

DRAFT

**A TESTIMONY TO THE GRACE OF GOD AS SHOWN IN THE LIVES OF
BILL AND PHYLLIS BOLTON**

Wilfrid Mullins Bolton, 3.2.1919 – 21.3.2015 and Phyllis Bolton, nee Ormston, 27.8.1918 - 21.12.2014 were two very different individuals. They were also an effective team for over seventy years of married life together, from 1942 until their deaths within a few months of each other, both at the age of 96. Throughout this time their often complementary skills were put to the service of others in many ways, always driven by compassion and concern.

Neither was born into a Quaker family. It was in the mid 1950's that Bill became an attender at Hull Meeting after an incidental meeting with a Quaker and some subsequent reading. Phyllis soon followed, and with their two daughters the Bolton family "found a real spiritual home in what at this time was a very vibrant Meeting – an intellectually and spiritually stimulating place to be".

Phyllis was born in Hull into a Baptist family of Scottish ancestry. A superbly practical person, she trained as a seamstress, and during the war she worked on various East Riding farms as a Land Girl. Much later in life her artistic side blossomed when she took a City & Guilds qualification in textiles, and later still when in her eighties she was involved in the Quaker Tapestry. Her feeling for the natural world led her to experiment with vegetable dyes for her spinning and weaving. She was a keen gardener and cook, "an inveterate Oxfam shopper" and an enthusiastic and thrifty home-maker.

Her warm, gentle and thoughtful manner endeared her to many, and she developed strong friendships especially amongst the disadvantaged and those on the margins of society. With other Quakers between 1965 and 1972 she was convenor of the "house committee" establishing and running Hillcrest House, which for the first time in the Hull area provided a safe and supportive home for unmarried mothers. She worked with handicapped children in Beverley. When invited by the local authority to help improve the education of the children of Travellers, she set up a pioneering roadside playgroup in a minibus. Her good rapport with the families led to some lasting friendships. She was also involved in the peace movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, attending the women's demonstrations at Greenham Common.

Bill had a difficult early life, enduring childhood poverty, losing his father at a young age and being brought up by various relatives. As a child he suffered from Bell's palsy and rickets, and as a young man he experienced bouts of depression. As an adult he suffered from stomach ulcers and stress, and in his final years he showed stoicism in living with ever-present pain, and the isolating effect of advanced deafness, which must have been very hard indeed for such a communicative person. Despite this, his twinkly-eyed humour was never far from the surface.

In World War Two he was a conscientious objector, having been strongly influenced to

this position by a Methodist minister in his youth. He served in the Royal Medical Corps with an ambulance unit in north Africa, until he was discharged due to ill-health. He trained as a teacher, teaching art and physical education and serving for nineteen years as a peripatetic headmaster. Bill was in his fifties before he took his B.Ed. Degree. He became Head of Swinemoor County Primary School in Beverley. As an education adviser he helped young teachers and took on the challenge of getting children from Traveller families into school. Their interest in the welfare of the young led both Bill and Phyllis to get involved with the Yorkshire Friends' Holiday School, where Bill's inventiveness and a certain air of irresponsibility resulted in the "potted sports" that continue to be enjoyed by holiday-schoolers.

He had many interests: butterfly swimming, painting, gardening, amateur acting, and singing in a male-voice choir. He loved his bee-keeping, and with a keen sense of the absurd he loved to tell people about the green-coloured "peppermint honey" his bees produced after discovering waste from the nearby Needlers sweet factory where peppermint creams were made. He was "always dapper – but only thanks to Phyllis" and had "a grip-your-eye way of telling a story". His monologues and sketches, in which his arched eyebrow suggested we were all in on the joke, were a favourite at meeting house socials. He was also a wise and passionate man, "an avid reader of Advices and Queries" whose ministry could be powerfully moving, and whose battered copy of Quaker Faith and Practice was ever-present in Meeting for Worship.

Phyllis and Bill met in 1939 on a young people's Christian holiday in Whitby, two weeks before the outbreak of war. Despite the distance between Bill's home in West Yorkshire and Phyllis' in the East Riding, Bill would cycle to visit her even during the wartime blackout. They were married at a Baptist church in Hull in 1942, and by 1946 had two daughters, Janet and Sheila.

Family holidays were spent walking and camping, often with their close friends Theo and Alice Tulley and their four children. The children remember both the fun and the serious conversations about topics like pacifism and vegetarianism, in which "there was always an enquiring element". Bill and Phyllis "always impressed the importance of truth, perseverance, strength of character, kindness, love and to respect all living things".

However, it was "a marriage made on Earth, not in Heaven": Phyllis' and Bill's strong and differing opinions made it difficult at times, perhaps most so later when keenly missing their daughters, both of whom had moved abroad. However, their firm view that marriage was for life won through. "Each was a help to the other, following the ebb and flow of want and need", and in lighter moments they could be very much a "double-act".

In the 1960's they gravitated towards the newly-established Meeting in Beverley, where a new meeting house had been built. Bill became treasurer, Phyllis served as an overseer and on hospitality, and they hosted many "at homes". They were "very much the power behind the social things" that helped to knit the Meeting together. They continued to serve the Meeting faithfully until the age of eighty, when they both felt it was right to step back from formal service.

Both Bill and Phyllis were very practical people who were prompted by loving concern to use their skills to help others, particularly the young and disadvantaged. There were many examples from relatives and Friends of how a Quaker ethos ran through their lives. They “always had time for you”, and were valued enormously by all who knew them.

Phil and Janet Entwistle,

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