SOME PRAGMATIC ASPECTS
OF HISTORICAL MINUTE-MAKING
The distinctiveness of the Quaker approach

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Abstract – This paper presents findings from a pragmatic investigation into the historical practice of administrative minute-writing as a text-type developed by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) over three centuries. Why and how have Quakers developed (and still rely on) their unusual decision-recording practice, based as it is on its theological underpinning? Quantitative and qualitative findings are compared with datasets from the historical minute books of some non-Quaker historical institutions. It is evident from this investigation how present-day Quaker minute-writing methods still evince the linguistic usages first developed in the late seventeenth century, notably commissive and directive speech acts, tense usage, and realized with many rich but formulaic expressions. This contrasts with a restricted, narrative discourse favored by the more conventional style found in contemporary organizations of past eras.

Keywords: minute-writing; Quaker; corpus-based; speech acts; orality.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates pragmatic and stylistic aspects of the minute-writing language of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in England between 1676 and 1874. I draw initially on the study by Fitzmaurice (2006) which sees historical business correspondence as a distinctive register in its own right, and with its own characteristics, although I prefer the term 'text-type'. Fitzmaurice emphasizes that present-day conventions in the production of business and other official correspondence derive from practices that are found in certain distinctive characteristics. Although Quakers have left us a large body of correspondence, there is almost none that is associated with the minutes from their business meetings; the reason for that is that for Quakers in past generations relied entirely on the written minutes to serve as vehicles for transactional or administrative communication between groups and individuals. The research presented in this paper seeks to discover the nature of historical Quaker minutes as a discourse type related to business correspondence. Several distinctive linguistic characteristics are explored

which I argue derive from the unique pragmatic context of Quaker business meetings (henceforth Quaker Business Method or QBM).

The article is organized thus. A brief description of present-day Quaker practice in decision-making meetings (observed first-hand as well as from the literature) is followed by an overview of the structure and theological underpinning of the early Quaker movement in seventeenth-century England – a format which has remained fairly constant since those first years. These details are relevant to pragmatic findings following analysis of the source corpus samples. These concern directive and commissive speech acts and tense usage, as well as stylistic questions in terms of formulaic or semi-fixed discourse. Both Quaker and non-Quaker minuting texts are compared. The central claim is that the distinctive Quaker practice of contemporaneous minute-drafting and collective editing produces an unusual and distinctive discourse – a blend of spoken and written style.

2. Setting the scene

There is a wealth of advice for present-day business English newcomers on best practice for taking administrative minutes (for example, Hawthorne 1993; Baker 2010; Gutmann 2013), but very little offers reflective or evaluative discussion on the actual process. Wolfe (2006, p. 355) in her present-day work-based study divides the minuting styles she has explored into three typical formats: *action-oriented, transcript style* and *parliamentary style*. Sanchez (2017) uses a comparative approach for investigating rhetorical strategies in notes and minutes of present-day business meetings conducted in English and in Spanish. This is a rare study using, as the present study does, corpus-based tools. I have adopted an aspect of her approach in analyzing moves within specific minutes in my own Quaker corpus. This dataset will be introduced in Section 3.1.

Muers and Burton (2018) in the section of their article headed *Quaker Business Method: Framing the Issues* (no page numbers) provide a useful overview of scholarly discussions related to Quaker decision-making practices in the present-day. There is some practical advice for Quaker clerks and others attending Quaker meetings for decision-making in a *Handbook* (2018) published by the *Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre*, a British organization that offers training in this work to Quakers. A rare evidence-based study by Mace (2012) discusses observations on current practice in Quaker business meeting. As far as I am aware, no linguistic studies have to date published any investigations into historical minute-writing, either conventional or Quaker.

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A word or two needs to be said here about the Quaker movement. Quakers (also referred to as Friends) have and have always had a particular theological basis underlying their approach to decision-making and the recording of decisions in agreed minutes. My paper goes into some necessary detail concerning the Quaker values of integrity and authority and how that informs the language of minuting, and this exploration attempts to respond to why as well as how this usage arose. Quaker usage is different from conventional administrative minutes in the early and late modern periods of English and I argue that the underlying principles and practices found across Quaker communities world-wide are unique to this text-type.

2.1. The Quaker business method (present and past)

From the very start of the organization of the Quaker movement in the mid-seventeenth century, Friends established a distinctive way of holding their business meetings and making decisions corporately. As Edward Burrough advised in 1662:

> Being orderly come together, [you are] not to spend time with needless, unnecessary and fruitless discourses, but to proceed in the wisdom of God, not in the way of the world, as a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to outspeak and over-reach one another in discourse as if it were controversy between party and party of men ... not deciding affairs by the greater vote ... but ... determining every matter coming before you, in love, in coolness, gentleness and dear unity. (Burrough 1662, quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice* 2013, 2.87)

This was written at the time of setting up the first Men's meeting in London at the *Bull and Mouth* inn. The clue to the new way is contained in the phrase "not in the way of the world". This concept is at the heart of the present linguistic exploration. A further important feature of Burrough's advice is the reference to not taking votes. These first Quakers devised a method for arriving at unity of decision-making without recourse to either majority rule or decree by a single person. This is a rare achievement. How was it brought about? The next paragraph describes present-day Quaker practice; internal evidence from the historical minute books shows this was employed from the very start.

Quakerism is based, and has always been based, on the authority of a Quaker group or Meeting; there is no separated priesthood or leaders, no constitution or written rules for making and recording decisions by the group. The only authority, Quakers insist, derives from God and is discerned in the trusting and waiting in silence by the group. One Friend is appointed as clerk, whose task it is to discern the sense of the Meeting in its search for guidance and to offer a minute for each topic on an agenda; this records both the

journey towards a decision as well as the decision agreed and action to be taken. The draft minute offered to the Meeting is often modified and 'edited' by the Meeting until there is unity over the exact wording. Thereafter it is the minute that contains the authority to action. There is no majority/minority and no voting. The wording and the content of the minute, therefore, assume prime importance both for the process the group goes through and the decision reached. The text cannot be changed subsequently except by a later Meeting revisiting the decision and considering change. Different present-day Quaker traditions world-wide may vary the practice slightly but the essence remains the same. Mace (2012) describes the oral and written aspects of the QBM as practised in the present-day British context:

> At a business meeting, Quakers expect to write a collectively agreed text. To do this, they ask one or two to take on the role of scribing for the group, with the task of producing a wording that may express the sense of those present. The meeting, for its part, is expected to give assent to this, a text they have heard but not yet read visually. When the clerk reads out a draft minute, those present are expected not just to listen, but also to contribute: either by suggesting amendments or by showing their acceptance of what they hear. Reading binds together with writing; as the draft becomes an acceptable finished text, the group takes ownership of it. (Mace 2012, p.108)

This short explanation highlights the nature of an unusual practice that blurs the spoken and the written. Quaker minutes as raw textual material therefore, offer a rich and abundant source of continuous historical material dating back to the last quarter or so of the seventeenth century.

2.2. The historical organizational structure of Quakers in Britain

A brief note of explanation of the underlying structure of a Quaker Yearly Meeting is necessary here. The organization devised and set up by George Fox in the 1660s was called 'gospel order'. In essence this comprises a set of interconnected circles of meeting structure. The term 'meeting' was, and still is, widely used to describe a variety of gatherings for organization and decision-making purposes. Some of these would be seen as committees or councils in the terminology of later centuries. The 'meeting' also referred to the local or regional 'church' community of Friends who met regularly for 'Meeting for Worship' – what in other Christian denominations is called a service.

Although there is no hierarchy of people-status in Quakerism, for administrative reasons there is a system of connections in terms of the communities of Friends' Meetings. In terms of authority, there was a two-way direction of travel for communication purposes – this will become important when we discuss certain speech acts in Section 4.3. These

Meetings were named either by area or by how often they were expected to meet: the smallest geographical groups were called Monthly Meetings, representatives of Monthly Meetings met in regional groups known as Quarterly Meetings and the whole community was invited to an annual national gathering called the Yearly Meeting. Other Meetings with specific purposes included the national *Second Day Morning Meeting* (a revision and editing committee for texts submitted for publication, set up in 1673); the national *Meeting for Sufferings* (a group of Friends from across the nation who met to record and support those being persecuted, fined or imprisoned for conscience sake) and regional Meetings of ministers and elders who were largely responsible for overseeing acceptable behavior, including marriage procedures, by the members.

In summary, the local Meetings sent reports, epistles and other information "upwards" to the Meetings with greater authorizing power; the Yearly Meeting sent instructions and records of decisions "downwards" to the regions and local Monthly Meetings; national groups also sent and received such minutes to each other. This two-way communication is the broad basis for all the minuting functions to be described in this paper. Historically, this held good from the seventeenth-century until the development of speedier telecommunications, although the instrument of authority throughout the Quaker world is still the agreed minute.

3. Methods used for analysis

This section presents important features of Quaker minuting practice observed through both qualitative and quantitative methods, prefaced by a description of the physical appearance of the MSS minute books and the range of topics covered by the business recorded in the texts. Connections are made concerning the central role of theological principles of Quakerism as evinced by the minutes. Certain discourse functions in the data relate to internal evidence of the behaviors of Quakers in their business meetings. I draw inferences from the internal evidence to make sense of these procedures. The behaviors relate to the underlying Quaker principles of equality of all participants before God, a shared understanding of the search for Truth and a sense of utter honesty and integrity. I further note the effect that rapid drafting and agreeing decisions in real time by a meeting can have on the resulting language, for instance a level of fixity and of indicators of speech-like discourse (also observed by Mace 2012 in the quotation above).

The framework of the study is limited to a 200-year period ending in the mid-nineteenth century. Some of the Quaker-based findings are then compared with the both the contemporary material described in Section 3

below, and reference is also made to some present-day sets of Quaker minutes from across the English-speaking Quaker world.

3.1. The Quaker corpus

Historical minutes for administrative affairs are rarely published and printed so the major task is to transcribe as much as is feasible and to rely for the remainder on close reading of a wider selection of material. My historical samples of Quaker minutes (1676 – 1874) are subdivided into three sub-corpora covering three broad periods. Some sets of minutes are complete for a particular date, other sets are shorter extracts. Table 1 presents the details of this dataset together with that of some non-Quaker texts that will be referred to later in this paper.

	17th century	18th century	19th century
Quaker, various minute books	(1676-1700) 11,540w	(1734-1789) 5,120w	(1824-1874) 4,720w
Royal Society Council minute books	(1660-1700) 970w	(1724-1743) 1,800w	(1822-1852) 1,950w
Royal Academy of Arts, London, council and General Assembly minute books	----	(1768-1793) 1,350w	(1828-1874) 990w
Orphanage Guardians, London, minute books	----	(1758-1759) 3,990w	----

Table 1
Corpus datasets – sources of minute-books.

The criteria for selection and inclusion were partly random but also involved judicious omissions. I found that many of the meetings represented by their minutes frequently dealt with very routine business. Two sets of information in this category in particular refer to a prodigious quantity of list of names (those present, those signing at the foot of each set of minutes, those signing reports that were being sent in, and so on), and to a tedious and repetitive procedure known as 'Answers to the Queries'. So that the sub-corpora were not unduly skewed by these two aspects of the business, I decided to omit many names and to omit for the most part the references to the Queries. Apart from this criterion, the remainder of the corpus is broadly random, although I make no claim for representativeness as the samples are not sufficiently large for major generalizations. Different clerks had different preferred styles but the shared distinctive text-type of Quaker minute-creating is evident across

the range and time periods under scrutiny. The small collection of non-Quaker minute-book sources serves as a homogenic historical comparator. Other sources consulted give confidence that administrative minutes of past eras resemble closely enough the approaches typically found in my transcribed data. A blend of qualitative investigation plus quantitative retrieval of observations serves as my primary evidence base. Concordance software yields useful results regarding lexical frequencies, collocation and grammatical patternings, and close reading enables a greater breadth for the analytical descriptions.

4. Analytical findings

Section 4 presents several approaches to the investigation. We start with the Quaker minute books as artifacts and how clerks from earlier periods laid out their text compared with present-day practice. This is followed by a number of textual characteristics relating to linguistic or discourse features. These will form the basis for my final description of historical Quaker minuting as a text-type and why the unusual contexts of production led to a distinctiveness of pragmatic style.

4.1. Quaker minute-books as artifacts

All the Quaker minute books from which I have transcribed extracts are held in London at the *Library of the Religious Society of Friends*. There is a consistency of formatting across the various Meetings and historical periods. Each minute is recorded and set out separately as opposed to a through-composed stretch of discourse as found in some non-Quaker sources consulted. By the eighteenth century most clerks were adding marginalia summaries adjacent to the minute for each topic under discussion. I found no headings placed at the head of each minute such as is typically found in present-day Quaker minutes. By the eighteenth century they also start to number the minutes sequentially for each set of minutes and are careful to note the day and the month of each meeting although in a Quaker fashion. I return to an example of this practice in Section 4.5.

There is evidence of speed, especially in Monthly Meeting books, where those attending were all local to that area and the procedure for holding the meeting was likely to be fairly informal, and I argue that the practice of drafting and agreeing minutes in the meetings is a reason for the resulting discourse having a sense of orality. These minutes were spoken and heard before a permanent written record was made. This aspect compares with the *post hoc* note-taking narrative style of conventional minuting. Regional and Yearly Meeting minutes were likely to be fair copies of what

was agreed at the time and certainly the handwriting is often clearer, depending of course on the individual handwriting style of each clerk. I was able to compare the original version of sets of minutes from Barking Monthly Meeting in the early nineteenth century with their "fair copies", as both versions are held in the Library. This contrasts with internal evidence I noted in the Royal Society Council minutes where changes were clearly asked for and amended by the minute-taker after the circulation of minutes. That process is quite distinct from amendments to a version of a minute required to be changed in session by members of Quaker meetings, or indeed mistakes in orthography corrected at the time by the clerk. There is abundant evidence of that in the original Barking Meeting rough minutes books. I therefore conclude that the present-day Quaker practice of not altering or tidying up agreed minutes was already in existence.

The seventeenth-century minutes contain many non-standard spellings and punctuation examples. Even before the more persistent prescriptivism of the eighteenth century, the seventeenth-century Royal Society minutes already demonstrate a uniformity of spelling and inflection that would pass muster in any published eighteenth-century spelling guide. I suggest that the non-standard Quaker spellings, such as, for example:

"desirous": desierous / desieros / desirous,
"endeavor": indeivour / endeavor / endeavour,
"burials": burals / burials / burials, buriing / buriring

are partly the result of haste in getting the agreed wording on paper in real time and partly the uneven levels of literacy found in Quaker trades-people and similar social groups who were taking their turn in serving as clerks at that time. A wealth of creative abbreviations abound in the seventeenth-century Quaker dataset.

4.2 Typical characteristics of Quaker minutes

In this section we consider three linguistic features that deserve closer analysis because they derive from fundamental Quaker practices of decision-making. They are: i) the functional language of giving instructions or stating promises (exemplified by certain speech act verbs) and the particular effect that Quaker theology had on its production, ii) tense usage, and iii) formulaic language that is recognizably different from non-Quaker fixed expressions found in administrative minuting.

4.3 'Instruction' and 'promise' as functions in Quaker minutes

I consider first the Quaker approach to recording actions encoded in instruction language (using directive speech acts), and to decisions recording agreement or promise of action (using commissive or requestive speech acts). Quakers in their business meetings frequently needed to ask somebody or a group of people to go off after a meeting and carry out an action. The minute therefore needed to express that function as an instruction in its broadest sense. The difficulty implied by the Quaker principle of equality arising from an absence of social hierarchy makes instruction-giving problematic. All Friends had equality of social status within the Society, and all meetings or communities structured themselves in the same flat hierarchy. In effect, many of the instructions or orders required the group to instruct *itself*, or to an individual acting on behalf of that group, to take an action. But the agreed minute carried quasi-legal authority, the sense of the meeting being guided as they saw it by God – this was the only authority within the community structure. Stylistically therefore, the wording was couched in a wide repertoire of civility and positive politeness although the illocutionary effect underlying directive verbs is always an instruction. I have analyzed four typical moves found in generic historical minutes thus:

a) Named individuals (or agentless '*that-*' complement clause) plus a communication verb introduce a situation or a need for decision.

b) This is followed by a narrative-form description of the ensuing discussion.

c) Specific instructions or orders using directive speech act verbs then record action that must follow.

d) Decision(s) by the group, often using commissive speech act verbs, are noted, sometimes with action(s) to be taken, sometimes merely implied.

Moves found in the Quaker texts to some extent match these prototype conventions. However, there are some differences. Firstly, move b) is virtually absent in the corpus data. No description is provided of how the discussion develops during a meeting. The minutes go straight from introductory comments to outcome, whether that be an agreed decision to act (move c) or merely to be noted (move d). Secondly, there is a wider repertoire of both reporting and directive verbs or verb phrases in the Quaker samples than in the conventional ones. More semantic choice seems to be available to Quaker clerks than to the narrower repertoire of the traditional style. Table 2 below summarizes the typical Quaker moves.

Rhetorical move	Tense	Examples of verbs or verb phrases
a) Describes or sets out a situation or background information requiring a **decision**	Variety of tenses	typical **'report'** verbs: reports, a letter/report has been received and read, it is signified to this meeting.
b) Stretch of narrative that describes a **discussion**	--------	--------------
c) An **instruction** or an **order** given, leading to action	Present tense	typical directive speech act verbs: agree, desire, order, conclude, recommend, request, it is consented and agreed that... [ellipsis] + 'that' clause.
d) Records a **decision**. Sometimes an agreed **action** could be taken (and if so, by whom)	Present tense	verbs that record a **decision**: it is agreed, x is requested to consider, it's the sense of the meeting that ... it's left to x; and if the way opens.

Table 2
Rhetorical moves found in Quaker minutes.

Table 3 takes the analysis of move d) further by separating out the "instruction" or "order" move in the Quaker framework and then providing an interpretation of the underlying implications of the two types of speech acts: commissive (promising) and directive (instructing). The underlying illocutionary force for each type is suggested.

Speech act type	Verb phrase	Illocutionary implication
commissive	(It is) agreed that/to .. (It is) seen meete (so to doe)	The meeting undertakes to itself to carry out the action.
performative/ declarative	(Friend x) is appointed to + vb	The meeting brings about the action by minuting it.
directive	(It is) proposed	Authorised action must follow (by individual Friends or other meetings).
directive/requestive	(It is) desired/desirous	Some measure of authority but carrying positive politeness.

Table 3
Quaker speech act verb types in minutes.

As will be noted, there is a subtle difference where a meeting feels the need to be especially courteous in expressing an authoritative decision. The "requestive" element softens the instruction, nevertheless the underlying force is quasi-legal. That is to say, a verb phrase such as *it is desired* still carries a deontic force of obligation in the sense of an order to be carried out

by someone on behalf of the whole meeting. Example (1) illustrates this by the way in which the two Friends mentioned have in effect been instructed by the community, albeit politely, to carry out certain maintenance jobs in the local meeting house:

1)   John Squirrel &Wm Cole *are desired* to get the Pales mended & what other little Repairs are Necessary to be done at Epping. (Monthly Meeting at Waltham Abbey, 1st mo, 1748.)

4.4. Tense usage in Quaker minutes

The second linguistic feature that derives from the pragmatic context of Quaker decision-making meetings is that of tense usage. My corpus data indicate that Quakers have for the most part continued into the present day a format first employed in the 1670s or even earlier. Why did Friends from the very start of their organizational practice adopt a different style of tense usage from that used in the wider world, both in the past and through until the present day? The explanation is a result of a meticulous adherence to Truth by Friends, what might today be termed integrity. (The token *truth* occurs 38 times in the Quaker minutes corpus: 1.8 per 1,000 words, and is twice as frequent as the token *God*). If a meeting is recording decisions and the process leading to those decisions in real time, i.e. deictic 'now', then the linguistic expression must be in the present or present perfect aspect.

To carry out an examination of the uses of present and past tenses by various Quaker bodies and their clerks, I analyzed the concordance for the auxiliary verbs: *is/are; has/have/hath; do/does/doth* (present) and *was/were; had; did* (past tenses). Perfective and preterite forms are covered by these tokens as are continuous forms. The periphrastic *do* is included. I include the present perfect aspect forms as part of the concept of past actions with effects that continue up to the present time of the text's creator. A breakdown of the distribution across the three historical sub-corpora shows a distribution of present-tense occurrence of 79%, 75% and 78% for the three datasets respectively, so there appears to be a uniformity in diachronic usage. A further linguistic feature supporting this finding is the set of deictic tokens *now*, *tomorrow* and *yesterday*. There are four occurrences of *tomorrow* in the corpus (all seventeenth-century) and 27 occurrences (in all three sub-corpora) of *now* in a deictic context. Section 5 will make clear some observed differences between the Quaker style and the more traditional minuting discourse from the non-Quaker world. Figure 1 demonstrates the ratio of present to past tenses as a percentage.

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Tense usage, Quaker historical minutes
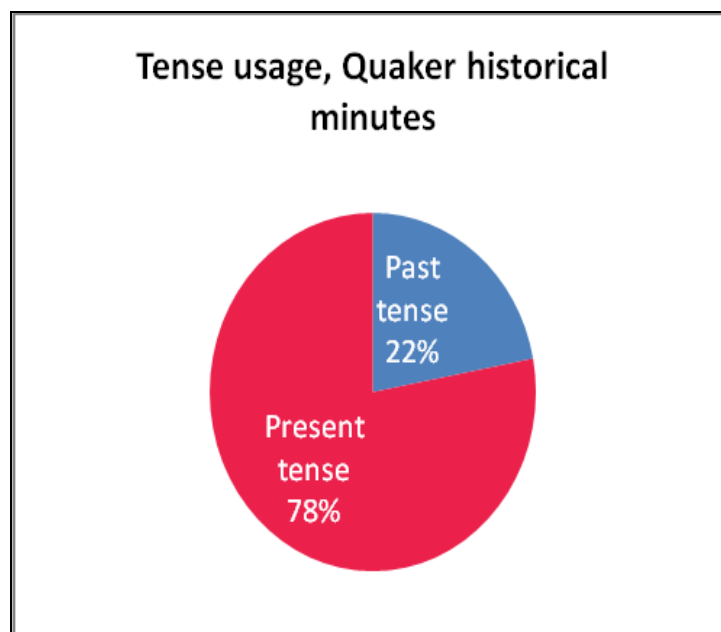
Past tense 22%

Present tense 78%

Figure 1
Historical Quaker tense usage.

I return to this topic in Section 5.2, where a comparison between the Quaker and conventional usage is shown in striking contrast.

4.5. Formulaic expressions in Quaker minutes

The third linguistic element that is a consequence of the Quaker principle of making minutes contemporaneously is a discourse strategy that relies on distinctive formulaic phrases or semi-fixed expressions. I argue this to be an additional symptom of the practice of drafting at speed but also an indication that the minutes were drafted prior to being read out. Orality, touched on earlier in this article, is suggested as one explanation for the presence of fixity in discourse (see Wray and Perkins, 2000:3 who also quote Moon 1998). The practice of corporately drafting and editing text, referred to by Mace (2012:xii), is an unusual one and which leads to these particularities of style and usage. She describes the present-day approach thus:

> Clerks are scribes, eliciting text from speech, writing from the spoken word. Unlike most scribes, however, their role is to do this not with an individual but with a group. Quaker usage sees clerks as reading the 'sense' of the meeting and initiating and developing the draft of what is to become that group's text: a record of its decisions. (Mace 2012, p.103)

The corpus is a rich trove of characteristic Quaker phrases. Some have dropped out of use over the centuries to be replaced by others, but others have stood the test of time. I argue that because of the requirement for

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contemporaneous minutes, speed and fluency were necessary skills for clerks. They were (and still are in the present day) drafting text for approval in the meeting. The practice, therefore, will have arisen of reaching for chunks of language that fit the bill, "buying time" as Wray and Perkins (2000, p.18) put it. Initially, these semi-fixed stretches might have been everyday phrases that occurred to Friends. As the tradition has evolved and standardized, many such phrases have become fixed and quaint-sounding. This section of the present paper falls into two parts: firstly, a description of the practice of written *Answers to the Queries,* and secondly, a look at certain phrases or clusters that stand out in the concordance data.

Rufus Jones (1921, pp.128-145) sets out a comprehensive summary of the now defunct quasi-survey known as *Answers to the Queries*: the practice in seventeenth-century meetings of providing a series of Advices, collected organically over time, and of expecting 'Answers' on a regular basis. The aim was initially the regulation of the outward manner of living by members.

> At first the Queries were formal questions asked for the sake of securing information in reference to the number of members suffering under persecution ...for the first 100 years answered only once a year to give definite information to the Yearly Meeting, for example: "Does Truth prosper among you?". (Jones 1921, p.128)

As time went on, this practice became ever more cumbersome as increasing numbers of Queries were formulated and which needed replies. The Yearly Meeting in 1755 revised and enlarged these questions but by 1792 they had developed into a single uniform set, with provision for written answers and for the next hundred years:

> Answers were minutely drawn up, scanned, discussed, considered, revised until almost every member knew the Queries off by heart and could forecast the answers with almost unerring precision. (Jones 1921, p.140).

Jones muses that such a formal detailed way of answering the Queries was "almost certainly a mistake." (ibid, p.140) At any rate, the practice led to the bloating of many sets of Quaker minutes with *Answers to the Queries*. The practice did not die out until well into the nineteenth century.

Here is an example of a set of responses from Barking Monthly Meeting in 1810. The relevant minutes for that meeting are numbered inside square brackets, and glossed below. Example stretches of fixed expressions are shown for present purposes in italics.

Barking Monthly Meeting held at Plaistow the 18 of *9 mo*., [1] 1810

Query. Whether any *Removals or Settlements* [2] since last Monthly Meeting?
…
Answers to the Queries [3]
1. Meetings for Worship & Discipline are kept up, many friends attend them duly at or near the time appointed, others are remiss more especially on *First day* [4] afternoons & other days of the week. Our Meetings for Discipline are generally small & those for Worship are not *clear of heaviness* [5]; but little admonition has been given.

3. Friends appear to be *preserved in a good degree of love* towards each other [6]. When differences arise, care is taken to endeavour to end them speedily & we are not aware that *talebearing & detraction prevail*. [7]

Signed in & on behalf of [8] Barking Monthly Meeting held at Plaistow the 18 of 9 mo. 1810. Luke Howard, Clerk this time.

The notes below explain the numbered formulaic phrases:

[1]   *mo* is the standard abbreviation for *month*, used throughout the corpus.
[2]   *removals or settlements* – standard format for responding to the query concerning Friends moving in or out of the meeting's catchment area.
[3]   [*answers to*] *the Queries* – the replies are almost a catechetical exercise.
[4]   *First day* – Sunday. Standard Quaker terminology throughout the historical range of the corpus.
[5]   *clear of heaviness* – free from. *Clear of* [1] was a favorite phrase with this meaning and used frequently in published material by Quakers *Heaviness* is harder to interpret and probably referred to an uninspiring or routine quality of the silence in Quakers' religious meetings.
[6]   *preserved in love*. Variants of this cluster occur 6 times in the corpus, *love* and/or *unity* collocating on either side of the node word *preserved*. A formulaic response to Query 2 in the nineteenth-century version.

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[1] The Oxford English Dictionary online gives sense 18c as: *quit, rid, free*.

[7]   *talebearing and detraction.* Also a kind of 'tick-box' response to Query 2[2]. This is arguably an attempt, albeit a favorite one, to enlarge the bare minimum of response routinely required.

[8]   *signed in (and on/in behalf of).* Standard ending to a set of minutes that endures into present-day practice. As the minutes were agreed in the meeting, the signature of the clerk, and witnessed by the whole meeting was essential to ensure the future integrity of the agreed text and that nothing could be altered subsequently. The minutes now became the property of the meeting and no longer the clerk's responsibility. This phrase is still in relatively common use by present-day Quakers.

Figure 2 below provides a glimpse of some favorite binomial clusters that Quaker clerks reached for in their drafting.

N	Concordance
1	that all the Monthly Meetings take care to advise and Admonish such. It is therefore the earnest request
2	profession & in plainness of speech behaviour and apparel but others are not sufficiently careful in
3	to make the necessary enquiry into their Conversation & Conduct, and if nothing appears to Obstruct, to
4	Tottenham Monthly Meeting signifying his Orderly Life and Conversation and clearness respecting marriage.
5	agree such persons should be dealt with in Love and plainness by the Respective Monthly and
6	well as heretofore, no unbecoming behaviour. 2. Love and Unity are pretty well preserved except in one
7	Truth but cannot say any Convincement appears. Love and Unity are well preserved in the General amongst
8	& inquiring whether he has answered those the Sense and Advice which, in the name of the Lord, that
9	having solidly considered the subject, feels unity and concurrence with the proposal of our said Friend,

Figure 2
Selected examples of binomial phrases in Quaker historical minutes.

5. Comparisons with non-Quaker minuting discourse

In order to bring out more clearly the specific traits that the Quaker method has developed, I present now some comparisons with contemporary conventional practices as illustrated by the sub-corpora introduced in Section 3.1. Table 1 is repeated here as a reminder of the metrics for my comparison sub-corpora:

[2] A corpus instance retrieved from the minutes of Peel Monthly Meeting of Women Friends offers this co-text: "We believe friends are preserved in love one towards another and a care is felt by some amongst us to avoid & discourage *talebearing and detraction* [italics added]". (Peel MM of Women Friends, 1846)

	17th century	18th century	19th century
Quaker, various minute books	(1676-1700) ~11,540w	(1734-1789) ~5,120w	(1824-1874) ~4,720w
Royal Society Council minute books	(1660-1700) ~970w	(1724-1743) ~1,800w	(1822-1852) ~1,950w
Royal Academy of Arts, London, council and General Assembly minute books	----	(1768-1793) ~1,350w	(1828-1874) ~990w
Orphanage Guardians, London, minute books	----	(1758-1759) ~3,990w	----

Table 1 (repeated)
Corpus datasets – sources of minute-books.

Section 4 considered the three features of interest: rhetorical moves found in minutes, directive and commissive speech acts and tense usage. We revisit this in order to look at how the Quaker practice differed from conventional styles, insofar as these are represented in three non-Quaker sources shown in Table 1.

5.1. Rhetorical moves in conventional minutes

All the conventional minutes show similarities synchronically and diachronically. The notes of the meeting typically constitute the minutes; in other words, several topics, decisions and actions are noted throughout and there is rarely a sense of minutes being seen as stand-alone stretches of text such as is found in the Quaker minutes. There is a clear implication that the secretaries (whether paid or voluntary) are the people expected to carry out agreed actions. This contrasts with the Quaker practice where the whole meeting is seen as one entity with one mind and a collective responsibility for future action. The traditional minutes quite often note occurrences previously carried out by individuals in authority. Agreement *post hoc* is not always sought by the meeting. This is not a feature of Quaker process in decision-making as inferred from the internal evidence.

a) **Describes or sets out a <u>situation</u> or <u>background information</u> requiring a DECISION**	Narrative past tenses	typical **'report'** verbs: *informed, reported, stated, acquainted, communicated, represented, desired x to,* *gave notice that.*
b) **Stretch of narrative that describes a DISCUSSION**	Narrative past tenses	typical **meta-discussion** verbs: *reported, was informed that,* *a letter was read.*
c) **An INSTRUCTION or an ORDER given, leading to action (and by whom).**	Past tenses	typical **directive speech act verbs**: *ordered, commanded,* [ellipsis] '*that*' clause.
d) **Records a DECISION, overt ACTION not specified but probably understood.**	Past tenses	typical **commissive speech act verb**: *resolved.*

Table 4
Rhetorical moves found in conventional minutes.

There are two comments to make regarding the generic moves shown above in Table 4. Firstly, move b) in which details of the discussions are noted: this move is present in the conventional style but is almost always absent in Quaker minutes. Secondly, there is a more restricted repertoire of instruction verbs – mostly *ordered* or *commanded*. Again, this abrupt style is mostly absent in the different contexts of Quaker business meetings in which agreement cannot be imposed by an individual, whether commissive ('noting' or 'promising') or directive ('action'). Decisions and actions require the Quaker meeting's collective written consent. I mentioned earlier the particular issue of civility in the Quaker minutes; the context of the QBM determines the degree of positive politeness in terms of instruction-giving. Here are three examples of the conventional style, found in the minutes of organizations where carefully treading on eggshells, as it were, seems less necessary. Firstly, we look at directive speech acts carrying the force of definite instruction, examples (2) to (4). The speech act verbs are highlighted in italics.

(2)   *Ordered* that the Visitation of the Royal Observatory be fixed for Saturday the 15th June. (RS Council, May 1822)
(3)   The Amenuensis *was commanded* to have the said Copy ready for him against next meeting. (RS Council, March 1662)
(4)   *That* Mr Day, Treasurer do pay the Servants Wages up to Lady Day last. (Orphanage Guardians, 1758)

Where commissive speech acts are found in the data, the illocutionary force has more the sense of recording a decision than has the 'promissory' nature of the Quaker verbs, as shown in examples (5) and (6):

(5)   The Committee of Guardians *have* this Day *resolved* to receive the eight Girls
      who were on the Register for Admission. (Orphanage Guardians, 1758)
(6)   The Keeper reported, That he had received a Letter from Mr. Bell, importing
      that he had sent a Picture ... The Picture not being arrived. *Resolved*, That it be
      received when it comes, if in time. (RA Council, 1769)

5.2. Tense usage in conventional minutes

The next point of comparison in Table 4 concerns tense usage, referred to
above in Section 4.4. It was calculated that most Quaker minutes are
expressed in the deictic present tense: approximately ¾ of all auxiliary verbs
carrying a grammatical aspect. When the same query is carried out on both
the Royal Society and the Royal Academy samples, the results are strikingly
similar, and neatly inverse to the Quaker set, namely ¾ of all such auxiliary
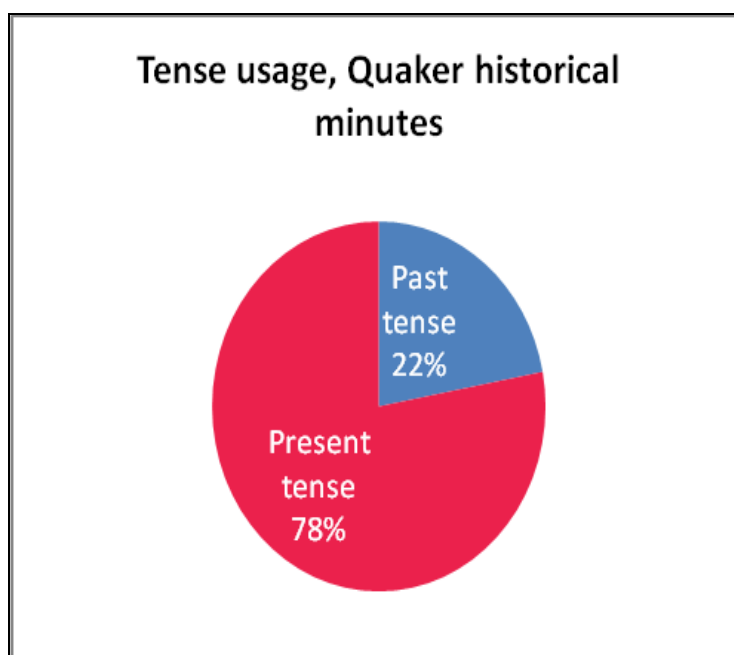verbs are cast in the *past* tense. Figures 1 and 3 show this in graphic form:

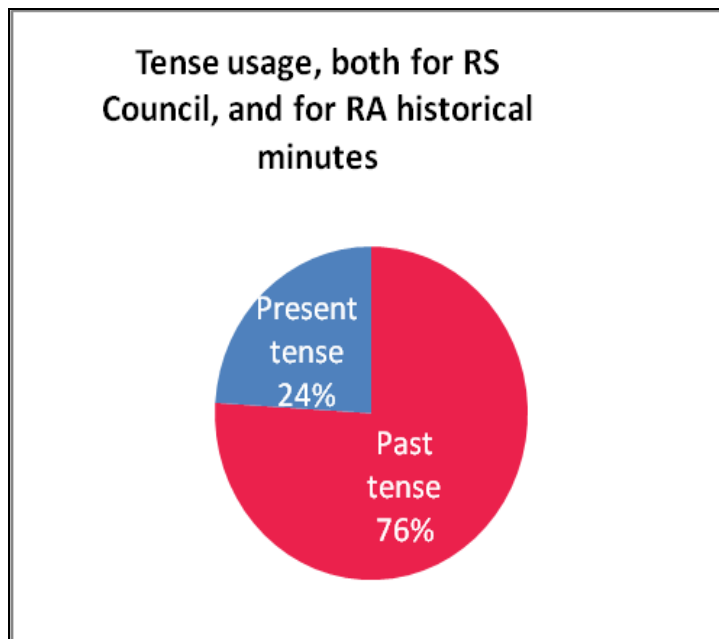Figure 1 (repeated)
Historical Quaker tense usage.

Figure 3
Historical conventional tense usage.

A further comparison with a small corpus of present-day Quaker minutes in English from several countries shows that the trend towards present-tense usage has actually increased, in contrast to conventional usage, as Figure 4 shows.
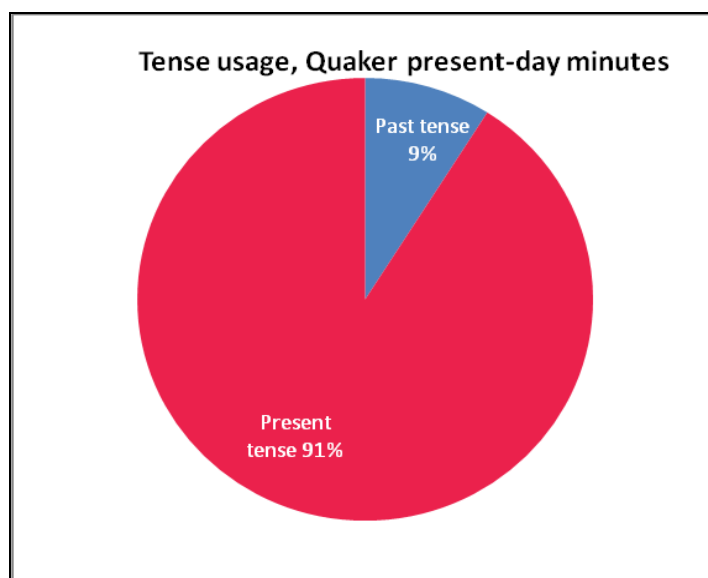

Figure 4
Quaker present-day tense usage.

5.3. Formulaic language in conventional minutes

The non-Quaker sample is relatively very small compared with the Quaker one and computational retrieval of clusters only yields a few instances. More research is needed on a larger sample, however, some initial points can be made here. The first is to observe that the distinctive process of producing Quaker minutes as was described in Section 2.1 is no longer the case with traditional minute-taking. Someone has the responsibility for creating the text after the conclusion of the meeting, and there is little likelihood of a spoken element being included unless verbatim stretches of text are present. Internal evidence supports the assumption that we are considering purely written discourse in the non-Quaker texts. Nevertheless, some two- or three-word clusters are detected. These include:

Three-word clusters
> *Read and confirmed.*
> *Read and signed.*
> *To be paid.*
> *Ordered that the.*

Two-word clusters
> *Be admitted.*
> *Be granted.*
> *Adjourned to.*
> *Agreed to.*

A few longer stretches were found with some frequency, for example:

With power to add to their number.
His majesty was graciously pleased.

The striking aspect of these examples is how few there are compared with what one might find in present-day conventional minute-making, at least in some contexts. A quick search on the Internet brings up many sites offering advice on useful templates and phrases for the inexperienced note-taker, however this side-avenue is beyond the scope of the present article.

6. Conclusion

This study looks at historical minutes generated by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in England from the perspective of a distinctive discourse text-type. Historical business correspondence has received scholarly attention but to date no substantive study has appeared regarding the language and process of minute-creating. The questions posed in the

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present paper have led to an enquiry into the nature of minutes created in past eras and the Quakers' approach because of their unusual methods. Additionally, the minute books themselves provide a rich heritage stretching back over 300 years through to the present time in which diachronic investigations into their physical appearance, language use and style become possible.

The paper devoted space to giving a description of the Quaker Business Method because of the interlinking corporate and governance structure of this religious body that sought to avoid hierarchy. As a practicing Quaker myself with 40 years of first-hand experience of Quaker business meetings, I am in a good position as a historical linguist to make informed inferences based on the written records of the past. This leads me to argue for the continuity of a text production system based on a process of collective drafting and agreeing actions and decisions, as well as the precise wording they are couched in. As I hope I have shown, this leads us into issues of speech-like text in written records, present tense usage, the realization of speech acts for instructing and committing, with the illocutionary force of quasi-legal authority, all combined through expressions of careful courtesy and civility.

The investigation into fossilized language and fixity has resulted in some unexpected findings. Fitzmaurice (2006) found a rigidity and narrowness in historical business correspondence and one might have assumed a similar outcome for minuting discourse. However, although the Quaker data have revealed some distinctive phraseology – jargon even – there was also a surprisingly wide repertoire available to clerks for functional language in their minute-crafting. The non-Quaker comparisons showed a narrower range of lexis and repetitive functional language but not yet at the level often thought of as stultifyingly rigid. This style may be evident in some twentieth-century conventional minuting text, but present-day equivalents although outside the scope of the present research, appear also to have rejected this style as outmoded. Nevertheless, the historical minutes, whether Quaker or not, indicate a distinct text-type in terms of functionality and conventions. The differences observed in the study derive more from the particular purposes of specific organizations or groups represented by the minutes, and the work they were required to carry out.

To conclude, this paper has attempted to respond to the central pragmatic question of why and how Quakers in the past developed (and still rely on) their unusual decision-recording practice, and has provided qualitative and quantitative evidence for the reasons the practice evolved and the linguistic features that make Quaker minuting the distinctive discourse type that it is. The study is arguably the first linguistic investigation into the untapped world of historical minute-writing and has made an important first contribution to the field. More work with larger and wider-reaching datasets now beckons.

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