

Small Pilgrim Places Journal 47: Come to Good Quaker Meeting House, Feock, Cornwall

On the south coast of Cornwall, to the north of the Lizard peninsula and at the head of an inlet framed by Falmouth to the west and St Mawes to the east, is the village of Feock. A few miles inland to the north, on a quiet lane with a scattering of dwelling houses and farms, stands Come to Good Friends' Meeting House, where Quakers have gathered for over three hundred years.

I approached it through a five-bar timber gate opening onto a grass sward carpeted with daisies, violets and the first blooms of bluebells. The boundary wall was a head-high stone and earth bank densely covered in primroses, ferns, red campions, mosses and lichens. Walking across the lawns I came to a path, bordered on each side by three-cornered leek in full flower, leading down to a wood where five simple gravestones, leaning this way and that, peeked out above a mass of wild garlic, ferns and bluebells. A bench nearby invited a pause to enjoy this quiet, wild haven.



The building itself is worthy of an image on a jigsaw puzzle or chocolate box: a neatly thatched roof rises above whitewashed, buttressed cobstone walls pierced by latticed windows flanked with green-painted shutters. To the right, the thatch continues over an open-sided extension with compacted earth floor - perhaps a store or cart house - where the construction of the building is evident in the undressed, angled ash poles that hold up the roof. On the other side, a more recent extension, also thatched, was completed in 1967 and brought the first electricity and running water. This lobby allows entrance to the main part of the house: an interior door opens into the original meeting room, little changed since it was first built.

In the 17th century, Quakers in Cornwall faced repression and imprisonment, and were hounded out of their meeting houses. George Fox, founder, visited the county in 1656 and, despite several arrests, continued to speak. But with the protection of the Toleration Act of 1689, local Friends started work on a simple building, and so Come to Good, one of the oldest Quaker Meeting Houses in England, was completed in 1710. It has remained in use almost continuously since it was built, and regular Sunday gatherings still take place.



I was immediately struck by the smell of this space which, apart from a timber-built gallery built across one end, rises to the building's full height, giving a clear view of the bare underside of the thatch and roof beams. Old unvarnished timbers, thatch and simple wooden furnishings facing a central table combine to give a fragrance that only such natural, organic materials can emit. Spring sunlight pouring through the ancient diamond leaded windows (thought to have been recycled from a previous building) rendered a soft gleam to the bare chairs and pews and unadorned walls, all in subtle, sepia shades of brown and cream. The total simplicity of the interior is arresting, an invitation to stillness, silence and contemplation.

