

Quaker Meeting House, Jordans

Welders Lane, Jordans, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, HP9 2SN

National Grid Reference: SU 97454 91022



Statement of Significance

A fine and little-altered late seventeenth-century meeting house, with an older burial ground in which are buried several Quakers of national and international significance. Jordans is a building and site of exceptional heritage significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1688 and retains its historic character to an unusually complete degree, despite a fire in 2005. Features such as the fixed seating in the elders' stand, the gallery shutters and the headstones in the

burial ground are all evocative of Quaker traditions and values. The making good of the building following the fire is itself part of its evidential value.

Historical value

This is one of the oldest and most complete meeting houses in the south of England. The burial ground is older still, and contains the graves of several notable Quakers, amongst them William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, and the poet Thomas Ellwood.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has a plain, somewhat vernacular late seventeenth-century character, with its old tile roof, cross transom windows and fine brickwork. The unmodernised interior, with its eighteenth-century fittings and simple finishes, is evocative and moving. The new additions have been carefully designed to fit into this very sensitive context. The two burial grounds and the wider setting of rolling, wooded country add to its aesthetic value.

Communal value

With the new facilities the meeting house has been able to extend use by community groups. Even without these, the outward appearance of the building and its contribution to the local scene and history lend it communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Chilterns*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007130*
- 1.3 Owner: *Chilterns Area Quaker Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Chiltern District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Chalfont St. Giles*
- 1.7 Listed status: *I*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1332449*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Jordans*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1688; 2005-8*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not known; Andrew Townsend*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *4 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Alex Wildwood, John Smithson*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial ground*

1.18 Attached burial ground: Yes

1.19 Bibliographic references:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 25-6

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, pp. 13, 26, fig. 36, pls. XLIX, L, LIX

Chilterns Area Quaker Meeting, *Jordans Burial Ground; A list of burials from 1671 to 1845*, 2010

Jordans Quaker Meeting House, A Guide, 2015

Local Meeting Survey, by Jane Edmonds, August 2015

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

2.1. Historical background



Figure 1: J. Doyle Penrose, 'Presence in the Midst', 1916
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/qmh/3965607508>, licensed for re-use under Creative Commons

The Meeting was originally called Chalfont Meeting, and started in the homes of various Friends in South Buckinghamshire. Around 1624 a kitchen was built at Jordans Farm (to the north of the present meeting house site), where Quakers met for worship, and where George Fox paid several visits. Local legend has it that the timbers used in the construction of the barn at Jordans Farm came from the Mayflower, which took the Pilgrim Fathers from Plymouth to the United States in 1620.

Jordans was part of the Upperside Monthly Meeting, established in 1668, when Meetings took place at the home of Thomas Ellwood (poet and friend of John Milton) at Coleshill, near Beaconsfield. In 1671 a field called Well Close was bought for a burial ground. A further four acres were acquired in 1688, for the purpose of constructing a meeting house. This was built

in just three months and opened in the same year, two years after James II's Declaration of Indulgence, which suspended laws against dissenters. The meeting house was known as New Jordans to distinguish it from the farmhouse, which became Old Jordans. In 1689, following William III's Act of Toleration, the meeting house was registered, thenceforward becoming known as Jordans Meeting.

There are historical references to alterations to the meeting house in 1733, and it is probably from this time that most of the present furnishings date, including the panelling and the elders' stand.

The meeting was discontinued by 1798, and did not re-open until 1910. The loft and the room below it accommodated a resident caretaker, and the building remained looked after, and was frequently shown to visitors.

Behind the meeting house there was stabling for twenty horses. This part of the building was altered in 1867, when the hayloft was converted to additional rooms. In 1912, soon after the re-opening of Jordans, Friends acquired Old Jordans Farm, which became a Quaker hostel. One of the farm's orchards was enclosed and made into a new burial ground.

In 1916 Jordans was the backdrop for James Doyle Penrose's famous painting 'Presence in the Midst' (figure 1), reproductions of which are to be found in many a meeting house.

Further additions and alterations were carried out by Hubert Lidbetter in 1958, with classrooms and WCs on the ground floor and a flat for the warden above. The plan of the building in 1995 is shown in David Butler's drawing at figure 2.

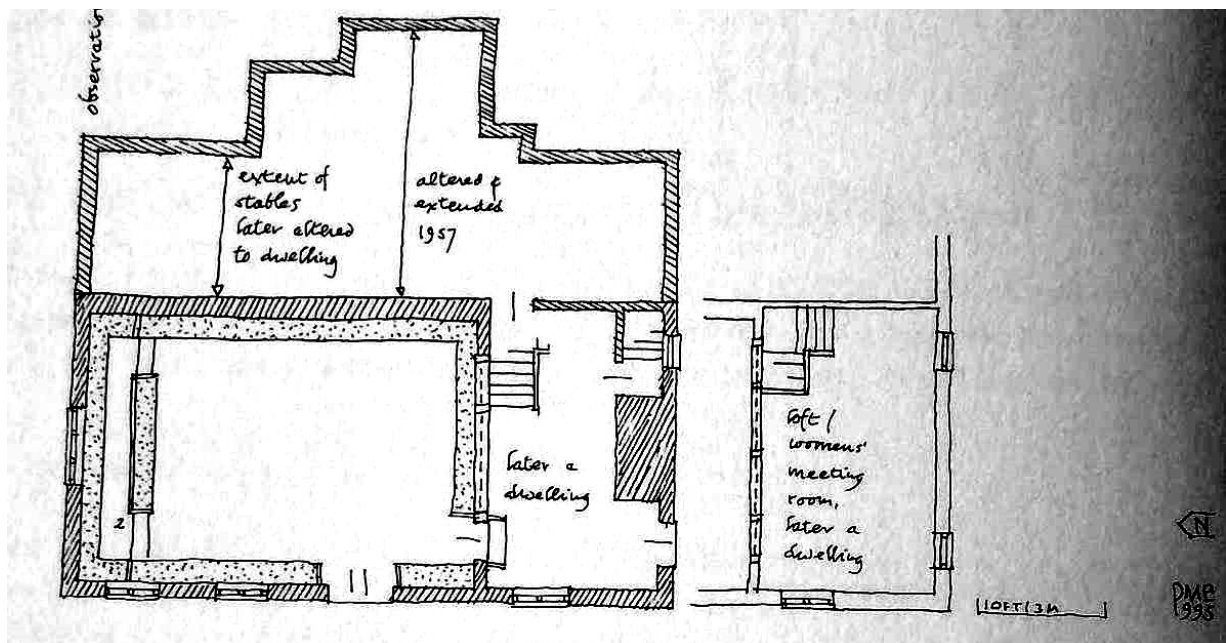
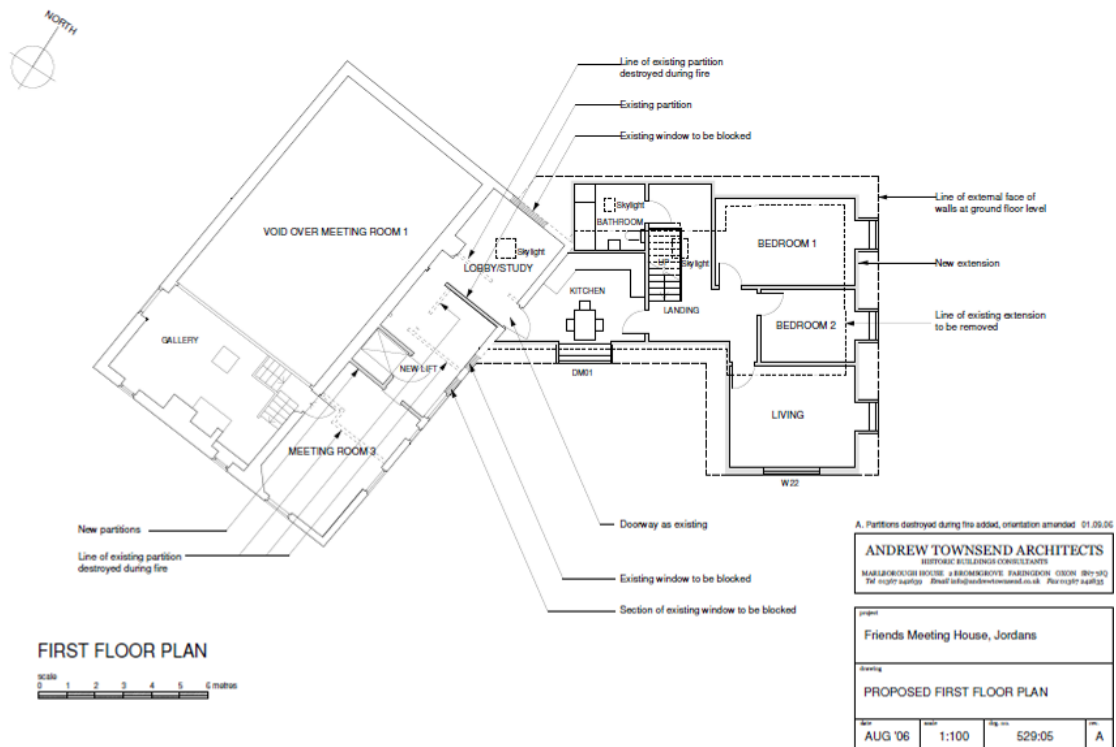
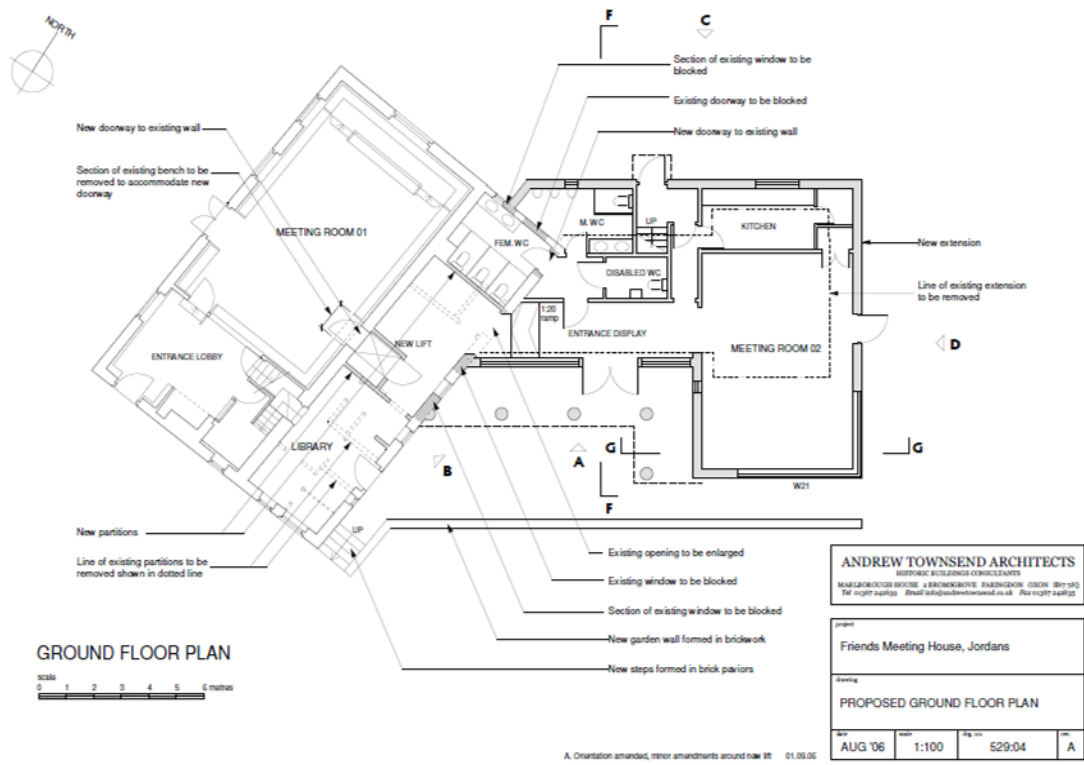


Figure 2: Plan in 1995, from Butler, vol. 1, p. 26

In March 2005 a fire broke out in the upstairs kitchen of the 1958 extension, causing extensive damage to that part of the building and, more seriously, to the roof structure of the meeting house. Mercifully, the rest of the meeting house, including its furnishings, was not seriously damaged. The building was carefully repaired under the direction of Andrew Townsend Architects, with substantial additions providing new facilities (figures 3 and 4). The meeting house reopened in 2008, the scheme winning the SPAB's John Betjeman Award for exemplary repairs to churches and chapels in use.

Old Jordans and its barn were sold in 2006.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures



Figures 3 and 4: Ground and first floor plans (by kind permission of Andrew Townsend Architects)

The meeting house was built in 1688 (a date formerly incised on the cornice), and was extended at the back at various times, these additions largely replaced or subsumed within the additions of 2008. The meeting house is of red brick laid in Flemish bond with random burnt headers, with a coved cornice and a hipped tile roof. The front (west elevation) has a central entrance with a four-panel twofold door with astragal moulding and oblong two-light timber mullioned fanlight. The fanlight (and all the windows) has diamond leaded glazing. To the left (north), two mullion and transom casement windows with flat gauged brick arches and panelled shutters light the double height space of the meeting room. The accommodation to the right is arranged in two storeys, with paired casement windows with panelled shutters, the opening to the ground floor with a gauged brick arch and that to the first with a soldier course under the eaves. On the north elevation there is a large three-light mullion and transom window to the meeting room, while the south return elevation has a side entrance and a range of smaller windows. The rear elevation contains the original stables and hayloft, as later adapted, and now joined to the additions of 2008. The additions are faced in brick and stained weatherboard, with a tile roof sweeping down to a loggia or covered way at the entrance, with primitive timber columns evoking ancient classical precedents.

Inside, the historic building contains the meeting room, an entrance lobby with gallery over and, at the back, a library and WCs, a lift added in 2008 and a lobby/study and meeting room above (meeting room 3). The ground floor of the former cottage has a tile floor and a large open fireplace. A vertical sliding shutter opens up to the meeting room. Alongside this are a door and a step up to the meeting room. This is a rectangular space, lit on the north and west sides, with plastered and limewashed walls and a coved ceiling, unpolished deal dado panelling, and a floor of orange-red bricks laid on bare earth. The large doors on the west side are curtained. The dado ramps up at the north end for the sounding board of the elders' stand, partially obscuring the large north window. The stand has a fixed bench and moulded rail in front, and on the sounding board are four hat pegs. Reached by a short flight of steps at the opposite (south) end is a gallery, originally used for women's business meetings, with vertical sliding shutters between oak posts and a plastered gallery front. The rear spaces have largely lost their historic features. There is a brick corner fireplace of early twentieth-century character in meeting room 3.

2.3 Loose furnishings

In the meeting room deal benches (not original to the building) run the length of the two side walls. Three benches by John Padday date from the late twentieth century. Many older wooden benches remain; none were lost in the fire.

In the gallery one of the original benches from the meeting room survives, salvaged from the fire and now worn. On the walls are several paintings, drawings and documents associated with the history of the Meeting, including the original indenture conveying the property to Quaker hands, a copy of the Declaration of Indulgence of 1687, and the (water damaged) burial register, recording nearly 400 burials. There is also a copy of Penrose's Presence in the Midst.

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground preceded the meeting house by seventeen years. Although nearly 400 burials are recorded, few are marked. Amongst these are headstones to William Penn (1644-1718), founder of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (photo bottom right), his first wife Gulielma, his second wife Hannah, and ten of his children. Others include the Quaker writer and theologian Isaac Penington (1616-79) and his wife Mary, the poet Thomas Ellwood (1639-1713) and Joseph Rule (d. 1770), known as the White Quaker from his habit of wearing unbleached cotton robes. The early graves were not originally marked, or if they were the headstones were removed in 1766 when such vanity was declared inappropriate. In 1862 new

headstones were placed over some of them, drawing on the memory of an elderly Friend called Prince Butterfield. While his recollections from childhood cannot be regarded as entirely reliable, the graves are nevertheless a focus of pilgrimage to many, particularly American visitors. In 1881 a request was made to transfer William Penn's bones to Pennsylvania, a request dismissed by Friends (however there was soon afterwards an illicit and unsuccessful attempt to dig up the grave).

Also planted in the burial ground is a charred roof timber, a poignant reminder of the fire of 2005.

The remains of a row of lime trees mark the northern boundary of the original burial ground. Beyond this is a small mound, over the vault of the Flemish Vandewall family, eighteenth century owners of Jordans Farm. Beyond this lies the new burial ground (see 2.5).

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting



Figure 5: The new burial ground

The meeting house and burial ground occupy a peaceful rural setting in rolling, well-wooded Chiltern countryside. A hedge runs parallel to Jordans Lane. The new extensions lie to the rear of the meeting house, where off-street parking has also been provided. To the north of the meeting house lies the new burial ground and beyond this the buildings of Old Jordans, now in separate ownership.

The new burial ground (NGR: SU 97470 91122, figure 5) is joined to the old one and is not strictly speaking detached, but may be treated as such since it is in separate ownership. It belongs to Friends Trusts and is administered on behalf of London West and North West London Area Meetings. The land was formerly an orchard belonging to Jordans Farm and was acquired along with that property in 1912. The site still contains some fruit trees. The

burials are arranged in a series of concentric half circles, mostly occupying the eastern half of the plot, with plenty of space remaining on the west side

2.6. Listed status

The building is listed Grade I, appropriately reflecting its outstanding architectural and historical importance.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

High.

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 building is in good condition following the major repairs completed in 2008, and is well maintained. The abundance of trees around the meeting house means that autumn gutter and gully clearance is a priority. There is no recent QIR.

3.3. Sustainability

The Meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures have been taken to improve energy efficiency, including secondary glazing in the meeting room. Details of measures taken on sustainability are not provided in the questionnaire return.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house is now provided with good facilities, including four meeting rooms, a kitchen and an upstairs flat. These improvements, and the increased use they have generated have brought another problem – insufficient car parking spaces. There is a railway station half a mile away, but most visitors drive unless very local.

3.5. Access

An access audit has not been carried out, but the building and the new facilities are now fully accessible, insofar as the constraints of Grade I listing allow. This includes a lift, which has enabled step-free access to all parts of the building except the gallery (which could not be made accessible in a way that is likely to receive listed building consent). Otherwise, there is level circulation into and around the building, and a hearing loop is installed. No special provision has been made for partially-sighted people.

3.6 Community Use

Average attendance at Meetings for Worship is 20-25, and Friends use the building and its facilities on average 8-10 hours a week. Other parties use the facilities for 27 out of a possible 140 hours a week. There is a lettings policy, and users have to be in sympathy with Quaker values. Users cite the reasonably priced facilities, peaceful rural location and convenience to motorways. The architectural and historic character of Jordans no doubt also attracts lettings.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reported instances of crime or antisocial behaviour. Jordans is not in an area of high levels of crime and social 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: Jordans is a building of outstanding architectural and historical importance, and only minor and carefully-considered changes to the historic parts are likely to be acceptable to the local authority and Historic England. The new accommodation is less sensitive and more flexible in nature, although any new work here should continue with the same level of quality and attention to detail.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The new facilities have greatly extended the scope for community use. The same considerations apply as above.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: In this very regrettable event, the building would not lend itself to conversion to alternative use without unacceptable impact on its architectural and historical significance. It would be necessary to explore the vesting of the meeting house and old burial ground in a trust dedicated to its future preservation and presentation to visitors.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description

Name: JORDANS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1332449

Location: JORDANS MEETING HOUSE, WELDERS LANE

Grade: I

Date first listed: 22-Dec-1958

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

CHALFONT ST GILES WELDERS LANE 1. 5134 Jordans Meeting House SU 99 SE 2/67
22.12.58

I

1688 (formerly incised on cornice). Red brick, hipped old tile roof with coved cornice. Left hand section containing meeting room is one storeyed with 2 cross mullion diamond lattice casements with flat arches and panelled shutters. Four panel 2 fold door with astragal moulding and oblong 2-light wood mullion fan. Right hand section is 2 storeyed with paired casements. Panelled shutters. Ground floor flat arches. Altered 1717 (incised on brick on north wall).

Interior: meeting room has original panelling. Gallery dated 1733.

In graveyard immediately outside are buried William Penn and members of his family and Thomas Ellwood (diarist, prominent Quaker and friend of John Mitton). This meeting house by reason of its antiquity and its associations with William Penn and the early Quakers has very great historical interest.

RCHM I, 82 Monument 2, and VCH III, p 185.

Listing NGR: SU9745491022