

Quaker Meeting House, Sidcot

Oakridge Lane, Sidcot, Winscombe, Somerset, BS25 1LT

National Grid Reference: ST 42930 57474



Statement of Significance

A meeting house of 1817, much altered in the 1860s and remodelled in the 1920s to serve as both a meeting house and an assembly hall for Sidcot school. At the same time, the adjacent caretaker's house and stable were adapted as a committee room. This was enlarged in the 1980s to form a room for the Local Meeting. A burial ground of 1817 is attached. Despite successive alterations, the complex of buildings and burial ground is of medium heritage significance.

Evidential value

The building has a long history of alteration and much of the original 1817 fabric has been renewed but there is still evidence of past functions and the building is of medium evidential value.

Historical value

The history of the main part of the building is as much to do with the history of Sidcot School as with the Local Meeting, but both are part of the history of the Society of Friends and the site has high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The simple outline of the original 1817 building has been largely lost through later accretions and the large meeting room has an entirely twentieth-century character. The whole is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building has been used as a Quaker meeting house since 1817, with intensive additional use by Sidcot School from the beginning. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *North Somerset*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0015150*

1.3 Owner: *North Somerset Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *North Somerset Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*

1.6 Civil parish: *Winscombe & Sandford*

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): *1817, enlarged 1872, re-cast 1926, small meeting room formed 1984*

1.13 Architect(s): *Original architect not established; plans for 1926 work by Theodore Sturge, surveyor of Bristol*

1.14 Date of visit: *2 September 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Adrian Shephard, Peter Bowyer*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *former meeting house*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 543-4, 912

Gladwin, C., *The Quaker Meeting House Sidcot*, 2001

Knight, F., *A History of Sidcot School*, 1908

Leimdorfer, V., *Quakers at Sidcot 1690-1990*

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991

North Somerset Historic Environment Record: number 41114

Local Meeting survey by Roger Starr, March 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

Sidcot Meeting was registered in 1690 and in that year Timothy Willis sold Friends a cottage at Harbury Batch for use as a meeting house with land for a burial ground attached. A school at Sidcot founded by William Jenkins in 1699 also used the building, which was enlarged in 1712. The school closed in 1729 but was re-established in 1808. Pressure for increased accommodation led to the sale of Harbury Batch in 1817 for use as a dwelling house and the building of a new and larger meeting house on a new site. The land was given by the school and the building costs defrayed by the Monthly Meeting. The old burial ground was retained but supplanted by a new burial ground attached to the new meeting house. This building was damaged by fire in 1858, repaired in 1860 and enlarged by the addition of a front lobby in 1869. In 1926 it was remodelled and enlarged to plans by the Quaker surveyor Theodore Sturge to serve as the main hall for the school, with a stage and tiered seats. (Butler (p. 912) credits the Quaker architect Harold Fletcher Trew of Gloucester with the 1926 work.) Further enlargements were made in 1961, when a gallery was inserted. In the 1980s some modest buildings north of the main meeting house, which had originally housed a stable and a caretaker's cottage and had been converted in the 1920s to serve as a committee room and kitchen, were adapted to provide a small meeting room with modern facilities. Since about 2005 this has been used for most regular meetings for worship, though the larger space is still used for this purpose on occasion. The old burial ground next to the old meeting house is not now in Quaker ownership.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The main building, which incorporates the 1817 meeting house, is rectangular on plan with roughcast walls and a hipped roof covered in natural slate. At the north end is an extension containing the gallery under a lower pitched and slated roof, with another even lower range set at right angles with a pantiled roof, which contains the small meeting room now in common use. The west front of the main building has a flat-roofed fore-building with two main entrances. The wall of the main building rising behind has three large round-headed windows (before 1926 there were four windows) and wide eaves with paired brackets. The south wall fronting the burial ground is blind. The east (rear) wall has a central projection flanked by two large round-headed windows. The lower buildings extending to the north have modern rectangular window openings and the east wall of the small meeting house is exposed rubble stonework. The entrance porch on the west side carries a tile mural.

Inside the large meeting house, the main space has a boarded floor, a painted timber panelled dado with plain plaster walls above and a flat plaster ceiling. Across the south end is a raised stage with a proscenium. Opposite the stage is raked seating which continues up into the gallery added in 1961. It is unclear how much, if anything, of the original interior survived the 1926 rebuilding. Minor ancillary spaces separate the large from the small meeting house. The meeting room here is a simple modern space with a carpeted floor, plain plastered walls and modern fittings and furniture.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of heritage interest in the small meeting house and none of the furniture in the large meeting house appears to be earlier than the 1920s.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

To the south of the large meeting house is a large rectangular burial plot, which is still in use for burials. The ground is enclosed by hedges, with the stone grave markers laid flat in the grass. Some burial stones have been lifted to maintain the surface level and names are recorded on memorial wall tablets. There are no burials earlier than 1818. There is an ongoing maintenance plan for the burial ground.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The two meeting houses and the burial ground stand on Oakridge Lane, which is a public road threading through the campus of Sidcot School (Grade II, NHLE: 1136835). To the west of the meeting houses lies the main group of school buildings, to the south is the school reception building and car park, to the north is the junior school. To the east are open fields, one of which has been acquired by the meeting to preserve the setting of the meeting house.

The old meeting house at Harbury Batch, with the old burial ground attached (NGR: ST 427 573) are now in private (Quaker) ownership.

2.6 Listed status

The large meeting house building has been very much altered in the twentieth century and is not a candidate for the statutory list. The building containing the small meeting house is not of sufficient significance for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting houses were built in an area where there was no earlier settlement and the meeting house site probably has low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1 Condition

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

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in October 2013 and was undertaken by Jonathan C. Miles of Bath, chartered surveyor. The building was found to be generally well maintained and not to be suffering from any major defects, but overdue for external decoration. In fact, the roof was in a worse state than the QI suggested and was completely overhauled in summer 2015. Following an agreement made in 2012 the School is responsible for all repairs and improvements to the large meeting house (or assembly hall). The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the smaller meeting house. The meeting has a 5-year maintenance and repair plan based on the QI and on annual inspections.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented some measures to reduce its environmental impact. For the small meeting house, these include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: roof recently re-felted and insulated to current recommended standard.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: Fairtrade goods used, gas usage monitored, waste management undertaken by Sidcot School.
- Wildlife and nature conservation: Options being explored to make best use of the small field adjacent to the meeting house; sheep grazed, ancient anthills preserved, fruit trees to be planted shortly.
- Transport: public transport is very poor, so options are limited.

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate and would not consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. Besides the meeting room there is a children's room and kitchen. The toilets are shared with the large meeting house. There is no resident Warden but the school provides many support services (from gardening to security). The meeting is accessible by public transport (bus), though most buses go through Winscombe which is 1 mile away. There is parking for about 10 cars on site and more parking in the school car park nearby. There is no dedicated secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, with level access from the entrance doors, but steps between rooms. There is an accessible toilet in the large meeting house and a hearing loop in both large and small meeting houses. There currently no special facilities for partially-sighted people, though they would be provided if required. A Disability Access Audit was carried out in 2004 and most of the recommended changes have been made (ramps provided, thresholds reduced and a disable toilet installed).

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the (small) meeting house for about 6 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings between 9am and 10pm for six days per week: all three rooms are included in the letting. It is used for about 1 hour per week by the school and about 60 hours per year by other users. The meeting has a lettings policy. Free use is given for activities led by Quakers, to local orchestra and choir meetings, to Churches Together meetings and for some special school events. Some users value the building for its location close to the performance space in the large meeting house.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There is no evidence of general crime or anti-social behaviour but there has been some heritage crime. Lead was stolen from the roof in 2010. The theft was not reported to the police. The locality is generally well cared-for and has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. Friends have not developed a liaison with the local police. The school security patrols also cover the meeting house premises.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no current plans for change to the building, but there is a very long-term notion to relocate to a more central location in the neighbourhood.

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: there is probably scope for change within the building, subject to planning controls.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: as above there is probably scope for change within the building, subject to the constraints of the planning system.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the larger part of the building is effectively part of Sidcot School. If the meeting house were to be closed, those parts now in regular use by the local meeting would doubtless be subsumed by the school.

Part 5: Category: 3