

Background information regarding Benjamin Lay, former member of Colchester Two Weeks Meeting

1) A letter from Tim Gee, South East London Area Meeting (with his permission)

Dear Friends in Southern East Anglia,

My name is Tim from Peckham/South East London Area Meeting, which is a successor group to (one of) the Meetings that anti-slavery pioneer Benjamin Lay attended in his youth with his future wife Sarah.

You've no doubt seen the various [news pieces](#) about Lay following the publication of a sympathetic biography last year by US academic Marcus Rediker. The book tells the story of his four disownments from Monthly Meetings and Quaker records stored at Friends House were a significant source. One of the Monthly Meetings to disown him was Colchester (his birthplace) to which I believe Southern East Anglia Area Meeting is the successor.

His US disownments were for challenging slavery. His London disownment was for challenging recorded ministers. His Colchester disownment was for protesting gender segregation, but was then used to justify his disownments elsewhere. All of these challenges were eventually caught up with by the wider Society (although it took us a while). Lay's physical form (he was a little person) added to the discrimination he faced, both within and beyond the Quaker Community.

You probably know that North London Area Meeting (Successor to Devonshire House Monthly Meeting) declared their unity with the spirit of Benjamin Lay late last year, in the same week as Lay's final meeting in Abington.

Here is a news story about the NLAM minute

<https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2017/11/22/hackney-quakers-make-amends-disowning-radical-anti-slavery-dwarf-300-years-ago/>

And the Abington minute <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/quakers-benjamin-lay-dwarf-abolitionist-slavery-abington-friends-meeting-20180419.html>

Just this week Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has endorsed the Abington Minute, meaning that there is just one Monthly Meeting left from which Lay remains disowned.

I've pasted all three minutes so far below.

I realise that this might not appear an urgent matter (and in some ways it isn't), but nevertheless, would Southern East Anglia Area Meeting be able to consider whether you are in unity with the minutes below? If so then Benjamin Lay will at last be fully 'undisowned' from the Quaker community, both sides of the Atlantic.

In Friendship and hope,

Tim Gee
Peckham Meeting

2) Minutes from other Meetings which have revised their disownment of Benjamin Lay

a) Minute regarding former Abington Meeting member, Benjamin Lay

Approved by Abington Monthly Meeting

November 12, 2017

(Drafted and brought forth by Abington Meeting member Loretta Fox)

Abington Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends recognizes Benjamin Lay's dedication to equality, and his willingness to repeatedly speak his messages of Truth to a society that was in denial about the evils of slavery. We acknowledge that Benjamin Lay used radical activism in his attempts to teach his peers to recognize the equality before God of all people, regardless of race or gender. He lived his life with integrity according to his Quaker beliefs, and he called others, especially slave-owners, to accountability.

Benjamin Lay was written out of membership at Abington Monthly Meeting on the thirtieth day, eleventh month, 1737 (which by the Quaker calendar, while the Julian calendar was in use, would have been January 30, 1738), because his zealous actions were considered disruptive. It is now known that at least two of the Friends who led the discernment about writing Benjamin Lay out of membership in the Society of Friends were slave-owners and were likely targeted by Benjamin Lay's anti-slavery activism. Benjamin Lay was disowned decades before Quakers were disowned for being slave-owners.

We now recognize the truth behind Benjamin Lay's abolitionist efforts. Although we may not reinstate membership for someone who is deceased, we recognize Benjamin Lay as a Friend of the Truth and as being in unity with the spirit of our Abington Monthly Meeting.

b) Minute Regarding Benjamin Lay, 18 November 2017, Approved by North London Area Meeting 18 November

"Quakers are proud of the times in history we have been ahead of our time on progressive social issues - but preceding those moments, there have often been long periods when we have not walked the path we would later understand to be the just one. At a time when racism seems as present and ugly as ever - both globally and nationally - and the structures of white supremacy are being defended and strengthened by powerful forces in our societies, this seems a timely moment for North London Area Meeting to reflect on its involvement in the struggle for racial justice.

North London Area Meeting recognises Benjamin Lay's dedication to equality - and his willingness to repeatedly speak his messages of Truth. We also recognise Benjamin Lay as being a Friend of the Truth - and as being in unity with the spirit of our Area Meeting. We ask our Clerking team to write to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Abington Monthly Meeting and Southern East Anglia Area Meeting (successor to Colchester & Coggeshall Monthly Meeting) to clarify that Lay is in good standing with North London Area Meeting (successor to Devonshire House Monthly Meeting)."

c) Philadelphia Yearly Meeting on July 14, 2018: "Benjamin Lay: After communicating further with Abington Monthly Meeting regarding their minute, Quaker Life Council endorses Abington Monthly Meeting's minute on Benjamin Lay. QLC recognizes Benjamin Lay as a Friend of the Truth and being in unity with the spirit of our Philadelphia Yearly Meeting."