

Friends Meeting House, Hammersmith

20 Nigel Playfair Avenue, London, W6 9JY

National Grid Reference: TQ 22621 78433



Statement of Significance

A modest design of the mid-1950s by Hubert Lidbetter. The building is scheduled for demolition as part of the King Street Regeneration Project and a new Hammersmith meeting house, the fourth, will be built in a more central location. The present building has a utilitarian external character but an evocative interior of traditional character, giving it an overall medium significance.

Evidential value

The building is of post-war date, but has a traditional Quaker character, displayed in features such as the plain design and fitting out, the high level windows and the visibility panel for the doorkeeper. It is of medium evidential value.

Historical value

Quaker observance in Hammersmith goes back to the late seventeenth century, but the present building is of post-war date. It is by a Quaker architect of note, and incorporates some historic furnishings. As such it is of medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building has little external aesthetic appeal, but its evocative interior of traditional character, with good quality furnishings, give it medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is not currently greatly used by Friends or the local community groups, and must therefore be regarded as of low communal value. This will change with the building of new premises.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *London West*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0001210*
- 1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Hammersmith NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not 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): *1955*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Hubert Lidbetter*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *21 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Kathy Dixon*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Former burial ground (now detached)*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 401-2

Cundy, H. W., *Hammersmith Quakers' Tercentenary 1677-1977*, 1978

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, pp. 9, 70, pl. XVII

Local Meeting Survey, by Charles Phillips, June 2015

Meeting House website, <http://www.hammersmithquakers.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>

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

2.1 Historical background

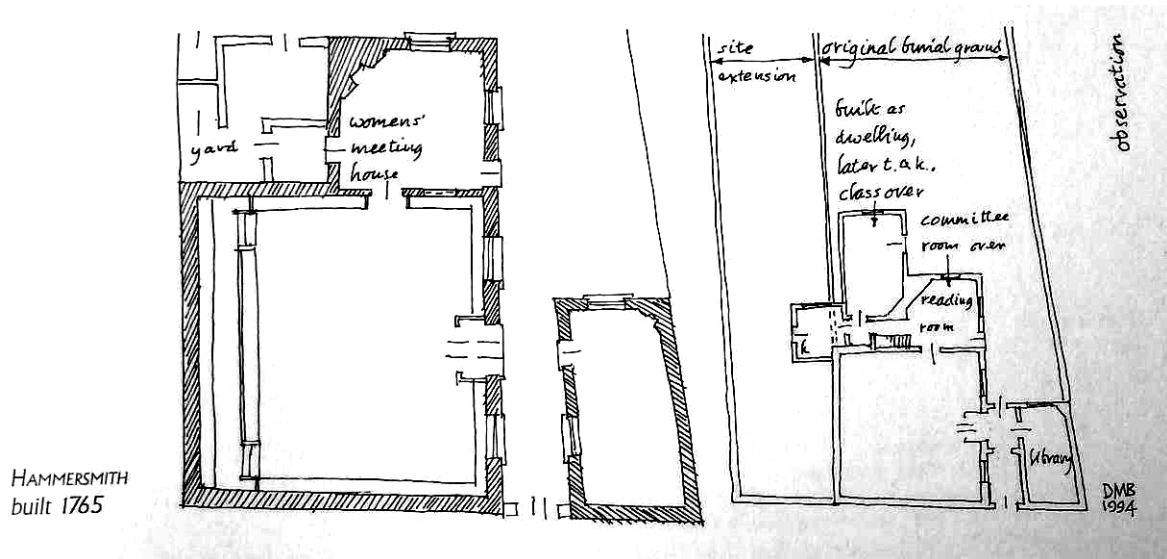


Figure 1: Plan of 1765 meeting house (from Butler Vol. 1, p. 401)

A Friends' meeting was established from about 1658 in the house of William Bond at Chiswick, moving soon afterwards to a riverside location closer to Hammersmith. The first meeting house was built in 1677 at 28 Lower Mall, to the east of Hammersmith Creek, a tributary of the Thames. This included a burial ground. In 1765 a new meeting house was built on the same site, at a cost of £315 (figure 1). This remained in use (with some interruptions and adaptations over time, as described by Butler, p.401) until 1944, when it was destroyed by a flying bomb.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there were links between Hammersmith Quakers and the local artistic community. William Morris (whose father had been a partner in a Quaker firm of discount-brokers) lived nearby at Kelmscott House. The calligrapher Edward Johnston, designer of the London Transport sans-serif typeface, was for a time a member of the Hammersmith Quaker Meeting.

After the war, the site of the bomb-damaged meeting house was surrendered to Hammersmith Council, which was planning the new Furnivall Gardens as part of the Festival of Britain commemorations (1951). This new public open space incorporated part of the old burial ground, laid out as a Garden of Rest. The replacement meeting house was built on a nearby site across the Great West Road (A4), which was then being widened. Designed by Hubert Lidbetter, Surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting, it opened on 23 October 1955 and cost £11,421.

In contrast with the rather utilitarian character of the exterior, the interior of the 1955 meeting house has an evocative and traditional meeting house character, with the proportions and character of the old meeting house perpetuated. It was furnished with benches obtained from the closed meeting house at Baldock (Hertfordshire), whence Lidbetter also wanted to incorporate seventeenth century panelling and the ministers' gallery, but these were not available. Lidbetter therefore favoured a new ministers' gallery – although recognising that 'of recent years there has been a distinct aversion to [these], as is, perhaps natural in so democratic body as the Society of Friends... new Meeting Houses have to a certain extent lost some of their traditional Quaker atmosphere by the elimination of this

feature...' (quoted in Cundy, pp. 48-9). The meeting favoured democracy over tradition, and by way of a compromise a platform was agreed.

At the time of writing, the demolition of the 1955 meeting house is imminent, as part of the King Street Regeneration Project. A new meeting house, the fourth in Hammersmith, will be built in a more central location, to a striking design by Satellite Architects. According to the architects' website, 'the project is designed to be a flagship for the area and to offer flexible space for the variety of activities that will take place in the building. The looped shape of the building in plan is designed to welcome people in from the street and to create a permeable facade to the street. The project will be fully sustainable including photovoltaic panels, rainwater collection and sustainably sourced materials'. For further details see the local meeting website, <http://www.hammersmithquakers.org.uk/new-meeting-house>.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1955 from designs by Hubert Lidbetter. Externally it is of functional character, of red brick cavity wall construction with a shallow pantile roof over the main meeting room and flat roofs and parapets to the ancillary spaces wrapping around on three sides (lobby, WCs, library, classroom, kitchen). The upper front elevation of the meeting room has corner pilaster/piers which create the effect of an open pediment in the gable, which is lit at the centre by a window. The rear elevation has broader piers and a central oculus, while there are three high level windows at the sides. The window openings have soldier course lintels and concrete sills, and most retain their original metal Crittall-type casements, with some uPVC replacements. The flat-roofed entrance porch is surmounted by a pierced brick parapet (a detail which has been picked up in the design of the proposed new meeting house).

In contrast with the rather utilitarian character of the outside, the interior has an evocative and traditional meeting house character. From the entrance lobby an observation window/squint for the doorkeeper (photo upper right) is placed beside oak double doors leading into the main meeting room. This space (photo upper left) is square on plan (26ft by 26 ft), with a woodblock floor, perimeter horizontal stained and boarded dado, and raised ministers' platform along the far (north) wall. It is mainly lit at high level, but there is a lower window (west) and door (east) at the platform end. Oak benches are arranged in traditional fashion around a central oak table. There is a modern suspended ceiling, somewhat undermining the traditional character. Alongside (to the east) is a smaller room, the library (photo lower right), with oak doors, woodblock floor and fitted bookcases.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of historic benches, acquired after the war from the old meeting house at Baldock, as well as oak tables and wheelback chairs of uncertain provenance.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is in a cul-de-sac leading off King Street in central Hammersmith. The fine Hammersmith Town Hall (started in 1939 and completed in 1950, listed Grade II) lies to the east, and the meeting house is approached through a surface car park. The site awaits redevelopment as part of the King Street Regeneration Project. Immediately to the south, the three-lane traffic of the Great West Road (A4) is a highly visible and noisy presence. Furnivall Gardens, which incorporates part of the old Quaker burial ground, lies to the south, between the A4 and the River Thames.

2.6 Listed status

Not listed. Externally this is a utilitarian and unremarkable design of the 1950s. While the interior is characterful, much of the character resides in the furnishings, which are no doubt shortly to be removed. The building is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

Possibly high. An archaeological evaluation is required of the applicants under the terms of the planning permission for redevelopment of the site.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

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

3.2 Maintenance

A QIR has been carried out, but not provided. It would appear that since the decision was taken to relocate, the building has only received basic maintenance. It is however of fairly sound construction, and remains wind and weathertight.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Some measures to improve energy efficiency have been undertaken in recent years (such as installation of double glazing in some areas), but the imminent site redevelopment has meant that further investment in the building would not be appropriate. The present site is close to public transport (bus and tube) and there is secure parking for bicycles.

It is intended that the new meeting house will be fully sustainable, with photovoltaic panels, rainwater collection and sustainably sourced materials.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house is equipped with two meeting rooms (the smaller incorporating the library), a kitchen, classroom and WCs. Investment in upgrading these facilities has not taken place due to impending site redevelopment. There is no resident warden.

3.5 Access

The meeting has not conducted a Disability Access Audit. However, there is step-free access into and circulation around the meeting house, and an accessible WC and hearing loop are provided.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is currently used by Friends for three hours a week. There is a lettings policy (details not provided) and it is let to third parties for about 40.5-48.5 hours per week. Users cite the good location, favourable pricing and very pleasant rooms. Due to the threat of redevelopment, the number of lettings is not as high as it might otherwise be.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There has been heritage crime (lead theft) and a car was broken into during a meeting. No details are provided about general crime and deprivation levels in the area, but as the site and its setting becomes more run-down in the lead up to redevelopment it can be anticipated that incidents of low-level crime and antisocial behaviour will continue.

3.8 Plans for change

The demolition of the meeting house and relocation to new premises is proposed, currently scheduled for late 2016/early 2017.

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: Planning permission has been given for the building's demolition and site redevelopment. A new meeting house will be built at a more central location. It would be desirable for the historic benches to be given an appropriate new home, either in the new building or at another meeting house.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The new meeting house will be built at a more central location and will undoubtedly be a community asset as well as an asset to Friends.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: Closure and site redevelopment is imminent. As stated above, it would be desirable for historic furnishings of note to be salvaged for appropriate re-use. A full drawn or photographic record of the present meeting house would also be appropriate in advance of demolition.

Part 5: Category: 3