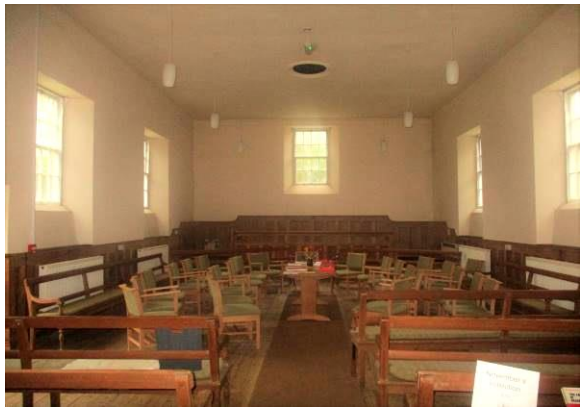


Friends Meeting House, Sibford

Sibford Gower, Banbury, OX15 5RY

National Grid Reference: SP 35171 37771



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has overall high heritage significance as a nineteenth century meeting house, retaining some internal fittings, built on the site of an earlier meeting house and set in an attractive burial ground.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1864, replacing an earlier building on site, a late seventeenth century meeting house. The burials in the attached burial ground are largely undisturbed. The site has high evidential value.

Historical value

This has been a site of Quaker worship since the 1670s. The present meeting house retains much of its historic layout and a number of original or early features, including the elders' stand and dado panelling. The simple headstones of the burial ground remain. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.

Aesthetic value

In keeping with Quaker principles, the meeting house is a plain, but attractive building, and retains a good set of fitted benches and panelling. The building is part of the distinctive character of Sibford Gower making use of local materials in a vernacular style. The burial ground has unmarked graves and simple headstones following Quaker tradition, which adds to the aesthetic value of the site. The building and burial ground has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house was built for and remains in primarily Quaker use. It makes a positive contribution to the local conservation area, and as such is appreciated by local people who may not be users of the building. The building and burial ground embody Quaker values of simplicity. The meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Banbury and Evesham*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0028810*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Cherwell District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Sibford Gower*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Local*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower and Burdrop*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1864*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Thomas Manning*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *5 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Paul Mobbs and Frank Cookson*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites:

Meeting house cottage and Mission Hall, Sibford Gower, Banbury, OX15 5RX

Detached burial ground at Lower Brailes, Warwickshire (NGR: SP 3092 3928)

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Banbury Historical Society, *Cake & Cockhorse*, vol 7 (8), 1979

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 504-505

Cherwell District Council, *Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower and Burdrop Conservation Area Appraisal*, 2012

Jack Wood, *Some Rural Quakers* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1991).

Frank Cookson, Local Meeting Survey, September 2015.

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

2.1 Historical background

In 1668 a Meeting is reported to have taken place at the house of Thomas Gilkes. Gilkes, along with other Quakers in the area, notably the Fardon family of Deddington, developed from blacksmithing to become pioneering clockmakers, a craft that would be continued by the descendants and apprentices of these two Quaker families throughout the eighteenth century. In 1670, George Fox travelled to Sibford and in 1678 he returned to preach to hundreds of people in a barn on the 31st January. The exact date when a meeting house (and burial ground) was built near the site of the present building has not been determined; it is noted by Wood (1991) and Butler (1999) as being built in 1678 – 81 on land given by Mary Little. The interior of the meeting house is described by Wood as having a loft inserted in 1736 with shutters to enable men and women to have their separate business meetings.

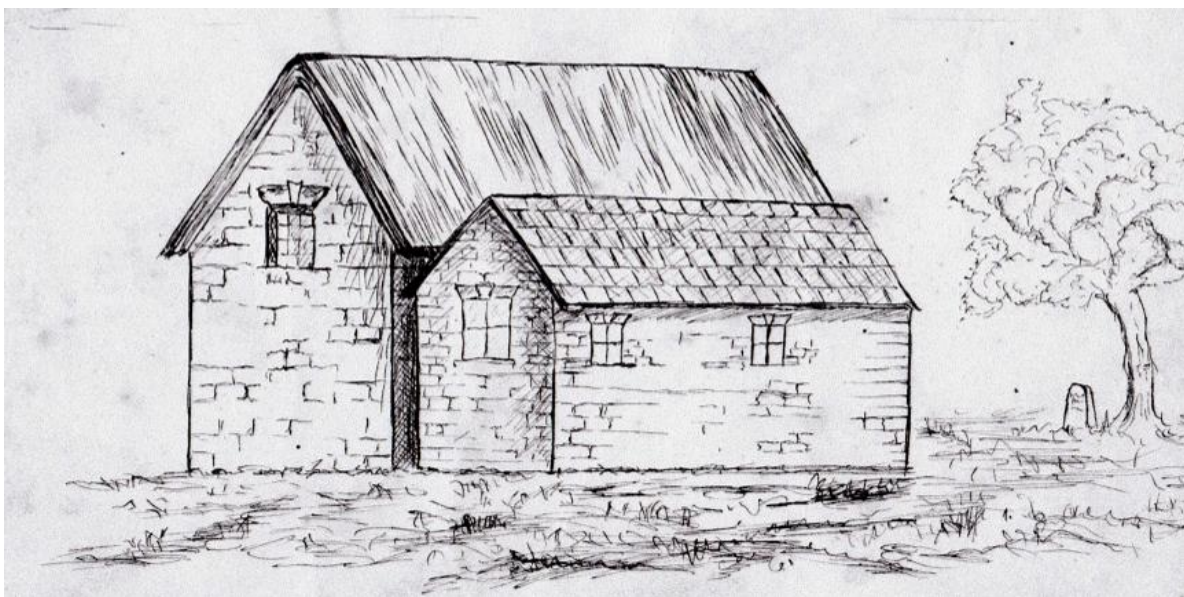


Figure 1: Reconstruction of the 1678- 81 meeting house, artist unknown (Sibford MH Archive)

In 1842, a Friends School was established at Sibford Ferris to provide education for children of Quakers who had been disowned for marrying outside the circle, later the school taught all Quaker children. By 1864, the meeting house was unable to accommodate the needs of the Friends at the time, who welcomed the attendance of the school children, and as a result the present meeting house was built. It was built by Thomas Manning at a cost of £435,16s,0d. The meeting house was built partially on the footprint of the former meeting house, on land given to the Friends by John Soden.

Internally, the main meeting room was subdivided into two spaces, the main meeting room and the women's meeting room (Fig.2). The rooms were separated by a wooden partition, with a shutter mechanism. In 1891, heating was installed and at the same time the partitions were removed and the doorway to the west of the meeting room was infilled. The partitions were recycled and used in the mission room. Probably at this date, the ranges to the west and east were extended with a lean-to extension built to their north face. In 1879, Friends purchased three cottages to the east of the meeting house, one cottage was converted to accommodate a caretaker and the other two altered to provide a mission room. Following the alterations to the meeting house in 1891, women held their meetings in the mission room and it was also used for gospel meetings, attended by people from the village.

During the Second World War the meeting house became a venue for the village school and two evacuee families were housed in the mission room.

In 2008, the architect Paul Richardson RIBA modernised the kitchen and toilet facilities. The work also involved improving disabled access and a new driveway. The same architect was appointed in 2012 to reinstate the doorway which was infilled in 1891 to provide a fire exit and level access into the building.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

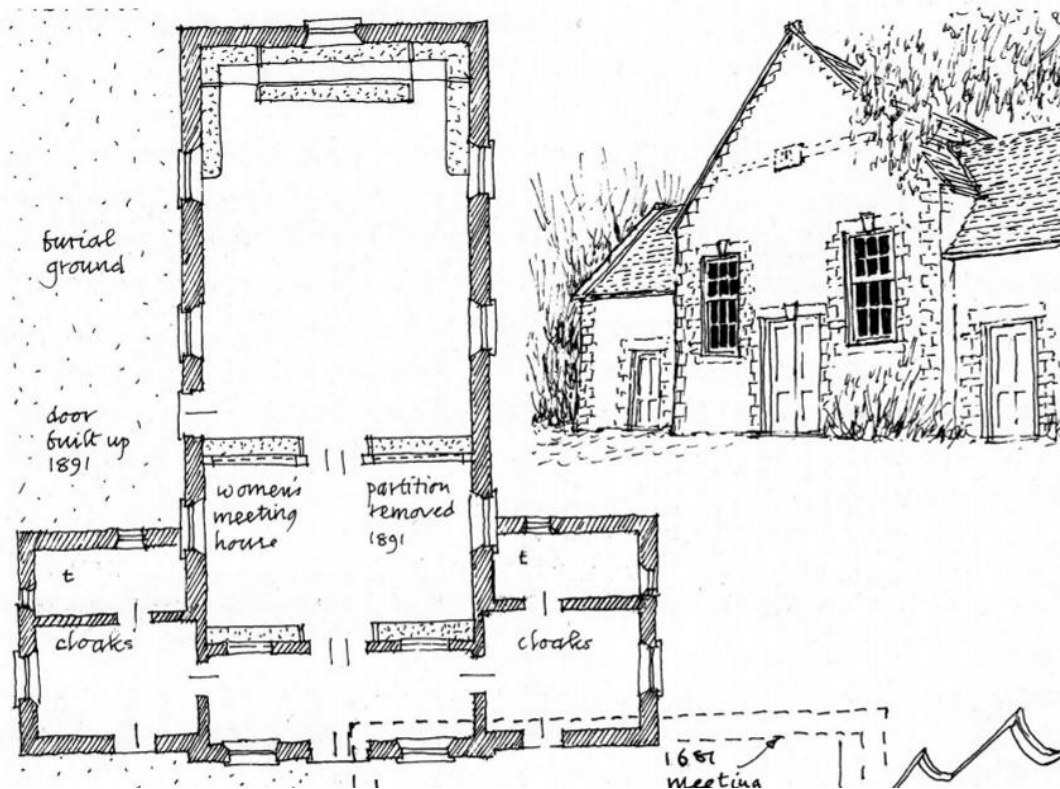


Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north at the top; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. II, p.504)

The meeting house was built in 1864 from designs by Thomas Manning. The style of the building reflects that Georgian elegance but also has a vernacular charm. The building has a T-shape plan and is constructed of Hornton Stone with stone quoins and copings. The roof is covered in Welsh slate and the rainwater goods are a mixture of plastic and cast iron. The symmetrical front (south) elevation has a central slightly projecting gabled entrance with date stone above the doorway, flanked by two 12-pane sash windows. Either side of the central gable are lower ranges accommodating the children's room to the west and kitchen facilities to the east, with a doorway to each range on the south elevation. All the openings have quoins and dropped keystones to the lintels. The west and east elevations to the meeting room each have three sixteen-pane sash windows with a doorway to the west, and the short wings each have a sixteen-pane sash window and a cat slide roof. There is a memorial plaque to commemorate those whose ashes are in the burial ground under the west window of the west wing. The gabled rear wall to the north has a sixteen-pane sash window with stone head with keystone and stone sill (no quoins as with the rest of the fenestration).

Internally, the meeting room, children's room and ancillary facilities are accessed via a lobby area from the south. The area is well lit by sash windows to the south, walls are plainly painted with coat hooks to the east, two internal six-pane sash windows on the north wall above the entrance to the meeting room, the floor is laid with red and black quarry tiles. The meeting room is a large rectangular space which has been little altered since the late nineteenth century; plain plastered walls, with a panelled timber dado to the perimeter, raised elder's stand and seating to the north, and flooring of exposed timber boards aligned north to south. The space which once formed the women's meeting is marked by the last row of benches to the south (the partition was removed in 1891); this area has a small library area with modern seating. To the south end of the room are fitted wall benches which presumably formed part of the women's meeting room. Pendant lights hang from the ceiling.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The main meeting room contains historic pine benches. The historic benches are aligned in rows facing north at the south end of the room, with modern chairs in a circle around a central table. The central oak table is by Bryn Mawr Arts & Crafts.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground forms an L-shape to the south and west of the meeting house (Fig. 3). It is enclosed in part by a dry stone wall and is well planted with mature trees and planting. The burial ground to the west has a uniform character with rows of small round headed headstones with basic information inscribed according to Quaker tradition, and further rows to the south. The date range is unknown, however, the burial ground is still in use today.

Work that has been undertaken in the burial ground includes the re-building of boundary walls, survey of trees and necessary treatment, and re-establishing allotments which revealed further headstones.



Figure 3: Attached burial ground from the west

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Sibford Gower is located approximately eight miles west of Banbury within the Sib Valley. The meeting house is located within Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower and Burdrop Conservation Area. The area is characterised by a number of buildings constructed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of which are constructed in ironstone in a vernacular style. To the north of Colony Road is the mission room and a Quaker cottage, now let, with the meeting house to the west (Fig.4). The area also contains the Grade II listed Wykham Arms Public House and Manor House both dating from the seventeenth century.



Figure 4: Cottage and Mission Room

The meeting house is set back from the road bounded by a stone boundary wall. The burial ground is well planted with trees and planting including evergreens which add to the mature landscaped character of the area and restrict views to the meeting house from Colony Road. A detached burial ground is located at Lower Brailes (NGR: SP 3092 3928), the writer understands that the burial ground has recently been sold to a neighbouring property (February 2016) for use as a garden.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is currently not listed. The building is locally listed by Cherwell District Council. While the meeting house is not the oldest in Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting, it retains surviving historic features including its exterior, the original plan form and fittings such as the elders' bench, dado panelling and fitted wall benches. Therefore, the meeting house is considered to be a possible candidate for statutory listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record was consulted, the site falls within Sibford Ferris and Sibford Gower Historic Core. The former meeting house on the site was built in approximately 1664; rectangular in plan it was aligned north to south and its footprint located to the south of the present building. The site and burial ground is considered to have high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Fair. The most recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in 2014 by Philip J Cooper, chartered building surveyor) found the meeting house roof and coverings to be in generally sound condition and there were no signs of any leaks. It is noted that the gutters overflow due to blockage caused by fallen leaves and this has caused damage to internal plaster and wall fabric. Damp staining is visible where an old chimney flue has been removed and dampness at low level in the separate male and female toilets due to moisture rising from the ground. The recommendations of work to be undertaken include repairs to roof (cement fillets are leaking and should be replaced with lead), repairs to the guttering, and remove ivy growth.

ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well maintained.

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house does not have a five year maintenance and repair plan, however, Friends undertake the recommendations in line with the quinquennial survey. The Area Meeting has funding, although it is very limited.

3.3 Sustainability

The Sustainability Toolkit is not used, but the following steps have been taken to improve sustainability:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Energy efficient lighting
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house uses the local authority recycling scheme and have a rainwater butt.

- Building maintenance and refurbishment: Quinquennial surveys and annual inspections take account of sustainability.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats. Friends work with children in the burial ground.
- Transport: Car sharing and walking to the meeting.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has access to all the amenities it needs; this includes a children's room, main meeting room, kitchen, and WC facilities (one fully accessible) within the meeting house. In addition, there is a separate meeting house cottage and mission room. Whilst there is no official resident warden the tenant in the cottage does much of what a warden would undertake. The mission room includes a kitchen (which is in need of modernisation), the hall and a room at first floor.

There is on-site car parking for a small number of cars with additional parking available along the nearby roads. The meeting house is not accessible by public transport on Sundays but there is a fairly frequent bus service on weekdays. There is no special provision for on-site parking for bicycles, but it is a low crime area.

3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. However, work undertaken in 2008 and 2012 has provided a fully accessible toilet and the reinstatement of the west doorway has provided level access into the meeting house with automated door programming. The quinquennial survey acknowledges that the provisions of the Equality Act have been met for the meeting house. A hearing loop has been installed and there are some facilities for partially-sighted people in terms of signage.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 1 hour each week and whilst there is great potential for the building to be let there is little demand or use. The mission hall to the east of the meeting house, is divided into three spaces at ground and one room at first floor which is let as art spaces for two artists on an annual basis. There is no letting policy.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, and the area is generally well cared-for and has low levels of crime and deprivation. The Friends have not developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and would consider making contact if the need arose.

3.8 Plans for change

No future plans for change.

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 building is well equipped for the needs of the meeting, following recent modernisation to the ancillary facilities.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building has the facilities it needs to accommodate wider uses. However, as a result of its rural location there isn't demand for local community use at the moment.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: As a non-designated heritage asset in a conservation area, a sympathetic new use would be preferable to demolition and redevelopment. Demolition and a use or conversion requiring subdivision of the main space would be harmful to the significance of the building. Appropriate provision would be required for the future management of the attached burial ground.

Part 5: Category: 2