

Friends Meeting House, Ashford

Albert Road, Ashford, Kent, TN24 8NY

National Grid Reference: TR 01035 43100



Statement of Significance

A modest design of the 1950s, well-detailed and relatively little-altered, and making a minor positive contribution to the local conservation area. Overall of medium significance.

Evidential value

The building is of post-war date, but expresses well its purpose and function. It incorporates some benches from a previous meeting house. It is of medium evidential value.

Historical value

The Ashford Quaker Meeting dates back to the seventeenth century, but the present building was built in 1956 and is of low historical value.

Aesthetic value

Although architecturally unassuming, the building is well-detailed, and with its attractive garden setting makes a minor positive contribution to the local conservation area. The meeting house is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

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

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *East Kent*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0003070*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Ashford Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Ashford NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Ashford Queens Road*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1956-7*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Jackson & Jackson*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *1 December 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Kay Schlapp*
- 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. 1, pp. 277-8
Local Meeting Survey, by Kay Schlapp, December 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1676 the house of Robert Steed was acquired and adapted to serve as a meeting house. Butler states that the location for this is not known; it might have been the property now known as 50-52 Romney Road, Willesborough (NGR: TR0238042217), a Grade II-listed house of late medieval date which, according to the list entry, was previously known as Charity Farm and was used as a meeting house. It was followed in 1686 by the acquisition of another property, again in an unknown location, which was sold in 1802. In that year a Methodist chapel in New Rents was acquired and adapted, part of its large garden becoming a burial ground. The plan of this building is shown at figure 1. By 1873 a women's meeting room and cloakroom had been added. The building was sold in 1898, when another former Methodist chapel was acquired, in Hempstead Street. This was extended in 1912 with classrooms, but in due course proved unsuitable and was sold in 1957. A purpose-built meeting house was erected on a new site which had been acquired in 1956. It opened in

spring 1957. The architect was T. Harrison of Jackson & Jackson (Ashford and Folkestone). It cost about £6,000 and the meeting room seated 100 people. In 1969 the house adjoining was acquired to provide a flat for a warden as well as additional facilities (since sold). A small addition was made to the meeting house in the 1980s or 1990s, providing a new kitchen and a library.

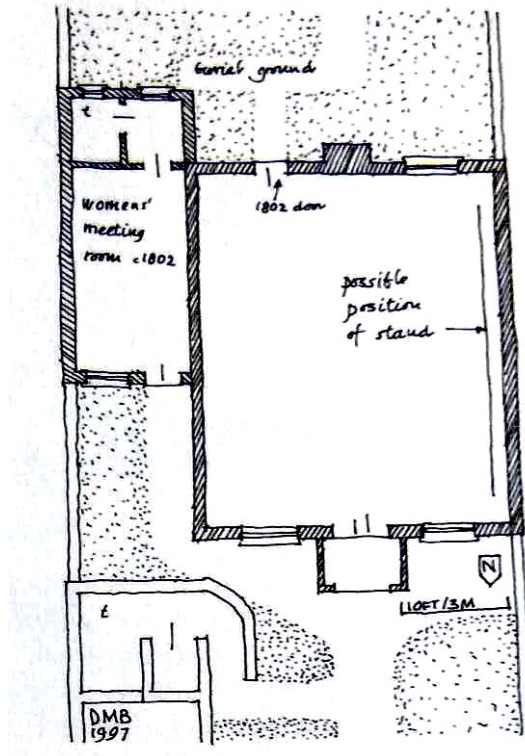


Figure 1: Plan of 1802 building (former chapel), from Butler, Vol. 1, p. 277

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

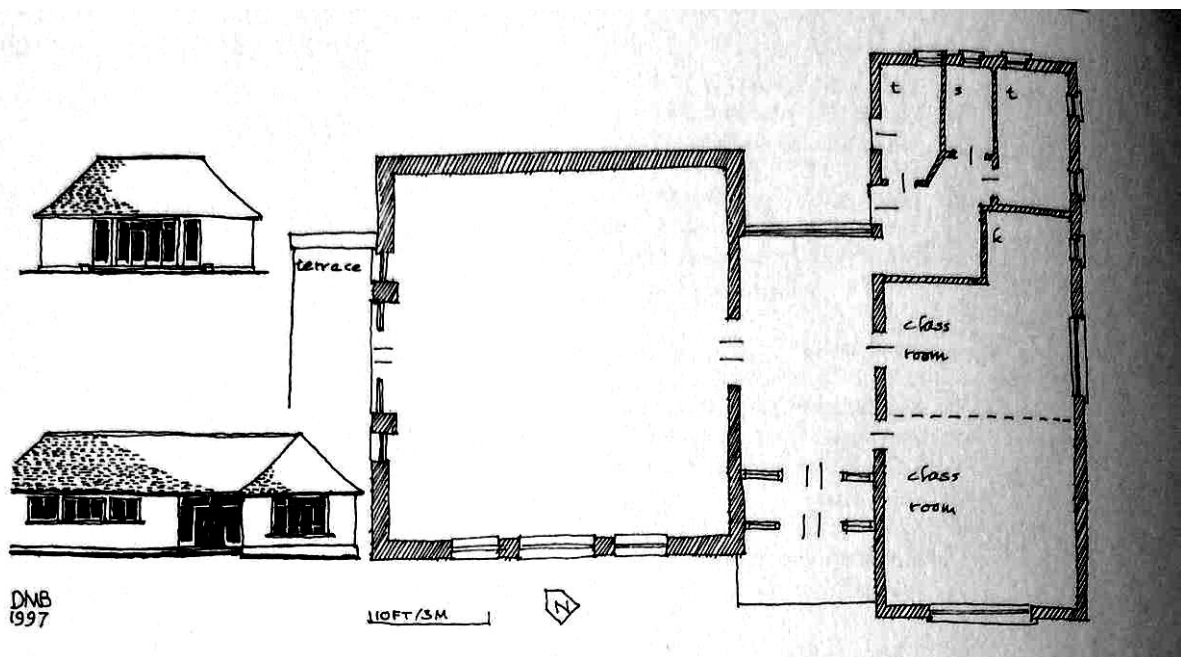


Figure 2: Plan and elevations of present building, from Butler, Vol. 1, p.278

The meeting house was built in 1956, from designs by T. Harrison of Jackson & Jackson. It is a single storey structure of cavity wall construction, faced in red brick laid in stretcher bond, with a plain tile roof with hips, bonnets and swept valleys, overhanging eaves and cast iron ogee gutters. The windows, probably originally metal framed, have been renewed in uPVC. On plan the building consists of a central hall with later kitchen and library addition at the rear (not shown in the plan at figure 1), with square meeting room giving off to the left, and classrooms and WCs to the right. The main entrance is set within the slightly recessed linking hall, with solid paired entrance doors and glazed side panels. The meeting room has a cork tile floor and two timber trusses with knee braces in the coved flat ceiling area. There is a high boarded dado around the perimeter of the room. The other spaces are utilitarian in character, with no features calling for special mention.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are some solid-backed benches (figure 3), presumably brought from the previous meeting house.



Figure 3: The seating in the meeting room includes old benches

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None. There are three headstones (two of them broken) reset against the garden boundary wall, presumably brought here from one of the earlier premises. The inscriptions are illegible.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a corner site in an area of nineteenth century and later residential development. There is a small car park (for six to eight cars) in front and a good-

sized garden at the rear. The site is bounded by a brick wall. It lies within the Queens Road Conservation Area.

2.6. Listed status

The building 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 (if any): n/a

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting house appears to be in good condition and well maintained. The most recent QIR was carried out in 2011 (Duncan Graham Partnership). The report recommended the repair or replacement of the large external doors to the meeting room (not yet carried out). The fascias and the cast iron ogee-section guttering have since been repaired.

3.3. Sustainability

Measures undertaken include cavity wall insulation and replacement of most of the windows with double glazed uPVC units. New compost arrangements are in place. The meeting house is close to public transport (nearby bus stop, railway station one mile away).

3.4. Amenities

The Meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs. These include the main meeting room, library, kitchen and WCs. The classrooms are used by a nursery. There is no resident warden or Friend.

3.5. Access

An access audit has not been carried out, but the meeting house is accessible for people with disabilities, including step-free access and circulation, accessible WC and a hearing loop. No special provision has been made for partially-sighted people.

3.6 Community Use

In addition to use by Friends for about three hours per week, the facilities are used for about 75 hours a week out of a possible 174 (in term time). There is no lettings policy, but letting conditions are made known to all hirers. Party political groups are excluded and Quaker groups use the facilities free of charge. Users cite the central location, pleasant ambience, reasonable price and car park.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no current signs of crime or antisocial behaviour. However, some lead flashing was stolen a year or two ago. Although the area is generally well cared for, there are some shabby rental properties nearby.

3.8. Plans for change

None.

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 are no heritage constraints governing internal change. The building is located in a conservation area, the character and appearance of which would need to be preserved or enhanced when external alterations or additions are contemplated.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already put to wider community use. The same considerations as above would apply.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building makes a pleasant and positive contribution to the conservation area. It would lend itself to a number of alternative uses, including residential. However, as this is a low-rise building occupying a fairly large site, redevelopment is perhaps a more likely consequence of laying down; again, this would need to meet the preserve/enhance test for development in conservation areas.

Part 5: Category: 3