

## **Quaker Meeting House, Wellington**

*High Street, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 8RA*

*National Grid Reference: ST 13994 20660*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***The building was erected in c.1845 on the site of an earlier meeting house of the 1690s. It was designed by Francis Fox, a Quaker railway architect from Teignmouth and a connection of the local Fox family who were prominent local woollen manufacturers. Although the exterior of the building is severely functional, the interior meeting rooms still retain much of their original character and the whole is of high heritage significance.***

### ***Evidential value***

***The burial ground may contain burials dating from the late seventeenth century. Overall, the site and building are of medium evidential value.***

### ***Historical value***

***Wellington was an important Quaker centre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with several prominent families including the Foxes. The building***

***itself is an interesting example of meeting house internal planning. The site has high historical value.***

**Aesthetic value**

***Francis Fox's building is a very plain structure, but the internal plan is unusual and ingenious and the fittings and furnishings of the two meeting rooms and the gallery have survived more or less intact. Principally for the interior, the building is of high aesthetic value.***

**Communal value**

***The building has been used by Quakers, since its opening in c.1845. More recently the building has also been used by other local groups. The building has high communal value.***

**Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *West Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0009820*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Taunton Deane Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Wellington*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1176261*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Wellington*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c.1845*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Francis Fox of Teignmouth*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 October 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Judith Blaker*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *There is a detached burial ground at Milverton which is still in use*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:  
Blaker, Judith, *Some Wellington History*, West Somerset Quaker Newsletter, Autumn 2015  
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.2, pp549/50  
Flatt, Doris, *Quakers in Wellington: 300 Years, 1689-1989*, 2008  
Local Meeting survey by Judith Blaker, May 2016

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

### 2.1 Historical background

The first meeting house in Wellington was built in 1694 (Butler). Recent research has shown that the building was rebuilt or extensively repaired in 1800 but it was demolished and replaced in c.1845 by the present meeting house, with a burial ground behind. The building accounts of 1843-44 survive (in the Somerset Heritage Centre) and show that the architect for the new building was Francis Fox, a Quaker railway engineer from Teignmouth, the mason was George Thorne and the carpenter was Richard Blackmore. The building is set back from the street front behind a row of shops and reached by a narrow passage and is also closely built-up on either side. A wooden classroom was erected in the burial ground in 1953 (Flatt).

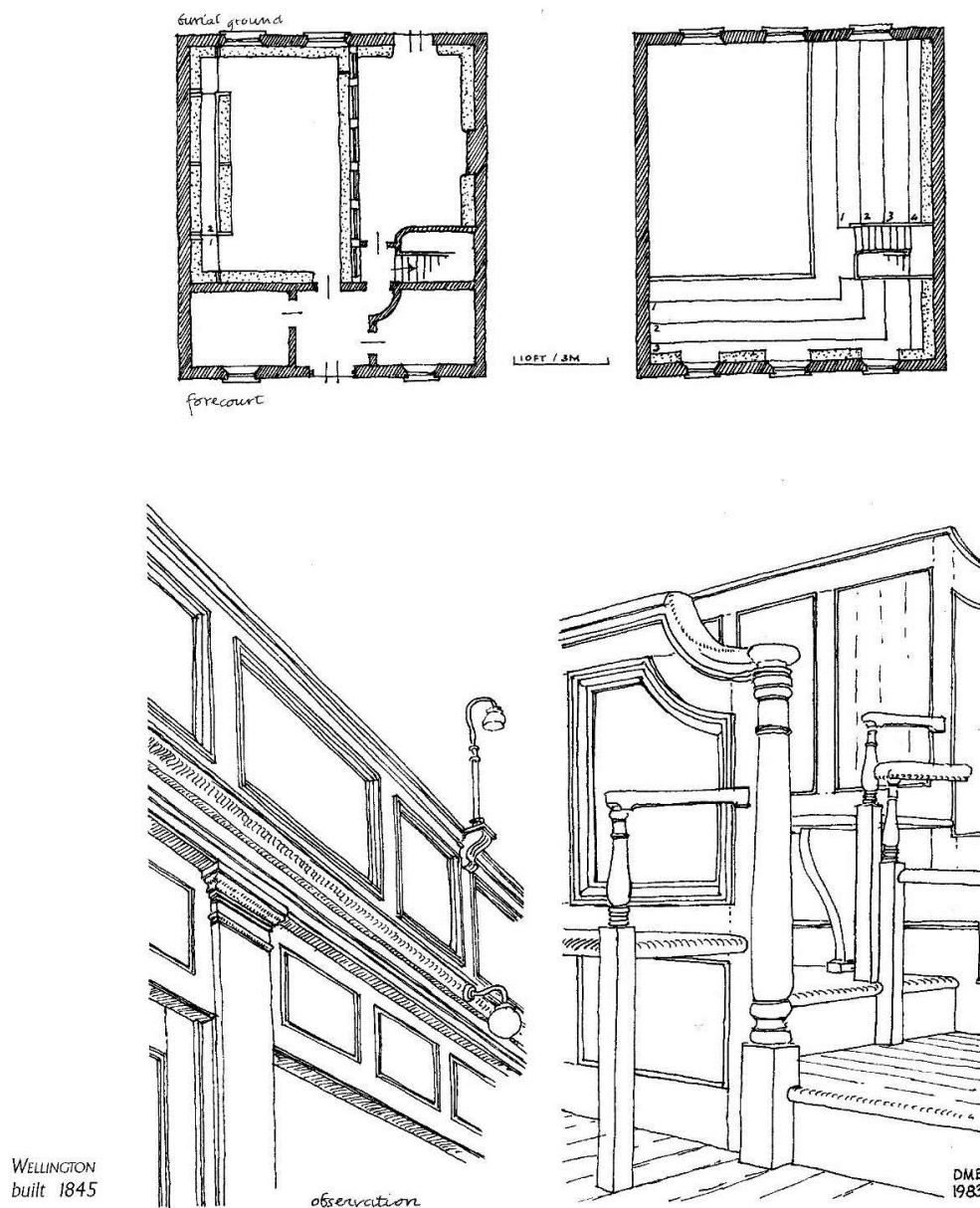


Figure 1: ground and first floor plans and details from the main meeting room. North is to the bottom of the plan. (Butler, vol. 2, p. 550)

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house fronts a narrow courtyard reached from the street by a passage beneath shops. The building is rectangular on plan, with a main (north west) front faced with white brick on a stone plinth and side and rear walls of red brick on brick plinths. The overall pitched roof is covered in natural slate. The main front has a central doorway with a segmental head and a pedimented timber canopy on brackets. The door is flanked by two segment-headed openings with 6/6 small-paned timber sash windows and further small windows beyond. Above are three segment-headed windows of similar pattern. The front rises to a simple moulded stone cornice and a pedimented gable with a central oculus. The side walls are blind and tightly enclosed by adjoining buildings. The rear wall has two large openings lighting the main meeting room, with segmental heads and 8/12 small-paned timber sash windows. To the left is a segment-headed doorway, apparently inserted in c.1900, and in the plain brick gable is an oculus.

The internal arrangement is ingenious (see figure 1) with large and small meeting rooms placed side by side and with an L-shaped gallery over the small meeting room and entrance lobby. The large meeting room has a boarded floor, a tall panelled timber dado, plain plastered walls above the dado, a simple moulded plaster cornice and a flat ceiling with a central ventilator roundel with acanthus ornament. On the long east side is a ministers' stand with a panelled front and all the other walls have perimeter benches. On the west side is a panelled screen with pilasters and central shutters to the small meeting room (still in working order). Above the screen and continuing on the north side is a gallery with a panelled front. The gallery retains its original benches and gas-light fittings. The small meeting room has a chimney breast on the west wall and was apparently unlighted before the insertion of the door in the south end wall. The stair in the lobby leading to the gallery has a shaped curving handrail and stick balusters. The joinery throughout is of high quality.

## 2.3 Loose furnishings

The building has retained many of its original open backed benches, though these have been supplemented by modern stacking chairs. The gallery still has all its original furniture.

## 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

There is a rectangular burial rectangular ground behind the meeting house, reached by a passage beneath an adjacent property. It is enclosed by timber boundary fences and laid to grass, with trees and a wild area at the far end. All except three of the burial markers were moved to the side in 1959. The ground was opened to the public as a peace garden in 2008. Burials here include various members of the Fox family, a prominent local family of woollen manufacturers and bankers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is completely hidden from the busy High Street by a row of shops, and closely hemmed-in by buildings on either side.

There is a detached burial ground in Quaker House Lane, Milverton, near Wiveliscombe (NGR ST 10633 26037). The ground dates from 1688 and was originally attached to a meeting house. The ground is walled and is still in use for Quaker burials and the scattering of ashes.

## 2.6 Listed status

The building is properly listed at Grade II but the present (1951) list description is inadequate and should be revised to include the very well-preserved interior, which is of considerable significance.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

This is a town centre site, which has been developed since the seventeenth century and possibly earlier, and is of high archaeological potential.

## **Part 3: Current use and management**

### 3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Generally satisfactory but with one localised problem. The 2015 QI noted that advice should be sought on the trees, one of which is leaning badly.

### 3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in July 2015 and was carried out by Clive Madge MRICS. The building was found to be generally in a satisfactory condition and well-maintained with some minor works required. The most urgent works have been carried out but some decoration and works in the burial ground remain to be done. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. Major works and repairs are taken care of by the Area Meeting. There is no five-year maintenance and repair plan. Matters are dealt with as they arise.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Use of a green energy supplier and low energy light bulbs
- Use of environmentally-friendly cleaning products; local recycling
- Burial ground maintained as a peace garden with a semi-wild area.
- Car-sharing encouraged

The meeting house does not have an EPC.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs within the meeting house. There are two meeting rooms, a kitchen and two WCs, including one adapted for the less able. The meeting house is in the town centre and well-served by daily bus services from Tiverton, Taunton and Bridgewater with a reduced service on Sundays. Here are limited weekday services to surrounding villages. There is no parking on site but parking is available at a nearby supermarket and is free on Sundays. There is no secure parking for bicycles, but they can be brought inside the meeting house when necessary.

### 3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is a portable ramp to the main entrance. All the main rooms are on the ground floor. There is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. There has been no Disability Access Audit.

### 3.6 Community Use

The building is used by Friends for about 3 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 80 hours per week and is let for an average of 6.5 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Activities in line with Quaker values are preferred. No alcohol is allowed. Members of the Society and, exceptionally, other groups fundraising for a charity may have free use of the building. A local choir uses the building because of good acoustics.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There has been some minor crime. Both the external notice board and the huts in the garden have been vandalised in recent years. The incidents were not reported to police. There has been no heritage crime. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low levels of deprivation and high community confidence. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but Friends might consider making contact.

### 3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for changes 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:* there is limited scope for change within the building, which is subject to the constraints of listed building control.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* as above there is limited scope for significant change within the building.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* the meeting house occupies a restricted site with limited access. If the meeting were to be laid down, the building might find another public use, but scope for such conversion is limited partly because of the access and also because the meeting house has a good interior which retains much of its original character. It is unlikely that listed building consent would be forthcoming for significant alteration.

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

## **Part 6: List description(s)**

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1176261

Location: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, HIGH STREET

County: Somerset

District: Taunton Deane

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Wellington

Grade: II

Date first listed: 25-Jan-1951

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 269988

1. 5365 HIGH STREET (South East Side) Friends' Meeting House ST 1320 1/34 25.1.51. ST 1420 2/34 II GV 2. Behind No 18. Built 1845. Activities of Friends in Wellington go back a long time and are bound up with the Were and Fox families. Land bought for 1st Chapel in 1694. Interest is therefore partly historical. 2 storeys. 3 window yellow brick front. Circular ventilator under low-pitched pedimented gable. Sash windows with segmental heads. Pedimented hood on brackets with lamp over doorway.

Nos 6 to 10 (even), 10A and 10B, Nos 12 to 18 (even) and Friends' Meeting House form a group.

Listing NGR: ST1399420660