barringtons' Hospital. James was secretary to the board in 1879 when it convened to discuss the hospital's precarious financial situation. Heated exchanges gave rise to allegations of proselytising of young patients admitted from the city's Ragged School. James Alexander defused the situation by stating that only one child was admitted two years previously from the Ragged School and the 'child was of such tender years that he could not be affected by such practices'.[28] The Quaker reputation for a non-sectarian approach to the distribution of charity was well established during the famine.

Among the early promoters of the Limerick Savings Bank were members of the Unthank, Bennis and Fitt families. The bank was established to encourage 'savings belonging to trades people, mechanics, servants, labourers and other industrious persons of either sex.'.[29] Other directors were industrialists Sir Peter Tait and Colonel Maunsell. Schemes to assist the poor and struggling working classes

received their unstinting attention. As early as 1771 Quakers were involved in organizations such as the Pery Charitable Loan Fund, which was set up to provide assistance to 'tradesmen through loans of three guineas each.'.[30] Through their network of international, national and local contacts Quakers succeeded in carrying out a major consciousness-raising exercise in the nineteenth century. They called for reforms which would improve the situation of woman prostitutes, they demanded changes in relation to property rights for women and an extension of voting rights for all. Their generous contributions to many philanthropic schemes acted as a catalyst for many of the improvements in welfare which were later adopted at official level and they had helped change the climate of opinion where poverty and indolence were no longer synonymous.

The shaping of the Quaker community in Limerick was determined by links which bound them together internally and was modified by forces encountered in their dealings with the wider community. Internal links were forged and maintained as a result of historic circumstance which

had isolated them at first and kept them apart from the general population. Their desire to distance themselves from the state and a church supported by tithes had forced them to be self-reliant, to undertake the care of their own poor and establish their own education system. Their desire for independence was facilitated by a network of business contacts, which was efficient and generous in its response to calls for assistance. It ensured that young people were placed in suitable environments to serve apprenticeships. Appropriate training was given in an atmosphere where high moral and religious standards were nurtured and monitored. Neglect of spiritual duties by an apprentice was notified to the local Quaker meeting and explanations were demanded. The vast majority of apprentices conformed, became imbued with Quaker values and transmitted them on to succeeding generations. Failure to attend meetings for worship usually resulted in a reprimand and the ultimate penalty of expulsion was extended, on rare occasions, only for serious offences. In Limerick in 1821, one apprentice deviated from Quaker rules and was summoned to account for his behaviour. An explanation for his absence from meetings for worship led to the revelation of a more grievous offence. He had joined the Freemasons, a move which ran totally against Quaker rules and principles.[31] Joining an organisation was not part of the Quaker culture. The need to retain their independence was a constant feature of reports from the annual meetings of Quakers. Involvement with political associations also met with official disapproval, as was the case in 1824, when a warning was issued against supporting any political organisation by joining it or by giving it financial support. Despite the best efforts of Samuel Alexander and Joseph Fisher, the apprentice who had joined the Freemasons in Limerick in 1821 refused to repent and was expelled. Gambling and alcohol consumption were vices totally inconsistent with the Quaker religion, and apprentices who indulged in them were summoned before a meeting of the local Quaker group. It must be noted, however, that it was only the actions of a very small minority which warranted such a call. Unorthodox behaviour was exceptional and the almost total absence of such cases in the records indicates the power and strength of the Quaker culture in maintaining moral standards. A rare glimpse emerges from Limerick Quaker records of someone who deviated form the rules, failed to attend meetings for worship and was accused of keeping unsuitable company, attending public houses and spending money improperly.[32] His offences were compounded by an act of total defiance when he announced his intention of joining the army, and he had left his masters employment for that purpose. Admission to the army required the taking of an oath of allegiance to the monarch, a procedure which was objected to by the Quakers. Their objection was

rooted in a history in which they had endeavoured to distance themselves from the apparatus of state. Also, oath taking was seen as superfluous to a Quaker, who was bound by a moral code to always speak the truth. Their exclusion from many areas of political and economic life obliged them to be independent, self-sufficient and to establish economic and social support systems almost wholly within their own religious grouping. The solidarity of the Quaker community was supported by strong family links and buttressed by a system which ensured regular contact at local, provincial and national level. Quakers were a highly literate and well-educated group and frequent exchange of letters was also part of a communication system through which social contacts were maintained. Parents wrote letters of encouragement and support to their children away at school or serving an apprenticeship, cousins, aunts and uncles sent local news to distant relatives. Descriptions of funerals and testimonials to deceased members were despatched to those unable to attend a burial. Their willingness to exchange information and the vigilance of individuals who alerted each other to business opportunities were factors contributing greatly to the overall welfare of the group. For example, in 1830 William Newsom of Cork wrote to his cousin Joseph in Limerick informing him of a newspaper report which he had just read, detailing the movement of a troop of soldiers from Gort, Co. Galway to Limerick.[33] The arrival of new army personnel in Limerick was seen as an event which might lead to the securing of a tenant for Laurel Hill House. Mindful of the duty to look after the interests of their own, William suggested that if the commander of the troops, Colonel Maxwell, could be secured as tenant, the widow now occupying part of the house would surely be happy to accept rent of forty to forty-five guineas per year. Thus the web of contacts ensured that they were well informed, alert and ready to take advantage of changing circumstances. From the middle of the eighteenth century in Limerick, Quakers were playing an increasingly active role in the business life of the city. Contacts with other prosperous merchants were established and maintained on commercial bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Harbour Board. Quakers were astute and capable in business and assisted each other to achieve positions on the management committees of such boards. Given that the overall size of the Quaker community in Limerick was never large, their strong representation on such committees is worthy of note.

Despite regular warnings on the dangers of attachment to worldly goods, some Limerick Quakers, from the end of the eighteenth century onward, began to mark their achievements by the acquisition of substantial houses. Most were located in an area south of the New Town. An Ordnance Survey map of 1870
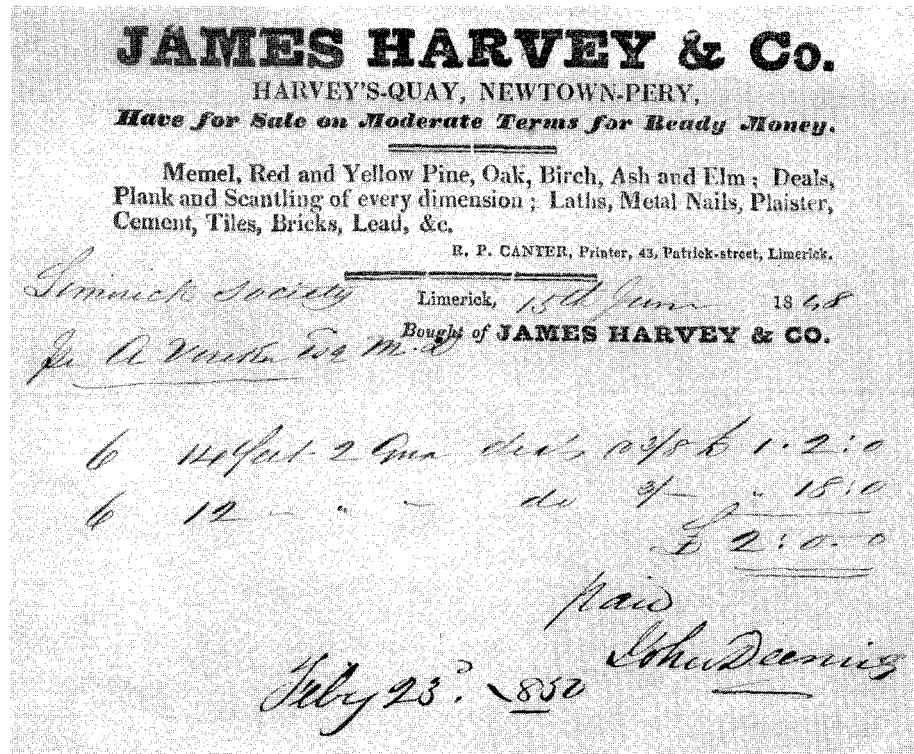
Bill of James Harvey to Limerick Philosophical Society, 15 June, 1848.
(Limerick Museum).

records a large tract of land named Quakers Fields at Ballinacurra. The area was favoured by Quaker families and the map shows the location of several Quaker homes. One such house, Richmond, was built by Joseph Fisher and it was the home to which his son, James, brought his bride, Lydia Leadbetter, in 1823. Joseph Massy Harvey built Summerville nearby in 1786. Laurel Hill, the house which was the subject of correspondence between the Newsom cousins, William and Joseph, was sold and later became Laurel Hill convent in 1854. Summerville, now part of Mary Immaculate College, was leased to Laurence Marshall in 1856. By 1859 the property was divided between Thomas Fitt, C. Gromwell and Francis Harvey. In 1873, James Bannatyne was the occupier and it was acquired by another Quaker family, the Goodbodys of Clara, County Offaly in 1902. Joseph Massey Harvey, owner of Sunville, died in 1834 and he and his wife, Rebecca, are buried in the Quaker cemetery on land which he donated to the Limerick Quakers at Ballinacurra. William Newsom was also listed as the immediate lessor of five houses in Victoria Terrace in the same area of the city.[34] The story of Joseph Harvey is emblematic of the condition of the whole Quaker community in nineteenth century Limerick. From his family of ten children, one son, William Henry, the eminent botanist, was disowned and joined the Anglican Church; others died young and one son, Ruben, inherited the business but because of his marriage to his first cousin, Elizabeth, he too was expelled from the Quaker community. Other substantial residences were built by the Alexander family across the river in the area of the North Circular Road.

Early in the nineteenth century, the demographic indicators were beginning to show trends which did not auger well for the future of the Quaker community. An estimate of the size of that community before the official census of 1861 can only be derived from circumstantial evidence. The presence of twenty Quaker households in Limerick is suggested by the receipt of twenty copies of the anti-slavery document for distribution to Limerick members in 1821. Vann and Eversley proposed that the total Irish Quaker population at its height, based on a figure of 750 households, was no greater than 5,000.[35] Calculated in a similar fashion, the Limerick Quaker population might have consisted of approximately 140 people. They were a small cohesive group, already linked by family ties and they judged with compassion cases of marriages which had taken place contrary to their rules. Marriages witnessed by clergymen of other Protestant churches were entered on the records and the births of children born to such couples were also recorded. In the decade after the famine there was a sharp decline of almost two-thirds in the number of marriages recorded. The same downward trend was displayed in the number of births recorded.[36] No exact correlation exists between the number of marriages and the number of births recorded, as couples who married in Limerick may not have continued to live in the city. However, the data on the frequency of such events gives an overall impression of social life within the Quaker community and is an indicator of its strength and vibrancy at a particular time. The relationship between the number of recorded births and deaths presents a more direct image of the position of the Quaker community. In the first decade of

the nineteenth century, the birth rate exceeded the death rate by a ratio of more than two to one. From the 1820s onward, the number of recorded births began to show a marked decline and the death rate exceeded the birth rate in every decade from 1830s onwards.*

	Marriages	Births	Deaths
1800-10	13	54	24
1811-20	7	39	30
1821-30	13	43	43
1831-40	15	49	54
1841-50	63	74	5
1851-60	5	24	30

*Source: Registers of marriages, births and deaths, (F.H.L., Dublin).

In 1861, the first official census in Ireland to include religion revealed that the number of Quakers in Limerick was 70 out of total population of 44,448, with a Catholic majority of 39,124. (The remainder consisted of 4,238 members of the Established Church, 418 Presbyterians, 344 Methodists, 170 Independents, 13 Baptists, 1 Jew and 70 others.) More than half of the Quaker community lived in Saint Michael's parish, an area encompassing the main commercial thoroughfare of George's Street and extending out to the southern suburbs. Out of the total Quaker population of 70, there were 45 in Saint Michael's parish, 9 in Saint Munchin's, 7 in Saint Patrick's, 4 in Saint Nicholas', 4 in Saint John's and 1 in Saint Mary's. From the beginning of the nineteenth century Quakers everywhere were uneasy about declining numbers. Traditionally they saw themselves as fulfilling the role of a 'peculiar people'[37] who, only by living a life separate from the rest of the world, would be granted eternal salvation. Their own increased affluence accompanied by a growing awareness of the problems of the poor led to a questioning of these teachings. An evangelical movement which promoted the bible above individual inspiration as the authoritative source of divine wisdom also gave rise to much anxious questioning. All of these debates created a general climate of dissatisfaction which resulted in a falling-off in Quaker membership in Britain and Ireland. For a small Quaker community like Limerick's, mid-century reform of marriage rules may have come too late and increasing numbers of resignations were recorded. The widespread campaign of opposition to a state-supported church in the 1860s, culminating in the Disestablishment Act of 1869, may have convinced many Quakers that, as the very basis of their dissent had been removed, membership of the Church of Ireland was now an option to be considered. The downward trend continued and by 1873 the number of Quakers in Limerick had declined to 51, with another 6 people regularly attending meetings, but who were not members.[38] In 1898 there were 38 members of the Quaker community in Limerick, with

some considerable changes evident in the list of surviving surnames.[39] The Alexander name survived in the person of Samuel, living at Eden Terrace. The Bennis family was in George's Street. The Fisher name was represented by Charlotte at Templeville, and Edward Alexander Fisher, whose address was listed as the Provincial Bank, Newcastle West. Newsom, too, was a long surviving patronymic, with Henry Ridgeway Newsom living in William Street. Other surnames were Goodbody, Fayle, Haughton, Davis, Martin, Neale, Scarr and Webb. There was evidence of the presence of one vibrant Quaker household in Limerick in 1898. William John Woodhouse and his wife, Annie, lived with their eight children in William Street. The Harvey name was all but eliminated and was represented only through the middle name of Ann Harvey Jackson. The downward trend continued and when the next official census recording religion was taken in 1911, there were twenty-five members of the Quaker community resident in Limerick city. A similar pattern was recorded all over Ireland and the total Quaker population in the country in 1900 was 2,609. The total in Ulster now exceeded that of Leinster, but Dublin was the largest urban centre with 854 members. Depletion of numbers led to a loss of momentum and the Limerick Quaker community went into a near-fatal decline early in the twentieth century. The energy and dynamism which was the hallmark of Quaker activities in earlier times was kept alive in Limerick by the few remaining members, such as Ernest Bennis, his daughter, Emilie, and Alma Fitt. Their efforts have been rewarded by a renewal of interest locally and, combined with the influx of new members from abroad, this has led to the re-establishment of the movement in a new meeting house in Limerick in 1997. The legacy of the Quakers is all around us in the houses which they built, the bridges and harbour facilities which they had developed, and in the mills and warehouses which they operated. As well as their role in providing relief during famine, the Quaker contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Limerick was considerable and of lasting significance.

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