

***Friends Meeting House, Earls Colne***

*4 Burrows Road, Earls Colne, Essex, CO6 2RZ*

*National Grid Reference: TL 85639 29009*



***Statement of Significance***

***The building has high significance as a good example of an early eighteenth-century meeting house with some important fittings, which was sensitively extended in the 1980s. The historic burial ground also has high significance.***

***Evidential value***

***The meeting house was probably built in about 1733, replacing an earlier building of 1674. The interior is relatively unaltered, retaining its gallery, elders' seating and some benches. Some fabric of evidential high value, such as the gallery within the present roof space, is now concealed. Other features,***

*such as the partially-blocked windows at the front, are evidence of previous changes. The fabric of the building and the marked burials on the site yield evidence about past patterns of Quaker life and worship. The building and the site have high evidential value.*

#### **Historical value**

*This has been a site of Quaker worship since the 1670s. The present building is later in date, but is still the oldest meeting house in use within the area meeting. It retains much of its historic layout and a number of original or early features, including the gallery and seating. The simple headstones of the burial ground remain, although relocated. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.*

#### **Aesthetic value**

*The design is plain, foursquare and under a hipped roof. The quality of the brickwork is high, both in the original build and in the modern addition (which is a scaled-down version of the historic building). The building has benefitted from the removal of the nineteenth-century porch, although the modern brickwork of the partially infilled windows on the front elevation is a negative feature. The building and the open space of the burial ground make a positive contribution to the local conservation area. Overall, the site is of high aesthetic value.*

#### **Communal value**

*Although built for and remaining in Quaker use, the building is also a community resource. It makes a positive contribution to the local conservation area, and as such is appreciated by local people and visitors who may not be users of the building. The building and burial ground embody Quaker values of simplicity. These spiritual and social values give the site high communal value.*

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

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Southern East Anglia*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0039520*
- 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: *Earls Colne*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1337916*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Earls Colne*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c1733; 1986-7*

- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established; Alan Bragg*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *1 July 2014*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Tim Holding*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Within the extension of 1986*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Bettley, J. and N. Pevsner, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Essex*, 2007, p. 331  
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 185–6  
Victoria County History, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15183>  
Local Meeting survey by Tim Holding, 2014 and 2015

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

### 2.1 Historical background

Quakers were active in Earls Colne from the mid-1650s. A meeting house with associated burial ground was built by John Garrod on the present site in 1674 and settled in trust in 1678.

The present building appears to be of early eighteenth-century date (there is a brick in the north wall with the date 1733). It originally seated 150 at the lower level. There was previously a loft on the north side, as well as an octagonal roof loft, now concealed by the ceiling (see figure 1). The stand on the south wall is of eighteenth-century character, although the VCH states that it was added in the nineteenth century.

At the time of the 1851 census, attendance was only eleven people in the morning and ten in the afternoon. At some point later in the nineteenth century, or perhaps early in the twentieth, the entrance was moved from the east to the west side of the building, where a porch was built, containing a small WC and kitchen. This required the bricking-up of the lower half of the windows on this elevation, the damage being made good by the plaster rendering of the front elevation. This was the appearance at the time of the listing of the building in 1983, and as shown in Butler's drawing of 1984 (figure 1).

The meeting house was requisitioned for military use during the Second World War but reopened as a Particular Meeting in 1949. The meeting amalgamated with Coggeshall in 1966 and with Halstead in 1971. In 1978 major repairs were carried out, and in 1980 the east wall was rebuilt. In 1986-7 the west porch was removed, the brickwork restored and a linked addition built on the north side, with improved WCs, kitchen and a committee room. Alan Bragg is credited as the architect (possibly a misprint for Stanley Bragg Architects of Colchester?).

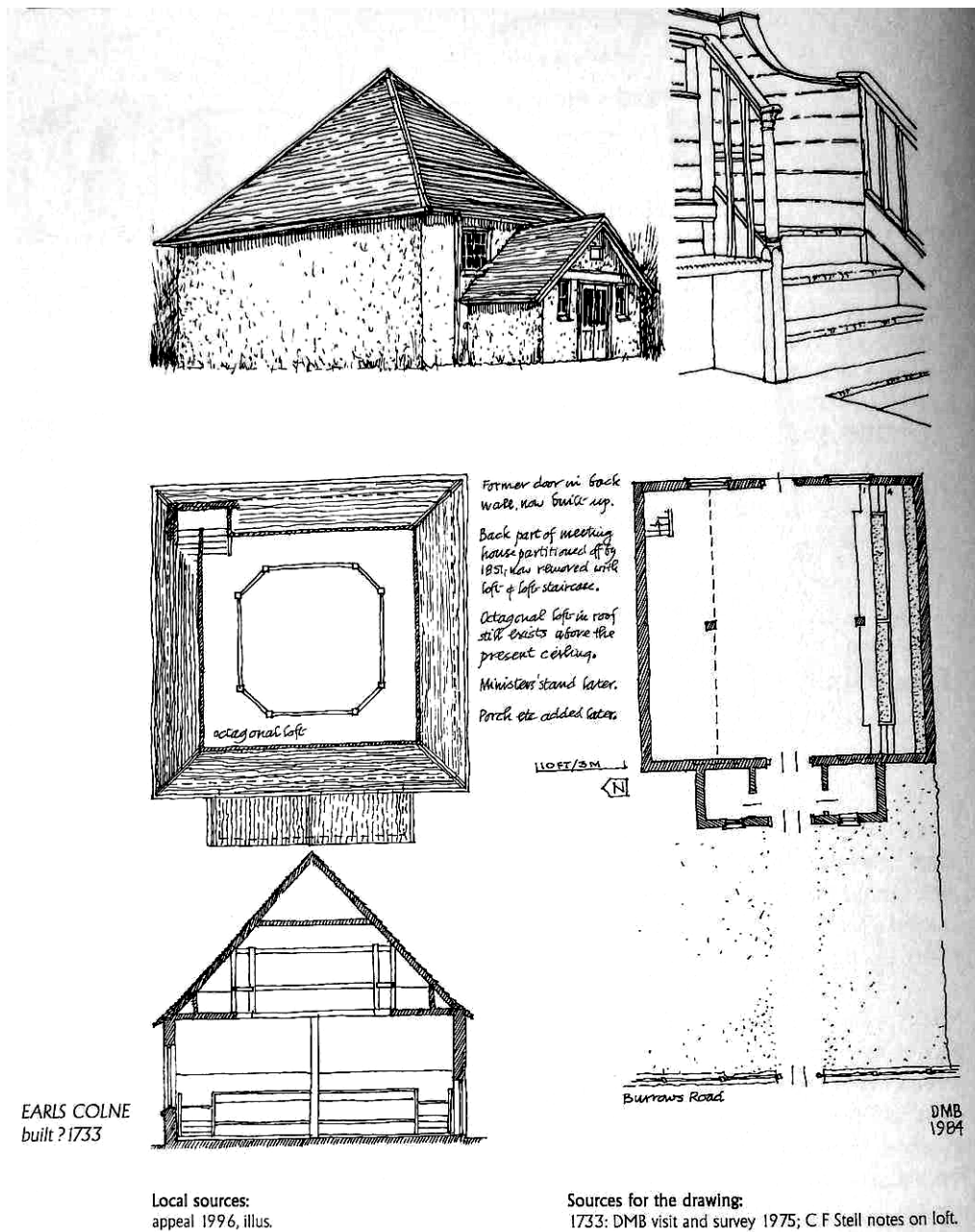


Figure 1: Plans, section, elevation and detail, from Butler, p. 186

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The list entry (below) is brief, and predates the 1986 alterations. It also dates the present building to 1674 (that built by John Garrod, not Garrard), whereas most sources agree that the meeting house is a rebuilding of c1733. The brickwork is laid in Flemish bond, with some burnt headers. Windows are mullion and transom casements with leaded lights; those on the west elevation were partially bricked-up with raised sills when the porch was added; following removal of the porch the brickwork was replaced, and the opportunity was not taken to return the windows to their original proportions. The door was replaced with windows of three lights width, with six smaller lights above the transoms.

The 1986-7 addition (photo top right) is a scaled-down version of the main building, of hand-made brick with a pyramidal tile roof. It is connected to the main accommodation via a mainly glazed link, which is now the main entrance.

The meeting house interior is a single space with two square chamfered columns at its centre; there is no evidence for the space ever having been partitioned. The upper gallery is now concealed by a ceiling. The elders' stand occupies the south wall; it has a horizontally boarded dado, ramped at the sides, and a short stair with columnar newel, closed string, attached square balusters and moulded handrail. It has integral seating. On the north wall, a timber surround with keystone of 1986-7 frames double doors to the link and the modern addition. The loft and staircase previously located on the north wall have been removed.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

In front of the stand are two long open-backed benches with shaped ends.

### 2.4 Attached burial ground

This is immediately to the north of the meeting house, and is still in use. It is laid to grass with the headstones (all late-nineteenth or twentieth-century in date) relocated to the eastern side near the boundary hedge (photo middle left, p.1).

### 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies in Burrows Road, north of the main village street, and at the northern edge of the Earls Colne Conservation Area. It is set back from the road, within its garden and burial area, with cast iron railings on the street frontage. At the rear are allotments. Immediately to the north are some former almshouses and other houses built by the local foundry, after which the historic character of the areas peters out.

### 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is appropriately listed in Grade II. The list entry requires updating to reflect changes since the time of the listing in 1983.

### 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site has contained a meeting house and been used for burials since the 1670s and is therefore likely to be of high archaeological potential.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well tended and the headstones are in reasonable condition. A section of boundary wall has been rebuilt.
- iii) Heritage at Risk: No.

### 3.2 Maintenance

The most pressing repairs identified in the last inspection report (J.A. Crafford, chartered surveyor, February 2012) have been carried out, but some minor repairs and maintenance works remain outstanding. The local meeting can draw on area meeting funds for maintenance and repair items. There is no five-year maintenance and repair plan other than the QI report.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Loft insulation has been installed. The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. The meeting house is accessible by limited public transport, for example there are no buses on Sundays. There is no on-site car parking but there is space for bicycles. There is no resident warden but a caretaker lives nearby.

### 3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to all. It has level access, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There are no specific facilities for the partially sighted. There has been no Disability Access Audit.

### 3.6 Community use

Friends use the meeting house for 3 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of about 55 hours per week. It is used for an average of 16 hours per week. There is a lettings policy and users and activities need to be broadly in keeping with the Quaker ethos. Users value the meeting house for its quiet atmosphere and competitive pricing, as well as for being one of the few community venues in the village.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has generally low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime on the site. There has been informal contact with the police and the parish council but at present there is no need for a formal liaison.

### 3.8 Plans for change

There are currently (20150) no plans for changes to the building.

## **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 well equipped for the needs of the meeting, but the writer was advised that membership is low, and that some members attend from Colchester. The building is already widely used by other community groups, and this helps to meet running costs.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* Wider uses compatible with the Quaker ethos already take place, helped by the improved facilities in the 1980s addition.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting:* Closure would end over three centuries of Quaker worship on this site, and would raise a question mark over the future use of the building. Residential use or a conversion requiring subdivision of the main space would be harmful to the significance of the building; continued community use is likely to be more compatible with the building, and there seems to be an established demand for this.

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

## **Part 6: List description**

List entry Number: 1337916

Location: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, BURROWS ROAD

Grade: II

Date first listed: 25-Nov-1983

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

TL 82 NE EARLS COLNE BURROWS ROAD (east side)

6/36 Friends' Meeting House 25.11.83

GV II

Meeting house. 1674 by John Garrard. Red brick in Flemish bond, plastered on front elevation, roofed with handmade red plain tiles. Square plan facing west. One storey. Large early C20 gabled porch with double doors. Steeply pitched pyramidal roof. Original tiered seating.

Listing NGR: TL8563929009