

Former Meeting House, Coggeshall (now Coggeshall Library)

29 Stoneham Road, Colchester, Essex CO6 1UH

National Grid Reference: TL 84943 22724



Statement of Significance

The building has high heritage significance as a former Quaker meeting house built in 1878, on the site of an earlier meeting house, and in secular community use since 1965.

Evidential value

Although the building is no longer in use as a meeting house, internal feature such as the stand for the elders' seating, and (to a lesser extent) its external design denote its historic use. The building has medium evidential value.

Historical value

Quakers have been active in Coggeshall since the 1670s, and the present meeting house is the second on the site. Built in 1878 by a local architect, it is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has a simple chapel-like appearance, almost reminiscent of Victorian functional railway architecture. It occupies a prominent corner site and makes a positive contribution to the local conservation area. It is externally little altered, but internally has lost much of its meeting room character. It is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is now a public library and as such is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Southern East Anglia*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *2015915*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Braintree District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Coggeshall*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed, not locally listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Coggeshall*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1878*

1.13 Architect (s): *William Doubleday (unconfirmed attribution)*

1.14 Date of visit: *1 July 2014*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Librarian*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Possibly, but no marked graves. There is a separate former burial ground nearby.*

1.19 Information sources:

Bettley, J. and N. Pevsner, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Essex*, 2007, p. 250

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 178–9

Heritage Gateway, SMR no. 8734

Website, <http://daryledmonds.com/index.htm?ssmain=g1/p1980.htm>

Local Meeting survey by Robert Parkes, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

Regular meetings of Friends in Coggeshall were established by 1670. According to the Essex Historic Environment Record, in 1693 a 480-year lease was granted for a burial ground on land about 150m to the west of the present meeting house site (NGR TL 848 26). The first permanent meeting house was a large structure (seating 500) built in the early eighteenth century, on the site of the present building (figure 1). According to Butler, this stood within the burial ground, but there are no marked graves. The original meeting house had three parallel gabled roofs facing the street, with a single internal space with the roof carried on two pairs of columns, and with a loft along the back wall. Butler describes the building as 'unlike any other'.

The burial ground to the west was extended in 1783 but went out of use in 1856. It now forms part of the land belonging to a modern housing development. Two headstones of 1855 remain close to the eastern boundary wall, for which drawings and transcriptions exist in the County Historic Environment Record (SMR no.8734).

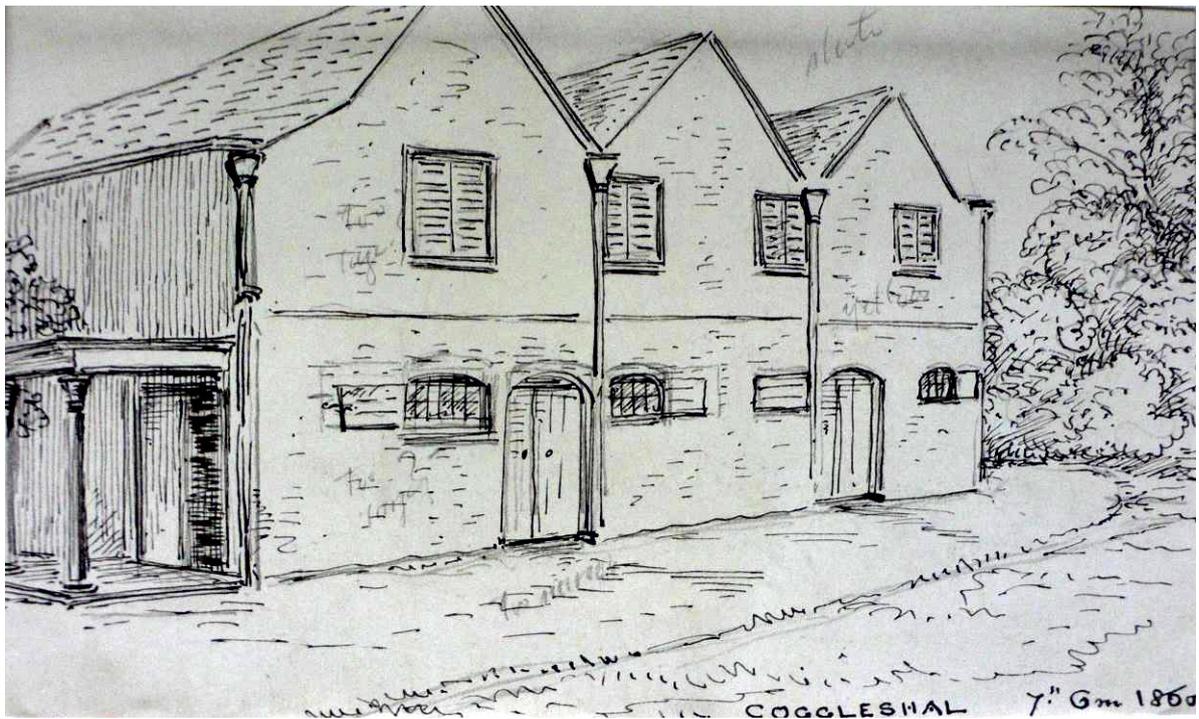


Figure 1: The early eighteenth-century meeting house, drawing of 1860 (Friends' House Picture Library)

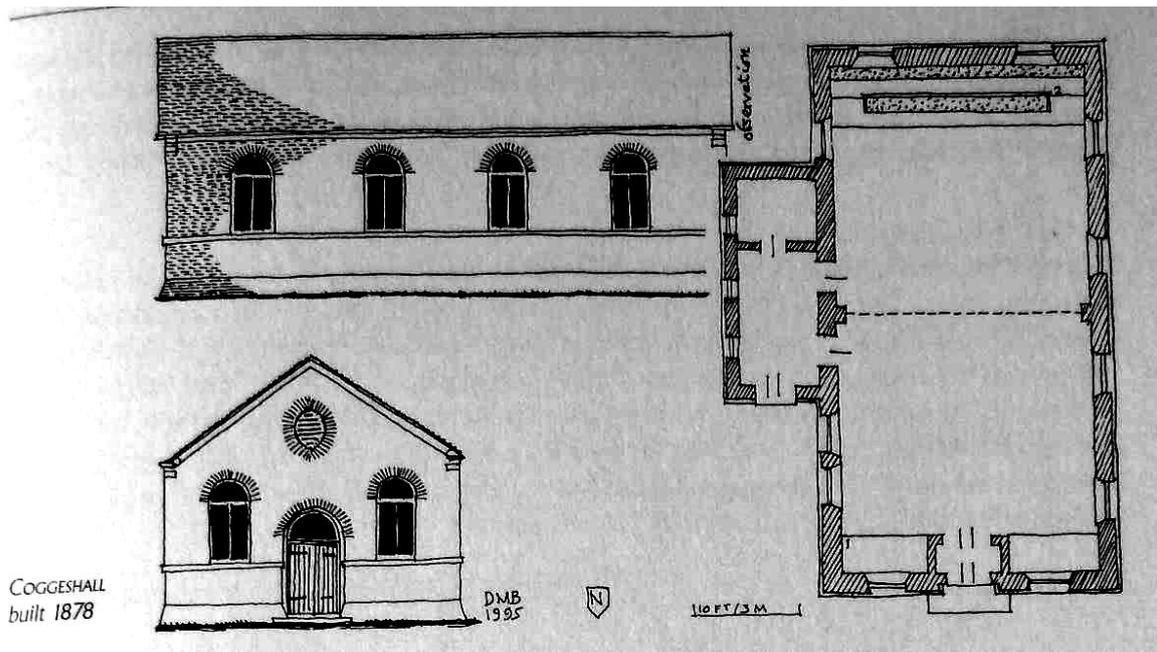


Figure 2: Plan and elevations of 1877 building, from Butler, p. 179

The original meeting house was replaced in 1877 by a smaller building on the same site, ‘from plans furnished by an architect the son of the oldest Friend in the town (quoted in Butler, p. 179). Butler suggests that this was Edward Doubleday, but no architect of that name is known and William Doubleday (1846-1938), architect of Great Coggeshall, is a more likely candidate (and is the attribution given in Bettley/Pevsner). There *was* an Edward Doubleday of Coggeshall, William’s brother, but he was a grocer by trade. Their father, also a grocer and also called William, was born in c1807, and may well have been the oldest Quaker in town in 1877 (he died in 1886). The new meeting house seated about 120 in two equally-sized chambers, which were originally separated by ‘a single large sash shutter’ (Butler). A small addition was built at the southwest corner of the building, probably (judging from its appearance) in the 1950s. The meeting house closed in 1965 and is now leased to the county council and used as a public library.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house is a small, chapel-like building, in its brick functional way reminiscent of some railway architecture. It is built of stock brick laid in English garden wall bond (three courses of stretchers for each course of headers). The shallow gabled roof is covered with slates. The entrance faces Stoneham Street and has a central round-arched entrance with plain semi-circular fanlight. A projecting brick band runs around the building, on which sit the sills of the windows; one on either side of the main entrance and four on the north side. The window surrounds have roll-moulded brick closers. On the south side is a projecting side entrance with catslide roof and a door similarly detailed to that at the main entrance. Two windows are placed to the east of this and one to the west, the latter now subsumed within a later – probably 1950s – single storey, flat-roofed addition, built of fairly closely matching brickwork. This is not shown in the plan at figure 2 but is just visible in the photo top left.

The interior is a single volume space, originally with a partition at the middle. The side entrance (now disused) allowed independent access to each of these spaces. The interior is now fitted out as a public library, with white painted plaster walls and a suspended ceiling. There is a matchboard perimeter dado and the elders’ stand survives at the far end (photo bottom right, p.1).

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no surviving historic loose furnishings.

2.4 Attached burial ground

Butler suggests that the meeting house has an attached burial ground, but this may be an error; no other sources suggest this, but there is known to have been one nearby.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The building occupies a corner site, set back from the highway behind a low boundary wall, the plot mainly laid to grass. The lane at the side leads to a surgery and other backland development, including a pair of Victorian cottages possibly historically associated with the meeting house (the separate gardens of which are now a small public garden). Further to the west is the site of the former burial ground, now part of the land belonging to King's Acre, a modern housing development.

The meeting house lies within the Coggeshall Conservation Area, in an area of mixed use and character. There are two other places of worship close by: Christ Church (1710, enlarged in 1834) lies opposite and was built as an Independent chapel; it is now a united Baptist, Methodist and URC church. Further to the north in the RC church of St Bernard of Clairvaux (1920s and 1960s).

2.6 Listed status

The building is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for statutory listing. It would merit consideration for inclusion in a local list, and contributes to the character of the conservation area.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The former meeting house is on the site of a larger early eighteenth-century meeting house (and possibly earlier development) and, according to Butler, this site incorporated a burial ground. The archaeological potential of the site may therefore be high.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Fair.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory. The area around the meeting house may hold burials, but none is marked. This area is laid mainly to grass, and is well tended.

3.2 Maintenance

Essex County Council has a full maintenance lease for the former meeting house. No inspection report has been seen, but there is evidence of under-maintenance (blocked gutters), and the joinery is in need of redecoration.

3.3 Sustainability

Not applicable

3.4 Amenities

Not applicable

3.5 Access

The main entrance has been adapted to provide step-free access.

3.6 Community Use

The former meeting house is used as a library for sixteen hours each week (half-days on weekdays apart from Monday).

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

Not known.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for change at the present (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 building has not been used as a place of worship since 1965.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: Not applicable.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: The building is already in an appropriate secular use, which allows it to remain a community resource without the need for major adaptation.

Part 5: Category: 3