

Friends Meeting House, Stevenage

21 Cuttys Lane, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 1UP

National Grid Reference: TL 24139 24101



Statement of Significance

A meeting house of the 1950s by William Barnes, which has been much altered with later additions, though the original meeting room survives. The building is of medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The meeting house dates from 1959 and is of low evidential value because it has little potential to yield evidence human activity in the past.

Historical value

The Stevenage meeting was established at this location in 1959 as part of the development of the new town. The building and site have medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The original design by William Barnes has been virtually submerged in later additions, though the original meeting room survives. It is a pleasant space, but as a whole the building is of low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building has been in continuous use by Quakers and other local community groups for over fifty years and is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Hertford & Hitchin*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0001790*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Stevenage Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Stevenage NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *None*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1959; additions made in 1965 and 2014*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *William Barnes; 2014 additions by Andrew Boakes*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *22 October 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Unaccompanied*
- 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.1, p.268
Local Meeting survey by David Hindle, June 2015
Local meeting archives

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

2.1. Historical background

An early meeting gathered in two barns owned by William Bradley which were registered in 1709. In 1954 a site was purchased from the Stevenage Development Corporation and a new meeting house was erected 'that would express Quakerism in this day and age and which would nevertheless be suitable for letting to other cultural bodies'. The architect for the new building was William Barnes, a Quaker architect from Letchworth. A quiet room was added in 1965 and a day room for adults with learning disabilities in 2014.

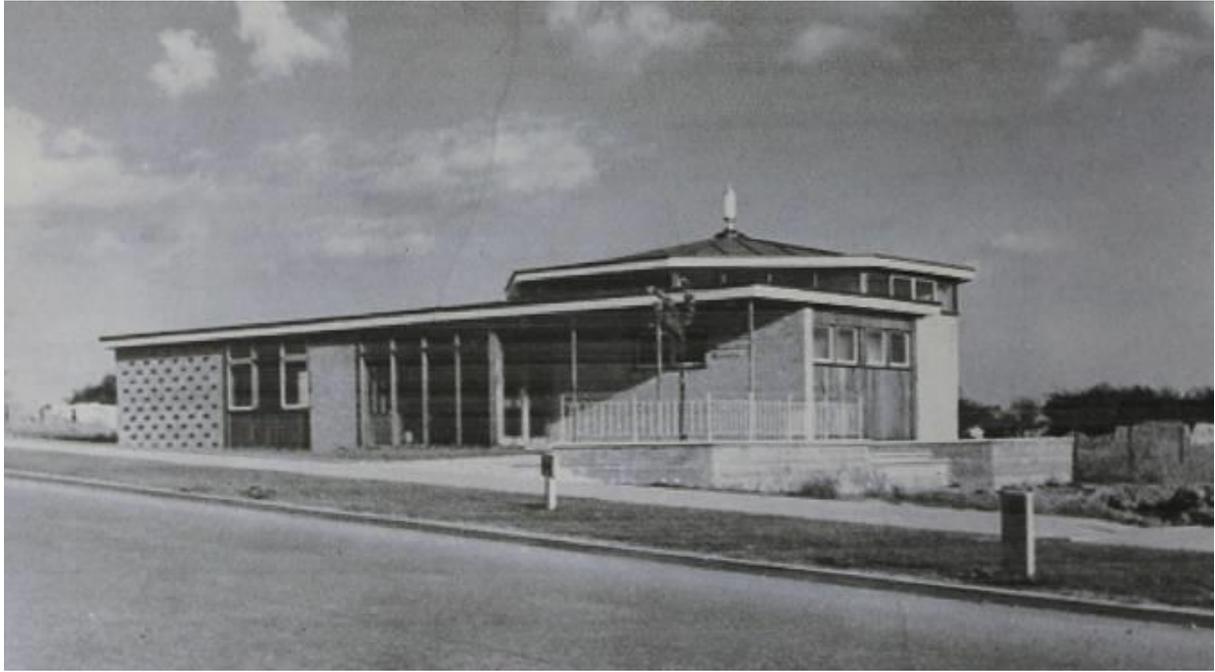
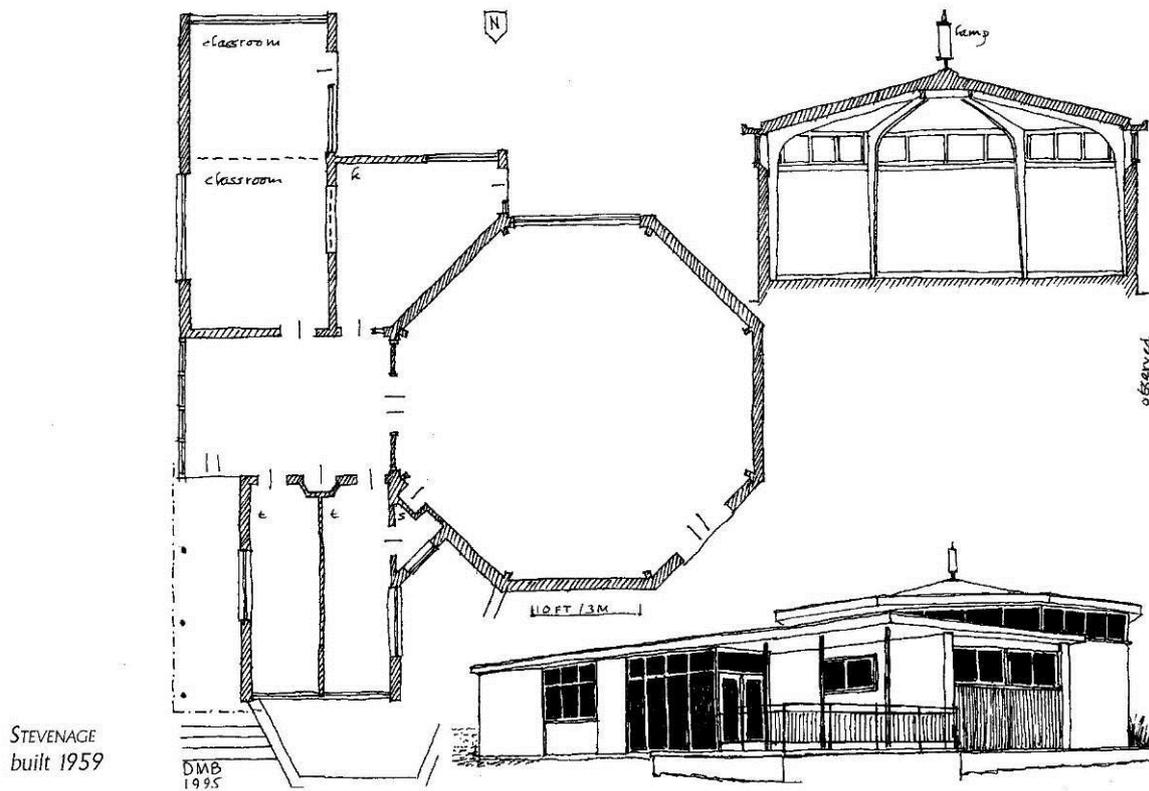


Fig.1 The meeting house in 1959 (Local meeting archives)



Local sources:
appeal [1956], illus.

Sources for the drawing:
architect's plan; photo *The Friend* 1959, 521.

Fig.2 The original plan of the building, with a section of the meeting room and a perspective sketch of the building, *Butler*, vol.1 p.266. (Butler's compass direction is wrong: north is to the left)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The 1950s meeting house consisted of single-storey flat-roofed range on the north side towards the road containing an entrance lobby, kitchen and cloakrooms with an octagonal meeting room behind and rising above the rest (figs. 1 & 2). The northern entrance range has been considerably rebuilt and has also been extended southwards at both ends, partially enclosing the meeting room, of which only two sides are now exposed. The external walls are faced with yellow stock brick. The roof of the meeting room is covered in copper, the remaining flat roofs are covered in felt. The entrance front to the north has a projecting central canopy with a blind brick wall to the right; both canopy and wall are part of the 2104 alterations. To the left of the canopy is part of the original fore building, with a partly-glazed timber panel and a section of plain brick studded with darker bricks in a manner typical of the 1950s. The west elevation is entirely of 2014 and has vertical timber facing with strip clerestorey windows. The east elevation is less altered, with some original timber and glass wall-panels. The octagonal meeting room still rises slightly above the rest of the building, with largely blind brick walls on the two sides still exposed and continuous strip windows under the eaves of the tented roof, which is topped by a lamp finial.

Most of the interior has been considerably altered and modernised, but the meeting room remains largely unchanged, with exposed timber laminated trusses. Both the walls and ceiling of the meeting room are lined with acoustic panels.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose fittings of heritage interest

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house stands on the eastern side the centre of Stevenage, near the 1950s reinforced concrete parish church of St Andrew and St George by Seely and Paget, between a small park and a residential area which is separated from the town centre by the busy dual carriageway of St George's Way.

2.6. Listed status

The building is too recent and too altered to be candidate for the statutory list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The 1959 meeting house was built on a greenfield site, which has low 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): Not applicable

3.2. Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection was made in 2014; it was not carried out by a suitably qualified person. The report identified the need for re-roofing, painting and minor repairs, but these have not yet been carried out. The meeting has adequate funds to cover the costs of maintenance and minor repairs. The meeting does not have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan, but there is an annual maintenance and repair schedule.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- The new (2014) addition has hemp insulation and sustainably sourced timber cladding.
- Energy-saving lightbulbs have been used since 1990.
- Where possible, all waste is recycled
- the walled garden is bird and butterfly-friendly

The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but the meeting would consider obtaining one.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house including a good-sized kitchen, toilets and three meeting rooms of various sizes. There is a resident warden. There is good public transport, with a bus station and mainline railway station within walking distance. There is a car park next to the meeting house and secure storage for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building and an accessible WC. There is at present no hearing loop but there are facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in January 2105 but the recommendations have not yet been implemented.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for about 4 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of about 200 hours per week and is used for approximately 130 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Users must share Friends' values and ethos. Preference is given to local community voluntary groups. Use by businesses is discouraged and the building is not let for political parties' promotional activities.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are some signs of general crime, mostly minor vandalism and damage to windows. There has also been some heritage crime: a section of the copper roof was stolen about six years ago. These incidents were reported to the police. The locality is generally well cared-for and has low crime levels, but there is some deprivation and community confidence is low. There is no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team at present, and Friends would not consider making contact at the moment.

3.8. Plans for change

There are currently no 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: there has already been considerable change to the original building to provide additional facilities. There is probably scope for further change if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: as in (i) above, there has already been considerable change to the original building to provide additional facilities. There is probably scope for further change if required

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could doubtless find another use, if the meeting was laid down.

Part 5: Category: 3