

A tour of the building

The Quaker meeting house and Quaker Close were originally a farmhouse. Pevsner dates the building as 16th-17th century. It was first used as a meeting house in 1680, but was not registered as a place of worship until the Act of Toleration was passed in 1689.

Start your visit outside the meeting house, standing in what Pevsner describes as 'the most charming courtyard'. Look towards the west corner of the building.



The original farmhouse was the section of the building in front of you. Look up at the roof above the meeting house door. To the right of the change in slope of the roof, what is now the meeting room was added as a barn—there are still stone tracks for carts under the present wooden floor. The weavers' cottage (now 1 Quaker Close) was added in about 1620. If you look carefully about 4 ft to the right of the door to 1 Quaker Close you can just see a vertical line in the mortar where the end of the farmhouse used to be. This join can be seen more clearly at the back of the building, where there is a 1" difference in the alignments of the walls.

The cottages of Quaker Close

1 Quaker Close has an unusual roof structure. At the top of the house is the weavers' loft, with a cross-gabled roof supported by purlins and win braces, leaving an area wide and high enough to have accommodated the weaving looms.

The doorway of 2 Quaker Close still has the original moulded stone surround and flat Tudor arch and dripmould. If you look closely at the right-hand side of the door-surround you will see the roman numerals III, IV and V carved in the stone. These were used to measure bales of wool stacked up in the doorway.

The plough in the courtyard is a reminder of the building's agricultural origins.

Inside the meeting house

As you go into the meeting house, notice the unusual round-headed doorway with keystones and imposts and a dripmould with large diamond stops. To its right the leaded window formerly had four lights with a transom, and was probably modified in 1794-5.

The meeting room itself (to the right as you enter the front porch) is set out for meeting for worship. The raised bench at the end of the room was formerly used by 'recorded ministers' (Friends whose spoken ministry was consistently helpful to the meeting), with the elders (those responsible for the spiritual welfare of the meeting) upholding them in prayer from the bench in front. These fixed benches, the dado and the fielded panelling were introduced in the early 19th century.

New benches have been made locally to replace some of the 18th-century ones, which came from Sibford School. The meeting house still has four of the original 17th-century benches: two in the upper room and two in what was the farmhouse kitchen. The table in the centre of the meeting room is believed to have been given to the meeting by George Fox, the founder of Quakerism. He records two visits to Nailsworth in his journal. The hooks on the wall behind the ministers' bench were for women's bonnets.

To reach the upper room, leave the meeting room by the double doors, and cross to the foot of the spiral staircase. At the top of this staircase is a room which doubled as accommodation for travelling ministers by night and a school by day.

On the wall of the landing is a painting of a Cotswold farm similar to how this house would have looked before the surrounding buildings appeared. Below this is one of the original 17th-century benches. Notice the window ledge to the right of the bench. Carved into the stone are the initials of some of those who attended the day school in the 1680s. The window ledge in the upper room has similar carvings, and this room houses another of the original benches.

Retrace your steps down the spiral staircase, and turn left through the kitchen. Down a few steps to the left is what was formerly the farmhouse kitchen, with the old stone fireplace and bread oven and two more of the original benches. This room is now used for our children's meeting and committees.