

Quaker Meeting House, Guernsey

North Clifton, St Peter Port, Guernsey, GY1 1JR

Coordinates: 49.45548°N, -2.53854°E



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a small building of 1811 retaining most of the original ministers' stand. The interior has been sympathetically subdivided. The building has high heritage value.

Evidential value

The fabric of the building may hold further information about its construction, use and any alterations. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

Quakers were reputedly the earliest nonconformists on Guernsey and this meeting house is one of the earliest nonconformist places of worship on the island. It has high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a small plain and peaceful building, in line with Quaker philosophy. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been used by Quakers since its construction. In addition, it is also used for counselling sessions. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Hampshire & Islands*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032570*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *States of Guernsey*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *N/a*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *St Peter Port*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not protected*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *St Peter Port*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1811*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *21 August 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Tom Le Pelley*
- 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. 1, pp. 233-4
The Friend, 8 September 1911, pp. 590-1

Le Huray, C.P., *The Bailiwick of Guernsey*, 1952, p. 37

Le Pelley, T., 'Guernsey Meeting House, 200 years or worship', leaflet

Local Meeting survey by Brittain Hadley (made available by Tom Le Pelley), June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The Quakers were reputedly the first Nonconformists on Guernsey. In 1775, the Friend Claude Gay of Barking visited and in 1786 four people applied to the Yearly Meeting for membership which was granted. According to David Butler, a meeting started in 1790. In 1797, a burial ground was acquired on the Vardes estate in St Peter Port. (This was sold to a neighbour in 1951.) In 1811, a small plot was acquired for £48 and the present meeting house built. The previous year, the Meeting for Sufferings in London gave £300 towards the building cost. In 1998-99, internal alterations were made by R. F. Watson + Son based on plans by the architect David Thornburrow. The floor level of the meeting room was raised to that of the platform in front of the ministers' stand, and two internal rooms were created.

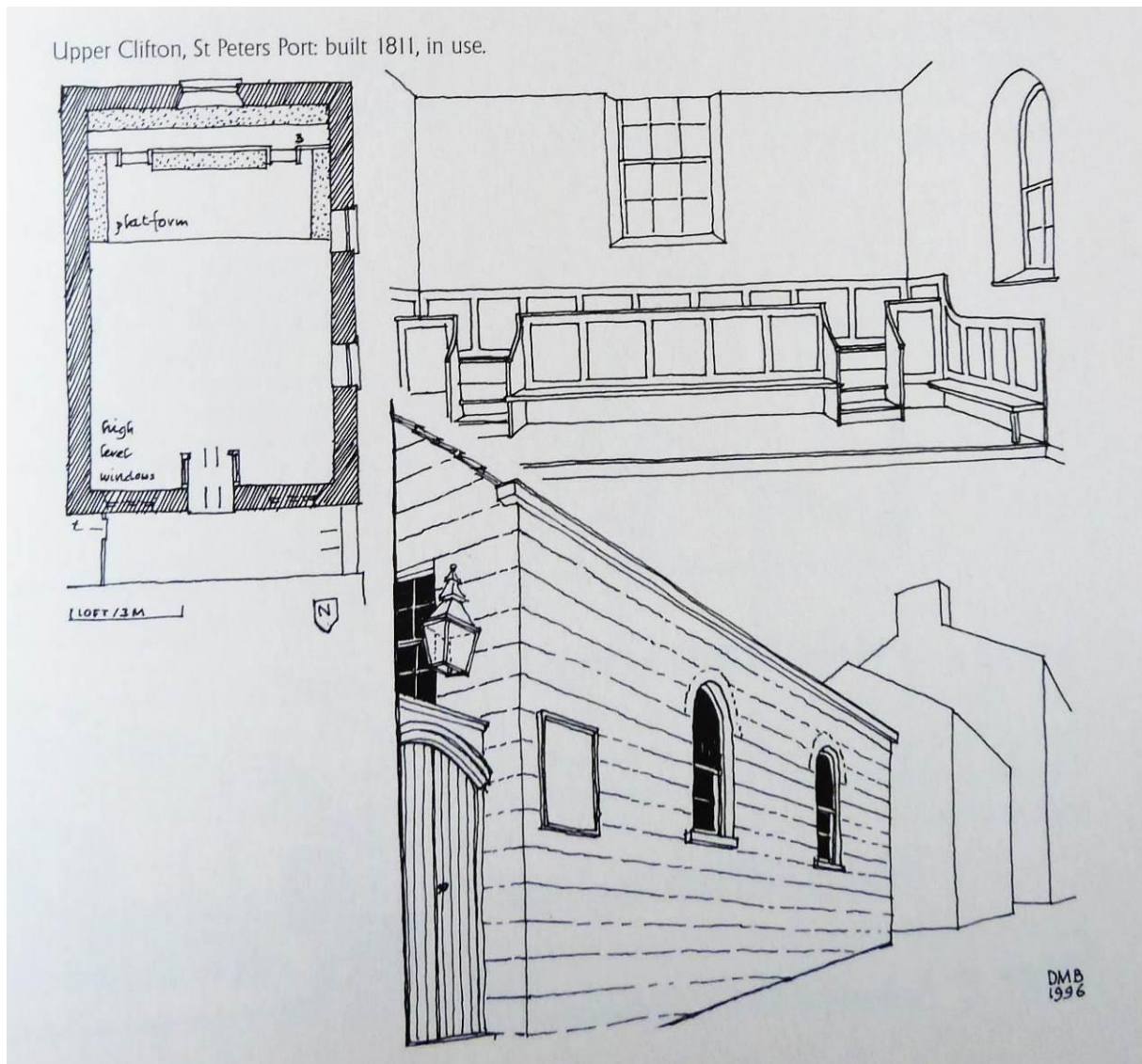


Fig. 1 Plan, internal view and external perspective of the meeting house in Guernsey. (North is at the bottom of the plan; not to scale.) (Butler, vol. 1, p. 233)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The entrance is located at the north end and the elders' stand to the south.

The meeting house was built in 1811 on an oblong plan. The walls are probably built of local granite and are rendered. The pitched roof is covered with clay pantiles. There is a narrow alley to the north (accessed via a flat-arched entrance) and a tapering space to the east between the meeting house and the neighbour's tall boundary wall. A toilet is located in the corner of these two spaces. The north elevation has two six-over-six sash windows on either side of the entrance door. The lantern shown in Butler's drawing (figure 1) is now above the entrance door. The west elevation has two arched sash windows, while the south elevation features one six-over-six sash window. There are no windows in the east elevation which only has a scar of a former outbuilding's roof line.

The interior was subdivided in 1998-99 with partitions which create a small lobby at the northwest and a kitchen at the northeast. The new north wall to the meeting room has two sash windows to match those in the north elevation. The meeting room has a suspended ceiling which is just lower than the top of the south window. At the south wall is the

ministers' stand with the rear bench raised a step above the front bench. The original aisle of flagstones is said to survive below the new carpeted timber floor. All the doors, including the entrance door, are modern.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The only furnishings of note are the remaining benches and panelling of the ministers' stand. These comprise two rows of timber benches painted white with steps near the end. (This is a type of stand which Butler found particularly common in Yorkshire and London.) Some of the panels were replaced in 1998-99. The lateral benches to the sides shown in Figure 1 have been removed.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located near the centre of St Peter Port, on the hill above the seafront. The neighbourhood is largely residential, with what looks like a converted chapel opposite the meeting house. The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

A detached burial ground was sold in 1951 to a neighbour who added it to his garden. (It was never a public park as stated in Butler.) The only known burial was reputedly exhumed and reburied before the sale. In c.1952 it was described as 'a tiny plot, overgrown with weeds and surrounded by a high stone wall, pierced in one place by an opening, from which the gate has long disappeared. [...] no stones or mounds mark the graves of the departed Friends' (C.P. Le Huray, *The Bailiwick of Guernsey*, 1952, p. 37).

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is currently not a protected building. In 2012, a review of Guernsey's protected buildings list was initiated which is still in progress. However, this review did not include the meeting house (information from Clare Vint, conservation officer). In March 2014, new selection criteria were published by Guernsey's Environment Department. These state that: 'Buildings dating between 1800 and 1900 should be of definite high quality and character to consider adding to the list, and may often be the work of important architects, or exceptional examples representing stylistic development in Guernsey.' While the meeting house has undeniably historical significance as a building of 1811 and Guernsey's only purpose-built meeting house, on balance it is not considered to meet the criteria for statutory protection as it has been too much altered.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

There was no known previous building on the site. There is no known below-ground archaeology on the site, apart from a clump of shot pellets found under the entrance alley's flagstones during refurbishment. The archaeological potential of the site 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): *N/a*

3.2. Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection report (by Matthieu Le Poidevin of the Brittain Hadley Partnership) of December 2012 found only minor issues. The windows have since been repaired and the exterior has been redecorated. The ownership of the wall just to the east of the meeting house has been clarified and works to stabilise the wall and remove the ivy were under way at the time of the visit. The meeting has a five-year maintenance and repair plan. Both the area meeting and the local meeting have sufficient building funds.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, nor does it have an Energy Performance Certificate. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: a lower stat level is set for the heating.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: paper is recycled and kitchen waste taken home for black bag.
- Transport: members walk from the nearest car park.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs, including a kitchen, a toilet and meeting space. They are all inside the meeting houses, apart from the toilet which is in an extension which can only be accessed from the outside. There is no resident warden or Friend.

The meeting house is not easily accessible by public transport and there is no parking on site or secure parking for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is not accessible to people with disabilities. There is no level access, no accessible toilet, no hearing loop and no facilities for partially-sighted people. The meeting has not conducted a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for one hour each week for their meetings. The building is currently used by one person for counselling sessions two hours per week. The meeting has a hire policy. Smoking, alcohol, gambling, incense burning and the lighting of matches are not permitted. Users enjoy the quiet atmosphere of the meeting house.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There is no evidence of general crime, heritage crime or anti-social behaviour at the meeting house. During the 200 years of the meeting house's history, there has been only one incident, namely when a window pane was broken. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and there is currently no need for it.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans for alterations to the meeting house.

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 currently has all the amenities required by the meeting, although lack of disabled access may become a problem in the future.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: Due to lack of demand, the meeting house currently has a very low level of community use. Apart from the lack of wireless internet, telephone connection and on-site parking, the building has all the facilities required for community use. Again, lack of disabled access may become an issue for wider use.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the meeting house cease to be used by the meeting, it could be converted to an alternative community use. However, given the current lack of demand for hiring the meeting house, a residential conversion may be a more realistic option. Given its location in a conservation area, demolition would not be an option.

Part 5: Category: 3