

## Quakers in Malvern

Greetings from Malvern Quaker Meeting! The long-winded title for our parent body is The Religious Society of Friends; but the term 'Quakers' is perhaps more commonly known. The Society began in the 1650s, owing to the devotion and leadings of George Fox. He travelled a



Malvern Meeting House in Orchard Road

good deal, with the aim of inspiring people to a more sincere and spirit-filled kind of worship, which he often found sadly lacking at that time in many places where the established Church held sway. Quakerism is sometimes described as 'rooted in Christianity, open to new light.' There are many distinctive aspects that make it different from churches (though we do use the term 'church government' and sometimes describe our *Meeting for Worship for Business* as meeting 'for church affairs').

Starting with what we don't have! No churches, but meeting houses; no services, but meetings for worship; no sermons, but vocal ministry – where anyone present who feels led to speak may do so; although by far the largest part of our one-hour meeting is usually spent in silence. There is generally no programmed worship in Britain, (though there is in the U.S. and other countries); and rarely any music, bible readings or prayers as such, though bibles are always placed on the central table, along with a guidebook *Quaker Faith and Practice* which has a wealth of inspiring material on many aspects of spiritual life and its outward expression in the world.



Seating is usually arranged in a circle or two. There is no Creed, but there is a faith – meaning quite a number of different things to a very diverse following in our present day. One of our statements is that 'we welcome people of all faiths or none'. We have no clergy or paid staff: there are Elders whose chief responsibility is to ensure the 'right holding' of weekly Meeting for Worship, and also those that are held to conduct business, often on a monthly basis.



The Quaker Peace Garden at Malvern Cube

The wellbeing of our members and attenders is looked after by people we now call Pastoral Care Friends, the long-used term 'Overseer' having been replaced within the last year, as having undesirable connotations with slavery and workhouses. We are affiliated to an Area Meeting, not a Diocese or District. In our case this is known as Worcestershire and Shropshire A. M., which in turn is under the aegis of Britain Yearly Meeting, the national body.

The basis of Quaker life has for many years been founded on four principles, which are usually referred to as our testimonies. (You can see these in concrete form – almost literally – in the Peace Garden, which was transferred, by gift from the local Quaker Meeting, to what is now The Cube in Albert Road North after its award-winning entry in the Three Counties Showground.) These testimonies are **Peace, Equality, Truth** and **Simplicity**. The third of these has now been extended to include Integrity, and the fourth now incorporates Sustainability, which is such an essential requirement in the present state of our environment.

Worcester Society of Friends was established in very early times. We know this from the fact that by December 1660 more than 50 Friends had been before Worcester Court on matters of conscience, and when a ship left Bristol for Philadelphia in 1683, thirteen Friends from Worcester were among the passengers. Elizabeth Fry, the well-known prison and social reformer, also visited Worcester Friends in 1824. Regarding the history of Quakers in Malvern, the story goes back to 1856 when Friends, supported by those from Worcester, met in a rented room above a stable in or near Portland Place. While holding their Sunday meeting, worshippers could hear the gentle sounds of their horses stabled below!



By 1914, the Malvern Quakers had been given permission to hold their own business meetings (straight after Sunday meeting for Worship), which until a few years ago were called 'Preparative Meetings', in readiness for similar Area-wide ones, usually held the following week, held at different locations in turn. The establishment of The Downs School in Colwall in September 1900 was a Quaker undertaking, and boys used to travel to worship in Malvern by walking to the Wyche and boarding two-horse brakes to take them on into town! Early pupils at the school were mainly from the extended Cadbury and Rowntree families. The fact that non-conformists were not admitted to universities, and therefore professions, led to many founding well-known commercial enterprises such as chocolate manufacture.

By 1935 the Malvern Meeting was sufficiently well established to consider purchasing a property, and by 1937 the site in Orchard Road where it now stands had been identified and planning permission sought. Two members of the Cadbury family generously offered one third of the anticipated cost of the building work, suggesting that the rest could be found by subscription and possibly a loan, the annual interest on which had been calculated by C. Cadbury in his letter on the subject.



The main hall at Orchard Road Meeting House

In the event the total outlay was £2000, and the premises were unlocked by young Charles Lloyd Cadbury on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1938. A detailed account of the opening appeared in the Malvern Gazette of 9<sup>th</sup> July. Tribute was paid to the Cadbury family, with the comment that 'it was their encouragement that gave us faith to go forward and build, and we want this meeting house to be always associated with their name'. The architect was Mr. Armstrong of the Bournville Village Trust, who designed a lovely Arts and Crafts building which received Grade II Listed status in 2020. The representative from London who presided at the opening remarked that: '...a desire for plainness had (sometimes) led to buildings of an exceedingly plain variety, not to say ugly... but that in the last generation Friends had learnt it was possible to maintain simplicity and yet have with it real beauty and dignity.' I would add that we today are privileged to have inherited this place of worship and inspiration.

Another speaker who attended the opening quoted from a textbook published in Norway that a student had shown him, as follows: 'Quakers are curious people, whose lives are better than their beliefs'! We are advised in our little books of *Advices and Queries*: 'Let your lives speak.'



Quaker meeting via Zoom

In recent times, that leads some of us to visit prisons regularly, to seek improvements in criminal justice, to protest against arms dealing, witness with white poppies in memory of all victims of all wars, take Peace Education into local schools, donate and give support to refugees and work towards greater diversity, in common with many in other denominations.

*I am indebted to Peter Bevan for his research on Quaker history in Malvern.  
Jill Etheridge, January 2021.*