



George Fox

Subject guide



Who was George Fox?

George Fox was one of the founding members of the Society of Friends, and is the most well known of its early leaders.

He was the son of a prosperous weaver from the village of Fenny Drayton, and was completing an apprenticeship as a shoe-maker when he felt called to leave his home, wander and find his place. Travelling through the battlefields of the English civil war, he encountered many religious and political dissenters, and began to formulate his own ideas. He believed that personal experience with God was what mattered and that the church was not needed as a mediator. He gathered other, like-minded, people together and they formed the Quaker movement, calling themselves the Friends of the Truth.

By all accounts George was a passionate and charismatic speaker. He spent the majority of his life travelling and speaking, publicly and privately, about his beliefs. Like many other Quakers he was imprisoned multiple times for upholding these beliefs.

In 1652 he visited Swarthmoor Hall for the first time, and encountered Margaret Fell. George and Margaret formed a partnership and together created a strong shared identity for Quakerism, laying the foundations for the system of meetings and discernment that exists today.

George understood the value of creating a narrative. He called for Quakers to write down their experiences of persecution and arranged for them to be collected in London. He also dedicated significant amounts of time to putting together an autobiography. An edited version, created from George's various drafts and known as the *Journal of George Fox*, was posthumously published in 1694.

George's latter years were spent living with his step-children and Friends in and around London. He continued to be influential in London meetings, and made representations to parliament on behalf of Quakers. It is reported that his funeral, in January 1691, was attended by thousands of mourners.

1624

George Fox born in Fenny Drayton, Leicestershire

1643

Leaves his family and his apprenticeship to travel around the country

1649

Is imprisoned for the first time for interrupting a sermon at a church in Nottingham

1652

Climbs Pendle Hill and has a vision, then visits Swarthmoor Hall for the first time

1655

Is arrested in Leicestershire and brought before Oliver Cromwell

1661

Publishes the Peace Testimony, building on work Margaret Fell had done the year before

1669

Marries Margaret Fell in Bristol

1671

Travels to Barbados, Jamaica and North America, returning in 1673

1675

Spends two years at Swarthmoor Hall writing his journal and organising papers

1691

Dies in London and is buried in Bunhill Fields Quaker burial ground

George Fox in the Library's collections

Getting started

Fox, G and Nickalls, JL (1952) *The Journal of George Fox: A revised edition*. Cambridge: CUP. [092.284]

Available online:

archive.org/details/journalofgeorgef00foxg

Edited by former LSF Librarian John Nickalls, this edition of George Fox's Journal incorporates additional manuscript material into the original 1694 published edition.

Larry Ingle, H (1994) *First Among Friends: George Fox & the Creation of Quakerism*. Oxford: OUP.

[092.2 ING]

Available online:

archive.org/details/firstamongfriend0000ingl

This is the most recent and only modern biography of George Fox.

Cadbury, HJ (1939) *The Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers*. London: Friends Book Centre. [002 CAD]

A heavily edited transcript of a 17th century manuscript catalogue held in the Library. This volume is a really useful place to start examining the manuscripts of George Fox.

Sharman, CW (Ed.) (1980) *No more but my love: letters of George Fox, 1624-91*. London: London Yearly Meeting. [092.2 SHA]

Available online:

archive.org/details/nomorebutmyloveI0000foxg_s9q5

A selection of George Fox's epistles designed to provide an accessible entry point.

Ambler, Rex (Ed.) (2001) *Truth of the heart: an anthology of George Fox*. London: Quaker Books.

[007 FOX]

An anthology of the writings of George Fox with the goal of showing the whole range of his works.

Moore, R (2000) *The light in their consciences: the early Quakers in Britain 1646-1666*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. [097.01 MOO]

A very well-respected look at the leaders of the early Quaker movement, useful for putting George Fox in context.

On the catalogue

Our extensive collection of printed works by and about George Fox, and parts of the archive material related to him is findable via our catalogue, available here:

quaker.adlibhosting.com

Archive collections

There are three things that are important to understand about the manuscripts of George Fox.

Firstly, he authored a lot, and there is a large amount of manuscript material available in the Library in addition to the many printed works.

Secondly, he often dictated his works to a scribe, so the "original" of many of his works is not in his handwriting.

Finally, there were contemporary copies made of many of his writings to pass them on and ensure preservation, so in some cases there are multiple 17th century copies of a work, and in some cases the work is only extant via a copy.

Two good places to start with the manuscript material are *The Annual Catalogue of George Fox's Papers* (see above) and the card index in the reading room.

The Library's guide to the Swarthmore Documents will also be useful, this is available here:

www.quaker.org.uk/documents/research-guide-swarthmore-documents-2024

Images and special collections

There are no confirmed portraits of George Fox painted in his lifetime. The Library's collections include some artistic interpretations of how he might have looked, including etchings by Robert Spence and a bronze bust by Sir Alfred Turner. There is more information available on these works in this blog post:

quakerstrongrooms.org/2024/02/29/gf400-evolution-of-george-foxs-image/

We also hold a small selection of items with an alleged connection to George Fox. To find out more about our objects or images, please ask to speak to our curator.

Online resources

We have curated a list of online resources on early Quakers including e-books, transcriptions and blog posts show-casing material from our archive. You can find this online here:

raindrop.io/Library_of_the_Society_of_Friends/early-quakers-21700444

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