
Visibility and Invisibility: Helen Priestman Bright Clark and the struggle for the Position of Women in the Society of Friends, 1873

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Abstract

Women Friends (or Quakers) held an antithetical position in their religious community during the nineteenth century. They were considered to be spiritually equal to male followers, and permitted to preach in public, yet were excluded from every major decision making process concerning the religion due to their gender. This text discusses the letters published in Quaker journals in 1873 on the subject of the position of women in the Religious Society of Friends. It analyses how this correspondence played a pivotal role in making Quaker women's battle for gender equality in their religious organisation visible to a national unisex audience.

The late action of the Men's Yearly Meeting in refusing to allow women Friends to unite with them in the proposed Conference on the state of the Society, may lead to consideration of the position of Women amongst us. It is sometimes said that they [women] have more advantages amongst Friends than in other bodies. The statement is probably made by those who are unacquainted with our discipline, but who know something of our peculiar views and practices with regard to the ministry, and who naturally suppose that a body that recognises the propriety of women preaching would allow its female members to unite in its meeting for business.¹

Analyses of the complex gender relations within the Religious Society of Friends during the second half of the nineteenth century have been recognised and discussed by Quaker historians and feminist scholars, including Thomas C. Kennedy, Susan Mosher Stuard and Sandra Stanley Holton.² These scholars have chronicled Quaker women's historical role as public preachers and have acknowledged the small band of radical and politically minded Quaker women who became leading campaigners in the anti-slavery and suffragist movements. However, in their texts debates on Quaker women's internal battle for gender equality in their own religious organisation have always been framed as another element of the national suffrage campaigns. As such, these scholars have remained ambivalent about acknowledging the pivotal role played by the letters published in Quaker journals in 1873 in bringing Quaker women's subjugated position in the Religious Society of Friends to the attention of the religion's conservative followers. This article acknowledges the significance of these letters. Close examination of these sources through archival research reveals them as powerful evidence of both the complexity of Quaker gender politics, and these women's pursuit of increased visibility in their own religious community, during the period. The terms 'visible' and 'invisible' may be usefully deployed in this context to

1 Helen Priestman Bright Clark, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, XIII (1873) 152: 203.

2 Thomas C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism, 1860-1920* (Oxford University Press, 2001). Susan Mosher Stuard, *Witness for Change: Quaker Women over Three Centuries* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1989). Sandra Stanley Holton, "Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement," *Women's History Review* 14. (2005) 3 & 4.

categorise the distinct and antithetical roles which Quaker women occupied during the nineteenth century. However the complexity of Quaker women's identities as occupying both of these categories during different spheres of action is illustrative of the fluid roles Quaker women played in their religious community.

In August 1873, the Quaker and suffrage campaigner, Helen Priestman Bright Clark, in her letter to the Quaker journal *The Friend: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, identified the gender inequality which existed in the Non-Conformist protestant religion, the Religious Society of Friends. During the Summer of that year, a London conference called 'State of the Society' was proposed, where exclusively male followers would discuss how to rectify the religion's dwindling membership numbers and poor attendance at religious Meetings. It instantly became the subject of censure by the excluded female members of the religion. The consternation vocalised by many Quaker women was, however, illustrative of a growing dissatisfaction at the established gender inequalities within Quaker disciplinary proceedings as well as in wider society. Ultimately, the conference acted as the catalyst for a religious wide, unisex debate which questioned the function and role of women in the Religious Society of Friends. As this text discusses, liberal and politically active Victorian Quaker women wrote letters to nationally available publications during 1873 challenging the discriminatory disciplinary structure of the religion. Thus these letters made visible both the inequality which Quaker women were subjected to and expressions of their dissatisfaction, which had been largely overlooked.

From the seventeenth century the Religious Society of Friends, known as Quakerism, asserted that female followers were spiritually equal to male followers. As Phyllis Mack has explained in 'Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism, 1650-1665', "as all Quakers in the light had transcended their carnal selves, a woman preaching in public had actually transcended her womanhood."³ Quakers sought to reject the Church of England's gender biased, hierarchical teachings and customs, by doing away with Priests and sermons in their worship. Quaker beliefs centred on personal revelation for religious guidance and respect for the authority of scripture, which they described as the "Inward Christ, Seed, or Light of God."⁴ As such, Quaker women were permitted by the religious community to preach in public to large audiences, often travelling extensively across the country to do so. The religion's provocative and subversive religious ideas were fundamentally in conflict with the doctrines and practices of the established Church of England. Consequently both male and female Quakers were subjected to cruel and humiliating punishments for their beliefs. The Quaker Dorothy Waugh's 1655 account described her confinement in an iron scold's bridle for public preaching, as follows:

[...] they tare my clothes to put on their bridle as they called it, which was a stone weight of Iron by the relation of their own Generation,

³ William Frost, "Changing Quaker Ideals for Material Culture," *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 17 and Phyllis Mack, "Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism, 1650-1665," *Witness for Change: Quaker Women Over Three Centuries*, ed. E. Potts Brown and S. Mosher Stuart (Rutgers University Press, 1989) 48.

⁴ Ben Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2008) 1 & 5 and Frost, "Changing Quaker Ideals for Material Culture," 16.

& three barrs [sic] of Iron to come over my face, and a peece [sic] of it was put in my mouth, which was so unreasonable big a thing for that place as cannot be related, and the mayor said he would make an example to all [...] and charged the officer to whip me out of town.⁵

Yet despite their equality in spirituality and levels of persecution, Quaker women always held a subordinate position to male members of the religion regarding who made the rules for religious followers and for enforcing discipline. Female Quakers were often entirely excluded from the day-to-day business of the Society altogether.⁶ Gender hierarchy was deeply embedded in the social structure of seventeenth century British life, and whilst Quakerism valued women's spirituality it never sought to abolish social expectations which framed womanly behaviour as domestic and subservient, as Susan Mosher Stuard confirms.⁷ Gender roles were therefore rigidly defined regarding practical elements of the religion not directly affected by Divine revelation.

Adherence to Quaker collective beliefs was strictly maintained through the religion's organisation of gathering, decision making and the dissemination of 'Advices' and 'Queries' which sought to remind all followers of appropriate Quaker conduct. Persistent failure to comply with this religious guidance could mean 'disownment', or total exclusion from the religious community. These Advices were communicated throughout the religion via a hierarchy of meetings on a local and national level.⁸ Women's Meetings, where women could join for worship and organise charitable acts, were sanctioned and encouraged by the religion's founder, George Fox, from the 1670s. Yet, as Quaker historian Peter Collins has noted, while women's Meetings ran parallel to those of the men during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and visibly co-operated with them, women played a negligible role in the religion's formal decision making processes.⁹ Whilst Quaker women did discuss matters of discipline in their own 'Meetings for Discipline', and reported their discussions to the parallel men's meetings, the male Quakers were under no obligation to take the female view into perspective. Female Quakers were also excluded from the Men's Yearly Meeting where all major decisions were made. Thus, Quaker women in reality had no say in the process of determining disciplines, Advices and Queries, which controlled how all Friends should dress, speak, behave, worship, raise their children and engage with non-Quakers. Such guidance was decided exclusively by a selection of Quaker men and then presented to the wider community. Even after 1784, when female Quaker representatives from across the

5 Dorothy Waugh, "A Relation Concerning Dorothy Waugh's Cruell Usage by the Mayor of Carlile," *The Lambs Defence Against Lyes* (London: Giles Calvert, 1655) 29-30. Qted in Catie Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650-1700* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005) 72.

6 Kennedy, *British Quakerism, 1860-1920*, 212.

7 Stuard, *Witness for Change: Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, 13

8 See Peter Collins, "Ethical Consumption as Religious Testimony: The Quaker Case," *Ethical Consumption, Social Value and Economic Practice*. ed. James G. Carrier, Peter G. Luetchford (Berghahn Books, 2012) 189 for a comprehensive description of the Meeting hierarchy.

9 Peter Collins, *Quakers and Quakerism in Bolton, Lancashire 1650-1995: The History of a Religious Community* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 177.

country became entitled to unite at a concurrent Yearly Meeting of Women Friends, their activities were still curtailed, as described in the minutes of the first Yearly Meeting of Women Friends on 5th June 1784:

[...] Yearly Meeting of Women Friends are] at liberty to correspond in writing with the Quarterly Meetings of Women Friends, to receive accounts from them and speak such advice as in the Wisdom of Truth [...] yet such Meeting is not to be so far considered a Meeting of Discipline as to make rules nor yet alter the present Queries.¹⁰

Quaker women were nevertheless actively involved in radical political movements during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, spurred on by religious sentiments which encouraged benevolence, peace and neighbourliness.¹¹ As Sandra Stanley Holton amongst others has clarified, female Quakers were Anti-Slavery campaigners as well as being involved in campaigns during the 1830s against the Corn Laws. They organised public meetings, fundraised, canvassed and petitioned on behalf of these causes.¹² As such, Quaker women enjoyed socially visible, active and useful roles in radical political movements, a function they were denied within their own religion's structures. These Quaker women were thus seen by non-Quakers as enjoying a powerful position in their religious communities as they were granted freedom of movement and conscience.

Those with only an external vantage point of Quakerism viewed Quaker women's position within the religion as privileged. Feminist historian Susan Mosher Stuard has described such a perception as arising from Quaker women's 'successful resistance to societal norms', especially those which sought to increasingly narrow and circumscribe women's position in public society.¹³ Indeed, articles and correspondence in the mainstream press during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries promoted Quaker women's advantageous position by advertising their religious tradition of women preaching and being educated, whilst excluding mention of their subjugation to male members in matters of business and discipline. The article "Quakers and Votes for Women" in *The Grantham Journal* as late as 1913, claimed that Quaker women had always been the pioneers for female emancipation because their founder, George Fox, had encouraged gender equality, stating:

The Society of Friends [...] was actually the pioneer in the women's movement. George Fox taught the absolute equality of the sexes on religion and Church government, and at a time when advanced education was supposed to be a male prerogative.¹⁴

10 *Yearly Meeting of Women Friends Minutes (1784-1792)*. 5th of June 1784. Case 27. Archive of the Religious Society of Friends London.

11 Holton, "Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement," 368.

12 Holton "Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement," 374.

13 Stuard, *Witness for Change, Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, 4.

14 "Quakers and Votes for Women," *The Grantham Journal*, 1st February 1913: 3.

Both of these statements however are highly misleading due to Quakerism's continued subjection of women in its 'government' throughout the nineteenth century and its reticence at formally advocating women's rights until 1913.¹⁵

Such a public perception of Quaker women as enjoying total equality within their religious community was additionally implied by many Quakers themselves throughout the nineteenth century, despite their knowledge to the contrary. Two letters published in *The Isle of Man Times and General Advertiser*, on 26th January 1878, debated the propriety of women preaching in public, one of which sought to defend women's prophecy. The Quaker writer, 'J.H' from Huddersfield, quoted numerous passages of Scripture where women "did actually pray and preach along with the men" and which presented women as "on a perfect level with man in every way." In line with Quaker sentiments, J.H, regarding public worship, advocated "neither the men nor the women take the lead [...] for all [are] equal."¹⁶ J.H did challenge the accepted Victorian social binary opposition of the sexes by promoting women's spiritual participation, yet he failed to acknowledge the prejudices which still existed in the Society against women's involvement in formal decision making processes despite debates on the subject occurring that decade. As such, J.H concealed the antithetical position of women within the Society from the argument and the readership. Clearly, many (largely male) Quakers and non-Quakers were quick to advertise Quaker women's advantages yet slow to acknowledge their inequality in religious business.

Such absence, however, may in part be explained by the notion that it never occurred to male Quakers to contemplate the position of Quaker women as one of subjugation. Bright Clark even acknowledged this in her letter, conceding, "I do not write in any spirit of harshness; no doubt many men have hardly given the subject a thought."¹⁷ Historically, women played supporting roles in Christian congregations and in society in general, and as such the notion of male and female Quakers' *total* equality during the 1870s meant a radical re-thinking of conventional gender norms and religious roles, as Stuard notes.¹⁸ Mary Poovey has described this Victorian gendered social model as "an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at midcentury, ranging from a sexual division of labour to a sexual division of economic and political rights."¹⁹ The subservient role of Quaker women

15 Whilst many radical Quaker women played significant roles in the women's emancipation movement from the 1860s onwards they were by no means the norm amongst their co-religionists, see Holton, "Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement," 365. Furthermore, Susan Mosher Stuard has acknowledged that Quakerism has historically reflected many of the prejudices against women and similarly indoctrinated restrictive gender ideologies into their sons and daughters, see *Witness for Change, Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, 18.

16 J.H. "Lonan Enquirer's Mistakes about Woman Preaching," *The Isle of Man Times and General Advertiser*, 26th January 1878: 2.

17 Helen Priestman Bright Clark, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, XIII (1873) 152: 203.

18 Stuard, *Witness for Change, Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, 11.

19 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1988) 9.

to the male followers was therefore a reflection of the established position of women in the British social order and therefore Quaker women's position was not a cause many men would have found unusual or disturbing. For Bright Clark, however, precisely because the subject of Quaker women's position in the Religious Society of Friends had been historically overlooked, it was all the more important to debate it during the planned 'State of the Society' conference. In her 1873 letter published in *The Friend*, she suggested, "[...] there could hardly be a more suitable subject for the consideration of a Conference called to discuss the state of the Society than the position of one half of its members."²⁰

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, women comprised the majority of the Quaker religion's followers, yet despite this, they continued simultaneously to endure a visibly useful role through public preaching, travelling and acts of charity, whilst being invisible during the key religious, male-led, decision making processes. As discussed by Sandra Stanley Holton in 'Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement', it was their involvement in the broader women's emancipation causes of suffrage, the Married Women's Property Committee, and the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts during the 1860s, which made them determined to protest against the gender hierarchy in their own religious community.²¹ A handful of radical Quaker women, particularly of the Bright and Clark families, were advocates and activists for national campaigns concerning women's rights by the early 1860s. By the 1870s therefore, these radical Quaker women refused to reticently endure disciplinary segregation any longer and sought visible printed platforms to vocalise their opinions.

Despite the three main Quaker publications being edited by men, the correspondence pages in Friends journals, namely *The Friend*, *Friends Quarterly Examiner* and *British Friend*, allowed Victorian Quaker women to express their opinions directly, rather than at second-hand, through the mediation of a male author(s), as had occurred in previous centuries, as Gill notes.²² Archival research has revealed that the letters pages in these journals were used to visibly express the opinions of Victorian Quakers to a national, unisex readership, on subjects as varied as the suitability of certain garments of fashionable dress, women's emancipation and the burgeoning suffrage campaign, charitable causes, national political campaigns and interpretations of Scriptural teachings.

Bright Clark's 1873 letter, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends", quoted at the beginning of this article, began by calling for "consideration" concerning the decision of the Men's Yearly Meeting to refuse female Quakers the right to attend the 'State of the Society' conference. However by its conclusion, the suffrage campaigner had called for the establishment of gender equality in *all* the religion's business, with women holding offices as "intelligent co-operators." Bright Clark called on her fellow Quaker women to acknowledge the "delusion" that they held any advantages

²⁰ Bright Clark, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends," 203.

²¹ Holton, "Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women's networks and the women's movement," 367.

²² Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community*, 42 & 53.

within the Society by reminding Quaker women that their involvement in Women's Meetings for Discipline was "needless" because the opinions voiced in Quaker men's concurrent Meetings took precedent. Bright Clark then went on to imply that Quaker women were being infantilised by such treatment, by questioning how "playing at business can be made interesting to grown-up people?" Clearly, Bright Clark not only sought to make the subjugated position of Quaker women visible to both sexes throughout her own community, but also to encourage her Quaker sisters to assert their mature voices in matters of religious management:

[...] I think it would be well for women no longer to cherish any delusion as regards their advantages in other respects. Many are already painfully conscious of the unreality of their meetings for discipline, since the little business that they do has been for the most part already done for them in the men's meetings, and they have no voice in the management of affairs.²³

Between August and November 1873, at least six letters were published in *The Friend* on the subject of "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends", with diverse opinions.²⁴ Mary Waddington, in the September edition, shared the opinions of Bright Clark. She similarly began her letter by considering the gender status-quo in the Society through a tone of diplomatic reasoning. However, unlike Bright Clark, Waddington went on to invoke Scriptural imagery in support of her cause. In her letter, Waddington implied that the Society's gender inequality was an 'evil' that had infected the community by being overlooked and was in need of being restored from illness:

That there is a large degree of awkwardness and inconsistency in an institution is, very properly, perhaps, thought not a sufficient reason for making changes so long as it is working to tolerably good purpose, and the mischief inherent in it does not crop out as a hindrance; but let it become certain that there exists not merely a theoretical mistake, but an active evil in such institution, then the time has come when it needs to be overhauled and ventilated, and made more healthy if it can be.²⁵

23 Bright Clark, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends," 203

24 The six letters referred to are: Helen Priestman Bright Clark, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends." *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 152: 203; Mary Waddington, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. I. To the Editor of The Friend." *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 153: 226-227; R.T. "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. II. To the Editor of The Friend." *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 153: 227; A. B. "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. III. To the Editor of The Friend." *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 153: 227-228; Alfred W. Bennett, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. IV. To the Editor of The Friend." *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 153: 228; William Pollard, "Women's Meeting for Discipline-How can they be Improved?" *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 157: 336 - 341 (336)

25 Mary Waddington, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. I. To the Editor of The Friend," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, XIII (1873) 153: 226-227. As in Biblical passages such as Luke 13:11-13 and Acts 1-: 37-38, which equate evil with sickness.

Waddington's letter described how Quaker women were "suffering from the present arrangement", and that women's exclusion from the decision making processes undermined their loyalty to the religion because these women were robbed of their usefulness.²⁶ Yet, Waddington was not alone in her approval of Bright Clark's assertions. In further response to "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends" letter, the female Quaker, R.T., affirmed the inconsistency of gender equality in the Society by asserting that, "surely in a Society which professes to believe in equal *gifts* to both sexes, it would be desirable in conducting its business to recognise equal *rights*."²⁷

However, the Quaker Alfred Bennet dismissed the debate in his September letter to *The Friend*, by simply stating that he supported the notion of women attending the 'State of the Society' conference, but that such a proposition had never been raised and therefore had not been discussed. Furthermore, he proposed that the proposition that had been raised, for women to hold a concurrent conference on their own on the same subject, could not be permitted because "such an allowed meeting, with distinctly subordinate authority, would be a mere mockery."²⁸ Many conservative Quaker men, and some women, within the religious community additionally believed that Quaker women already held an adequate amount of power appropriate to their gender, and derided Bright Clark, Waddington and R.T.'s demands for practical and disciplinary equality. In the same issue of *The Friend* the female Quaker, A.B., noted that whilst she did not relish her subjugation, it was Scripturally ordained in the passages of Timothy 2: 11-12 and Corinthians 14: 34-35. A.B. thus believed that women who sought involvement in the business of the religious community were "stepping out of their sphere."²⁹

Despite such nationally visible published debate however, the 'State of the Society' conference went ahead on 3rd to the 6th November 1873 with the exclusion of women Quakers. The conference stopped short of including the position of women as a formal agenda point, despite the coverage of the debate in print. In a clear illustration of their awareness of the exposure the topic had received, however, they did nevertheless deliberate the subject. Whilst several male representatives argued for "men and women alike to have the care of everything relating to the more important affairs of the church", many more male Quakers argued to the contrary.³⁰ The Quaker, William Brockbank, argued that Quaker women "preferred to be left alone" in their meetings and thus felt religious disciplinary debates should remain an exclusively male sphere.³¹

26 Mary Waddington, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. I. To the Editor of The Friend," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, XIII (1873) 153: 226-227.

27 R.T., "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. II. To the Editor of The Friend," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, XIII (1873) 153: 227.

28 Alfred W. Bennet, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. III. To the Editor of The Friend," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, IV (1873) 153: 228.

29 A. B., "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends. III. To the Editor of The Friend," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, XIII (1873) 153: 227-228.

30 William White "Report of the Conference on the State of the Society held in London," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* XIII (1873) 156: 298.

31 William Brockbank, "Report of the Conference on the State of the Society held in London," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* XIII (1873) 156: 301.

Despite some resistance from male members, upon its conclusion the conference did carry a motion to recommend the first concessions to women Quakers' practical equality. It advocated unisex Meetings for Discipline at a local level, stating "That much advantage may arise from more general and frequent joint conferences of men and women Friends, both in Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, in relation to such subjects as may rightly engage the united concern of all the members of the Church."³² Yet this dispensation, far from being legislative, was only "a very general suggestion that the conference of men and women Friends in our meetings for discipline, should be encouraged."³³ As such, despite defending and even promoting Quaker women's right to publicly preach, many male Quakers stopped short of advocating a physical female presence in disciplinary meetings. Therefore, as Kennedy confirms, these male Quakers continued to advocate Quaker women's continued invisibility concerning matters of religious business.³⁴

Such a concession failed to satiate radical Quaker women's campaigning for total equality within the religious community. As Kennedy has noted, as the opinions of female Quakers on the subject intensified throughout the 1870s and 1880s, disapprovers of the campaign kept increasingly quiet.³⁵ Finally on 29th May 1896, *The Friend* reported that an official religious committee, organised to investigate "the position of women Friends in our meetings for Church affairs", conceded that female Friends from 1898 should be considered an equal and constituent part of all meetings for religious business and discipline. Helen Priestman Bright Clark had, once again, been a central female figure in voicing an opinion to the committee that "women Friends were very desirous of taking part." According to the published 1896 minutes of the committee meeting, "Helen [Priestmen] Bright Clark [...] knew that some members of the committee did not desire the attendance of women; but sentiment should not be allowed to stand in the way of justice."³⁶ Whilst the committee recommended the gradual phasing in of the motion, to give time for "reconstruction" of meetings, it conceded that the passing of the motion was merely a reflection of "the system already at work in many parts."³⁷

Thus success was achieved in 1896 with the Quaker women's campaign for "participation of women in all the Society's business". Helen Priestman Bright Clark's letter of August 1873 had, however, arguably acted as the pivotal moment in making the campaign visible to a national Quaker audience. Victorian Quaker women mindfully used the published platform of *The Friend* to initiate an important debate on the gender-biased structure of the religion. For the first time, male and female Quakers, and those who may have overlooked the subject, were exposed to

32 "Report from the Conference" *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*. XIII (1873) 156: 320.

33 "Report of the Conference on the State of the Society held in London," 305.

34 Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920*, 222.

35 Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920*, 222.

36 "Women Friends in Our Meetings for Church Affairs," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* XXXVI (1896) 22: 336.

37 "Women Friends in Our Meetings for Church Affairs," *The Friend. A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* XXXVI (1896) 22: 336.

the arguments of fellow female Friends who sought a fundamental re-evaluation of the position of women in the Society. During 1873, radical Quaker women used their campaigning acumen to make visible their invisibility in the decision making process of the religious body. Through non-violent methods therefore, Quaker women were successful in effecting change in established gender identities and roles during a period of a broader social pursuit of female emancipation, through the use of published platforms for debate in 1873, in order that their visibility within the organisation of their faith should be a true reality.

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