

Friends Meeting House, Swindon

79 Eastcott Hill, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN1 3JF

National Grid Reference: SU 15167 84223



Statement of Significance

A meeting house of 1901 which has been much altered and extended. Its overall heritage significance is low.

Evidential value

The primary evidential value lies in the inscribed stone panel on the frontage. There is little otherwise to denote the meeting house function. The building is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting was established at this location in 1901, on a site acquired with the support of the Cadbury family. Over a century of Quaker use lends the site medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

What survives of the 1901 building is much altered, and the 1970s addition is functional in character. The building is of low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is used by local groups and charities and as such has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Oxford & Swindon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0009020*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Swindon Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Swindon 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): *1901; 1976*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established; B. S. Associates*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *21 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Steve Russell, Elspeth Wollen*
- 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. 2, pp. 688, 911
Local Meeting Survey, by Steve Russell, April 2016
Quinquennial Inspection Report, April 2015

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

2.1 Historical background



Figure 1: The 1901 meeting house in 1968 (Swindon Local Meeting)

Quaker meetings began in Swindon in the 1890s. An Adult School was established in 1894, but was discontinued the following year. The meeting restarted in 1899, and a site on Eastcott Hill was acquired, Edward Cadbury contributing £250 of the purchase price of £350. The builder was William Nichols of Gloucester (Butler, p. 911). Originally rectangular on plan and with a small entrance lobby (figure 1), just under half of this building survives today, in greatly altered form. The alterations were carried out in two main phases, the first in 1976 when the rear half of the building was demolished and a two-storey addition built, with classrooms below and a flat above (later used as offices). This cost £28,500 and the architects were B. S. Associates (Oxford). By 1987 structural problems had developed in the remaining older part and rebuilding was considered; in the event it was strengthened, remodelled and repaired in 1989 at a cost of about £30,000.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

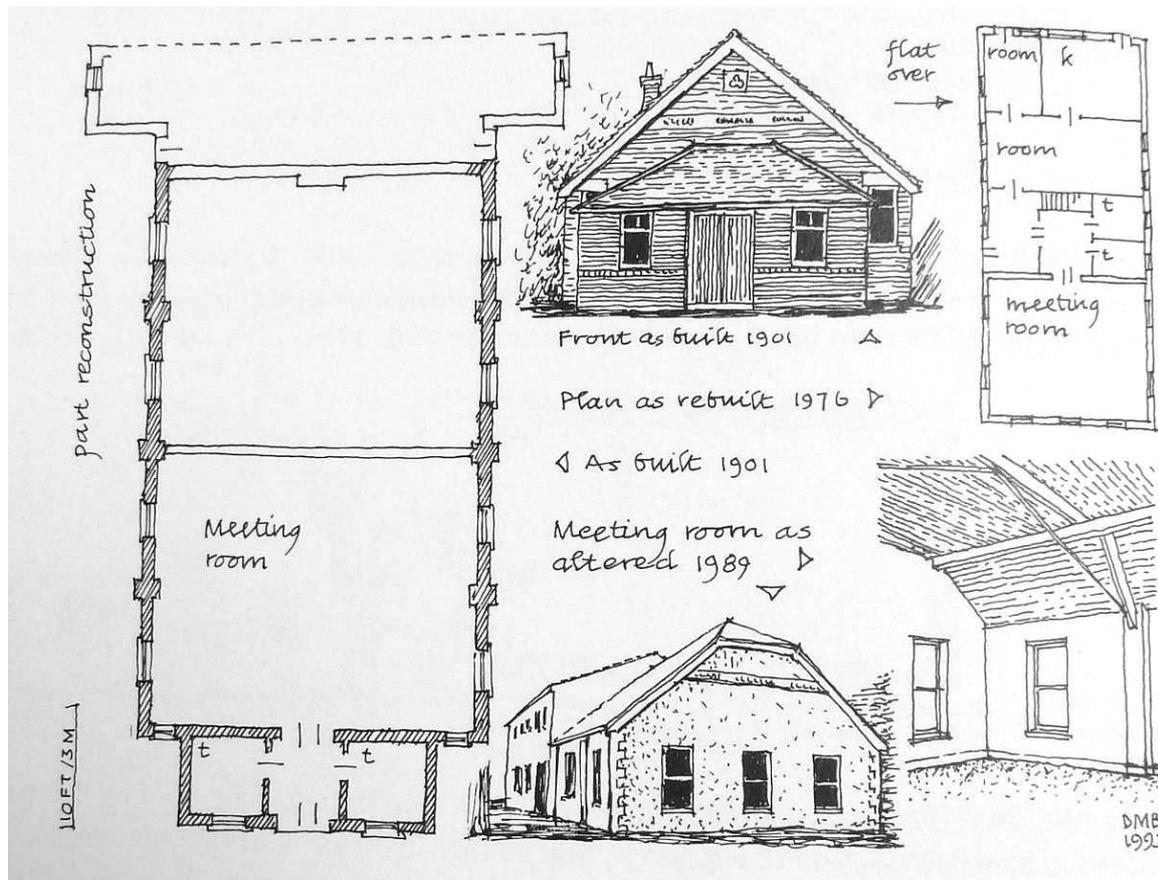


Figure 2: Plans and elevations, from Butler, 1999, p. 688

The present building consists of two elements: a single-storey front range, built in 1901 and remodelled in 1989, which contains the meeting room, and a two-storey range behind, built in 1976 and containing a long children's room with a small committee room off, kitchen and WCs. At first floor level there was originally a one-bedroom flat for the warden, two children's/general rooms and a WC. The residential element is now in office use. The front range is built of dark red brick laid in stretcher bond, except for the front elevation which has been rebuilt or refaced with a render finish, but still incorporates a long stone panel inscribed FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE. At the sides, the two bays are separated by brick buttresses, with windows between. This range has a half hipped roof clad with artificial slates. The rear range is functional in design, also brick built, with a concrete tile roof of shallow pitch. Rainwater goods throughout are of uPVC.

The entrance is at the side, leading into a hall lobby in the rear range. The meeting room gives off to the right, and is a roughly square space, with plastered walls, steel roof trusses and ties, and a pine boarded finish to the ceiling.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of particular note in the meeting room. The children's room contains a collection of ercol chairs.

2.4 Attached burial ground

Not applicable.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Eastcott Hill lies to the south of the town centre, and is lined with houses of mostly early twentieth-century date. The meeting house is set back from the road behind a low brick wall, and there is an 'in-out' circulation route around the building for vehicles.

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

Low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground: Not applicable

3.2 Maintenance

The QIR comments: 'the property generally has been well maintained and apart from the issues raised is in good order'. Those issues were pointing, renewal of drain covers, renewal of guttering and fascias and a new fitted kitchen; all have been completed. The building is well maintained, but the immediate setting could be enhanced with resurfacing and a little landscaping. The meeting considers that it has sufficient funds for repair and maintenance. There is no five-year maintenance plan; maintenance and repairs are carried out if and when the need arises.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures taken to reduce environmental impact have included insulation of the walls and roof, renewal of the boiler and replacement of luminaires with fluorescent lights. Friends walk, cycle or share car transport where possible, and the usual recycling arrangements are in place.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs. These include three WCs (one fully accessible), a new kitchen and large and small meeting rooms. There is no longer a resident warden, and the former warden's flat is now part of the upstairs lettable accommodation.

The meeting house is about fifteen minutes' walk from the town centre, which is served by frequent rail and bus services. On site there are parking spaces for about eight cars, sufficient for Friends, although it is considered more spaces would be useful for lettings. There is secure parking for cycles.

3.5 Access

There is step-free access into and around the ground floor facilities. There is an accessible WC and a hearing loop. The upper floor office accommodation is not accessible for those unable to use the stairs.

3.6 Community Use

In addition to use for about four hours a week by Friends, the downstairs rooms are used by third parties for about six hours a week (out of a possible twenty-two). The upstairs offices are let full-time to Relate and Cruse. There is a lettings policy: 'At the centre of our religious experience is a belief in the equality of all people and a respect for all creation. We will refuse booking from any group or individual whose words or actions, in our view, diminish the dignity of any person or group of people. The final arbiter in making such a decision will be the Swindon Quaker Meeting. We do not let to individual political parties. Hustings-type meetings involving several political parties will be considered'. Generally only Quaker meetings are free. Hirers appreciate the convenient location and pleasant, comfortable accommodation.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

Apart from some antisocial behaviour (e.g. littering) there are no recorded instances of crime. The area is generally fairly well cared for, with low deprivation levels and reportedly moderate levels of community confidence.

3.8 Plans for change

Solar panels are proposed on the roof of the 1970s addition.

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 meets the present needs of Friends, but there are no heritage constraints should change be required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The same considerations apply. The chief constraint on extended community use is the lack of sufficient on-site parking and (possibly) the location in a residential area.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building is partly in office use, and this use could be extended. Alternatively it might be converted (or the site redeveloped) for residential use, subject to planning.

Part 5: Category: 4