

Friends Meeting House, Banbury

Horse Fair, Banbury, OX16 0AH

National Grid Reference: SP 45318 40582



Statement of Significance

The building has high heritage significance as a purpose-built meeting house replacing an earlier meeting house on a site acquired in the 1660s. Built in the eighteenth century and later altered and extended, the building retains some historic fittings and features and has an adjoining burial ground.

Evidential value

The interior of the meeting house retains a gallery and elders' seating. The fabric of the building and the burials on the site could yield further evidence about the building construction, and past patterns of Quaker life and worship in Banbury. The building and the site have high evidential value.

Historical value

This has been a site of Quaker worship since the late seventeenth century. It retains much of its historic layout and a number of original or early features, including the elders' stand and dado panelling. The simple headstones of the burial ground remain. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.

Aesthetic value

This is a typical meeting house design of the mid-eighteenth century, being rectangular in plan, with a hipped tile roof. Inside it has a gallery at one end and the elders' seating at the other. It makes a notable and positive contribution to the local conservation area. The meeting house has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house remains in primarily Quaker use, but is also a community resource. The meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Banbury and Evesham*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0008430*

1.3 Owner: *Banbury and Evesham Area Trustees*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Cherwell District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*

1.6 Civil parish: *Banbury*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1199817*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Banbury*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1681 (women's meeting house), 1749-51 (meeting house); 1868-72; 1906*

1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *5th November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Paul Mobbs*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

C.F.C. Besson, *Quaker Clockmakers of North Oxfordshire*, The Antique Collector, 1958, pp. 185-190.

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 493-495.

Paul Mobbs, Local Meeting Survey, October 2015.

Paul Mobbs, *A short history of Banbury Friends and their Meeting Houses*, 2015

Jack Wood, *Some Rural Quakers* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1991).

Part 2: The Meeting House & Burial Ground: history, contents, use, setting and designation

2.1 Historical background

George Fox's 'Publishers of Truth', John Audland and John Camm travelled from Westmorland to the Midlands in the mid-1650s and arrived in Banbury in 1654. They held a meeting close to Banbury and were welcomed by Edward Vivers, a prosperous merchant who later became the leader of the Quakers in Banbury. In 1655 the wives of John Audland and John Camm along with Thomas Robinson held a further meeting in Banbury; regular meetings of Banbury Friends took place from the on, held in each other's homes.

In 1654 land was purchased off Horse Fair for use as a burial ground. In 1657 James Wagstaffe built a meeting house at the rear of his premises, the Flower-de-Luce Inn, and by 1665-6 a meeting house had been built at the burial ground, possibly re-using fabric from James Wagstaffe's building. This meeting house was in plot A (Fig.1). The site at this time included other buildings believed to be stables associated with the inns located on North Bar. A women's meeting room was added on land purchased in 1681 to the north-west of the 1665-6 meeting house (plot B).

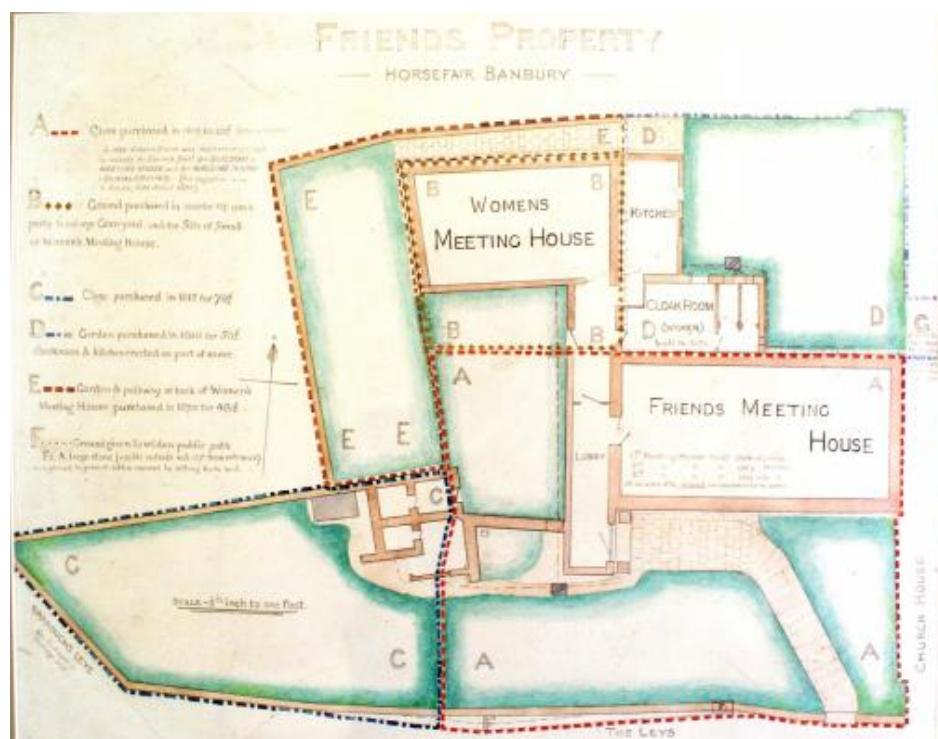


Figure 1: Plan of Friends Property, Horsefair Banbury (1665 – mid 20th century) by Arthur Fox, 1931 (Banbury MH Archive).

The phasing is not entirely clear, due to conflicting accounts of how the site developed, but it seems that in 1749-1751 a new main meeting house was built (Building A), to the south-east of the women's meeting room, and the 1660s meeting house was demolished. The 1751 building was largely funded by Benjamin Kidd an eminent Quaker preacher. In 1815 further land was purchased to expand the burial ground, however from 1854 the town corporation forbade burials within the town and burials later took place at Sibford or Adderbury.

The interior of the 1751 meeting room was altered during the nineteenth century; the gallery which spanned three sides was reduced to the current single gallery to the east, the elders' seating was re-located from the north to the present location. To the south-west, a Tuscan porch was added, probably in c1820. A plot of land (plot D) was purchased to the north of the meeting house in 1868 and the ancillary buildings in this area date from 1872 and were improved and extended as part of the 1906 building works.

Further changes occurred in the twentieth century including replacement of some of the Stonesfield roof tiles with concrete and limestone composite tiles and the 'tortoise' solid fuel stoves were removed from the meeting rooms along with the chimneys.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

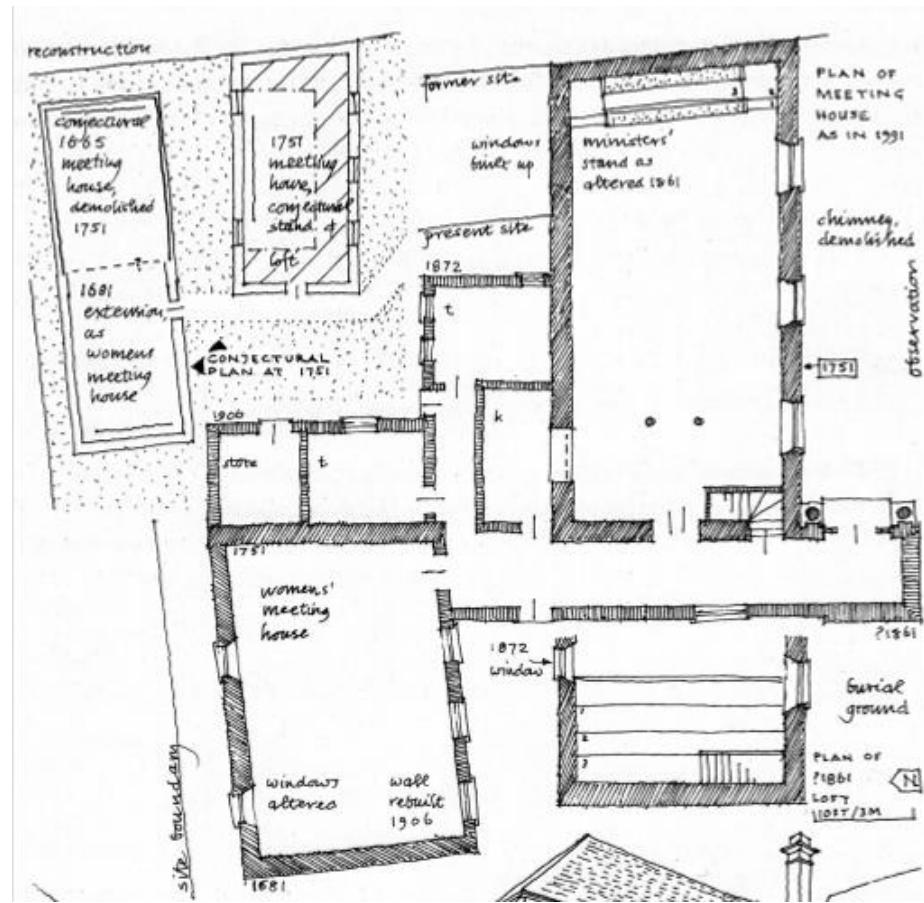


Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the left; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. II, p.494)

The meeting house was built in 1749-51, with further extensions in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The main body of the meeting house is built of Hornton stone, with a hipped roof covered in mostly Stonesfield tiles. The principal elevation is to the south consisting of three 4-pane sash windows at ground floor with dropped keystones, lintels and stone sills, with a plat band and three similar windows above. A side extension to the south west corner includes the entrance via a Tuscan porch, probably added c.1820 with door

joinery of c.1861. To the west of the main meeting room is a one-storey lean-to range built in 1872 constructed in red brick laid in English Garden Wall bond; it wraps around the north west corner. This range forms a corridor to the west and ancillary facilities to the north. To the north west of the main meeting room is the former women's meeting room, now used as the room for worship. The footprint of this building dates from 1681, but the present building consists of masonry of varying ages; parts of the north and west wall retain original masonry, the west wall partly rebuilt in 1906 incorporating earlier stone structures, the east wall dates from 1751 and the brick wall to the south is 1906. Further ancillary facilities date from 1872 which were remodelled and extended in 1906 adjoin the east wall of the former women's meeting room.

Internally, the former main meeting room now used as a children's nursery is accessed via the main entrance which leads into a small corridor, the walls to the west are lined with tongue and groove panelling, along with nineteenth century coat hooks. To the east are separate entrances to the meeting room and gallery. The meeting room is a large, high space which is well lit. The floor is covered in carpet, the high ceiling is plastered with a timber beading detail and the walls have vertical tongue and groove panelling to dado height, ramped up at the east end for the elders' stand. The west the gallery is supported on two cylindrical posts, with a panelled front. The former women's meeting room, now used as the main meeting room is well lit from windows to the north and south. The walls are plastered with vertical tongue and groove panelling and the timber floorboards are partially covered by carpet.

2.3 Loose furnishings

In Adderbury, an oak table used by George Fox at the opening ceremony in 1675 was donated by Bray Doyley. The table was kept at Adderbury until the Second World War when it was relocated to a local Quaker's house for safe keeping; it is now at Swarthmoor Hall. According to Wood (1991), in the late eighteenth century South Newington's meeting house was built, modelled on Adderbury and a replica table was made which stayed with the meeting until its closure in 1910, subsequently relocated to Banbury. The replica table is in the smaller meeting room, now used for worship (Fig.3).



Figure 3: Replica table

In the corridor outside the large meeting house is a series of prints by Marjory Lester, who came from a Quaker family in London, acquainted with the Gillettes, who moved to Banbury in 1920. The prints show Banbury Meeting at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fig.4) along with local scenes of Banbury.

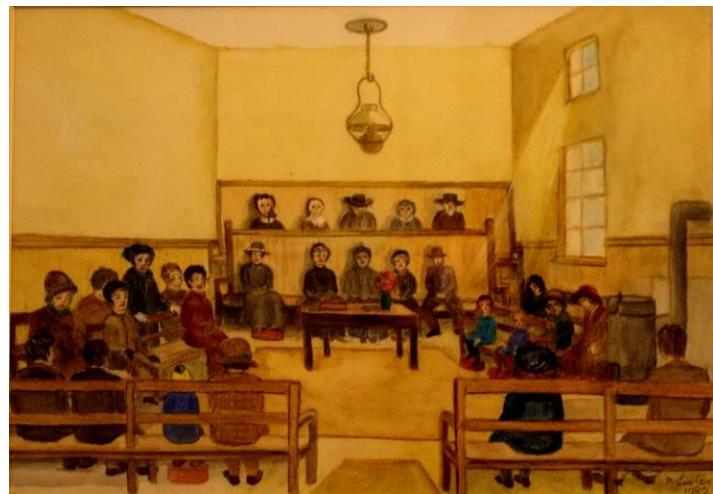


Figure 4: Marjory Lester print

A member of the Banbury Meeting bequeathed his Quaker clock to the meeting when he died in 2011. In the seventeenth century clocks were made by Quaker families in North Oxfordshire such as the Gilkes and Fardons, who along with their descendants were notable in English clock-making throughout the eighteenth century. The clock at Banbury is by John Gilkes of Shipston-on-Stour, an eight-day, fruitwood long case clock with solid brass dial made in the 1780s.



Figure 5: Clock by John Gilkes of Shipston-on-Stour

2.4 Attached burial ground

The burial ground lies to the south and west of the meeting house. It is enclosed by brick and stone walls and contains burials from 1665 to 1849. Standing headstones are located against the south elevation of the women's meeting room and a fixed memorial stone to the western range of the meeting house. The last recorded burial was in 1849. An undated burial plan identifies 70 burial plots.

Locally significant burials include Benjamin Kidd (1693 – 1751); for thirty-eight years he was a Minister in the Society of Friends, and travelled to America extensively. He died on the 21 May 1751 and was buried at Banbury three days later.

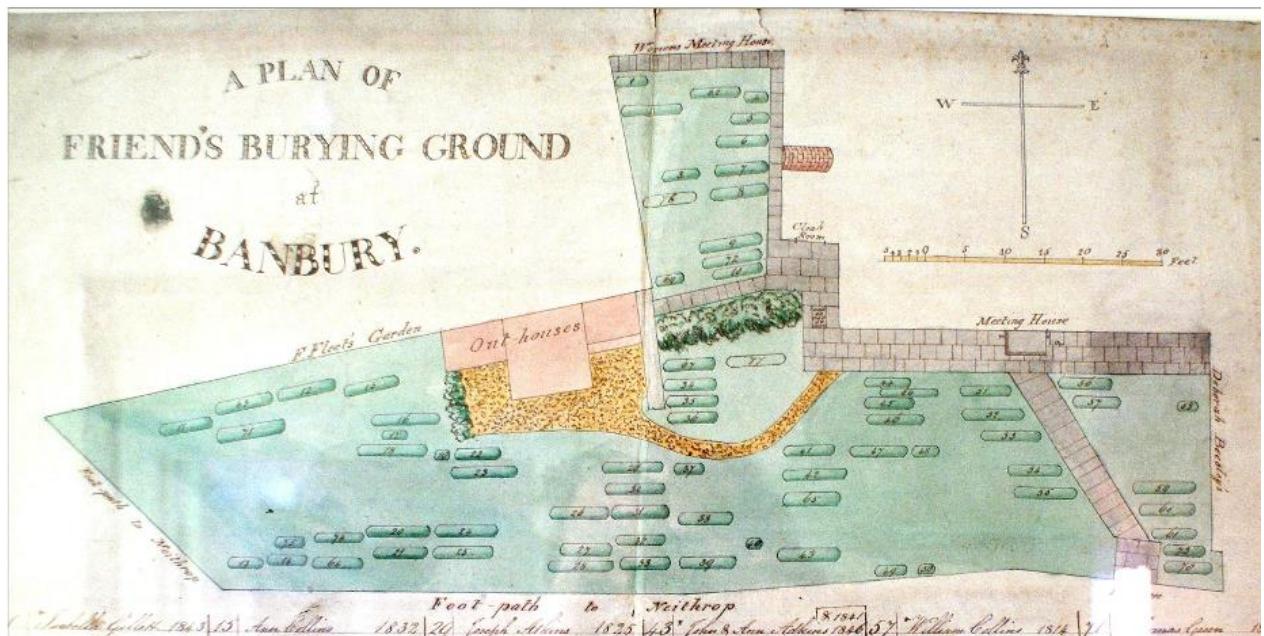


Figure 6: Undated plan of the burial ground

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located within the centre of Banbury, on a street lined with historic buildings of different periods; some of the earliest are on Horse Fair, built in the seventeenth century from local ironstone in vernacular style. To the east of the meeting house is the grade II listed Church House dating from 1906, along with a number of grade II listed buildings along Horse Fair and the grade I listed St Mary's church. Banbury Conservation Area was designated by Cherwell District Council in 1969.

The immediate setting of the building is defined by a high stone wall boundary which partly screens the building, with access via a stone-lined arch. A pleasant garden is located to the south of the building which sweeps to the west of the meeting house and retains some round-headed headstones bearing the usual basic Quaker information.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II, which is considered to be appropriate. The list entry for the meeting would benefit from being updated with an expanded description of the interior.

The boundary wall south of the meeting house is also listed as Grade II, also considered appropriate.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record was consulted; the site is within the defined Banbury Historic Core and has medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. The most recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in 2015 by Philip J Cooper, chartered building surveyor) found the building to be generally sound and adequately maintained. Repairs to the main roof and walls were identified as of the utmost urgency in the previous QI in 2011, and Friends have since been undertaking ongoing repairs to roofs, walls, drainage, heating, fire alarm and electrical systems.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well maintained.

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house did have a five-year maintenance and repair plan, however, this has been superseded by a refurbishment scheme in order to address longer-term maintenance costs.

3.3 Sustainability

The Sustainability Toolkit is used, and the following steps have been taken to improve sustainability:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Installed sheep wool insulation, low energy lighting and control of water use.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting uses the local authority recycling scheme.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: Plans in progress at present.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats. Garden maintained without the use of chemicals.
- Transport: Site is readily accessible by public transport.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house contains two meeting rooms, kitchen and WC facilities (not fully accessible). At present these facilities are not adequate, the kitchen and WC facilities are 40 to 50 years old, and dated. Currently a play group utilises the main meeting room during week days which restricts Friends to the smaller meeting room.

There is no on-site car parking, the nearest car park owned by Cherwell District Council is Horsefair West, £2.20 for 2 to 3 hours. The meeting house is 20 minutes' walk from Banbury railway station and is served by local bus service (limited on Sunday mornings). There is no secure on-site parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. At present access into the meeting house is limited, a removable ramp is available for access over the entrance steps. Internally, ground floor access is available, but access to the gallery of the main meeting room is restricted. There are currently no facilities to accommodate partially-sighted people. A hearing loop has been installed. An initial feasibility for the meeting house was undertaken by Acanthus Clews Architects in 2013, to improve the building's existing facilities which

include improving the process of arrival and accessibility. When a scheme is chosen a Disability Access Audit will be undertaken as part of the refurbishment works.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 4 hours and in community use for 32 hours each week. The maximum number of hours that the meeting house is available for lettings is 70 hours. There is a no lettings policy. There are conditions of hire on the booking form which notes alcohol, smoking, illegal drugs and gambling are not allowed on the premises. Each booking request is considered by the Premises Committee on a case-by-case basis. If a need for the meeting house to be used for free this is considered by the Premises Committee, and referred to Local Meeting if necessary. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to its quiet ambience, central location in the town, and is competitively priced with other rooms for hire in the town centre.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded. In the past anti-social behaviour has been an issue with the occasional throwing of litter over the boundary wall. One incident has been reported to the police, when a door was forced a number of years ago. The meeting house is set within a locality which is generally well-cared for. The Friends have not developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and would consider making contact if it was considered it would be beneficial.

3.8 Plans for change

Discussions have been taking place on redeveloping the site since 2010. In 2012 the Meeting set out rough objectives for a building renovation, including increasing activity at the meeting house to enhance and strengthen the meeting, diversifying the sources of and growing the income from the building and meeting requirements for disabled access. In 2013, Acanthus Clews Architects conducted a feasibility study, with five proposals ranging from simple reordering of the existing spaces to more extensive interventions. Discussions are continuing.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1 To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

- i) *As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting:* At present the meeting house does not meet the needs of the local Meeting. As a listed building alterations would need to be carefully considered and a feasibility study has been commissioned; there is scope for sensitive change.
- ii) *For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* Although primarily a Quaker meeting house, the building's main user is a playgroup. This has all the required facilities, and further change would be subject to listed building consent.
- iii) *Being laid down as a Meeting House:* It would seem unlikely that the meeting house would be laid down as considerable investment is expected to be made in the near future by the Friends to both improve and extend the meeting house. In the regrettable event of closure, an appropriate new use would be needed, subject to heritage and planning constraints.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List descriptions

Name: **FRIEND'S MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1199817

Location

FRIEND'S MEETING HOUSE, HORSE FAIR

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County District District Type Parish

Oxfordshire Cherwell District Authority Banbury

Grade: II

Date first listed: 09-Apr-1952

List entry Description

Details

BANBURY HORSE FAIR SP4540NW (West side) 6/214 Friend's Meeting House 09/04/52

GV II

Friends' Meeting House. Dated 1751. Tuscan porch c.1820. Regular coursed ironstone rubble. Hipped stone slate roof. 2 storeys; 3-window range. Entrance into porch attached to left end. Door is partly glazed and partly panelled. Overlight. 3 sashes to ground floor have keystoned heads and stone sills. 3 similar windows to first floor. All windows of 4 panes. Flat band between ground floor and first floor. Interior not inspected. (N.M.R. Photograph; Buildings of England: Oxfordshire, 1974, p.437; V.C.H.: Oxfordshire, Vol.X, p.111).

Listing NGR: SP4531640588

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Pevsner, N, Sherwood, J, The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire, (1974), 437

Salzman, L F, The Victoria History of the County of Oxford, (1972), 111

Name: **WALL APPROXIMATELY 25 METRES SOUTH OF FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1046951

Location

WALL APPROXIMATELY 25 METRES SOUTH OF FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, HORSE FAIR

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County District District Type Parish

Oxfordshire Cherwell District Authority Banbury

Grade: II

Date first listed: 14-Feb-1986

List entry Description

Details

BANBURY HORSE FAIR SP4540NW (West side) 6/215 Wall approx. 25m. S of Friends' Meeting House GV II

Wall. C18. Regular coursed ironstone rubble. Semi-circular arched entrance has keystone head. Stone coping swept up to right of entrance. Included for group value.

Listing NGR: SP4530240572