

Darlington Meeting House of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

6 Skinnergate, Darlington

We welcome you to our wonderful meeting house and hope you enjoy your visit, learning as you see some of our history both locally and nationally within the meeting house and recalling some famous and influential Darlington names in our burial ground.

A Brief History of the Quakers

The Quakers were 'born' in the turmoil of the English Civil Wars and start their history with George Fox's experience on Pendle Hill and his big meeting in 1652 on Firbank Fell (a picture of the plaque is in the Elm Tree Room). Fox had already been gathering likeminded people together which he called 'meetings of Friends' in the late 1640s and to the emotional outbursts and trembling which characterised these meetings gave rise to the nickname 'Quakers'. In 1652 there were about 5,000 Quakers within 5 years they had increased their number to 60,000. By the time of the restoration they accounted for more than 1% of the population in England and were seen as a threat. The Restoration brought purges and specific Acts of Parliament against Quakers. In 1660 over 90 Friends from County Durham were confined in the city gaol at Durham. The Corporation act which prevented Quakers and others from becoming MPs was repealed in 1838 thus allowing Joseph Pease to be the first Quaker MP, but more on the burial ground tour.

Until 1859 Friends could not marry out and the professions were not open to them, this gave rise to tight groups linked by faith and kin which was to lead to the great Quaker companies such as Cadbury, Barclays Bank and for Darlington; Backhouse's Bank and the Stockton and Darlington railway. If you join a tour of the burial ground we will explain how the religious society changed from the oppressed, simple Quakers who scorned fashion, to include millionaires, baronets and MPs.

Quakers today: our testimony

Our numbers now in the UK are quite small we couldn't fill a premier league football stadium, but we still have more Nobel Prizes for Science per head than any other religious groups, we were awarded the Noble Peace Prize and have offices in both the EU and the UN. At present we have two Quaker MPs and Jude Kirton-Darling is one of our local MEPs and is a Quaker originally from Middlesbrough.

We have few entrepreneurs amongst our number, work or have worked work in education, medicine, science or similar disciplines. Our worship has changed little since the Meeting Houses were first built on this site, we still seek that of God in everyone and all have equal status. We have no appointed Priests, we all 'minister' we have no creed but a testimony, a belief in Peace, Equality, Simplicity, Truth and Sustainability, we do not judge ourselves and others on philosophical beliefs but on actions and how a life is lead.

Meeting for Worship

Our Meeting starts when the first person comes in and sits down. There is no announcement to say the meeting has started. We meet in silent worship. This is a collective stillness. Sometimes someone may be moved to speak. They may talk about something that they have experienced, something they have read, a poem or something else. Their words are spoken into the silence and held in the silence. This is called ministry and is always followed by silence. Sometimes it is followed by more spoken ministry. Often the meeting can be in total silence. The combination of silence and speech makes each meeting unique. After an hour the meeting will be closed by the shaking of hands.

If you would like to know more please contact us at <http://www.darlingtonquakers.org/>. Or better still join us for Meeting for Worship held here every Sunday, 10:30 until 11:30 or if you are free during the day we meet each Thursday 10:00 until 10:20 followed by Fairtrade coffee and biscuits.

In Conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed reading about this Quaker site and appreciate its virtue and history and know a little more of the Quaker history of Darlington.

In his book on English Social History, G.M. Trevelyan wrote:

“The finer essence of George Fox’s queer teaching, common to the exited revivalists who were his first disciples, and to the ‘quiet’ Friends of later times, was surely this – that Christian qualities matter much more than Christian dogmas. To maintain the Christian quality in the world of business and of domestic life, and to maintain it without pretension or hypocrisy, was the great achievement of these extraordinary people. England may well be proud of having produced and perpetuated them. The Puritan pot had boiled over, with much heat and fury; when it had cooled and had been poured away, this precious sediment was left at the bottom.”