

Quaker Meeting House, Stansted

71 Chapel Hill, Stansted Mountfichet, Essex, CM24 8AE

National Grid Reference: TL 51009 25029



Statement of Significance

As a relatively modern building, the meeting house itself has low heritage significance. However, it was built on the site of an earlier meeting house and the burial ground dates back to 1703; the site has high significance.

Evidential value

The current meeting house is a modern building with no evidential value. However, it was built on the site of an earlier meeting house with attached burial ground. The site and the burial ground to the rear have considerable evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has medium historical value as a prefabricated post-war timber building, built on the site of an earlier building and later encased in brick. The burial ground dates back to 1703 and contains a number of eighteenth and nineteenth-century headstones. The site has high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is in use as a Quaker meeting house and for community groups. This and the presence of the burial ground give the building and site considerable communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Thaxted*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0018260*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Uttlesford District Council*

- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Stansted Mountfichet*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed, not locally listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Burial ground: yes (Stansted Mountfichet); meeting house: no*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1967, 1994*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Paul V. Mauger*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *19 June 2014*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Sue Moloney*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Bettley, J. and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Essex*, 2007, p. 739
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 199–200
Jonathan Morrell, typescript article in Stansted Community Newsletter ‘The Link’
Saffron Walden area meeting archive, 1966 specification for Stansted
Olive Tyson, typescript article about the Friends Meeting House at Stansted, no date
Uttlesford District Council, planning database
Local Meeting survey by Sue Moloney, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

The current site was acquired on 20 August 1703 when a 1,500-year lease was signed. The same year a meeting house was built and a burial ground established. This first meeting house was a timber-framed structure with a cellar (figure 1). It was extended in 1850 and later a new porch was added. In 1929 the meeting closed and the meeting house was used by the Methodists. In c.1955 Hubert Lidbetter described the meeting house as ‘a perfect little building in the best local tradition, ruined by a Victorian extension’.

The meeting was revived in the post-war period. In 1967, the eighteenth-century building was demolished (due to its poor state of repair) and a new prefabricated, flat-roofed timber building erected by Paul V. Mauger of Mauger Gavin & Associates, Welwyn. The builder was A.S. Reynolds of Saffron Walden. The new building seated 85 and cost £6,000. It was used for the opening meeting in September 1967. By the early 1990s, it was in need of repair. Works to encase the building in brick and add a pitched roof were completed in 1994 (Allan

N. Wright, surveyor). The cost was £62,000, which also included some internal alterations (new toilets and kitchen).



Figure 1: The 1703 meeting house (Stansted Local Meeting archive)

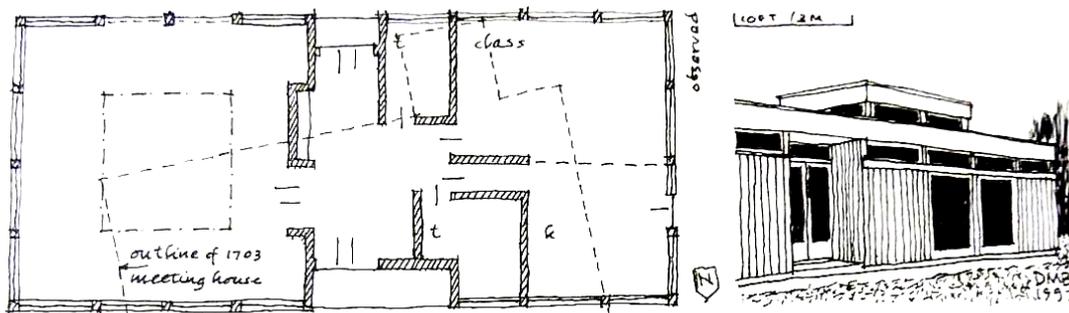


Figure 2: Butler's plan of the present meeting house (pre-1994) with the footprint of the 1703 meeting house superimposed (dotted line) (left) and a perspective of the exterior before the 1990s alterations (right) (Butler (1999), vol.1, p. 200)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house was constructed in 1967 on the site of the earlier building. It was a prefabricated flat-roofed timber building typical of the era (architect: Paul V. Mauger). In 1994 it was encased in brick, and a pitched slate roof was added. The plan is oblong with the long entrance elevation facing north. The facing materials are brown brick in stretcher bond, with blue engineering in soldier courses for the window lintels and bull-nosed blue engineering bricks for window cills. The north elevation has four windows and one dormer and a gabled, timber-panelled entrance porch.

The meeting room is a square room in the eastern half of the building. It has a laminated timber roof structure and a woodblock floor. It is lit by two dormer windows, four side windows to the north and east and French door to the garden (south). In the west half of the building are the toilets, a kitchen and a smaller meeting room.

2.3 Loose furnishings

None of note

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Only the burial ground is included in the conservation area. This is an oblong plot to the south of the meeting house with perimeter planting. It was established in 1703 when the site was acquired and the first meeting house built. The most recent legible headstone dates from 1924. The burial ground is no longer used for burials, but the scattering of ashes takes place here. In the 1950s all the headstones were moved to the perimeter of the plot and the human remains were moved to the southwest corner. Apart from individual headstones there is also a collective memorial stone for members of the Day family, whose death dates range from 1712 to 1796.

There is no comprehensive inventory recording the locations and inscriptions of the surviving headstones. As many of them are suffering from lamination, it is recommended that a full record is carried out. (The list of names held by the local meeting is not comprehensive, misspells several names and does not record all the information on the headstones.)

The most notable burial is probably that of Richard Crafton Green (1848–1931), a painter who was born in Stansted. A short road opposite is named after him ('Crafton Green'), although the original connection appears to have been lost over time and 'Green' has become the topographical denominator.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The site of the meeting house is close to the centre of Stansted. Opposite are a public car park, a day centre and a library. The south part of the crossing of Chapel Hill and Bentfield Road is included in the conservation area, which includes the burial ground but not the meeting house. Further west along Chapel Hill are inter-war and post-war houses.

There are no detached Quaker burial grounds still in Quaker ownership. A public garden in Newtown Road, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, was originally a Quaker burial ground (NGR: TL 48828 21031) until it was gifted to the town in 1935. A notable burial is that of Dr Thomas Dimsdale (1712–1800), an early pioneer of smallpox inoculation. Bishop's Stortford Council recently contacted the Stansted Local Meeting (as the geographically closest meeting to the garden) about plans to 'tidy up' the garden. The Stansted Friends are concerned the Council may have plans to develop the garden. It is not known if the original deed of gift included any covenants preventing any uses other than that of a garden.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site was acquired in 1703 when the previous meeting house was built. Its footprint is partially below the present meeting house and partially to the north. Burials have taken place on the site since 1703. Stansted was a medieval settlement and Roman pottery has been found near the Norman castle site. The overall archaeological potential is high.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting house: Good.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Generally satisfactory. There is no formal plan for the future care and maintenance of the burial ground. It is recommended to prepare a full inventory of the headstones whose inscriptions are being lost through delamination.

3.2 Maintenance

The last inspection took place in July 2014 (Martin & Martin, surveyors, Bishop's Stortford). (No copy of the report was seen.) The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. It uses the QIR as a five-year repair and maintenance plan.

3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Survey on heat loss carried out in 2009; cavity wall insulation not deemed possible due to wall construction; more efficient boiler installed with up to date timing device; heavy duty curtains purchased to retain heat within the building.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: purchase of a paper shredder and compost bins; chairs surplus to requirement given to Ecology Charity second hand shop
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: Electrical survey carried out in 2013 with subsequent 'replacement of consumer unit; annual fire checks carried out by Anglia Fire Protection; local handyman deals with regular needs such as gutter clearance, and mending fencing, renewing and paving etc.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: following tree damage due to Hurricane Jude, the meeting is considering creating a 'stumpery' in the area.
- Transport: regular car lifts for members to Meeting.

The meeting has no EPC certificate and would not consider obtaining one as it has already investigated ways to improve energy efficiency.

3.4 Amenities

All the required amenities are in the meeting house. There is no resident warden. The meeting house is accessible by public transport. There are on-site parking spaces for cars and bikes.

3.5 Access

The meeting house has level access, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There is one large print copy of Quaker Faith & Practice and the meeting plans to paint the entrance steps for greater visibility. A Disability Access Audit was carried out in c.2002 and in 2013, following which ramps were installed and wash basin taps were replaced with disabled-friendly versions (c.2002), and the hearing loop system adjusted (2013).

3.6 Community use

Friends use the meeting house for 2 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 60 hours per week. It is used for an average of 18 hours per week. There is currently no formal lettings policy although the meeting plans to adopt one. No one-off uses are permitted. Use is free of charge for Quaker users and other church events. Users value the meeting house because of its good location, convenient parking, size of rooms, peaceful atmosphere, pleasant garden and reasonable fees.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has generally low levels of crime but there have reportedly been several burglaries in the wider area, some of which are thought to be connected to the proximity to Stansted airport. There has been no heritage crime at the meeting house site. The meeting made contact with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team when the meeting house was recently broken into.

3.8 Plans for change

None

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 is a modern building which could be altered as required. Apart from its proximity to the conservation area, there are no heritage constraints.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is already in use by local community groups. At present, it has all the required facilities to support these.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: The building could easily be adapted for secular use. The location of the meeting house just outside a conservation area and the burial ground just inside it would make redevelopment of the whole site difficult. The local authority would probably require a sympathetic design on the present footprint, and the future of the burial ground would need to be taken into account.

Part 5: Category: 4