

Mansfield Quakers Audio Tour Transcript

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Track 1: How to use this audio tour

Welcome to Mansfield!

Not many people realise that Mansfield is the birthplace of the Quaker religion which is followed around the world.

You can enjoy finding out about this part of Mansfield's heritage by looking at some of the places and buildings associated with the Mansfield Quakers.

The tour can be followed by leaflet or audio downloads to your device or a combination of both.

You can decide how much you want to see and how far you want to walk. The tour does not have to be completed all at the same time. The whole tour should take around 1-2 hours depending on walking pace and how long you spend at each point.

You should start this tour, at the Quaker Way entrance of Mansfield Bus station, in front of the Mansfield Quakers memorial plaque. You will embark on a roughly circular route around Mansfield town centre. At the end of the tour you will be guided back to the market place in the centre of the town.

This audio tour project has been managed by Nottinghamshire County Council Heritage Tourism Department and has been produced in partnership with the University of Nottingham Theology students.

Track 2: A General Introduction to Mansfield and the Quakers

Mansfield is an ancient Nottinghamshire market town, which, by Mid-Victorian times became the county's second largest township. Mansfield's strategic position meant that it became a trading centre and a base for industry. Being at the centre of Sherwood Forest, Mansfield was important during the medieval period for royal hunting parties, as well as agriculture and manufacturing.

In the 18th century, Framework knitting came to Mansfield. This resulted in new mills being built or old water-powered corn mills along the River Maun being converted to be able to manufacture textiles.

Other industries such as shoe making, metal box making, malting, quarrying and mining began to flourish with the introduction of the railway and the famous viaduct that crosses the town centre. By the commencement of the 20th century, coal mining led to a rapid increase in the population and prosperity. However, the coal industry began to decline from the 1970s and the town suffered from high unemployment rates. Today, Mansfield is experiencing an upward turn as a centre for retail and leisure.

Religion has always been a prominent feature of the town and was home to a multitude of different denominations. Quakerism was established in the town from 1647 emerging, like many other groups, from the turmoil of the civil war years.

So, who are the Quakers?

Quakers are a group with Christian roots that began in Mansfield. The formal title of the movement is the 'Society of Friends', you may also hear them referred to as the 'Religious Society of Friends'. It is not entirely clear how the group came to be known as the Quakers. One story is that the founder, George Fox, once told a magistrate to tremble or 'quake' at the name of God and the name stuck. Others suggest the name derives from the physical shaking that sometimes went with Quaker religious experiences.

A key part of Quaker belief is toleration and they have been hugely influential over both Christian and secular culture. Quakers have played a part in law reform, prison reform, human rights, women's rights and ending the slave trade. Their beliefs will be explained in more detail later in the tour.

Famous Quakers include Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer, who appears on the £5 note. George Cadbury and Joseph Rowntree the well-renowned confectioners as well as banking firms Barclays and Lloyds.

So there is a good chance that most people today are carrying something on them that relates to the Quakers - a Quaker in your pocket!

Track 3: The Bus Station

To start this tour, you should be standing at the Quaker Way entrance of Mansfield Bus station, in front of the Mansfield Quakers memorial plaque. The memorial plaque remembers those Quakers who were once buried here but whose remains now lie in the Mansfield cemetery.

Quaker meetings for worship take place in meeting houses, not churches. Not many people know that this bus station was built where the Quakers Old Meeting House once stood.

Initially, the Mansfield Quakers met at the house of Timothy Garland. It wasn't until the early 1790s that Mansfield's first Meeting House was to be erected in the heart of the town built around the original house of Timothy Garland. It had the distinction of being one of the first purpose built buildings for Quaker worship in Nottinghamshire.

The money to build was raised by selling land at Farnsfield and East Markham.

This Meeting House was rebuilt in 1800 as the growth in the number of followers meant that more space was needed.

The Meeting House was now 58ft 6 inches by 30ft externally, and the walls were of coursed sandstone with a curved window on each side. The interior was divided into a large meeting room and a smaller room to the west with a loft above approached by a staircase in the porch. Above the door lintel was inscribed 'Anno 1800'.

Behind the building, the original burial ground with its uniform headstones was retained.

The Old Meeting House burial ground provided the final resting place for approximately 150 Quakers between the 1700s and the 1950s.

Each burial was recorded and included some of Mansfield's most prestigious families such as Barringer, Wallis and Manners, the owners of the Metal box factory. The first complete recorded entry was for Mary Ellis in 1778.

When the Old Meeting House was demolished, the graves were moved. Some of the gravestones themselves were moved to the New Meeting House on Rosemary Street, the physical remains of the people buried there were transferred to Mansfield Community Cemetery. Fortunately, they were reburied and a memorial stone has since been erected to commemorate them.

To continue exit the bus station onto Quaker Way and stop just outside the bus station entrance.

Track 4: Quaker Lane and Quaker Way

You should now be outside the bus station on Quaker Way.

During 1973, the Old Meeting House and grounds on Quaker Lane were pulled down to make way for a new inner ring road around the town centre. Quaker Way was named in memory of the Old Meeting House and burial ground. The Old meeting House was an impressive building with large gates to the front. The burial ground was well-tended and managed like a garden and was shaded by trees.

The historian W S Harrod gave a quaint description of the Meeting House;

“Very neat on the outside and within, the assembly inside consisted of respectable people in plain, neat, yet costly apparel.”

Records from 1841 give us some idea of the cost of maintaining the Meeting House. For example, William Neale was paid 7 shillings and 6 pence for lighting fires at the Meeting House and his wife was paid 2 guineas a year for cleaning it. In 1818, repairs to the Meeting House roof cost 1 shilling unlike in 1823 when damage caused by the wind cost £1 14 shillings and 7 pence with an extra 1 shilling for ale for the workmen.

Whilst some Quakers were meeting in Mansfield, other Quakers were also worshipping at a house in Skegby, a near-by village . This house belonged to a lady called Elizabeth Hooton who was to become the first person to be “convinced of the truth” by George Fox. She was a foundational member of the early group called “Children of Light”, a name which the Quakers adopted later. It was Hooton’s words which convinced Fox that God anointed women for ministry as well as men.

Her house at Skegby was a Friends Meeting house and burial ground for local Quakers until it was sold in 1800 to help fund the new Meeting House in Mansfield, replacing the smaller house previously on the same site.

Elizabeth Hooton led an incredible life. She travelled to America several times and petitioned King Charles II to help to stop the persecution of Quakers. She refused to kneel in his presence. She suffered this persecution in England and in the New World being gaoled several times. She died aged 71 whilst on a trip to Jamaica with George Fox to visit the Quakers there.

To continue to the Almshouses, turn right and carry on along Quaker Way. Continue under the viaduct onto Albert Street and cross over St Peter’s Way straight onto Nottingham Road, where you will find the Almshouses immediately on the right.

Track 5: Almshouses

This row of twelve small Almshouses were built by Elizabeth Heath in the 1690s. It was here that some Quakers were buried before the creation of the Old Meeting House burial ground. The burials are still in the back gardens of these buildings including the grave of Elizabeth Heath whose tombstone inscription reads:

"Eliz. Heath, of Mansfield, widow, who founded these almshouses for twelve poor people, died 24th of the second month, called April, 1693, aged 76."

On the front of the centre doorway of the almshouses was formerly this inscription:

"Eliz. Heath, of Mansfield, widow, founded these houses for twelve poor people, and gave them eight shillings apiece, and to be paid by the trustees every calendar month in the year, and every one of them a wayne load of coals, and a coat or gown yearly, for ever, who departed this life the twenty-fourth day of the second month, called April, An. Dom. 1693."

Created almost 250 years before the introduction of the welfare state, these house provided a home for those who had no where else to go. The Alms Houses were divided into two sections, 6 houses were reserved for Quaker women and, to avoid antagonising other Christian authorities, 6 were given over to members of the established church (The Church of England). The 6 houses which were reserved for Quakers were done so by Elizabeth Heath's request. All the left over money that was not required for the benefit of the Almshouses and inmates was used to pay for boys, from poor families, to be apprenticed to some honest trade. The only requirements needed to enter this program were that: the boys had been born within the parish of Mansfield and that they were born of honest parents.

To continue to St Peter and St Paul's Church, turn around and cross back over St Peter's way again. Walk back along Albert Street and take the first right onto Midworth Street and follow this road down. This roads leads into Church Side and the Church will be on the right.

Track 6: St Peter and St Paul's Church

· Mansfield is closely associated with George Fox (1624-1691) founder of the Quaker movement in the 1600s. · He had his first revelation in 1643 whilst walking past this very church or 'steeple house' as he would have called it · It was at this point that he began to form his ideas about God.

“as I was walking by the steeple-house side in Mansfield the Lord said unto me, “That which people trample upon must be thy food.” And as the Lord spake, He opened it to me that people and professors do trample upon the life, even the life of Christ; they fed upon word, and fed one another with words; but they trampled upon the life; trampled underfoot the blood of the Son of God, which blood was my life, and lived in their airy notions, talking of Him. It seemed strange to me at the first that I should feed on that which the high professors trampled upon; but the Lord opened it clearly to me by His eternal spirit and power.”

This showed Fox that man could approach God in silent prayer and that there was no need for priests and clergy, because everyone possessed the Divine Spark. This belief is the foundational understanding of Quakerism, which holds to this day. These and other ideas became formulated, in this period of his life, in Mansfield. People shared his feelings and after another vision of 'a great crack to go through the earth' he felt compelled to preach to others, returning to Mansfield where he had his first converts.

· However, negative reactions to his new movement were not uncommon. On one occasion Fox tried to preach in a church at Mansfield Woodhouse and was assaulted by the congregation, some even using their Bibles as weapons, and later putting him in the stocks!· It is incredible that we are able to pinpoint the very beginnings of the Quaker movement to this very spot.

The Church itself dates from the early 12th century made up of additions made to an earlier Saxon building. The spire dates from 1699, and the clock 1802. There is a peal of 8 bells of which the oldest dates back to 1603.

To continue to the Clocktower of the old Metal Box factory, continue along Church Side turning right onto Bridge Street. Take the first left onto Toothill Lane (you will recognise this road by a pedestrian crossing at the bottom of it). Follow this lane uphill and take the second right onto Rock Valley just before the viaduct. Follow Rock Valley down and round to the left, where you should continue under the bridge until you find the Clocktower on your right.

Track 7: Clock tower of the Metal Box factory

The Clock tower is all that remains of the Mansfield Metal Box company. Run by Barringer, Wallis and Manners, three prominent Quaker families, the site was divided into two sections, the “Rock Valley Mill” to the north, which produced mustard and the “Rock Valley tin works” in the south. The clock tower was added in 1927 as part of a four-storey tower block built to provide more space for production floors and machinery in order to enhance the company’s production capability.

The tins made were originally purely for storing the mustard produced there, but their success was such that Barringers expanded this part of the business, and their tins were famed for their quality and design. The demand for tin containers was so great that after a major fire in 1873, the rebuilding of the factory saw production shift more towards the tinware side of the business. By 1889 the now enlarged tin manufacturing department comprised 12 men and 28 boys working a 12 hour day, compared to the two tin smiths working ten hours a day that had previously been employed. A large part of the success of this side of the business was down to Robert Barringer’s idea to market their products more towards housewives, rather than grocers, which called for a wider variety of tins of different sizes and more attractive designs. He was one of the very first to realise the value of the housewife as a customer.

Robert Barringer himself was an extremely valuable member of the community, born in 1818, he had a Quaker education and actually inherited the Rock Valley mustard mill aged 46 after the death of his older brother. He was active in the Council and in 1891 became chairman of the new Waterworks committee, which at the time aimed to bring an additional water supply to the nearby town of Rainworth. Despite his important business obligations, he is said to have still found the time to visit the waterworks site almost daily to check its progress, and upon it’s opening one of the pumping engines was named after him. At the age of 78 in 1896 he was persuaded to become Mayor of Mansfield, and this being the year of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, he was responsible for the town’s celebrations. The following year he attended Queen Victoria’s reception at Buckingham palace, and also visited her at Windsor Castle. He died on the 8th of November 1905 and was buried in the Old Meeting House Graveyard.

The mustard business was sold to Colman's of Norwich in 1919, and in 1939 Barringer, Wallis and Manners was incorporated into the Metal Box Company. The west wing of the original mustard mill complex was demolished in 1953. Unfortunately no part of the site was deemed worthy of a listed status, and it was demolished in 2011 leaving only the clock tower standing. Sadly over the years it has been damaged by metal thieves who stole some copper tiles from the domed roof, but has since been renovated. The tower as you see it now is a reminder of the great legacy of some of the most prominent Quaker families in Mansfield, Barringer, Wallis and Manners.

Retrace your steps back to the top of Rock Valley, turn right and go under the viaduct. Go past Handley Arcade on your right until you reach the traffic lights where you should turn

left down Leeming Street towards the Market Place and Town Hall. At the bottom of Leeming Street, turn right and head up West Gate to the top. Cross over St John's Street and go straight ahead until you come to a metal feather sculpture. Continue straight ahead and go down Westfield Lane that lies opposite this sculpture, to the right of the round building. Westfield Folkhouse is the big building on the right.

Track 8: Westfield Folkhouse

The Westfield Folkhouse originally belonged to the Manners family the same family who ran the Mansfield Metal Box Company. The last of the Manners family to own the building was Rachel Manners.

Rachel Manners, a widow, was very concerned about the welfare of the large number of girls employed at the Metal Box Company. With the help of another widow, Hilda Royce, they formed a Girls Society and club in the 1920s where the girls could go, which would provide a place to go after work instead of the streets. It was based at the large house in front of you, where they held activities including tea dances and sports.

Today the building still exists as a young people's centre. This is due to the fact that in 1946, Rachel Manners donated the house and its gardens to Mansfield District Council, on the terms that it will always be used by the youth of the area.

Ever since, Westfield Folkhouse has been one of the main provisions for young people in Mansfield. The building has been run by Mansfield District Youth Team, through Nottinghamshire County Council for years.

Due to its popularity, in the 1960s, Westfield Folkhouse had an extension built onto the side of the old house which, due to the amount of people using the building, became old and worn.

In 2011, Westfield Folkhouse received £1.5million to refurbish the building from Nottinghamshire County Council. However, as the original building is grade 2 listed, it was thought the money would easily be swallowed up on making good the old building without having any improvements to benefit the young people using the centre.

With the help of the Big Lottery, Westfield Folkhouse received an additional £5million. This meant that Westfield Folkhouse was able to complete a £6.5m transformation into the building you see today: one of the most modern, innovative, and state of the art youth facilities in the country.

During the renovation, young people from Mansfield, played a key role in providing suggestions and the planning of the building. This was all done to compliment the main house which was also retained and refurbished.

As you can see, the Westfield Folkhouse has now been renamed "My place" by the young people of the town. "Myplace" is open to young people ages 13 to 21, or 24 for disabled youth. The building offers a range of facilities, activities, advice and information, work and training opportunities, as well as an indoor and outdoor skate parks and climbing walls, BMX track, an indoor multi sports area, arts performance space for music and live bands, a recording studio, training rooms and more.

It is entirely due to the Quaker beliefs of Rachel Manners that this fantastic centre exists for young people today.

Retrace your steps back to the end of Westfield Lane and turn left onto Chesterfield Road South. Continue along until you reach the Catholic Church of St Philip Neri and stop here.

Track 9: Catholic Church of St Philip Neri – on the site of George Fox’s house

The site of the Catholic Church of St Philip Neri was once the location of George Fox’s home during the period of time he lived in Mansfield. It was believed to be a humble cottage.

The son of a weaver, George Fox was born in the Leicestershire village of Fenny Drayton in September 1624.

It was clear from an early age that he had a serious and thoughtful nature. There is no record of any formal schooling but he learned to read and write.

Fox said, "When I came to eleven years of age, I knew pureness and righteousness; for, while I was a child, I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be faithful, in all things, and to act faithfully two ways; viz., inwardly to God, and outwardly to man." Known as an honest person, he also proclaimed, "The Lord taught me to be faithful in all things...and to keep to Yea and Nay in all things."

As he grew up, his relatives "thought to have made me a priest" but he was instead apprenticed to a local shoemaker, George Gee of Mancetter - a village in Warwickshire.

Being an apprentice shoe maker was a portable skill which exposed him to the drunkenness and wickedness of the era, which deeply concerned him given his earnest religious temperament.

At the age of 19, the Civil War was in progress and was even fought near his home town. Fox was therefore very aware of the events and proceedings of the war. During this period of religious turmoil he sought the advice of religious ministers, but began to formulate his own religious ideas. It was during a visit to Mansfield that he had his first revelation which led to the Quaker movement and religion we have today.

In living memory of George Fox, a plaque was placed on the wall of his cottage stating that George Fox once lived there. This was unfortunately lost when the cottage was demolished.

Continue along Chesterfield Road South, past the Supermarket until you reach Rosemary Street. Cross over the road and head down the right hand side of Rosemary Street. Then go past the Baptist Church until you come to the Quakers New Meeting House on the corner opposite the pharmacy.

Track 10: New Meeting House (Quakers today)

After the destruction of the Quaker Lane meetings house in the 1960s, it took five years to find a suitable site for its replacement. The project cost £43,000, and was opened on the 24th July 1973 by the Mayor of Mansfield. It offers space for use by the local communities, including meetings and community events. The Garden of Reflection contains the original headstones from the previous meeting house, and is there to commemorate Fox's first opening in 1647, as well as to honour Elizabeth Hooton, who held the very first silent meetings for worship, and introduced Fox to this important tradition, still at the heart of what it means to be a Quaker today.

Mansfield meeting house is active in the community and in spreading its message. In 2013, a meeting was held for worship outside during the remembrance procession, as a silent witness for peace. Historically, Quakers have also been involved in helping slaves, prisoners, the mentally ill, refugees and war casualties.

Today there are around 25,000 Quakers in the UK, which is nearly 500 meetings.

As with many other Christian congregations, Quaker meetings are usually held on Sundays, and last for about an hour. However, you will find in a Quaker meeting a group of people sitting and facing each other, in a circle or a square, and there will not be an altar of hymnbooks. The meetings are based on silent waiting, and Quakers are welcome to stand and share their thoughts, as they believe a lot can be learnt from other people's experiences. Quakers do not have priests or other clergy and run their own meetings, and take it in turns to serve in roles such as the clerk.

Thanks to Fox's legacy, every person can have a real and direct experience with God, because every person has the light of God within them, which is behind the Quaker tradition of equality and peace.

This concludes the Mansfield Quakers Audio tour. To return to the centre of Mansfield, re-trace your steps back along Rosemary Street and turn right at the bottom into Chesterfield Road South. Head past the supermarket and the Catholic Church which should be on your right. Cross St John's Street and continue straight down West Gate until you reach the Market place.

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