

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

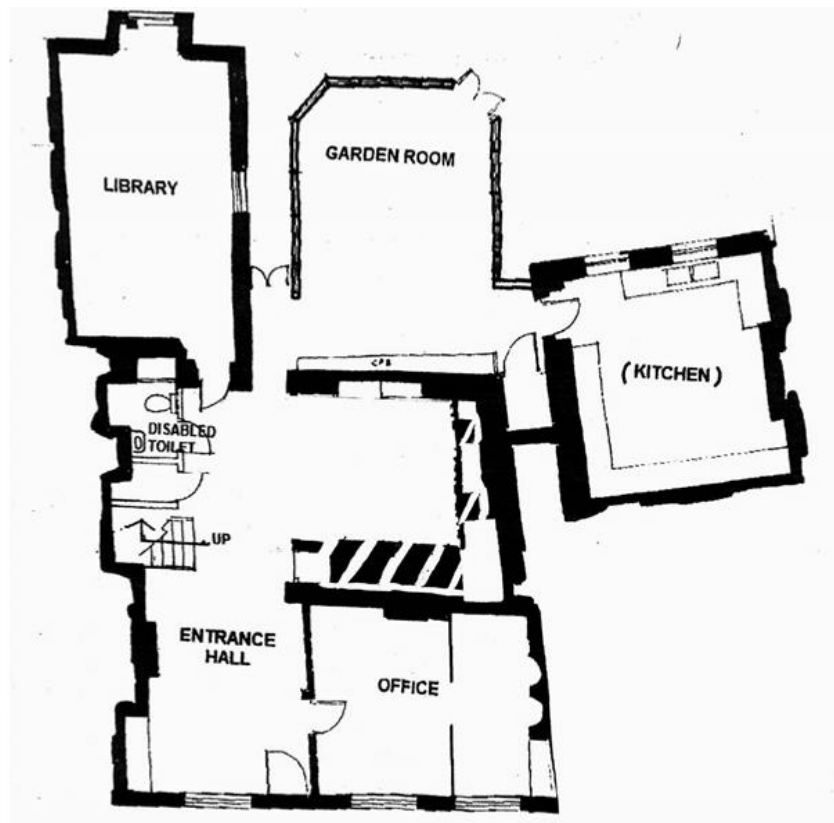


Figure 1: Plan of 43 St Giles (provided by local meeting)

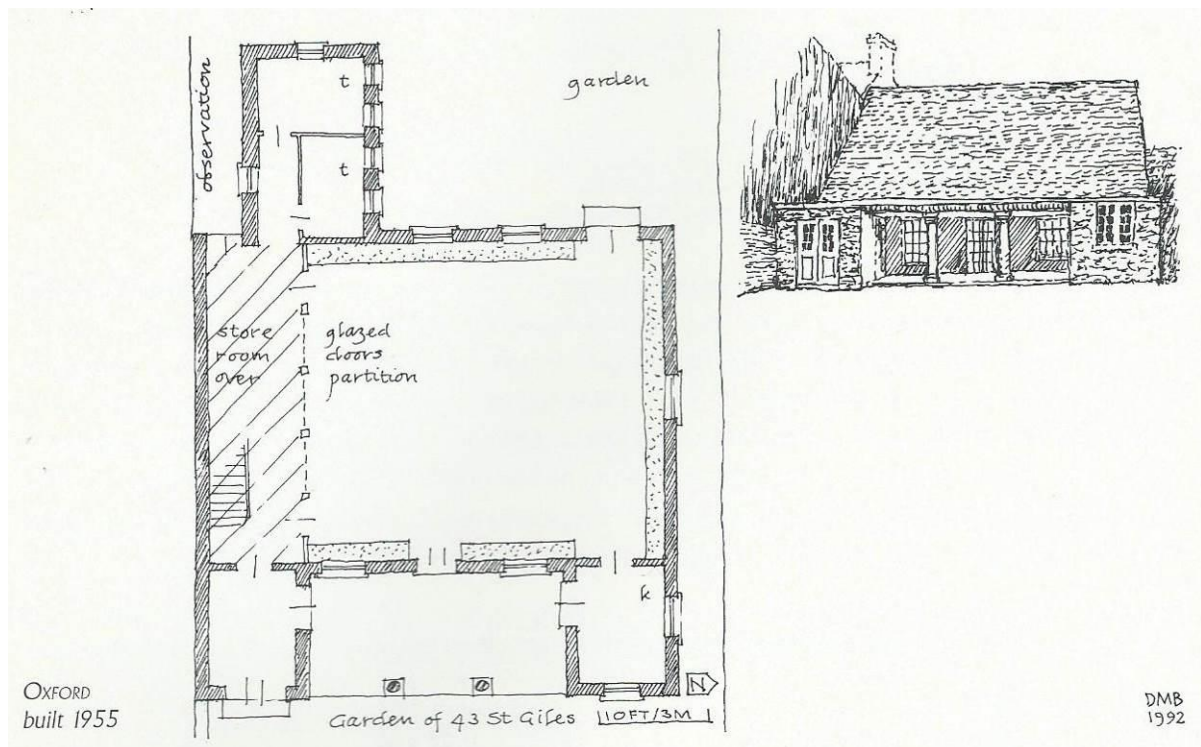


Figure 2: Plan and elevation of 1955 meeting house, from Butler, p. 502

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 is 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 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