

Friends Meeting House, Charlbury

Market Street, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, OX7 3PH

National Grid Reference: SP 35671 19596



Statement of Significance

A late eighteenth-century meeting house with attached burial ground, occupying a prominent position in the local conservation area. Charlbury Meeting House is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Evidential value

The late eighteenth-century building has undergone several changes over time, reflecting changes in fashion and practice in meeting house design. Despite some losses, the character remains that of a typical Georgian meeting house. The burial ground has marked graves ranging in date from 1808 to 1945. The building and site are of high evidential value.

Historical value

Friends have worshipped here almost continuously since 1681. The present meeting house was built in 1771, and alterations were made in about 1860, which in turn were largely reversed or superseded by alterations of 1990-1. The attached burial ground contains memorials to local worthies, not least members of the Albright and Spendlove families, both locally active in social reform. The meeting house fell out of Quaker use for some thirty years after the Second World War but the use resumed in 1987. Both the burial ground and the meeting house site are of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The stone building is a typical late Georgian meeting house design, with symmetrical front elevation, hipped roof, and neat small burial ground enclosed by retaining walls, all making a positive contribution to the local conservation area. Inside, the high coved ceiling is more unusual and worthy of note. The building and site are of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building and its facilities are well used by the wider community. The site also has high communal value by virtue of the townscape contribution of the building and the open space of the burial ground.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Oxford & Swindon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007520*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *West Oxfordshire District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Charlbury*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1053243*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Charlbury*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1779; 1990-1*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established; Robert Franklin*
- 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: *Robin Harland*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial ground in Witney*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 497-8

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, pp.9, 11, 23, 64

Pensom, B., *Charlbury Friends' Meeting, The Early History*, 2015

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England*, 1986, p. 173

Local Meeting Survey, by Robin Harland, April 2016

Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (HER 277)

Quinquennial report, April 2014

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

2.1 Historical background



Figure 1: The meeting house in c.1800 (Charlbury Local Meeting)

A small meeting house was built on the present site in Market Street in 1681, on land given by Thomas Gilkes of Sibford. This was replaced by the present building and burial ground in 1779, 'the stones and mortar of the old building being used in the new' (PM 1779, quoted in Butler, p. 497). The cost was £191 1s 2d. The original external appearance, with the entrance on the return on the north elevation, is shown on a drawing of c.1800 (figure 1), and a conjectural plan by Butler is shown at figure 3.

From 1856 Quarterly Meeting met each summer at Charlbury, for which purpose various alterations were made in about 1860, including a lean-to addition on the north side and a new main entrance between two of the windows on the front (west) elevation. A stone panel bearing the date AD 1779 was set or reset over the new entrance. External window shutters shown on the drawing of c.1800 may have been removed at this time. Inside, a shuttered partition was introduced, or more likely reused from the old building.



Figure 2: Undated photograph showing the alterations of c.1860 (Charlbury Local Meeting)

The meeting was discontinued in 1957, and the building was let as an office to J. Alan Bristow, architect. It returned to Quaker use in 1987, when internal alterations included the removal of the elders' stand and the return of the original or previous benches, tables and bookcases. In 1990-1 a new extension was built on the north side, replacing that of c.1860, from designs by Robert Franklin of Oxford; it was named the Arthur Bissell Room, after the principal donor. This provides a new entrance lobby, kitchen and WCs and a small meeting room. The c.1860 door on the west elevation was removed, but the datestone remains above, along with a cast iron boot scraper to the side of the blocked opening.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house (figure 3) was built in 1779 and altered and extended in c.1860, with those alterations largely reversed or superseded by further alterations in 1990-1. It replaced an earlier and smaller building of 1681, and the stone is said to have been reused. The windows have raised brick dressings and the slate roof is hipped. The 1990-1 north addition (date stone on west elevation) is also faced with coursed stone rubble (over blockwork) with raised brick window surrounds, and a slate roof. The original main (west) elevation faces towards the burial ground and street and has three glazing bars sash windows, double glazed modern replacements of 1991 following the original design. A datestone inscribed 'AD 1779' and a cast iron boot scraper denote the position of an entrance formed in c.1860 and blocked in 1990-1. The entrance is now via the north addition.

A kitchen, WCs and small meeting room give off the entrance lobby, which leads on to the main original space, which is divided roughly one third/two thirds by an unpainted pine panelled shuttered partition. The smaller space, lit by one window on the west side, was formerly for women's business meetings but is now a library. The larger space (lit by two

windows on the west side and one on the east) is the meeting room. Unusually, the meeting room has a steeply coved (not coffered, as stated in the list entry) plaster ceiling, with a decorative cast iron ventilator placed centrally. Above, in the roof space, is the original king post roof. The meeting room has lost its original elders' stand at the southern end, and a doorway with an incongruous exposed rubble stone arch has been formed to a boiler room and storage area beyond. The pine boarded dado around the perimeter of the room (raised at the south end) and boarded floors are modern.

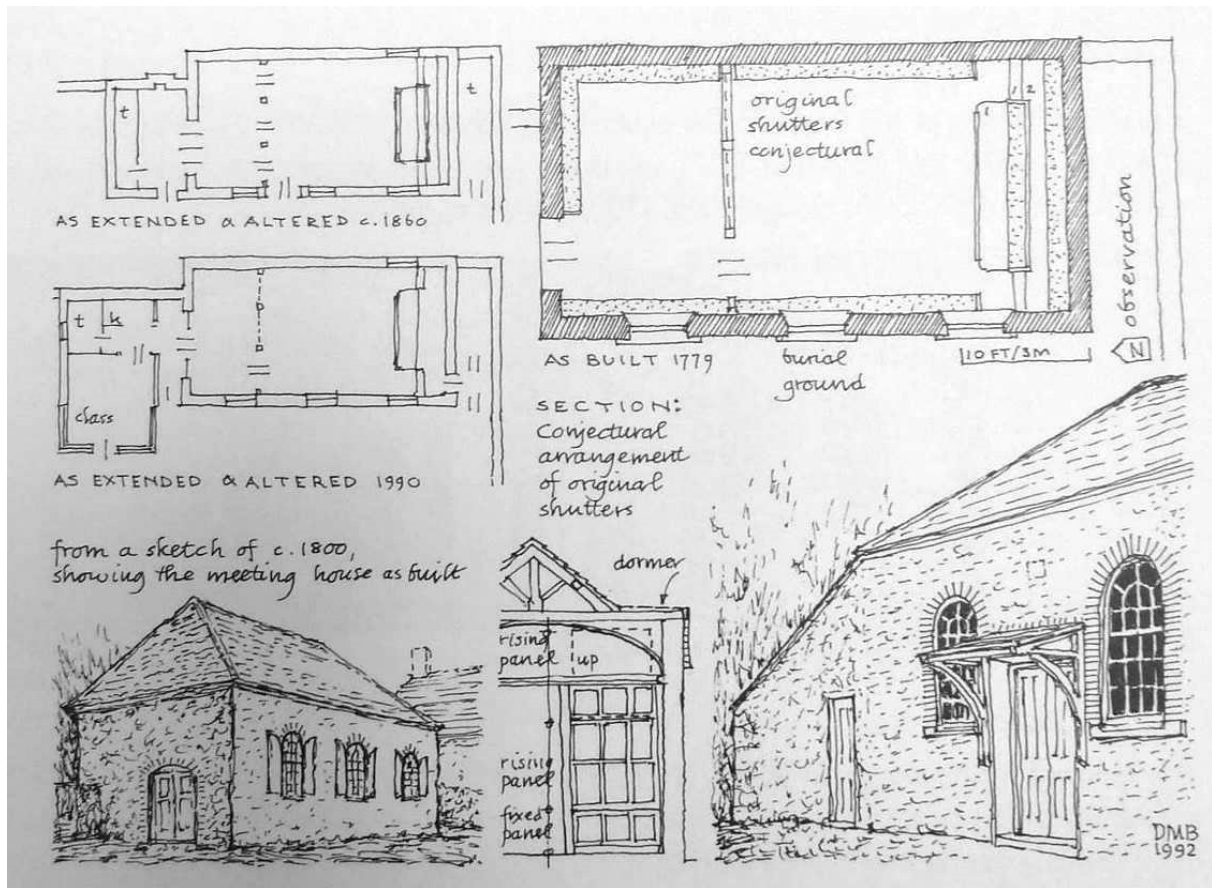


Figure 3: Plan and elevations, from Butler, Vol 2, p. 497

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are some open backed benches with arm rests arranged around the perimeter of the meeting room (and one in the library), probably of nineteenth-century date. Otherwise, the furnishings are modern.

2.4 Attached burial ground

The burial ground is in front of the building, occupying the space between the meeting house and the street. The plan at figure 4 shows the marked burials in 1986, of which nos. 1-17 remain *in situ* (the headstones for nos. 18-25 were relocated to the northern perimeter wall in 1990-1). Headstones range in date from 1808 to 1945. Here are buried seventeen members of the Albright family, nineteenth-century benefactors and contributors to social reform in the town, and Robert Spendlove (1726-1822), another wealthy benefactor. Today the burial ground is used for the burial of cremated remains.

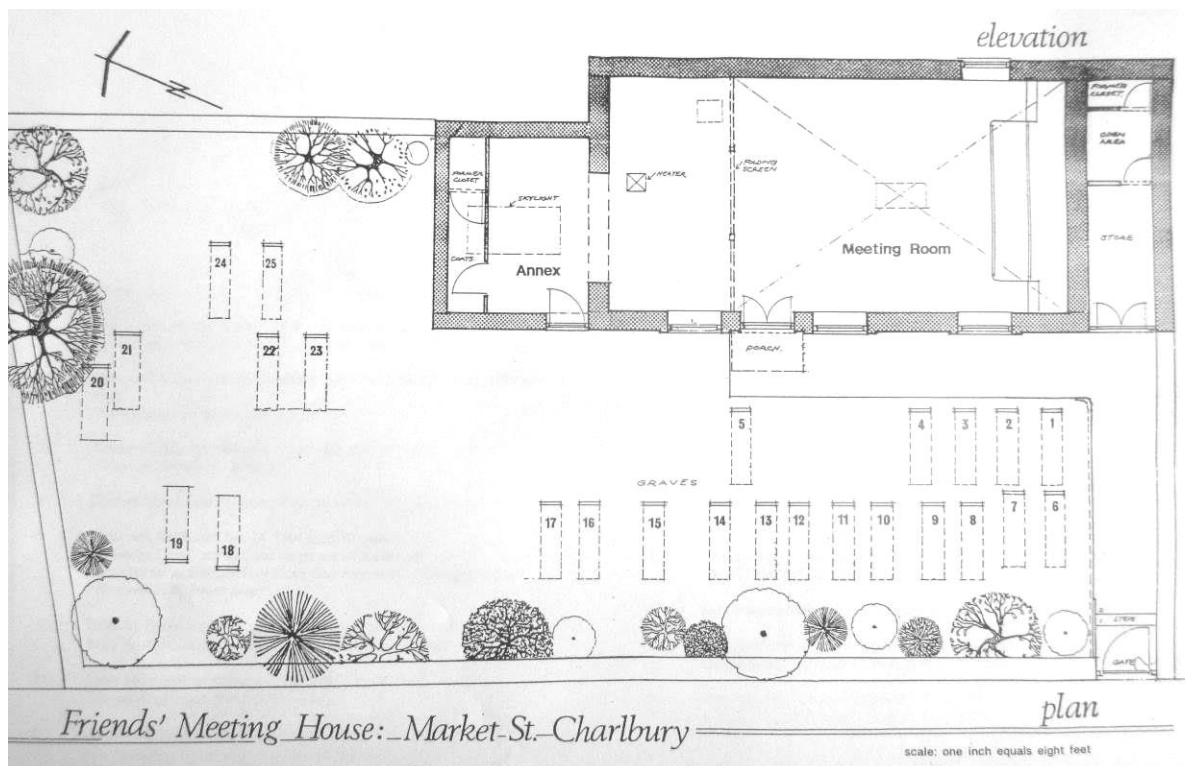


Figure 4: Plan of 1986, showing location of marked burials at that time (Charlbury Local Meeting)

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a central location in the Charlbury Conservation Area, raised above Market Street behind a high stone retaining wall.

There is a detached burial ground at Witney (NGR: SP 36017 10395), although this has no connection with Charlbury meeting house. It remains in Quaker ownership, but the Grade II-listed meeting house of 1712 was closed in 1966 and converted to a house in c.1980 (Butler, p. 506).

2.6 Listed status

The building is appropriately listed Grade II. The list description predates the alterations of 1990-1 and requires updating and correction.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

High. The meeting house is located within the medieval core of Charlbury, and is on the site of its predecessor of 1681.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory but with minor localised problems. There is spalling on some of the headstones, with resultant loss of inscriptions. The boundary retaining walls have been rebuilt.

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house is well maintained. Works recommended in the most recent QIR (2014) have been carried out. A legacy of over £100,000 received in 2014 has allowed for the establishment of a reserve building fund and an expendable fund. There is a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures undertaken to reduce environmental impact have included the installation of double glazing. The main roof has not been insulated, but a thermographic survey in 2015 suggested that there was no significant heat loss through the roof or walls. However, the roof of the 1991 addition has been insulated. The external door to the boiler room has been draught-proofed. The usual recycling arrangements are in place.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs; these include WCs, kitchen and small meeting room in the 1991 extension, and a library alongside the main meeting room. There is no resident warden.

The town is served by public transport, including hourly trains, but buses do not run on Sundays. There is no car parking on site, but there is some street parking and a public car park is about 600m away. Bicycles may be chained to a bench.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, but there is a fairly steep slope from the pavement to the building. There is step-free access into and around the building, and an accessible WC and hearing loop are provided.

3.6 Community Use

In addition to use by Friends for three to five hours a week, the building is let to third parties for about twelve hours each week (out of a possible eighty). There is a lettings policy with proscriptions on alcohol, unsupervised children, childrens' parties, commercial activities, private social events and amplified music. Lectures, hustings, non-political meetings and cultural and charitable activities are encouraged, and the small room is used for individual counselling sessions. Local organisations pay less. Users appreciate the location, warmth, quiet and price, and the ease of booking when compared to the two other main spaces for hire in the town.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no recorded instances of crime. This is a well-cared-for area with 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 has been fairly sympathetically adapted to meet present-day needs. Future changes should aim to retain the open character of the

meeting room, the unusual tall coved ceiling, the pine shuttered partition 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 building is already well used by the wider community, and the likely constraints concerning extended use are likely to be the same as those outlined above.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The Grade II listing means that in the regrettable event of the building being closed it would be necessary to find a suitable alternative use. It has been used as an office in the past, and could be so used again, or as a small gallery or shop (subject to planning). However, there is likely to be pressure for residential conversion, which in turn would lead to pressure for a more intensive internal adaptation and, most likely, removal or relocation of the headstones in the burial ground. This option should only be considered as a last resort.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: QUAKER MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1053243

Location: QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, MARKET STREET

County: Oxfordshire

District: West Oxfordshire

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Charlbury

Grade: II

Date first listed: 09-Oct-1980

Date of most recent amendment: 18-May-1990

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 254206

CHARLBURY MARKET STREET SP3519 5/64 (East side) 9/10/80 Quaker Meeting House (formerly listed as premises occupied by J. Alan Bristow, architect)

GV II

Quaker Meeting House. Date stone 1779. Coursed squared rubble with brick dressings; hipped slate roof. Single storey; 3-window range. Original entrance in pitched-roofed lobby to right with double plank doors in chambered doorcase. Late C19 double doors inserted to left of centre with hood on moulded timber brackets with open spandrels. 3 original round-headed brick arched windows have with glazing bars. Later lean-to extension to left. Interior extensively remodelled but retains its coffered ceiling.

Listing NGR: SP3567119600