

## ***Quaker Meeting House, Oxford***

*43 St Giles, Oxford, Oxfordshire, OX1 3LW*

*National Grid Reference: SP 51142 06792*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***The meeting house is an attractive traditional design of the mid-1950s, of neo-Georgian and Cotswold vernacular character. It lies towards the bottom of the long back garden of a house of late seventeenth-century origin on St Giles, within the Oxford Central Conservation Area. The site is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.***

### ***Evidential value***

***The evidential value of the frontage property resides primarily in its character, fabric and fitting out as a house of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century date. The meeting house is also of high evidential value as***

***an example of mid-twentieth-century Quaker architecture, recalling Georgian and local vernacular precedents, with its use of plain, well-detailed local materials.***

#### **Historical value**

***Oxford has seen Quaker practice at a number of locations since the middle of the seventeenth century. The earliest meeting house was also in St Giles and was also built in a back garden, but was sold in the late nineteenth century and demolished in the 1950s. In the 1940s, local Quakers were prominent in the establishment of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam). The present meeting house dates from the mid-twentieth century, but is on a site of greater antiquity, going back to the 1660s or earlier. The meeting house and site are of high historical value.***

#### **Aesthetic value**

***The frontage building is of predominantly mid-late Georgian character and makes a distinctive contribution to the street scene close to the historic core of the city. The beautifully-maintained back garden enhances its setting, and also forms an appropriate setting for the meeting house, itself an attractive stone-built design of the 1950s which combines Cotswold vernacular and neo-Georgian elements. The meeting house and site are of high aesthetic value.***

#### **Communal value**

***The frontage building and the meeting house are well used by local community groups and have high communal value. The frontage building also has communal value for the contribution it makes to the character and appearance of the local area.***

#### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Oxford & Swindon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0009220*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Oxford City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Oxford NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II (frontage building)*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1047145*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Oxford Central (University and City)*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c1660 (frontage building); 1954-5 (meeting house)*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not known; Thomas Rayson*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *12 May 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Karima Brooke*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *42 St Giles (Grade II)*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.2, pp. 501-3

Joyce, T., *A very brief history of Quakers in Oxford*, n.d.

*Forty-three St Giles and the Oxford Quakers; The Garden and the Buildings*, Oxford Quakers, 2012

*Quinquennial Condition Survey*, 2012

Oxford Urban Archaeological Database (HER Number: 921)

Local Meeting Survey, by Karima Brooke, April 2016

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

### 2.1 Historical background

The Oxford Meeting began in 1654, settling in the 1680s at the house of a surgeon, Richard Bettris, in Seven Deadly Sins Lane (now New Inn Hall Street). This house survives at the back of Bonn Square, alongside the Baptist church. However, by 1688 it was replaced by a purpose-built meeting house with burial ground, located at the back of the garden of the property of Silas Norton in St Giles (probably no. 63, although its precise location is uncertain, see Butler, p. 502). Regular meetings continued here until 1746 but thereafter membership of the Oxford Meeting declined, and the building became used less frequently until 1867, when it was let and eventually sold. The building survived until after the Second World War, being finally demolished in the 1950s. It was stone-built and was of the common two-chamber plan. (Single storey and with a steep Cotswold tile roof, its design may have influenced that of the present meeting house).

In 1890 Friends purchased the former Scottish church in Nelson Street, in the working class district of Jericho, which had been built only about fifteen years earlier. This seated 300 and included a mission room, two houses and cottages. However, it proved relatively short-lived, the meeting moving briefly in 1906 to premises at 40 Canal Street, and thereafter to hired premises at 21 George Street, 19 Holywell and 115 High Street.

An increase in membership and the need for a permanent building led to the acquisition in 1939 of a house at 43 St Giles, for £6,000. This was built in about 1660, but altered and extended in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Adaptations after the war allowed the building to be used for Quaker meetings from 1946. Shortly afterwards, Friends acquired the adjoining property at no. 42 St Giles, and a brick wall dividing the back gardens of the two properties was removed. In 1954-5 a purpose-built meeting house seating 120 was built towards the bottom of the garden of no. 43, from designs by Thomas Rayson of Oxford. Ownership of no. 43 was retained by the meeting, originally with a warden's flat as well as class and meeting rooms. In 1982 it was extended with a Garden Room, from designs by Alan Bristow, whose office at that time was in Charlbury Meeting House (*qv*).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

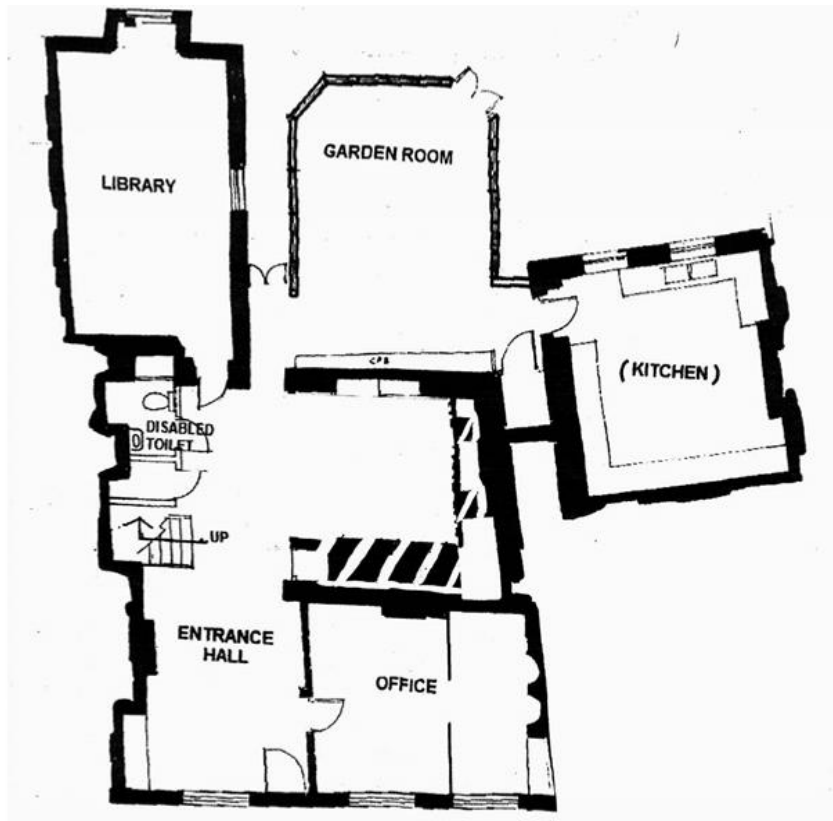


Figure 1: Plan of 43 St Giles (provided by local meeting)

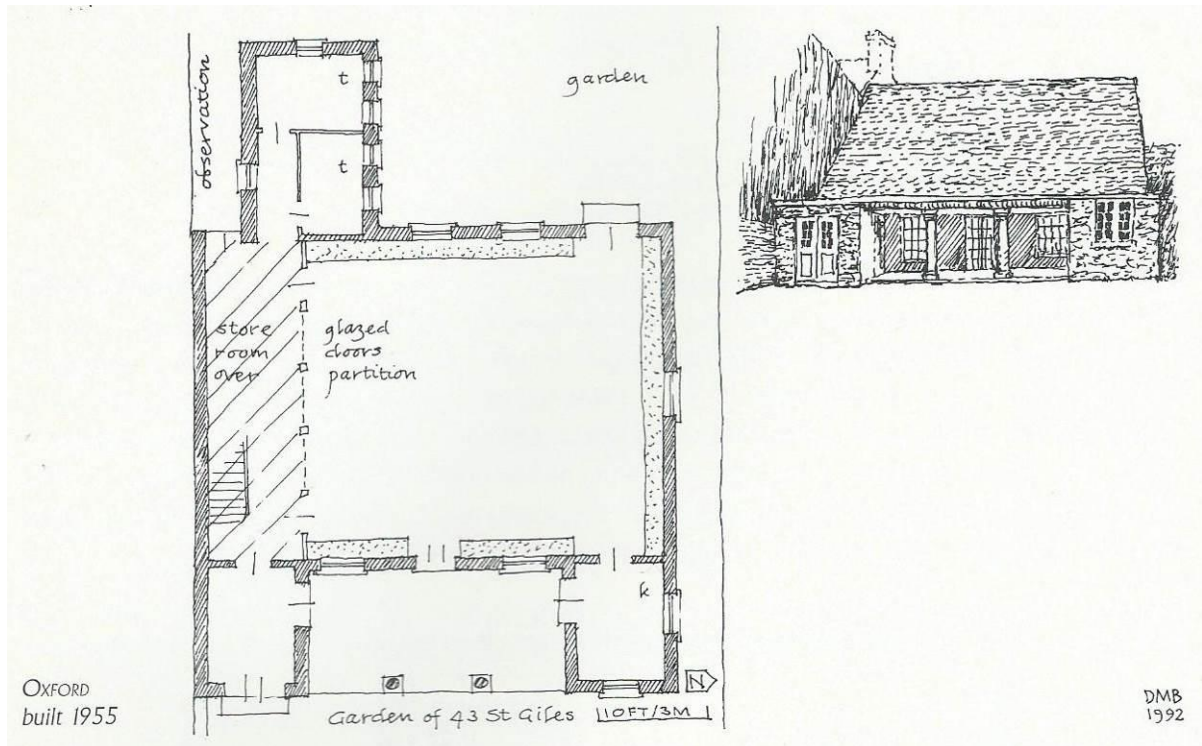


Figure 2: Plan and elevation of 1955 meeting house, from Butler, p. 502

No. 43 St Giles (plan at figure 1) is to outward appearance of eighteenth-century date, but incorporates a datestone inscribed 'W P 1660'. It is built of plastered rubble stone, of three storeys and three bays. Internal features include a fully panelled room on the ground floor ('office' on the plan), and dado panelling and chimneypieces of eighteenth-century date on the first floor. On the ground floor rear elevation is a late-nineteenth-century addition, now a library, and a garden room added in 1982 for the Friends. The building is described in more detail in the list entry, below.

The meeting house (figure 2) is located towards the far end of the long garden at the rear of the property. It was built in 1954-5 in a Cotswold vernacular style, from designs by Thomas Rayson of Oxford. It consists of one large meeting room, with a gallery at one end and ancillary spaces giving off. The building is faced in coarsed rubble stone, and has a steep Cotswold stone slate roof. It is roughly square on plan, with a recessed entrance lobby area set behind a three-bay loggia with two stone columns with simple stylised acanthus capitals, flanked by ancillary rooms. At the rear is a projecting flat-roofed WC block, also stone-faced. Above this, a gabled dormer window gives light to the gallery. The windows throughout, and some of the doors, have been renewed in uPVC.

The meeting room is a large, well-lit space, with boarded timber floor and a high vaulted plastered ceiling between four painted timber trusses. Around the perimeter oak panelling with pilaster subdivisions runs up to full window height. A high-level window is placed at the north end, while at the south end is a gallery with folding timber doors/partitions below. The gallery is reached by an oak open string stair with turned newel, stick balusters and carved tread ends.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of moveable timber benches, possible contemporary with the meeting house, supplemented by modern upholstered chairs. The pendant light fixtures date from c.2005 and were designed by Peter Winchester, architect and Attender.

### 2.4 Attached burial ground

Not applicable.

### 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

No. 43 faces the wide thoroughfare of St Giles, close to and leading north from the historic core of the city. Nearby landmarks include the medieval parish church of St Giles, various college buildings, and two famous historic public houses, the Eagle and Child and the Lamb and Flag. The building makes a positive contribution to the Oxford Central Conservation Area (designated in 1971) and has group value with adjoining listed buildings, including the Quaker-owned no. 42. The meeting house lies towards the bottom of the garden of no. 43, and is not prominent or even visible in most public views. It is physically attached to 1 and 2 Wellington Place, early-mid nineteenth-century stuccoed villas lying immediately to the south, which are listed Grade II. Beyond the meeting house to the east it is a small car park, for the use of Friends, created in the 1960s on the site of the warden's vegetable garden, and accessible from Pusey Lane. Adjoining the entrance to this car park to the south are two more listed early nineteenth-century stucco villas, 3 and 4 Wellington Place.

## 2.6 Listed status

No. 43 St Giles is listed Grade II. The list entry does not refer to it as a Quaker meeting house, simply stating that ‘the whole of the first floor has been converted to a “meeting room”.’

The meeting house is built against the side of the Grade II-listed 1 and 2 Wellington Place, but does not form part of the curtilage of those buildings. It lies within the curtilage of 43 St Giles, but post-dates 1948 and is therefore not included in the Grade II listing for that building.

The meeting house was built from designs by Thomas Rayson in 1954-5. Rayson (1888-1976) studied architecture under Professor Beresford Pite at Brixton School of Building. In 1910 he became an assistant in the Oxford practice of N.W. and G.E.A. Harrison before setting up in practice on his own in 1920, after winning the Witney Housing Scheme competition. He was elected a Fellow of the RIBA in 1927. Best known for his housing designs, Rayson was also responsible for a number of war memorials, mainly in Oxfordshire, including those at Witney, Cogges, Oxford and Woodstock as well as two listed examples at Stanton St John, Oxon., and on Chester Cathedral Green (both Grade II). Oxford Meeting House is an attractive, well-detailed traditional design combining neo-Georgian and Cotswold vernacular elements and employing good materials and finishes. The interior has been sympathetically adapted and little altered, and retains its oak panelling and gallery stair. However, the replacement of the windows and some of the doors has detracted from the completeness and quality of the design, and the flat-roofed range at the rear is not of special interest (although part of the original design). The building is of historical interest (by association), dating from a time when Oxford Quakers were prominent in the newly-formed Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam), founded nearby at 17 Broad Street in 1942. The building is considered to be at best a marginal candidate for listing, and at the least would merit inclusion in Oxford City Council’s local list (Heritage Asset Register).

No. 42 to the north (owned by the Quakers and today let as a dentist’s surgery) is also listed Grade II, as is an ancient boundary stone outside the property (list entries below).

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site has been occupied since the seventeenth century, and probably from much earlier. The HER records the discovery of a post-medieval well at the rear of the building. The archaeological potential of the site is high.



## **Part 3: Current use and management**

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground: Not applicable

### 3.2 Maintenance

The buildings are well maintained and the garden excellently so. The most recent QIR (2012) concluded that the buildings were in reasonable condition given their nature and age, and most of the identified works were relatively minor and routine. These included refurbishment of the WCs in the meeting room.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, as witnessed in the recent refurbishment of the library and meeting room, with the walls, floor and ceiling insulated with natural wood fibre-based materials and finished with eco-friendly paint. At the same time, underfloor heating was installed in the meeting room. Electricity comes from Good Energy (100% renewable energy), energy-efficient water heating and appliances are in place in the kitchen, and eco-cleaning products are used. Outside, organic gardening methods are used.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs, spread between the frontage building and the meeting house. Tents/gazebos are erected in the garden when needed e.g. for weddings. There is no longer a warden, but there is a non-resident manager and assistant manager. Weak joists inhibit the use of the first floor rooms in the frontage building for large gatherings. The Garden Room is used for smaller meetings for worship.

The site is well served by public transport, and there is parking for six vehicles. Provision for cycle stands is currently considered inadequate, but there are plans to improve this.

### 3.5 Access

A disability audit was being conducted at the time of the survey return (March-April 2016). There is a demountable ramp at the entrance from St Giles. The ground floor of no. 43 is wheelchair accessible, and while the upper floors are not, full access to the services offered can be provided downstairs. The ground floor level of the meeting room is also accessible, and both buildings have an accessible WC. A hearing loop is installed, and provision for partially-sighted people is currently being audited. Any recommendations arising from the disability audit will be implemented, subject to any listed building consent issues that may arise.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the facilities for about twenty hours a week. Figures for use by other parties (potential maximum 350 hours a week) are not yet provided. There is a published lettings policy, summarised by the manager as 'everyone is welcome unless they do harm to themselves or anyone else in the building'. Political meetings, alcohol, gambling and smoking are not permitted. Users appreciate the good location, warm and quiet facilities, competitive price and good IT facilities.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

Apart from one or two instances of minor theft (not reported) there are no recorded instances of crime. It is difficult to generalise about the locality; as the survey return says, 'Oxford is a city of massive contrasts and (there are) many rough sleepers in the centre of town. Generally people (are) not afraid of crime or antisocial behaviour in the area'. The manager is planning to develop a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

None proposed for the meeting house apart from upgrading the WCs. In the garden a children's climbing frame is planned. In the medium term, rebuilding and enlarging of the Garden Room behind no. 43 is being considered, as well as possible changes to the layout of the ground floor of the listed building, putting the kitchen in the centre.

## **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 has recently been sympathetically upgraded to provide better insulation and comfort heating. Window replacement has already taken place, improving insulation but at the expense of the original architectural character. Future changes should aim to retain the open character of the meeting room, including the panelling, and the stair to the gallery. The ancillary spaces are less sensitive to change. The frontage building is listed Grade II, and so any changes will need to take account of its special architectural and historic interest. The greatest sensitivity lies in the fabric and fitting out of the front part of the building. Features such as panelling, fireplaces and historic floor finishes should be respected. The installation of a lift may be problematic (but is not currently being considered). The kitchen, modern Garden Room and late nineteenth-century library are of lesser sensitivity. The proposed replacement of the Garden Room would not be contentious in historic buildings terms, and should allow for an enhancement of the rear aspect of the listed building.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building is already well used by the wider community, and the likely constraints concerning extended use are no different from those outlined above.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* The frontage building could fairly readily revert to residential or possibly other uses, subject to planning and listed building consent. The future of the meeting house would most likely be bound up with that of the frontage building, although it could (subject to planning) be hived off for separate use, with access from Pusey Lane. The building is of at least local architectural and historical interest, and makes a positive (albeit minor) contribution to the local Conservation Area, and so it would be desirable for a new use for to be found rather than for this part of the site to be developed. It would also be desirable for that use to retain the internal space of the meeting room – it might therefore lend itself more easily to an office or gallery use than a residential one.

## **Part 5: Category: 3**



## **Part 6: List descriptions**

### ***43 St Giles***

Name: 43, ST GILES STREET  
List entry Number: 1047145  
Location: 43, ST GILES STREET  
County: Oxfordshire  
District: Oxford  
District Type: District Authority  
Grade: II  
Date first listed: 12-Jan-1954  
Legacy System: LBS  
UID: 245841

1. ST GILES' STREET 1485 (West side) No 43 SP 5106 NW 5/514 12.1.54.

II GV

House. RCHM 179. Dated on front "W P 1660" but has been subsequently altered. 3-storeyed plastered rubble with cellars, moulded cornice and Welsh slate roof. There are 3 windows in each floor in stuccoed frames; those in the ground and 1st floors have sashes; the 2nd floor windows have 2-light casements. The sash windows all have glazing bars. There is a tripartite sash on the 1st floor. The central doorway has an early C19 reeded frame with angle paterae. The side doorway on the North (now used for No 42) has flat pilasters with moulded caps and pediment, all in wood. Interior: The whole of the 1st floor front has been converted to a "meeting room". A few ancient flat slat balusters of the original staircase remain in the upper flight.

Nos 31 to 46 (consec) and Nos 49 to 56 (consec) form a group.

Listing NGR: SP5114206792

### ***42 St Giles***

Name: 42, ST GILES STREET  
List entry Number: 1068618  
Location: 42, ST GILES STREET  
County: Oxfordshire  
District: Oxford  
District Type: District Authority  
Grade: II  
Date first listed: 28-Jun-1972  
Legacy System: LBS  
UID: 245839

1. ST GILES' STREET 1485 (West Side) No 42 SP 5106 NW 5/513

II GV

House. 3-storey C19 stuccoed front with 1st-floor iron balcony, band at 2nd floor, moulded cornice and parapet. 2 sash windows. The doorway on the South is part of the No 43 building on the South. The windows have glazing bars.

Nos 31 to 46 (consec) and Nos 49 to 56 (consec) form a group.

Listing NGR: SP5113906801

***Stone outside 42 St Giles***

Name: STONE OUTSIDE NUMBER 42 ST GILES STREET

List entry Number: 1046585

Location: STONE OUTSIDE NUMBER 42 ST GILES STREET, ST GILES STREET

County: Oxfordshire

District: Oxford

District Type: District Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 28-Jun-1972

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 245248

INSCRIBED STONES 1. 1485 Hundred stones Stone outside No 42 St Giles' Street SP 5106  
NW 5/740

II

An ancient stone with the worn inscription 'Here endeth North Gate Hundred'.

Listing NGR: SP5114206823