

Friends Meeting House, Leiston

Waterloo Avenue, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HE

National Grid Reference: TM 44296 62606



Statement of Significance

The building has high heritage significance as a little altered example of a nineteenth-century meeting house built on the site of an earlier meeting house, retaining some internal fittings and set in an attractive burial ground.

Evidential value

As a meeting house purpose-built in 1860 and relatively unaltered, the building has high evidential value. The burials on the site could yield evidence about past patterns of Quaker life and have high evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is a mid-nineteenth-century building, dating from the height of Leiston's expansion as a local industrial centre. Its relatively grand design and conspicuous location are testimony to the influence of Quakers in the town at that time. The meeting room retains its historic layout (i.e. the division into two meeting rooms), as well as a number of original benches, and even the old gas light fittings. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a good example of mid-Victorian Italianate architecture, its external design grander than is normal for a meeting house. Its architect William P. Ribbans is not a major national figure, but is of regional significance (he also designed an extension to Hadleigh Town Hall in 1851 and the Ipswich Borough Asylum in 1870, both in a similarly Italianate style). The interior is relatively unaltered, retaining its seating for the elders, a number of original benches, and gas light fittings. The design of the 1988 addition is low-key, contextual and well-detailed, and does not detract from the aesthetic value of the building. The building and the open space of the burial ground are positive features in the conservation area. However, the inserted floor and stair in the smaller meeting room is a negative feature. Overall, the building is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house was built for and remains in Quaker use. However, it is also a community resource, as well as being a landmark in the conservation area, and as such is seen by local residents and visitors. The building and burial ground symbolise Quaker values, such as the testimony of simplicity. These spiritual, commemorative and social values give the site high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Ipswich and Diss*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000040*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd (on behalf of the Area Meeting)*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Suffolk Coastal District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Leiston*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1227725*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Leiston*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): 1860; 1988

1.13 Architect(s): *William P. Ribbans of Ipswich; Cecil Bourne & Woods*

1.14 Date of visit: 8 July 2014

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Ruth Hawthorn*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *1988 addition*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 575–6
An Account of the Estates etc. belonging to Suffolk Quarterly Meeting, second edition,
Ipswich, 1868

Quakers in Leiston, 1960

Local Meeting survey by Ruth Hawthorn, June 2014 and October 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

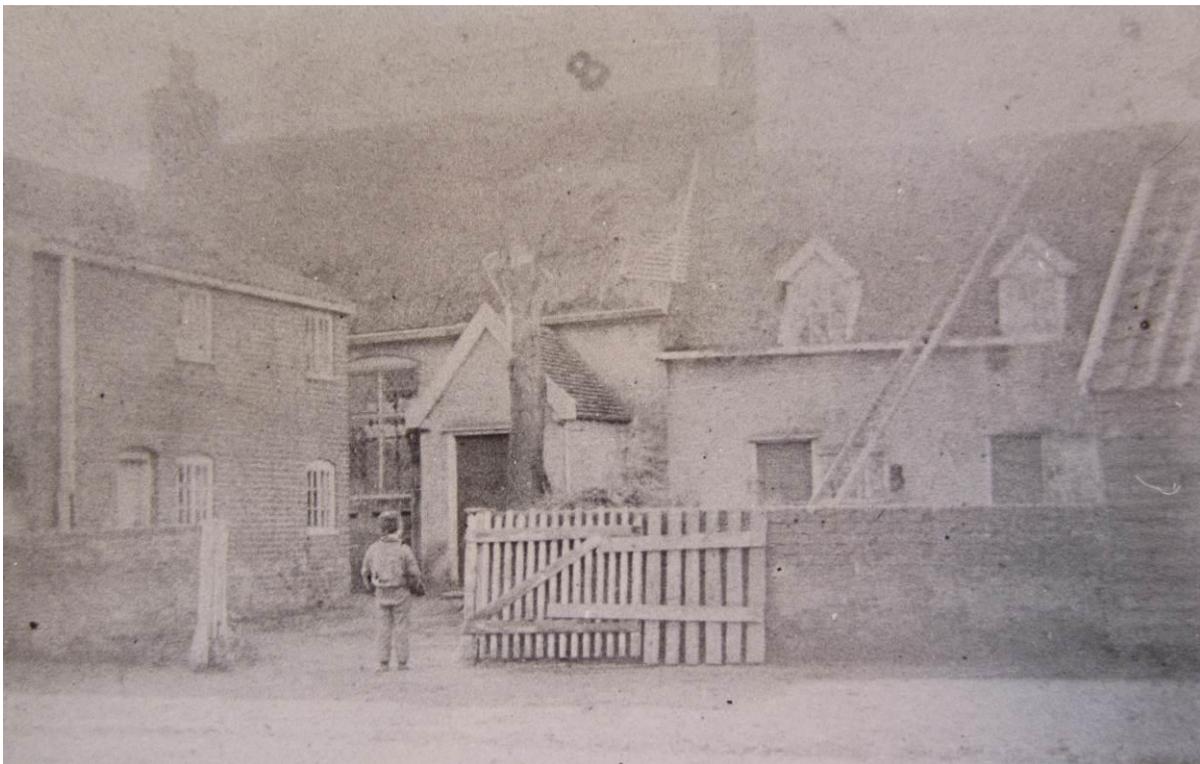


Figure 1: An early (c1860) photograph of the 1713 meeting house and cottages (original held by local meeting)

A Quaker burial ground existed off the Aldeburgh road, about a quarter of a mile outside Leiston, from 1670. This was in use until 1786, after which two cottages were built on part of

the land; these survive today as 1 and 2 Quakers Cottages, set amongst modern council housing in the cul-de-sac called Quaker's Way. A plaque on one of the cottages records the site's significance.

In 1713 a plot of land called Jordans was acquired, close to the Saxmundham crossroads, and two cottages and a meeting house seating sixty to seventy were built. These are the thatched buildings shown in figure 1, the meeting house being the larger building with a big leaded window and a gabled porch. Butler states that they were brick-built but the photograph suggests that they were timber framed and rendered, although some brick cottages, built later, adjoined.

Leiston grew as an industrial centre from the late eighteenth century, and particularly after the Napoleonic wars with the establishment of Richard Garrett's iron foundry and agricultural machinery manufacturing plant. Following his success at the Great Exhibition, Garrett's Long Shop was built in 1852-3. The railway arrived in 1859, and terraces of brick workers' cottages and houses were built.

By 1853 the meeting house was in a state of disrepair, and the decision was taken to rebuild it, instigated largely by Gundry Neave, the Quaker owner of a nearby factory. It was replaced by the current meeting house, built from designs by William P. Ribbans of Ipswich, in 1860. This seated 170 and cost £555. The site is shown at figure 2, with the burial ground behind and the retained brick cottages (visible in figure 1) on the corner. An early photograph is shown at figure 3, showing the patterned brick boundary wall and original low range to the right of the meeting house.

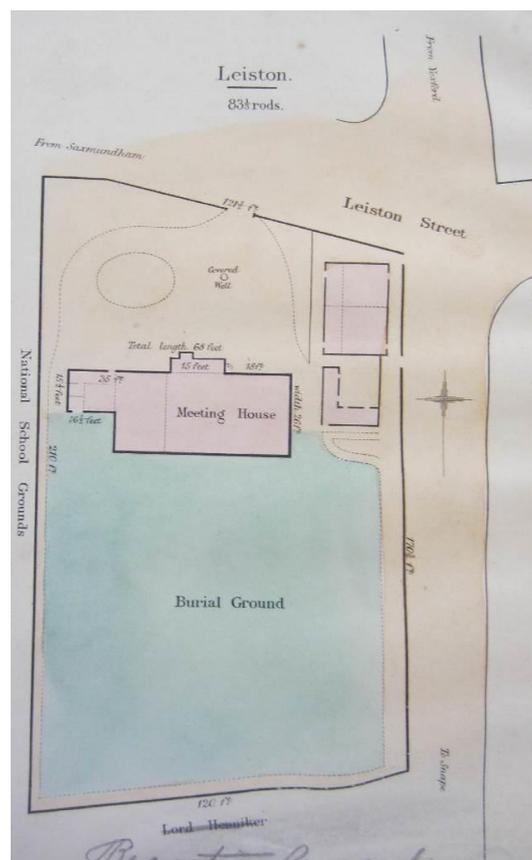


Figure 2: Site plan, from *An Account of the Estates etc. belonging to Suffolk Quarterly Meeting*, 1868



Figure 3: Early photograph of the new meeting house (original held by local meeting)

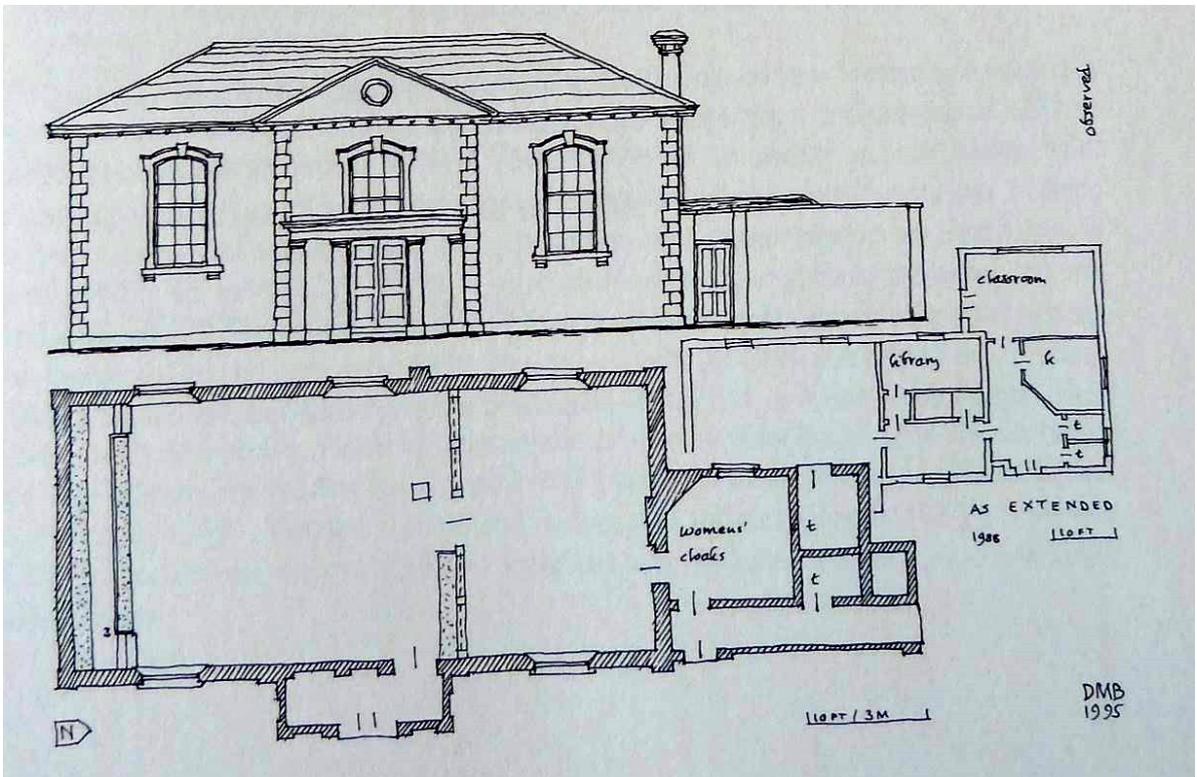


Figure 4: Elevation and plan, from Butler, p. 575 (plan of new extension not shown as built)

In 1931 the two brick cottages shown in figures 1 and 2 were demolished to allow for road widening and improved visibility at the corner.

The meeting house was listed in 1983. In 1988 an extension housing a new kitchen and other facilities was built, replacing the structure visible in figure 3. The plan at figure 4 (from Butler) does not show it as actually built. The architect for the extension was Philip Woods of Cecil Bourne & Woods, the cost £80,000.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house was built in 1860 from designs by William P. Ribbons of Ipswich. Additions were made in 1988 from designs by Philip Woods of Cecil Bourne & Woods. The 1860 building is in Italianate style, of red brick with white brick dressings (rusticated quoins and window surrounds). It has a hipped slate roof with overhanging bracketed eaves. The front elevation (photos top left and right) is of three bays, the centre bay projecting forward slightly. It has a central porch with double three-panel doors, pilastered brickwork, entablature and flat roof. The brick on edge coping is a twentieth century repair. Above the centre bay is a triangular pediment, within which is set a blind circular opening. The window of the centre bay and the two large sash windows of the flanking bays have small panes with narrow section glazing bars, segmental heads and ornamental keystones. The flank elevations are plain, while the rear elevation (photo middle left) facing towards the burial ground (photo middle right) has three equally-spaced sash windows and quoins, similarly detailed to the front.

The original interior consists of two spaces, divided or connected by a partition with half-height pilasters and sliding shutters. The secondary space (women's meeting room) has had a floor inserted in the twentieth century. The main space is little altered, being rectangular on plan, with plain plastered and painted walls and with the stand for elders remaining on the south side. Unusually, the interior retains its historic gas light fittings, no longer used. A panelled timber dado runs around the perimeter wall in both the main space and the secondary space, the latter interrupted by the enclosed stair, leading to a store room above. On the wall is a 1936 plan of the burial ground and nineteenth century photographs of notable Quakers, including Edward Neave, from the family which instigated the building of the meeting house.

The 1988 addition is attached on the north side, and now forms the principal entrance (the central porch is now a fire escape route). The addition is designed in a contextual manner, of red brick with white brick quoins, and with a pyramidal slate roof with overhanging bracketed eaves. At the rear, the building wraps around the northeast corner of the main building (photo middle left) and has a projecting oak bay window. Inside it houses kitchen, WCs and a meeting room (the Neave Room).

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room has bench seating around the perimeter, and there are more benches in the secondary room (ground and first floor) and 1988 extension. The benches are contemporary with the building. The secondary space contains a cabinet of Quaker memorabilia, including china made for the Leiston Adult School, bonnets and collection boxes.

2.4 Attached burial ground

This lies to the rear (east) of the meeting house, and is a large space, partly mown grass and partly left semi-wild. It contains a large number of plain headstones. It is still in use.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies close to the centre of Leiston, by the crossroads. It is set back from the road behind a low modern brick wall (the wall shown in Figure 3 has gone), with parking on gravel at the front. It occupies a large site, and is a conspicuous building on the approach into town from the Saxmundham direction. The meeting house is a notable and positive feature in the conservation area. The historic (Grade II*) Long Shop lies over the road to the south.

The old burial ground lies about half a mile to the southwest and is now part of two private gardens Quakers Way, Leiston (NGR: TM 45023 62183); it has not been visited as part of this review. The cottages that were built on part of the land survive, amidst post-war council housing.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is appropriately listed, Grade II. The list entry (below) makes no mention of the architect, or the interior, and predates the 1988 addition.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The building is built over the site of the previous meeting house and cottages, insubstantial buildings without deep foundations, which would no doubt have been lost in the 1860 reconstruction. Before the meeting house was built and the burial ground laid out, the site was open fields. The recorded burials go back to 1838. Archaeological potential is therefore thought to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good, on the basis of a brief inspection.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well maintained, left in part as a semi-wild area. Some of the headstones are over 150 years old and their inscriptions are no longer legible. The 1936 plan in the meeting house gives the names of those interred up to that point, but not their dates.

3.2 Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection is believed to have been carried out in 2012; the report (by Richard Brunt FRICS & Associates, Ipswich) has not been seen as part of this review. The meeting does not have enough money for repair and maintenance. It relies on Area Meeting funds for larger works. A five-year repair and maintenance plan was drawn up at the time of the last QIR.

3.3 Sustainability

The Premises Committee has considered the Sustainability Toolkit and has been as compliant as possible, given the listed status of the building. The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities required. There is no resident Warden. The meeting house is accessible using public transport. There is on-site parking and space for bikes, although no bike racks.

3.5 Access

The meeting house has level access, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There are no specific facilities for partially-sighted people. No Disability Access Audit has been carried out.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 4 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 76 hours per week. It is used for an average of 2.75 hours per week. The meeting has no lettings policy and no exclusion policy, other than the health & safety criteria in the lettings agreement. There is no specific policy for usage free of charge. Users value the meeting house for its competitive pricing.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has low crime levels. However, a number of vandalism incidents have taken place: about eight years ago an outdoor bench behind the meeting house was set on fire. More recently, the house was broken into. Other minor incidents include the throwing of beer bottles through a window and the theft of a wheelie bin. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but the meeting might consider making contact.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for alterations at present (2015).

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 building meets the needs of the meeting, with good modern facilities as well as an attractive historic meeting space. Some of the historic benches have been removed and are either relocated to other parts of the building or proposed for sale. Further disposal of historic benches would be regrettable.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already used by third parties, and no particular threats to heritage or vulnerabilities are reported. Such extended use is vital for the continued viability of the building and meeting.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Closure of this historic meeting house would be highly regrettable. In that event it would be necessary to find another, preferably public or community use for the listed meeting house which retained its internal volumes and surviving historic features, and appropriate provision for the future management of the attached burial ground.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description(s)

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1227725

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, WATERLOO AVENUE

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

Grade: II

Date first listed: 02-Aug-1983

TM 46 SW LEISTON-CUM-SIZEWELL WATERLOO AVENUE 4/44 Friends' Meeting House

II

Quaker Meeting House. 1860. Red brick with rusticated quoins and window surrounds in yellow brick; slate roof. Single-storey. 3 window range, tall sashes with glazing bars. Segmental heads with stone coping and ornamental keystones. The centre bay is set forward slightly. Central porch with pilastered brickwork, entablature and flat roof. Double 3-panel doors, the top panels glazed. Overhanging eaves carried on wooden brackets. Above the centre bay is a triangular pediment, within which is set a circular unglazed opening. Hipped roof.

Listing NGR: TM4429662606