

Friends Meeting House, Sutton Coldfield

Kenelm Road, Sutton Coldfield, B73 6HD

National Grid Reference: SP 11807 95852



Statement of Significance

The building has medium heritage significance as a purpose-built inter-war meeting house designed by the Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter.

Evidential value

This is a purpose-built structure of 1939, and is not on a site of a former meeting house. It is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has medium historical value, as a relatively recent building typical of the small and plain meeting houses designed by Hubert Lidbetter in the twentieth century. It has strong associative value with the architect.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is modest and small-scale and like most Quaker meeting houses, is a building of simplicity. The building is well-designed and in its use of materials typical for the period. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building's primary use is as a Quaker meeting house but is also used by a number of community groups. The meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: 0033460
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Birmingham City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Sutton Coldfield*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date: *1939*
- 1.13 Architect: *Hubert Lidbetter*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *14 December 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Ian Taylor*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp.646.

Ian Taylor, *Local Meeting Survey*, October 2015.

Unknown, *The Religious Society of Friends in Sutton Coldfield*.

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

2.1 Historical background

Prior to the First World War Friends in the Sutton Coldfield area would travel further afield to attend worship, notably to Bull Street meeting house. During the war Friends found it

difficult to travel and instead met at each other's houses. By 1926, Meetings were being held in the Assembly Room in Sutton Coldfield and then in 1929 Meetings were held in the grounds of Oakhurst within 'The House of Friendship'. By the 1930s, Friends wanted to reach communities across a wider area and decided to hold Meetings in Kingstanding, on a temporary basis. By 1937, Friends began the search for a suitable piece of land in order to build a meeting house. Kenelm Road was chosen and the new meeting house was built to the designs of Hubert Lidbetter and opened in 1939.

In 1990, when Butler visited, the entrance was accessed by a series of steps which have since been replaced by a gently sloping ramp to provide better access into the building. The plan form of the building and usages within the building have been much altered since Butler's conjectural plan was drawn (Figure 1). The linear ancillary range to the north; the doorway from the library to the rear exit lobby is incorrectly positioned. The room which was formerly a classroom is now in use as a library and the kitchen is lit by two windows not one. The internal wall from the main lobby area to the kitchen is flush. The children's and young persons' room within the ancillary range to the north is lit by two windows (not annotated on Butler's plan), and toilet facilities are provided in the south projecting bay. The classroom located underneath the main meeting room is now in use as a furniture store and garden store. Finally, it has been suggested by Butler (1999) that whilst a classroom was built to the north of the meeting house provision was made for future expansion to the south with a doorway provided for this purpose. This opening has now been infilled and there are no future plans for an extension.

The meeting house underwent a scheme of repair in 1985-6.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

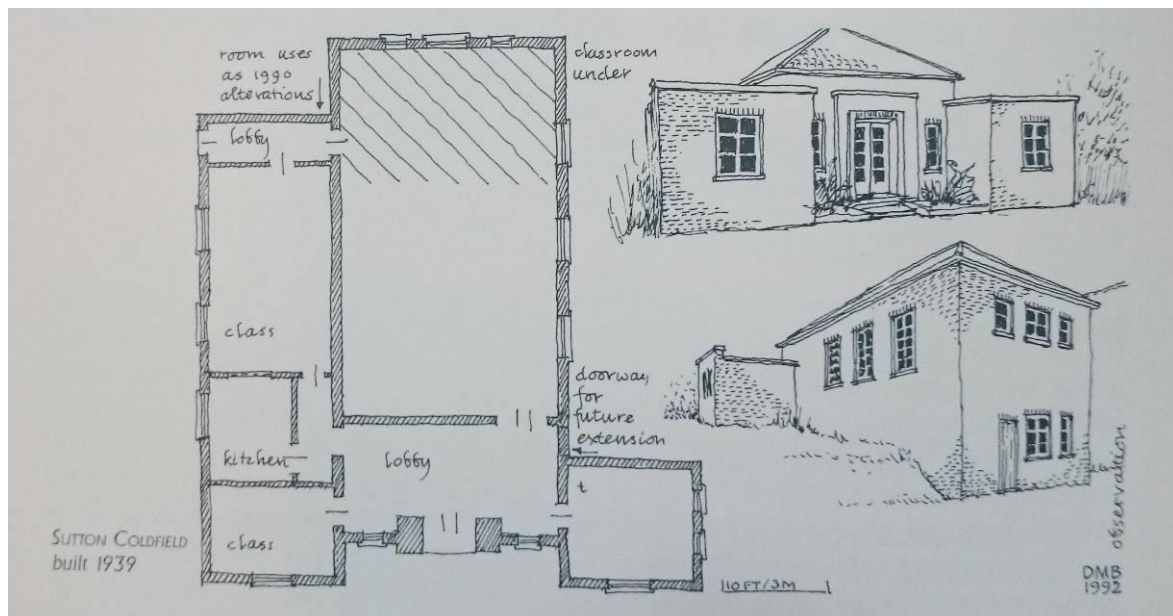


Figure 1: Ground floor perspective plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the bottom left corner; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.646)

The meeting house was built in 1939, to designs by Herbert Lidbetter. The materials are brown brick laid in both stretcher and English bond, with a concrete tiled hipped roof. The meeting house is aligned northwest to southeast, and the plan consists of the main hall behind the entrance lobby which is flanked by low pavilions, with a linear ancillary block to the northeast. Due to the fall in the ground level the building provides single storey accommodation to the west and is two-storey to the east. The main entrance is to the north-west (for clarity in the report this will be referred to as the west). The west symmetrical

elevation towards the private road has a recessed porch between projecting pavilions; the central double entrance doors are in a concrete surround, engraved with the lettering 'SOCIETY OF FRIENDS'. The north and south projecting bays are flat-roofed and each have two 1-light windows (all windows indicated in this description are of uPVC). The main body of the meeting house has windows to the south side, this elevation also contains a former opening now infilled which Butler (1999) describes as being a doorway for a potential extension, now infilled and there are no plans for an extension. Solar photovoltaic panels are located on the south facing roof slope. To the north a linear range parallel to the hall provides a children's and young persons' room, kitchen and library. To the end of this range is a rear exit lobby accessed via a set of steps. The main body of the meeting house has two small 1-light horizontal windows. To the south of this elevation is a doorway which gives access to the furniture store (located underneath the meeting room). The rear east elevation of the hall has three windows, and at basement level a timber planked door to the garden store, with a 2-light and 1-light window to the furniture store.

The main meeting room, children's room, and ancillary facilities are accessed via a pleasant well-lit lobby area. The lobby is plastered, walls painted white, with parquet flooring. The interior of the main meeting room is rectangular in shape, with timber floorboards aligned north to south. The walls are covered in timber panels to dado height and the canted tiled ceiling has six pendant drop lights. To the north-east is a rear exit from the meeting room which also provides access to the library.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no furnishings of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Sutton Coldfield lies eight miles north of Birmingham city centre. The meeting house is located in Kenelm Road, a private road with grass verges lined with residential properties and a Spiritualist Church on the south side and the railway tracks to the west. To the north of Kenelm Road are two modern apartment blocks. The grounds of the meeting house to the southeast are well planted with shrubs and mature trees screen buildings located on Caversham Place. A modest area for car parking is located along the frontage of the meeting house.

2.6 Listed status

Not listed. Whilst not considered to be a candidate for listing the meeting house has strong associations with the renowned Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter and could be a suitable candidate for a local list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Birmingham Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. The site is likely to be of low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The most recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in March 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) found the building to be in good working order. Recommendations for the next twelve months included repointing to ridge and hip tiles, moss and lichen removal from the roof, clear gullies and surface repairs. Following the report Friends have completed the following recommendations: repointing of ridge and hip tiles, isolated repointing of brickwork joints and redecoration of external timber.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2 Maintenance

The building is well-maintained by the meeting, and the Friends have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan, in accordance with the recommended works detailed in the quinquennial report. Central England Area Meeting issue an 'Annual Inspection of Premises Questionnaire' each year. The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

1) Maintenance items of a routine or cyclical nature. For example, have the gutters and down pipes been cleaned our regularly?

2) Structural and other defects which may give cause for concern, and actions required or taken as a result of the quinquennial survey.

The questionnaire was completed by the Meeting's Premises Committee in July 2014, with no record of any major problems or issues with the building. The Friends have sufficient funds for the maintenance and repair of the building. There is no reserve policy, but adequate funds are available. The Local Meeting is responsible for repairs and Central England Quakers have a central Building Fund that can provide grants and loans on application.

3.3 Sustainability

The Meeting has not used the Sustainability Toolkit to date, although it has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Insulation for underfloor, internal walls in the Hall, and in roof space; external cavity wall filling; replacement double-glazed windows throughout; air-to-water heat pump and comprehensive new heating system, with new individually thermostat-controlled radiators throughout; solar photovoltaic roof panels.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house uses the local authority recycling scheme.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: Isolated repointing of brickwork joints; ridge-tile repointing
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: Lower lawn changed to meadow, with some wild flower planting to produce pollen to encourage honeybees and butterflies;

windfall from surrounding trees left to encourage insect population and thus bird life. Most of the trees are safeguarded by Tree Preservation Orders.

- Transport: Lockable bicycle racks installed to encourage Friends to cycle to the meeting house and to leave cars at home.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs. This includes a medium-sized main meeting room; large lobby; a rear emergency exit from small lobby; two (unisex) toilet cubicles with cloakroom (with wheelchair access to one of the toilet cubicles); a fully-fitted medium-sized kitchen with serving hatch; library, and a children's and young persons' room.

There is a private car parking area available along the front of the meeting house and also opposite the building on a narrow strip of the lane. Sutton Coldfield railway station is a fifteen minute walk to the meeting house, with frequent services seven days a week. The meeting house is served by local bus services which run seven days a week, reduced service on Sundays. Bicycle racks have been installed to the front of the building to provide secure bicycle parking.

3.5 Access

A formal Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken, however the Meeting is considering the recommendations made by the quinquennial inspection. The last survey was carried out in March 2015 by Barnsley Bate (chartered building surveyors) which identified that the meeting house is accessible in terms of ramps for access to the front of the building and circulation within the premises, however the rear fire exit route is not accessible for non-ambulant persons. The report recommends that consideration is given to a ramp or more achievable action to improve escape routes for non-ambulant persons. A demarcated parking space for those with disabilities should be provided adjacent the front of the premises if possible. The meeting is aware that further work is required at the meeting house to ensure compliance with Equality Act. The meeting house does not have a hearing loop but does have a Sound Field Amplification system with two hand-held microphones. Facilities for the partially-sighted include bold clear signage and plans are in hand for stair nosings in a contrasting colour.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 12 hours and in community use for 23 hours each week. Possible use is 80 hours per week. There is a lettings policy; Quakers encourage the use of their meeting houses in ways which serve and benefit the local community. If there are any doubts regarding prospective tenant suitability this will be addressed at the monthly Local Business Meeting. The Friends have no precedent for tenants using the meeting house for free and have not received such requests. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to its location on the edge of the town centre, and is within a quiet cul-de-sac, which is also a private road. The environment is quiet but convenient. The meeting house has adequate car parking areas & bicycle racks immediately in front of the building. It is well-served by public transport. Internally the building is all on one floor level, and accessed by a gentle external ramp to the front door. The current letting charge (an 'all-in' charge, with use of the kitchen etc.) compares very favourably with other similar premises in the local area.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has not been subject to heritage crime but anti-social behaviour has been evident with signage vandalised, garden furniture been removed along with littering. These incidents have been reported to the police. The Friends have not developed liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and at present this is not something they would pursue.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no future 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: At present the meeting house meets the needs of the Friends, but there is scope for further change if considered necessary in the future.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is well used by community groups and with no heritage constraints, changes could be made to accommodate increased community in the future, if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The meeting house is located in a predominantly residential area and if a community use was not viable, the meeting house and site could be adapted for residential or other purposes.

Part 5: Category: 3