

Early Quakers in Embsay and Eastby.

The Quaker movement was founded by George Fox in 1652 during the Commonwealth period, and by 1654 Quakers were speaking to public gatherings in Skipton market place. There were Quaker converts in Embsay as early as 1656, and by 1660 the Stott family of Eastby were using their home at The Heugh as an illegal Quaker Meeting House. The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 led to systematic persecution of Quakers, and the Act of Uniformity in 1662 enforced the use of the Book of Common Prayer.

In 1682 Richard Thompson of Embsay was fined 10 shillings for using his house for Quaker Meetings, and several others, including William Tennant, were arrested for attending meetings in Embsay. Because they refused to pay their fines they were summoned to appear at Knaresborough Quarter Sessions where they were sentenced to imprisonment at York Castle

They and other Quakers from this part of Yorkshire remained in prison at York for nearly four years during the reign of Charles II, and it was only after his death in 1685 that his brother James II issued a warrant from Whitehall to release the 52 Quakers held at York Castle. Unfortunately, only 48 were released, the other four having died in prison.

It was not until the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689 that William III introduced the Act of Toleration, which allowed Quakers and others to worship legally. Farfield Meeting House near Addingham was built that same year. Quakers continued to meet in Embsay and Eastby, and later at Skipton Quaker Meeting House which was built in 1693.

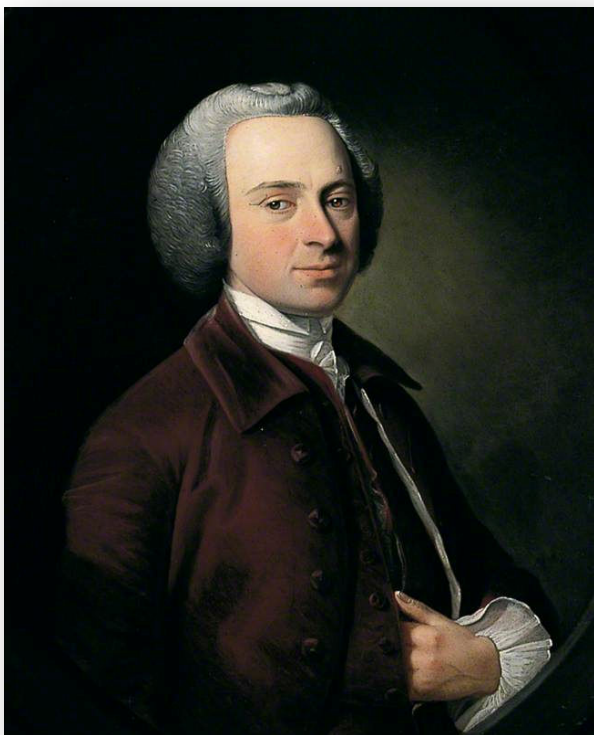


Image: William Baynes (1731-1871) by Nathan Drake

[York City Art Gallery, York Museums Trust]

In 1695 the Baynes family came to Embsay from Westmoreland. Despite living at Embsay Kirk, the most prestigious house in Embsay, they were Quakers and registered Embsay Kirk as a Quaker Meeting House in 1700. They were political radicals who campaigned in the 1780s for the vote to be extended to ordinary people. They were to subsequently build the first cotton spinning mill in Embsay in 1792, later called Primrose Mill. The family lived in Embsay for 150 years and were also influential in the building of the first two chapels in Embsay and Eastby.

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