

Tercentenary Celebrations of the Quakers

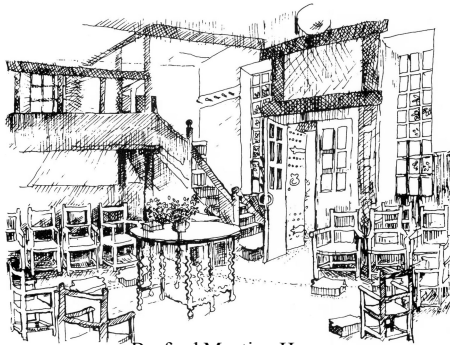
The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, as they are generally known, grew out of the civil and religious turmoil of the seventeenth century. Quakerism is a way of life rather than a set of beliefs; they do not have priests or a hierarchy as they believe

that everyone is equal and has a direct relationship with God. They meet for one hour and worship in silence. During meetings members may be moved to speak.

The Quaker Way of Life

Today more people come to the Society than are born into it. Simple marriage ceremonies are held at the Meeting House; after the ceremony the newly married couple are required to sign the official register. Funeral services take the form of a memorial meeting, when Friends recall their own memories of the deceased. Baptism services are not needed as everyone is born equal so does not need to be officially welcomed into the Meeting.

As non-conformists, Quakers were barred from attending university and many trades were not open to them, as they would not pay tithes or swear oaths. They set up their own trades, many of which are household names today. Barclays Bank was founded by a Quaker family. The wife of the Quaker schoolmaster in Burford, Thomas Huntley, despite being mother of eight



Burford Meeting House

children, stepmother to two and school matron and housekeeper, began making biscuits in the school kitchen. In 1811 her stepson Joseph moved to Reading and opened a small biscuit factory. In 1841 he went into

partnership with George

Palmer and Huntley and Palmer's Biscuits was born.

Many Quakers have made their mark on history. We have all heard of Elizabeth Fry, the famous prison and social reformer of the early 19th century.

William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania became a Quaker at the age of 22, despite being born into a distinguished Anglican family.

The Milton Connection

There is a strong Quaker connection in Milton-under-Wychwood. The house in Green Lane, now known as *Quakers Meet* and owned by Sandra Seacole and Jim Bradshaw, was once a Meeting House.

In 1669 about 80 Quakers are recorded meeting monthly at the house. Sandy takes up the story.

"The surprising thing was that the gentleman who put the property in trust for the Quakers in 1668 was a Robert Seacole which happens to be my family name!

Originally the Quakers met in Robert's house in 1665 before outbuildings were transformed into a meeting house. Part of

the garden of the meeting house was marked out as a burial ground and Robert stipulated that he and his wife Joan and a lady called Martha were to be buried in the garden.

Over the years many more burials took place and also weddings but by the middle of the 1800's the number of members had dropped significantly and the Charity Commissioners agreed to sell the property in 1925 by public auction. But it remained unsold and was eventually bought by Mr Walter Rawlins in November 1925. Amazingly the Society of Friends in Oxford still receives the interest from the money invested from the sale.

About 15 years ago whilst we were digging foundations for our garage, we found a number of skeletons. The police arrived, the coroner was informed and once the possibility of mass murder was dismissed, we were allowed to rebury the bones. Some members of the Society of Friends in Burford came to the garden and said a few prayers and the unfortunate skeletons were put to rest. Who knows one day we may come up with a connection to Robert Seacole. How strange would that be?"

Quaker Clocks

In 1675 Milton Quakers were fined for attending a meeting in Alvescot. Locally, there were several clockmakers, including William Green of Milton-under-Wychwood. He had a 'clock club' into which so much was paid per week to get a clock. Matthias Padbury, another clockmaker of Burford is known to have married his first wife Susanna at the Meeting House in Green Lane, Milton in 1774. Examples of 'Quaker clocks' are still in existence and some are owned locally.

Burford Quakers Celebrate

This year Burford Quakers are celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of their Meeting House. A simple and beautiful building, sited in Pytts Lane, which runs parallel to the High Street, behind the Bull Hotel, it has remained largely unchanged since the first stone was laid in 1709. In the 1970s a kitchen was added. The Friends now enjoy a drink and chat after their Meetings and shared lunches.

Burford's first Quaker School started in 1722 and the Meeting House was the centre of Quaker life throughout the 18th century. There was a marked decline in numbers during the 19th century, but apart from one break, worship has continued at the Meeting House. To mark the anniversary, Burford Friends have organised two exhibitions and would like to welcome members of the public to join them at the following events:

April 1st to October 31st Exhibition of Quaker Memorabilia

Tolsey Museum, High Street, Burford
Open: Weekdays 2.00 to 5.00pm
Saturdays and Sundays
11.00am to 5.00pm

Admission free

May 11th to 16th Quaker Tapestries Photographic Display

The display will show aspects of Quaker history and the work of Friends past and present. Burford Meeting House, Pytts Lane, Burford.
Open: Weekdays 10.00am to 4.00pm.
Or by prior appointment.
Telephone: 01993 822459.

Admission free