

Quaker Meeting House, Alton

39 Church Street, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 2DA

National Grid Reference: SU 71728 39689



Statement of Significance

As the second oldest purpose-built meeting house in England still in use, the meeting house has high heritage value. Built in 1672 beside a contemporary burial ground, it was extended in 1832.

Evidential value

The meeting house and the attached burial ground both date back to 1672. They have high evidential value.

Historical value

The early date of the meeting house and its association with prominent local Quaker families lend the building and site exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building shares many features and materials with other local vernacular buildings, such as brick, tile hanging and clay peg tiles. Of particular aesthetic value are original features such as the internal south wall of the meeting room. Overall, the building has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is well used by local Friends and the local community. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Hampshire & Islands*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005790*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *East Hampshire District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Alton*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1338904*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Alton*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1672 and later*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *15 July 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Jonathan Riddell*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Bullen, M. et al., *Hampshire: Winchester and the North (Buildings of England)*, 2010, pp. 122-3

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 227-8
Hampshire Archaeology & Historic Buildings Record, reference number 12690

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, plate 37

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991, p. 136

'Alton Quaker Meeting House', leaflet

Alton Local Meeting, historic photos and plans

Local Meeting survey by Jonathan Riddell, May 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The site for the meeting house and burial ground was bought in 1672 and the meeting house completed the same year at a cost of £204, making it the second oldest purpose-built meeting house in England still in use (after Hertford of 1670 (*qv*)). The original building included a cottage to the north under the same roof. Another cottage was added in 1832. In order to accommodate increased numbers after the 1689 Toleration Act, two galleries were built in 1690 and seats provided for £71. (The south gallery survives while the location of the second gallery, since removed, is unclear.) In 1730, the floor was re-laid and new sash windows installed. By 1961, the cottages were in a poor condition and described in a plan as 'condemned' (copy held by local meeting, original in Hampshire Record Office). In the early 1960s (Butler: 1964-5, info from local meeting: 1961), the architect Ernest G. Allen restored the building at a cost of about £8,000, refurbishing one cottage and internally linking the other to the meeting house (for which the central stack had to be removed). In 2002-05, the porch was altered (see Figure 2) and converted to a disabled toilet and a reading room (architect: Richard Ashby Associates of Liss, Hants). A new staircase replaced a 1960s stair in the same position. (Prior to the 1960s, the staircase to the south gallery was located in what is now the library beside the porch (Figure 1 and 2).)

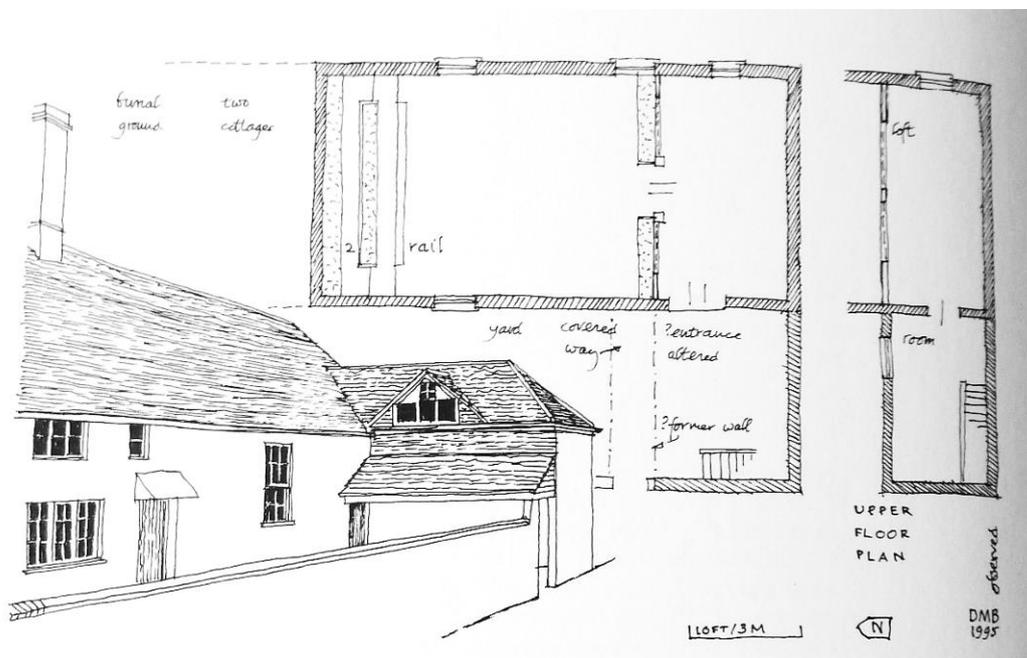


Figure 1: Perspective, ground and first floor plan (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p. 228) (North is to the left, not to scale)

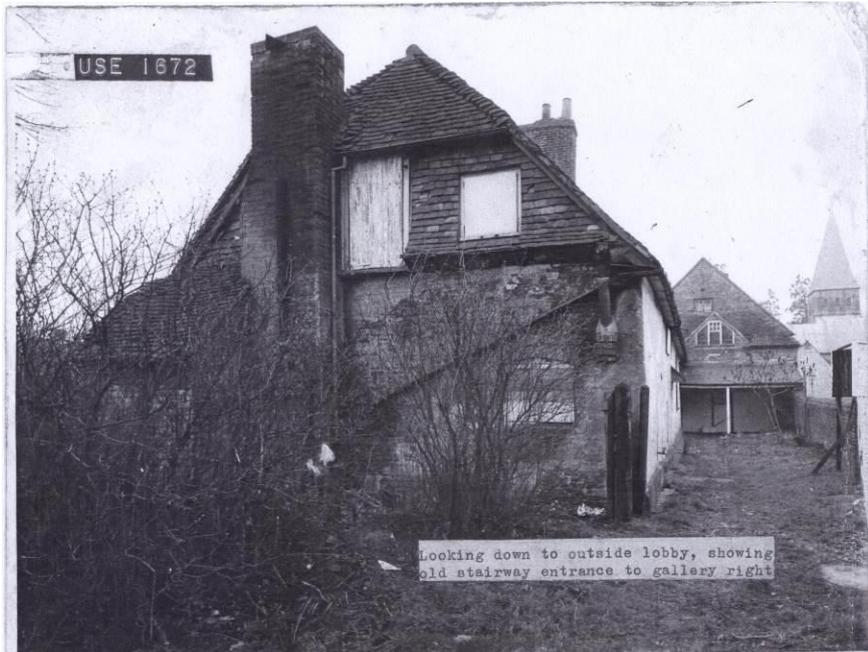


Figure 2: The meeting house in c.1960, seen from the north
(Alton Local Meeting Archive)



Figure 3: The south gallery with shutters, looking east, in c.1965
(Alton Local Meeting Archive)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building is aligned roughly north-south, with the west elevation facing Church Street.

The meeting house with one attached cottage was built in 1672. Another cottage was added to the north in 1832. The plan is L-shaped with a cross wing at the southwest and small extensions to the northeast, east and southeast. The materials are brick (English bond on the east elevation), which on the west elevation of the main wing is stuccoed. The hipped main roof is tiled with handmade clay tiles, as are the dormers and the hipped cross wing roof. The southwest cross wing has a tile-hung first floor. The west elevation has a sash window to the meeting room, two doors with modern canopies on carved brackets (one to the original cottage, one to the 1832 cottage), two modern ground floor windows and two modern

dormers. The cross wing's former open lean-to porch has been removed and the north wall rebuilt using second-hand bricks. It has casement windows to the west and north elevation, with the dormer window to the north having been altered (see Figure 2). Compared to historic photos (Figure 2), the fenestration of the north elevation has been altered and a chimney stack removed. Apart from the timber sashes, the windows are metal-framed casements with internal secondary glazing.

The main entrance to the meeting house is via a modern door in the southwest cross wing. The wing contains a small library and a toilet. The lobby at the south of the main wing contains a small wall-mounted safe, the new stair to the south gallery and access to a small toilet wing at the southeast. Between the lobby and the meeting room there are original timber shutters which can be folded away to link the two spaces. The south gallery room (now used as an office) and the first floor room in the cross wing (now used as a counselling room) have some modern dado panelling. Some of the roof timbers of the gallery are visible and there is an access hatch into the main roof (which has collar and tie beams and V-braces) (photo bottom left).

The meeting room is a full-height room with one sash window to the west and two to the east. Two ceiling beams are visually supported by simple pilasters. The dado panelling has been removed and remains only behind the ministers' stand at the north. On either side of this are doors which were created in the 1960s to link to the adjoining cottage. The floor is 1960s woodblock. The south wall of the meeting room (photo centre right) has unpainted panelling and shutters to the ground and first floor. The gallery shutters are set behind a balustrade with turned balusters. The ground floor of the adjoining former cottage has a corridor which leads to the door in the west elevation, a small children's room to the north, and a kitchen extension to the east. The children's room has a chamfered and stopped ceiling beam supported on a re-used timber post and a small recess in the north wall. The first floor level of both cottages is used as a flat (not inspected) which is accessed through the northern door in the west elevation. A smaller flat (bedsit) occupies the ground floor of the 1832 cottage and the northeast extension (not inspected).

2.3 Loose furnishings

With the exception of the fixed seating of the historic ministers' stand to the north, the chairs and benches in the meeting room are all new. However, some of the open-backed benches formerly in the meeting room are now in some of the other rooms including the children's room and the entrance hall. One bench is outside. The 'unusual candle-holder on an articulated iron arm' noted by Butler and formerly fixed to the stand in the meeting room is now in storage (not seen during the visit). The eighteenth-century benches with shaped supports and later backs noted by Stell were also not seen.

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground is just to the north of the meeting house and is still in use for the burial for ashes. (The last known burial took place in 1919.) Burial records are kept at the Hampshire Record Office and in the Hampshire & the Islands Area Meeting archive at Portsmouth. There is no plan for the future care and maintenance of the burial ground. The boundary wall which encloses the burial ground on three sides is of flint and brick. Beside the gate into the burial ground (which is near the north end of the meeting house) is a large modern sandstone panel with the inscription 'QUAKER BURIAL GROUND 1672'. Just inside the burial ground is a glass plaque listing the names of people whose ashes have been buried and scattered in the burial ground since 1983 (erected 2014). The burial ground has mostly perimeter planting, as well as several benches and a picnic bench.

The surviving gravestones, which date largely from the late nineteenth century, have been laid flat on the graves. They are generally of two types: headstones of limestone with a curved top and oblong ledgerstones of slate with vertical or horizontal inscriptions. Notable burials

include the Crowley family who were local brewers, as well as relatives of the botanist William Curtis (1746-1799) who was born in Alton. (Curtis himself is buried in the graveyard of St Mary's church, Battersea.) Reputedly, other headstones were stacked around the inside of the boundary walls at some point but may have been destroyed since. (Due to the perimeter planting the walls to the north and east are not easily accessible, so this could not be verified.)

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Parallel with the meeting house and to the west is the boundary wall of brick (photos top left and right) with black headers which spell out '1672', the date of the meeting house and burial ground. The two wrought iron gates are modern. There is a narrow yard on the east side of the meeting house.

The meeting house and the burial ground are located along Church Street, north of the High Street and just northeast of the medieval parish church and churchyard. Opposite the meeting house is a large secondary school. To the north of the burial ground is Spitalfields Road, north of which is a municipal cemetery with a timber lychgate to Old Odiham Road. The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is currently listed at grade II. Based on its early date as a purpose-built meeting house it may be a candidate for upgrading to grade II*. The list entry needs to be updated to take account of recent alterations and current patterns of use.

The boundary wall with the date 1672 is mentioned in the list entry but not specifically included in the listing (other than a curtilage structure).

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Alton has Roman origins and remained an important market town from the medieval period onwards. It is not known if there was an earlier building on the site of the meeting house. The site has high archaeological importance due to the burial ground of 1672.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): optimal/generally satisfactory

3.2. Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection took place in 2013 (Seymour & Bainbridge, chartered architects, Winchester). Some of the recommendations of the QIR have been completed, such as the painting of the windows. Others remain to be executed. The area meeting has an ample property fund and the local meeting at Alton only pays for minor repairs and maintenance. The QIR serves as a five-year maintenance plan.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. The two flats have Energy Performance Certificates (results not available). Very few measures have been implemented to reduce the environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: secondary glazing, new boiler, loft insulation

- Resource use, recycling & waste management: the meeting uses the Council system of bins
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: the meeting uses Keim paints.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has access to all the required amenities which are all in the meeting house. There is no resident warden or Friend.

The meeting house is accessible by public transport. There is no onsite parking for cars or secure parking for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The ground floor of the meeting house is accessible for people with disabilities. There is level access to, and within, the ground floor, an accessible toilet and a hearing loop. There are no facilities for partially sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was carried out in 2005 and changes were made as part of the refurbishment that year, including the installation of the accessible toilet and of a handrail to the burial ground.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about 6 hours per week. The meeting house is available for lettings for about 120 hours per week. On average, it is let for 60 hours per week. The meeting has a letting policy. Unacceptable political groups and groups not in tune with Quaker ethics are excluded. All bookings are approved by the property committee if time permits. Free use is only available for Quaker groups, with the permission of the committee. Users prefer the meeting house because of its good location, warmth, quiet, and fair pricing.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There is no sign of any crime or anti-social behaviour at the site, and no heritage crime has occurred. No incidents have been reported to police and there have been no unreported incidents. The area is generally well cared for and has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no planned changes for the meeting house.

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: While the meeting house has seen small changes over time, future alterations should be carefully considered and kept to a minimum.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The main spaces available for letting are the meeting room, the children's room and kitchen and toilet facilities. At the moment these are sufficient for the community users and there is no demand for alterations. Any alterations should be carefully considered and kept to a minimum.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the meeting house cease to be used by the Friends a new sympathetic use would need to be found for that part of the building

not currently in residential use. The meeting room would not lend itself to subdivision as this would destroy the space and affect original and historic features.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1338904

Location

39, CHURCH STREET

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, 38, CHURCH STREET

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Hampshire	East Hampshire	District Authority	Alton

Grade: II

Date first listed: 13-Mar-1951

Date of most recent amendment: 31-Mar-1977

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 141781

List entry Description

Details

CHURCH STREET 1. 5236 No 38 (Friends' Meeting House) and No 39. (Formerly listed as Friend's House) SU 7139 2/15 13.3.51. II 2. C17. Altered. 1 storey with cottage of 1 storey and attic under the same roof. 2 storey tile-hung projecting wing to the right with entrance to the hall. Stucco; tile roof. Large sash windows to the hall. Simple furnishings including a few benches, some panelling and a railing with balusters. Cottage ground floor with central door in moulded frame and under a modest hood and with a secondary door to the left. One window projecting into the roof and one smaller dormer casement window. Red brick wall to the road with the date 1672 in black headers. VCH Hants II, p 482.

Listing NGR: SU7172539697