

Friends Meeting House, Brentford & Isleworth

Quakers Lane, London Road, Isleworth, London TW7 5AZ

National Grid Reference: TQ 16349 76881



Statement of Significance

A late eighteenth-century meeting house, with a little-altered main meeting room, set within a large burial ground and bounded by a contemporary boundary wall. Overall this is a meeting house of exceptional significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1785 and retains much of its original character and fabric, including hidden elements such as the king-post roof. Features such as the fixed seating in the elders' stand, the gallery shutters and the rows of headstones in the burial ground are evocative of Quaker traditions and

values. The making good of the building following wartime bomb damage is itself part of its evidential value, which is exceptional.

Historical value

This is one of the oldest meeting houses in Greater London, and has been in continuous use since 1785. The burial ground records over two centuries of Quaker witness. The site is of exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has a plain Georgian character, with notable details and features such as the inscription over the doorway, fine brickwork detailing, the shutters and their hooks and, in the main meeting room, high quality fixed furnishings. It stands within a large and well-maintained burial ground, with mature planting, and is bounded by a contemporary brick boundary wall. The post-war additions have reduced the aesthetic value of the building, but not significantly, and it remains of exceptional aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is widely used by local groups as well as Friends, and is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *London West*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0026290*
- 1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Hounslow*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Syon NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1240256*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1785; 1958*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not known; Hubert Lidbetter*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *30 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Bernadette O'Shea*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Boundary wall*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 376-7

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, p. 70

Wilding, J. (ed.), *Brentford & Isleworth Friends Meeting House 1785-1985, A local Quaker history*, 1985

Local Meeting Survey, by Bernadette O'Shea, June 2015

Oxley Conservation, Quinquennial Survey Report, 2014

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

2.1 Historical background



Figure 1: Drawing of 1945 hanging in meeting house, showing wartime bomb damage

By 1659 local Friends were hiring the house of John Woolrich for meetings for worship (in 1669 Woolrich was jailed for holding such illegal meetings). From 1707 an old barn at an unidentified location was obtained and fitted up as a meeting house. While its replacement with a purpose-designed building was proposed in 1731, this did not happen until 1785, when the present building was constructed on a site bought in the previous year from Benjamin Angell, Elder and Clerk to the Longford Monthly Meeting. A burial ground was also created, and a boundary wall constructed.

In 1824 unspecified alterations were made to the meeting house to make it 'more commodious' (quoted in Butler), and in 1829 a library was established. Also in 1824, Angell's widow Sarah gave further land, allowing an extension of the burial ground, which from 1850 served the whole Quarterly Meeting.

In about 1930 (the precise date is not recorded in the published histories) land on the London Road frontage was acquired from the Duke of Northumberland. It was then occupied by a building known as The Barn, which was adapted for use as a social club.

The meeting house suffered bomb damage in 1940 (figure 1) and until it was repaired in 1950, meetings for worship were held in The Barn.

A classroom was added and other internal alterations made in 1958. The architect was Hubert Lidbetter, Surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting, although the 1985 history (p. 42) states that Bernard McGeoghegan, an interior designer, was largely responsible for its planning. Further improvements were made in 1982, including a new heating system, WCs, kitchen and provision of a pitched roof over the schoolroom. More recently, secondary glazing has been installed in the meeting room.

In 1978 the frontage site on London Road was developed with nine dwellings in association with the Shepherd Bush Housing Association. Called Angell House, the development includes a two-bedroom apartment for a Warden.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

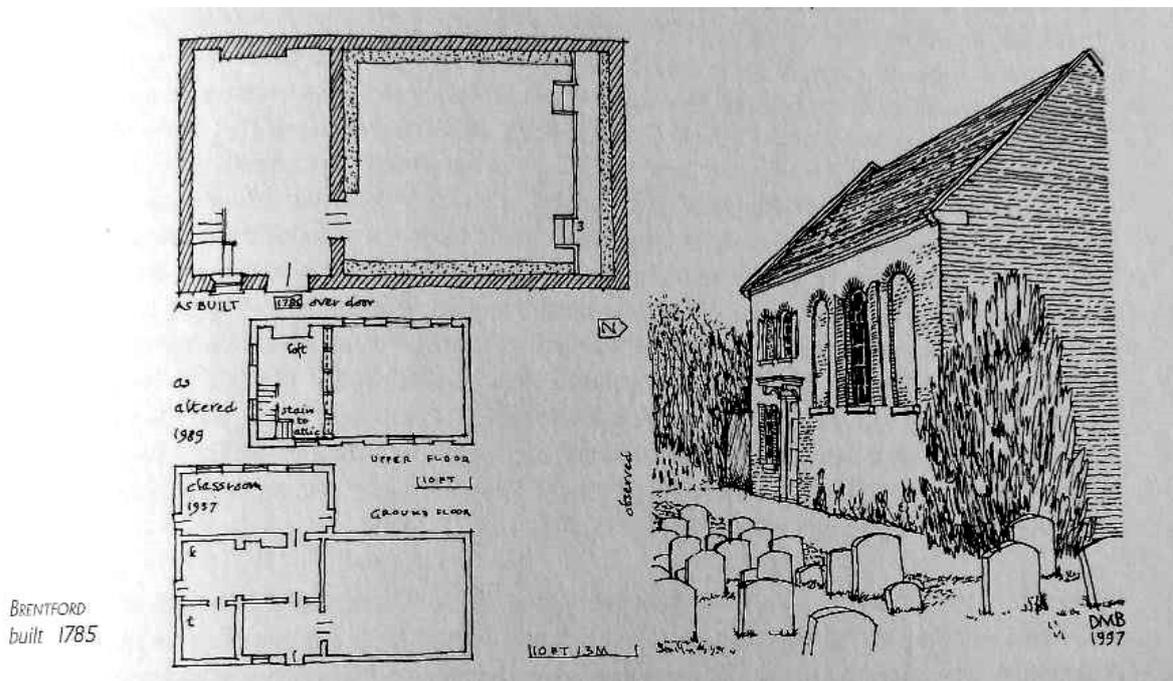


Figure 2: Plans and sketch elevation, from Butler, Vol. 1, p. 367

See list entry, below. This does not describe the interior, and can be augmented as follows.

The meeting house was built in 1785, originally to a rectangular plan, consisting of a large double height space for the large meeting room, and a smaller two-storey area with a stair to a gallery (see figure 1). A single storey schoolroom was added in 1958 and there were further adaptations in 1982. The meeting house is plain in design, built of brown brick laid in Flemish bond under a slate roof with gable ends which rise from Bath stone corbels. The main elevation faces east towards Quakers Alley, where the main entrance to the left has double doors, each of three flush beaded panels, and a stone hood on brackets inscribed '11 4 Mo 1785'. Alongside this is a replacement (with horns) six-pane-over-six sash window, gauged brick arch with fine lime putty joints and shutters with shutter hooks. On the first floor are two arched window openings, one blind and one glazed, with shutters. To the right, two of the three tall arched openings to the meeting room are blind, while the central one is a glazing bar sash window with shutters. Above is a brick dentilled eaves. This elevation has been much rebuilt following wartime bomb damage, following the original design; the change in brickwork is clear at the northeast corner. The north elevation is plain, the brickwork enlivened only by a small oculus for roof ventilation in the gable, while the west

(rear) elevation has three round-headed windows with glazing bar sashes. The south elevation has two multi-pane sashes to the first floor and one to the attic (where there is an office over the gallery/library), all with flat gauged red brick arches with fine joints. Twentieth century additions to the south and southwest are single-storey, of brick and slate, with traditional joinery and glazing bar sash windows.

The main entrance leads into a lobby area with a stair leading up to the gallery. There is a blocked fireplace with plain surround to the gallery; at ground floor level the chimney breast has been truncated for access to the schoolroom. The main space of the meeting room is entered via double doors, and has perimeter dado panelling which sweeps up around the raised elders' stand. There is a light oak woodblock floor and the walls and flat ceiling are plastered (above this is a king-post roof structure, see photograph in the QIR of November 2014). At high level on the south side, full-width vertically-sliding shutters communicate with the gallery. Three windows on the west side and one on the east have been fitted with secondary glazing. Below, there is fixed seating on three sides and in the elders' stand, which is raised by three steps and has a panelled front. It is reached by two short flights of stairs, each with turned newels of late eighteenth century character, very similar to the arrangement at Uxbridge (*qv*).

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are some open-backed freestanding benches of apparent nineteenth century date in the large meeting room.

2.4 Attached burial ground

There is a large burial ground, still in use, mainly to the south but also to the north and east of the meeting house, and containing a large number of burials marked by headstones (1850 onwards). The headstones are simply inscribed with the names and dates of the deceased, in the Quaker fashion. Most interments in the twentieth century were carried out by H. W. Crook & Son, a Quaker firm of undertakers. On the northern boundary there is a more recent area for cremated remains, with associated plaques. The burial ground is mainly laid to grass, with a number of yew and other trees, and is bounded by a brick boundary wall which is contemporary with the meeting house.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a long thin site, bounded to the east by Quakers Lane, a long and straight pedestrian alley, where a high brick wall runs along the site boundary (figure 3). On the other side of the lane are the buildings and playing fields of the Green School, a site given by the Duke of Northumberland in 1906, whose Syon Park estate lies nearby to the east. The building is concealed from the London Road frontage by the 1970s block of Angell House.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II*, a high grading which reflects its architectural and historical interest (although the building has been partially rebuilt and added to). The list entry is very short and does not describe the interior. It needs to be augmented.

The contemporary boundary wall (figure 3) may be deemed to be listed by virtue of curtilage, but might be considered for separate listing in Grade II (as with the boundary wall at the Uxbridge Meeting House, *qv*).

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

High.



Figure 3: Wall in Quakers Lane

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good

ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory but with significant localised problems of erosion of headstones.

3.2 Maintenance

The most recent QIR was in November 2014 (Oxley Historic Buildings Consultancy). This concluded that the meeting house was in a generally satisfactory condition, well used and well cared for. Items requiring immediate attention included:

- Repair of the boundary walls, including cutting back and maintaining tree and plant growth
- Repair and improved detailing to the roof of the extension below the first floor south windows.
- Light overhaul of the roof coverings
- Repair and redecoration of rotten external joinery to the single storey extension.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. Various measures have been taken to reduce the environmental impact of the building, including insulation between the ceiling joists over the meeting room (but not over the office in the attic) and secondary glazing in the large meeting room. Further improvements recommended in the QIR include draught-proofing of the windows and doors and insulating the attic office space. Other sustainability measures have included use of low energy light bulbs, recycling and the establishment of allotments on the site for use by the local community.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has all the amenities it needs. These include two WCs (one with disabled access) and three meeting spaces. There is separate two-bedroom accommodation for a warden in Angell House.

3.5 Access

There is a step at the main entrance but a ramp to the side door. An accessible WC is provided. The meeting has not commissioned an accessibility audit, but one was strongly recommended in the recent QIR.

3.6 Community use

Friends use the meeting house for three hours each week. It is also well used by other group, particularly a nursery, although the number of hours (actual and potential) are not stated in the questionnaire return. The meeting has a lettings policy, details not provided. Users cite the location, ambience, low cost and garden.

The QIR cautions: 'The Meeting House is subjected to a relatively high intensity of use. This is currently not having an adverse influence on the condition of the building, although it is clear that the day nursery use has reached its capacity/limit. The manner in which the building is used, and can be used, needs to be reviewed and monitored to ensure that it remains in active beneficial use and that potential conflicts with the building fabric are avoided.'

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The meeting has not experienced general crime. Lead was stolen in 2008. A fence was damaged on one occasion, and repaired after liaison with the local police. The area is said to be well cared for, with low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence.

3.8 Plans for change

None stated.

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 building and its facilities meet the needs of Friends. Further changes (for example in association with disabled access or insulation) should take account of the architectural and historical importance of the building. The historic seating arrangements should be preserved, even if no longer used during meetings for worship.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already widely used by the wider community, and is well equipped for this purpose. The QIR's cautionary comments about intensity of use should be borne in mind.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: This is an outstandingly important historic meeting house, with original internal furnishings and an adjacent burial ground. It would not therefore lend itself satisfactorily to a secular use. In the event of being laid down it would be desirable to explore the possibility of its being vested in a trust dedicated to the preservation of the building.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description

List entry Number: 1240256

Location: QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, QUAKER LAKE

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 21-May-1973

UID: 438394

Details

Date on inscription over door: - "21 4 Mo 1785". Simple rectangular building in brown brick. Slate roof. 2-storey main building, with 1-storey additions. Bath stone corbels and gable edging. The meeting house occupies most of the building. 1 flat arched and 5 round-headed windows. 3 tall windows to meeting house. Shutters and shutter hooks. Simple entrance with stone hood on brackets. Double door, 3 panels each side. Single ground floor window with flat arch to left side of entrance. 2 small round-arched windows over brick dentilled eaves. Rear elevation has 3 round-headed windows. 2 modern additions to front and rear at left side. Front of building was heavily damaged by enemy action and was restored after the war. Side outshut on L has 4-panel door below flat arch. Rear: L C20 addition at R side.

Listing NGR: TQ1634976881