

Appreciation of the life of Brontë Bedford-Payne

12 November 1928 ~ 6 August 2017

In her teenage years, Brontë and her sister, Elizabeth, lived with their aunt's family, who kept sheep at Drebley near Bolton Abbey. She explored widely on her bicycle, coming to know and to love the uplands of the Yorkshire Dales, its people, birds, flowers, buildings, history and the lay and feel of the land. On one such tour, she first visited Airton Meeting House, where a relative of hers had formerly been a resident warden, and in the restoration of which she was later to be closely interested. The habits of keeping a personal diary and of making notes of what she observed served her well in later life, when she produced several books and gave talks on local history and related topics. She was an excellent public speaker.

During the war years, Leeds Grammar School for Girls was evacuated to Bolton Abbey. Brontë attended as a day pupil and went on to study dentistry at University College in London, an unusual career for a woman in those days. She married a fellow dentist, Richard Arthur Bedford-Payne, on 13 September, 1952, at Bolton Abbey. They raised two children and had a thriving practice in Letchworth Garden City. Brontë had several placements as a schools' dental surgeon, including six months as a locum in Orkney in the early 1970s.

Eventually, the call of the north became irresistible and in 1975 they bought Low Mill, on the Grassington side of Linton Falls, where they established themselves as the local dentists with a side-line in fish farming. Brontë specialised in children's dentistry. She had a wonderful ability to relate to people, so much so that decades after she had retired people would say with pleasure, "she used to be my dentist when I was a child". During this time, they had memorable caravan holidays with their family and friends. Brontë also had a rich creative life, as a pianist, a writer, and an outstanding needle worker. While living in Letchworth and at Low Mill, she and Richard were active Attenders of Quaker Meetings. They each joined Skipton Meeting (Settle Monthly Meeting) in 1994, a few months before Richard died. A year later, Brontë moved to Summers Barn in Grassington. In 2012 she transferred the listing of her membership to Airton Local Meeting (Craven and Keighley Area Meeting).

Brontë was active in the Grassington Peace Group and in the Upper Wharfedale Field Society, which she served as General Secretary for ten years, and then as its President in 1999. In 2001, she was made an Honorary Life Member of the Field Society, for which she organised study groups, projects and field visits. In the last days of her final illness, she was concerned that a trip which had been arranged months previously and which she had intended to lead should go ahead as planned so that its participants would not be disappointed.

Among all her varied interests, Brontë also gave much time to Friends. She served as an Elder of Skipton Local Meeting and as an editor of the Meeting's newsletter; she was a Trustee and frequent Resident Friend at Glenthorne, the Quaker guest house in Grasmere. She was one of the first Friends to be interested in and actively support restoration of the Airton Meeting House, joining with a few others to huddle in blankets in a circle around a noxious paraffin heater as we worshipped in the partly-unroofed building for almost two years before it was repaired. On one such occasion, she went out to hush a noisy party of walkers who were peering into the windows of what they thought was a derelict building and was just in time to hear one of them say to the others, "Look! They're in there. They're doing

it. They're doing it right now!". She explained that "it" was Quaker worship, not witchcraft and sent them on their way.

In 2000, Brontë was inspired by an article in *The Friend* to create an Airton tapestry panel. Typical of her ability to bring people together, the nine whom she assembled for this project included embroiderers and non-needle workers, local school children, members of Skipton Meeting, and residents of Malhamdale. Brontë wrote of the project, "We were not an established group of men and women looking for something to do we were a group of local people, not all Quakers, who came together, purely to create an embroidered panel, a thing well made, which would add to the rich heritage of historical interest in Malhamdale".

Several Friends have said that what they have valued most about knowing Brontë was the pleasure of her company. Travelling with her on country roads to visit farming friends or a favourite wildflower meadow and simple trips between Grassington and Airton were enlivened by her pointing out the origins of scars on the landscape, places where her relatives had lived, the ages and purposes of particular walls and buildings, an ancient rabbit warren or an archaeological site. She was thoroughly embedded in the Yorkshire Dales and generous in sharing her love and knowledge of it. Visitors to her home were warmly received, with tea and much-appreciated home-made ginger biscuits. She was equally welcoming to newcomers to Skipton and to Airton Local Meetings. One Friend said, "I will always remember how welcoming, reassuring and informative she was towards me as a newcomer". Other Friends have said, "she was always approachable and easy to talk to sometimes a bit timid, but at the same time there was real steel in there.... there was a touch of gentility.... Brontë's capacity for recognising the abilities of others.... working with Brontë was a privilege as well as a delight".

Brontë was never a very conspicuous Quaker. She shuddered at the idea of wearing a lapel badge that said, "I am a Quaker ask me why", but she kept our testimonies and she lived her Quakerism to the full. In doing so, she enriched the lives of all who knew her.

Books and articles by Brontë Bedford-Payne:

2007. *People and Places in Upper Wharfedale*, Summers Barn Publishing.

2010. "Hough Mill in Barden 1604-1889", The Upper Wharfedale Field Society.

2011. "Charles Kingsley, Christian Socialist – Malham Tarn and Tom the Chimney Sweep", North Craven Heritage Trust.

2012. "The Turnpike from Skipton to Cracoe and Sandybeck Bar", The Upper Wharfedale Field Society.

2016. *Barden in Wharfedale, The Place and its People*. Hayloft Publishing, Ltd.

Bedford-Payne, B. and H. Beaumont 1997. *The Story of Barden School, its Patrons, Pupils and Teachers*, Prontaprint.

signed on behalf of Airton Local Meeting 12.11.2017

Laurel Phillipson. Clerk