

Friends Meeting House, Brentwood

49 Hutton Road, Shenfield, Brentwood, Essex, CM15 8NF

National Grid Reference: TQ 60987 94816



Statement of Significance

The building has medium heritage significance as a typical example of a post-war meeting house designed in the domestic tradition by the eminent Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter and his son.

Evidential value

The meeting house and the site have low evidential value as a modern building constructed in 1957, extended in 1959–60. The site was formerly part of the site of Brook Farm, dating back to at least the 1870s and may have related archaeological potential.

Historical value

The meeting house has medium historical value, as a relatively recent building typical of the small, plain, domestic-style meeting houses built by Hubert Lidbetter (and his son) in the post-war years. It has strong associative value with the architects.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is modest and small-scale and like most Quaker meeting houses, is a building of simplicity. Decoration is reduced to lettering, brickwork and internal arches. The building is well-designed and in its use of materials typical for the period. It has medium aesthetic value.

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 value, all of which lend it high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Essex*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0003820*
- 1.3 Owner: *Mid-Essex Area Quaker Meeting with Friends Trusts Limited who hold the deeds as custodian trustee*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Brentwood Borough Council*
- 1.5 English Heritage locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Brentwood NPA*
- 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): *1957, 1959–60*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Hubert and H. Martin Lidbetter*
- 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: *John Cannell, Francine Carpenter and Peter Garratt*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Bibliographic references:

Bettley, J. and Pevsner, N., *The Buildings of England: Essex*, 2007, p. 684

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, p. 175

Gawne, E. 'Buildings of endearing simplicity: The Friends Meeting Houses of Hubert Lidbetter', *The Twentieth Century Church (Twentieth Century Architecture 3. The Journal of the Twentieth Century Society)*, 1998, pp. 85–92

Powell, W.R. (ed.), *Victoria County History: Essex*, vol. 8, 1983, pp. 90–109

Brentwood Local Meeting archive, photocopy of plan of December 1959, 1957 photo

Mid-Essex Area Meeting, 'History: Meeting Houses',

<http://www.midessexquakers.org.uk/history-meeting-houses.php>

Local Meeting survey by John Cannell and Francine Carpenter, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

A first meeting house in Brentwood was registered in 1699. In 1808, a bakehouse was registered as a Quaker meeting house. This meeting still existed in 1811 but must have declined later. The current meeting was founded in the 1940s. The present site (on part of the former Brook Farm) was purchased in 1955 for £1,000 and the meeting house was constructed in 1957, funded by the proceeds of the sale of the old meeting house in Chelmsford. The architects were Hubert Lidbetter and his son H. Martin. (Pevsner and Gawne attribute the building to Hubert (1885–1966), while Butler attributes it to H. Martin Lidbetter (1914–92).) In 1959, the original architects returned to design a small classroom beside the recessed entrance (drawings are signed ‘H. & H.M. Lidbetter’), completed in 1960 (figure 3).

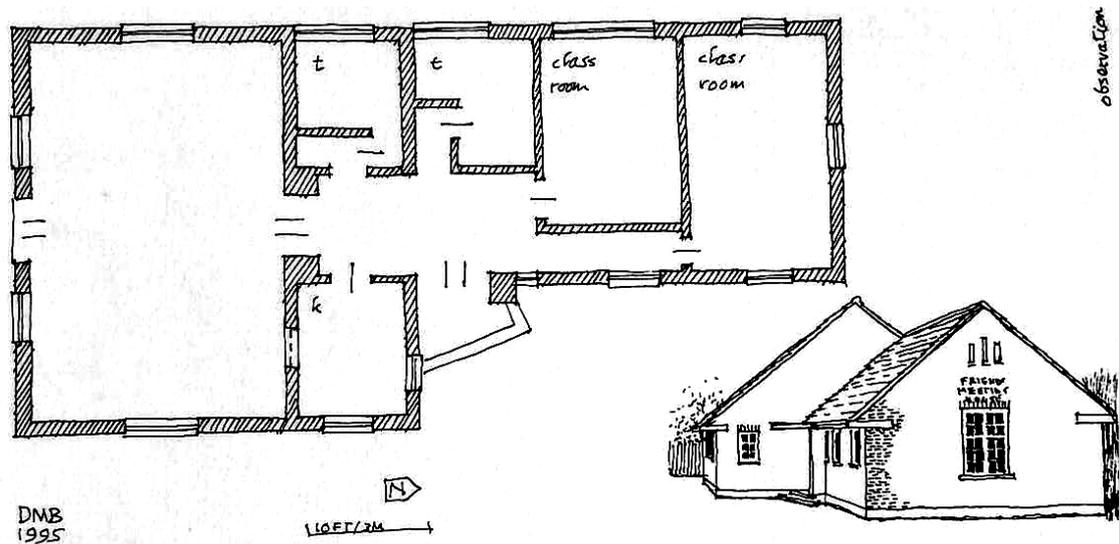


Figure 1: The original plan of 1957 and perspective as drawn by Butler (not to scale; north is approximately to the right) (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p. 175)



Figure 2: Photo of the opening of the meeting house in 1957, showing the entrance area prior to the later classroom extension (Brentwood Local Meeting archive)

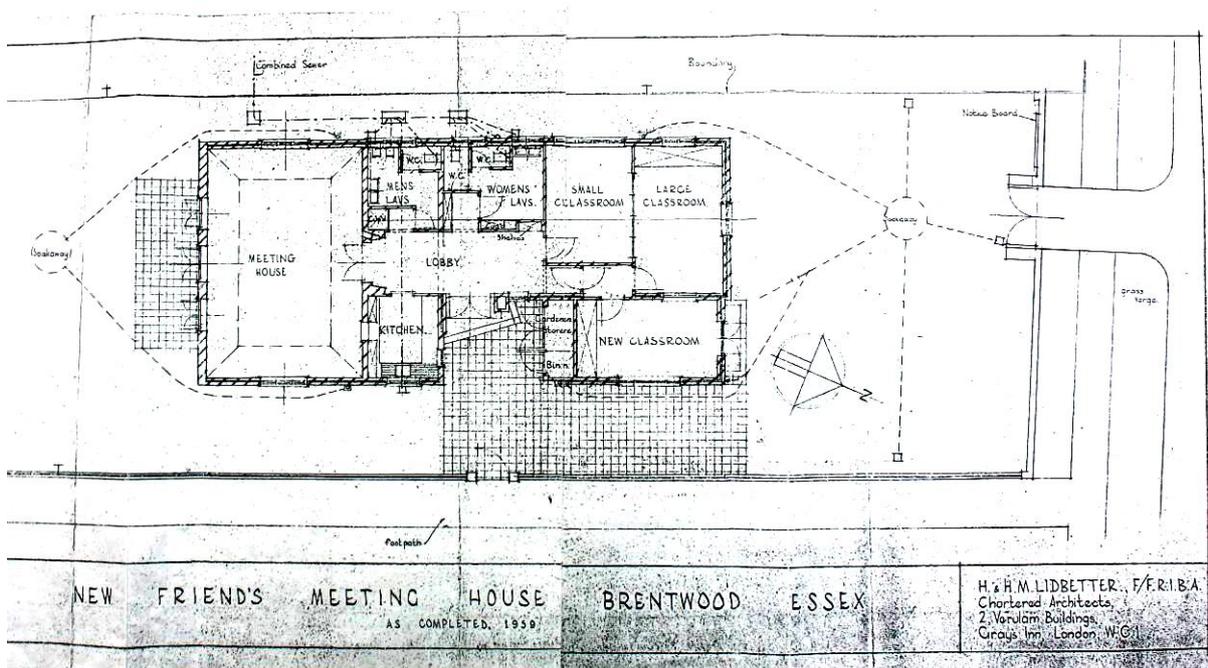


Figure 3: Plan dated December 1959 by H. & H.M. Lidbetter, showing the original meeting house and the then proposed 'new classroom' (bottom right) (north is approximately to the right; not to scale) (Brentwood Local Meeting archive, reproduced with kind permission of Mark Sessions)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house was built in 1957, to designs by H. & H.M. Lidbetter in a simple domestic revival style. It was extended with one classroom in 1959–60 by the same architects. The materials are brown brick laid in both stretcher and English bond, with a tiled roof. The plan is oblong, with a recessed entrance bay on the east side. The north elevation towards the street has a broad gable end with concrete kneelers, original lettering, and a four-light casement (photo top left, p. 1). Beside it is an entrance in the later classroom; despite its proximity to the street this was never the main entrance. The side and rear elevation area all similar with casement windows, only the north-facing gable of the southern half is tile hung. The actual entrance to the east has projecting yellow brick side walls and a flat canopy. The garden elevation has three French doors (photo top right, p. 1).

The corridor which connects all the rooms has arched openings to the toilet lobby, a cupboard and a narrower corridor. The floors in the main rooms are of woodblock while the corridor is carpeted. The original folding partition between the two classrooms at the northwest has been removed (photo bottom right, p. 1). One of the original external windows was blocked by the addition of the 1959–60 classroom; it is now filled with glass bricks. The other window was turned into an internal door. Beside the door into the meeting room is a small 'squint' (even though the door is part glazed as well). The meeting room has a canted ceiling and a serving hatch to the kitchen (photo bottom left, p. 1).

2.3 Loose furnishings

No furnishings are of particular heritage significance. Some of the chairs and tables are probably contemporary with the meeting house.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

According to map evidence, the meeting house was built on the site of the pre-1870s Brook Farm (also known as Brookhall Farm), which had been demolished by 1952. The south side of Hutton Road was developed in the 1950s with houses, although the development of the area had started much earlier, prompted by the presence of Shenfield Station further east on Hutton Road.

The meeting house is flanked by post- and interwar houses and faces a small shopping street which developed due to the proximity of Shenfield Railway Station (Shenfield and Hutton Junction). The plot is quite narrow and the main view from the street is of the north elevation (photo top left p.1).

2.6 Listed status

The building is not listed. While it is a fine, understated design by a prominent architect of Quaker meeting houses, it is not considered to be a candidate for listing. The only listed building by Hubert Lidbetter is Friends' House in London (grade II). None of his (or his son's) smaller purpose-built meeting houses are listed so far. Brentwood Borough Council currently does not have a local list, although the meeting house at Brentwood could be a suitable candidate for a local list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was built on part of the site of the former Brook Farm. The known archaeological potential of the site relates to the farm's former buildings and activities, although the construction of the meeting house will probably have destroyed any below-ground archaeology inside the building's footprint. Overall, the site is considered to have low archaeological value.

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

In 2005, the architects Scott and Jacques made alterations to the toilets, including providing a new accessible toilet. The most recent inspection was undertaken in 2014 by a member of the meeting (John Cannell). It found no major problems. Since 2013, some of the windows have been replaced with sympathetic timber double-glazed casements. Works planned for 2014-15 include the replacement of the remaining windows. The meeting has enough funds to maintain and repair the building. It has a 5-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: Double glazing with wood frames, in progress, part completed
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: Waterless urinals

The meeting does not have an energy performance certificate.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. The meeting house can be reached via public transport. There is limited on-site car and bicycle parking. There is no resident warden.

3.5 Access

There is a moveable ramp to the step at the entrance, an accessible WC, and a hearing loop. Once inside, all rooms are at the same level. However, the emergency exit from the meeting room has a step down to the garden. There are no specific facilities for the partially-sighted. The meeting has not conducted a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 40 hours per week. It is used for an average of 28 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy but no specific policy excluding groups. Before allowing use free of charge, groups are assessed on their merits and funding ability. Users value the meeting house for its good location and fair pricing.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There has been no heritage crime, general crime or other incidents. 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 as this is not considered necessary.

3.8 Plans for change

Apart from completing the installation of double glazing, there are no plans for changes to the building (as of 2015).

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 currently fulfils all the requirements of the meeting. There are no heritage constraints and few fittings of particular note. The meeting is currently considering the replacement of the front elevation signage to increase their visibility. However, this should be carefully considered as this is a fine example of 1950s lettering and adds to the period charm of the building.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is already in community use and has all the required facilities to support this.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the unlikely event of closure, a sympathetic new use would be preferable to the demolition of the building. The building is relatively flexible and could be utilised for a range of purposes without requiring major alterations.

Part 5: Category: 3