

## OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD REPORT OBR.85

### Friends' Meeting House, Pytts Lane, Burford



Figure 1 Friends' Meeting House

#### Introduction

The Oxfordshire Buildings Record are grateful to the Friends, and to Ruth and David Day, for allowing us access to this property for the purposes of compiling this report as a contribution to the better understanding of Oxfordshire's buildings. Heather Horner and David Clark were able to spend about three hours there on 23 November 2009.

The objectives of the survey were to understand the dates and phases of the building.

We made a detailed visual inspection of the exterior and such internal spaces as were accessible. Photographs were taken of significant features. Measurements were taken by tape of one of the main roof trusses and subsequently drawn up to scale. A limited number of historical sources were consulted. A copy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1899 survey) Ordnance Survey map at 1:2500 annotated for the 1910 District Valuation was obtained from the Oxfordshire History Centre.

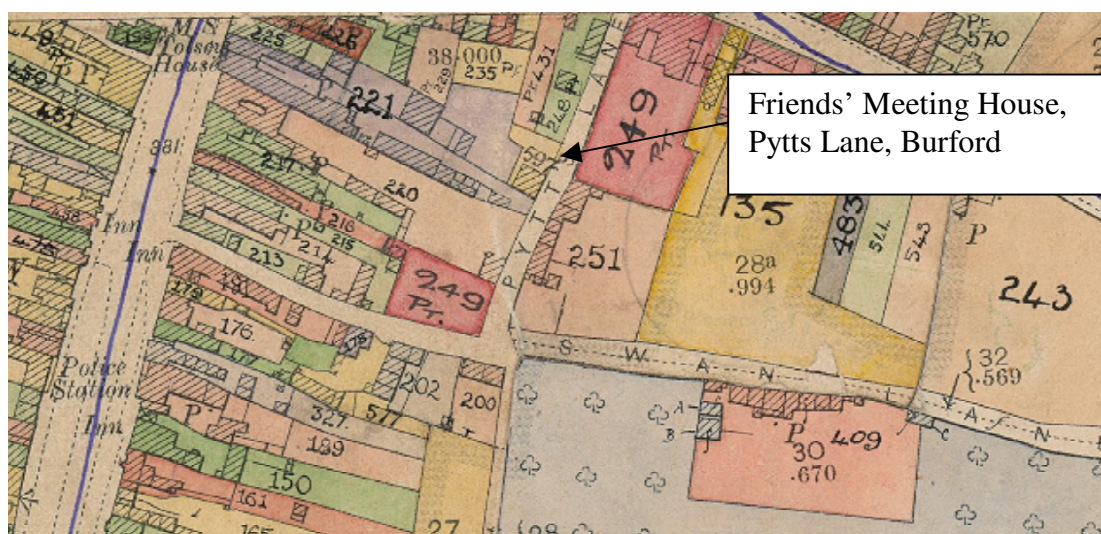
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Please note that this building is private property.

#### Location (NGR SP 252121)

The Meeting House sits on a plot to the rear of Castles Yard, the burgage plot fronted by nos.109-113 High Street. It is plot 597 on the 1910 District Valuation map at Fig.2

below. The land was part of an orchard belonging to the Bull.<sup>1</sup> The entrance is through an iron gate in the wall along Pytts Lane. The building is to the south of the plot with a central doorway facing a small memorial garden to the north.



**Figure 2 Extract from 1910 DV map (Reproduced by courtesy of the Oxford County Council – the Oxfordshire History Centre)<sup>2</sup>**

### Description

This section is confined to the main meeting house building; the modern extensions to the west have not been studied. The main structural material is local oolitic limestone rubble, dressed, but laid without regular coursing, except in the Pytts Lane gable wall, where courses of different depths are evident. In the south wall are some quite large blocks bearing strong tool-marks (Fig.3).



**Figure 3 Large dressed stones in south wall**

The roof is half-hipped at both ends and is covered with Cotswold stone slates laid in diminishing courses. There are two tall 9-over-9 sash windows with rebated surrounds either side of the doorway, and evidence in the east gable wall of a similar (but

<sup>1</sup> Harley (1999) p.5

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/leisureandculture/history/collectons/districtvaluation/DV-VIII-318\\_Oxfordshire\\_XXX-4.pdf](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/leisureandculture/history/collectons/districtvaluation/DV-VIII-318_Oxfordshire_XXX-4.pdf)

narrower) window there at one time (Fig.4). The west window survives to light the staircase, but the uppermost part is redundant and boarded on the inside (Fig.5).



**Figure 4 (left) East gable showing position of former window (beneath present one)**  
**Figure 5 (right) Meeting House from the west showing top of long west window (beneath later sash)**

These tall sash windows have thick glazing bars which have an ovolo moulding on the inside with decorative square blocks where they join (Fig.6).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 6 Glazing bars on west window**

In the reveal of the eastern window on the north wall are slots on either side for a board to be inserted to cover the bottom of the window to a depth of about a foot.

As can be seen from Figs. 4 and 5, 6-over-6 sash windows have been inserted in the upper parts of east and west gables. That to the west has horns on both sashes; the

<sup>3</sup> This feature has recently been noted on the windows of a house in Woodstock (6 High Street) dated 1710, and at Blenheim Palace (1709); they can also be seen on the sash windows of the Clarendon Building (Hawksmoor 1712-15) and the High Street frontage of The Queen's College, Oxford (1733-6) See also Louw and Crayford (1999) p.211-216

eastern is without horns.<sup>4</sup> The sash weight boxes are set back from the façade but are not concealed within the walls.

The doorway has a stop-chamfered ashlar surround; the doors are of wooden planks, studded with nails and supported by strap hinges. In the building is a further pair of hinges from the collection of the late Roger Warner and labelled 'hinges from the Friends Meeting House' (Fig.7).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 7 Pair of hinges from Warner collection.

#### Interior

The plan of the meeting house is shown at Fig.8 below.

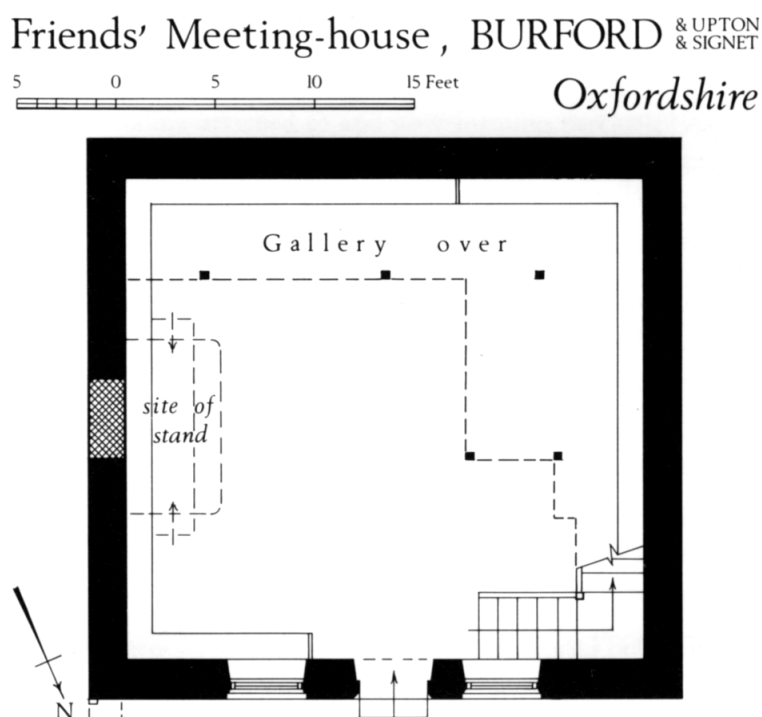


Figure 8 Plan of Burford Meeting House (RCHME)

<sup>4</sup> Horns are a feature of mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century windows when the joint at the lower rail of the upper sash had to be strengthened to hold the new and heavier plate glass.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Warner was a noted antique dealer in Burford and a member of the Friends' meeting.

The floor is of pine planks, butted together<sup>6</sup>. These are laid on joists supported by simple piles of stone offcuts loosely bound with mortar (Fig.9).



**Figure 9 Floorboard removed to show stone supports for floor joists**



**Figure 10 Interior of Meeting House facing east (English Heritage)**

The east wall has plank panelling, axed and laid sideways and in such a way that the taper of the tree is retained (Fig.11). The raised element indicates the former position of the elders' bench, removed in 1947.<sup>7</sup> The internal porch is from 1967<sup>8</sup>. Two heavy pine beams span the space either side of the doorway. These timbers have been shaped with an axe, and have chamfers along the lower edges (Fig.12). Fig.12 also shows some scratched lines, possibly level marks.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I.e. without a rebate or tongue-and-groove

<sup>7</sup> Stell (1986) p.173

<sup>8</sup> Harley (1999) p.6

<sup>9</sup> We make the distinction between level marks, lightly scored cross-like marks, which were used to obtain two parallel flat faces when hewing a log, and 'assembly marks', in these buildings the chiselled numerals used to ensure the correct assembly of parts of a timber-framed building where the pieces are cut and framed off-site. On the former, see, D W H Miles and Henry Russell, 'Plumb and Level Marks' in *Vernacular Architecture* 26 (1995) pp.33-38



**Figure 11 Detail of panelling on east wall**



**Figure 12 Transverse beam showing chamfer, axing and possible level mark**

To the west and south of the space is a gallery (Fig.13) approached by means of a staircase to the right of the entrance porch. The western section of the gallery is the



**Figure 13 Meeting room looking south-west (English Heritage)**

earlier; the southern has been added as a later extension, as can be seen from the awkward junction between the two parts (Fig.14) where the regular spacing of the balusters to the handrail has been interrupted by the later eastward extension along the south wall. The gallery floor is of pine planking.



**Figure 14** The gallery handrail was truncated when the eastward extension was built

From the gallery, a staircase (Fig.15) rises to the attic. Here, the structure of the roof can be seen. This consists basically of two A-frame trusses in elm (shown in Fig.16 and in section at Fig.17) supporting three tiers of purlins. The lower parts of the rafters are concealed behind stud partitions 175cm in height. Removable sections allowed access to the eaves spaces, where evidence of riven laths and contemporary plaster can be seen. The roof is ceiled above the partitions but the principal rafters are partly exposed.

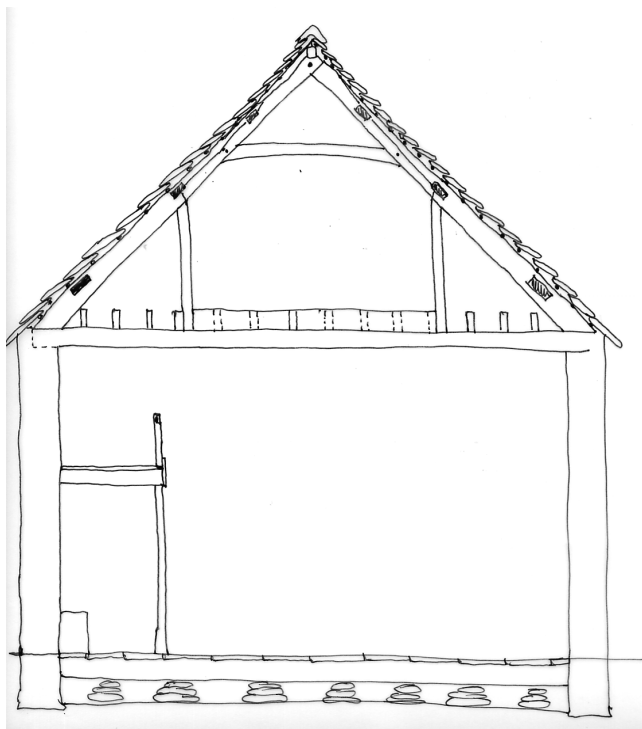


**Figure 15** Staircase to attic



**Figure 16** Roof structure

Where they are fully visible (within the boarded section under the eaves) it can be seen that the rafters are very deep (36cm) and that the lower purlins are butted into them and fixed by free tenons (Figs.18, 19). The common rafters have been cut and replaced in part, but are almost entirely concealed so no detailed survey was carried



**Figure 17 Section through E truss (from the E)**

out. The purlins also have evidence of joist seatings and other interventions which do not correspond to those on the opposite purlin; this all points to reuse of timber from elsewhere (Fig.19).



**Figure 18 (left) Principal rafter, a common rafter and lower tier of purlins within eaves space  
Figure 19 (right) Pegs for free tenon joining purlins at principal rafter; the nail marks indicate the existence of the former ceiling**

The principals are chamfered, and seem to have been pit-sawn; such assembly marks as are visible have been made by a chisel. They are pegged at the apex and support a ridge of thin scantling. The hipped ends of the roof have been made using timbers in an *ad hoc* fashion rather than in a standard way using well-carpentered hip rafters. It can be seen from Fig.21 that the hip rafters rest on the ridge rather than supporting it,

and so an additional structure comprising a birdsmouth collar supporting a king post has had to be inserted to support the ridge. Most of these timbers seem to be available bits of wood rather than carpentered timbers cut to size and fitted together in the traditional way.



**Figure 20 Purlin of reused timber**



**Figure 21 Hip roof carpentry**

This roof structure has been cut into in order to insert a ceiling. Fig. 22 shows the extent of this on one of the trusses where the mortice and tenon of the collar is exposed, and the peg is hardly supported by the remaining timber.



**Figure 22 Cutaway of lower side of collar and principal**

Bands of alternating limewashed and bare timber show the presence of the laths for the plaster ceiling, understood to have been removed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is no evidence of such marks on those parts of the principal rafters now within the eaves area.

The attic room is floored with elm boards within the area enclosed by the partition walls; there is no evidence of flooring in the eaves spaces.

## History

The documentary history of the Burford Meeting House is well recorded in Basil Harley's 1999 booklet and will not be repeated here. However, work of the Burford Probate Group did include transcription of an indentured conveyance of 1708 for the land at the end of 2 tenements on the east side of High Street (Annex 1). This records the transfer of:

'All that parte or parcel of ground now sett out for building a Meeting house on containing about sixty foot in length and about Thirty-eight foot in breadth lying at the lower end of the backside of two tenements of him the said Peter Rich now in the occupation of William Wikes tobacconist and William Castle glover scituate on the East side of the High Street in Burford in the parish of Burford aforesaid and abutting upon a Lane called the back lane leading into Whitney Street'

Hartley refers to some possible reasons for the various alterations which were made, for example that the formerly open hall was floored over in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, possibly for the Women's Business Meeting. A Quaker school was founded in the 1720s, which in 1751 became Thomas Huntley's Hillside Academy at a building on The Hill. It is possible that some of the alterations to the meeting house were made before this time to accommodate the needs of the earlier school. Huntley's school closed in 1811, symptomatic of the decline in Burford's prosperity and in the fortunes of the Quaker businessmen. The meeting house finally closed in 1854.

The general development of Quaker meeting houses follows the history of the movement – characterised by Quaker principles which included a rejection of any elaboration of life-style, as expressed in dress, language and daily life. The purity of worship and the practice of quietism were key features. Thus the early meeting houses were simple expressions of vernacular construction. They are often found on back lands, gifted by sympathisers, and building materials might have been donated. The reference to the Women's Business Meeting reflects the movement's recognition of the role of women. In England the pattern seems to be that separate areas were created within the meeting house for these meetings, often in upstairs rooms separated by shutters from the main space so that women could choose whether to be private or to participate in the main meeting. In eastern North America in the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the movement had a major re-examination of its identity from which the equality of the sexes emerged as a theme and many meeting houses were doubled in size. This does not seem to have happened in England. Further moves to egalitarian worship led to the removal of the elders' stand in Burford in 1947<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Catchpole et al (2009) p.157

Among the Quaker families of Burford were the Minchins (one of whom was a photographer in 1868) and the Huntleys. The Will of Thomas Minchin made in 1692 survives and has been transcribed, but he bequeathed his estate to his daughter. Thomas Huntley's second wife made biscuits, and in 1811 her stepson set up a factory in Reading. It was his son, Thomas, who went into partnership with Palmer to found the firm of Huntley and Palmer.

## **Discussion**

The development of the Friends' Meeting House can be traced with some confidence from the visible evidence. The original building seems to have been open to the roof. Although the carpentry is not of the finest quality, the principal rafters are chamfered, and in any event the expression of deliberate poverty would not have been out of place with Quaker thinking in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was not ceiled, as there is no evidence of this on the lower parts of the principal rafters.

The sash windows seem to be largely original. The glazing bars with their distinctive square blocks are found in a number of high status buildings in Oxford and Woodstock in 1709 and later, which contrasts with the roof carpentry. Possibly the Quakers were able to call on the services of a joiner who had worked at Blenheim Palace for this work.

The first part of the gallery was probably introduced quite soon after the meeting house was built, for the Women's meeting, the school, or simply an expansion in membership, or indeed for all these possibilities. The extension to the gallery has much the same carpentry and no doubt came along not much later. The flooring over of the attic space and the building of the upper staircase created an additional space, but one which needed new windows. As these have exposed sash-weight boxes, they are likely to be pre-1774 (the date of the London Building Act which sought that these boxes be concealed within wall cavities for fire prevention reasons). The stud partitions were also introduced at this time to create a usable room. Although the List Description states that the attic room was created ca.1730, the partitions have no especially early features and so we would suggest the floor was inserted somewhat later – perhaps in the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The roof trusses were cut back at this time for the creation of a coved plaster ceiling, built on laths nailed to the exposed timbers.

## **Conclusion**

The Friends' Meeting House in Burford is remarkable testimony to the growth, decline and revival of the Quaker movement in the town. The phases of rapid growth in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century can be read in the changes to the structure, culminating in the ceiling of the main space and the creation of an attic room. These and other changes also reflected changes in the Friends' meetings and the roles of women and elders. The architecture speaks of an interesting mixture of reuse and quality work. Clearly funds were scarce, but perhaps some members of the meeting were craftsmen and/or had access to good materials, whereas the rest had to be sourced as cheaply as possible.

## Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by member(s) of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record, a voluntary organisation whose objectives are to advance education and promote research on the buildings of Oxfordshire. Whereas every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, it is based only on evidence which was visible at the time of the recording. The information and discussion contained in it is intended as a contribution to research, and the OBR takes no responsibility for any other use to which it may be put. Advice should always be sought from those professionally qualified to give it.

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13 February 2010

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## Annex 1

### BURFORD SOCIETY OF FRIENDS INDENTURE no 1: 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1708

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1708

**Between:** 1) Peter Rich of Burford, papermaker, and  
2) Daniel Flexney of Widford, Glos, clothier,  
and Giles Greneway of Tainton, cordwayner

**Entitled:** 'Conveyance per Release'

**Price:** perhaps £10

*This indenture gives the name, occupation and place of residence of three early Friends, and describes the site for the new Meeting House. The rent for the Meeting House is set at one peppercorn.*

**This indenture** made the First day of Aprill Anno d[o]m[ini] 1708, And in the seventh year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lady Anne by the Grace of God Queen of Great Britain etc  
Between Peter Rich of the parish of Burford in the County of Oxon Papermaker of the one part  
and Daniel Flexney of Widford in the County of Gloucester Clothier and Giles Grenoway  
of Tainton in the said County of Oxon Cordwayner....of the other part  
Witnesseth that the said Peter Rich for and in considerac[i]on of the sum of Five shillings of lawfull mony of  
Great Britain to him in hand at or before his ensealing and delivery of these presents by them the said  
Daniel Flexney and Giles Grenoway well and truly paid, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged Hath  
bargained and sold and by these presents doth bargain and sell unto them the said Daniel Flexney and  
Giles Grenoway their executors Administrators and Assigns, All that peece or parcell of ground now  
sett out for building a Meeting house on, containing about Sixty foot in length and about Thirty<sup>Eight</sup> foot in breadth  
lying at the lower end of the backside of two Tenements of him the said Peter Rich now in the occupac[i]on of William  
Wikes Tobacconist and William Castle Glover scituate on the East side of the High Street in Burford in the  
Parish of Burford aforesaid and abutting upon a Lane called the Back Lane leading into Whitney Street  
Together with all wayes passages waters watercourses lights profits com[m]odities and appurtenances whatsoever  
to the said peece or parcel of ground belonging or in any wise appertaining, and the reverc[i]on or reverc[i]ons  
remainder and remainders rents issues and profits thereof and of every part and parcell<sup>thereof</sup> **To have and to**

**hold** the said peece or parcell of ground and all and singular other the premisses herein before menc[i]oned meant or intended to be bargained and sold and every part and parcell thereof with the appurtenances unto them the said Daniel Flexney and Giles Grenoway their Executors Ad[mi]nistrators and Assigns from the day next before the day of the date of these presents for and dureing and unto the full end and term of one whole year from thence next ensueing and fully to be compleat and ended. **Yeilding and Paying** therefore unto the said Peter Rich his Heirs and Assigns the rent of one peppercorn only on the Nine and Twentyeth day of September next ensueing the date of these presents (if the same shall be lawfully demanded) To the intent and purpose that by vertue of these presents and of the statute for transferring of uses into possession in that behalf made and provided, They the said Daniel Flexney and Giles Grenoway may be in the actuall possession of the said premisses and be thereby enabled to accept and take a grant and Release of the reverc[i]on and Inheritance thereof to them and their heirs, In witnesse whereof the parties aforesaid to these present Indentures interchangably have sett their hands and seals the day and yeare first above written

Peter Rich [*his signature and seal*]

*Transcribed by Barbara Allison, November 2009, from a photograph of the original document*