

Friends Meeting House, Streatham and Brixton

Redlands Way, Roupell Park Estate, London, SW2 3LU

National Grid Reference: TQ 30556 73641



Statement of Significance

A plain building of the late 1950s, designed by the well-known Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter, located within a post-war housing estate. Overall, the meeting house has medium significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1957. Its evidential value is low.

Historical value

The meeting house was built after the Second World War in an area then undergoing major rebuilding. It is an unusual example of a purpose-built Quaker meeting house incorporated in a post-war housing estate; it has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is a modest design by Hubert Lidbetter, a Quaker architect of note. It has a pleasing domestic character and is relatively little altered, retaining its original Crittall windows and doors, and pantile roof. It is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is valued by the meeting and other users, for its facilities and its tranquil garden setting. It could probably be put to greater use. As it is, it is of medium communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *South London*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0015920*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Lambeth*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Brixton NPA*
- 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): *1957*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *H. and H. M. Lidbetter*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *7 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Geoff Watts*
- 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, pp. 421-2
Copies of original plans held at meeting house
Local Meeting survey by Geoff Watts, June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

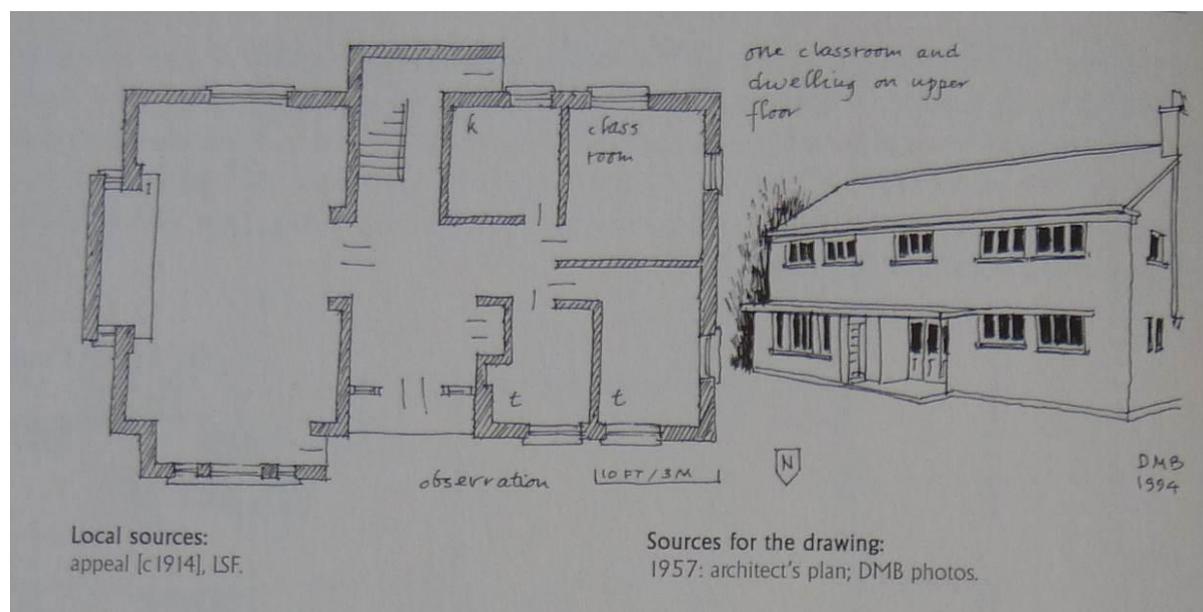


Figure 1: Plan and elevation, 1994 (not to scale), from Butler, Vol. I, p. 422

In about 1915 a house on Brixton Hill was acquired and adapted to serve the needs of the local meeting. This was compulsorily purchased and demolished by the local authority in 1953. Thereafter the meeting used a local Methodist Hall until 1957, when the present building, designed by Hubert Lidbetter (of H. and H. M. Lidbetter, of 2 Verulam Buildings, Grays Inn, WC1, and Surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting) was opened. Built on the edge of the then newly-developed Roupell Park Estate, this had the main meeting accommodation on the ground floor and a classroom and three bedroom flat for the warden above. The ground floor plan and elevation as existing in 1994 are shown at figure 1. A clock tower/cupola shown on the ridge in the original designs (copies of which are held at the meeting house) was omitted from the final design, presumably on grounds of cost.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1957 from designs by Hubert Lidbetter. It is of domestic character, of two storeys, built of straw-coloured Fletton-type brick laid in Flemish bond, with pantile roofs. An originally flat-roofed porch and side projection for the meeting room have been renewed with pitched pantile roofs. The meeting house retains its original metal-framed Crittall windows and doors, apart from a pair of French doors adapted from a window on the rear elevation (giving off the main meeting room), which are in white powder coated aluminium. Sills are of creased tiles, window arches have soldier courses. At the rear is a staircase projection with brick on edge patterning below the landing window. A stack is placed on the west gable, corbelled out from the first floor flank elevation.

From the entrance hall, the meeting room gives off to the left, and a smaller meeting room, kitchens, and WCs to the right. A concrete staircase leads up to the first floor, where there is a classroom (now office) and a warden's flat (now let and not inspected). The floor construction throughout is of concrete. The ground floor has parquet floor finishes. In the main meeting room, a raised elders' platform is placed in a recess on the west side. On the east side, some original cupboards and bookshelves remain in situ.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are none of particular note, apart from one open-backed bench on the elders' platform in the main meeting room, of unknown date and provenance.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located towards the top of Brixton Hill, set back from the road and somewhat hidden away on the edge of the post-war Roupell Park estate. This is a large development of mid-rise post-war social housing, not unattractively laid out, with areas of grass and mature tree planting, but with a high level of deprivation. The estate and the meeting house border onto, but are not included in, the London Borough of Lambeth's Rush Common and Brixton Hill Conservation Area. The meeting house is placed within a large and well-maintained garden, beyond which are the backs of the houses in the attractive late-nineteenth-century terraced development of Holmewood Road and Gardens (which are in the conservation area).

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for listing. Although architecturally modest, it was designed by a Quaker architect of note and is of some local historical interest. It may merit inclusion in the London Borough of Lambeth's local list, or it could (with a minor adjustment to the boundary) be brought within the Rush Common and Brixton Hill Conservation Area.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Probably low. Until the 1950s, Brixton Hill consisted largely of early nineteenth century and Victorian villas, set back from the road, with large gardens and (well into the nineteenth century) fields and orchards behind. The early history of the site of the meeting house has not been researched, but it does not appear to have been previously developed, and in any case any below-ground archaeological remains would probably have been damaged if not lost at the time of construction; the meeting house has very deep piles at one end, which might suggest poor soil conditions, or possibly the site of a wartime bomb crater (see <http://bombsight.org/bombs/17463/>).

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Fair.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2. Maintenance

A QIR is understood have been carried out in 2014, but this has not been seen; its recommendations have not yet been implemented. No major problems are apparent, but the building is in need of redecoration, especially internally, and signs of inadequate maintenance were noted outside (e.g. a blocked gutter).

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. There is no EPC for the meeting house or flat.

- Climate change & energy efficiency: No measures undertaken.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: Food waste and paper are separately recycled.
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: The loft has been insulated
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: None specifically. There is a well-cared-for garden.
- Transport: The meeting house is well served by public transport, with a bus stop nearby.

3.4. Amenities

There are meeting rooms, kitchens and WCs. A commodious hut in the garden is used for children's meetings.

3.5. Access

The ground floor is accessible to people with disabilities. There is a ramp to the front entrance, a hearing loop and an accessible WC. There is no lift to the upper floor. The meeting has not conducted a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about four hours per week. The three rooms of the meeting house have a maximum potential availability of 135 hours a week, but normal take-up is about thirty hours. The meeting does not have a lettings policy, but alcohol, bands and groups with extreme views are not permitted. The facilities are well-priced and in a convenient location, and the well-maintained, secluded garden is also an attraction. However, some users may be discouraged by the building's location.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house is in an area of high deprivation and vulnerability to crime, including littering/dumping of rubbish and loud and threatening behaviour (often alcohol-fuelled). The meeting house has also experienced heritage crime (theft of lead flashing; replaced with non-lead substitute). Incidents are not generally reported to the police, but the meeting would consider developing a relationship with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

Internal refurbishment is proposed (estimated cost £30,000).

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 could be altered or extended in a sympathetic way. The space of the main meeting room should preferably be retained, along with original features such as the bookcases/cupboards and woodblock floor. Secondary glazing should be considered in order to make energy savings.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house has facilities which allow for community use, most of them on the ground floor, which is accessible to all.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building could be retained as a community facility within the estate, or could fairly easily be converted to a purely residential use.

Part 5: Category: 3