

The Silent Revolution

George Fox and Quakerism

A revolutionary heretic?

George Fox (July 1624 – January 1691), the son of a Leicester weaver, was born into a time of social upheaval and war.

He rebelled against the religious, political and royal authorities by proposing a different and radical way of living a Christian life:

- **He refused to acknowledge social status of any kind**
- **He rejected priests, churches, rites and icons**
- **He refused to fight for anyone**
- **He refused to swear oaths in court, as it implies a double standard of truth.**



Fox was moved to travel around the country as a dissenter, preaching uncomfortable and challenging beliefs to thousands, even in and around established places of worship. Consequently he found himself being persecuted and physically attacked by members of the establishment who were appalled by his charismatic and impelling preaching which undermined their power, wealth and status.

Fox arrives in Furness

In 1652 Fox's travels brought him to Swarthmoor Hall in Ulverston. Margaret Fell, the wife of Judge Thomas Fell, (a lawyer, member of parliament and vice-chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster), was convinced and converted by his preaching in Fell's absence.

- **Thomas Fell allowed Fox's ideas to flourish in his home, and thus afforded the protection and time Fox and his followers needed to create and establish the movement which became Quakerism, both in Europe and in the Americas.**
- **Fell never embraced Quakerism himself, but was certainly instrumental in its eventual success.**

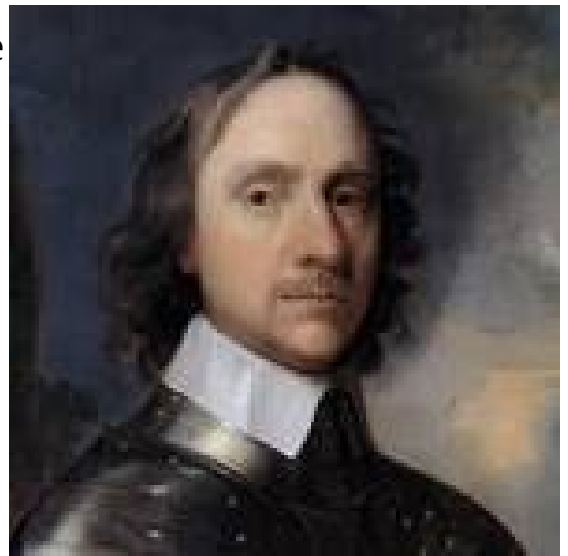


Around 1688, Fox bought the present Meeting House in Ulverston; having the foresight to realise that Swarthmoor Hall might eventually fall out of Friends' hands.

Cromwell and Fox

Fox regularly attracted large crowds of around 1,000 people, and in 1655 the Parliamentarians were growing increasingly suspicious of plots to overthrow them. They feared Fox's popularity and influence, and arrested him in Leicester and brought him by armed guard before Oliver Cromwell in London.

- **Fox asserted that he would never take up arms against anyone and that his protests were peaceful.**
- **He explained his beliefs to Cromwell for hours, “speaking truth to power” as Quakers still do today.**



Despite their obvious differences, the two men seemed to have a certain rapport, meeting and talking several times between 1656 and 1658. In fact, some of Cromwell's men were welcomed and lodged at Swarthmoor Hall following a minor skirmish at Lindal.

George Fox and Margaret Fell never stopped petitioning the government and later, the King himself, to stop the persecution of Quakers.

*Unfortunately this state of affairs lasted until as late as 1860, when Friends were finally allowed to pursue **a university education** which had previously been denied them.*

Quakerism today

Working towards peace

- Quakers were involved in **peace processes** in Northern Ireland, Sri-Lanka, Israel, Palestine and South Africa.
- We are a strong dissenting presence outside Arms Fairs and set up the **Bradford Peace Museum**. Many Friends attend peaceful protests.

Simplicity and Sustainability

- Modern Quakers have **no ministers**, icons or rites.
- We seek to **avoid the excesses** of consumerism.
- Friends only hold managerial positions for a short time to ensure that these roles are **shared fairly**.
- Our Meetings are held in **silence** until someone is moved to stand and speak.
- There is no priest or registrar at a **Quaker wedding or funeral**. These are civil occasions conducted by appointed Friends.
- We were the first church in Britain to divest our central funds away from fossil fuels. We **campaign to compensate and support** countries suffering from the effects of **climate change**.



Equality- anyone may attend a Quaker Meeting

- Quakers were instrumental in founding **Oxfam and Greenpeace**
- More than 90 Quaker Meetings work with **migrants and refugees**.
- We were the first religious group to facilitate **same-sex marriages**.

Truth

- Implicit in all of this is our belief in truth delivered with care and respect. Quakers continue to **“speak truth to power”** and prefer to **affirm in court**, rather than to swear on the bible, as this implies a double standard of truth.