

TODAY

Quakers began as a religious movement. It included pamphleteers, travelling ministers and prophets, followed soon after by social reformers, missionaries and 'plain Quakers'. By the twentieth century, Quaker meetings were established in many countries of the world, with a variety of faith and practice: deists and universalists, evangelicals and liberals.
- and throughout its history, the ground of Quaker faith has remained constant.

Quakers hold on to our inherited traditions; we remain open to new light. Here in Nailsworth, we welcome visitors to this meeting house seven days a week. In continuous use for over three hundred years, it has been maintained and cared for as a place of worship and as a centre for the community.

To know more about Quaker faith, about Quaker meetings in Gloucestershire, or about hiring a room in the meeting house, please pick up one of our leaflets - or visit the national and local websites:

www.quaker.org.uk,
www.glosquakers.org

References

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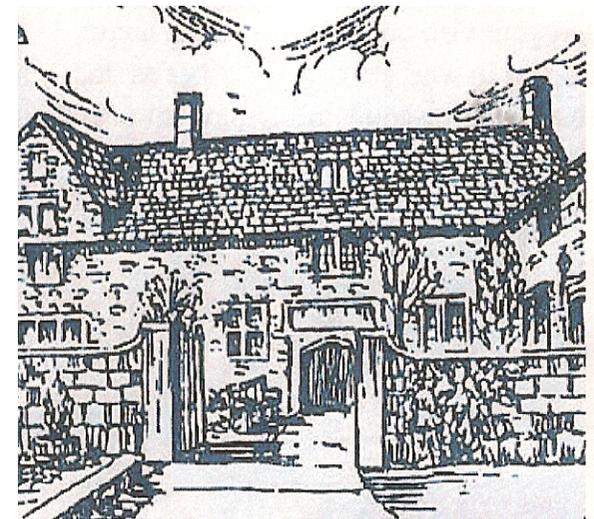
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Nailsworth Quakers past and present



THE PEOPLE

The Religious Society of Friends, known as Quakers, arose during the turmoil of seventeenth-century England following the Civil War of 1642-49. Many who were seeking religious freedom came together under the leadership of George Fox (1624-1691). Their belief was that the spirit of God is accessible to everyone, without the need for a priest.

In Gloucestershire, the first public meeting of Quakers took place in 1654 - in an open field. By then, Quakers across the country were being persecuted for their beliefs. Bailiffs took away their furniture and cattle. Some were beaten and imprisoned.

In 1655, one of the travelling ministers of the new movement had a meeting in Painswick. Many who attended it from Nailsworth came back 'convinced' and continued a pattern of regular meetings at their homes, meeting in secret 'seeking to know the way of the truth'. In Nailsworth, a group of such independents met in the house of a man called William Beale.

On 17th January 1660, soldiers took William Beale and ten others from their homes in Nailsworth to Gloucester prison. Their crimes were: refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance to the king and holding meetings for worship in their homes.

The present Meeting House, in a group of buildings in Quaker Close, was one such meeting place.

THE BUILDINGS

Farmhouse

On entering the Close, you see in front of you the oldest of the group. Originally a farmhouse, its doorway has the original stone surround, with flat Tudor arch and dripmould. To the right of this, carved in the stone wall, can still be seen the roman numerals III, IV and V - once used to measure bales of wool stacked up in the doorway.

Weaver's cottage

In about 1620, a weaver's cottage (now number 1 Quaker Close) was added to the left of the farmhouse. A vertical line in the mortar to the right of its front door marks the join between the two buildings.

At the top of the cottage is the weavers' loft. Its cross-gabled roof, supported by purloins and wins braces, made an area wide and high enough to accommodate weaving looms.

Meeting house

The meeting house itself, to the right of the main gate, was originally a barn. It was around 1680 that Quakers first met there – but it was not until after the Act of Toleration in 1689 that the house was registered as a public place of worship – the Meeting House that you see today.

The keystones, imposts, dripmould with large diamond stops around the door are unusual for the time. To the right of it, the leaded window formerly had four lights with a transom (probably modified in 1794-5.)

Inside, through the door to the left, is a spiral staircase. In the early years, this upper room was used by day as a school and by night housed travelling ministers. Two of the original wooden benches are here. Carved into the stone on the window ledges are the initials of some of those who attended the day school in the 1680s.

Downstairs, beyond the kitchen, is a room used today for our children's meeting on Sundays as well as community groups. The old stone fireplace, bread oven and wooden bench remind us of its former use as the farm house kitchen.

Meeting room

In the panelled meeting room, benches and chairs are set out 'in the manner of Friends' with a table in the centre. Some say George Fox gave this to the early Nailsworth Friends (he records two visits here in his journal). However, it has been much renovated, and only the drawer remains of its 17th century origin.

The wooden screened raised benches would have been the seats for 'recorded ministers' (those who Friends felt gave the most helpful spoken ministry); while elders (responsible for the meeting's spiritual welfare) upheld them from the bench in front. Nowadays, everyone is welcome to sit on these.