

# The Diary of James Backhouse 1747:1752

---

**B**Y the kindness of Edward Backhouse, J.P., of Darlington, we have been able to read this Diary, and we are permitted to print extracts therefrom for our readers.

The records of these years are contained in a quarto, leather-bound volume of about 200 pages and they occupy rather less than half of the book. The book is lettered "Vollum First," and on a flyleaf are the words, "The Diary of my Grandfather, James Backhouse. E. Backhouse, Ashburne, 1842," and in pencil "E. B jr."<sup>1</sup>

The book opens with an historical retrospect, which here follows :

I was Born at Yealand Conyers in the parish of Warton and County of Lancaster on the night betwixt the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>d</sup> of the first month 1720/21, My Father william Backhouse [1695-1761] was younger son of James Backhouse of the same place who Dyed prisoner for Tythes in Lancaster Castle the 13<sup>th</sup> of 4<sup>th</sup> month, 1697 Aged 29 years see his Dying saying voll : 8 page 46. My Grandmothers name was Jennet Godsalve before shee was married, my Mothers name was Agnes Atkinson from Colthouse near Hawkshead Lancashire.

My Parents lived at Yealand Conyers till about the 19<sup>th</sup> of 2<sup>d</sup> month 1727 when we removed to Over Kellet to the house where Tho<sup>s</sup> & Robert Withers formerly lived. I went mostly to the free schooll at Kellet except a little I staid at Yealand at my Grandmothers till shee Dyed, & I think I went most of the year 1732 to Yealand Scool & back every day on foot being three long miles each way to learn Wrighting and Arithmatick with Michael Jenkinson who afterwards married my Aunt Ruth Robinson.

The Second of twelfth month 1734 My Father left home and went to Yealand to my Uncle John Backhouses [d. 1739] and from thense by Hawkshead &c. to Whitehaven where he took shiping for Philadelphia intending to visit Friends in America Mother & I went with him to Whitehaven where he met his Companion John Burton,<sup>2</sup> I supplied the place of a Servant Womon to my Mother during his Absence. he came home again much out of health in harvist 1736.

About the 30<sup>th</sup> of ye Eight month same year Father bought some Flax and began hackling that I might get Instructed in Trade at home.

I staid at Kellet with my Father and wrought at hackles untill about the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> month 1740/1 when I took the Small Pox w<sup>ch</sup> I had to a very great degree being 14 Days before I was at the height most if not all that saw me expected I should Dye for many days, after I was got pretty much recovered which was about the 27<sup>th</sup> of 6<sup>th</sup> month, 1741 I went to live at Lancaster and acted under my Father while I staid there which was about four year & nine months. The 21<sup>st</sup> of 11<sup>th</sup> month 1744/5 Thomas Kendall of Lancaster accompanied me to Darlington and Introduced me to Father Hedleys house with an intent to ask consent for his daughter which was the first time I was at Darnton I think I made her 5 or 6 visits more and we were married at Stockton meeting house on the month meeting day & after the business was over being the eight of the Second month 1746 and In a few days after Entered into partnership with my Father in Law Jonathan Hedley.<sup>3</sup>

“ James Backhouse became extensively engaged in business as a flax-dresser and linen manufacturer, and in the year 1774, in conjunction with his [two] sons, established the Bank at Darlington. . . . For a long period he filled the office of clerk to Durham Quarterly Meeting ” (*Select Family Memoirs*, 1831). During part of the period of the Diary he was clerk of Stockton Monthly Meeting.

In later life James Backhouse engaged in the ministry and visited Friends in Great Britain, Ireland and Holland. He died 1 iv. 1798.

There are several entries respecting his elder son, Jonathan (1747-1826)—he first attended Meeting in 3 mo. 1751; “ made son Jonathan a place over Cole hole for his pidgeons ”; the next day a “ pidgeon ” was lost. Several other children did not survive their birth. James, the younger son (1757-1804), was ancestor of the York family. His wife’s relations are mentioned occasionally—“ Uncle Thomas Hedley ” (*circa*. 1676- ) was visited at his home at Studdah, near Spennithorne, and in 4 mo, 1748, said uncle and his wife settled in Darlington.<sup>4</sup>

There are many references to J.B.’s trade—visits to Middleton Tyas for yarn; constant attendance “ at Shop down street ”; “ took about £6 & sold near 19 Dosen of Lint on Trust ”; “ Fair day. I was down street. Wee got in near 22 dozen of Yarn, took cash Yarn Included about £17 and trusted about £6 ”; “ In evening cast up

what profit we had made this year [1750] which was about £50 besides £20 left us by Mary Foster. We had a bad year for profit by Flax, we also did considerable less than other years"; the hacklers strike for higher wages in 1747, and the next year "we had about eighty Score of Yarn stole out of garth."

Much time was spent in assisting to build and furnish "the new house and arrange the garden."

1750. 6 mo. 26. "David Barclay his wife & 2 Daughters brickfasted w<sup>th</sup> us in new house w<sup>ch</sup> was first time in it."

1750. 4 mo. 19. "The Window Surveyor came."

Many visits of itinerant preachers are recorded, but little said of their labours. Among transatlantic Ministers we note :

1748. Peter Davis of New England.

1749. Daniel Stanton of Philadelphia ("his memory is sweet to me"), Thomas Nicholson of South Carolina, Betty Hudson of Philadelphia, "who had a silent meeting."

1750. William Lightfoot of Philadelphia, William Brown of the same.

1751. William Thomas of Maryland, John Churchman.

1751. 6 mo. 14. "We came to Yarme where John Churchman & John Pemberton from Pensilvania had a hard meeting, many came in & was very unsettled."

Home Ministers included Samuel Bownas, Benjamin Holme, Robert and Grace Chambers, May Drummond, Gharret van Hassen, "from Ireland but formerly from Holland," Abiah Darby, Robert Wardell.

1750. 9 mo. 18. "At meeting twice both very dull ones."

1751. 5 mo. 9. "At Month meeting at Shotton . . . Jona Garbut preached I tho<sup>t</sup> flattened the meeting & had much better been quiet."

1751. 7 mo. 12. "Jas Conyers from York was at meeting & preached twice which was no advantage to y<sup>e</sup> meeting."

1751. 7 mo. 28. "Robert Lawson from Lancaster & James Park from Tortola came & I spent evening with them at post office."

1752. 2 mo. 18. "At meeting appointed for W<sup>m</sup> Impey<sup>s</sup> from Saffron Waldon where John Murthwaint went into the Gallary & I had him to take out of meeting. a good meeting at Last tho very much desturbed at first by J : Murth<sup>t</sup>."

Miscellaneous entries include :

1748. 5 mo. 8. "At Liverpool. We went to see pot houses & silk works where one wheele works above 300 Twisting bobbins & about 450 that winds Silk of the hank there is 2 of these Sets & about 50 Girls to attend on them."
1750. 5 mo. 24. "About  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 12 o'clock, when at Dinner it began to Thunder & was very Teryfying. the Cracks & Lightning seem'd both near at one Instant which split the Spire<sup>6</sup> upon this seeple-house from near bottom of spire to above the hole where people goes out almost at Top & burst a great hole oposite to said door. some of the Stones were thrown about 50 yards from steeple, a house the other side the bridge was much damaged by y<sup>e</sup> Lightning, several people was stifled for some time they could not speak some most blinded, it made our house shake as I never felt the like before."
1750. 8 mo. 26. "Tees was so frose could not cross with safety at higher ford at Blackwall."
1750. 9 mo. 9. "Blands Dragoon<sup>7</sup> came out of the North & went South yesterday & to-day."
1750. 10 mo. 23. "My wife and I began about a month since to read some in the Bible every evening at going to bed & began 1st Chapter of Genesis this night got 3 chapter in Numbers." [Progress is reported from time to time.]
1751. 5 mo. 29. "My wife and I went to see some wild Beasts over Henry Wright Stable a he Lion 2 Leopard 2 hiancas &c."
1751. 8 mo. 19. "James Wilson & I went to Auckland, with Robt Wardell, we went to make the Bishop a visit and request his Interest in a bill Friends is going to lay before the parliament requesting to have the prosecutions in the Exchequer & Ecclesiasticall courts put a Stop to, who rec<sup>d</sup> us kindly & answered our request as much as we could expect."<sup>8</sup>
1751. 10 mo. 22. "By this days post we have an account that Lottery Tickets sells at London for £44 2 0 a piece there being a £10,000 & a £5,000 prise to draw. . . . I had no concern in this Lottery."
1751. 10 mo. (December). 31. Third Day. "I went to Raby . . ."
1752. 1 mo. (January) 1. Fourth Day. "This day was always before now 1<sup>st</sup> of 11<sup>m</sup> but by an Act of Parliament past last Sessions the year is for the future to commence on New Years day."<sup>9</sup>
1752. 1 mo. 6. "We have of late had a great quantity of halfpence made of bad drossy brass which was stopt payment here this day."
1752. 3 mo. 2. "Norgate bridge battlement fell & turn Leeds Waggon over into the water."
1752. 3 mo. 13. "at home Gardened Transplated Colly flowers Sew Lettice radishes onions parcella pears &c and Transplated Holly-hocks."

The Diary ends suddenly. Printed diaries are extant for 1752, 1760, 1763, 1768, entitled *The Daily Journal*, into which many entries were made (in cypher) but apparently never transcribed. Among the entries in plain English is a notice of the visit of Phœbe Dodge, from Long Island, in 1752, also of the binding apprentice of Benjamin Flounders<sup>10</sup> from 1st September this year.

James Backhouse attended London Y.M. in 1752, and summarises his expenses thus :

Up	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	12	8
Horse & bed at London			..	..	..	..	1	3	8
Home again	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	8	6
							—		
							4	4	10
laid out there ..									
a gown for my wife			..	..	..	..	2	16	0
a hat for my self	..	..	..	..	..	..		14	0
a Gallan of mum	..	..	..	..	..	..		5	0
a st of Cheese	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	10	0
A Parret Cage	..	..	..	..	..	..		7	6
on Quarter meeting at			..	..	..	..		5	0
Books	..	..	..	..	..	..		5	3
Penknife & Snuf Box			..	..	..	..		1	0
my watch mending			..	..	..	..		13	0
Brought home	..	..	..	..	..	..		3	0

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edward Backhouse (1781-1860), of Ashburne, Sunderland, son of Jonathan and Ann (Pease) Backhouse. Edward, his son, of the same (1808-1879).

<sup>2</sup> John Burton (1682-1769) lived at Dent, N.W. Yorks.¶

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Hedley (1693-1763), of Darlington, was the eldest son of the second family of Thomas Hedley, of Hedley-on-the-Hill, in Northumberland. From the two marriages of Thomas Hedley descended numerous Quaker families. Jonathan married Mary Severs, of Darlington, and their only child, Jane (1718-1805), married James Backhouse, the Diarist.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hedley (c. 1676- ) was the elder son of the first marriage of Thomas Hedley of Hedley-on-the-Hill, hence was uncle of the half blood. His wife was Ann Bell (c. 1685-1759).

<sup>5</sup> In one of James Backhouse's printed diaries, he has written (1752) : " Wm. Impey from Essex informed there is from 26 to 30 meetings in Essex & neer 20 in Suffolk and more in Norfolk, about 11 in Kent."

<sup>6</sup> In his diary for 1752, J. Backhouse writes, under May: "They began to scaffold for repairing the Spier" and in June: "They finished the Spier & put on the weathercock," but this may not refer to repair of the damage done by the storm of July 1750.

<sup>7</sup> Humphrey Bland (1686?-1763) served in Marlborough's campaigns; colonel of dragoons; governor of Edinburgh 1752-63. (D.N.B.)

<sup>8</sup> This was the noted Joseph Butler, D.D. (1692-1752), author of *The Analogy of Religion*, and Bishop of Durham 1750-1752. In his *Daily Journal* for 1752, James Backhouse records on the 23rd of June: "Bishop of Durham Dyed y<sup>e</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> at Bath." He also records in his Diary a visit of the Bishop to Darlington, 28 iv. 1751: "Had great attendance with 8 Coaches &c."

<sup>9</sup> This is interesting in connection with the change of Calendar. The names of the months were not affected, but as Friends prior to this time had called March "First Month," they had now to omit Eleventh and Twelfth Months, so that January 1752 should become First Month.

In one of the Registers referred to by Percival Lucas in his pamphlet: *Some Notes on the Early Sussex Quaker Registers*, 1913, there is this note:

Memorandum: That y<sup>e</sup> Names of y<sup>e</sup> Months mention'd in this Book does Hold like correspondency with the Other Months Named after y<sup>e</sup> manner of y<sup>e</sup> world as they are distinguisht hereafter followeing vizt

The First Month is called by y<sup>e</sup> world March.

„ Second „ „ „ April

„ Third „ „ „ May &c.

And note that by the Acc<sup>t</sup> in this Book the year is [to be understood] to Begin the First day of the First Month comonly called March Whereas in the worlds Accompt it begins not till y<sup>e</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> day of the said Month."

It has a strange sound to us that an Act of Parliament was required to make the year begin on New Year's day, but it must be remembered that the *official* year began on 25th March (which Friends called First Month), while the social and historical year had for a century or so been reckoned from 1st January. John Bunyan, in his introduction to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, writes the line:

"From New Year's Day to the last of December"

and Pepys, in his *Diary*, under date 31st December, 1662/3, writes

"Thus ends this year with great mirth to me and my wife."

<sup>10</sup> This Benjamin Flounders was, perhaps, a son of Benjamin Flounders (d. 1756) and Barbara, his wife (c. 1707-1777), of Crathorne, near Yarm. In 1753, John Storer of Nottingham, lodged at the house of "Barbery Flunder's" at Yarm (THE JOURNAL, xiii. 116).

For reference to various members of the Flounders family, see *Richardsons of Cleveland*, 1889, ch. xvii.

1704.—Memorandum. That the minister and churchwardens have given their consent that George Stowerton and his family shall sit in the seat with John Clarson of Eardington, because their is no seat belonging to the house George Stowerton lives in, as shown on their being a many alterations made in the Church, and Quakers living in the House and never look'd after it.—From Parish Register, Aston, Birmingham.

Sent by G. Eyre Evans.