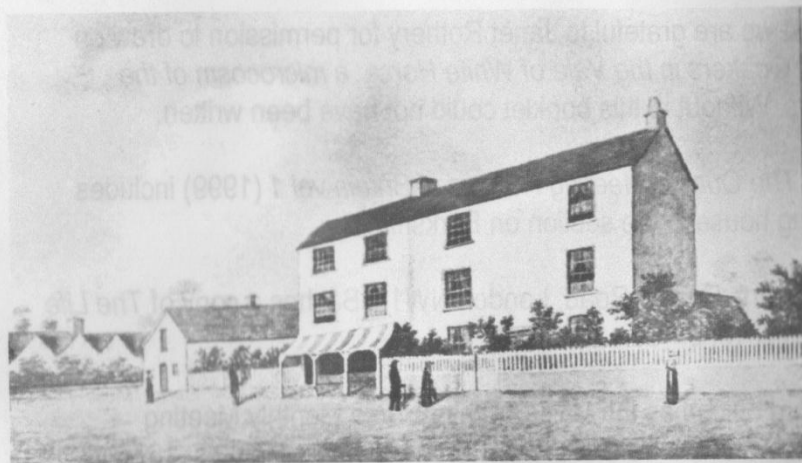


Faringdon Friends Meeting House in 1823



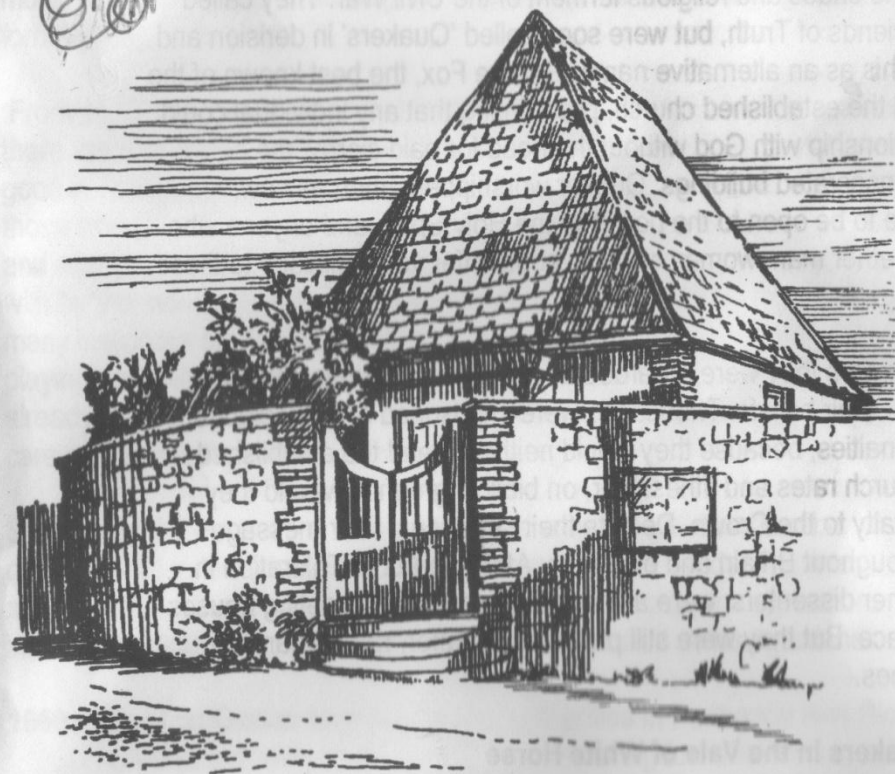
The house of Richard Reynolds in Faringdon and the smaller house occupied by his nephew, James Reynolds in 1823

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For further copies or information contact J. Cottis tel: 01235 764411

Quakers in Faringdon

Count
Club
Limassol



**EPISODES FROM THE HISTORY OF QUAKERS IN
FARINGDON DURING THE LAST 350 YEARS**

These episodes from the story of Quakers in Faringdon have been compiled in 2006 to celebrate **twenty five years of the official revival of Faringdon Meeting in 1981**, after a lapse of **about a hundred years**. The historic meeting house in Lechlade Road, built in the **1670s**, had fortunately remained in the ownership of Witney Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends.

How Quakerism began

The Society of Friends was one of the radical Christian sects which emerged in the 1650s out of the chaos and religious ferment of the Civil War. They called themselves the Friends of Truth, but were soon called 'Quakers' in derision and readily accepted this as an alternative name. George Fox, the best known of the founders, rejected the established church, proclaiming that any individual could have a direct relationship with God without the need for paid clergy, the sacraments, or consecrated buildings. Quaker worshippers, then as now, gathered in silence to be open to the power of the Holy Spirit, and anyone who felt this power, whether man, woman or child, could offer vocal ministry to those present.

For their first forty years they were regarded as dangerously subversive and suffered heavily for their beliefs. Thousands were imprisoned or subjected to heavy financial penalties, because they would neither attend the established church nor pay church rates and tithes. Nor, on biblical grounds, would they swear oaths of loyalty to the Crown. Despite their sufferings, their message spread quickly throughout Britain and overseas. After the Act of Toleration in 1689 they, with other dissenters, were allowed to register their meeting houses and worship in peace. But they were still prepared to suffer, rather than pay church rates or tithes.

The arrival of Quakers in the Vale of White Horse

Faringdon had been hard hit by the Civil War. In 1648 the townspeople complained to Parliament that their habitations and church were in ruins and that they were 'destitute of food for their souls'. The conditions were right for dissent to flourish and the Baptists were the first nonconformist church to be set up in the town. Quaker missionaries from Cumbria arrived in Oxford in 1654 and Friends were meeting at Kingston Lisle in the Vale of White Horse by 1660. Soon after this they were meeting in barns or private houses in Faringdon, Uffington, Childrey, Challow, Abingdon and Appleton.

1660-1699

The earliest history of Friends in the Vale region is found in the record of their sufferings as a persecuted, nonconforming sect, in the minutes of the Vale Monthly Meeting set up by George Fox in 1668 and in records kept by the Berkshire Quarterly Meeting. This was a turbulent time for Quakers. The series of laws against nonconformity known as the Clarendon Code came into force after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. These included the Quaker Act of 1662, which made it an offence for Quakers to assemble in groups of five or more, 'under pretence of worship', or to maintain that the taking of oaths was forbidden by Scripture.

From 1673, minutes of the Vale Monthly Meeting have survived, and from 1676 there are also minutes of the Women's Monthly Meeting. The minutes give a good idea of the life of the meetings, including sufferings, and disciplining of those who did not observe the testimonies against oaths, refusal to pay tithes and marrying in the parish church. Differences between Friends were also dealt with by the monthly meeting. A strict moral code was maintained and there are many instances of 'disorderly walking', from sexual offences to dancing, card playing and debt. Those intending to marry had to prove that they were not already married or promised in marriage. Then there was always the ongoing care of the sick, the widows and orphans.

Sometimes the names and occupations of Faringdon Quakers can be distinguished in the minutes from those of other Vale Friends. The menfolk were mainly local craftsmen and tradesmen, with some engaged in agriculture. They included a draper, shoemaker, bodicemaker, baker and market gardener.

1660 The first Quaker to challenge the authorities in Faringdon was Richard Greenaway, who stood up to preach in Faringdon 'schoole house' after the priest had finished. For this he was hauled out of the church and into custody where, 'ther being a Covenant window, he Declared the truth unto the people, who were very stil & willinge to heare'. He was eventually committed to gaol in Reading.

- 1662** Seventeen Vale Quakers were in prison after the Quaker Act, out of a total of about 1,300 Quakers imprisoned nationally. They included John Reynolds from Faringdon. Members of the Reynolds family were to be the backbone of the meeting for nearly two hundred years.
- 1668** In this year George Fox set up a national structure of local, Particular Meetings, and area Monthly Meetings. Faringdon was one of the Particular (later known as Preparative) Meetings within the Vale Monthly Meeting. Other local meetings in Vale Monthly Meeting at various times were at Abingdon, Appleton, Bishopstone, Challow, Childrey, Lambourn Woodlands, Shrivenham and Uffington.
- 1672** Charles II issued a short-lived Declaration of Indulgence in March, whereby he suspended all penal laws against nonconformists and recusants, and places could be licensed for worship. Probably as a direct result of this, the Quarterly Meeting of Berkshire and Oxfordshire Friends recorded in the same year that Faringdon Meeting House was being built. Land for this, and for a burial ground, had been held in trust since 1668, possibly on the site of a barn.
- 1673** The building must have been completed by October 1673, when a public meeting was held in Faringdon. Monthly Meeting was held there in December. Meanwhile the Declaration of Indulgence was cancelled, and the Test Act was passed. Fortunately the backbone of Faringdon Friends was strengthened in this year when Oliver Sansom moved to Faringdon with his wife, Jane, and set up a draper's shop. We know from his published biography (1710) that he was a fierce defender of Quakers and their testimonies. One of his major opponents was Robert Pye of Faringdon House, a former Roundhead who was in general opposed to persecution for religious dissent but who prosecuted Quakers for non-payment of his rectorial tithes. The care that Jane and Oliver showed for the Faringdon Quakers was immensely important during the subsequent years of persecution. Jane (née Bunce) was born in Charney Bassett. Her sister Joan lived in Challow, near Wantage, after her marriage to Richard Vokins. Joan was a Quaker missionary who travelled to Ireland, America and the West Indies before her death in 1690.
- 1676** In February, Oliver Sansom went to visit Friends in prison in Reading. In April, Thomas Reynolds was appointed to keep the keys of the meeting house and burial place, and was to be allowed 12 pence for digging a grave 'by reason of the hardness of the ground'. In August, the burying place at Faringdon was to be 'well-fenced'. In fact a wall was built at a cost of £4..11s..4d.
- 1676** The Vale Women's Meeting was started in October, despite opposition from a group of Reading Friends led by Thomas and Ann Curtis. In 1684, Reading Friends recalled that an earlier meeting of women from the county had been held in Faringdon (date unknown) and that Ann Curtis 'went with an Intent to Spoyle it...for they made a publicke show in the Towne...and the world's people came In and soe prevented the women that they had noe meeting at all by themselves'. Joan Vokins had been intending to go to America at this time, but postponed her voyage 'to labour for the settlement of our women's meetings in our county of Berks'. The Vale women were successful in establishing their business meeting and they kept their own accounts. Their first meeting was held at Appleton.
- 1679** Persecution intensified. All Faringdon dissenters and sectionaries were excommunicated, and the civil magistrates imprisoned many.
- 1680** As a result of the persecution, Vale Friends begin to think of emigrating to America. We can trace this because each needed a certificate from their monthly meeting to state that they were free of debt and of any promises of marriage. In this year Andrew Pearson wanted to emigrate to New Jersey, but he was warned of the many dangers he might encounter and did not set sail. Joan Vokins braved these dangers and was given a testimony to take on her missionary visit to New England 'in the service of truth'.
- 1680** Several Friends were troubled at the consequences of not paying their tithes. The meeting house needed a new door, possibly because of damage by the authorities.
- 1681** Two windows next to the highway were walled up for the safety of the meeting house. Alice Weethers was given 2s. for her son's labour in

sweeping the meeting house at Faringdon and for his care and attendance to 'light candles & the like'. This boy, Thomas, was later Treasurer and Clerk of Vale MM.

- 1682** William Penn had now begun his 'Holy Experiment' in America, on land granted to him by Charles II in payment of a debt owed to his father, Admiral Penn. Penn did not go immediately to his territory, but from March in this year we read of Friends who have requested certificates for themselves and their families to emigrate to Pennsylvania. There were eight requests in this year and all except Andrew Pearson (having a second attempt) seem to have left England. Although most were from rural communities they must have been a severe loss to Faringdon and the local community of Friends. Five more requests were made between 1683 and 1688.
- 1683** An informer, Eustace Hardwick of Shrivenham, came into the meeting for worship in Faringdon and arrested Oliver Sansom, who later recalled being 'on my knees, praying to the Lord'. Subsequently, Sansom said, 'I and many others became great sufferers for keeping up our religious meetings at Faringdon'. Besides Sansom, the Great Book of Sufferings listed Thomas Withers, George Adams, William Green and Edward Lockey, all of Faringdon, as having goods and chattels confiscated for attending meetings for worship.
- 1684** Oliver Sansom was in prison and the meeting house was locked by order of the magistrates. Mention was made of paying the poor children 'that have for a long time swept the meeting house at Faringdon'. Friends agreed to lend money to Widow Weethers of Faringdon, 'being left in debt and 4 children to be bred up', so that she might manage her trade of making bodices, and keep her children at work
- 1686** A minute of July recorded that 'the persecutors have attempted to seize the meeting house at Farringdon'. Sansom's autobiography relates that it was Thomas Fettiplace JP who fastened up the doors of the meeting house with locks and chains and nailed up the windows. Friends unlocked the doors again but an informer caused the worshippers to be pulled out of the meeting house and they locked the door again. Sansom was arrested, but pardoned under a

general pardon when James II came to the throne.

- 1688** Walter Tull of Faringdon, shoemaker, gave his intention to marry Ann New. Friends advised them to wait, as they were young and had not long been attending meeting, but as they were resolved to go on with their intentions and had their parents' consent they were permitted to marry. Thomas Reynolds received money to pay for a nurse for one of his children, his wife having given birth to triplets. Repairs were made to the meeting house.
- 1689** The Act of Toleration was passed, which allowed dissenters, including Friends, to worship in freedom, provided they registered their meeting houses. Penalties for non-payment of church tithes and rates continued to be imposed, and three more families emigrated from the Vale in 1694, but a new age of quiet respectability began to evolve.
- 1692** A plot of ground was bought to enlarge the burial ground at Faringdon
- 1693** In December it was reported that the evening meeting at Faringdon was not well attended and therefore it was agreed 'to have but one meeting every first day [Sunday] & that to begin at the Eleventh houer'.
- 1690s** After consulting with Friends, Oliver Sansom moved to Abingdon, where the meeting was 'very small and hardly likely to be continued without some additional assistance'. He died there in 1710.
- 1695** It was agreed to repair the meeting house 'by making a stone wall under one side of it & at one End'. Joseph Stevens of Baulking was publicly disowned 'first for his slackness in coming to meeting & afterwards by his seeking a wife among the world thereby to yoke himself unequally' [i.e. a wife outside the Quaker community].
- 1699** Overseers were appointed for Challow, Uffington and Faringdon, Woodlands (i.e. Lambourn Woodlands), Bishopstone and Abingdon.
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1700-1730

Minutes of the men's meetings survive until 1722, and those of the women's meetings intermittently until 1741, although transcribed only until 1730. Beatrice Saxon Snell has noted that there were an unusually large number of widows in the Vale Monthly Meeting, and attributes this to the unhealthy climate of the undrained clays. A good number of marriages were recorded, but emigration continued in the early years of the century, with five more Vale men taking their families to Pennsylvania between 1702 and 1709. From 1715 to 1718 the Clerk records the meetings represented by Friends. For Faringdon, the names were Thomas Withers, John Green, Thomas Wick, John Wells, Richard Townsend, John Cook, Michael Rainalls [Reynolds] and James Rainalls, Thomas Vickers, Thomas Sargood, Edward Turner. The social composition of the meeting seems unchanged, the recorded occupations being those of yeoman, shoemaker and slater. Reproofs continue for errors including fraudulence, card-playing, and fornication. Meeting houses were built or re-built in this period at Uffington, Abingdon and Challow.

- 1700** Monthly Meeting was held in this year at Faringdon, Goosey, Challow and Lambourn Woodlands. The *Journals* of George Fox were delivered.
- 1701** In June, Michael Reynolds manifested his contrition for consorting with a harlot and promised to settle his estate to secure portions for his children and pay his debts. In November there was mention of 'some damage lately don to the meeting house at Farringdon'.
- 1702** In April, there was another reference to damage, i.e. 'some abuses offered to our meeting at Farringdon and concerning removing some pales there'.
- 1704** Quarterly Meeting asked for subscriptions for the reprinting of George Fox's Doctrinal Books. (Only three were requested, all for Abingdon Friends.) Repairs were made to the wall around the 'burying ground' at Faringdon. (Further repairs were carried out in 1706, 1708 and 1710.) A difference arose between James Reynolds and his brother in law, John Green. Four Friends were appointed 'to do their endeavour to put an

end to the difference and to make peace between the parties concerned'. Four books of Luke Howard's works were bought.

- 1707** Friends lent 40s. to Ann Evans, widow, and recorded that she was 'poor & low in the world and that she is in a small trade of dealing in worsted yarns whereby she has pretty well maintained herself and her children by her industry'.
- 1709** The Particular Meetings named at this time were Faringdon, Uffington, Bishopstone, Lambourn Woodlands, Challow and Abingdon. Friends were also meeting at Goosey.
- 1710** 'A testimony concerning the Life, Suffering & Death of our deare & Well-beloved Friend Oliver Sansom' was signed.
- 1715** Some Particular Meetings (not named) were reproved for not sending representatives to the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings.
- 1716** Repairs for Faringdon meeting house amounted to the large sum of 'about Tenn pounds'. Faringdon Friends raised £5 towards this sum and the rest was contributed by other meetings in the area.
- 1717** In this year Thomas Story, a travelling Friend, visited an afternoon meeting for worship at Faringdon and noted that 'This was small and heavy in the forepart but ended pretty well'.
- 1720** There was a proposal to reprint Thomas Ellwood's *Sacred History of the Old and New Testament*, but none subscribed.
- 1721** A dispute between George Sanders of Uffington and John Wells of Faringdon concerning some land was settled in favour of George Sanders.
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1731-1799

Very little is known about the Meeting's history at this time. Numbers were clearly declining, to the extent that in 1790 it became necessary to lay down the Vale Monthly Meeting and transfer its members to other monthly meetings. Faringdon Meeting became so small that in the closing years of the century Witney Monthly Meeting recommended merging it with another preparative meeting.

1760s Travelling ministers were going around to rural meetings at this time, making reports on the members which were in many cases negative. At Faringdon they found tale-bearing and concluded that 'love and unity seemed much a-wanting between them'.

1790 The Vale Monthly Meeting was laid down. Faringdon and Uffington became part of Witney Monthly Meeting while Abingdon was transferred to Warborough Monthly Meeting. The meetings at Challow, Bishopstone and Lambourn Woodlands had died out by this time.

1796 Faringdon Friends did not take much part in their new monthly meeting. In 1796 it was reported that they had discontinued their preparative meetings [business meetings held to prepare for the monthly meeting], and did not well attend the monthly meeting.

1797 It was suggested that Faringdon Friends should unite with Witney Preparative Meeting, but they were unwilling to comply. Thomas Giles of Faringdon applied for membership in this year.

1798 Burford Preparative Meeting recorded in November that Faringdon Preparative Meeting decided it would be 'most pleasant' to be united with Burford, to which Burford agreed.

1800-1880

During this century, Faringdon meeting gradually dwindled away, although the Reynolds family, which had connections with the Darby family of Coalbrookdale and the Lloyd family of bankers, kept up the meeting for many years. Janet Rothery has studied the history of this family in detail and has traced links with

the Reynolds and Darby families of Coalbrookdale.

The religious revival of the mid-nineteenth century brought new life to Faringdon, but this time it was connected with other nonconformist churches. The Wesleyan Methodists built a chapel in 1837, the Independents (Congregationalists) in 1840 and the Primitive Methodists in 1850. All of these, like the Quaker meeting house, were on the Westbrook side of the town. In 1852 the Baptist church was repaired and extended. These denominations had a fervour which Quakers had lost, although the Methodists were sometimes known as 'the singing Quakers'.

1803 A visitor reported that only one family was keeping up the meeting.

1813 Robert Huntley, a chemist and the son of a Burford schoolmaster, married Issett Reynolds of Faringdon and they settled in Faringdon. He was the half-brother of Joseph Huntley who founded the Huntley and Palmer's biscuit factory in Reading. But Robert became a doctor, and in 1826 they moved to Middlesex. Then in 1836 they emigrated to Australia, where they bought an estate near Sydney and named it Faringdon Park.

1815 Burford Meeting was informed that Charles Reynolds [of Faringdon] had lately been married 'in a manner contrary to the rules of our Society' and he was subsequently disowned, but seems to have brought up his family as Quakers.

1817 The meetings of Faringdon and Burford agreed to separate.

1823 Thomas Pole painted pictures of the meeting house, the home of Richard Reynolds and the adjoining house occupied by his nephew, James Reynolds. One Reynolds house is now Ferndale School. It was probably shortly after this that the present entrance porch was added to the meeting house, perhaps with money left by James Reynolds in 1835.

1851 The census taken in this year lists four main Quaker families. Their heads were: Benjamin Collier de Horne in Marlborough Street, a retired cheese-factor; Charles Reynolds, farmer of 200 acres, who had three

children; James Reynolds, with his brother Michael, at 71 Westbrook, draper and mercer; Jane Reynolds, widow, at 72 Westbrook. Thomas Fawkes joined the Society not long afterwards and became Clerk of the Meeting.

- 1859** Charles Reynolds resigned from the Society in this year, and his brother Richard was disowned. Both brothers had 'married out', like their father, i.e. they married non-Quakers.
- 1861** Jane Reynolds died. It was probably she who was described by Caroline Pumphrey of Charlbury as 'Jane Reynolds, our hostess, a quaint old Quaker lady with maids somewhat quainter than herself. Caroline enjoyed attending Witney Monthly Meeting at Faringdon, 'another pleasant Quaker picnic', and she recalled that it was at Faringdon that her uncle John first 'spoke in meeting'.
- 1875** Thomas Fawkes died, aged 73. Others buried in the Faringdon burial ground from 1858 onwards included the names of Whitfield, Reynolds, Giles, and Harding.
- 1880** Mary Ann Reynolds died, aged 55. After this, the meeting lapsed, although there was one more burial in 1902, of John Gardner, who had married Tryphena Reynolds.

1903-2006

The Monthly Meeting retained ownership of the meeting house, fortunately. Members inspected the building from time to time and lettings to local organisations were made occasionally. But eventually it would probably have suffered the fate of Witney and Chipping Norton meeting houses and been sold, had it not been for Charney Friends, who began to take an interest in Faringdon meeting house in 1975. In 1981, Charney Preparative Meeting became Faringdon Preparative Meeting, and in 2006 we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of this return to Faringdon.

- 1928** A request to use the meeting house as a wheelwright's store was refused by Witney Monthly Meeting.

- 1933** The premises were let, probably to the Boy Scouts.
- 1939** Some benches were transferred to Burford meeting house.
- 1941** Dry rot in the floor was reported. During World War II the burial ground was used by the Scouts for growing vegetables.
- 1949** Repairs were carried out and the Girl Guides became tenants.
- 1960** A Faringdon builder negotiated for purchase, in order to convert the meeting house into a dwelling, but the Charity Commissioners refused permission. A local Friend, Tom Williams, used to cycle over from time to time to check on the state of the building.
- 1975** Interest in the meeting house was revived by Friends in Charney Preparative Meeting, who were worshipping at Charney Manor, which had been given to the Society of Friends after World War II by the Gillett family. At this time the future of Charneymanor seemed uncertain, so the possibility of putting the Faringdon meeting house into good repair was discussed.
- 1976** Through generous donations, the meeting house was reglazed and re-roofed. After this it was used from 1977 to 1979 by the Marlborough Boys Club, which was founded for boys who had been refused entry to other clubs. The boys decorated the meeting house with money supplied by Charney Friends, and an outside lavatory and electric light were provided.
- 1977** Charney Friends began to meet in Faringdon once a month, on a Friday
- 1979** In June, Charney Friends decided to worship in Faringdon every third Sunday for six months. By now the Boys' Club had almost ceased and their tenancy was terminated. From December, a meeting for worship was held every Sunday. Friends involved in this decision included Margaret and James Collin, Betty and Dennis Compton, Mary

Guillemard, Albert Hudspeth, Barbara and Philip Humphry, Alex Kerr, Margaret and David Saunderson and Marjorie Stevenson-Jones.

- 1980** A work camp came from Witney Monthly Meeting in April to tidy the burial ground and redecorate the meeting house. In June it was reported that ten benches, formerly at Charlbury, had been received from Burford meeting. Repairs were made to the panelling. Faringdon Peace Group began to use the meeting house and still meets there (2006) on the first Wednesday of the month.
- 1981** In September, the monthly meeting agreed that Charney Preparative Meeting could change its name to Faringdon PM. The Book of Meetings recorded 19 members, 6 attenders and 12 children. Hugh Creighton designed a new notice board and gate, and modifications to the entrance porch. Children from Park School, Swindon came with their teacher to plant shrubs and trees in the garden.
- 1983** A wooden building was erected by Russell Spinage for a children's classroom, kitchen and toilets.
- 1990** The meeting had 22 members, 6 attenders and no children. In this year the wedding of Fiona Macbeth and Simon Ripley took place, probably the first Quaker wedding in the meeting house for well over a hundred years.
- 1993** An inspection revealed that considerable repairs were needed.
- 1995** Extensive repairs were carried out, including damp proofing, replacement of parts of the floor, plaster and brickwork, rewiring and installation of new lighting, and restoration and completion of the panelling. The cost was well over £10,000. Grants were made by various Quaker Trusts, the Society for the Care of Historic Churches, and the Faringdon Environmental Trust. A loan from Witney Monthly Meeting, repaid in three years, made up the rest of the shortfall. An Open Day with an exhibition was held in November to thank all those who had helped. In September, Bronwen Evans and Peter Halford were married.

- 2002** Facsimilies of eight panels from the Quaker Tapestry in Kendal were shown in the meeting house in June. In August, Friends took part in Faringdon's Golden Jubilee Flower Festival, decorating the Pye Chapel in All Saints parish church. Faringdon Friends continue to take part in Churches Together in Faringdon.
- 2006** Friends are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the meeting's official revival. Plans include opening the meeting house on 9 September during English Heritage Weekend, putting a display in the town's public library in September, a birthday picnic in August, and making improvements to the garden. We also hope to install a loop system for those with hearing impairment. After a time when numbers were very low we are now gradually increasing our membership and hope for a continued Quaker presence in Faringdon.

Principal Sources

First and foremost we are grateful to Janet Rothery for permission to draw on her 2004 history, *Quakers in the Vale of White Horse: a microcosm of the Society of Friends*. Without it, this booklet could not have been written.

David M Butler's *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain vol 1* (1999) includes Faringdon meeting house in the section on Berkshire.

Friends House Library, Euston Road, London NW1 2 BJ, has a copy of *The Life of Oliver Sansom* (1710, 2nd edn 1848)

Oxfordshire Record office has the Vale of White Horse Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1673-1722 and the Vale of White Horse Women's Minutes, 1676-1730. ORO also has copies of the excellent typed transcripts of these minutes, transcribed by Nina Saxon Snell and annotated by Beatrice Saxon Snell. Minutes of Burford PM covering the years when it was united with Faringdon PM have also been transcribed by the Saxon Snell sisters.

PJ Goodrich, *Great Faringdon, Past and Present* (1928) and Cyril Hughes Hartmann, *Faringdon in the Civil War* (1964) have been useful for background information.