

Quaker Meeting House, Henley

45 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 2JJ

National Grid Reference: SU 75923 83139



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was built in 1894, replacing an earlier meeting house on the site. It is attached to a listed cottage and has a historic burial ground to the rear. The meeting house has medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The meeting house is a Victorian building; it has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The construction of the meeting house in the 1890s was the result of the work of the Home Mission Committee and the adult schools movement. The building has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building was designed by a local architect, Charles Smith & Son of Reading, and incorporates fine moulded brick and terracotta on the main elevation. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is well used by Quakers and community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Thames*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0031740*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *South Oxfordshire District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Henley-on-Thames*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed (only by attachment/curtilage)*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Henley*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1894*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Charles Smith & Son, Reading*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *22 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Ralph Malcolm Barnett*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *cottage, 2 barns/garages, Wheeler's Yard*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 499-500

Macleod, M., *Quakers in Henley, 1658-2008*, 2010

Pitt, A., *Henley Quakers. A short history of the Religious Society of Friends in Henley-on-Thames*, 1994

Sherwood, J. and N. Pevsner, *Oxfordshire (Buildings of England)*, 1974, p. 638

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in Central England*, 1986, p. 176

Local Meeting archive: undated news cutting, architect's sketch, drawings of 1991, pre-1894 photo

Oxfordshire County Council, HER entry number 445

Local Meeting survey by Ralph Malcolm Barnett, June 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

Quakers first met in Henley in c.1658. From about 1668, they met in a hired house. In 1672 the present site, which included two cottages and seven acres of land, was acquired from Katherine Boswell for £37. In 1681 ownership was transferred to Quaker trustees but two

years later, it was transferred – in response to Quaker prosecution – to John Toovey (1652-1720). In 1727, his brother Caleb bequeathed an adjoining cottage and Wheeler's Yard, whose rents were to be used for poor Friends. In the eighteenth century, the meeting house was rebuilt or at least refaced (figure 1).

By 1873, the meeting was discontinued although Bible readings on Sundays resumed in 1874. In 1882, the Henley meeting was described as '[partaking] somewhat of the nature of a mission meeting'. In 1892, the Friends Home Mission Committee sent William George Hall as missionary to Henley, who, together with Charles Singer, worked hard to re-establish the meeting as well as founding an adult school in 1892. In 1894, it was decided to rebuild the meeting house. Work on site started on 4 April and the building opened later that year (Butler and Pitt: 3 October, Macleod: 3 December) (figure 2). The architects were Charles Smith & Son, Reading, and the contractors were Waldron & Cox. Bricks and terracotta were supplied by the brick and tile works of S. & E. Collier at Grovelands, Reading. The total cost was £1348 15s 3d. The new meeting house was built on the site of the old one and of one of the cottages. In 1934, the Preparative Meeting was closed and from 1939 an Allowed Meeting continued in the cottage. From 1934 to 1985, much of the building was used as a youth hostel with the meeting room and library used as dormitories. In 1961, the Preparative Meeting was re-established. In 1986, several alterations were made, including the removal of a dais with rail and the alterations of the rear wall. In 2003, a partition in the meeting room which dated from 1953 was removed.



Figure 1: The meeting house (far right) and the two cottages before 1894 (Henley Local Meeting archive)

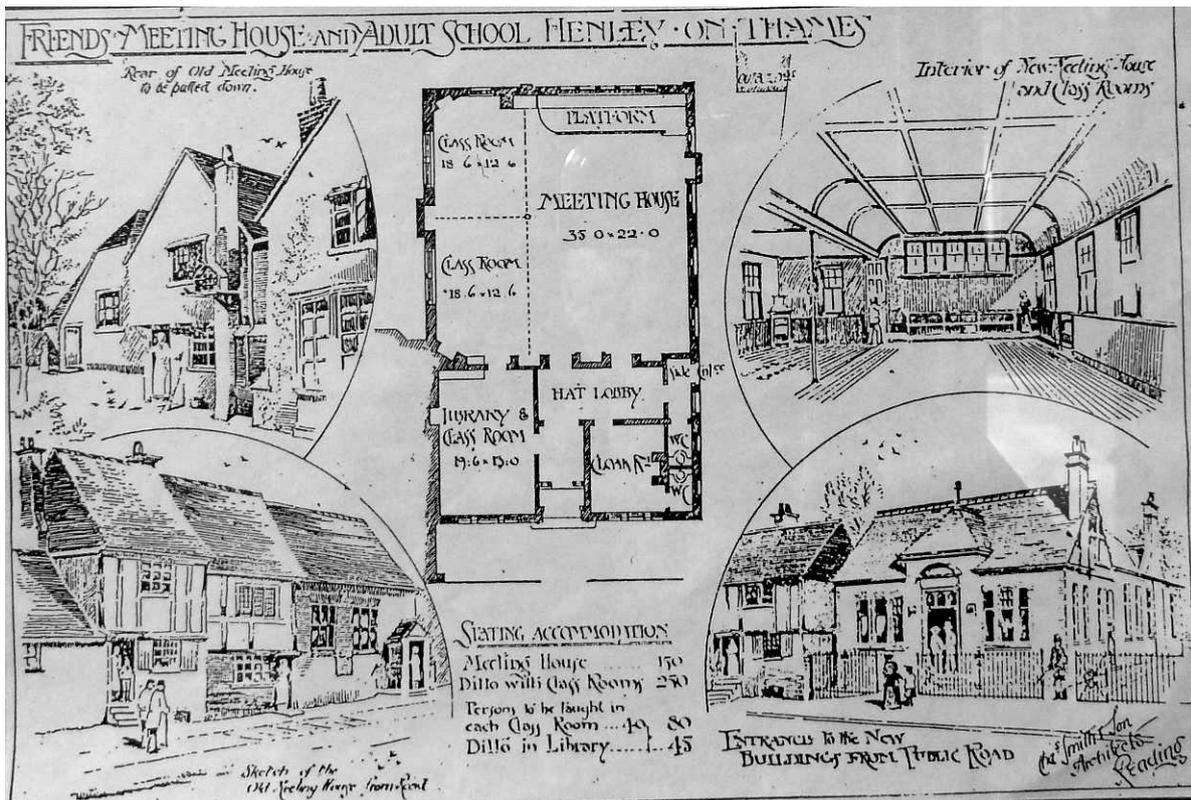


Figure 2: Architect's drawing of the old meeting house (left above and below) and the new (plan, interior and exterior) (northeast is at the bottom of the plan; not to scale) (Henley Local Meeting archive)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The street elevation faces northeast. The building has an oblong plan and was built of brick laid in English bond with Bath stone dressings. The front range has a tiled gable roof with decorative ridge tiles, while the hipped roof to the rear is covered with slate. (The southeast slope has solar panels.) There are chimneystacks with mouldings at either end of the front range, with two others near the rear corners and another short stack on the ridge. (One further stack on the southeast elevation has been taken down leaving only the projecting chimneybreast.) The three-bay street elevation has a dentil cornice. The centre bay has a cross roof above the entrance topped by a finial. The two-leaf six-panelled entrance door under a three-centred arch and a fanlight of three leaded lights is framed by a brick architrave. Above it is a segmental pediment in brick with egg-and-dart mouldings. On either side of the door are terracotta panels with the dates '1668' and '1894'. The two outer bays have three narrow segmental-arched sash windows each, whose upper sash has glazing bars. The current main entrance is the entrance to the former adult school in the northwest side elevation. The side elevation has three sash windows and one door to the front range, and another four sash windows to the meeting room behind. The gable end of the front range has the return of the dentil cornice which continues as far as the chimneystack, beyond which a moulded cornice at a higher level continues the cornice of the rear wing. The rear elevation to the meeting room has a clerestory of five sash windows, below which two windows and a door have been inserted (photo top right on p. 1 and figure 2). The east bay of the rear elevation has one sash window to light a former classroom. The southeast side elevation has a pair of sashes to the south, and a window and door to the north.

The front range contains an L-shaped lobby with access to toilets and a cloakroom to one side and the library (not seen) to the other. The meeting room is in the southern half of the building behind, occupying two thirds of the width of the building. The other third (two former classrooms, now a kitchen and a smaller room) is divided from the meeting room by

an original folding screen (described in 1894 as ‘a new patent shutter movement’). The screen is panelled with a row of glazed panels at the top. The meeting room has a coved ceiling divided into square panels, as well as a dado and picture rail. There are two disused fireplaces in the meeting room, and two blocked corner fireplaces in the adjoining smaller rooms.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are six open-backed benches in the meeting room with curved armrests on turned supports.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground at the rear is no longer used for burials, only for the interring of ashes. There are a number of gravestones which have been placed against the boundary walls on either side. The inscriptions are largely eroded but they seem to date mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One stretch of the brick and flint walls was recently rebuilt (with listed building consent as they are considered to be curtilage structures to the listed cottage).

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located on the A4130, at the edge of Henley. At one side of the meeting house is a brick arch with a modern iron gate. The original railings in front of the meeting house (figure 2) were presumably removed during the Second World War. To the southeast is the seventeenth-century timber-framed cottage (photo top left on p. 1), the remainder of the cottages visible in figure 1. This is rented out and the proceeds go to local Friends in need. The meeting also owns two single-storey buildings (rented out as garages) on either side of the entrance to Wheeler’s Yard, as well as the yard itself.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is currently not listed. However, it has been treated as a curtilage building and listed building consent was required for the installation of solar panels. It is a design of some quality by a local architect. Charles Smith (1832-1912) set up in private practice in Reading in 1857. In 1893, he took his son Charles Steward Smith (1858-1923) into partnership. Charles senior was mayor of Reading in 1874-6. (The practice’s papers are at the Berkshire Record Office.) The meeting house has been altered, especially the rear elevation. On balance, it is not considered to fulfil the criteria for statutory listing. However, it would be eligible for inclusion in the Council’s local list.

The conservation officer recently (June 2015) confirmed that the boundary walls to the burial ground are also curtilage structures to the cottages and should be treated as listed structures.

The attached cottage is listed as two cottages: Henley Cottage and Meeting House Cottage, both grade II (see list descriptions in Part 6). They might be merged into one entry.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was built partly on the site of the previous meeting house which was re-fronted or rebuilt in the eighteenth century, partly on the site of a seventeenth-century cottage. The site includes the burial ground to the rear. Overall, the site has high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

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

3.2 Maintenance

A quinquennial inspection last took place in 2013 (Faithful + Gould). The most urgent items have since been addressed, including re-roofing, clearing gutters and repairs to the boundary walls. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the meeting house. There is no five-year maintenance and repair plan; instead, maintenance is reviewed annually.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not regularly use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: PV (solar) panels, secondary glazing, loft insulation, draft-proofing of doors, low energy light bulbs
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: recycling where possible
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: compost bins, growing vegetables and fruit in the garden

The meeting house has an Energy Performance Certificate with an energy efficiency level of 98. The energy impact level is not known. A related report contains the energy-efficiency recommendations.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden.

The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is parking on site as well as secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is step-free access via a ramp, an accessible toilet, a hearing loop and facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in December 2001 and its recommendations were implemented in 2003 when a ramp, an accessible toilet and an accessible kitchen were installed.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 6 hours per week. There is no maximum number of hours the building is available for lettings. It is used for an average of 110 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. The aims of users and groups should be in line with Quaker principles. Only members or attenders of the local meeting can use the building for free. Users value the peaceful and quiet atmosphere of the building, its fair pricing and the carpeted rooms.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There has been no heritage crime, general crime or other incidents. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is currently no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

There are currently no plans for alterations.

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 is considered a curtilage structure to the listed cottage and any alterations need to be well-considered and require the appropriate permissions.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house has all the facilities required by its community users.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the meeting house cease to be used as such, a new sympathetic use would need to be found. It could easily continue to be used as a community centre.

Part 5: Category: 3

Part 6: List description(s)

Henley Cottage (front part of adjoining cottage)

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: HENLEY COTTAGE

List entry Number: 1219458

Location

HENLEY COTTAGE, 45, NORTHFIELD END

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

County	District	District Type	Parish
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Oxfordshire	South Oxfordshire	District Authority	Henley-on-Thames
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Grade: II

Date first listed: 28-Oct-1974

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 246301

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Details

1. NORTHFIELD END 5355 (West Side)

No 45 (Henley Cottage) SU 7583 4/170

II GV

2. C17. Small timber framed cottage with brick nogging and old tiled roof. North gable end rebuilt with tile hung gable. 2 storeys. 1 window, 3 light casements with glazing bars.

No 45 and Meeting House Cottage, with Nos 51 to 61 (odd) and Portland Cottage with its garden wall form a group with No 46, Magnolia Cottage, Northlea and its former coach house, Easby House and its former coach house and Nos 70 to 84 (even) opposite.

Listing NGR: SU7592583130

Meeting House Cottage (rear part of adjoining cottage)

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: MEETING HOUSE COTTAGE

List entry Number: 1047758

Location

MEETING HOUSE COTTAGE, NORTHFIELD END

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

County	District	District Type	Parish
Oxfordshire	South Oxfordshire	District Authority	Henley-on-Thames

Grade: II

Date first listed: 28-Oct-1974

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 246302

Details

1. NORTHFIELD END 5355 (West Side)

Meeting House Cottage SU 7583 4/344

II GV

2. C17. Small timber framed cottage with rendered facade. Henley Cottage (q.v.) and Meeting House cottage are 1 building of which the latter forms the rear part. Gable end, 2 storeys, 1 window.

No 45 and Meeting House Cottage, with Nos 51 to 61 (odd) and Portland Cottage with its garden wall form a group with No 46, Magnolia Cottage, Northlea and its former coach house, Easby House and its former coach house and Nos 70 to 84 (even) opposite.

Listing NGR: SU7592983134