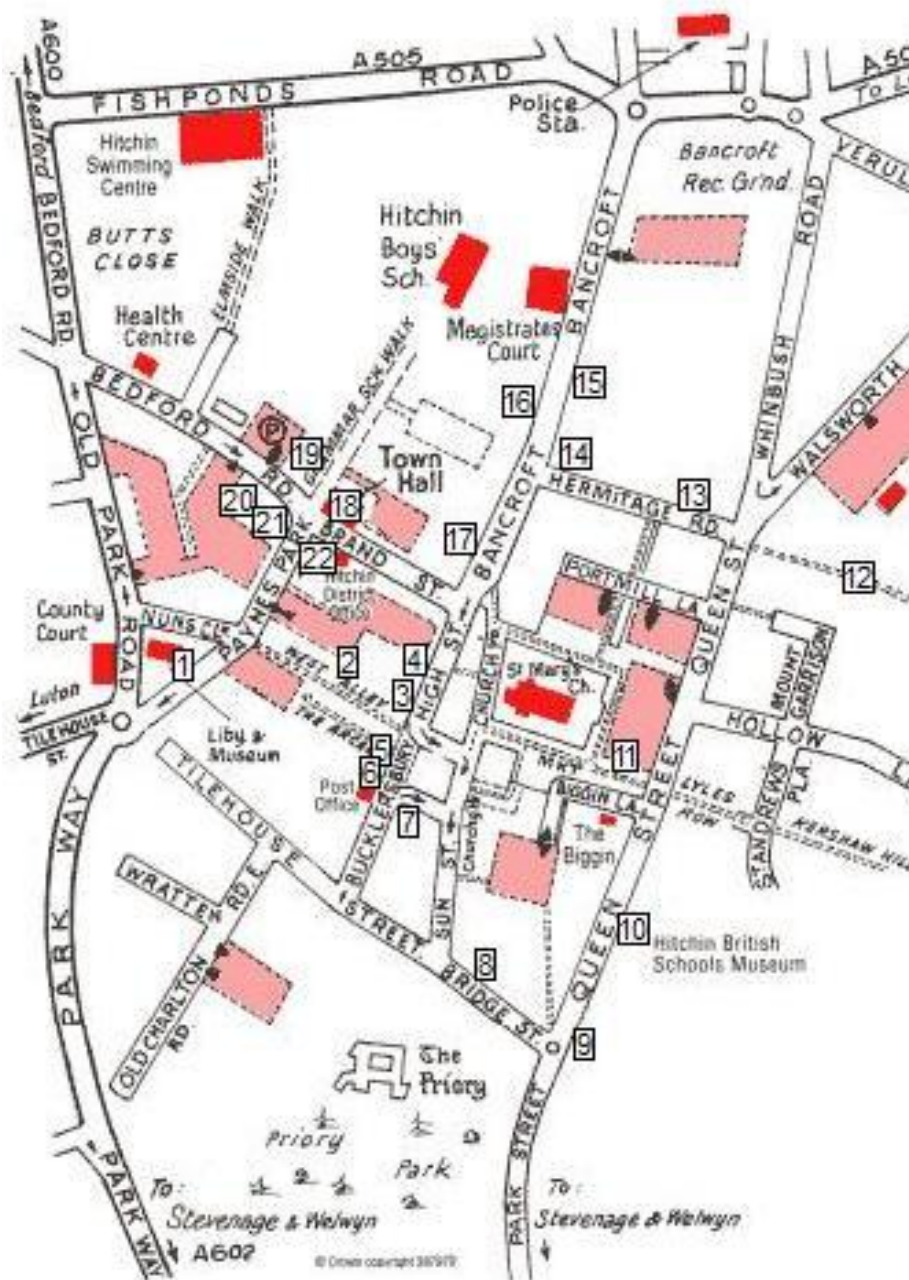


HITCHIN & THE QUAKERS

A Town Trail celebrating the involvement & presence of Quakers in Hitchin.



This Trail starts outside the former Hitchin Museum (Charnwood House, next to the library) and finishes at Hitchin Quaker Meeting House.

The Trail is designed to be followed in numbered sequence, taking about an hour. Alternatively, it is possible to pick and choose sites as you wish.

This Trail is not exhaustive, nor is it inclusive of all aspects of Quaker involvement and presence in Hitchin.

The information contained in this leaflet is correct as far as can be ascertained, although absolute accuracy is not guaranteed.

Hitchin, with its medieval market town roots, retains much charm and beauty.

As you follow this Trail, please take time to appreciate your surroundings.

The Trail starts from Charnwood House – until a few years ago, Hitchin Museum. Before leaving, take time to look at the town’s mural on the wall of the adjacent library building. Friends’ prominence in Hitchin’s history is marked by the Quaker figure towards the right. Returning past the museum, turn left and follow the path round towards Nun’s Close. On your right you will see ...

1 the William Ransom Physic Garden, opened in 1990 to commemorate and celebrate the life of William Ransom (1826-1914), a Quaker worthy who was a great servant of Hitchin and founder of William Ransom & Son (see number 15).

Go straight on across Nun’s Close and forward along Paynes Park. At the pedestrian lights, cross to the other side, and turn right past the Hitchin Language Centre, and then left into West Alley (formerly Quaker Alley and, before that Cod-piece Alley!). It was here,

2 in the area now used as Barclays Bank car park, that Hitchin Quakers built their first Meeting House in 1694, used for worship until 1840. The old brick and tile building was sold to Joseph Lucas for £717; it was demolished in 1960.

Carry on down West Alley and, at the end, turn left into High Street, passing ...

3 Barclays Bank. Built in 1845, the bank here originated as the partnership of three Hitchin Quakers – Joseph Sharples (1791-1871), William Exton (1800-1851), and Jeffrey Lucas (1810-1855), later joined by Quakers James Hack Tuke (1819-1896) and Frederic Seebohm (1833-1912). It was subsequently formed into a Joint Stock Company, together with other private banks, under the name of Barclay and Co. Ltd in 1896. The Barclay family, from Norfolk, were also well-known Quakers.

Continue in the same direction until you reach ...

4 What was Poundland. On this site, 9 High Street, stood the home of William Lucas. Here Quakers met for worship in the early days of the Society.

Now retrace your steps, past West Alley, to the point where the Arcade opens on your right.

5 This was the entrance to the Swan Inn, where early Quakers, by a judicious arrangement with the landlord, stabled their horses while they were at worship. The Inn was demolished in 1884.

Go on past the Arcade and on your right you will come to ...

6 the Corn Exchange which was built in 1853 at a cost of about £2,000 to a design by the Quaker architect William Beck, whose grandfather Thomas Barton Beck lived at Wratten Cottage, Hitchin.

Continue into Bucklersbury, noticing on your left in Market Square ...

7 Millets which, in the 1950s and 1960s, was The Book House, run by the Quaker bookseller and humorous author Basil Donne Smith.

At the end of Bucklersbury, turn left into Bridge Street. Cross the end of Sun Street, and continue towards Queen Street. On your left, just before the bridge, you will pass ...

8 Ohh La La. This occupies the site where W & S Lucas Limited's brewery stood from 1709 until 1923 – one of two Quaker breweries in the town! The building was sold for £2,275 in 1924, and was demolished in 1963.

Cross Queen Street with care, then look for the plaque on

9 The Lord Lister Hotel which, in the early nineteenth century, housed an academy run by Quaker Isaac Brown. Joseph Lister was a pupil here from 1838 to 1841, along with several other Hitchin Quakers.

Turn left into Queen Street, passing on your right ...

10 the British Schools building, built in 1837 to house the educational project for poor children already set up in 1810 by William Wilshere, a Hitchin lawyer and philanthropist, under the inspiration of Quakers Joseph Lancaster and William Allen, among others.

Walk further along Queen Street with St Mary's Church on your left. At this point, between the road and the river Hiz, was ...

11 the Girls' Club, started by Aillie Latchmore, a concerned Quaker, in 1915. In 1926, when this area was cleared of many slum dwellings, the club moved to St John's Road – then called Bethel Lane.

Continue along Queen Street until you come to the junction with Hermitage Road. Pause here to admire, on your right ...

12 Windmill Hill. The land at the top of the hill was given in 1907 by Frederic Seebohm for the building of Hitchin Girls Grammar School. His daughters Esther and Hilda gave the rest of Windmill Hill to the town in 1921. The water tower which you can see on the crest of the hill was opened in 1909 at a cost of £11,000 by Theodore Ransom, Chairman of Hitchin Urban District Council, and Lawson Thompson, both worthy Hitchin Quakers. Windmill Hill is so named since James Hack Tuke (see number 3) had a mill here until 1875, when it burned down.

Turn left at the traffic lights into ...

13 Hermitage Road which was built in 1874 on land which had been part of The Hermitage, residence of Frederic Seebohm. He donated the land to the town so that easier access could be made to the railway station. He himself was an early commuter to London.

Walk to the end of Hermitage Road.

14 The Sports District shop is within the corner site once occupied by The Hermitage, which was demolished in 1929.

At the junction at the end of Hermitage Road turn right into Bancroft for a short distance until you reach on your right the entrance to the site of ...

15 William Ransom and Son, manufacturing chemists established here in 1846, but since moved to Bury Mead Road. The firm was originally based on his family farm in the same area.

At this point cross Bancroft with great care and turn left walking back along it towards the town centre. Notice in particular...

16 number 21 Bancroft. This was at one time called Woodlands House, and was the home of Joseph Sharples, the Quaker banker. After his death in 1871 it became a school.

Keep on past Sketchley, Red Rooster, and M & Co shops on your right.

17 The Croft. These shops occupy the refurbished ground floor of a large house called The Croft, where James Hack Tuke, a partner in the Hitchin Bank, lived from 1859. He was consulted by the Government as an expert on the 'Irish Question' and participated in other forms of relief work.

On reaching the junction, turn right into Brand Street. At the top of the road pass, on your right ...

18 the new Town Hall which was opened in 1901 at a cost of £7,300 on land donated by William Ransom and Frederic Seebohm. It was designed by architect Geoffrey Lucas (a relative of the Quaker brewing family), to provide more space than was possible in the old Town Hall of 1840 which faces it across Brand Street.

Cross over Grammar School Walk, and continue a few steps ahead with ...

[19] the former North Herts District Council Buildings on your right. The first long block lying back from the road was built as the second Hitchin Quaker Meeting House in 1840 on land donated by Joseph Sharples (value £300). Designed by Samuel Dawkes of Gloucester, it cost £2,115 to build. Quakers worshipped here until it was sold in 1956 for £6,000 to Hitchin Rural District Council.

Cross Bedford Road by the pedestrian lights, and walk up the ramp ahead to the present Quaker Meeting House.

[20] The present Quaker Meeting House was built in 1958/9 at a cost of £8,000, and was designed by Quaker architect Paul Mauer. The unusual design was employed to minimise grave disturbance while building on the existing Burial Ground.

While you are here take time to admire ...

[21] the Burial Ground. This was bought by Quakers in 1750, and first used in 1757, following their abandonment of Friends' first Burial Ground near St Ippollitts. It is now closed for burials. Many of the gravestones disturbed by the building of the present Meeting House are arranged below the southwest wall. In the northwest wall can be seen some crudely carved initials together with the date 1726. It can be discerned by anything more than a casual glance that this wall was built after the bricks were thus inscribed, as it is clear they have been relaid 'out of sequence'!

Inside the Burial Ground and facing Paynes Park is the Unity sculpture, erected in 2022 within the 'Peace Garden'.

If you stand and look across Paynes Park you will see

[22] Latchmore Court which commemorates the life of Quaker Thomas Benwell Latchmore (1832-1908) who recorded much of Hitchin life in photographic form.

For more information about the Hitchin Quaker Meeting do visit the website –

<https://www.hertfordandhitchinquakers.org.uk/hitchin/index.html>