

Quaker Meeting House, Wandsworth

59 Wandsworth High Street, London, SW18 2PT

National Grid Reference: TQ 25725 74618



Statement of Significance

The oldest meeting house in Greater London, hidden away with its burial ground behind a neo-Georgian frontage on Wandsworth High Street. The meeting house and burial ground are of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1778 and retains much of its original character and fabric, including hidden elements such as the king-post roof. Features such as the fixed seating in the elders' stand are important survivals, evocative of Quaker tradition and worship. The attached small meeting room

is an early addition. The rear burial ground retains a large number of historic headstones. The building and site are of high evidential value.

Historical value

This is the oldest meeting house in Greater London, and the successor to one built in 1673. The burial ground contains a late-seventeenth-century memorial to Joan Stringer, original Quaker owner of the land. The women's meeting room was an early addition, possibly in the late eighteenth century. For nearly 350 years this has been a site of Quaker witness. It is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is best viewed from the burial ground at the rear. Here it is externally little altered and has a handsome plain late Georgian character. Inside, furnishings in the large and small meeting rooms contribute to the aesthetic value of the building. It stands within a small and well-maintained burial ground, with an old brick boundary wall, and is an oasis of calm off the busy High Street. The neo-Georgian frontage which obscures the historic buildings from wider public view is not without its own qualities, and makes a positive contribution to the local conservation area. The building and site are of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is widely used by local groups as well as Friends, and is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Kingston & Wandsworth*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032870*
- 1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Wandsworth*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Wandsworth NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1299826*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Wandsworth Town*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1778, with later additions*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not known*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *10 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Fred Ashmore*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information Sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 427-8

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, p. 31 and pl. XLIII

Local Meeting Survey, by Giles Alldis, 17 June 2015

Franklin, G., *Wandsworth Town Conservation Area; Historic Area Assessment*, English Heritage (Architectural Investigation), 2009, p. 35

Oxley Conservation, *Quinquennial survey*, 2014

Wandsworth Quaker Meeting, *Sketch Visioning Thoughts*, April 2015

Wandsworth Quaker Meeting, *Meeting House History for London Open House*, 2002

Wandsworth Quaker Meeting, *Garden and Burial Plan*, n.d.

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

2. 1. Historical background



Figure 1: The meeting house in c1910 (Historic England Archive, red box collection BB60/1204, © Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain)

Friends first met on this site in 1673, underleasing the property of Joan Stringer, a Quaker. A meeting house is reported at this time, most probably an adaptation of an existing building. A burial ground was laid out to the rear, and a memorial stone of 1697 now set into the boundary wall records Joan Stringer as ‘the giver of the ground’ (photo bottom right at top of report).

The first meeting house, which was prone to flooding and generally considered troublesome, was demolished in 1778 and replaced by the present building, built at a cost of about £600. It stood behind a Georgian house facing onto the High Street (figure 1), and was accessed via a passage at the side, the gateway visible to the left in the photograph. This passageway was roofed over to form a lobby in 1798. The freehold was purchased in about 1811, and it may have been about this time that a small (women's) meeting room was built on a former yard between the meeting house and the frontage building (although the similarity of the roof construction suggests a date not too far removed from that of the meeting house; the addition may be contemporary with the 1798 covering of the side passage). The small meeting room was separated from the large meeting room by a solid wall rather than the more usual shutters. The meeting house was one of the first buildings in the area to have a piped gas supply (by 1846), and an iron stove was later installed in the large meeting room (the chimney pot survives on the ridge).

The High Street appearance in about 1910 is shown at figure 1. The frontage building underwent neo-Georgian refacing and widening in 1927 (architect not established). Alterations by Hubert Lidbetter in 1957 included the first floor rear extension of the frontage building, remodelling of the covered way at the side and removal of most of the fixed perimeter benches in the large meeting room.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

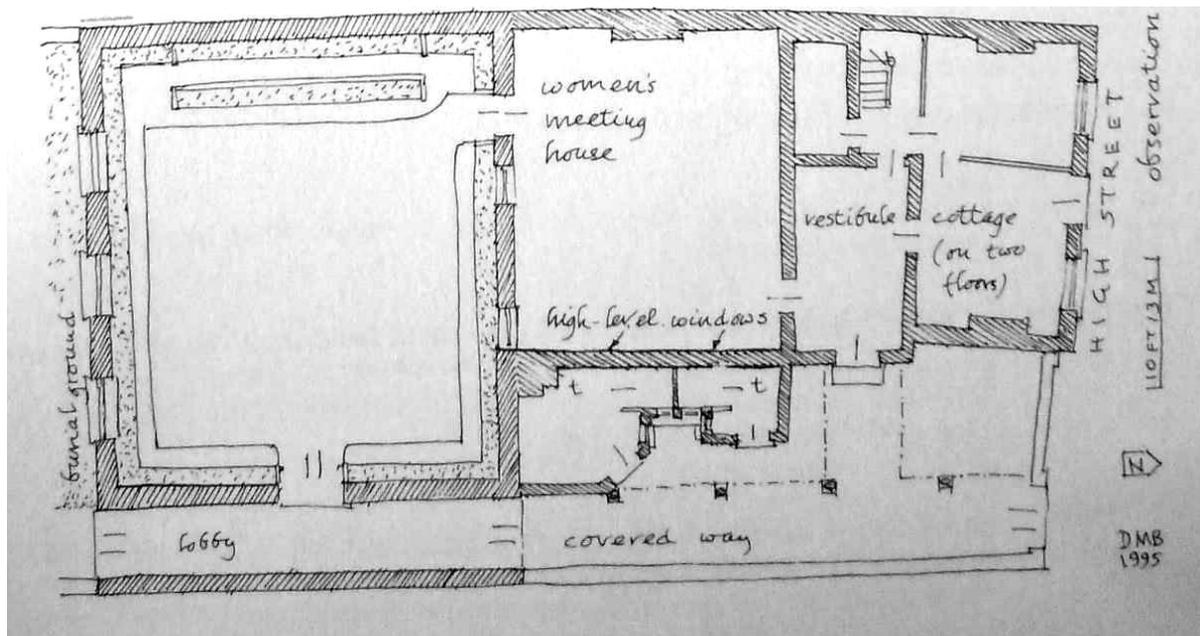


Figure 2: Plan, from Butler, Vol.1, p. 427

The meeting house occupies a long rectangular site. Built in 1778, it is set back from the road behind a former cottage, probably of eighteenth century or earlier origin, which was refaced in 1927 and further adapted in 1957. A smaller meeting room between the meeting house and frontage building was added at an uncertain date, possibly c1798, on the site of a former courtyard. At the side is a covered way leading to the meeting house and burial ground beyond.

A small plaque is set into the frontage building below one of the ground floor windows, recording its neo-Georgian refacing in 1927. This building is of two storeys and three main bays, with two further bays slightly set back to the left. It has a plain stock brick return elevation and a flat roof hidden by a parapet with concrete coping. The red brick façade has

horned glazing bar sashes to the ground and first floor of the main three bays and to the first floor of the recessed bays. The window arches are of creased tiles rather than brick. A central doorway in the main three bays has been replaced with a window, bricked up below the sill. In the recessed bays are two ground floor arched openings, one blind and the other forming the main entrance and provided with handsome timber gates. These lead into a covered way (photo middle left) with doors leading off to the right to a vestibule between the frontage building and the small meeting room. The covered way retains many of its original flagstones, a single timber column with cast iron Tuscan capital and base (possibly a remnant of the covering of the side approach in 1798), and WCs etc. in a later addition attached to the small meeting room. The walls and ceilings of this semi-indoor space are plastered and painted.

The meeting house is a single-storey building of 1778, with three windows giving onto the rear towards the burial ground. It is of brown brick laid in Flemish bond, which rises to a parapet with a stone coping. The windows have glazing bar sashes (six panes over six) and segmental brick heads. Behind the parapet is a tiled double-hipped roof, with a clay chimney pot on one of the ridges. The attached small meeting room also has a hipped tile roof and a stock brick east wall with parapet and arched windows, truncated to make way for ground floor additions.

The meeting house interior is a square space, lit by the windows on the south side. It has a boarded floor and plastered and painted walls and ceiling with square sunk dado panelling. This steps up at the elders' stand on the west side, which retains its original doors and fixed seating. The remaining perimeter fixed seating was removed in c1957.

According to the QIR, king-post roof structures of late-eighteenth-century character survive above both the large and small meeting rooms (see photo 15, p. 26 of QIR for that over the small room).

The small meeting room was heated (the fireplace now removed and a piano placed in front of the chimney breast). It has a boarded floor and square sunk dado panelling. It is lit at high level from the north and east sides, the window openings on the east side being the original (but truncated) late-Georgian openings.

The ground floor of the frontage building consists of two rooms, each originally heated and with a panelled dado and eighteenth-century cupboards on either side of the chimney breast in the room to the west. The floors are of modern woodblock.

2.3 Loose furnishings

Both the large and the small meeting rooms contain a quantity of open-backed benches. There is a handsome Georgian glass-fronted bookcase and cupboard on the west room of the frontage building. Lidbetter (p. 31) reports two pewter inkstands inscribed 'Wandsworth Friends Meeting', dated 1758 and 1798 and 'in a small partially concealed cupboard in the wall' (not seen).

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground lies to the rear and has a London stock brick boundary wall. It may have been in use from the 1670s; certainly Joan Stringer, who owned the site and died in 1697, is buried here. Apart from her memorial, the earliest marked burial is from 1846. Burials are said to include members of the Hanbury family (Allen and Hanbury pharmaceuticals; in 1903, Sir Thomas Hanbury donated a 60-acre garden at Wisley to the Royal Horticultural Society). According to the history prepared by the Meeting for London Open House the last burial was in 1908, but the burial ground plan indicates a headstone to J. E. Hinchcliffe

dated 1937. The burials are marked in typical Quaker fashion, with simple headstones giving names and dates. The burial ground is now used as a garden and for the interment of ashes.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The building occupies a central position in Wandsworth High Street. Only the neo-Georgian frontage is visible in public views; the historic meeting house and burial ground lie to the rear. Surrounding buildings are generally much larger in scale. The site lies within the Wandsworth Town Conservation Area.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II. The list entry (below) briefly describes the 1778 meeting house and refers to the fact that it is masked by a modern (i.e. 1927) extension. It does not refer to the fact that this 'extension' incorporates features from a considerably older building, and no mention is made of the women's meeting room. The list entry would therefore benefit from revision to avoid ambiguity (especially as significant changes are proposed, primarily affecting the frontage building, see below).

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

There has been a meeting house and predecessor properties here since at least the mid-seventeenth century, and the archaeological potential of the site is high.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Fair
- ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory but with minor localised problems (south boundary wall)

3.2. Maintenance

The Premises Committee meets on an *ad hoc* basis, usually about four times a year, to manage and implement maintenance and refurbishment. The QIR of 2014 concluded that the meeting house was generally in sound condition, having had the benefit of regular and routine maintenance, such as the clearing of rainwater and parapet gutters. The condition of the frontage building is less good, with rainwater coming through the flat roof. Little effective work has been done to this part of the building while a decision is awaited regarding its development (see below). The QIR listed several urgent requirements, including:

- Stripping and re-felting of flat north roof
- Short-term repairs as necessary to other roofs
- Repair and replacement of weathered copings
- Repair of the east passageway wall
- Investigate water ingress and carry out remedial works
- Repairs to south boundary wall.

3.3. Sustainability

A Green Action Plan was prepared in 2008, outlining various measures to improve energy efficiency, and in 2012 Oxley Conservation Prepared an Energy Assessment Report. Air tests for the latter showed that the ventilation rate for the building is high, with the large meeting room performing worst. One source of heat loss was the ceilings of the two meeting rooms; neither of the two double hipped roofs was insulated. In the large meeting room this was

compounded by the presence of ceiling vents. Since that time (in 2012 and 2013) natural insulation (cellulose fibre and sheep's wool) has been added in the two lofts, sealing off the ceiling vents, along with draught proofing of doors, windows and floors. Rubbish is recycled as far as possible, for council collection. Members are encouraged to use sustainable transport, with many walking or cycling to meeting (there is no off-street parking). However, there is no secure parking for bicycles.

3.4. Amenities

The Meeting considers that it has the facilities it needs (meeting rooms, kitchen, WCs) but believes that these can be improved. There is a resident caretaker, living on the upper floor of the frontage building.

3.5. Access

There is step-free access into the large and small meeting rooms (a demountable ramp was installed in c2010), but a level change to the ground floor of the frontage building (used as a children's room). There is a WC suitable for disabled people, and a hearing loop is installed.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for an average of seven hours each week. Other groups use the facilities for 33 hours out of a possible 216 (based on three rooms over 12 hours available over 6 days). Uses have to be in line with Quaker thinking, and alcohol is not allowed. Users cite the number and variety sizes of the rooms, good value and friendly helpful organisers. The lack of on-site storage is an issue.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been little recent evidence of vulnerability and/or crime against either the Meeting House, or people using the premises. However, in the past there have been break-in incidents, after which protective measures such as anti-climb barbed wire were put in place. Generally the area is considered to be well cared-for, with low levels of crime and social deprivation.

3.8. Plans for change

The Premises Committee is proposing to redevelop the caretaker's flat, which has a failing roof, to provide new flats at the front of the building. This will improve revenue returns and help to bring the facilities up to date. Proposals are at an early stage of development, but include provision for one or more additional storeys on the frontage range, possibly in the form of a mansard roof. Early discussion with the local authority's Conservation Officer is recommended, and a review of the designated status of the building by Historic England would be desirable, in order to remove any ambiguity about the significance and sensitivity to change of the frontage 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 large and small meeting rooms are historic spaces retaining original fixtures and fittings, and here the scope for change is limited. In the frontage range, the ground floor rooms also contain historic panelling. Provided these principal spaces and features are respected, there should be scope for carefully-considered change, including additional accommodation over the frontage building.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already put to wider use by various community groups, and such use could be encouraged by improved facilities, while respecting the architectural and historic character of the building.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: This is the oldest meeting house in Greater London, and as such its closure would be highly regrettable. The existence of the burial ground, the Grade II listing and survival of internal features of note also limit the adaptability of the building and site. It may be necessary in the event of laying down the meeting to vest the historic meeting rooms and burial ground in a preservation trust. The frontage building, although appearing to have a historic core and some historic features, is much altered and although not without qualities is less sensitive to change; it would lend itself to conversion to residential or office use.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1299826

Location: 59, WANDSWORTH HIGH STREET SW18

Grade: II

Date first listed: 07-Apr-1983

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

WANDSWORTH HIGH STREET SW18 1. 5033 (south side)

No 59 and Friends Meeting House TQ 2574 12/19

II

A single-storey building of 1778, 3-windows wide. It is of brown brick rising to an integral parapet with a stone coping. The double-hipped roof is tiled. The front elevation is masked by a modern Georgian-style extension in red brick. On the rear elevation facing the burial ground the windows have segmental heads. Interior with square sunk dado panelling.

Listing NGR: TQ2572574618