

Friends Meeting House, Dorking

Butter Hill, South Street, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2LE

National Grid Reference: TQ 16447 49252



Statement of Significance

A meeting house of 1846 with an attached cottage and several extensions. The most significance feature is the unusual vertical sliding partition. Overall, the building has medium significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house has the potential to reveal further information about its development and use. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is one of probably only two in England with a vertical sliding partition. This lends the building high historical value.

Aesthetic value

Despite the extensions, the character of the original exterior is still discernible. Inside, the screen and the main meeting room are of particular aesthetic interest. The building has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

As a Quaker meeting house which is also in regular use by the local community, the building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *West Weald*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0020090*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Mole Valley District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Dorking NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Dorking*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1846*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Su Johnston and Keith Poulton*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 586-7

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in Eastern England*, 2002, p. 321

'Friends Meeting House, Dorking', leaflet

John Day, 'A vertically sliding partition at Dorking Friends' Meeting House', *Surrey History*, volume V, no. 2, pp. 94-98 and no. 3, p. 156

Information from Colin Gerard, October 2015

Local Meeting survey by Su Johnston, June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1704 meetings were held at the house of Friend Resta Patching. Five years later he gave a plot in West Street on which a meeting house was built for £161 which opened the same year. It included a dwelling which was separated by shutters from the meeting room. This building was let in 1746 for use as school and lecture room. In 1825, Joseph John Gurney, the eminent Quaker minister (and brother of Elizabeth Fry), visited Dorking and the floor of the meeting house reputedly collapsed under the weight of the assembled crowds. It was sold in

1852 for £420. A new site was acquired in 1846 on Butter Hill for £300, for use as a burial ground and for the construction of a meeting house. A new meeting house and attached dwelling were built that year for £1,200. The meeting house contains a rare vertically-sliding partition whose top half is winched into the roof space while the bottom half goes into a pit below the floor. Similar examples are said to be found at the meeting houses in Gloucester (1834-5, Samuel Daukes) and in Darlington (front block of 1839-40, meeting room of 1846). The meeting house at Darlington also has a similar porch with columns in antis and the same architect may have been involved at both sites. Repairs and alterations were made in 1959, 1960s (leaflet: 1966, Butler: 1969) and 1988-9 (for £27,000). A first-floor extension to the cottage was built in 1989.

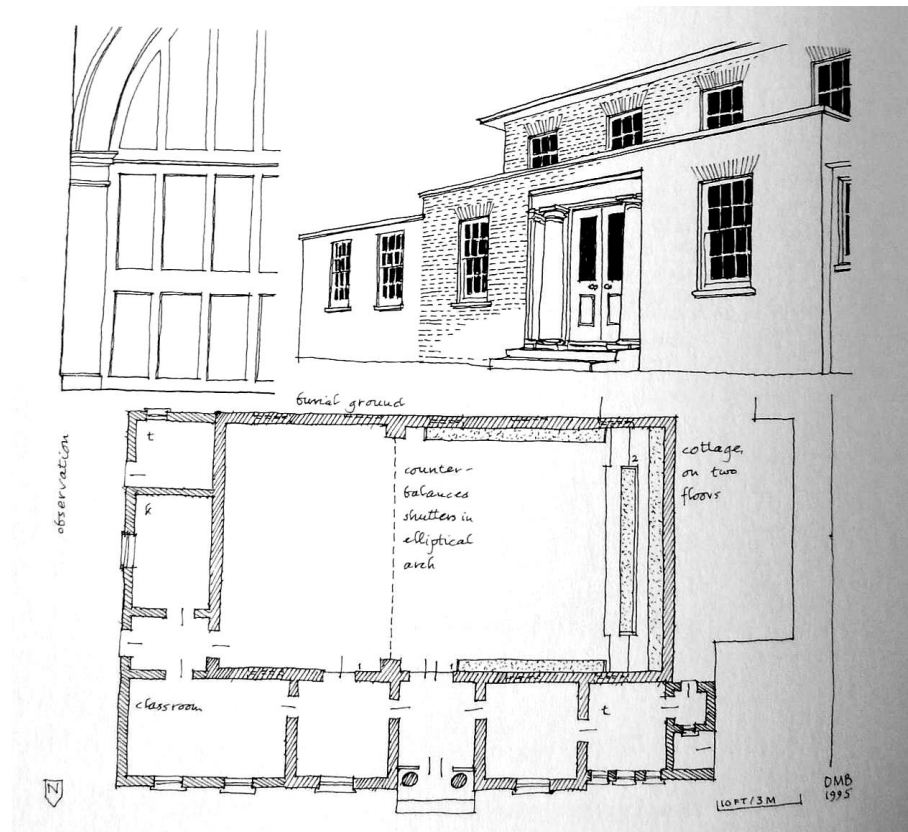


Figure 1: Plan, detail of shutter screen and perspective (north is roughly at the bottom of the plan; not to scale) (Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 586)



Figure 2: Undated photo of the meeting house ('Friends Meeting House, Dorking', leaflet)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The street elevation faces roughly north. The materials are red brick laid in Flemish bond (and stretcher bond for the later extensions). The main meeting house has an oblong plan and a hipped slate roof. The attached cottage is to the west. There is a flat-roofed extension to the front, flanked by hipped-roof extensions on either side. To the east is a flat-roofed extension (which is wider and longer than that shown on Butler's plan (figure 1), projecting further south than the rear elevation of the original building).

The three-bay porch has two 8-over-8 sashes on either side of the entrance with Tuscan columns in antis. (The porch's cornice, visible in an historic photo (figure 2), has been removed and replaced by a brick parapet.) The first floor of the main block has five 6-over-6 sash windows under rubbed and gauged flat arches. The toilet block to the east has frosted plate glass sashes, the block to the west has two 8-over-8 sashes. The rear elevation of the original building was also five bays wide, with a square brick stack off-centre. There are two 6-over-6 sashes to the first floor, which alternate with blind openings. The first-floor window at the far west is obscured by the cottage extension. On the ground floor, there is one modern double-leaf door in the second bay from the east, under a modern canopy which is a continuation of the east extension.

The entrance lobby leads into the information centre (a former classroom) to the left and an office to the right, with toilets beyond. The main building is divided into two rooms by a counter-balanced timber partition under a wide three-centred arch. The top half can be winched into the roof space, while the lower half simultaneously goes into a pit below the building. The winding mechanism is in the lobby and is still in working order. At the centre of the partition are back-to-back doors.

The meeting room ('large hall') to the west of the partition has a panelled dado and a timber floor. The west wall has a two-tier stand; the back panel of the front bench has turned columns which flank the steps to the top level. The room is lit by three windows to the front and one to the rear. There is a wall-mounted clock by Thomas Marsh of Dorking. The smaller room on the other side of the partition is plainer without a dado. It has doors to the main lobby, the east extension lobby and the garden, as well as an opening to the kitchen in the east extension. It is lit by two windows to the front and one to the rear. The east extension contains a kitchen, toilets, a store and a lobby.

The two-storey cottage has a narrow and rendered front elevation of two bays with sash windows. A small brick porch is the entrance and links it to the meeting house. To the rear is a two-storey brick extension of square plan (the first floor was added in 1989). The interior was not inspected.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are fourteen open-backed benches in the meeting room, probably contemporary with the meeting house. There are two further benches in the smaller meeting room and one in the lobby.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The attached burial ground was first used in 1847 and last in 1927. In 2013, the 20 remaining headstones were removed from the grave locations (where they had been lying flat since 1966) to lean against the south boundary wall. They date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A grid of painted letters on the rear wall of the meeting house and the flint boundary wall correspond to a burial plan. The burial ground is now laid out as a garden with a wildflower meadow in one corner.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located on Butter Hill, a hill above South Street which is a continuation of the High Street. There is a flint and brick boundary wall to Butter Hill, with a plain gap for steps at the east leading up to the meeting house, and brick and stone coped gate piers to the drive at the west. In front of the meeting house is a small lawn, while the rear garden is much larger. The garden's east boundary wall is of brick and flint, while those to the west and south are of brick. The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6. Listed status

The building is currently not listed. While it is of undeniable historical interest (the shuttered screen in particular), it is probably too much altered to be eligible for inclusion on the statutory list. It is suitable for inclusion on the Council's local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

It is not known if there was an earlier building on the site. The archaeological potential is high, due to the presence of burials.

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 was undertaken in 2011 by Simon Dyson of HMDW Architects. Most of the recommended works have since been carried out. The local meeting has sufficient money for small maintenance works but never has sufficient funds to make all the desired improvements. The QIR serves as a five-year maintenance and repair plan; in addition the warden has a maintenance diary for checking services, leaks, gutter cleaning etc.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: draft and loft insulation, sash window insulation, efficient gas boiler, green fuel provider, green paint, zoned heating
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: compost heap, recycling where possible
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: environmentally-friendly cleaning materials, refills for liquid soap
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: minimal use of chemicals in garden, wild flower garden, new plants chosen for benefit to bees, insects and birds
- Transport: cycling and walking where possible, care share for elderly Friends

The meeting won the Eco-Congregation Award in 2003-05. The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is a resident Warden, who lives in the attached cottage.

The meeting is accessible by public transport although bus services are limited on Sundays. There is limited parking on site (for disabled people and deliveries) and no secure parking for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There are steps at the main entrance but there is level access to the rear. The only level access into the larger meeting room is through the door in the screen. There is an accessible toilet, a hearing loop and some facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in the early 2000s and its recommendations have been implemented as far as possible.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 9 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 60 hours per week. It is used for an average of 32 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. No alcohol or political parties are permitted on the premises. Free use is granted to public services and mediation meetings, events for fundraising and exhibitions organised by Friends. Users value the meeting house for its good atmosphere, good facilities, reasonable cost, good location and welcoming warden.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There has been no heritage crime, general crime or other incidents, apart from the occasional intruder during a meeting for worship when the doors were not locked. The meeting uses Smartwater on its lead roofs. The locality is generally well-cared for, has generally low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is currently no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but the meeting might consider making contact if necessary.

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: The local meeting has currently all the facilities it needs. Changes to the two main rooms and the screen should be kept to a minimum.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building offers all the amenities currently required by its community users. Should the demand rise in future, the issue of direct level access into the main meeting room (rather than via the adjoining room) might need to be addressed.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the unlikely event of closure, a new sympathetic use would be preferable, as this is an undesignated heritage asset in a conservation area. In particular, the screen should be retained in situ.

Part 5: Category: 3