

## ***Friends Meeting House, Croydon***

60 Park Lane, Croydon, London, CR0 1JE

National Grid Reference: TQ 32542 65217



Adult School Hall exterior



Adult School Hall interior

### ***Statement of Significance***

***A well-detailed post-war design by Hubert Lidbetter, forming a respectful neighbour to W. Curtis Green's fine Adult School Hall of 1908 and occupying a prominent position in the post-war townscape of central Croydon. Overall, the meeting house has high significance.***

### ***Evidential value***

***There has been a Quaker meeting house and burial ground on this site since the early eighteenth century. All earlier buildings apart from the Adult School***

**Hall were lost as a result of wartime bombing, but the site remains of high below- and above-ground evidential value.**

**Historical value**

**The Croydon meeting originated in the 1650s and has been on this site since 1705. There have been three meeting houses as well as a school, burial ground and adult school. The site is of high historical value.**

**Aesthetic value**

**The meeting house is a well-detailed building of domestic character, designed as a contextual addition to the earlier Adult School Hall. Both buildings occupy a prominent position in the local townscape. The meeting house is little altered inside and out, and displays Arts and Crafts, New England and Scandinavian influences. It is of high aesthetic value.**

**Communal value**

**The meeting house is widely used by local groups and is a prominent and well-recognised feature in the local street scene. It is of high communal value.**

**Part 1: Core data**

1.1 Area Meeting: *South London*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0008110*

1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Croydon*

1.5 Historic England locality: *London*

1.6 Civil parish: *Croydon NPA*

1.7 Listed status: *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): *1956*

1.13 Architect (s): *Hubert Lidbetter*

1.14 Date of visit: *14 September 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Gillian Turner and David Parlett*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Adult School Hall (Grade II)*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes (closed)*

## 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 2, p. 584-6

Mirwitch, J., *The Society of Friends' Hall at Park Lane, Croydon*, *The Twentieth Century*

Society Newsletter, Winter 2006/7, pp.9-11

Historic maps, photos and plans held at meeting house

List entry for Adult School

Local Meeting survey by Gillian Turner, June 2015

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

### 2.1. Historical background

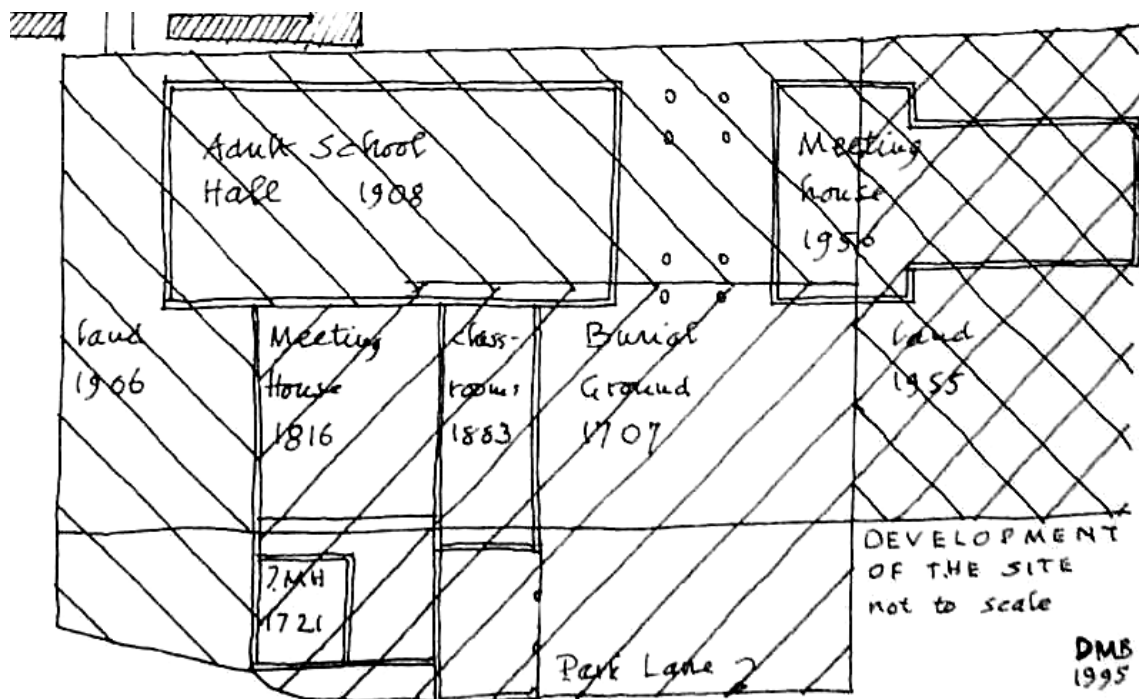


Figure 1: Site development plan (from Butler, p. 584)

Friends in Croydon met regularly from about 1658, renting accommodation at an unknown location. In 1707 land for a burial ground was acquired in Back Lane, remaining in use until 1871 (after which the municipal cemetery was used by Friends). A small meeting house was built on part of this land in 1721, shown at the bottom left hand corner of the site development plan at figure 1. This was retained as a women's room and incorporated into a larger meeting house built behind it in 1816. In 1832 an addition was made to accommodate the Friends School, which moved here at that time (it transferred to Saffron Walden in Essex in 1879). The situation in 1847 is shown in the map at figure 2.

Further additions and classrooms were added in 1883 at the expense of John Horniman, including a projecting entrance over the pavement in Back Lane (figure 3). In 1908 the Adult School Hall was built on land adjoining the burial ground, acquired for this purpose two years previously. This giant structure, seating 900 and in its design an Arts and Crafts reinterpretation of a medieval aisled barn, was built at the expense of G. Theodore Crosfield. The architect was W. Curtis Green, who was related to Crosfield's family by marriage. It was the only building on the site which escaped destruction by bombing in 1940 (see figure 4).



Figure 2: Detail from W. Roberts's plan of Croydon, 1847



Figure 3: Back Lane elevation (late nineteenth century photograph held at meeting house)



Figure 4: Old burial ground and bomb-damaged buildings (photograph held at meeting house)



Figure 5: The 1956 meeting house as newly-built (photograph held at meeting house)

Meetings were held in the Adult School Hall until the replacement meeting house (figure 5) was built in 1956 (not 1959 as stated in some sources). The architect was Hubert Lidbetter, Surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting. It was built to the north of the Adult School Hall, on land acquired from Croydon Borough Council in exchange for land given for the projected widening of Park Lane. In 1956 human remains were reinterred at the centre of a courtyard behind the present covered way linking the meeting house and the Adult School Hall, and in 1967-8, before road widening actually took place, the remaining bodies were reinterred at Queens Road Cemetery, Croydon. A second covered way, enclosing the western side of the courtyard and connecting to the western 'aisle' of the Adult School Hall, was not built (or does not survive). Lidbetter also made good the eastern 'aisle' wall of the Adult School Hall, following removal of the remains of the previous structures which had abutted it.

In 2006 a proposal to redevelop the Adult School Hall as special needs housing was abandoned after the building was listed Grade II.

## 2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

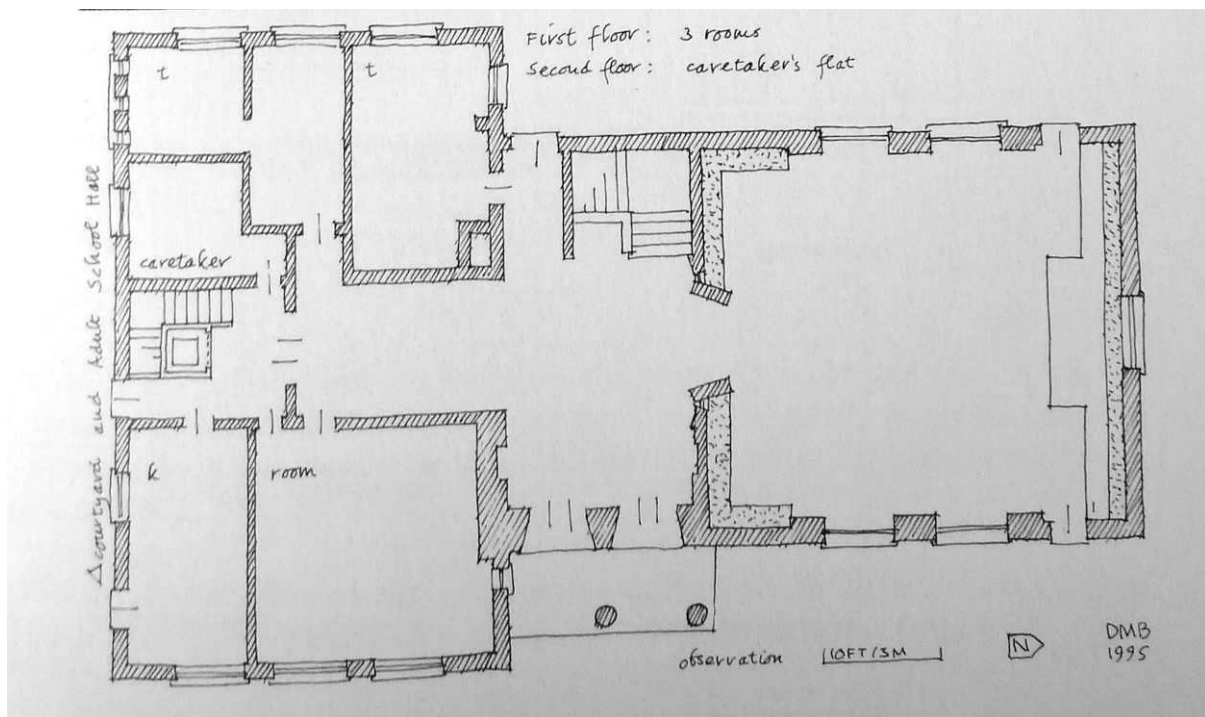


Figure 6: Plan (from Butler, p. 585)

The building is a design of 1956 by Hubert Lidbetter, combining Arts and Crafts, New England and Scandinavian elements, its crafted simplicity reflecting the Quaker ethos. It is built of stock brick laid in Flemish bond, with vertical tile hanging to the dormer windows, and pantiles to the steeply pitched roof. The building is T-shaped on plan, with the main range housing the entrance lobby and stair and (to the right) the double height space of the meeting room, and a three-storey gabled east-west 'cross wing' housing ancillary spaces. There is a tall rectangular brick chimney stack with inset horizontal panels at the junction of the two ranges. Originally the cambered north window to the meeting room had hardwood shutters (figure 5), since removed. The east and west walls of the meeting room are stepped up above the eaves to accommodate large window openings (two on each side), with flat brick-on-end lintels. Each window is divided into twelve by broad mullions and transoms, and within each of these are small-paned metal casements. On the rear (west) elevation a similar raised wall and window denote the main staircase. The main entrance is from the east side, where the roof continues down over an open porch supported on two plain columns (the porch now partially enclosed with a draught lobby). Similar columns support

the pantiled covered way linking the south side of the meeting house with the Adult School Hall.

The lobby leads into a hall with a woodblock floor and exposed brick walls. The stair to the first floor has a brick balustrade, lightened by the omission of headers to give a pierced pattern. The meeting room gives off to the right, the walls framing its entrance kinked inwards, one of several subtle conceits which enliven the interior. The meeting room is roughly square on plan; it has a woodblock floor and a flat ceiling articulated by encased beams. It is lit on three sides. A high horizontal stained timber boarded dado runs around the perimeter, stepping up at the north end, where there is a dais with fixed seating.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

A few polished hardwood pews of Victorian character survive in the Adult School Hall and in the entrance hall of the present meeting house, said to be from the bomb-damaged former meeting house.

### 2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground was in use until 1871. There were many headstones, as shown in the photograph at figure 4. With the post-war development of the site, that part of the former burial ground which remained in the ownership of the Friends became part of the car park (the burials were reinterred in 1956). The remaining part of the site of the burial ground was acquired for road widening, at which point the burials there were reinterred at the local cemetery. A few of the older headstones have been reused as paving at the rear of the site.

### 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a highly prominent position at a major road intersection in the centre of Croydon. The steeply-pitched roofs and domestic character of this and the Adult School Hall contrast markedly with the overbearing scale and brutal character of much of the surrounding post-war architecture. However, the Unitarian church on the adjoining site to the west is similar to the meeting house both in date and architectural character.

### 2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed, unless considered so by virtue of its physical attachment to the Grade II Adult School Hall. The list entry for the latter describes Lidbetter's design for the meeting house as 'not of special interest', a questionable assessment. Lidbetter designed the building to be a respectful, contextual addition to W. Curtis Green's Adult School Hall, using the same facing bricks and steeply pitched pantile roofs. It is a well-crafted design, both inside and out, and is of high townscape value. Lidbetter (1885-1966) was a significant Quaker architect who designed a number of meeting houses, notably those at Birmingham (1933) and Liverpool (1941, demolished). His most significant building for the Quakers is Friends House at Euston, built near the beginning of his career in 1923-7 and now listed Grade II. The meeting house at Croydon was built towards the end of his career. It is considered to be a possible candidate for listing (it is already included in Croydon's local list).

### 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

High. There has been a meeting house and burial ground here since the early eighteenth century, although the interments in the burial ground have been removed.

## **Part 3: Current use and management**

*See completed volunteer survey*

### **3.1. Condition**

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): No longer applicable.

### **3.2. Maintenance**

The most recent quinquennial inspection was in 2014. The meeting house is well maintained; there is a five-year maintenance plan, and funding from Six Weeks Meeting is supplemented by grants and income from legacies. A recent bequest has been used to redecorate the meeting room and lobby.

### **3.3. Sustainability**

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Various measures have been undertaken to improve energy efficiency. Low energy light bulbs are used, and secondary glazing is proposed in those windows which do not have it. Paper, cardboard, glass and plastics are recycled. The meeting is close to Croydon's public transport system (including a frequent tram service). There is secure parking for bicycles.

### **3.4. Amenities**

The meeting considers that it has the facilities it needs. These include a meeting room, library/common room, kitchen, and WCs. There are two rooms on the first floor, one designed for children, one as a classroom. Above, what was the warden's flat is now let as a shared flat; it has three double bedrooms, a large sitting room, kitchen, bathroom and WC. Outside there are twenty-two car parking spaces.

### **3.5. Access**

The meeting has not conducted a disability audit. There is step-free access into the meeting house and the whole of the ground floor is accessible. The first and second floors are not accessible to wheelchair users. There is no accessible WC, but one is proposed. Provision is made for partially-sighted people and a hearing loop is installed. Outside, there are two dedicated parking spaces for disabled people.

### **3.6 Community Use**

Friends use the meeting house for about ten hours each week. Facilities are available for up to fifty hours, with a take-up of about thirty hours a week. The meeting has a lettings policy, and criteria for exclusion are as directed by Six Weeks Meeting. All users pay charges. The facilities are well used on account of this being a convenient central location, with car parking and clean, quiet, well-kept rooms with a welcoming ambience.

### **3.7. Vulnerability to crime**

The meeting house has not experienced crime or antisocial behaviour and is considered to be on the edge of a suburban area unaffected by social deprivation. It is however close to the town centre, which witnessed significant civil disturbance in 2011. Friends liaise with the local police, and an unmarked police car uses the car park.

### **3.8. Plans for change**



Current proposals include adaptation of a ladies' WC to form an accessible WC, and secondary glazing in those windows which lack it. However, in the next few years the funds and efforts of the meeting are going to be more focussed on the adjoining Adult School Hall, which lacks basic facilities such as heating and modern accessible WCs, and needs major investment if its future sustainability is to be secured.

#### **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 offers a series of flexible spaces. The historic features and spaces, especially in the entrance hall, stair and main meeting room areas, should be respected, but within these constraints change should be possible. Installation of secondary glazing will require careful thought to avoid harm to the architectural character of the building. Extended use of the listed Adult School Hall by the meeting is hampered by the absence of heating and up-to-date facilities; currently this building is not used in the winter months.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building and its facilities already lends themselves very satisfactorily to such extended use. Again, extended use of the Adult School Hall by the wider community is hampered by the absence of heating and up-to-date facilities.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* The meeting house is of architectural and historical interest, included in the local authority's local list and identified here as a possible candidate for the statutory list. In the regrettable event of its being laid down, it would be desirable to find a suitable alternative use for the building (rather than succumb to the temptation to redevelop what would be a very valuable site). In this location, an office use would probably be more marketable than residential use, and should avoid the need for subdivision of the space of the main meeting room.

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

## **Part 6: List description**

### ***Adult School Hall***

Name: THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS HALL

List entry Number: 1391697

Location: THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS HALL, 60, PARK LANE

Grade: II

Date first listed: 05-Jul-2006

#### Details

1005/0/10083 PARK LANE 05-JUL-06 60

The Society of Friends Hall

II

Adult education hall. 1908 with minor late-C20 alterations. William Curtis Green, paid for by Theodore Crossfield for the Society of Friends.

**MATERIALS:** Yellow stock brick with brown pantile roofs, timber casement and plastic replacement windows.

**PLAN:** Rectangular building with aisles aligned north-south. Attached to north end via colonnade with pantile roof is Society of Friends Meeting Hall, which is later (1959) and not of special interest.

**EXTERIOR:** The building is defined externally by deep sweeping roof, A-framed and set low to cover the aisles. At clerestory level is a continuous run of small-paned hopper glazing, six eight-paned windows in each bay, under a dormer roof, replaced late-C20 but in sympathetic style; original timber casements at ground floor. The south end has deep hipped roof porch with timber bracing; steps down to original entrance, and steps up to gallery inside. The ground level has been built up at this end and the east wall altered slightly to accommodate this; early-C21 garage to south end barely touches and is not of any interest. The main entrance has double timber doors with triangular cut out glazing lights under wide segmental arch with vertical and horizontal flat brick tiles. Above this is diamond shaped stone plaque indicating the opening date of 1908, and the motto 'Caritas Vero Aedificat CAS' ('charity edifieth' I Corinthians 8:1). To north and south ends, a tall five-part window under segmental arches, that to south sympathetically replaced, that to north original.

**INTERIOR:** Largely one open space, defined by the striking timber roof - the appearance is somewhat of an aeroplane hangar or a medieval barn. The structure comprises scissor braced trusses with passing braces from the ridge to the aisle plate and long raking struts to the arcade posts. There is a short tie across the aisle and a short raking strut in each bay. The boarded ceiling structure has raking struts and slender purlins. Clerestory lights at midpoint of the gambrel profile roof provide generous and atmospheric light into the space. At the south end is an original gallery with latticed balustrade, now with a later brick wall to enclose the gallery into a room, although the roof and the gable window remain exposed. There are double doors to the base of these, in line with those of the main entrance. Flanking doors that lead to the toilets and the stairs to the gallery do not appear in the original photograph, but they seem to have been added soon after. There are two small interventions fitted into the southernmost bays: to the east, an enclosed brick vestibule that allows the side door to serve as the main entrance now, and to the west, a one room kitchen. Original platform to the north end with flanking lobbies. The walls are exposed brick interspersed with small

sections of flat brick tiles. The shallow segmental arches over original openings are of flat brick tiles.

**HISTORY:** The Adult Education Hall was built to the designs of William Curtis Green (1875-1960) and it opened in 1908, the same year the design of the building was exhibited at the Royal Academy. The commission was gained through Curtis Green's wife, who was part of the Quaker Crossfield family. Theodore Crossfield paid for the hall, which was owned by the Society of Friends. The hall was to seat about 900 people, and accommodated school classes, lectures, social meetings, and community uses. It now adjoins the later Friends Meeting House, designed 1959 by Hubert Lidbetter and presumably replacing an earlier meeting house on the site. Curtis Green further developed the hall's roof design at his inter-war churches, but none seems to be as dramatic as the 1908 hall. A familial roof is seen at the near-by Grade II Church of St. George, Waddon from 1932, but this does not rely on timber alone. It has also been pointed out that the hall's roof structure is reminiscent of Albert Richardson's Church of the Holy Cross, Greenford, which is listed Grade II\*. This 1939 church has a timber framed interior that resembles a Medieval tythe barn, also with clerestory lights, and Richardson may have been looking to Curtis Green's churches for design inspiration. The Croydon design can thus be shown to have been influential. The building was also important in terms of Curtis Green's overall work: It is interesting to note that Green's obituary in the RIBA Journal for June 1960 singles out 'the Adult School Hall at Croydon' for special mention. Green's own nomination papers for Fellowship of the RIBA, made in 1909, also include what he describes as 'a public hall in Croydon to seat 1000 persons, for G. T. Crosfield Esquire.' He selected this building for exhibition at the Royal Academy, and for his FRIBA submission, both clear signs of the importance he attached to the project.

**SUMMARY OF IMPORTANCE:** This Adult Education Hall for the Society of Friends was opened 1908 to the designs of William Curtis Green. The exterior is a discrete and sympathetic barn-like structure with deep pantile roof and clerestory lights. However, the interior is where the main special interest lies. Here, the open aisled hall has a remarkable timber roof structure, comprising a series of scissor trusses that altogether resembles an aisled medieval barn. The timbers are bolted rather than pegged, but otherwise the exposed structure and high level of craftsmanship is an honest and striking work in the Arts and Crafts idiom. There is a poignant connection between the honest construction of the roof structure and the Quaker tradition, expressed clearly in the detail of the materials and construction, as well as the space it creates inside. The structure is remarkably complete and still retains the drama of the original design, which was published at the time and which Curtis Green himself considered an important work of his long career.

**SOURCES:** The Builder March 22 1912 pp 323-326. The British Architect January 15 1909 pp 38-39. Cherry B. and Pevsner, N. Buildings of England London:2 South. p.211. Weaver, Lawrence. Village Halls and Clubs. London: Country Life. 1920. Grey, Stuart. Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary.

#### Selected Sources

##### Books and journals

Bridget, C, Pevsner, N, The Buildings of England: London 2: South, (1994), 211

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'The British Architect' in The British Architect: January 15, (1909), 38-39

'The Builder' in March 22, (1912), 323-326

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