



Roundabout Central England



The newsletter of Central England Quakers—Summer 2024
centralenglandquakers.org.uk

Fox 400



2024 marks the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox, one of the founders of Quakerism, and Friends around the world have been marking this quatercentenary. Events were held in Central England, including a pilgrimage in South Birmingham, and an event at Hartshill Quaker Meeting House—the closest meeting to the village of Fenny Drayton where Fox was born.

Read more inside.

George Fox Pilgrimage

Central England Quakers were approached by Birmingham Churches Together asking if we had anything planned to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox. They had helped to organise a pilgrimage for a different church group and offered to help us to organise one too. A planning group including Friends from Bournville, Cotteridge and Selly Oak Meetings and one of the Area Meeting clerks was set up and plans began to form. It was decided to hold a pilgrimage starting from Selly Oak Meeting House, walking round the boating lake in Bournville where there would be a stop for reflection and then a stop at Bournville Meeting House before returning to Selly Oak Meeting House for tea and a concert. We are grateful to Maud Grainger and Robert Mountford from Birmingham Churches Together for the idea and for their support in making it happen.

The day was dry and sunny and Friends from eight local meetings as well as friends of Friends, members of local churches and Maud and Robert from Birmingham Churches Together began to arrive at Selly Oak Meeting House. It was lovely to be joined by Pentecostal Bishop Mike Royal, the General Secretary of Churches Together in England, who lives in Birmingham. Good chat was had as people ate their packed lunches sitting out in the sunshine or inside listening to the music of the Jazz Trio including Selly Oak Friend Wal Warmington. The children had an impromptu dance in the car park to the music!

The formal part of the afternoon began with a fascinating talk by Stuart Masters, until recently



Bournville Meeting

Programmes Co-ordinator at Woodbrooke and a member of Selly Oak Meeting, on the life and times of George Fox. Two Selly Oak Friends then read words of George Fox interspersed by music from the Jazz Trio. A procession of around 50 people set off from Selly Oak, carrying banners handmade by



Music at Selly Oak

Friends at Selly Oak saying 'Be patterns, be examples wherever you are', 'Look for that of God in everyone', 'Be still and cool in your mind and spirit' and 'George Fox 1624-1691 Quakers'.

Cotteridge Friends had thoughtfully prepared four readings for us to consider at the stop by the boating lake summing up George Fox's message and its relevance to us today.

At Bournville Meeting we arrived to find George Fox himself on stage writing his diary! He read to us from his journal and then there was time for discussion and reflection while the children made him birthday cards. These were presented and Happy Birthday was sung before we set off back up the hill to Selly Oak Meeting House for a very welcome tea and time for more chat and fellowship.

The day finished with a concert by Quaker singer songwriter Mark Waistell. He played songs which he had written himself, taking inspiration from Advices and Queries, and interspersed them by readings from Advices and Queries and his reflections on them.

It was a hugely enjoyable day, a good source of outreach and a great way of building community within and between our Meetings.



George Fox 400 at Hartshill

Clare Barnett reflects on an event at Hartshill, the nearest Local Meeting to Fox's birthplace.

100 years ago Hartshill Meeting became involved in the Friends' national tercentenary commemoration of the birth of George Fox, at Fenny Drayton on the 5th and 6th July 1924. Joan Allen, in her book 'The Quakers of Hartshill' wrote that "On the Saturday afternoon and evening an estimated one thousand people crowded the field next the church and churchyard at Fenny Drayton to hear the special guest speakers... It is also remembered in the Meeting, for 'about six hundred and fifty



The old Hartshill meeting house c1907, and the new one built in the 1960s.

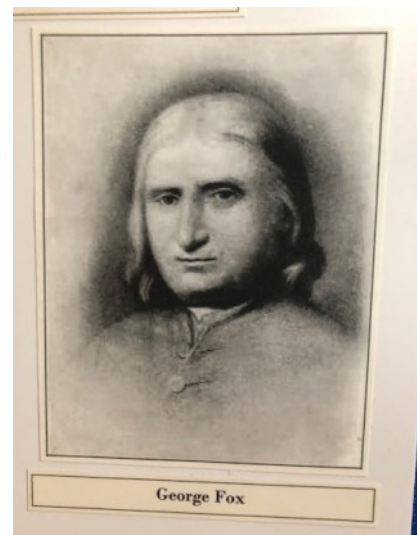
persons received a substantial tea, provided and catered by our willing groups of workers' in a large marquee at the edge of the field.'

It was with some relief that one thousand people did not come to Hartshill Quaker Meeting's George Fox 400 Celebration Day on Saturday 25th May 2024. 17 Hartshill Friends were joined by around 50 visitors at our celebration day including Friends from 11 meetings from around the West Midlands, Warwickshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Gloucestershire. Our day included exhibitions on the history of Hartshill Quakers, an exhibition about the history of George Fox's family home in Fenny Drayton, demonstrations of stitching our Quaker Tapestry style panel,



The birthplace of George Fox

Quaker history films and lots of refreshments. An exhibition of photographs taken by Hartshill Friends on a visit to Fenny Drayton showed the creative work we had undertaken as a meeting this year.



In the morning visitors joined a guided walk around Quaker sites in Hartshill and we were very grateful to the owners of The Grange for allowing Friends into their garden and sharing insights into the extensive renovations they are undertaking to the house. This is where George Fox used to meet with the owner, Nathaniel Newton, and other early Quakers. In the afternoon another guided walk was undertaken to Fenny Drayton and we thank local historian Malcolm Lockett for talking about the research he has undertaken into George Fox's family home.

Hartshill Quaker Meeting and Fenny Drayton church now also have explanatory pull up banners created and funded by the meeting as part of our George Fox 400 commemoration. This year a permanent explanatory board will also be positioned near the site of the house.

Hartshill Friends also hosted the devotional Area Meeting in August, at which the exhibitions were on display and there will be a community coffee morning in the autumn. The meeting has recently launched a new website and this includes a local history section. The page includes scanned copies of Joan Allen's local Quaker history books from the 1980s 'Our George' and 'The Quakers of Hartshill' which can be downloaded. There are also links to the Fenny Drayton and Hartshill Quaker history leaflets.



A tapestry at Hartshill

Read more at hartshill.quakermeeting.org/history

Fox's message for us today

As part of the pilgrimage, Cotteridge Friends had thoughtfully prepared four readings for us to consider, summing up George Fox's message and its relevance to us today.

Patterns and Examples

Fox made a point of living with integrity, acting against injustice, and building a faith community that practiced what they preached. These are well-known words for Quakers everywhere:

And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

Quaker faith and Practice 19.32

Faith leading to action

In 1652, George Fox travelled to the north-west and had a vision of the work he was to do. We can take time out of our ordinary routine to think about how we should be living today. George wrote:

As we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it with much ado, it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see atop of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered.

Quaker faith and practice 9.06



What can we do?

George believed that he could make a difference by writing to members of Parliament or even to the king. Is it still possible today to have a similar impact? What are the important issues today that writing to our new Members of Parliament might help to address?

Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country... Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear... Work for an order of society which will allow [people] to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.

Quaker faith & practice 23.01

Step onwards

George Fox was much persecuted for his lack of conformity to the dictates of the time. He wrote to his followers in 1663:

Sing and rejoice, ye Children of the Day and of the Light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of Darkness that may be felt: and Truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs doth skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the Seed Christ is over all and doth reign. And so, be of good faith and valiant for the Truth.

Quaker faith and practice 20.23

Outreach Opportunities this Quaker Week

Quaker Week (27th Sept – 6th Oct) runs every year to help Quaker meetings to attract new people and share their faith. There's still time for your meeting to take some inspiration from events happening around central England. If you're curious about Quakers, it's a great opportunity to find out more at some friendly events:

Saturday 21st September 3-6pm Cotteridge Meeting House

Crafting Quaker Week Displays - the Making a Difference Group will be making signs featuring motivational quotes for display in the Meeting House garden during Quaker Week. For example quotes from Quaker Faith & Practice and statements on the testimonies. It is also a chance for a relaxed chat over tea/coffee and cake.

Friday 27th September [Warwick Meeting House](#)

'Nudges and Winks' Concert by singer/songwriter Mark Waistell

Saturday 28th September 10.45am-12.45pm [Stourbridge Meeting House](#)

Building Community all-age workshop (arrivals and drinks from 10.15am) followed by lunch and Area Meeting 2-5pm.



Sunday 29th September 10.30am-12noon [Cotteridge Park B30 2HF](#)

A Quaker Meeting around the Campfire, suitable for all ages

What to expect: A few minutes of quiet at the start, activities exploring Quaker values of peace, equality, truth and simplicity, marshmallows and popcorn!

Sunday 29th September [Barnt Green Meeting House](#)

Shared picnic lunch and a showing of a short film about George Fox followed by questions and discussion and light refreshments.



Friday 4th October Stourbridge Town Centre

Quaker week stand.

Friday 4th October [Warwick Meeting House](#)

Quaker Film

Saturday 5th October 10-12.30 [Stourbridge Meeting House](#)

'Why be a Quaker' event.

Saturday 5th October 11am-4pm [Sutton Coldfield Meeting House](#)

Clothes repairing workshop.

Sunday 6th October 9-10am [Stourbridge Meeting House](#)

Pop up breakfast before Meeting for Worship.

Sunday 6th October 12:45-4:30pm [Selly Oak Meeting House](#)

Open afternoon to include lunch and a Meeting for Worship followed by refreshments.

Sunday 6th October World Quaker Day

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) suggests that the [epistle from the recent World Plenary Meeting](#) is read out in our Meetings.

Good Money Week

Quaker Week coincides with Good Money Week, so if your Meeting is interested in the 'good and just use of money', this could be an opportunity for outreach. The Christian [Just Money Movement](#) encourages churches (including Quaker Meetings) to mark Good Money Sunday on 6th October, they have [resources you can download](#). Their [Just Money Conference](#) takes place online on Saturday 5th September.

Faith walk to the Lickey Hills Yearly Meeting 2024

Peter Doubtfire reports on a recent interfaith event to connect with the environment.

On Sunday 18th August Barnt Green Quakers hosted Footsteps, who were holding their annual interfaith walk in the Lickey Hills. Around fifty walkers – Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and humanist – made their way from Barnt Green Quaker Meeting House to Bilberry Hill, with children stopping off in the playground and adults enjoying the fine views across Longbridge and the South Birmingham suburbs to the city centre.

It was wonderful to see so many people really enjoying themselves, especially those who do not often have the opportunity to take part in community walks in the countryside. The children were visibly happy to be outside walking and enjoying each other's company. We were reminded that there is something valuable in people from different communities coming together and walking alongside each other in Nature – that is a powerful eco-action in its own right.

The aim of Footsteps' annual walk is to share different faith perspectives on creation, and to take time to reconnect with our local environment.

Earth Care is a shared value that all of our faiths teach: spending time with each other and with nature has helped remind us why we take action together to protect it. We can all boost our wellbeing through these activities, but access to green spaces is not equal across the city. By providing support to travel to the Lickey Hills via public transport, and offering hospitality at the Meeting House, we welcomed people from different backgrounds to take steps with us towards a low carbon future.



Claire Bowman reflects on Yearly Meeting.

Yearly Meeting was held at Friends House and online at the end of July this year, rather than around the May bank holiday, as an experiment. Ten Central England Quakers were present in person and a number of others online. The two major themes on the agenda were Truth and Integrity and a Decision on the Future of Yearly Meeting and its Structures.

To begin with the group to review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings reported its findings, which had already been considered and approved by Meeting for Sufferings. It took three sessions across the weekend to come to the decision to create a continuing Yearly Meeting, which will meet four times a year.

Along the way new Area Meeting representatives to Meeting for Sufferings were appointed. Our reps were not on the list but I was assured by the recording clerk that their names are with his office along with quite a few others and will be appointed between meetings.

The meeting received a report from Trustees which announced that due to more rigorous audit requirements and greater time needed to prepare the accounts, they will not be ready in future in time to be reported to a May meeting. Meeting for Sufferings will receive and accept the 2025 financial report.

Consideration of Truth and Integrity focused on whether Friends hear Yearly Meeting minutes as a call to personal action. The minute on this states that local and area meetings need to spend more time considering Yearly Meeting minutes. Some of them have clearly inspired action, for example on sustainability and on sexual equality. The final paragraph of minute 27 reads:

'It is a great responsibility to discern in community what the 'Great Creator' is leading us to do. In that discernment each of us can learn from others and support them in the work that we cannot do ourselves. God's work is where your deep joy meets the deep hunger of the world'.

The second session on the proposals to change our Yearly Meeting structures included much heartfelt ministry on deeply held reservations about the changes. Would Friends actually turn up to several Yearly Meetings a year? One is quite a big ask. Would they travel to meetings held in different parts of the country or just wait for a meeting near where they live? Could we somehow keep the name Meeting for Sufferings, which is so dear to many Friends? Area Meetings are still going to appoint representatives. Will it just dwindle down to a Meeting for Sufferings in all but name?

The second session on Truth and Integrity focussed on public life. We should exercise our testimonies in our private lives but also get involved in politics. Minute 30, third paragraph, reads:

‘When we see politicians of any party acting with truth and integrity we should thank them for their honesty and encourage others to do the same. This encourages those serving in political positions to aim higher and is one way towards the kinder ground we seek’.

At last the meeting came into unity regarding its future. A dozen points were minuted that should be taken into consideration as the changes are planned for and take place, matters such as bursary help for Area Meetings to be able to afford to send representatives to all the meetings and for Individual Friends to attend - and the need to offer instruction on how Yearly Meeting and the Quaker business method works.

Sessions of the new continuing Yearly Meeting are expected to begin from the rise of Yearly Meeting 2026 (1st - 4th May) At this point Meeting for Sufferings will be laid down. Ways of clerking the new Yearly Meeting will be considered so that too great a burden doesn't fall on individual members of the clerking team.

A new, single, Agenda Committee will be appointed to organise all Yearly Meeting sessions after May 2026. This will need to start work after Yearly Meeting next year (2025). In the future one of this new committee's important functions will be to receive minutes from Area Meetings. It is envisaged that residential Yearly Meeting gatherings will be held from time to time, rather than regularly every three years.

Friends from around the country were asked to uphold and pray for all those Friends appointed to undertake the work of preparing for this transition. A review of how the new arrangements are working will take place no more than five years into the new arrangements.

The Adderbury Gathering

Rob and Helen Hooper of Warwick Meeting explore 'receptive ecumenism'.

We were pleased to attend the annual Adderbury Gathering in June this year. The lovely old Meeting House near Banbury, Oxfordshire is only open four times a year.

Approaching 50 people came to the talk by Elaine Green, clerk to the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, on "Receptive Ecumenism". She read her talk by torchlight as there is no electricity in the Meeting House.

The concept of Receptive Ecumenism was conceived of and led by the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University. It challenges us not to focus on how others might benefit from our practices but to recognise our needs and learn from and collaborate with other faith groups.

Elaine reminded us how early Quakers kept themselves separate from other groups, regarding themselves as holding specific truths, and wearing distinctive clothes. Though we later co-operated with others, still many of us prefer to keep separate. We are not easy ecumenists. Closer co-operation could add to our spiritual nourishment.

In this time of conflict and division, we could set a great example of togetherness with our near, but separated, brothers and sisters in Christian and other faith groups.

Elaine also counselled that we need to connect more fully with Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012), who communicate differently and may seek different paths to spirituality.

Elaine's scholarly and stimulating talk was followed by lively questions and discussion, and we finished with generous refreshments.

Notices & Dates for your Diary

Bournville Lunchtime Concerts

First and third Fridays of the month, 1pm at Bournville Quaker Meeting House, 65 Linden Rd, B30 1JT:

20th September—Ashley Wagner (organ)

4th October—Vivien Chasey (violin) Robin Bowman (piano)

18th October—Darren Hogg and Godfrey Leung (piano duet)

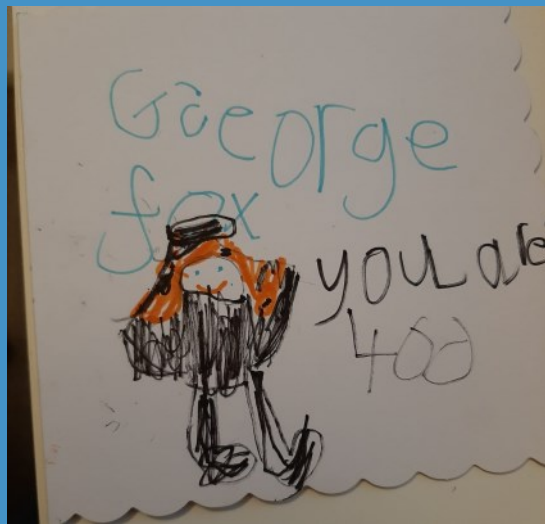
1st November—Nathan Winters (clarinet) Julian Jacobson (piano)

15th November—Margaret Fingerhut (piano) Music inspired by Ukraine.

6th December—Thomas Howell (organ)

20th December—James Brawn (piano)

A final reflection on Fox 400 from the children at Selly Oak, who made birthday cards for George Fox:



Friends' Cinema at Barnt Green

Barnt Green & Redditch Quakers invite you to join them at their monthly film showings.

Barnt Green & Redditch Quaker Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green, B45 8NR

Sat 21st Sept 7pm—Mozart's opera about princes, princesses and monsters

Sat 19th Oct 7pm—Western about a gunslinger and a Quaker nurse

Sun 20th Oct 2.30pm—In conjunction with the Council of Christians & Jews (B'ham branch) a highly acclaimed film, based on a novel by Martin Amis, about Rudolf Höss and Auschwitz

Sat 16th Nov 7pm—Tchaikovsky ballet, featuring a sleeping princess.

Sat 21st Dec 7pm—Aardman's comedy a nimation about Santa's gawky son.

Fri 27th Dec 2.30pm—family animation about a young Viking who befriends a dragon.

Fri 27th Dec 7pm—'Lovely' musical starring Rex Harrison and Audrey Hepburn.

Visit another meeting Sundays

On the 5th Sundays in a month: a regular opportunity for informal intervisitation to help strengthen our sense of community across the area meeting.

There are two more Sundays in 2024 when we encourage Friends and Meetings to go visiting:

29th September 2024

29th December 2024

Do you have news to share for the next edition of Roundabout Central England?

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