

Children's Summer Schools – The Friend July 16, 1954

It was in 1922 that some Friends of Hampstead Meeting, including Barrington and Gertrude H. Whitlow, invited a group of school-age boys and girls to a one day's gathering at Hampstead Meeting House. The chief aim of this gathering was to give an opportunity for children scattered over the area to meet each other and realise they were part of a larger whole, for it must be remembered that not nearly as much was done in those days to meet such a need as is done nowadays. So this first gathering was more of a social nature than anything else. But Barrington Whitlow felt a deep concern for these young people and in October, 1922 he spoke to Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting on it, having received the support of London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting young people's committee.

As a result the Monthly Meeting agreed to help to arrange a week-end settlement for boys and girls in the Easter holidays of 1923 with a view to help forward their religious education as well as giving them an opportunity for coming together from a wider area and realising that they were an essential part of the Society of Friends. The

concern gripped London and Middlesex Quarterly meeting, and three simultaneous week-end gatherings for boys and girls were held during the Easter holidays of 1923 – at Croydon, Hampstead and Wanstead. The children stayed overnight in the homes of local Friends. These gatherings were continued every year until 1933. In Addition to talks on Quakerism and religious subjects, topics of general interest were introduced, and one of the writers of this article well remembers a lecture given by Hubert Leslie McMichael on "Wireless" (which was then in its early stages), who demonstrated on a "closed circuit", some of the children taking it in turns to speak into the microphone in one part of the building and the sound being relayed into the Meeting House.

Penketh and Wigton

During one of these Easter week-ends Alice Warner, of Liverpool, was staying with Barrington and Gertrude Whitlow and was most interested in the project. On her return home she discussed it with other Friends including the late William Butler, and it was decided to hold a one-day gathering at Penketh for Children from Liverpool and St. Helens.

From this germ came the first regular Summer School. Held at Penketh in 1928, where Charles and Alice Warner were Wardens and William Butler the organising secretary. It was largely owing to the work and enthusiasm of William Butler that the period of the Summer School was extended to a week. In 1930 another Summer School was held at Penketh, and the Friends Education Council's Children's Work Committee was asked to help. Summer Schools were also held at Penketh in 1932 and 1934 (in which year Penketh closed down) and since then they have been held at Wigton in 1936, 1938, 1940, 1942, 1945, 1947, 1949 and 1951 and at Wennington in 1953.

Saffron Walden and Leighton Park

In 1932 London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting Young People's Committee in consultation with Essex and Suffolk and Bedfordshire Quarterly Meetings, and with the active co-operation of the Friends Education Council, arranged a Summer School at Saffron Walden. The School lasted a week, but now the children were divided into three, instead of two age groups, the age range being approximately 12 to 18 years. Since then Summer Schools for this area have been held at

Saffron Walden in 1934, 1939, 1941, 1945, 1947, 1950, 1951 and 1953, and at Leighton Park in 1936. In 1944 a Summer School was to have been held at Leighton Park, but it had to be cancelled owing to the risk of flying bombs. Arrangements made to transfer it to the Agricultural College at Loughborough, joining with Derby, Lincoln, and Notts and associated Quarterly Meetings, had also to be cancelled owing to an outbreak of scarlet fever.

Yorkshire Schools

The Yorkshire and Durham area held its first Summer School at Ackworth in 1933 and so attains its majority this year as does the Midlands area. Schools were held at Bootham in 1934 and annually thereafter – The Mount in 1936, Ackworth in 1937, Bootham in 1938, Ayton in 1939, Ackworth in 1940 and 1941, Doncaster (a week-end camp) in 1942, The Mount in 1943, Bootham in 1944, Ackworth in 1945, New Earswick in 1946, The Mount in 1947, New Earswick in 1948, Doncaster in 1949, Ayton in 1950, Ackworth in 1951 and Doncaster in 1952 and 1953. This year's school is at Bootham (July 31 to August 6). This list shows how materially Summer Schools can be helped by having a number of schools in the area willing to co-operate. In areas where only one

school is situated it is not possible for practical reasons to use the building each year.

Sibford

Also in 1933, Friends in the Midland area with practical support from the Friends Education Council, held their first Summer School at Sibford. Since then Schools have been held there in 1935, 1937, 1943, 1945, 1946, 1948, 1950 and 1952, and in 1947 one was held at Leicester. The school is being held at Sibford this year (August 6 to 13).

Sidcot

In 1938, owing to illness, the Saffron Walden Summer School was abandoned and the one planned by Bristol and Somerset Quarterly Meeting, which was to have been held at Sidcot, was moved to Leighton Park and attended by some children from the Quarterly Meetings usually catered for by Saffron Walden Summer School. It was not until 1948, however, that a Summer School for the Western area only was held at Sidcot, since when Schools have been held there in 1949, 1951 and 1952.

Aims of the Schools

When Summer Schools first started one of the aims was to give children not attending Friends' Schools a chance of living together under conditions similar to those at the Schools. In the early stages little was done to formulate the aims of the Schools, but in 1948, at a meeting of representatives from the five regions which organised such gatherings, the aim was summarised as follows:

“The aim of these ‘Schools’ has developed from the early intention of giving a taste of boarding-school life to the children of Friends and Attenders, who have not been at Quaker boarding-schools. To that of providing an opportunity for living together as a community, in the spirit of Christian fellowship. The deep spiritual significance of the Schools lies not only in their recognition as a link in the chain of Quaker associations, but as training ground for developing Christian living and Quaker service.”

In recent years some schools have included a few boarding-school children among their number, one reason being that it is helpful to have a nucleus used to living in a larger community.

A glance through some of the earlier programmes suggests that isolated talks on

Quakerism and allied subjects were given in those days; but later the talks were grouped round a central theme for the week. For example, in 1938 the subject of "The adventure of Fellowship" was a general one for all Schools, although each approached it in a different manner; in 1939 "Our Quaker Heritage" was a general theme also. In 1947 each School had its own theme – at Wigton it was "Adventurers All", at Saffron Walden "Standards of life", at The Mount "Science and Religion" and at Leicester "Christian Citizenship".

Lectures and discussions usually took place on such subjects in the varying age-groups in the mornings, and the afternoons were free for excursions to places of local interest, games and swimming. The evenings were given over to lectures on varied subjects or entertainments given by children and staff. From 1945 onwards time has been found for some practical work in music, drama, art or handicrafts, each child bringing able to choose which subject he or she wishes to study. The one item which has remained unchanged on the programme is the morning period of worship.

Wardens and Lecturers

In addition to those connected with the Friends Education Council and its Children's

Work Committee, many Friends have given continuous thought and work for these Summer Schools. We have not sufficient knowledge to name all, but would mention a few whose names will always be connected with the Schools as wardens, organisers or lecturers (in addition to many who did much of the less spectacular behind-the-scenes work): Fran and Hilda Parkin, John Hunter, Howard Jones, Neave Bryshaw, J. Penrose Whitlow, Cuthbert Wigham, Florence M. Dent, Eric W. Savage, James and Joyce Drummond, Frank and Winifred Uttley, mentioned, Charles and Alice Warner, William Butler and Barrington and Gertrude Whitlow.

The foundations of their work were well laid, and the fact that a number of attenders at earlier Summer Schools are now returning as wardens, helpers and group discussion leaders is one indication of the value they themselves once found at these gatherings.

The mere fact that the Schools are always full and in some cases cannot accept all who would like to attend, shows that they help to meet a need in the younger age-groups of our Society. They have become a part of the Society's integral structure, as has Junior Yearly Meeting, and, as Barrington Whitlow wrote in *The Wayfarer* in 1934, are a

development "of the Summer School or Lecture School movement which, under the inspiration of John Wilhelm Rowntree, began among Friends nearly forty years ago... The vitality of the movement is continually shown by its capacity for taking on new forms ... and gradually the method has been adapted to bring in the children"

Muriel H Whitlow
Kenneth L Whitlow