

Former Friends Meeting House, Gildencroft
(now Treehouse Children's Centre)
30 Chatham Street, Norwich, Norfolk, NR3 3DN

National Grid Reference: TG 22752 09348



Statement of Significance

The present building has medium heritage significance as a post-war rebuilding of a large and stately late seventeenth-century meeting house destroyed in the Second World War. It stands next to the Quaker burial ground for Norwich which has high heritage significance.

Evidential Value

The building is essentially a rebuilding of the 1950s, but incorporating earlier fabric and standing on the site of the earlier meeting house. The attached burial ground has been in constant use since the seventeenth century. Together they have high evidential value.

Historical Value

Although the present meeting house is of some historical interest as a reminder of its handsome seventeenth century predecessor, incorporating some re-used fabric, the chief historical importance of Gildencroft now lies in the burial ground which is of high historical value.

Aesthetic Value

The meeting house is essentially a very modest 1950s building, of low aesthetic value.

Communal Value

The former meeting house is now in permanent use as a Children's Centre, which gives it high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: Norfolk and Waveney

1.2 Property Registration Number: 2015942

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Norwich City Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Norwich*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed but locally listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Norwich City Centre*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *Meeting house originally built 1698; reconstructed on a much reduced footprint in 1958 after severe war damage; repaired in 1990 after a major fire.*

1.13 Architect(s): *Original building supervised by John Fenn and James Byars, a carpenter; 1958 reconstruction by Theodore G Scott*

1.14 Date of visit: *24 June 2014*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *unaccompanied*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *N/A*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 454–5

Norfolk HER, ref. NHER51785

Local Meeting survey by Lucy Parker, 2014

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

2.1 Historical background

The large Quaker burial ground at Gildencroft on the northern outskirts of Norwich was purchased in 1670 to serve the whole of the town and part was at once let off to produce income. In the late 1690s a new meeting house was built at the west end of the burial ground to supplement the existing meeting house in Goat Lane. The Gildencroft Meeting was a

substantial red brick two-storey building on a rectangular plan with a handsome pilastered front seven bays wide and a tall hipped roof with a flat top. It was not used continuously by the Quakers and the 1883 Ordnance Survey map shows it as a Baptist Chapel. In 1942 the meeting house was almost entirely destroyed by bombing and in 1958 a much smaller new meeting house was erected, incorporating part of the south front of the original building. After 1975 it was not used regularly by Friends and was subsequently let to the County Council and used as a day centre. In 1990 the building was gutted by fire but restored and is now leased for use as a children's centre. The burial ground has remained in continuous use since the 1670s.

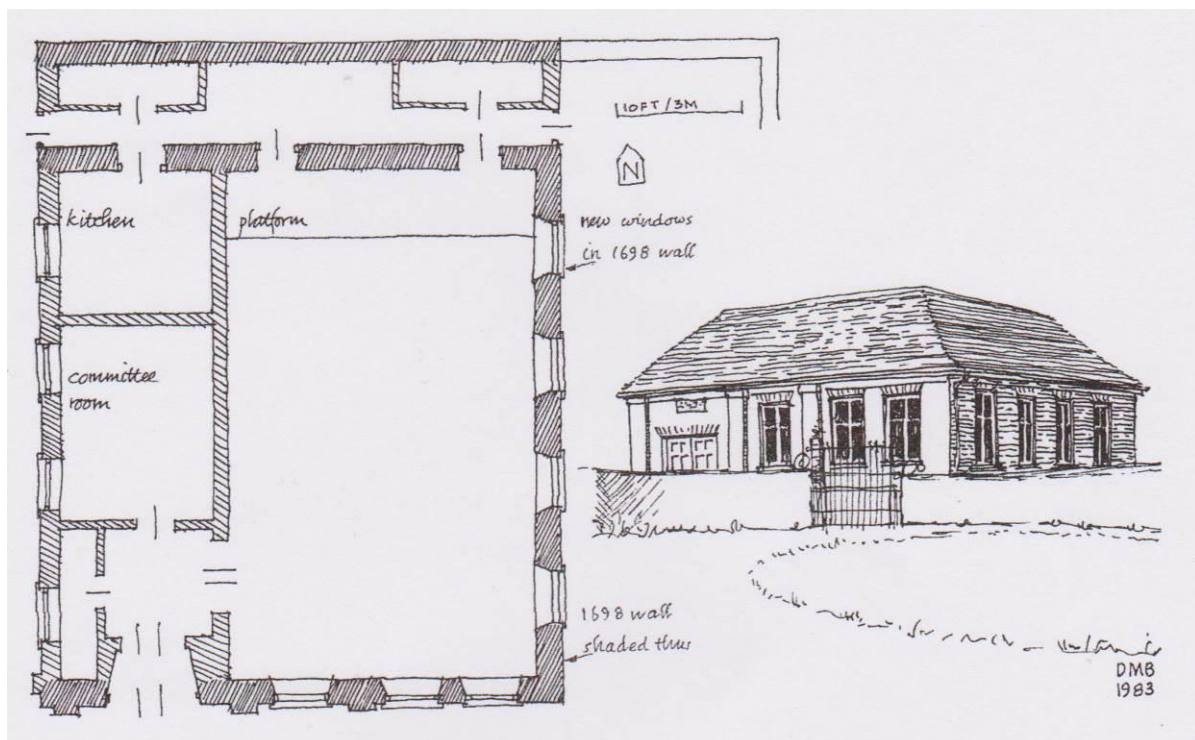


Fig. 1 Ground floor plan of the meeting house as rebuilt in 1958
(Butler (1999), vol.1, p.455)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The present building is a single-storey modern structure, erected in the late 1950s, but incorporating parts of the south and east walls and some other elements of the earlier building. The walls are of old and new red brick laid in a mixture of English and Flemish bond. The main part of the building is L-shaped, with hipped plain tile roofs, but the plan is made rectangular by a flat-roofed section behind the main ranges. The south entrance front is divided by pilasters into three unequal bays with a broad double door in the left hand (west) bay and one and two windows in the remaining bays. The door is of oak and panelled and may have been salvaged from the earlier building. Above the door is a stone tablet commemorating the rebuilding and re-opening of the meeting in 1958. The bay spacing follows that of the original building. The east wall which is part of the original fabric was originally blind apart from a doorway, but now has four rectangular window openings inserted in the 1950s. The interior was not inspected.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The interior was not inspected.

2.4 Attached burial ground

The large rectangular burial ground, first opened in 1670, extends eastwards of the former meeting house and is entered through a modern gateway next to the meeting house at the south west corner. It is fully enclosed by a brick wall, with brickwork of various types and dates, predominantly nineteenth or twentieth century, and a brick coping. A double avenue of mature lime trees has been planted on the long axis of the burial ground, terminating in an ornamental seat. There are a number of headstones, the earliest of which appear to date from the mid-nineteenth century. Plan of c1850. The burial ground is still in use.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The burial ground and former meeting house is on the northern outskirts of Norwich, just outside the A47 inner ring road. The area was described in a recent valuation survey as comprising 'low quality housing and lacklustre commercial'.

2.6 Listed status

The former meeting house is locally listed. It is not a candidate for the statutory list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

Both the meeting house site and the burial ground have high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good (on the basis of an external inspection)

ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory. This is a large burial ground and is still in use for burials. The perimeter wall appears to be in reasonable condition. The ground itself is overgrown in places but not out of control. The location of burials is recorded on a plan made in the 1850s; it is held by the Goat Lane meeting.

3.2 Maintenance

The exterior of the building appears to be in reasonable condition (interior not inspected).

3.3 Sustainability

No meetings have been held in the building for some time and the Sustainability Toolkit is not used by the present occupants.

3.4 Amenities

The building has all the usual amenities.

3.5 Access

The building is of one storey only and reasonably accessible to people with disabilities.

3.6 Community Use

The building is leased for use as a Children's Centre; this is its sole use at present.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There has been some damage to the burial ground wall and to the roof of the building, which has been reported to the police. Much of the burial ground is not overlooked; this lack of natural surveillance may encourage anti-social behaviour.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no known plans for alterations at present (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 building has not been regularly used as a place of worship since the 1970s

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the accommodation comprises one main room with ancillary spaces and facilities. It could presumably be used for both meetings for worship and other additional uses

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: the building is already effectively in full-time secular use.

Part 5: Category: 3