

## ***Friends Meeting House, Ditchling***

*East Gardens, Ditchling, Hassocks, East Sussex, BN6 8ST*

*National Grid Reference: TQ 32621 15362*



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

***The meeting house is a small former agricultural building which had been used as slaughterhouse and club house before being acquired by the Quakers in 1966. It has medium heritage value.***

#### ***Evidential value***

***The built fabric has the potential to reveal more information about its original use, construction and development. The building has medium evidential value.***

#### ***Historical value***

***The meeting house is a reminder of Ditchling's more rural past and its history of alterations is visible in its built fabric. It has medium historical value.***

#### ***Aesthetic value***

***The building was erected as a utilitarian building in the local vernacular style and has been altered over time. It has low aesthetic value.***

#### ***Communal value***

***The building has been a Quaker meeting house for about fifty years and is also used by local community groups. It has high communal value.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Sussex West*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0006010*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting/Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *South Downs National Park*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Ditchling*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Ditchling*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *mid-nineteenth century*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *18 August 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Simon Kitchin*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 603  
Ditchling Local Meeting, copies of historic photos of the Reel Club  
Local Meeting survey by Helen Rice, June 2015

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

### 2.1. Historical background

Friends first used a variety of buildings including a church room, a school and the Unitarian Chapel at Ditchling. In 1966, they bought the present meeting house and converted it (architect: Ronald H. Carn). The cost of purchasing and converting came to about £5,000. The building was apparently originally an agricultural building. It is not on the 1839 tithe map but is shown on the 1874 OS map, suggesting a mid-nineteenth-century date. By the early twentieth century it was used by the village butcher as his slaughter house. In 1959, the Ditchling Reel Club took a three-year lease on the building and Mr Stenning converted it to their club house, adding a parquet floor and lavatories. The club house was named 'The Smugglers' Snuff'.

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

The meeting house is aligned roughly northwest-southeast with the street elevation at the northwest. The building dates from the mid-nineteenth century and was built at some point between 1839 and 1874. The entrance lobby with lavatories was built in the 1950s. The original architect or builder is not known. The materials are red brick laid in Flemish bond, with an entrance lobby of darker brick incorporating a flint wall. The roofs are tiled in handmade clay tiles, while the extension has a flat roof. The plan is roughly L-shaped, with two blocks of differing roof pitches to the east and the extension to the west. The taller of the two blocks is closer to the street and has modern windows in the apex of the gables. The building has timber casement windows. The street elevation has an oblong window under a soldier course of bricks, a gable window and a lantern on a wrought-iron bracket. The part of the extension which houses the entrance lobby has fixed full-height window panels with small panes.

The meeting room occupies the lower, rear block. Most of the room is open to the roof apart from a short ceiled bay at the northwest. The roof has two trusses with tie-beams, of which one has raking struts between the tie-beam and the rafters. It is lit by two windows to the west, one to the east and one in the gable. The other historic block is the kitchen. This has a queen-post roof truss with struts. The kitchen is lit by the large window to the street, a small window to the east and the two gable windows. The extension houses toilets and lobby space.

## 2.3 Loose furnishings

None of note

## 2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

## 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located just to the north of the centre of Ditchling in a lane branching off from the High Street. Most buildings in central Ditchling have a vernacular character, as does the meeting house. It makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. To the south of the meeting house are two garages which were built in the 1960s on the site of a stable. One garage has been sold, one is let, and access to the garages via the forecourt is shared between the meeting and the garage users.

Between the late seventeenth century and 1732, Quakers used a corner of the churchyard of St Peter, Twineham, as a burial ground (NGR: TQ 25279 19964). This was originally a piece of land adjacent to the church and was leased to the Quakers in 1675 for 999 years. They acquired the freehold in 1694. Between 1694 and 1723, around 60 burials took place, including of George Fox, called the Younger to distinguish him from his contemporary (but unrelated) namesake, the founder of Quakerism. In 1894, the parish rented the plot from the Quakers in return for maintaining it. This plot remains marked by four stone corner posts.

## 2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

## 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Ditchling was founded in Saxon times. As far as is known, there was no previous building on the site. The site of the meeting house may hold information about the building's construction and early use. Its archaeological potential is low.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

### 3.2. Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection was carried out by Holland Alexander Chartered Surveyor in 2012 (copy not seen). Some of the recommendations are currently under consideration. The meeting has sufficient funds to maintain the building. There is a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

### 3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: use of energy-efficient light bulbs
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: recycling
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: regular maintenance
- Transport: use of bicycles, car share and public transport where possible.

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

### 3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden.

The meeting is accessibly by public transport, although the bus provision and times are not ideal. There is limited on-site parking but there is a nearby village car park. There are no facilities to lock up bicycles.

### 3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is a mobile ramp for the steps at the entrance. There are no steps or level changes inside the building. There is an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There are no facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was undertaken in 2010. As a result, the accessible WC was installed in 2013 and the ramp acquired.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2-5 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 40 hours per week. It is used for an average of 8 hours per week. The meeting has no formal lettings policy. Hirers use the meeting house because they like the building and because it has all the facilities they need.

### 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 but the meeting might consider making contact.

### 3.8. Plans for change

Current plans include: the refurbishment of the wooden window frames, the installation of a fixed ramp, and remedial work for the damp wall.

### **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:* While retaining historic fabric, the meeting house could be altered or extended in a sympathetic manner. However, this is a small building on a restricted plot. Should the meeting increase in numbers, accommodation requirements might need to be re-assessed.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The meeting house has all the amenities required by its current users, apart from a fixed ramp at the entrance. Should the need arise, the building could be altered or extended sympathetically.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting:* Should the meeting house cease to be used by the Quakers, it could be converted to an alternative, community use. As the building is located in a conservation area, consent for demolition and redevelopment is unlikely to be granted.

### **Part 5: Category: 3**