

Kingston Quaker Centre, Kingston

Fairfield East, Kingston-upon-Thames, London, KT1 2PT

National Grid Reference: TQ 18427 69264



Statement of Significance

A fine contemporary design, well used by the local community as well as the Local Meeting. It is of overall medium significance.

Evidential value

The contemporary design incorporates references to traditional meeting houses, and some furnishings and headstones from the previous (1773) meeting house are incorporated. Although of recent date, the building is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The Kingston Quaker Meeting goes back to the seventeenth century, and this is the third meeting house in the town. The building incorporates some furnishings and headstones from the old meeting house. Being new, the centre is of low historical value, but as a demonstration of the continuing Quaker witness in the town it is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The centre is a cool contemporary Miesian 'pavilion in the park', well-detailed, planned, lit and furnished. It is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The centre is widely used by local community groups, and is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Kingston & Wandsworth*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0004170*
- 1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Kingston upon Thames 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): *2014*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Tectus Architecture*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *10 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Fred Ashmore*
- 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. 2, pp. 591-2
CgMs Consulting, *Historic Buildings Record, Friends' Meeting House, 78 Eden Street, Kingston upon Thames*, August 2005
Local Meeting Survey, by Nigel Morris, June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background



Figure 1: The 1773 meeting house, November 2015

By 1656 a house in Kingston High Street belonging to John and Ann Fielder was in use as a Quaker meeting house. In 1663 land on Norbiton Street (now London Road) was acquired for a burial ground (sold in 1922), and in 1673 a purpose-built meeting house was erected on a leasehold site at the corner of Heathen Street (now Eden Street) and Back Lane. In 1765 Thomas Barnard offered the Meeting £100 towards the acquisition of a freehold site further along Heathen Street, where a meeting house was completed in 1773. This was described in c1890 as ‘...the usual meeting room which occupied about two-thirds of the entire space, the women’s meeting room and the entrance lobby in the lower part of the remainder and over these a gallery with sliding shutters...’ (quoted in Butler, p. 592). In 1806 land behind the meeting house was acquired to serve as a burial ground, first used in 1814. The last burial there took place in 1952 and it closed in 1955 (Butler).

In 1870 a two-storey addition was built in front of the 1773 meeting house, with cloakrooms, women’s meeting room and gallery. The interior of the old meeting house was gutted to make a single meeting room space. In 1901 an adult school was built and in 1930 a cottage for a caretaker. A first floor classroom was added in 1960 (architect: Martin Lidbetter).

From the late twentieth century there were moves to find alternative premises in the town, and in 2005 a detailed historical report on the 1773 site was prepared by CgMs Consulting in advance of demolition and site clearance. The building was sold by the Quakers and planning consent has now been granted for the redevelopment of the site with a new Primark store, but at the time of writing the building still survives, boarded up, and still with some of headstones in the burial ground (figure 1). The burials were exhumed in 2010 and reburied in Surbiton Cemetery with a memorial stone.

The new Quaker meeting centre has been built on a site less than a quarter of a mile away on a site in Fairfield East, previously occupied by a prefabricated twentieth-century school building. Designed as a £2m project by John Langley of Tectus Architecture, its opening in June 2014 was attended by Quaker actress Sheila Hancock and local MPs Ed Davey and Vince Cable. In 2015, the building was the joint winner of the ACE/RIBA Award for religious architecture.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

A multipurpose building designed by John Langley of Tectus Architecture and opened in 2014. The building is a single storey, flat-roofed pavilion, with a perimeter colonnade of regularly-spaced slender rectangular grey steel piers, behind which it is faced in pale stock brick. The perimeter path is paved with narrow hand-made red bricks. Raised zinc-clad air cooling stacks are placed on the roof.

The main entrance leads into an axial, top-lit hall, with small meeting rooms giving off to the right and a small square planted courtyard, kitchen, main meeting room and smaller hall to the left. The interior spaces are bright and well-lit. The architectural character is coolly contemporary, with some nods to traditional Quaker architecture, for example in the glazed 'squint' or observation panel at the approach to the meeting room by the internal courtyard.

The meeting room is square on plan, and seats about eighty. The walls are plastered and painted white, with areas of planted timber acoustic panels. The space is well lit by windows onto the garden and courtyard, as well as by top lighting cut out at the corners (acting also as a funnel for warm air) and in a square lantern light at the apex of the shallow pyramidal roof.

2.3 Loose furnishings

In the meeting room individual bespoke upholstered chairs made by Treske Ltd are placed in a circular arrangement around a central table. There are also some longer upholstered benches by Treske. In the lobby at the rear is a heavy nineteenth-century L-shaped pine bench, brought here from the Eden Street meeting house.

2.4. Attached burial ground

None. Six headstones from the Eden Street meeting house have been reset against the boundary in the garden.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The building is in Fairfield East, a primarily residential area of low-rise Victorian terraces. It looks onto Fairfield, a public open space and recreation ground, and has been described as having the character of 'a pavilion in the park'. Behind it is the old cattle market site, now usually in use as a surface car park. The meeting house is set back from Fairfield East, with some parking spaces in front. There is a garden to the side and rear. Although architecturally quite different from the nearby residential properties, the quiet modernity and sympathetic palette of materials ensure that it sits comfortably in this location, and makes a positive contribution to the local scene. It lies just outside the current boundary of the Fairfield/Knight's Park Conservation Area.

The old meeting house, with its attached burial ground, lies not far away to the east (NGR: TQ 18174 69233).

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed and is too recent in date to be a candidate for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Low. An archaeological watching brief for the site was undertaken between May and June 2013 by Pre-Construct Archaeology, who monitored the foundation trenches for the new building. The works did not extend deeply enough for archaeological deposits to become apparent.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

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

3.2. Maintenance

The building is of recent construction and is well-maintained. There is an annual maintenance schedule.

3.3. Sustainability

The Meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. However the centre is a model of energy efficiency and sustainability. The building is highly insulated and well-sealed. Air source heat pumps using renewable electricity are used in conjunction with underfloor heating and cooling, and the hall and meeting room are ventilated through an underfloor void and four roof towers (incorporating rooflights). The windows are designed to maximise daylight while avoiding overheating and glare. Rainwater is recycled for WC flushing and for the garden. Energy and water use is electronically monitored. The building is designed to meet BREEAM standard 'very good'; the Energy Impact Level is 34. Recyclable waste is sorted for local authority collection and most garden waste is composted.

An ecological study was undertaken before and after construction. This underpinned the landscape design, which uses almost exclusively native species, with habitat creation in mind. It includes native hedgerows, coppiced willows, a wild flower meadow, fruit trees, a vegetable patch, and nesting boxes for birds and bats, as well as maintaining the existing mature trees.

Parking is for loading and unloading and for those with limited mobility. Other users are encouraged to travel by public transport (rail and bus stations are nearby), bicycle or on foot. There is secure parking for bicycles.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house is newly-completed and has all the facilities that the Meeting considers it needs. In addition to a meeting room, hall and several small meeting rooms, these include a kitchen, five unisex WCs, a gallery/social space and a library. There is no resident warden, but the front office is let to a local charity which provides light reception duties and oversight during office hours.

3.5. Access

This is a new building, and access has been built into the design. It is single-storey, without level changes. Accessible WCs and three hearing loops are provided.

3.6 Community Use

The centre is well used by Friends (15 hours a week) and is freely available for other Quaker users. It is also well used by community groups; the accommodation allows for 440 hours use per week, although the actual use figures were not available at the time of completion of the questionnaire. The Meeting has a lettings policy, and uses have to be compatible with Quaker values (e.g. they should not be linked to violence or incitement to violence, and should avoid discrimination on the grounds of race, sex etc.). Users of the centre have commented favourably on the quality of the new facilities, as well as factors such as location, price and peaceful ambience.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reported signs of crime or antisocial behaviour at or near the meeting house. The area is considered to be one of low crime and deprivation levels. An attempted theft of scaffolding during construction was reported to the police. Contact has been made with the local neighbourhood policing team, but this is not routine.

3.8. Plans for change

None 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: This is a new building, designed to fulfil the needs of the Meeting. As such major change is unlikely in the immediate future, but when that happens it should seek to retain the fine qualities of the building.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: Similarly, the building has been designed to allow for wider community use, and the quality of the facilities and good location are such that these are likely to prosper.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: An unlikely prospect, given the recent date of the building. The building is of high architectural quality and is sufficiently flexible in character to lend itself to a number of alternative uses, such as a health centre or offices. It would not lend itself easily to residential use.

Part 5: Category: 3