

Friends Meeting House, Bedford

5 Lansdowne Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK40 2BY

National Grid Reference: TL 04415 50242



Statement of Significance

The meeting house consists of a substantial late Victorian suburban villa which was purchased by the Friends in 1955 and a new octagonal meeting room built behind the house in 1998/9. Taking both parts together, the meeting house building has medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The original house is a fairly common type and the meeting room is wholly modern; the complex has low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has medium historical value as part of a planned late-Victorian suburb.

Aesthetic value

The original house is of medium aesthetic value; the modern meeting room is a pleasing functional structure of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been in use by the Quakers and local community groups since 1955. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Luton & Leighton*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0008520*
- 1.3 Owner: *Luton & Leighton AM Trustees on behalf of BYM*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Bedford Council (Unitary)*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Bedford*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Bedford*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *House late 19th century; meeting room added 1998/9*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Meeting room by R P Hart of Rothesay Building Design*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *29 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Sheila Holderness/Helen Osborn*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *There are two detached burial grounds related to the Bedford Local Meeting, at Cranfield/Bourne End and in Ampthill (see 2.5 below).*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1 pp.2
Local Meeting survey by Sheila Holderness, June 2015
Local meeting archives

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

2.1 Historical background

A Victorian house was purchased in 1955 and altered to replace hired premises. In 1998/9 an octagonal meeting room was built in the garden behind the house and the spaces in the house were adapted for classrooms and smaller meetings. The new addition won the Bedfordshire Design Award (community category) in 2000, which was awarded by the Bedfordshire Association of Architects (a branch of the Royal Institute of British Architects).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The house purchased in 1955 is a substantial double-fronted villa dating from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The street is lined with buildings of a similar date and style. The walls are of red brick with blue brick bands, the pitched roof is covered in concrete tiles. The central front door is set in a square three-storey tower; to the right is a two-storey canted bay window; to the left is a two-storey square bay window under a cross-gable. At the rear a single-storey flat-roofed brick-faced link connects the main house to the meeting room built in 1998/9. This is octagonal on plan, with walls partly faced with red brick and partly glazed with uPVC fittings. The shallow pitched roof is covered in slate.

The rooms in the main house retain some original features, like chimneypieces, skirtings and moulded cornices. In the meeting room, the laminated timber trusses of the structure are exposed and the spaces between them boarded or plastered. The floors throughout are close-carpetted.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room in the house was partly furnished with benches from the old Luton meeting house (ref. Butler), some of which are still in the present meeting room.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

N/a

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The immediate setting of the meeting room is the back garden of the house. Lansdowne Road is on the south western edge of central Bedford, in what was originally an area of substantial Victorian private houses. Many of these houses are now occupied by offices, medical practices or hostels or have been converted to flats.

There are two detached burial grounds related to the Bedford Local Meeting, at Cranfield/Bourne End (grid. ref. TL961436) and in Ampthill at the rear of Ampthill Hall in Dunstable Street. Both are still owned by the Area Meeting and let to tenants at a nominal rent.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not a candidate for the statutory list or the local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Lansdowne road was laid out in the later nineteenth century on open land and the archaeological potential of the site is 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

There has been no recent quinquennial inspection. An annual inspection is made by Friends and Trustees. The Clerk of Trustees does not consider a professional inspection to be justified unless works are requested. Currently the Fire Risk Assessment recommendations are being attended to. The local meeting has a good budget for repair and maintenance and AM Trustees support local meetings for major works. There is a flexible maintenance and repair plan devised by the Finance and Property Committee.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- Underfloor insulation in the downstairs double room
- Double-glazing throughout the meeting house extension.
- Roof insulation is in place and there are plans to increase it.
- Waste is recycled through the Borough Council collections

The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house with upstairs and downstairs kitchens and toilets. The facilities were refurbished in 1999. There is no resident warden.

There is good public transport by rail and bus; buses are less frequent on Sundays. There is limited parking on site and secure storage for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is ramped access into the building and level access to the whole of the ground floor. There is an accessible WC, a hearing loop and hazard strips on steps to aid partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit, but a stair lift has been fitted (Feb.2015) to accommodate Friends and MH users with limited mobility.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for approximately 8 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 468 hours per week (6 rooms available for up to 13 hours, 6 days each week) and is used for approximately 120 hours per week. Another room is let permanently to a single user.

The meeting has a lettings policy. Rooms are available to any group in sympathy with Quaker testimonies and ideals. Any potentially contentious request is brought to the Business Meeting. The rooms are only free for Quaker use and by decision at the Business meeting. Users value the good atmosphere, friendly and respectful contact with Quakers, quiet and accessible location, and reasonable rates.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There is little sign of general crime at the site, but lead has twice been stolen from the meeting house roof; anti-grip paint and CCTV have been introduced as a result. The lead thefts were reported to the police. The locality is generally well cared-for, has low crime

levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is no liason with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but contact might be made as required by circumstances.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans for significant change.

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 currently has all the required facilities, but there is probably scope for further alteration if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house currently has all the facilities required by its users, but could probably be further altered or extended if required, subject to the usual consents.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: should the meeting house be closed or laid down, the building could certainly find a new use.

Part 5: Category: 4