

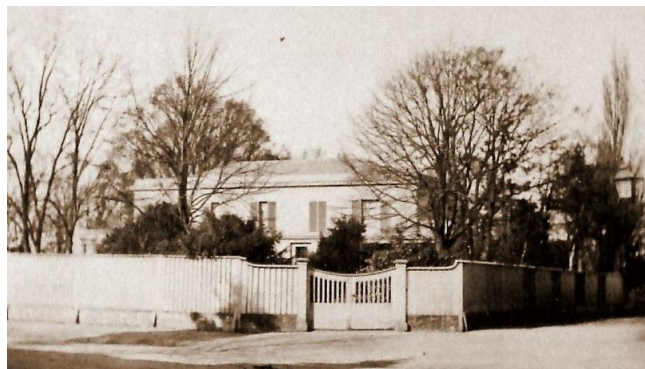
## WHAT WE WOULD HAVE SEEN.....

*if we had been able to visit the Hitchin Quaker Meeting House on 6<sup>th</sup> June.*

Hitchin's Quakers were never large in numbers but this did not prevent them being big in influence in the development of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Meeting's early origins lay in Hitchin's determined Puritan and Non-Conformist tradition which predated the Civil Wars, and members survived regular persecution until the Toleration Act of 1689. By 1694 the first purpose-built Meeting House was completed in Cod Piece (now West) Alley. There was no room here for a burial ground (whose original location was off the London Road in St Ippolyts) so a ¼ acre of land was obtained in 1723 within Salters Dell on Bedford Road. This remains, with its venerable brick walls incorporating 18th century work and a date stone of 1726, the site of the burial ground and home to the present Meeting House.

Quakers (or "Friends") were soon generally recognised for their moral fibre and example. Even after 1689 they still lacked access to such means of advancement as the English universities, many professions and national politics where Anglicanism was *de rigeur*. Quaker enterprise and talent went, therefore, to a disproportionate extent into business and finance where their acknowledged honesty was a major asset, and where their family linkages provided aid from beyond their immediate communities in a world before investors had the greater safety of limited liability and transparent accounting.

Successful Quakers were always used to helping other Friends who were less well off. Such philanthropy soon extended more widely thus, in Hitchin, Quaker landowners, bankers and businessmen helped provide healthcare, libraries, educational facilities, friendly societies and other saving schemes as well as contributing to civic amenities such as the Old and New Town Halls, the Corn Exchange and open spaces. These contributions were very significant to the wider life of the town and their legacies endure.



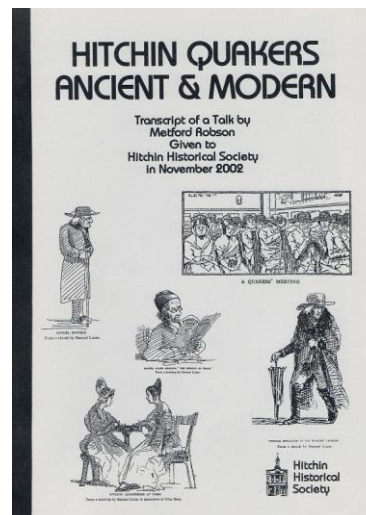
**The 1840 Quaker Meeting House in 1866**  
(*Hitchin Collection, North Hertfordshire Museum*)

The mid 19th century probably saw the peak of Quaker influence in Hitchin, and this was reflected in the new larger Meeting House of 1840, constructed opposite the Salters Dell burial ground. This building survives today but is now used by the National Health Service. In the late 1950s the Friends decided to erect a new Meeting House within the burial ground; designed by Paul Mauger the modern Meeting House was opened in 1959. Its construction was cleverly devised to stand almost wholly above the graves. These graves contain many individuals key to the history of the town and one of the treasures of the new building is its retention of a large mounted plan of the burial ground plots, a veritable Who's Who of Hitchin history with many of the names – such as Lucas, Latchmore, Ransom and Seebohm – still very familiar to us today.

HHS  
May 2020

Joshua Whiting 3 <sup>mo</sup> 11 1909 Aged 66	Susanna Burrows 5 <sup>mo</sup> 29 1887 Aged 83	Ann Carter Pirson 5 <sup>mo</sup> 14 1889 Aged 71	Henry Seebohm 1 <sup>mo</sup> 26 1893 Aged 69	Frederic Seebohm 5 <sup>mo</sup> 8 1892 Aged 76
Lawson Thompson 1 <sup>mo</sup> 11 1919 Aged 82	Catherine Sewell 3 <sup>mo</sup> 15 1903 Aged 80	Watson Grace 5 <sup>mo</sup> 29 1901 Aged 59	Juliet Grace 4 <sup>mo</sup> 1 1929 Aged 75	Benjamin Seebohm 7 <sup>mo</sup> 17 1907 Aged 67

Extract from burial ground map (*S Walker*)



**Hitchin Quakers, M Robson 2002, showing mainly Lucas drawings (HHS Collection)**



**The 1959 Quaker Meeting House today (*A Fleck*)**