

Friends Meeting House, Leighton Buzzard

Behind 27 North Street, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, LU7 1EQ

National Grid Reference: SP 92188 25266



Statement of Significance

An attractive building of the late eighteenth century, enlarged in 1813 and with interiors which have preserved much of their original character. The meeting house is of high heritage significance.

Evidential value

Much of the original building of 1787 is presumably incorporated in the present structure, which is of medium evidential value.

Historical value

As the statutory list entry observes, this is an unusually well preserved example of an early Quaker meeting house and is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The exterior of the building is attractive and the interior still preserves much of its original simple character. The building is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been used by Quakers continuously since the 1790s and more recently by other local groups. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Luton & Leighton*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0031690*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Central Bedfordshire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Leighton-Linslade*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1158162*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Leighton Buzzard*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1787*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not known*
- 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: *Ken Barry & Helen Osborn*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *27-31 North Street is a row of three small terraced houses between the meeting house and the street. These buildings belong to the Area Meeting and are listed grade II (see list description below).*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1 pp.4-5
Stell, C, *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in Eastern England* (2002) p.13
Bedfordshire HER, ref. no. 4651
Local Meeting survey by Ken Barry, October 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The Leighton Buzzard meeting was an offshoot of the Hogsty End meeting and was extant by 1777. In 1786 John Grant, who was clerk to the Monthly Meeting, bought some old cottages on the west side of North Street which were demolished to make way for a new meeting house which he built in 1787. In 1807 Grant bought another 854 sq.yds. of land adjoining the meeting house for use as a burial ground. In 1812 the building was extended at the northern end to provide a women's meeting house and the whole of the front was refaced in red and blue brick. The property was given to Friends in 1844 by John Grant's widow. It was

restored in 1953 and repaired in 1960. At one time there was a cottage against the north wall, but this has been removed.

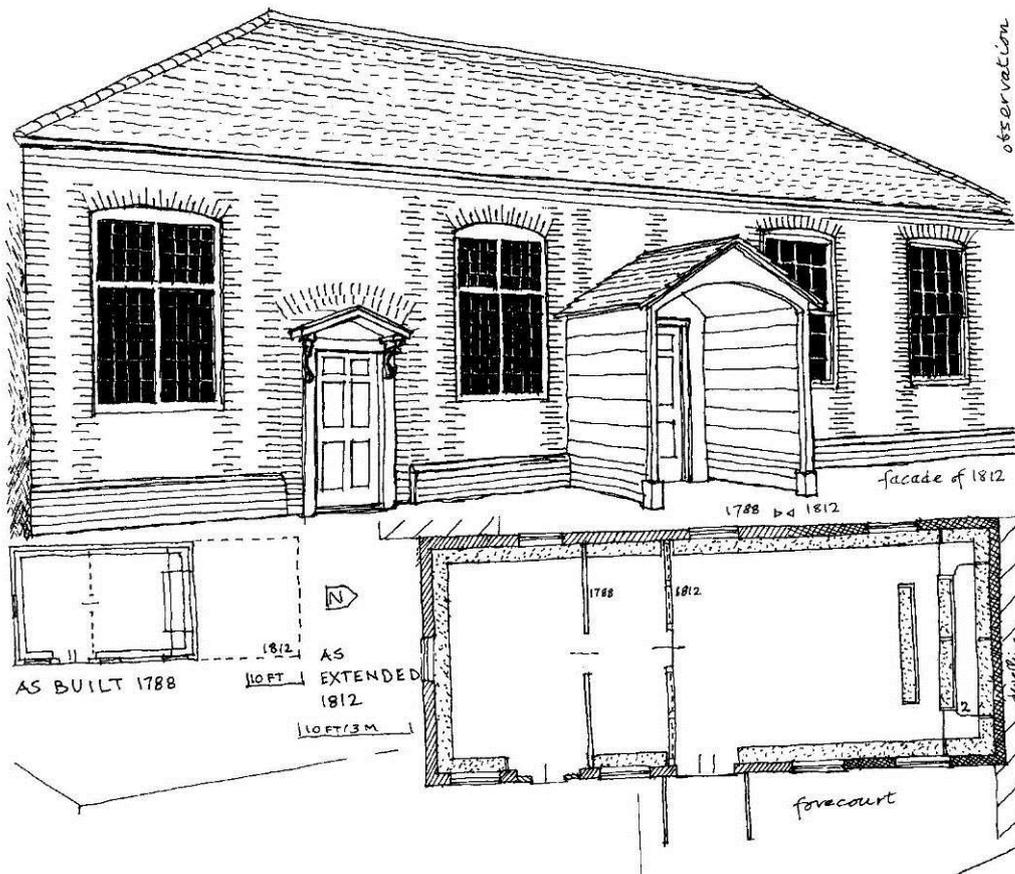


Fig.1 Main front and ground plans of the building, *Butler* p.4

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house is single-storeyed and rectangular on plan, with an overall pitched roof which is hipped at both ends and covered in tiles. The east or entrance front is faced with blue bricks laid in header bond with extensive red brick dressings and a brick plinth. The front is four windows wide. The two left hand windows have wooden cross frames. Between them is the original entrance, now reduced in width and with a timber pedimented surround. The present main entrance is covered by a projecting timber porch. Beyond the porch are two rectangular sash windows in the later part of the building. The west or rear elevation facing the burial ground has is of red brick in a mixture of bonds, with blue diaper decoration on the southern or earlier part of the building. This elevation has three nineteenth century timber sashes, and a small rear projection at the southern end.

The interior is divided into two rooms by a partition with vertically sliding shutters of unpainted timber. The smaller south room has been further subdivided by a modern partition. In the larger northern room the elders' stand against the north wall comprises three tiers of seating with horizontally-boarded backs and arm-rests with turned balusters. The side walls also have horizontal boarding to half height with some integral bench seating.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of timber benches in the building with similar detailing to the elders' stand and presumably of the same date.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground to the rear of the meeting house is enclosed by a stone and brick boundary wall, part of which may be coeval with the neighbouring seventeenth century building, and is laid to grass with shrubs in the borders under the walls. The gravestones have been lined against the walls. None of the gravestones dates from before 1800. The ground is still open for burials.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is set back from the road frontage behind a row of small yellow brick nineteenth century houses (27-31 North Street) which belong to the meeting. An entry at the south end of the terrace with an iron gate and overthrow gives access to the cobbled meeting house forecourt.

2.6. Listed status

The building is properly listed at grade II.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

This part of Leighton Buzzard was being built-up in the seventeenth century and the area is probably has medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal

3.2. Maintenance

The most recent quinquennial inspection was in November 2012. Following the inspection improvements were made out to the loft insulation. Minor electrical works and repairs to porch have not yet been carried out. The meeting has enough money to cover the costs of maintenance and repair, though major works are the responsibility of the Area Meeting. The meeting does not have 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:

- improvement of the loft insulation
- recycling of waste
- setting aside wildlife areas in burial ground.

The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house. There are two meeting rooms, plus kitchen and toilets. There is no resident warden.

There is reasonable public transport with buses on weekdays and a railway station 30 mins walk away. There is no on-site parking, but there is a public car park nearby. There is secure parking for bicycles on site.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level but uneven access into and inside the building but access to the kitchen is by a step with a ramp. There is an accessible WC and a hearing loop in the main meeting room, but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for between 4 and 6 hours per month. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 80 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. No gambling or alcohol is allowed nor any activities inconsistent with Quaker ethics. Free use is usually only for ecumenical groups which have a Quaker involvement, e.g. the Christian Ecology Group. Users value the good atmosphere, pleasant location and competitive rates.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been no heritage crime and there are no current signs of general crime at the site. A break-in occurred in the 1990s and an antique clock was stolen. 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 current plans for change

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. There is probably some scope for change, but the stand and panelling of the main meeting room is a valuable survival and should be retained.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house is already used by community groups. There is probably some scope for alteration, but subject to listed building constraints.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could serve a wholly secular use if laid down, subject to listed building constraints.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description (s)

List entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1158162

Location

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, NORTH STREET

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Central Bedfordshire	Unitary Authority	Leighton-Linslade

Grade: II

Date first listed: 27-May-1954

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 35703

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Details

NORTH STREET 1. 5125 (West Side) LEIGHTON BUZZARD Friends' Meeting House SP 9225 SW 1/55 27.5.54.

II GV

2. Set back from road in courtyard. 1789. Local bond of vitreous headers, hipped old tiled roof. Single storey, plinth, cornice moulding. 2 sash windows with glazing bars and 2 double light leaded mood mullion and transom casement windows Later central wooden porch with open pediment and elliptical arch leading to 2 fold door. Left central C19 door of 6 flush panels in architrave surround under open pedimented hood on cut brackets. Largely unaltered interior divided into 2 main rooms by wooden screen double hung like a sash window. Each room retains original pine seats and dados. An unusually well preserved example of an early Quaker meeting house.

Nos 27 to 31 (odd) form a group with the friends Meeting House.

Listing NGR: SP9218825266

27-31 North Street

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: 27-31, NORTH STREET

List entry Number: 1114574

Location

27-31, NORTH STREET

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

District: Central Bedfordshire

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Leighton-Linslade

Grade: II

Date first listed: 01-May-1975

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

List entry Description

Details

NORTH STREET 1. 5125 (West Side) LEIGHTON BUZZARD

Nos 27 to 31 (odd) SP 9225 SW 1/276

II GV

2. Early C19. Yellow brick, Welsh slated roof. 2 storeys, 1st floor sill band. 3 sash windows with glazing bars in reveals, ground floor stucco surrounds with cornices on consoles. 3 small modern 1st floor windows. Doorways, like ground floor windows, have stucco surrounds, cornices on consoles.

Nos 27 to 31 (odd) form a group with the friends Meeting House.

Listing NGR: SP9220125272