

GEORGE FOX – A Brief Biography

George Fox, founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), was born in Drayton-in-the-Clay (now called Fenny Drayton) in July 1624. His father Christopher, who was known as 'Righteous Christer', was a Churchwarden at Fenny Drayton Parish Church, and was a weaver by trade. Fox's mother Mary was of the local Lago family.

Fox's parent were pious minded and devout in their religious practice; they were of the Puritan persuasion. Fox described them as 'seeing beyond the priests'. The residents of Fenny Drayton and of the surrounding district were known to have Puritan sympathies; this included the local squirearchy, the Purefey family, who appointed their local priests accordingly, including Nathaniel Stephens who was very influential in George Fox's early years. (See the 'George Fox and the Purefey's' by Joseph Pickvance - see website)

Fox was apprenticed to a local shoemaker and leather worker, George Gee, at the nearby village of Mancetter. Throughout his boyhood Fox was regarded as a quiet and studious child. As a young man, and against the background of a local Puritan heritage, he sought, by continuing to meet local religious leaders and teachers for a new religious truth, free from hypocrisy.

In 1643, aged nineteen, Fox left his home district to spend several years travelling throughout England, often visiting centres of religious dissent, whilst largely ignoring the national troubles. In 1647 Fox's early experience of a personal revelation led to his unique claim that anyone can attain a direct knowledge of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and his teachings.

As Fox journeyed, people began to meet for worship. Like-minded groups began to form despite persecution and imprisonment. Fox's followers met in silent worship, waiting in stillness 'There is One, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition' (Fox Journal 1647).

By the late 1640s the organization, of the Quaker movement began to become established. Fox having secured the support of the many dissenting groups of Seekers, particularly those in the north-west of England. He was imprisoned on several occasions for sedition, as were Quakers persecuted in general. He had several

meetings with Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector, following the English Civil War (1642-1651); Cromwell became favourably disposed towards Fox. After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, religious dissenters throughout England, including the Quakers, continued to be intermittently persecuted until the Act of Toleration in 1689.

In 1669 Fox married Margaret Fell, a widow from Ulverston in Cumbria, who had helped Fox in consolidating the organization of the Society of Friends. Later he travelled in Northern Europe and America; he was again imprisoned in England at Worcester in 1673. Towards the end of his life Fox lived in London, where he died in January 1691 and where he was interred in the Burial Ground at Bunhill Fields. His Journal, dictated by Fox during his latter years, was published after his death and is regarded as a classic of English religious literature.

Now visit Hartshill (see leaflet No 2.)

By road. Leave along Drayton Lane at the A5 turn left and immediately right. At the junction with the main road go under the rail bridge and straight up the hill over the canal bridge and you come to Hartshill village. The Quaker Meeting house is just past the green on the left.

On foot. There is a footpath across the fields. Leave by the path by the hedge at the back of the recreation ground (back of Dog Yard Cottages). Follow the hedge. At the A5 turn right and in a few yards left along the farm road. It eventually comes into Leather Mill Road and continue up the hill. The Grange is on the left (see map on Leaflet 2). Continue past it to the centre of the village.

Based upon notes from Ian Taylor
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The inscription on the monument

A Walk Around Fenny Drayton the Birthplace of George Fox

Fenny Drayton George Fox's Birthplace

Park near the Parish Church (A) all places are in easy walking distance. There is usually plenty of roadside parking in the village.

There are four main sites in Fenny Drayton associated with George Fox - refer to the sketch-map.

A - St. Michael and All Angels' Parish Church.

The Parish Church of 'St. Michael and All Angels' is Gothic in architectural style, with 12th Century Norman features.

The church tower is late 13th Century. Immediately inside the main church door is a notices corner, where there are leaflets for sale giving a brief history of the Church and of the village of Fenny Drayton. The leaflet introduces the rich history of Fenny Drayton, especially with regard to the Purefey family and its association with George Fox. Within the Church there are several items of significance relating to George Fox.

A1 : The House Photograph.

On the south wall, and immediately above the Notices corner, is hung a single black-and-white framed photograph which purports to show the birth place of George Fox c.1900. There is some doubt as to the authenticity of this claim - e.g., the Rev. Jenkyn Edwards in his history quoted a certain Thomas Fullylove as having said that his mother, who died in 1887 aged 96, used to talk of George Fox's birthplace as having been pulled down before her time - which would put it back to the 1770s'. Nevertheless the photography remains of curiosity value, and probably illustrates the type of building in which Fox was born.

A Guide of 1912 refers to George Fox's house as being 'a large cottage of timber-framing and brick'. The cottage was probably originally of timber frames with mud walls, and was infilled with bricks at a later date.

A2 : The Baptismal Font

The family home of George Fox stood nearby, where he was born and brought up. His family worshipped at this Church during the early part of the 17th Century.

The second of the two Baptismal fonts, which stands beyond the first font at the back of the Church, is regarded as being the original font at the Church. It is reputed to have been used to baptise George Fox. The lead-lined stone font had apparently been used for many years as a horse drinking-trough. It had become damaged and had stood dormant in the Vestry. It was restored in the 1970s and reinstalled in the

Church upon an oak pedestal.

A3 - The Bier

It bears the date 'A.D. 1635'. It is thought likely that George Fox, when in Church as a boy, would, have sat upon it. Certainly his father, Christopher Fox, a church warden for the parish during the early 17th Century would at his own funeral service, have been laid upon it in his coffin.

A4 - Display Board is at the head of the south aisle, next to the Purefey family's altar tomb, showing various items, mainly local newspaper cuttings, relating to George Fox and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

A5 - Visitors' Book. This is the notices corner, Please sign the book you leave the Church.

Across the road is the old rectory (now renamed) where Nathaniel Stephens lived.

B - Commemorative trees. Walk south along Church Lane, at the end turn right. On the corner of Drayton Lane as it turns south-west towards the A5 is a group of three small trees that surround a public bench. The three trees were planted in 1991, to celebrate the Tercentenary of George Fox's death on 16th January 1691. This was both a village and a Quaker commemorative event; Quakers from Hartshill took part in the commemoration. (The plaque commemorating the event has been stolen.)

Retrace your steps along Drayton Lane to turn first right into Drayton Close, at the end of which is the entrance to the grassed Jubilee Play Area for the children of Fenny Drayton, and which was dedicated on 7th June 1977 as a memorial to the 25 years' reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

C - Dog Yard Cottages

Across the grassed area you will notice a terrace of three houses on the southern side of the play area, cross diagonally to the far right corner and follow the path and to the left. You will pass the end of these cottages which are known as Dog Yard Cottages, built in 1890 by Squire Vincent T. Eyre of Lindley Hall. 'VTE' and '1890' are on the terrace front. P.J.Foss, in quoting the 1912 Guide, refers to George Fox's cottage as situated in the 'Dog Yard, just outside the first field from the road', and that 'according to some, was still there at the beginning of this (20th) Century: also that the cottage was apparently concealed from the road by modern (i.e. 1890) cottages.

If the observation by Jenkyn Edwards (refer to A1 : The Photograph at the Church) - that George Fox's cottage was demolished in the 18th Century - is correct, then the 1912

observation must be incorrect. George Fox's cottage may possibly have stood near to the present terrace. The precise site of George Fox's birthplace has not been accurately determined.

Leaving the site of the cottages and walk along the road opposite and then turn left you will emerge on the main road in sight of the Obelisk Monument at site D on the corner Old Forge Road, and follow it until it turns the corner to become George Fox Lane. At the road corner, in a small fenced-off plot, is situated the Obelisk.

When you are walking around Fenny Drayton, notice the modern street names which highlight the heritage connection with George Fox e.g. Quaker Close' and 'George Fox Lane'; 'Fox's Covert'.

D - The Obelisk Monument

The Obelisk Monument to George Fox was erected in 1872 by a Mr. Bracebridge of Lindley Hall. He was an admirer of Fox, although he himself was not a Quaker. George Fox's date of death recorded on the stone as 'A.D. 1690' the correct date of death being 16th January 1691.

The adjacent plaque with additional information has been provided by the Bull Street Quaker Meeting in central Birmingham.

Continue along the road back towards the Parish Church and your Quaker Trail is completed!

