

Friends Meeting House, Faringdon

4 Lechlade Road, Faringdon, Oxfordshire, SN7 8AQ

National Grid Reference: SU 28533 95590



Statement of Significance

Built in 1672, this is one of the oldest Quaker meeting houses in the country. A contemporary attached burial ground is now a garden. The stone building, with its hipped roof and high enclosing wall together make a notable contribution to the local conservation area. Faringdon Meeting House is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Evidential value

The late seventeenth-century building has undergone several changes over time, some of them (such as the blocking of windows and the building of a high

stone wall around the building) evidence of past persecution. The fabric may contain evidence of an earlier building, possibly a barn. The burial ground is now a garden, but some headstones survive, laid flat as pavements. The building and site are of high evidential value.

Historical value

This is the oldest meeting house in the Area Meeting, and one of the oldest in the country. It fell out of Quaker use for about a century after 1880, but was revived in the 1970s. Both the burial ground and the meeting house site are of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The stone building with its rectangular plan, hipped stone-tiled roof, and burial ground enclosed by high stone walls all make a positive contribution to the local conservation area. Inside, the ramped panelled dado and historic benches add to the high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building and its facilities are little used by the wider community on account of a planning restriction. The site nevertheless has high communal value by virtue of the townscape contribution made by the historic building and its perimeter boundary wall.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Oxford & Swindon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0008440*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Vale of White Horse District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Great Faringdon*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1048464*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Faringdon*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1672-3*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *21 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *John and Janie Cottis*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Timber ancillary building*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Anon., *Quakers in Faringdon; Episodes from the History of Quakers in Faringdon during the last 350 Years*, 2006

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 10-11

Local Meeting Survey, by Janie Cottis, April 2016

Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER 10376)

Quinquennial report, April 2014

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

2.1 Historical background

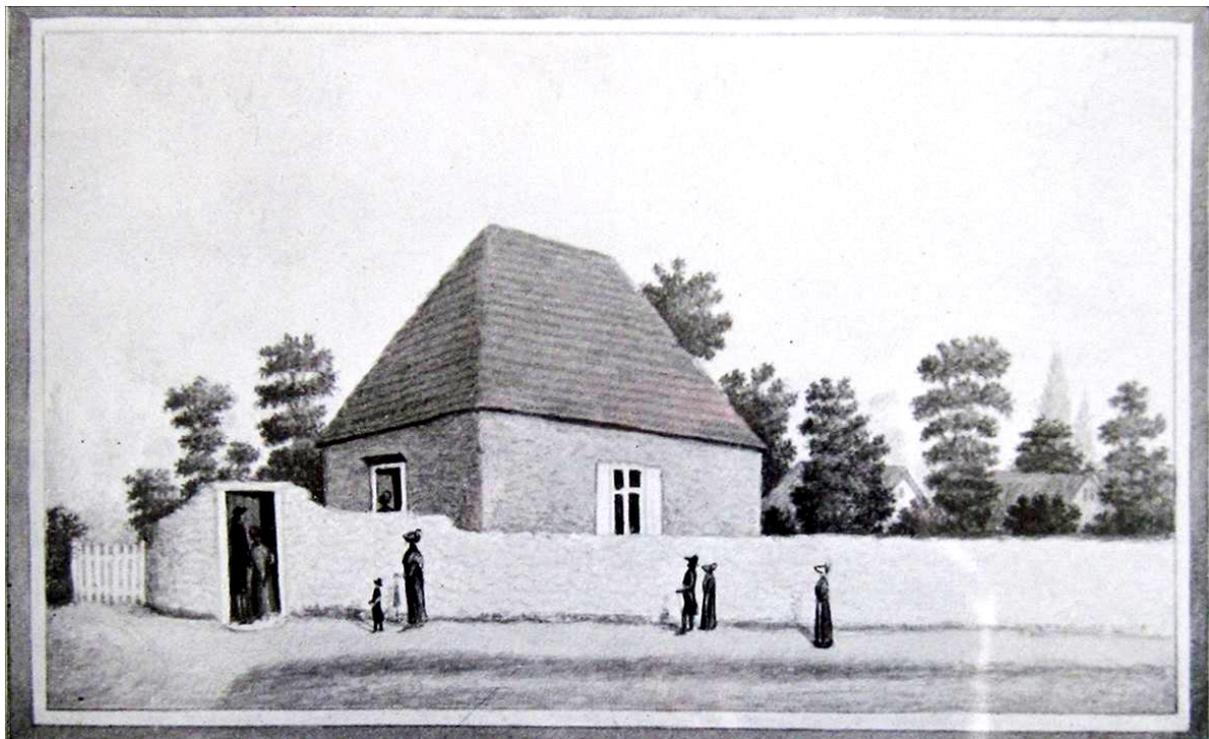


Figure 1: Faringdon meeting house in 1823, by Thomas Pole (from *Quakers in Faringdon*)

Faringdon Quaker Meeting House is the oldest in the Area Meeting, and one of the oldest in the country. In 1668 a Particular (later known as Preparative) Meeting was established in the town, and land was acquired for a meeting house and burial ground. The present building was built in 1672-3, as soon as Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence (briefly) suspended penal laws against Nonconformists. Butler suggests (p.10) that the east wall was incorporated from a previous building, and *Quakers in Faringdon* suggests there might have been a barn here. In 1692 the burial ground was enlarged by purchase of a plot of ground, and in 1695 it was agreed to repair the meeting house 'by making a stone wall under one side of it and at one End' (quoted in *Quakers in Faringdon*).

As originally designed, the longer side elevations of the meeting house presented symmetrical fronts; that to the northwest being the entrance front, with a central doorway flanked by a window on either side, while the opposite elevation had a central window. This was a time of persecution of Quakers, and in 1681 Monthly Meeting 'agreed that two side windows [...] next the highway shall be walled up' for reasons of safety. One of these windows

remains so blocked. Later the other window was reopened and the central doorway made into a window when the entrance was moved to the end wall. Butler suggests these changes may have been made in 1716, when £10 was spent on unspecified work. An illustration of the building dating from 1823 (figure 1) shows a visitor entering the building at the position of the present entrance. The stone porch was added later, possibly in 1835, when money was left by James Reynolds.

The meeting declined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The building fell out of Quaker use for about a century from 1880, and went through a succession of other uses but (unlike the meeting houses at Witney and Chipping Norton) was not sold; an attempt by a local builder in 1960 to purchase the building and convert it to residential use was prevented by the rules of the Charity Commission.

Interest in the Faringdon Meeting was revived from 1975 by Friends in Charney Preparative Meeting, and meetings for worship resumed (initially monthly on Fridays, and weekly on Sundays from December 1979). In 1980 repairs were made, and ten benches which had previously been at Charlbury were brought from Burford. In September 1981 Charney Preparative Meeting changed its name to Faringdon Preparative Meeting, and in 1983-4 a prefabricated timber building was put up in the burial ground, housing WCs, a kitchen and a classroom. In 1995 repairs costing over £10,000 were carried out, including damp proofing, replacement of parts of the floor, plaster and brickwork, rewiring, new lighting, and repair and reinstatement of panelling. The elders' stand and a former shuttered partition (described in 1999 by Butler and shown on his plan at figure 2) were removed at an unknown date. More recently (in 2014) alterations for easier access were made, including the removal of the steps and wooden gates at the street entrance and the creation of a ramped approach to the porch (architect: Andrew Townsend of Faringdon, cost £48,000).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

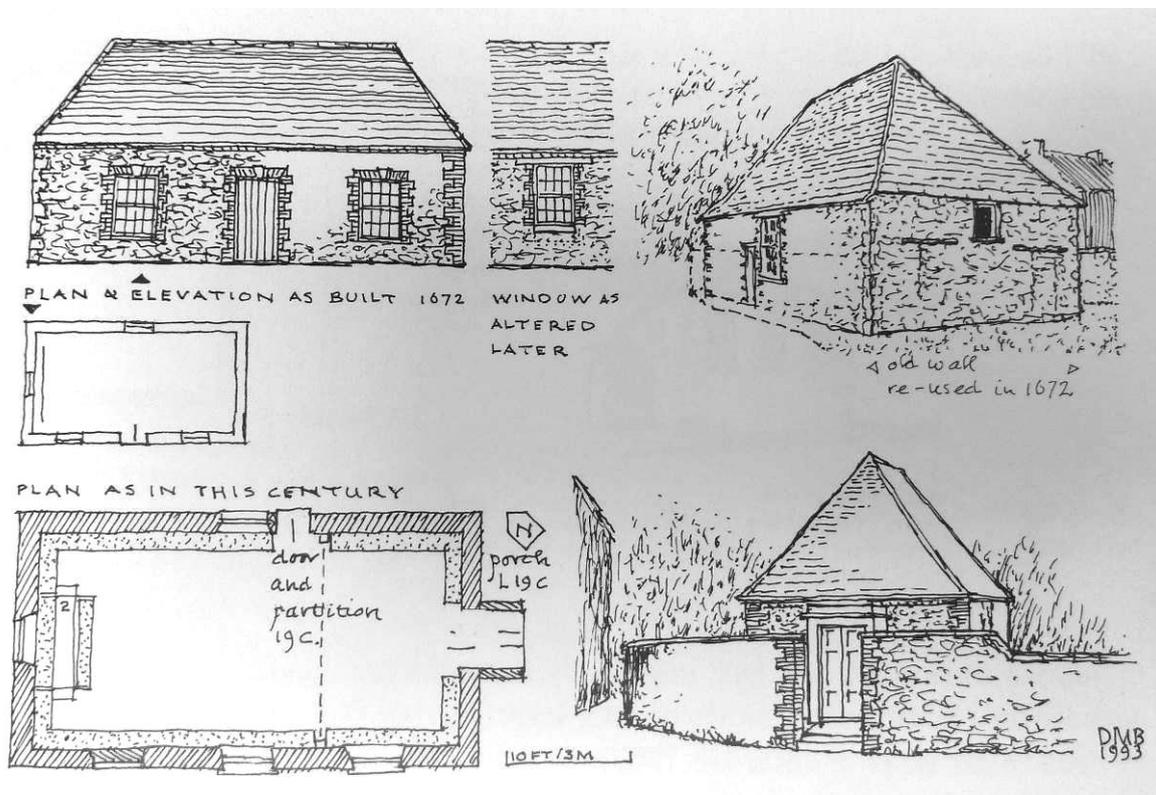


Figure 2: Plans and elevations as built and as existing in 1993, from Butler, 1999, vol. 1, p. 11

The meeting house was built in 1672-3, possibly incorporating part of an earlier building. It was altered in the late seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The single storey building is of rubble stone construction, with brick quoins and dressings. It has a steeply pitched hipped stone tiled roof, with uPVC rainwater goods. The original entrance was on the north side, where the central door was flanked by a window on either side. The windows on this elevation were blocked in 1687 and one, to the east, remains blocked (in the foreground in middle left photo on page 1). This blocked opening retains its original brick surround and flat rubbed brick arch with central keystone. The other window on this elevation was reopened at a later date, when the sill and head were raised; it contains an eight-over-eight sash window of late Georgian character (but probably renewed). A similar window now occupies the central bay, but the shadow of the stone infilling of the former doorway can still be discerned below the sill. The main entrance is now on the shorter return elevation facing Lechlade Road, via a flat-topped porch, possibly of 1835, with bead moulded stone surround and rendered sides, and six-panel door with square glazed upper lights (renewed in 2014). The south elevation has one central window with a glazing bar sash of late Georgian character, and an off-centre doorway, probably late nineteenth-century. The rear (east) elevation faces towards the burial ground and may be a surviving element from a previous building on the site; two timber lintels are set into the wall, suggesting the position of former doorways. In the middle is a square window of uncertain date.

The interior is a single space; a timber partition indicated in Butler's plan at figure 2 has been removed, although it is understood to survive in part in the roof space (the present modern flat plastered ceiling is about 1ft 6ins below the original ceiling level). The elders' stand at the east end has also been removed, but its traces can be read in the dado panelling. This panelling, of mid-eighteenth-century character, but much renewed, runs around the entire perimeter, and is ramped at the east end, and on either side of the main entrance and windows. The floor is timber boarded. The roof structure (not seen) is described in the QIR as of traditional oak construction, with substantial trusses and triple purlins.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of open-backed benches with arm rests arranged around the space, brought here in 1980, having previously been at Burford and before that at Charlbury.

2.4 Attached burial ground

The burial ground is contemporary with the meeting house and lies to the rear of the building. It is now a garden, the three remaining headstones laid flat and used to line the footpath around the building; the most detailed inscription is to Marian Lockey (d.1734). The burial registers up to 1837 are held at the National Archives (Ref. RG6/1022) and there are some records of the names and dates of burials at the Oxfordshire History Centre. Recorded burials range in date from approximately 1680 to 1902.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies on the western edge of Faringdon, on the Lechlade Road, amidst residential and commercial properties of varying date. Its high brick enclosing wall gives a rather fortified air, evidence of early days of persecution. The hipped stone roof and boundary wall make a positive contribution to the local conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is appropriately listed Grade II. The boundary wall might also be deemed listed by virtue of curtilage, but would merit separate listing, or specific mention in any revised and expanded list entry for the meeting house.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

High. This has been a meeting house and burial ground since the late seventeenth century, and there is a likelihood of earlier occupation of the site. The classroom is on a concrete raft.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house, classroom and garden/burial ground are well maintained. The recommendations contained in the most recent (2014) QIR have been largely implemented. The meeting has sufficient funds to attend to normal maintenance and repair needs, and there is a repair and maintenance fund.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures undertaken to reduce environmental impact have included roof insulation (both buildings) and draught proofing of the meeting house doors. The usual recycling arrangements are in place.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs. These are in the detached classroom and include a fitted galley kitchen and WCs. There is no resident warden. The meeting house is served by local bus services. There is no off-street parking, but a public car park is 150m away. There is secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

A disability audit was carried out in 2009 and its recommendations have been largely implemented. The removal of steps and the formation of a ramped approach in 2014 have made the meeting house accessible for wheelchair users. The same programme of works involved the adaptation of one of the WCs in the classroom to meet modern accessibility standards. A hearing loop is provided.

3.6 Community Use

In addition to use by Friends for 2.5 hours a week, the building is let to Quaker and other groups for an hour or so each week (out of a possible eighty). It is understood that a planning restriction means that the classroom (which contains the kitchens and WCs) can only be used in association with the meeting house, and this is assumed to preclude uses which fall outside the scope of the charitable objects of the Area Meeting.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There have been instances of young people congregating in the garden and drinking, but there are no recorded instances of crime. This is generally a fairly well-cared-for area with relatively low levels of crime and deprivation.

3.8 Plans for change

None.

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: The meeting house serves the needs of the meeting well, and the detached classroom provides the necessary additional facilities. The latter is not a building of special interest, and does not enhance the setting of the listed building, but it does pre-empt the need to provide facilities within the meeting house. Future changes should aim to retain the open character of the meeting room, its panelled dado and the surviving historic benches. Within these constraints, there is scope for carefully considered change.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house and classroom are subject to a use restriction, imposed by the local planning authority in order to safeguard the amenities of nearby residences. Nevertheless, it may be hoped that the possibility of suitable low-key uses which do not disturb those amenities will be explored; a greater level of community use will help to ensure the historic building's continued viability.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: This is the oldest meeting house in the Area Meeting, and one of the oldest in the country, and permanent closure would be very regrettable. In that event, the Grade II listing means that it would be necessary to find a suitable alternative use. It has been used for other purposes in the past, and would lend itself to a community use. Residential conversion is undesirable in heritage terms and may fall foul of Charity Commission rules.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE
List entry Number: 1048464
Location: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, LECHLADE ROAD
County: Oxfordshire
District: Vale of White Horse
District Type: District Authority
Parish: Great Faringdon
Grade: II
Date first listed: 10-Jul-1986
Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.
Legacy System: LBS
UID: 249394
GREAT FARINGDON LECHLADE ROAD SU 2895

3/8 Friends' Meeting House

II

Late C17 meeting house altered in C19. Rubble stone with brick dressings. One storey. Steep pitched hipped stone-tiled roof over low walls with brick angles, eaves course and window surround. 2 glazing bar sashes to north side and one blocked window with keystone. One glazing bar sash and door to south side. West end C19 flat-topped stone porch with plain

bead-mould to doorway. Interior: Simple with plain dado level panelling ramped at east end and at windows.

Listing NGR: SU285339590