

Quaker Meeting House, Wanstead

Bush Road, Wanstead, London, E11 3AU

National Grid Reference: TQ 40060 87558



Statement of Significance

A purpose-built 1960s meeting house in a simple modern style, designed by the architect Norman Frith. The large attached burial ground contains the re-set headstone of Elizabeth Fry. The building is of medium significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house is a 1960s building on the site of an earlier building of the 1850s. There may be some limited below ground remains of the earlier building but generally the meeting house is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The site was acquired by the Quakers in 1870 and the existing building adapted as a meeting house. The old building was demolished to make way for the present structure. The site history gives the meeting house medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

Norman Frith designed several meeting houses in the post-war period, all thoughtfully planned and in a simple functional modern style which has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

As a Quaker meeting house which is in additional community use, the meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *North East Thames*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0006030*
- 1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Redbridge*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Wanstead 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): *1968*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Norman Frith*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 August 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Cliff Hendon*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial ground in North Street, Barking*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, p. 203
Hadley, Arthur, *Wanstead Friends meeting, its history and associations* (1925).
Local meeting survey by Roger Estop, August 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

Land in Wanstead with a building for a meeting house was acquired in 1673. The location is not known. Both were sold in 1714 and the meeting lapsed. It was revived in the later nineteenth century by Friends of Plaistow meeting. With money donated by Joseph Gurney Barclay, a mid-nineteenth century building known variously as the Beaconsfield or Becontree Archery Rooms was purchased in 1870, together with nearly 2 1/2 acres of land on the edge of Wanstead Park. The Plaistow meeting was closed and many of the fixtures and fittings transferred to the Wanstead building. Land at the rear of the Wanstead meeting house was first used for burials in 1881 and enclosed by a brick wall in 1884. The old meeting house was demolished in 1967 and replaced by a new building on the same site designed by Norman Frith.

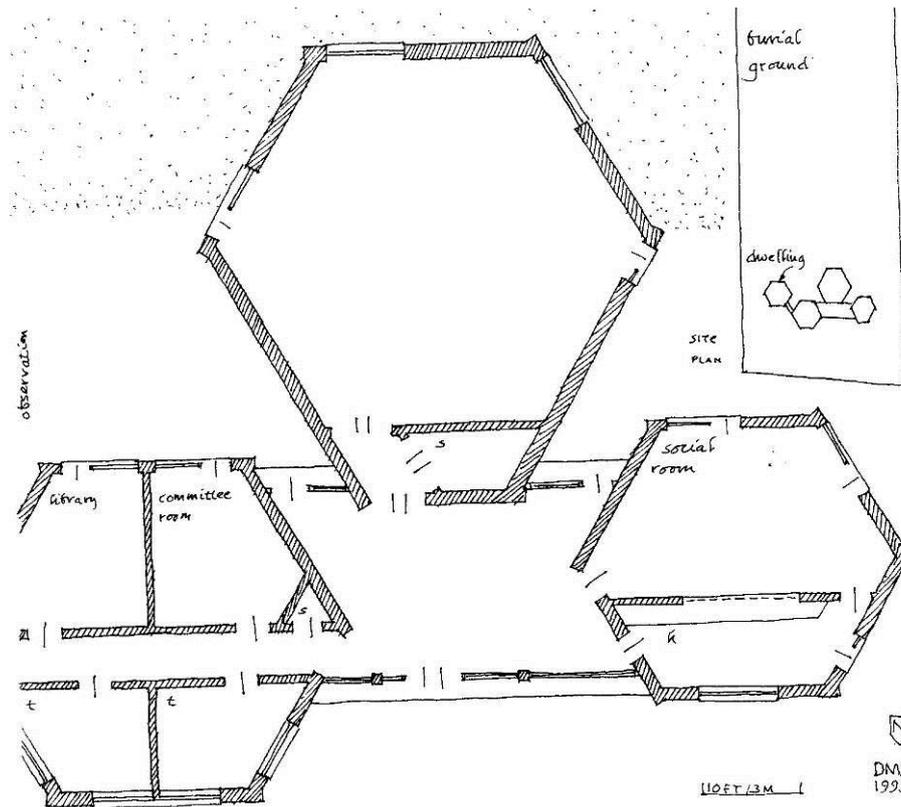


Fig.1 The ground plan of the building from *Butler* vol 1 p.203.
The warden's dwelling (not shown on main plan) is to the left

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

Norman Frith's 1967 meeting house is modern and functional. In plan, the building is formed of four linked hexagons. The largest hexagon contains the meeting room which faces away from the road and across the large burial ground; two of the smaller hexagons contain further meeting rooms and one is the warden's dwelling. The external walls are of white industrial brick, with large rectangular openings with metal windows. The monopitch roofs to the hexagons appear to be covered in felt. On the north-facing entrance front a wide fully-glazed lobby extends between two of the smaller hexagons, with the main meeting room rising behind. On the south side a raised terrace between the hexagons overlooks the large burial ground.

2.3 Loose furnishings

All the furnishings appear to be modern.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The rectangular burial ground extends to the south of the meeting house (see fig.1 above). The burial ground is fully enclosed by a brick wall, which is probably the wall erected in 1884. There are a large number of burials, many of them marked by small headstones in rows. These include the headstone of Elizabeth Fry, who was buried in 1845 in the detached burial ground in North Street, Barking. The southern extremity of the burial ground is enclosed by bushes and is partly cultivated as a vegetable garden.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house has an open situation, set back from a busy road near the Green Man interchange with woodland to the rear of the site.

The detached former burial ground in North Street, Barking (NGR: TQ 43971 84375) is still owned by the Society of Friends but has been maintained as a park by the Barking and Dagenham Council since 1980. The original brick piers to the entrance survive but all the headstones have been removed (including that of Elizabeth Fry which was re-erected at Wanstead).

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is a thoughtful design closely adapted to its function. It has clear stylistic links with Frith's other meeting houses (like those at Harlow and Gidea Park) but is more elaborate in its layout and has been little-altered since the 1960s. The meeting house might be considered for listing but is probably a borderline case. It would certainly be a candidate for a local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house stands on a site distant from any early settlement. An Iron Age flint tool was found in the burial ground in the nineteenth century. The site is likely to be of medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good (no details of QI supplied)
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal. The far end of the burial ground, which is not used for burials, is slightly overgrown at present but is being attended to.

3.2. Maintenance

There is no maintenance plan for either the meeting house or the burial ground, but maintenance to both is carried out as required.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has a sustainability specialist as a member of the meeting and has implemented several measures to reduce the building's environmental impact. These include cavity wall, roof and floor insulation, new boilers and improved heating controls. Neither the meeting house nor the warden's flat has an EPC certificate. Works to the ground are carried out by Newham Conservation volunteers.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it requires within the building - a large meeting room, good kitchen, male, female and disabled WCs and additional meeting rooms. There is car parking space and secure parking for bicycles. There is a resident warden.

3.5. Access

The building is fully accessible to people with disabilities, and has a hearing loop and facilities for partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 8 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for lettings for 280 hours per week (4 rooms). There is a lettings policy. Acceptable uses are those in accordance with Quaker values. Quaker-organised events are allowed to use the meeting house for free. People use the meeting house because of its good quiet location and ample car parking space.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

Lead has been stolen from the roof in the past. Otherwise there has been little crime or anti-social behaviour. The locality is generally well cared-for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and is an area of high community confidence. No link has been made with the local police.

3.8. Plans for change

Proposals are being considered for introducing solar panels and improving drainage

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 interior spaces are flexible enough to accommodate change.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the building is already used by many community groups and there is probably scope for more intensive use within the existing building.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could probably serve another, secular, community use with little change.

Part 5: Category: 3