

Quakers hold a diversity of views and I would say they generally see themselves as seekers of the “truth” rather than committed believers. They do not go in for dogma but value truth, equality, simplicity and peace. In the public mind they are often wrongly associated with a rather austere Puritanism. That may have been the case in the early days, but I assure you it is not true now. I have found Quakers to be very broad minded and tolerant. They dress colorfully these days and celebrate life to the full. Some are vegetarian, some are not, some drink alcohol, some do not, some are left-wing, some right wing – I have never known a more diverse group.

I came to the Society in my late twenties after attending a Quaker wedding. The “service” was essentially the same as a Meeting for Worship – an hour of silence interspersed with contributions from the bride and groom’s family and friends who said what they felt for them and wished for them. The whole atmosphere was very relaxing and uplifting. My wife (whose grandmother was a Quaker) and I were both sufficiently intrigued to give our local Meeting a try and we’ve been going ever since.

Please do not be put off by the term Worship attached to our Meetings – I found it strange at first. To Quakers Worship simply means sitting quietly and leaving your mind as open as you can to the promptings of your deepest self. It is an opportunity to try to put aside current cares and contemplate what is really important to you – which is what I consider to be prayer. It often surprises me how the spoken contributions of others, (which Quakers call ministry), can be compatible and helpful with what I am thinking about. In the 1960s transcendental meditation was all the rage – that is essentially what Quakers have been practicing since George Fox founded the Society in 1652. If you come, just before 10.30 am on a Sunday there should be someone at the door to shake your hand and welcome you – just say you are a visitor and that this is your first time. You will not be pressurized to do anything apart from sit down. And if you find an hour too long feel free to leave when you have had enough. At 11.30 we have a drink and chat for a short time. You would be very welcome to stay for that when you could talk to us and ask any questions you may have. We also have a meeting at 7pm each first Thursday of the month for 45 min followed by refreshment.

Chris Grove (Clerk to Chichester Local Quaker meeting)