

Part 1

OWNING A MEETING HOUSE

.1 Purpose

The value of a Meeting House derives from its use by the Meeting as a centre for worship and service. When it is light and fresh, well maintained and well cared for, it can express a welcome to all, whereas a dingy and down-at-heel appearance tends to depress users and deter newcomers.

There are many advantages in opening premises for the use of outside bodies in the development of activities of social, intellectual and spiritual value in beneficial outreach. It may provide a valuable service to the local community and at the same time bring in useful income. However the rewards of a lively meeting house will bring more decision making, more responsibilities, and the need for more active management.

.2 Ownership

Friends may use private homes for their meetings, hire premises, or own their own property. The benefits of ownership include the availability of space for all needs, the continuous presence of Friends in the locality, the benefit of outreach and encouragement for growth. Ownership necessarily involves added responsibility of managing, financing and maintaining. The consequent involvement of time and attention must be recognised whenever a decision over ownership has to be made.

Friends Trusts Ltd. serve the Society of Friends as Custodian Trustee in which the legal title to property is vested; it will not enter into management matters or make decisions and will only act on the instructions of the managing body. Thus local Friends are wholly responsible for managing the property. Sometimes other arrangements apply where meetings or trusts have holding trustees specially appointed, but note the advice in *Quaker Faith and Practice* that meeting houses are best in the ownership of monthly meeting, and where in the ownership of preparative meetings are still within its oversight.

Disposal of a meeting house by sale or long lease requires the approval of either the Charity Commission or Friends Trusts Ltd., and guidance should be sought from the latter before starting negotiations.

.3 Management Responsibilities

Practice varies, but Monthly Meeting usually accepts responsibility for its properties used by its constituent meetings, and works with the Preparative Meeting to fulfil this duty. There are instances where the Monthly Meeting takes very little part in the management or funding of its properties; elsewhere it takes a centralised view and delegates little to the meeting using the premises.

Whatever course is adopted, there is need for a clearly defined organisation by which to express our care for what we possess. Casual and occasional management, for example responding only to crises, cannot be effective. A property management committee with explicit terms of reference and regular procedures appears essential.

The Committee is advised to appoint a Clerk or Convener and to keep proper records of decisions. Major matters affecting finance, policy, or the use of property, will be referred

101. General Management

101 page 2 of 2

to the appointing body for decision, normally with recommendations offered by the committee. Monthly Meetings should ensure that the duties of recognised meetings in respect of upkeep and financing of property are done satisfactorily, reports are received regularly, and budgets for repairs and renewals are prepared.

Caretaking and Wardenship Good upkeep involves caretaking. If the meeting house is to become a centre of activity the appointment of a Warden or Resident Friends can be highly beneficial. The function of Wardenship is considered in the Handbook entitled *Wardenship*, prepared by the Quaker Home Service Wardenship Committee.

.4 Funding Maintenance

Good management of estates requires recognition of the cyclical nature of maintenance expenditure. Whereas the shorter term cycles for redecoration are usually recognised and allowed for, it is common for the longer term replacements to be ignored until an emergency occurs and a wider appeal for financial assistance has to be launched.

In the Appendix A101.1 a guide is given on longer-term cyclical replacement of elements of buildings. Property and finance committees should advocate policies on the level of annual funding necessary in order to even out cash flow, and avoid the imposition on Friends of crisis decisions and major appeals for emergencies which could have been readily foreseen and prepared for. Friends should recognise the need for regular and systematic allocation of money for building up such a fund, accumulating tax-free interest in a high-interest account. At the same time, the value of appeals in special circumstances is to be encouraged.

.5 The Green Meeting House

The attitude of the meeting towards 'greening' is central to many of the necessary decisions of management, as a physical expression of the ideals its members hold. We have not mentioned the subject at every turn, but are glad to be able to include the Quaker Peace & Service *Greening our Meeting Houses* as appendix A 101.2

- .6 See:** 304 Fundraising for major work
Treasurers Handbook
- Property
 - Insurance
 - Wardens, Caretakers and other employees

.1 Recording Information

Whether a meeting house is new-built on a newly-acquired site or is an old and perhaps much-altered property, certain information about it must be easily available in case of need. This includes for example:

- Date of erection or acquisition.
- Location of the title deeds and of local copies.
- If Listed, what grade, and a copy of the Listing description.
- If in a Conservation Area.
- If any Tree Preservation Orders apply.
- If any rights of, or over, the site exist, eg. right of way, right of light, easement, overhead or buried cable, service pipes, sewer.
- If any restrictive covenants on its use or development.
- Site boundaries, their ownership, and responsibilities for upkeep.

See: 103 Systematic Care
 A103.1 Record Sheets

.2 Rights

Take care that over the years others do not acquire rights over the meeting's property, by our neglect or even by our goodwill. Such rights could be very detrimental to the needs of the Society in the future. Examples include:

- Short cut across the site becoming a right of way.
- Neighbouring building acquiring a right of light.
- Loss of ownership by allowing a neighbour to use part of the site, eg. as an adjunct to his garden, without proper and regular acknowledgement.
- Total loss of a remote burial ground to a neighbouring landowner through neglect of demonstrating our ownership.

.3 Disposal and Lease

Professional advice, professional negotiating and professional recording are to be preferred for the long-term satisfaction of all parties. If a disused MH is to be let, particular attention should be given to:

- The length of lease: the tenant may wish for a long term as most worthwhile to him, while Friends may seek the possibility of ready repossession should the meeting revive.
- The rights and obligations of both parties.
- The territorial extent of the lease, eg whether to include care of burial ground or boundary walls. Avoid outright sale unless you are replacing with a new meeting house. Circumstances change, and irrevocable disposal may be regretted later. Consider seriously the possibility of leasing instead.

The option of 'lease-back' is not thought appropriate for a meeting house.

.4 Insurance

See: The *Wardenship Handbook*
 Treasurers Handbook : Insurance

.5 Legal obligations

The Health and Safety at Work Acts have considerable importance to meetings as employers, as well as a wider moral bearing. See: The *Wardenship Handbook*.

Note particularly the obligation for an employer:

- To display in the premises a written statement of safety policy and certificate of employers' liability insurance
- To provide and maintain a first-aid box and an accident book.

.6 Certificate of Registration

Particularly in the case of a new meeting house, note the requirement to register the premises as a place of worship. See: *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

.1 Cycles of care

There are recurring cycles of inspection and maintenance which should be carried out on any property, and records to be kept. Such records are essential for a meeting house, given the skills available to the meeting, and the changing membership of property management committees. In addition, there are matters which should be kept in mind over the years so as to ensure that the meeting house does not fall behind the needs of the times.

.2 Keeping a record

We offer at appendix A103.1 three draft record sheets which may be used as found or altered to suit local circumstances and committee structure.

- **Record sheet A** brings together the essential information on the property, which needs to be readily accessible and which should not change often.
- **Record sheet B** is suggested as a check on recurring events, and to help keep control of what needs doing, when, and by whom, and as a basis of the annual report to Monthly Meeting.
- **Record sheet C** is suggested in respect of the care of burial grounds, both those attached to meeting houses and those remote, whether in use or not.

These three sheets will in time accumulate to form a valuable record most helpful to those who follow us in looking after the meeting house; they will form in time a logbook. In addition, thought might be given to keeping a record of costs.

.3 Recurring events

Annual	heating boiler	see: 203
	taps and stop-cocks	203
	gas installations and heaters	203
	fire extinguishers	204
	smoke detectors	204
	emergency lights	204
	burglar alarms	205
	building condition	201
	electrical fittings and flexes	202
	2-3 yearly	external varnish
	water heaters	202 & 203
3-5 yearly	external protective stain	201
5 yearly	external conventional paint	201
	professional quinquennial survey	105
	heating system	203
	electrical heating	202
	electrical controls to central heating	202
	electrical installation	202
5-10 yearly	internal decorating	201
10 yearly	lightning conductor	-
as advised	septic tank/cesspit	-

.4 Re-assessment

The times and outside circumstances change, and demand a corresponding change in the meeting house. Occasional re-assessment is needed. Examples are:

- Are energy-saving components suitable and working?
- Does the building meet current energy-conservation standards?
- Is the provision for the disabled up to current standards?
- Is the provision for security and for safety in fire up to current standards?

See: 301 Improvements – Renewing and Altering

.1 Work on Listed Buildings

All work of construction or external alteration requires Planning Consent. However if the meeting house is in a Conservation Area or is Listed, special additional provisions of planning legislation will apply. Listing covers all of the building, inside and out, later additions and alterations, outbuildings, boundary walls, etc., whether or not referred to in the List. Before any plans are prepared it is essential to ascertain by enquiring at the Planning Office concerned the precise status of the building.

If you wish to demolish (in whole or in part), alter, or extend a Listed Building you will need 'Listed Building Consent', and it is an offence to carry out work without consent. Work consisting of repair or restoration, change of material, replacement of doors or windows or opening up an old feature is likely to need consent, and the advice of the Conservation Officer should always be sought.

Until 1993 the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 gave exemption from Listed Building Consent to churches of all denominations. In 1993 legislation took away this ecclesiastical exemption unless the church adopted its own system of control along approved lines. The Society of Friends has not instituted its own system of controls. Accordingly Friends' buildings which are listed are subject to controls in the same way as any other listed building.

.2 Maintenance of Listed Buildings

Owners of Listed Buildings have a responsibility to maintain them in reasonable condition. A Planning Authority or English Heritage may make a grant towards repairing historic buildings, under close control, but grant aid must be agreed before any work is begun.

.3 Value Added Tax

The Value Added Tax Act, 1983, as amended, has conferred zero-rating on building work on 'protected buildings, group A'. Seek confirmation from the tax office on the current position. Keep track of notes on VAT changes appearing in *The Friend*.

.1 The need

A distinction is to be made between observing and surveying. It is now considered essential in church management to commission a professional survey of the premises every five years: a quinquennial survey. This is intended to identify incipient problems before the evidence appears obvious, and while they are relatively cheap to cure. It will involve inspection behind the normally visible surfaces, eg. under floor boards, in roof voids, behind chimney stacks and panelling; it will include recording the inevitable decline of the heating and electrical installations. It is a job for specialists.

Expression must be given to the principal objective of the survey, which is to safeguard the long-term future of the premises by anticipating potential problems and allowing for planned maintenance, and to its scope which should include the entire premises.

A joiner may be needed to provide ladders and to open up inaccessible spaces by installing a permanent trap door, under the guidance of the surveyor.

.2 The surveyor

A professional surveyor will be needed for the building itself, either a registered architect or a surveyor with RICS qualifications in buildings. When considering the choice of one (if the meeting has none within its membership qualified and equipped and willing to act) it may be right to keep to one with whom the meeting has already worked. Failing such, relevant factors will include personal recommendation and experience with historic buildings (though not necessarily with churches). Other specialists will be needed for the heating and electrical installations.

.3 The report

The report will indicate for each defect, the probable cause, suggested remedy, its urgency and the estimated cost. It should be accompanied by dated photographs. It must indicate areas not inspected, though with today's equipment these should be few.

The report will not necessarily be an adequate basis on which the committee may order remedial work: a more detailed investigation of possible remedies may be needed, as well as a more detailed specification, in order to do the job satisfactorily.

.4 The cost

The fee should be negotiated in advance, where appropriate for all the properties in the Monthly Meeting, and a programme agreed to cover them all in due order. The initial survey may well take longer and thus cost more than subsequent visits. It is the duty of the meeting as client to instruct the surveyor every five years. It should be agreed who, each time, is to order and pay joiner, electrician etc, should they be necessary.

