

Friends Meeting House, Bardfield

Brook Street, Great Bardfield, Braintree, Essex, CM7 4RQ

National Grid Reference: TL 67593 30562



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has high heritage significance as an early nineteenth-century building with original fittings and furnishings and a historic burial ground.

Evidential value

The meeting house is a timber-framed structure of 1806 with an attached burial ground. It was built in the garden of the medieval Buck's House, and the site is located in the historic centre of Great Bardfield, a village with Anglo-Saxon origins. The building and the site have high evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has a high illustrative value, as it retains several original features, such as the partition (with sliding panels) between the two rooms. It is associated with notable local Quaker families, such as the Buck and the Smith families. It has several burials of local and national importance. Overall, it has high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a vernacular building of the Georgian period. Its local materials and slight asymmetry (possibly due to the timber-framed construction) contribute to its aesthetic value, as does its setting in the historic burial ground. The modern extension was designed in sympathetic forms and materials. Overall, the building has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has a commemorative and symbolic function, not only for the local meeting but also for the wider community for whom it forms an important part of the historic streetscape. The building's primary function as a meeting house lends it spiritual value, while the community use gives it social value. Overall, the meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Thaxted*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0026590*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Braintree District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Great Bardfield*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1123465*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Great Bardfield*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1806; 1985–6*

1.13 Architect(s): *Not known; Martin Howard (1985–6)*

1.14 Date of visit: *19 June 2014*

1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Angela Howard, Michael Collins*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Bettley, J. and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Essex*, 2007, p. 390

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 172–3

Essex Historic Environment Record, MonUID: MEX1004758

Great Bardfield Village Design Statement

Local Meeting survey from Angela Howard and Michael Collins, 2014, 2015

Part 2: The Meeting House & Burial Ground: history, contents, use, setting and designation

2.1 Historical background

In 1703 the house of Joseph Smith was registered as a meeting house. By 1708 a meeting house appears to have been rented. In 1804 a new meeting house was proposed and the current site in the garden of Buck's House bought in 1806. Several members of the Buck family are buried in the Quaker burial ground. The meeting house was completed later in 1806. In 1848 a small extension was built beside the entrance (figure 1). This was demolished in 1985–6, when a new and larger extension was built in its place (figure 2). The architect was Martin Howard, a Friend and member of the meeting. The works cost about £25,000. A large part of the brick wall to the street was demolished to provide access and later rebuilt. In November 1993, the timber sill-beam or sole-piece on the elevation towards the burial ground was repaired (figure 3) and in 1996 the burial ground was landscaped. In 2007, the architect James Boutwood made some alterations to the 1980s extension: the dividing wall between the two small ground floor rooms was removed, and a new inner west wall constructed to alleviate problems with dampness (the outer floor level is higher to the west). In 2008, the burial ground was landscaped to convert it to a wildlife garden with a small gravelled patio.

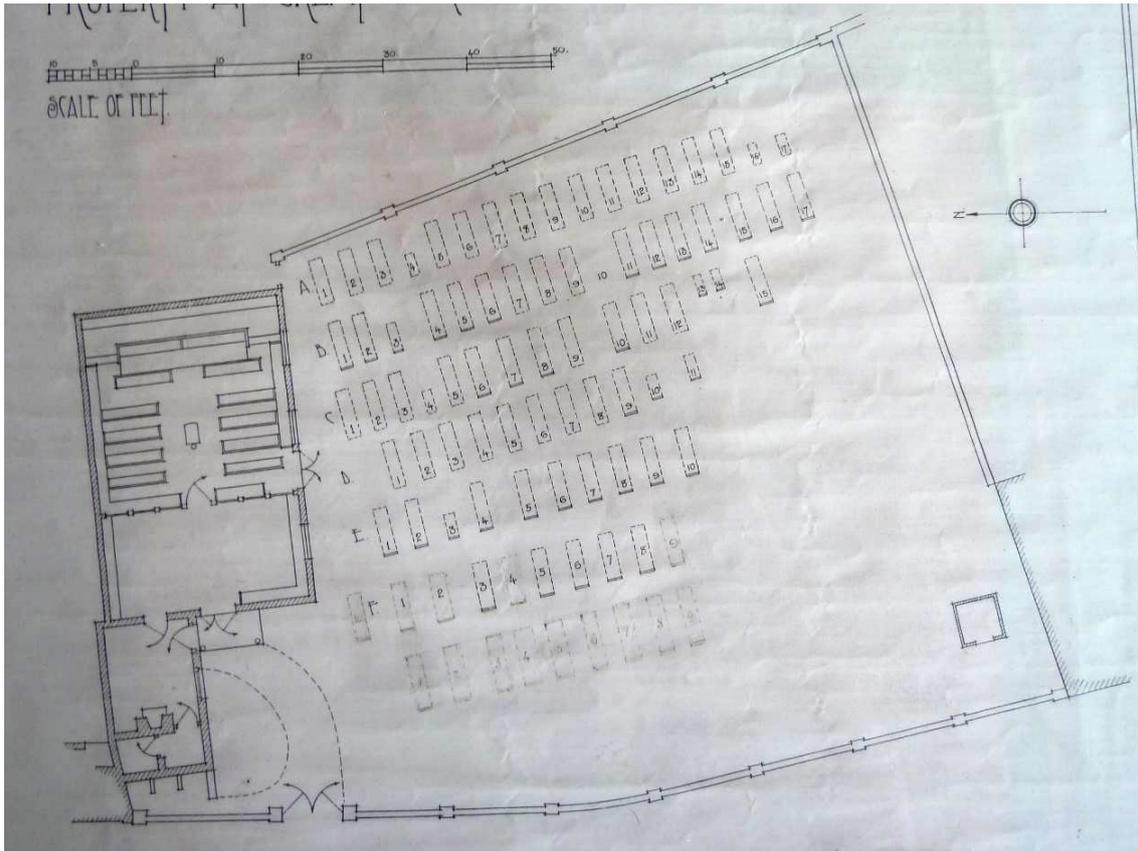


Figure 1: Plan of the meeting house and burial ground in 1930 by D.G. Armstrong, architect and surveyor. (North is actually at the top of the image; not to scale)
(Great Bardfield Meeting House archive)



Figure 2: The demolition of the 1848 extension (left) in 1985 and the newly constructed extension before rendering (right) in 1986 (Great Bardfield Meeting House archive)



Figure 3: Repairs to the sole-piece in November 1993, showing the timber framing (Great Bardfield Meeting House archive)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The street elevation faces approximately south. The main meeting house of 1806 is an oblong timber-framed building on a brick plinth with a hipped roof of handmade clay tiles. To the south is an extension of 1985-6 (by Martin Howard). This comprises a two-storey structure of rendered concrete blocks with a half-hipped roof towards the road and a flat-roofed entrance block with a brick-faced base which links the former to the meeting house. The half-hipped wing has two sash windows on the ground floor, with one sash to the attic. The entrance block has two small-paned fixed windows on either side of a four-panelled door. The meeting house has a high level window on the south elevation, lighting the lobby. The east elevation has three 8-over-8 paned sashes, and a two-leaf door under a corbelled hood.

The entrance link contains toilet facilities as well as a panelled door with a pilaster surround into the historic meeting house. This is divided into a smaller room and the main meeting room by a timber screen with sliding sash panels (still in working order) and a central door. In both rooms the floor is of woodblock. The main meeting room has a flat ceiling, a horizontal pine dado and fixed wall benches on three sides. Of the elders' and ministers' stand at the north wall only the dais, the back panels and the railings with turned terminal balusters are left. The two-storey extension of the 1980s contains one ground-floor room with a kitchen range, with attic storage above (not seen).

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are two benches in the place of the former stand, as well as several benches in the entrance lobby and ancillary rooms.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground lies to the east of the meeting house. It is enclosed by brick walls and contains burials from 1806. The older gravestones are lined up along the north wall. The only standing headstones are two rows near the entrance (photo centre right). The last burial took place in 1953 and the burial ground is no longer used for burials, only for the burial of caskets of ashes and the scattering of ashes. A burial plan of 1930 shows 88 burials (figure 1); there is apparently no up-to-date burial plan. The small shed shown on the 1930 plan no longer exists.

The burial ground was landscaped in 2008 which created a slightly elevated gravelled platform for outdoor seating just outside the meeting house (photo centre left). Most of the burial ground is maintained as a wildlife garden and only one path is mown around its circumference. There are several conifers just inside the boundary wall to the street.

Locally significant burials include that of H. Charles Swaisland (1919–2012), a former colonial civil servant, who in 1994 was sent with his wife to South Africa by the World Council of Churches to act as peace monitors at the first democratic elections. Other notable burials are those of Robert Henry Mays (died 1998); and Henry Smith (1804–64), who built a drinking fountain (1860; grade II) and the town hall (1860) in Great Bardfield.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is slightly set back from Brook Street. The entrance to the site is through gates between brick piers and a brick-paved path to the meeting house. Due to the narrow entrance there are only oblique views of the meeting house from the street (photo top right). The meeting house, its sympathetic extensions, the boundary wall and the trees all make a positive contribution to the conservation area. Brook Street, Vine Street and Crown Street form a triangle at the heart of the village.

As the meeting house was constructed in the former garden of Buck's House, there remains a right of way for the residents through the burial ground to the street. The gate is at the northwest corner of the burial ground (figure 1).

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is listed at grade II which is considered appropriate. The list description was written before the 1985–6 works and therefore needs updating and correcting.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was built in the garden of Buck's House, a house of c1400 with later alterations (grade II). The site is right in the historic centre of Great Bardfield, which is first recorded in Domesday Book and as a settlement dates back to Anglo-Saxon times. The site has high archaeological potential, due to the burials and the historical settlement.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting house: Good.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well maintained with a large area at the centre set aside as a wildlife garden. Paths are mown.

3.2 Maintenance

The most recent inspection was undertaken in November 2009 by C.C. Woodhouse FRICS of Joscelyne Chase, property consultants. He highlighted in his report of January 2010 that the inflexible Tyrolean render on expanded metal lathing will have to be replaced in the long term, while any cracks need to be made watertight regularly. Since the inspection, cracks have been filled in and a split in the flat lead roof repaired. A blocked gulley near the entrance remains a problem. The meeting has enough money for minor maintenance and repair jobs. For major ones, they can draw on the area meeting funds. The local meeting does not have a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: monitoring electricity and water use; Added room thermostat.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: composting
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: insulation in the roof space
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: less mowing of the burial ground and its use as wildlife area
- Transport: the meeting encourages car sharing

The meeting does not have an EPC certificate but might consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. There is no resident warden. The meeting is not accessible by public transport. There is no on-site parking for cars and bikes but parking is usually available in the road nearby.

3.5 Access

There is no level access to the site, as there is a step up from the street to the entrance path. There is no accessible WC, no hearing loop and no facilities for partially sighted people. The meeting has not conducted a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2 hours per week. It is used for an average of 2.5 hours per week. There is a lettings policy and each application for use is considered according to its merits. Only Quaker groups can use the meeting house free of charge. Users value the building for its convenient location, warm and quiet atmosphere, and competitive pricing.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime on the site. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and the local meeting does not consider this to be necessary.

3.8 Plans for change

Future changes to the building are currently (2015) under review.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1 To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting: The meeting house appears to serve the needs of the meeting well. However, average attendance at meetings for worship is only four people and there is concern about the future of the meeting house.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: At present, the meeting house is only in community use for an average of six hours per week. This relatively low number is possibly due to its location in a small village with other facilities, and the lack of disabled access. Apart from the access issue, the meeting house has all the facilities it needs to support the current local groups who use the building.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the event of closure, a new sympathetic and sustainable use would need to be found which would allow the historic features of the listed building and the burial ground to be retained. A level access path from the road may need to be considered.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1123465

Location

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, BROOK STREET

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Essex	Braintree	District Authority	Great Bardfield

Grade: II

Date first listed: 21-Dec-1967

Date of most recent amendment: 17-May-1985

TL 6730 GREAT BARDFIELD BROOK STREET (north side)

8/150 Friends' Meeting House 21.12.67 (Formerly listed under High Street)

- II

Meeting house. Early C19, extended in mid-C19. Plastered brick, roofed with handmade red clay tiles. Rectangular plan facing E. Small extension at S end. E elevation, 3 high original sashes of 16 lights, with crown glass. Double doors with shallow hood on scrolled brackets. Roof hipped. Entrance porch on left return wall. The interior is divided into 2 areas by a full-height screen of pine, the lower panels removable, the upper panels sliding vertically on sash

boards, to form one almost unobstructed area when required, all original. At the N end is a dais and elders' bench, with pine balusters at each end, the terminal baluster turned, the others plain. Pine dado, rising at the N. end.

Listing NGR: TL6759330562