

Quaker Meeting House, Harpenden

12 Southdown Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 1PD

National Grid Reference: TL 13638 14015



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a small former village reading room of the 1880s with minor later twentieth century additions. It has medium heritage value for the former reading room.

Evidential value

The former reading room has been considerably altered, but still has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The building has only been used as a meeting house since the 1930s but was built as a Village Reading Room. This original function gives it medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is an unassuming example of a building in the Vernacular Revival style characteristic of the later nineteenth century and on this account has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been used by Quakers and other local groups since the 1880s and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Luton & Leighton*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007080*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *St Albans City and District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Harpenden*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Locally listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Harpenden*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1887, with alterations in 1954, 1972 and 2014*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *original architect not known. 1972 alterations by Norman Hyde (drawings in meeting house); 2014 alterations by Michael Dales Partners.*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *29 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Donald Robertson*
- 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.255
 - Brandreth, E., 'The Institute, Southdown Road' in *Harpenden & District Local History Society Newsletter*, 37, 1985
 - Hertfordshire HER, ID no. 30888
 - Local Meeting survey by Donald Robertson, July 2015
 - Local meeting archives

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

2.1. Historical background

A plot of land was purchased in 1930 for a new meeting house, but this did not proceed and instead a former village reading room dating from 1887 was purchased in 1932 and adapted to form a meeting house and caretaker's dwelling. The building was altered in 1954 and 1972, when the rear verandah was enclosed. Another programme of improvements has recently been completed which included the widening of entrance doors, improving internal access routes, enlarging the rear lobby and kitchen and modernising the toilets.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The original 1887 building consists of a single storey range parallel to the street between two-storey gabled cross wings. The walls are faced with red brick laid in Flemish bond, the tall pitched roofs are covered in tiles. All the windows are of timber. The entrance front has a modern brick central porch flanked by broad four-light windows. The two cross wings have canted bay windows to the lower floor with three-light windows above. The gable-ends have exposed timbers with red brick nogging. The original rear elevation is now completely hidden by accretive small modern additions - two with pitched roofs and a central lobby with a flat roof and French windows to the rear garden. The materials are red brick and tiles, with a metal covering to the flat roof.

The interior has been re-arranged, most recently in 2014. The meeting room occupies a double-height space in one of the cross wings. The parquet floor and other finishes are modern but the roof with its exposed principals, rafters and collars is original. One of the smaller meeting rooms has moulded timber ceiling beams.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of note.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None, though there is a garden at the rear of the meeting house

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house has a picturesque setting, facing west across the open common which is a major feature of Harpenden. The meeting house building is set back from the road behind a brick and flint boundary wall and is flanked on one side by brick almshouses of the 1870s and on the other by a late Georgian house.

2.6. Listed status

The building is locally listed. It has probably been too much altered to be considered for statutory listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house is sited on the outskirts of the Harpenden settlement and has low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground: N/a

3.2. Maintenance

There has been no recent quinquennial inspection. The meeting has enough money to cover the costs of maintenance and repair, though major works are the responsibility of the Area Meeting. There is a 5-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include

- All windows and external doors are now double-glazed with uPVC units
- additional insulation has been fitted in new and replaced ceilings
- A new efficient boiler has been installed
- Waste is recycled, with separate recycling bins in the kitchen

The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house. There is a resident caretaker, whose accommodation is part of the meeting house building.

There is good public transport by rail and bus every day of the week. There are 6-8 car spaces and secure storage for bicycles at the rear of the building.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building, an accessible WC and a hearing loop in the main meeting room. There are facilities for partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for between 6 and 12 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 200 hours per week and is used for approximately 90 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy which excludes groups promoting violence, racism etc. No gambling or alcohol is allowed. Preference is given to activities which benefit the community. Groups allowed to use the meeting house for free are those instigated by and/or actively supported by the meeting and serving people in need. Users value the convenient location, peaceful ambience competitive rates and friendly service.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been no heritage crime and there are no signs of general crime at the site (apart from some occasional damage to the front notice board). 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 the matter has not been considered.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans for change at present

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 required facilities, which have been recently upgraded, but the building could be further altered if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house currently has all the facilities required by its users, but could probably be further altered or extended is required, subject to the usual consents.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: should the meeting house be closed or laid down, it could doubtless find a continuing community use.

Part 5: Category: 3