

Friends Meeting House, Epping

Hemnall Street, Epping, Essex, CM16 4LL

National Grid Reference: TL 46261 02322



Statement of Significance

A modest mid-Victorian meeting house, re-fronted in the 1950s, which replaced an earlier building and is attached to a late seventeenth century burial ground. Overall it is of medium significance.

Evidential value

It does not appear that any of the fabric of the original meeting house survives but the Victorian fabric of the existing building and the fittings from Plaistow meeting house give the building medium evidential value.

Historical value

There has been a meeting house on or near the present site since c1700. With the associated burial ground the building has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is a modest structure, given some architectural interest by its neo-Georgian front and is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

As a Quaker meeting house which is in additional community use, the meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *North East Thames*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0012350*

1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Epping Forest District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Epping*

1.7 Listed status: *Locally listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Epping*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1851, re-fronted and extended 1957*

1.13 Architect (s): *William Beck; architect for later work was possibly Hubert Lidbetter, who was Surveyor to the Six Weeks Meeting until 1957.*

1.14 Date of visit: *11 August 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Christine Downes-Grainger*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, p. 187

Friends meeting house in Epping: A brief history (1984)

Local meeting survey by Christine Downes-Grainger, August 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

Quaker Meetings were held in Epping from 1667. Some time after this, Thomas Brand bequeathed his orchard as a burial ground and £20 for a new building. A meeting house had been built by 1705, set back considerably from the road with the burial ground alongside. The building was apparently of red brick with a thatched roof and a rustic portico on three sides. In 1850 the adjoining owner sought to acquire land to improve his access and an exchange was arranged. The old meeting house was acquired by the neighbour and demolished and a new meeting house built at his expense on a newly-acquired site between the burial ground and the road. The new meeting house, designed by William Beck, was opened in that year. Upon the dismantling of the Plaistow meeting house in the later

nineteenth century some of the 1820s panelling was re-installed at Epping. Some alterations were made to the building in 1957 when the north and south gable ends were given large round-headed openings of neo-Georgian character and single flat-roofed additions were made on either side. The western addition was enlarged in 1996.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The external walls are of white and yellow brick laid in Flemish bond. The main building is rectangular on plan with a continuous pitched roof covered in slate. On either side are lower flat roofed additions. The gabled main front faces north west and has a large round-headed central opening, fully glazed and incorporating the entrance door. The woodwork detailing is neo-Georgian in character. Above the opening the wall rises to a gable with a plain coped parapet on kneelers. The single-storey flat-roofed side additions have rectangular windows with flat brick arches. The gabled rear elevation of the main building has a single large round-headed window with three main openings and a fanlight over.

The main entrance leads to lobby divided from the main meeting room by a full-height panelled timber partition. Inside the meeting room, the upper part of the partition is painted white to match the canted plaster ceiling, whose main rafters and collars are exposed. The room has a panelled timber dado and an elders' dais along the full length of the south east end wall below the large window. The smaller side rooms are wholly modern in character.

2.3 Loose furnishings

Most of the furniture is modern but in the meeting room are four oak benches of traditional type, reputedly from the Plaistow meeting, like the dado panelling. A further two oak benches are in side rooms.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

There is a burial ground at the rear of the meeting house, which is fully enclosed by brick walls, which appear to be all of nineteenth or twentieth century date. There are several stone grave markers, the earliest of which date from 1808 and the latest from 1875. Among the Friends buried here are Henry Doubleday of Epping who created the first catalogue of British moths and butterflies.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies at the northern end of this small town, where Hemnall Street with its mainly nineteenth and twentieth century residential buildings joins the High Street.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not a candidate for the statutory list but is already included on the Council's local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The precise site of the former meeting house is unclear but the site is certainly of medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The last Quinquennial inspection made in November 2011 identified a number of relatively minor issues, most of which have been dealt with. The roofs of the side rooms have been reconstructed to improve rainwater disposal, insulation and daylight.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal.

3.2. Maintenance:

The Meeting has a five-year maintenance and repair plan for the building. There is no separate maintenance plan for the burial ground.

3.3. Sustainability:

The Meeting generally uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Draught-proofing and heat de-stratification following SWM-funded Canterbury Commitment survey.
- SWM pooled funds paid for extra insulation to be added on top of the roof and side walls and meeting room ceiling in 2014.

3.4. Amenities: the meeting house has all the required amenities.

3.5. Access:

There is level access to all parts of the meeting house, a hearing loop and a WC suitable for disabled people.

The meeting house is accessible by public transport, there is adequate parking on site and secure parking for bicycles.

3.6 Community Use:

The meeting house is in community use for twenty out of a theoretically possible eighty hours per week. Parking space is also let. Acceptable users are those in line with Quaker values and testimonies. The meeting house is well-located near the centre of Epping and has small rooms suitable for e.g. dementia care and tutoring groups

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house is an area which is well cared-for and has low deprivation and low crime levels. To date there has been no heritage crime and no evidence of anti-social behaviour.

3.8. Plans for change

No changes are in prospect

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 has all the facilities it currently needs.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is already used for other purposes besides worship and the intensity of use could probably be extended.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building could doubtless serve a wholly secular use if laid down

Part 5: Category: 3