

***Friends Meeting House, Sudbury***

*Friars Street, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2AA*

*National Grid Reference: TL 87316 41132*



***Statement of Significance***

***The building has high significance as a good example of an early nineteenth-century meeting house built on the site of an earlier one, retaining a little-altered interior with historic gallery and fittings, and sensitively extended. The burial ground is also of high significance.***

***Evidential value***

***The meeting house was built in 1804 and enlarged in 1818 by the addition of a women's meeting room (later known as the schoolroom). The interior of the meeting house is relatively unaltered, retaining its gallery, elders' seating and***

**many benches. The fabric of the building and the burials on the site yield evidence about past patterns of Quaker life and worship. The building and the site have high evidential value.**

#### **Historical value**

**The meeting house retains its historic layout (i.e. the division into two meeting rooms, one for men and one for women), as well as a number of original features, including the gallery and seating. The simple headstones of the burial ground remain, although relocated. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.**

#### **Aesthetic value**

**The meeting house has a plain design, and is set well back from the street; it does not make its presence felt in the conservation area. The recent addition of a projecting entrance porch has made the building appear more welcoming, and is a good example of sympathetic yet unapologetically modern design in a historic setting. The interior of the meeting house is little-altered, retaining its plain character and many historic furnishings. The buildings, their attractively landscaped approach and the secluded burial ground have high aesthetic value.**

#### **Communal value**

**The meeting house was built for and remains in primarily Quaker use, but is also a community resource, making a quietly understated but positive contribution to the local conservation area. The building and burial ground symbolise Quaker values, such as the testimony of simplicity. These spiritual and social values give the site high communal value.**

#### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Southern East Anglia*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0010280*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Babergh District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Sudbury*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1037493*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Sudbury*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1804; 1818; 2012*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not established; Tricker Blackie Associates (2012 work)*

1.14 Date of visit: *11 July 2014*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Betty Scrivener*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Schoolroom, modern addition*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 578–9  
*An Account of the Estates etc. belonging to Suffolk Quarterly Meeting*, second edition,  
Ipswich, 1868

*Friends Meeting House, Friars Street, Sudbury, Suffolk*, guide, n.d.

Heritage Gateway: [http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results\\_Single.aspx?uid=1149274&resourceID=2](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=1149274&resourceID=2)

Local Meeting survey by Henry Ruse, 2014 and 2015

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

### 2.1 Historical background

Quakers are recorded in Sudbury in 1664, and a meeting house was built near the site of the present building in 1669 or 1670. In 1710 a newly-built house on the present site was registered as a meeting house. In 1801 this was reported to be in a state of disrepair, and it was replaced by the present red brick building in 1804, at a cost of £616. The women's meeting room (later known as the schoolroom) was added in 1818. According to Butler, the meeting room was adapted in 1840 to accommodate Quarterly Meeting, and he suggests that this might have been when the gallery was put in. The more recent history leaflet suggests that the adaptations for this purpose were actually carried out to the women's meeting room.

Behind the meeting house is the burial ground, its boundary wall built in 1844 (rebuilt at the bottom end in 1979). A plan of the burial ground dated 1894 is on the wall of the entrance lobby of the meeting house. The earliest grave dates from 1814, the most recent from 1991. In 1967 the headstones were moved to the perimeter to make a garden.

The meeting house was originally entered via a simple pedimented portico, enclosed in 1975 to incorporate new cloakrooms. This is the appearance shown at figure 2.

In 2012 a major renovation and extension of the meeting house was completed, made possible by a £250,000 bequest from John Savage, a regular attender of the meeting. The altered entrance portico was taken down and replaced with a new extended entrance lobby, incorporating an accessible WC, a store room and baby changing facilities. The architect for the new work was James Blackie of Tricker Blackie Associates and the builder John Younger. The renovation and extension won an award from the Sudbury Society.

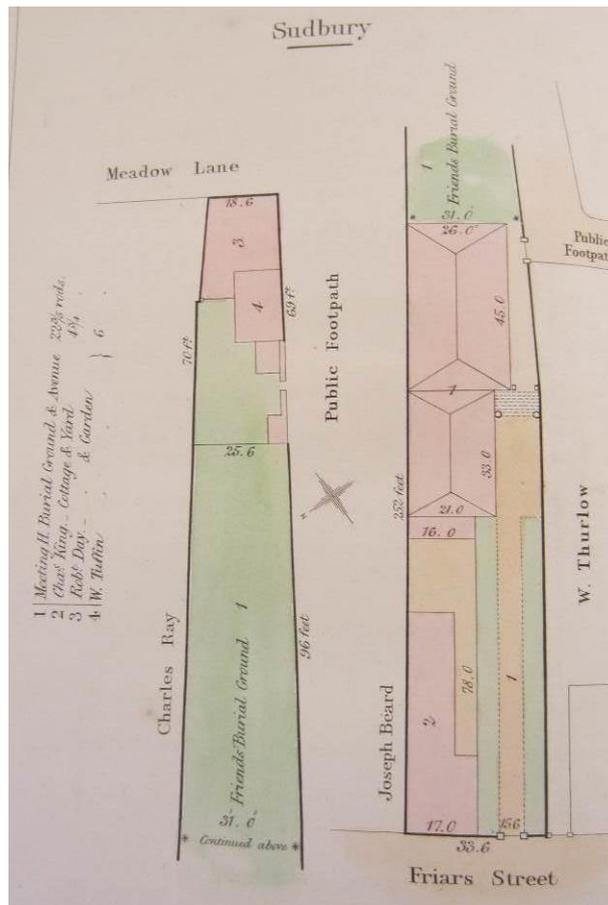


Figure 1: Site plan (right), from *An Account of the Estates etc. belonging to Suffolk Quarterly Meeting, 1868*



Figure 2: The approach to the meeting house before the 2012 alterations

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

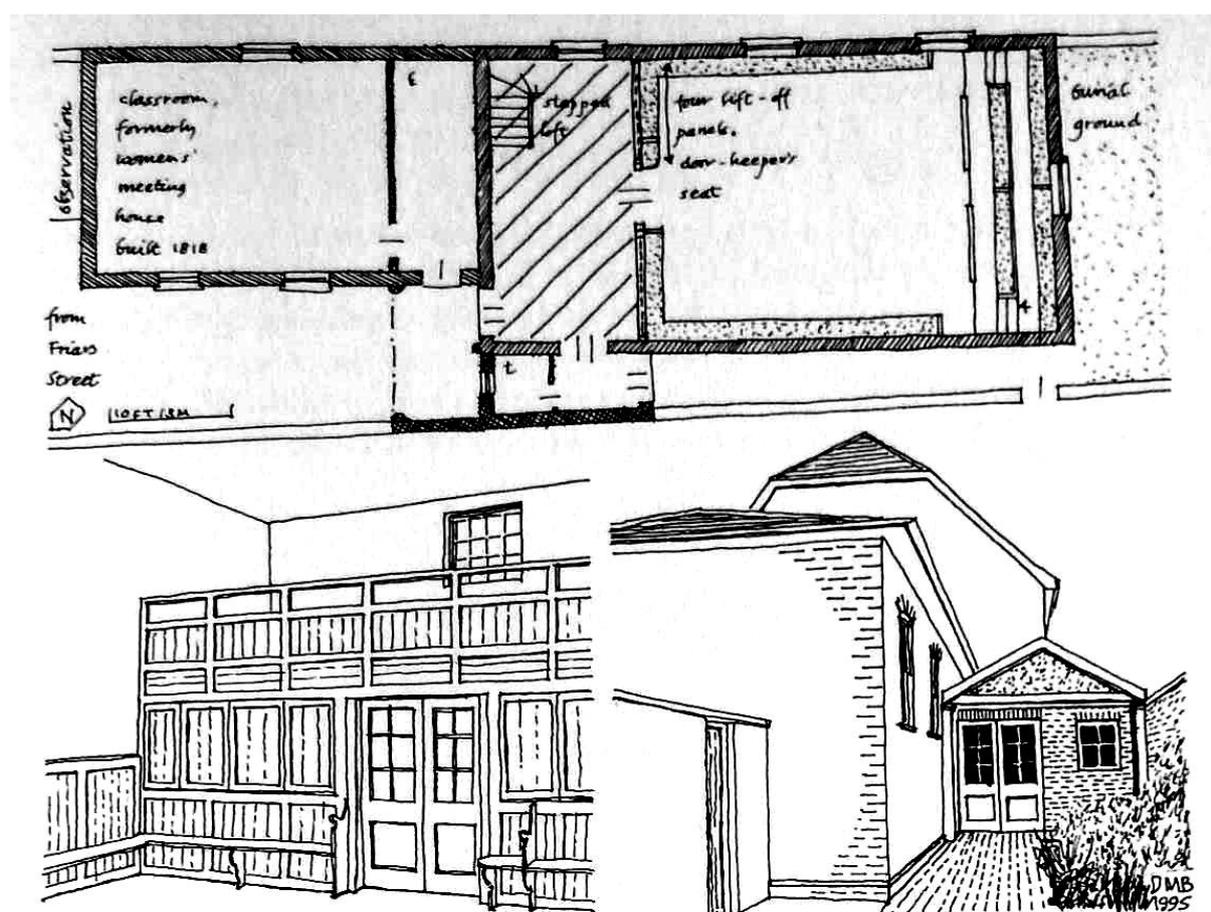


Figure 3: Plan and internal elevations (before recent additions), from Butler, p. 575

The present buildings were built in three phases. The 1804 meeting house is rectangular on plan and built of red brick laid in Flemish bond. It has a plain tile roof, half hipped. There are three windows on the north side, a high-level window on the east side lighting the gallery, and a tripartite sash window with segmental head at the east end, over the elders' seating. The 1818 addition is attached to the west, and is lower; it is built of white brick, with a rendered west wall, and has a hipped slate roof. Between its two large and almost flush glazing bar sash windows a door has been formed in 2012. Attached to this building, and extending back to wrap around the corner of the original building, is the new entrance lobby area. This has a modern version of the original portico, of glass with outwardly splaying timber columns.

The interior of the meeting house consists of a single space, with a gallery at the west end and raised seating for the elders at the east end. The gallery is approached by its original closed string stair, columnar newel and square balusters; its underside is enclosed with panelling. The interior has a flush-headed panelled dado with attached seating. A fire escape door has been formed on the south side (2012). The former women's meeting room/school room is a well-lit space with a perimeter boarded dado, but does not contain furnishings of note. It has been partly divided to create a separate kitchen.

## 2.3 Loose furnishings

The interior retains a large number of original or early open-backed freestanding benches, both in the main meeting area and in the tiered gallery. An 1894 plan of the burial ground is on the wall of the entrance lobby.

## 2.4 Attached burial ground

This lies to the rear, and has been relandscaped as a garden, with the headstones relocated to the perimeter. More recent burials at the bottom of the garden have not had their headstones relocated.

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The building is set well back from Friars Street and is glimpsed through a narrow break in an otherwise fairly continuous frontage. A winding brick path and the striking new entrance porch have increased the visibility of the building, and given it a more welcoming character. The site is fairly central in the town, amidst other historic buildings which dominate in this part of the Sudbury Conservation Area.

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is appropriately listed Grade II. The list entry (below) gives a late eighteenth rather than an early nineteenth-century date for the meeting house, and needs to be updated to take account of recent alterations.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

Sudbury is known from documentary evidence to have had a market in the mid-ninth century and the church of St Gregory was an important ecclesiastical centre from at least the early eighth century. The east side of the town appears to be demarcated by the curvilinear line of Friars Street, Burkitts Lane and Croft Road. The site is therefore likely to be of high 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): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well tended and the headstones are in reasonable condition.

### 3.2 Maintenance

The building was given a major overhaul at the time of the 2012 additions. The most recent inspection report (Nicholas Percival, September 2013) identified no significant repair needs. The meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. Other than the QI report, there is no five-year maintenance and repair plan.

### 3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: replaced heating system to include controls by time and temperature to reduce unnecessary heating periods
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: Installed internal recycling bins, and encouraged all users to follow guidelines
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: avoid use of chemicals harmful to wildlife
- Transport: installed facilities for cyclists.

It is not known if there is an Energy Performance Certificate for the meeting house.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. The meeting house is accessible by public transport but the service is poor in the rural surroundings, especially on Sundays. There is no car parking on site but there are spaces for bicycles. There is no resident warden or Friend.

### 3.5 Access

It is accessible to all: it has level access, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There are no specific facilities for partially sighted people. There has been no Disability Access Audit.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 3-4 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 120 hours per week. It is used for an average of about 30 hours per week. There is a lettings policy which excludes party political and overtly commercial uses. Uses have to be alcohol-free. The pricing policy takes account of the type of hirer. Lower charges are available to community groups and non-commercial therapeutic use. Users value the building for its convenient and quiet location, and competitive pricing. In addition, support groups like to meet here because their privacy and anonymity is respected, and a special needs group welcome the 'freedom' they have in the building.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime on the site. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Police Team but the meeting might consider making contact should the need arise.

### 3.8 Plans for change

There are currently (2015) no plans for alterations to the building.

## **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 of a high design quality and an attractive historic meeting space. The meeting house retains more of its historic benches than most meeting houses, and diminution of their number would erode the special interest of the place.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building is already used by third parties, mainly in the former schoolroom, and no particular threats to heritage or vulnerabilities are reported.

*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 sustainable use, preferably a public or community use which would retain the internal volumes and surviving historic features, and also make appropriate provision for the future management of the attached burial ground.

## **Part 5: Category: 2**

## **Part 6: List description**

List entry Number: 1037493

Location: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, FRIARS STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 26-Oct-1971

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Details

### 1. FRIARS STREET

1692 (South East Side) Friends Meeting House TL 8741 3/160

II

2. Probably C18 with alterations and additions. Red brick, rectangular, with 2 windows at high level North and 1 3-light segmental headed East. Interior has flush-headed panelled dado, gallery West and platform East. Recessed casement windows with glazing bars. Tile roof with half hip. Doric porch with alterations, West and white brick addition West, 2 windows, near-flush frame sash with glazing bars, wide eaves, slate roof, probably early C19.

Listing NGR: TL8731641132