

***Friends Meeting House, Bury St Edmunds***

*St John's Street, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 1SJ*

*National Grid Reference: TL 85207 64608*



***Statement of Significance***

***The building has high heritage significance as a purpose-built meeting house, first built in the eighteenth century and later altered and extended, with some historic fittings and features and an adjoining burial ground.***

***Evidential value***

***The meeting house is a timber framed building of the mid-eighteenth century, and was refronted in white brick in the 1870s. The interior of the meeting house is relatively unaltered, retaining its gallery, elders' stand and some benches. The fabric of the building and the burials on the site could yield***

***further evidence about the building construction, and past patterns of Quaker life and worship in Bury St Edmunds. The building and the site have high evidential value.***

#### **Historical value**

***Friends were meeting in private houses in Bury St Edmunds from the 1670s, including one near the present meeting house. The present building is evidence of greater toleration in the town and nationally, and consequently of greater confidence. It retains its historic internal layout, as well as a number of original features, including the gallery and some seating. The simple headstones of the burial ground remain in situ. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.***

#### **Aesthetic value**

***This is a typical meeting house design of the mid-eighteenth century, being rectangular in plan, with a hipped tile roof. Inside it has a gallery at one end and the elders' seating at the other. The design is characterised by plainness. The timber-framed construction is unusual for a public building of this date, and perhaps a desire to cover this evidence and make the building look more up-to-date was the primary motive for the 1870s refronting. The recent additions are also timber-framed and rendered and reflect the desire for simplicity as well as concern for environmental sustainability. It is a good example of sympathetic modern design in a historic setting. The buildings, their attractively landscaped approach and the secluded burial ground have high aesthetic value.***

#### **Communal value**

***The meeting house remains in primarily Quaker use, but is also a community resource. It makes a notable and positive contribution to the local conservation area, and is appreciated by local people and visitors who may not be users of the building. The building embodies Quaker values of simplicity, welcome and environmental concern. These spiritual and social values give the site high communal value.***

#### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Ipswich and Diss*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0013740*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *St Edmundsbury Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Bury St Edmunds*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1135150*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Bury St Edmunds Town Centre*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1750; 1871; 2007-8*

1.13 Architect(s): *Architects for 1750 and 1871 work not known; Modece Architects*

1.14 Date of visit: *3 July 2014*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Graham Gosling*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Attached new facilities*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 570–1

Curtayne, B., *Quakers in Bury St Edmunds*, second edition (revised), 2008

*An Account of the Estates etc. belonging to Suffolk Quarterly Meeting*, second edition, Ipswich, 1868

St Edmundsbury Borough Council, *Bury St Edmunds Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*, 2007, <http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/conservation/upload/ConservationAreaAppraisalBury080320.pdf>

Local Meeting survey by Graham Gosling, June 2014 and October 2015

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

### 2.1 Historical background

In the 1670s Friends in Bury St Edmunds were meeting regularly at one another's houses, including that of Thomas Tillet in Long Brackland (the present St John's Street). Butler states that this was on the site of the present meeting house, but no such building is shown here on Thomas Warren's map of 1747, and it is more likely that the meeting house was further up Long Brackland (at a property identified as a Quaker meeting house on Warren's maps of 1747 and 1776). These maps also show a small burial ground nearby in Well Street.

The present meeting house and attached burial area date from 1750, and were built on the site of old tenements. The site amounted to about an acre, extending from the present St John's Street at the front to St Andrew's Street at the rear (figure 1). The new building was of timber-framed construction (externally rendered), unusual for a public building at that time. It is shown as square on Warren's map, but this may be a schematic representation, and the smaller room at the back (Margaret Kemp Room, originally the women's meeting room and later a school room) may be contemporary with the meeting house. It is also timber-framed, and had an elders' stand on its west side until 1973.

In 1791 a gallery and screen (with moveable shutters) were added in the main meeting house. In 1871 the east front facing towards St John's Street was refaced in white Suffolk brick. It is not clear whether the central Venetian window then installed repeated the previous design, or was an aggrandisement of the 1870s.

In 1874 part of the burial ground facing onto St Andrew's Street was sold and the Fennell Memorial Homes built with money left by the Quaker Sarah Fennell. Provided for impecunious women, these are said to be the first purpose-built flats in the town. These, and further additions to the meeting house, are shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map

of 1885 (figure 2). In the 1960s the roof was retiled and the gallery sealed off, with WCs and kitchens installed beneath it.

In 1982 a garden room was built to the south of the meeting room. This was replaced in 2007-8 by a larger addition, housing a wide entrance corridor/link, garden room, kitchen and WCs (Modece Architects of Bury St Edmunds). At the same time general repairs and renovations were carried out to the meeting house, including the re-opening of the gallery and the removal of the 1960s additions beneath the gallery.

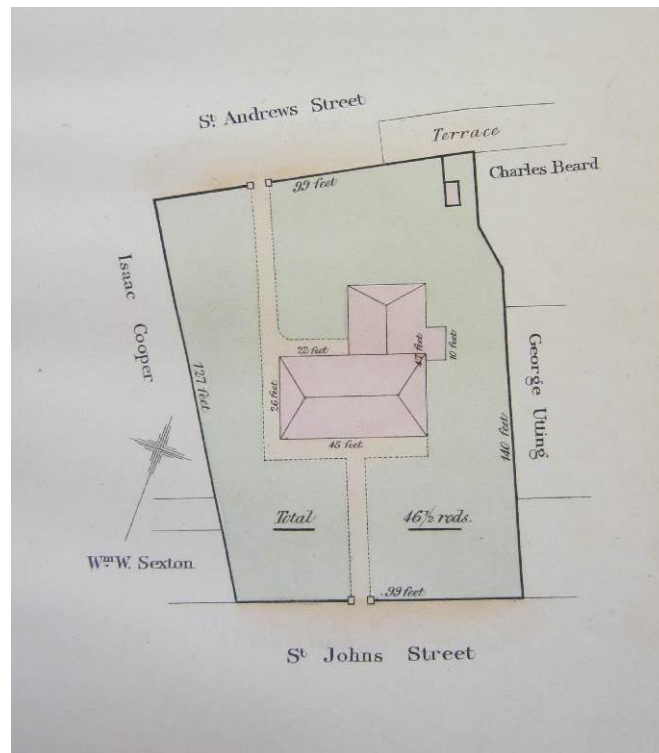


Figure 1: Site plan, from *An Account of the Estates etc. belonging to Suffolk Quarterly Meeting*, 1868

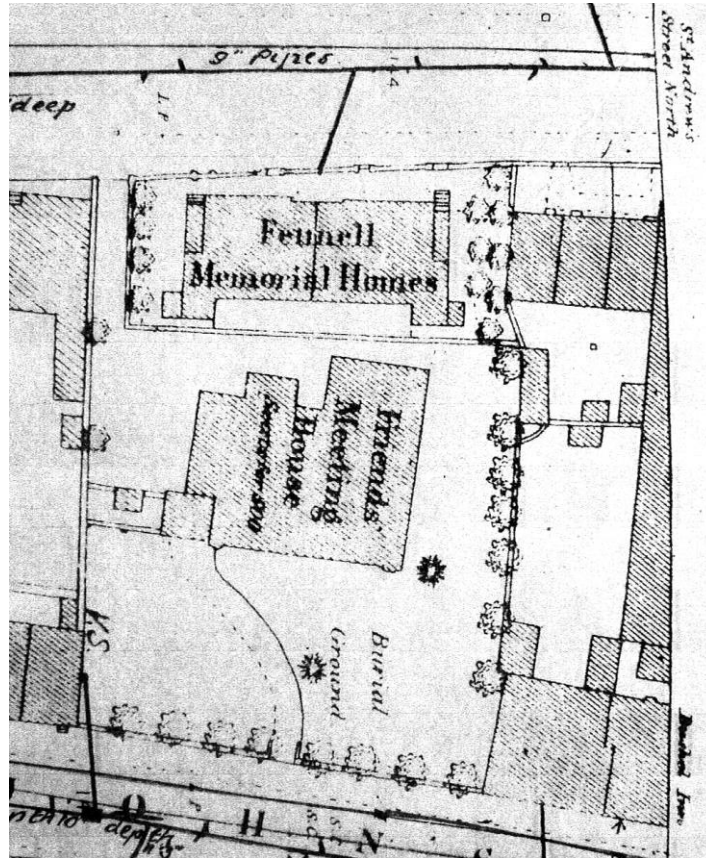


Figure 2: Detail from first edition Ordnance Survey map, 1885

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The list entry (below) offers an adequate description of the external appearance of the building. It is timber-framed, externally rendered, save for the elevation towards St John's Street, which was refaced in white brick in 1871. The building has a hipped tile roof, and plain pilasters at the corners of the front elevation. The windows on this elevation consist of a central Venetian window flanked by two tall (fifteen-pane) windows, with narrow section glazing bars and top-opening lights. The open entrance porch supported by two plain wooden columns which is mentioned in the list description was replaced as part of the extensions of 2007-8, by Modece Architects. These are contemporary in style, and consist of a glazed entrance hall/link with projecting canopy over the entrance, and a rendered (over timber frame) single-storey addition with a projecting angular bay window.

The interior is summarised in the list entry in one word: austere. It is indeed plain in character, as befitting a meeting house, but retains much of its historic character and fitting out. These include the stand with its seating at one end, the gallery at the other. The Kemp room also has a ramped timber dado of mid-eighteenth century character. Floor surfaces are of timber boarding, with further modern seating.

## 2.3 Loose furnishings

There are some historic benches both in the main space and in the Kemp room.

## 2.4 Attached burial ground

The burial ground is at the front of the building (when viewed from St John's Street) and retains a number of headstones of mid-nineteenth-century date onwards, within an attractively landscaped garden space.

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The main frontage is set back from, and looks onto St John's Street, renamed after the church of the 1840s by William Ranger, which lies two hundred yards or so to the west, its 'ignorant' (Pevsner) spire (rebuilt in 1872) a local landmark. To the rear of the meeting house are the Grade II Fennell Memorial homes and, over St Andrew's Street, the town's bus station. The site lies within the Bury St Edmunds Conservation Area, to which it makes an important contribution. The former burial ground in nearby Well Street is now incorporated into the back garden of residential properties, and has not been inspected as part of this review.

A former detached burial ground survives in Well Street (NGR: TL 85347 64529). This is now in private ownership.

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is appropriately listed in Grade II. The list entry would benefit from updating and an expanded description of the interior.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site is likely to be of high archaeological potential. The line of St Andrew's Street follows that of the medieval town wall, and post-medieval development preceded the building of the meeting house and associated burial ground.

# Part 3: Current use and management

*See completed volunteer survey*

## 3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory.

## 3.2 Maintenance

The building has been repaired and redecorated as part of the recent programme of adaptation and extension. The last QI took place in May 2014 (Jeremy Sheppard FRICS, of Sheppard & Co). The meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. It has 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: low energy light bulbs used throughout; new extension is insulated to a high specification; secondary double glazing recently installed in Margaret Kemp Room.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: all kitchen and other waste is recycled.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: There are suggestions that a wildlife garden should be created around the burial ground.

The meeting does not have an EPC and is not planning to obtain one.



### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. They are all in the meeting house and include: Fully-equipped 'commercial' grade kitchen; three WCs (including one fully accessible); one large meeting room and two smaller rooms. There is no resident Warden.

The meeting house has local transport links: a bus station is opposite and the railway station a short walk away. There is on-site bicycle parking and limited on-site car parking. Further car parking is in the adjacent roads and the pay and display car park opposite.

### 3.5 Access

The meeting house has level access, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There are no specific facilities for the partially-sighted. A Disability Access Audit was carried out in 2008 and is kept under review. Measures implemented include a sound-proofed door to the Margaret Kemp Room.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 4 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 234 hours per week. It is used for an average of 80 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. There is a lettings policy. Political party meetings are not permitted; otherwise the hiring of the room/s is at the discretion of the warden. Use by Quakers is free of charge and some groups in financial hardship have been given discounts. Users value the meeting house for its central location, competitive pricing and peaceful atmosphere.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has generally low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime at the site. The main problem is the occasional presence of drinkers in the attached garden (open to the public and in an alcohol-free area). Other reported crimes include one or two incidents of theft of property from users of the meeting house. The meeting has developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Police Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

The meeting is currently (2015) exploring ways to improve the acoustics.

## **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 is flexible in nature, and meets the worship needs of the meeting. It is desirable that the internal volume and remaining historic furnishings and features of the two meeting room spaces should be retained.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building is already used for other compatible purposes, and the building is sufficiently flexible to allow for this undermining its historic character.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting:* Closure of this historic meeting house would be highly regrettable. In that event it would be necessary to find another, preferably public, use for the listed building which retained its internal volumes and surviving historic features, and which made appropriate provision for the future management of the attached burial ground.

## **Part 5: Category: 2**

**Part 6: List description(s)**

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1135150

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, ST JOHNS STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 12-Jul-1972

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

BURY ST EDMUNDS

TL8564NW ST JOHN'S STREET 639-1/3/617 (West side) 12/07/72 Friends' Meeting House

GV II

Quaker Meeting House. C18 and early C19. Faced in white brick c1870; fully hipped roof with C20 plain tiles. Plain pilasters at the corners. Single storey; 3 window range: 2 outer 15-pane sashes in plain reveals with flat gauged arches and a central small-paned Venetian window, the 2 narrow outer lights with flat gauged arches surmounted by a moulded cornice, the central window with a semicircular brick arch. On the left a rebuilt open entrance porch supported by 2 plain wooden columns. INTERIOR: austere.

(BOE: Pevsner N: Radcliffe E: Suffolk: London: 1974-: 146).

Listing NGR: TL8520764608