

Friends Meeting House, Billericay

School Road, Billericay, Essex, CM12 9LH

National Grid Reference: TQ 67586 93993



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has medium heritage significance as an inter-war suburban house which was converted for use as a meeting house.

Evidential value

The meeting house and its site have low evidential value as an inter-war suburban house (originally known as the Red House) built in the former grounds of the mid-nineteenth-century South Lodge, and converted to meeting house use in 1957–8.

Historical value

Little is known about the early history of the Red House, its architect and occupiers. As a typical suburban house which was converted to meeting house use it has low historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a well-designed building, whose elevations combine Arts and Crafts elements with neo-Georgian sash windows. The interiors retain no historic features and the medium aesthetic value resides chiefly in the external elevations.

Communal value

The building's primary use is as a Quaker meeting house but is also rented out to local community groups. Due to these uses, the building has symbolic, social and spiritual significance, all of which lend it high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Essex*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032530*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting with Friends Trusts Limited who hold the deeds as custodian trustees*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Basildon District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Billericay*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed, not locally listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c.1920s*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *18 June 2014*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Andrew Watson and Peter Garratt*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, p. 174

Billericay Local Meeting archive, plans and documents

Billericay Local Meeting, typescript of talk to Women's Institute, 6 April 2011

Local Meeting survey by Peter Garratt, Andrew Watson and Rachel Martin, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

A building was first acquired for a meeting house in Billericay by 1698 (according to Butler; the local meeting's own history has 1704 as the date of the acquisition). The size of the meeting declined in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The meeting house closed and was sold (by 1800 according to Butler, in 1848 according to the local meeting's history).

From 1937, groups of Billericay Quakers started to meet again, initially at a private home, then in the Women's Institute Hall. In December 1957, the sale of the old meeting house in Chelmsford also provided funds to buy the so-called Red House in Billericay and convert it for use as a meeting house. According to map evidence the Red House was built between 1922 and 1937 in the grounds of the adjacent South Lodge, but its actual construction date, builder and designer are not known. The meeting house was officially opened on 20 September 1958. Alterations in 1957–8 included the installation of a WC in the former pantry and the removal of a wall between the former Morning Room and the Lounge (which was replaced by a curtain). The upstairs floor was used as a warden's flat.

In 2009, the surveyor Terry Gregson of GH Chartered Surveyors of Billericay surveyed the building and prepared a development appraisal report. The chosen option was to sell part of the plot for development with a detached house which provided the funds for the refurbishment of the meeting house and the flat above (which is rented out). This was undertaken in 2011–12. New separate entrance porches were built for the meeting house and the flat, and a disabled toilet extension built. A new car park was laid out with a shared drive for the meeting house and the new house. A single-storey 'cottage' in the grounds was demolished for the new house. (This appears to have been a linear brick building which predated the Red House and probably associated with the early nineteenth-century South Lodge just to the north, possibly stables or coach house.) In 2013, sound insulation between the ground and first floor was installed.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house was built as a private detached house in the 1920s or 1930s. It is an L-plan building of two-storeys, built of orange brick laid in stretcher bond with a tiled roof. The garden elevation faces north-east towards Southend Road; on the ground floor this has a single-storey canted bay window which shares a flat roof with a short loggia over a central hexagonal window (with radial glazing bars) beside a sixteen-pane sash window. On the first floor are three twelve-pane sash windows. The motif of the hexagonal window recurs (without glazing bars) on the south-east elevation, now the main entrance to the meeting house. The gable end has two ground-floor eighteen-pane sash windows, and one centrally placed sash above (above which is the hexagonal window). The brick gabled porch was added in 2012. Above it is a short and wide sixteen-pane sash, while beside it is a small eight-pane sash. Two sash windows are on the southwest gable end (eight and twelve-pane). A single-storey extension containing a disabled toilet and the entrance porch for the upstairs flat was built in the corner of the L-plan, 2012. In this area, the arrangement of the sash windows is less symmetrical than on the street-facing elevations. A back entrance door to the kitchen has been blocked recently. The northeast-facing gable end has the original entrance door with a lattice-pattern fanlight and a semi-circular canopy.

The interiors have been recently refurbished, with new skirtings, dado rails and picture rails. All the fireplaces have been blocked. The main meeting room is in the former lounge with the bay window. This can be connected by a folding screen to the present entrance hall (the

original morning room) to create a larger room; the wall between the two spaces had already been removed in 1957–8 when it was replaced by a curtain. A smaller meeting room is in the former entrance hall.

2.3 Loose furnishings

None of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

N/a

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located on a corner site between Southend Road (A129) and School Road in an area south of the town centre. Access is via a driveway from School Road. The fence between the meeting house plot and the site of the new house runs close to the former entrance (which is now largely disused). School Road was developed in the inter-war period with local authority housing and the houses there are of a noticeably lower architectural quality than the meeting house, comprising semi-detached houses with pebble-dash elevations. There are also some older houses in the vicinity, such as nearby South Lodge (mid-nineteenth century, grade II) and Locker's Hall (early eighteenth-century and later, grade II), both on Southend Road. Map analysis suggests that the Red House was built in the grounds of South Lodge.

Key views of the meeting house are those from School Road and the car park of the southeast elevation, and from Southend Road of the garden (northeast) elevation. The land to the south of the meeting house is now a car park, while the areas to the north and east are maintained as a garden.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed. It is a well-designed example of inter-war suburban housing, but is not considered to be a candidate for national designation or the local list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Red House was built during the inter-war period, in gardens or grounds belonging to the mid-nineteenth-century South Lodge. The archaeological potential is considered to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/a

3.2 Maintenance

The last QI took place in 2009 (Terry Gregson of GH Chartered Surveyors, Billericay), before the start of the recent refurbishment and extension works in 2011–12. The only remaining repairs are those to the chimney stack, which will be undertaken later this year (2014). The next inspection is planned for 2016. Regular maintenance of the building is funded by the

area meeting but the local meeting has sufficient funds for other works. The rental income from the flat is shared between the local and area meetings.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not formally use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact, including:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: New gas boilers and heating systems for each floor, together with provision of double glazing and much improved insulation to walls and loft space
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: Recycling of all appropriate materials in accordance with Local Authority facilities.
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: Under continuing review by Local Meeting Premises Committee in association with Area Meeting Finance and Property Committee.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: Garden is carefully maintained and includes a variety of plants, shrubs and trees which provide a range of habitats for wildlife.
- Transport: Car-sharing and cycling adopted where possible.

The meeting house has an energy performance certificate (energy efficiency level: 67, potential 77; energy impact level: 67, potential 79). There were two recommendations on the certificate: cavity wall insulation and low energy lighting (both installed during the 2011-12 refurbishment).

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities which are located on the ground floor of the meeting house. It has public transport links. There is on-site car parking, as well as a bike shelter (without racks). There is no resident warden.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. It has level access and an accessible WC, as well as a hearing loop in the main meeting room. Signage has large print for the partially-sighted with the recommended type of colour contrast. In 2010-11, a Disability Access Audit was conducted. Measures installed subsequently include an additional accessible toilet, a ramp to the entrance and the hearing loop.

3.6 Community use

Friends use the meeting house for 5 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 60 hours per week. It is used for an average of 18 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Political parties, children's parties and the consumption of alcohol are not permitted. Only groups associated with the meeting can use the building free of charge. Users value the meeting house due to its convenient location, warmth, quiet, fair pricing, good disabled facilities, good car parking facilities and business-like administration of lettings.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has low crime levels and there has been no recent crime at the site. In 2002-3, there was damage to windows from school children. In 2004-5, the 'cottage' (since demolished) was occupied by squatters. The incident was reported to the police but no charges were pressed. Other past incidents include graffiti on doors and the theft of a notice board. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is currently no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but the meeting might consider making contact if necessary.

3.8 Plans for change

There are currently (2015) no plans for alterations or changes to the building.

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 has been adapted to suit the present needs of the meeting and facilities have recently been updated. There should be no need for further alterations in the near future. The building has no fittings or fixtures of any historical value.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is already in regular community use and the upstairs flat is rented out. No further alterations relating to extended use should be necessary in the near future.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the unlikely case of closure, the meeting house could easily be converted back to residential use by reconnecting the staircase to the ground floor. This would be preferable to demolition.

Part 5: Category: 3