

Friends Meeting House, Beccles

15 Smallgate, Beccles, Suffolk, NR34 9AB

National Grid Reference: TM 42249 90398



Statement of Significance

This modest meeting house has high significance for heritage values as a centre of religious and community activity in Beccles for over two centuries, although its architectural interest is low because of early twentieth century alterations.

Evidential Value

Little is known of the history of the site of the meeting house before it was given to the Quakers in 1745 but the former burial ground and to a lesser extent the altered fabric of the building have potential to yield evidence about the building construction and Quaker life and activity. Building and site have high evidential value.

Historical Value

The history of Quaker occupation dates back to the 1740s, with some interruptions, though the building itself is now essentially of 1909. The meeting house certainly has high historical value, especially taken together with the adjacent school mission hall.

Aesthetic Value

The meeting house is of medium aesthetic value as a simple single-storey Georgian structure, remodelled to create a building essentially of 1909; it has the character of a minor institution of the Edwardian period.

Communal Value

The meeting house was built for Quaker meetings and adjoined a Quaker burial ground. The building is now also in community use and is closely associated with the adjacent mission hall which has been used continuously for community purposes for over a century. Because of these spiritual, commemorative and social uses the building and site today have high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Norfolk and Waveney*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0001770*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Waveney District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Beccles*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed (only as curtilage building)*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Beccles*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1745, 1909, 1983*

1.13 Architect(s): *Original designer not known; 1980s extension by Peter Codling*

1.14 Date of visit: *25 June 2014*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Penny Simmonds*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *the site also includes the mission hall and an early eighteenth-century house formerly occupied by the caretaker of the meeting house. There is said to be a detached burial ground in Worlingham, but it is not included in David Butler's list.*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 569
Local Meeting survey by Penny Simonds, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

The meeting house was built in 1745 on land behind the present 15 Smallgate which was given by Thomas Sewell. It was single-storey structure with a three bay front and a hipped roof, and the open ground adjacent was used for burials. The meeting was discontinued in 1816 and the building became an infants' school and later an adult mission school which was very successful. Early in the twentieth century meetings resumed and in 1909 a new mission hall was erected fronting onto Newgate. The new hall was separated from the old meeting house space internally by moveable shutters. At about the same time the old building was altered by the addition of a first floor meeting room. In the 1980s a small extension was added on the west side to provide a new stair to the upper floor.

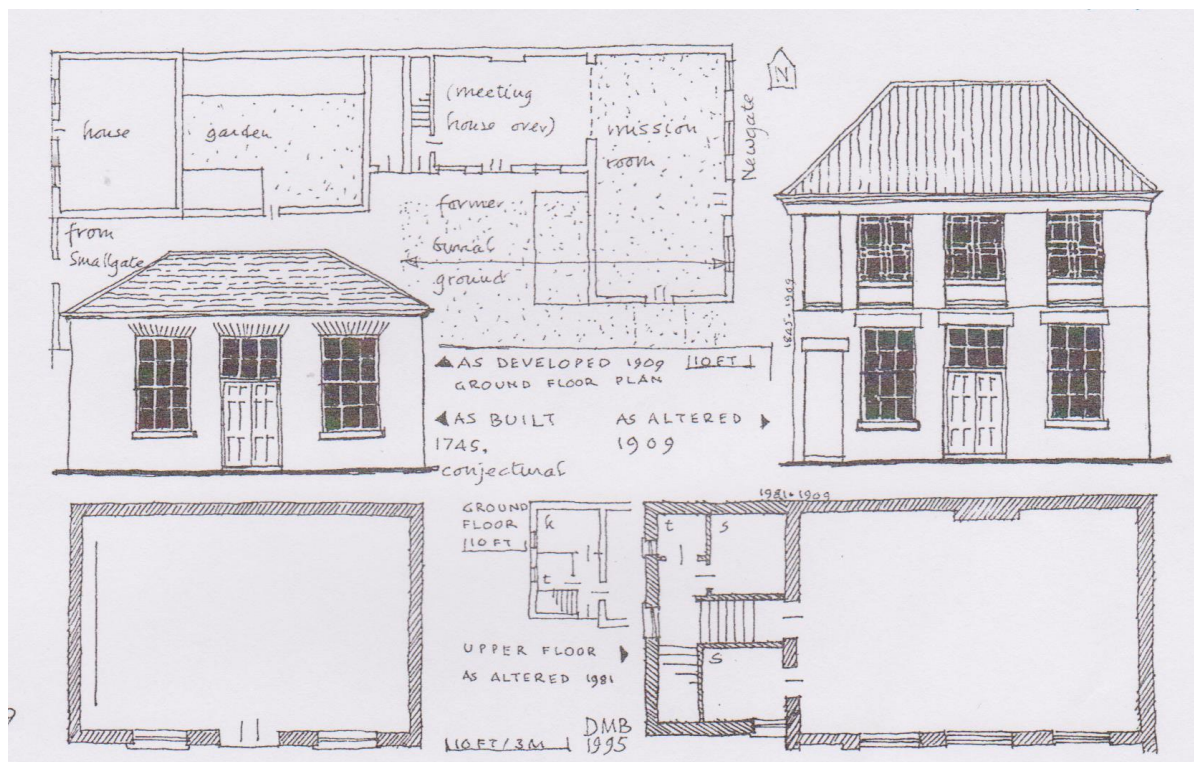


Fig. 1 Ground floor plans and front elevations of the original meeting house and the building as enlarged in 1909. (Butler (1999) vol.2, p.569)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house is reached through an open entry between two old houses in Smallgate, one of which (with a Dutch gable) previously served as the caretaker's house. The meeting house building is two storeys high with a front of red brick laid in Flemish bond and a tall hipped roof covered in pantiles with deep eaves. Some of the lower courses of brickwork may belong to the 1745 building. The main front is three main bays wide, with a narrower western bay. There are three large rectangular openings to the ground floor, with decorative

stone lintels (the original building apparently had brick arches). The central opening contains a glazed entrance doorway, those on either side have timber small-paned sashes. On the first floor are three rectangular openings set in deep reveals with timber cross windows with marginal lights. The narrow western bay has blind openings on both floors. All the other elevations are enclosed.

Internally, the ground floor room which formed part of the original meeting space now has a chimneybreast on the north wall with a neo-Adam chimneypiece. In the east end wall is a wide recess which originally communicated with the adjacent mission hall. The present meeting room on the first floor, which is reached by a modern stair, has a simple timber skirting and cornice with a ceiling raised into the roof space. There are no other fittings.

2.3 Loose furnishings

None of note

2.4 Attached burial ground

The former burial ground originally extended to the Newgate frontage. About half of the burial ground was lost in 1909 when the mission hall was built. The remainder is now partly paved and partly laid out as a garden with some small trees. There are no headstones. Burial records cease in 1797.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Beccles is an attractive small town and Smallgate is an old street near the main square, lined with eighteenth and nineteenth century houses. Newgate is slightly further from the centre and slightly bleaker. The meeting house building stands in a small enclosed area between these two streets with 15 Smallgate to the west and the former mission hall on Newgate to the east.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is presumably considered to be listed because it stands in the curtilage of 15 Smallgate, an early eighteenth-century building which has previously served as the caretaker's house. However, the meeting house itself is not mentioned in the list description, and it may not meet the criteria for the definition of a 'curtilage listed building'. Given the extent of the 1909 alterations and the consequent loss of original fabric, it is doubtful whether the meeting house on its own is of listable quality; a review is recommended to clarify its designation status.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The burial ground has been partly built-over by the mission hall and the remainder is now part-paved and planted as a garden, but presumably contains burials. The site is within the medieval core of Beccles and could have high archaeological potential, depending on the degree of disturbance to below-ground deposits.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory. The small space is well-maintained as a garden by volunteers.

3.2 Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection was made in 2011 by Chris Codling. In 2014, repairs were undertaken to the external brickwork and in 2015 the roof was re-felted, re-tiled and properly insulated. The meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the meeting house. It has a five-year maintenance and repair plan, as well as an immediate action plan for 2016.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented measures to reduce the environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: PV Panels installed on the main roof
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: Waste is recycled through local council collections
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: Maintenance plan in development
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: Organic garden designed to attract wildlife, small pond, nesting boxes
- Transport: use of public transport is encouraged

There is an Energy Performance Certificate: energy efficiency level G20, energy impact level F22. Some of the recommendations on the certificate have been implemented.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. There is no resident warden. There are public transport links to the meeting house, as well as on-site parking for cars and bicycles.

3.5 Access

Only the ground floor of the meeting house has level access. It has an accessible WC and a hearing loop. There has been no formal Disability Access Audit but a Health & Safety Review is currently underway.

3.6 Community use

Friends use the meeting house for 7 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 42 hours per week. It is used for an average of 15 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy which excludes political parties and the consumption of alcohol. Users value the meeting house for its location, atmosphere, quiet, warmth, and competitive pricing.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has low levels of crime and, other than low level vandalism, there has been no heritage crime at the site. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and the meeting does not consider this to be necessary.

3.8 Plans for change

There are currently (2015) no plans for changes to the building. Major works have been completed in 2014 and 2015.

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 meeting house appears to have all the facilities it needs and significant change appears unlikely.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house is already in community use and has three separate spaces suitable for this purpose, but there is scope for further alteration if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: the building could be used for wholly secular purposes with a minimum change to its physical character. As a significant building in the conservation area a sustainable new use should be found in the event of closure, and demolition would be resisted.

Part 5: Category: 3

Part 6: List description

(N.B. The list entry and description refers to 15 Smallgate, which is part of the property and was formerly used as the caretaker's cottage. The meeting house is within the curtilage of the listed building)

Name: No name for this Entry

List entry Number: 1298962

Location

15, SMALLGATE

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

County	District	District Type	Parish
Suffolk	Waveney	District Authority	Beccles

Grade: II

Date first listed: 22-Sep-1971

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

SMALLGATE 1. 828 (East Side) No 15 TM 4290 2/111

II GV

2. Early 18th century. 2 storeys and attic. 1 dormer. Red brick. 1st floor band. Dutch gable, north. 2 windows, at 1st floor, sash with flush frames, and central blank recess in lieu of window. Cambered arches. Pantiles. 6-panel door in wood case with pilasters, frieze and cornice.

Nos 11 to 17 (odd) form a group.

Listing NGR: TM4224990398