

Friends Meeting House, Hastings

5 South Terrace, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1SA

National Grid Reference: TQ 81787 09686



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was built in 1864-5 to a design by the Quaker architect William Beck. It was built for visiting Friends, rather than a resident meeting. It has medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built on the Great Brook Estate which was developed in the early 1860s. It has low evidential value.

Historical value

The building is a good example of a Victorian meeting house built during the mid-nineteenth-century expansion of Hastings. It has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The decorative street elevation lends the building medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is well-used by the local meeting and local community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Sussex East*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007020*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Hastings Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Hastings NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1865-66*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *William Beck*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *19 August 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Paula Radice and William Penn*
- 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. 2, pp. 603-4
Antram, N. and N. Pevsner, *Sussex: East (Buildings of England)*, 2012, p. 431
Lewes Monthly Meeting, 'Particulars of Trust Properties', 1978, typescript
Local Meeting survey by Paula Radice, August 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1833, visiting Quakers started to meet informally in the summers. Donations were collected for a prospective meeting house but the meeting ceased in 1836 and the money was returned. By 1859, visiting Friends met in a reading room, owned by the Quaker C.H. Southall. In September 1864, the current site in South Terrace was purchased by a committee of Friends 'who frequently resided at Hastings some portion of the year' (quoted in Butler). The committee's joint secretaries were Edward Smith of Sheffield and Edwin R. Ransome of London. Building work commenced in 1865 and the meeting house opened on 12 January 1866. The construction and the purchase of the site cost £1,420. The architect was William Beck (famous for the book *The London Friends' Meetings* which he published in 1869 together with T. Frederick Ball) and the builder was John Howell. While the meeting

house was already under construction, plans were changed to include a small caretaker's flat on the first floor. In 1920, the staircase was rebuilt (due to dry rot) and the first-floor flat converted into committee rooms. In 1957-9, a chimney was removed and electric heating installed. In 1969-70, the lobby was altered and extended into the meeting room to provide a library, kitchen and toilets. (The original toilets were outside, in the narrow alley to the rear of the meeting house.) According to Butler, the building at Hastings is a rare example of a meeting house built solely for visiting Friends.

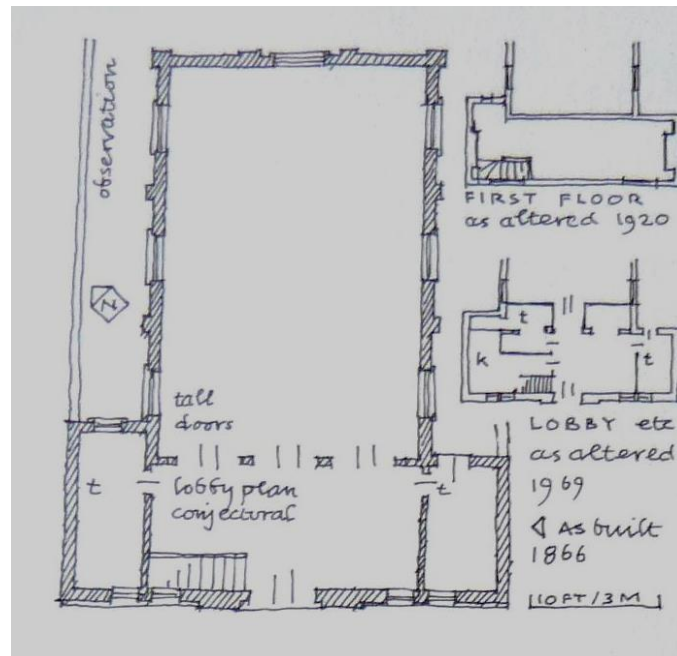


Figure 1: Plans of the meeting house as built and as altered (northwest is to the left; not to scale) (Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 604)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The main elevation faces southwest. The meeting house has a T-plan with the crossbar towards the street containing ancillary rooms on two storeys and the meeting room behind. It is a brick building with a pitched slate roof over the meeting room which is hidden behind a tall parapet towards the street. The two-storey block has lean-to roofs on either side of the main roof. The street elevation, which is stuccoed and painted, is divided into three bays. The central bay has the pedimented entrance with an egg-and-dart cornice. On either side are pairs of oblong windows with chamfered jambs. There is a sill course above the ground floor. The first floor is divided into three bays by four wall strips: The centre bay has a quatrefoil window and the flanking bays have pairs of window set into arched and chamfered openings. (The lunettes and probably the whole windows have been altered, presumably when the suspended ceiling was installed on the first floor. They may have originally looked like the windows in the side elevations.) Above is a course of billet mouldings, an entablature with a slim architrave, and the short parapet with four short, chamfered pilasters. The side elevations of the meeting room each have three arched twin windows with a small circular window in the apex between shallow brick buttresses. The rear gable has a semi-circular window in the gable which is not visible from inside the ceiled meeting room. The east corner of the building is chamfered, presumably to provide extra space for the former external toilet.

Inside, the crossbar of the plan contains a kitchen, toilets, an accessible toilet and the 1920 stair to the first floor. The meeting room is a large space with a suspended ceiling. Of the roof structure, only two chamfered tie-beams are visible whose braces are supported on uncarved corbels. There is a thick dado rail and a recently added picture rail. The lobby extension of 1969-70 projects into the meeting room. The lighting is suspended strip lighting. On the

first-floor landing is another toilet. The first-floor room (the former caretaker's flat) has a suspended ceiling and a blocked chimneybreast against the south wall whose fire surround is curiously placed off-centre.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are eight open-backed benches in the meeting room with chamfered legs.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies nearly the full extent of its plot, leaving only a narrow yard on three sides of the meeting room. It is located in the centre of Hastings, opposite the Priory Meadows shopping centre (opened 1997) which was built on the site of a cricket ground of 1864. The meeting house is flanked by Victorian houses with bay windows. Its colourful elevation makes it a highly visible and distinctive part of the streetscape. Its original cast-iron railings to the pavement were removed during the Second World War.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is currently not listed. It is a large building with an ornate Victorian elevation by a well-known Quaker architect. However, it probably falls short of the listing threshold. It would be suitable for inclusion in the Council's Local List.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was built on part of the Great Brook Estate which until its sale in 1862 was in agricultural use. The archaeological potential of the site is considered to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

3.2. Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection was undertaken by Mark Kenward of Right Surveyors Kent and South East Ltd in October 2012. Most of the recommendations have been carried out, including the repointing with lime mortar of the rear and side walls. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: use of renewable electricity, improved roof insulation, modern condensing boiler
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: use of Council recycling system where possible
- Transport: provision for secure cycle storage in the back yard

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden.

The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is no off-street parking. Bicycles can be securely stored in the back yard.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, apart from the first floor. There is level access into the building, an accessible toilet, and facilities for partially-sighted people. There is no hearing loop. In 2004, a Disability Access Audit was conducted and its recommendations have been implemented, including the provision of an accessible toilet.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 4 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 206 hours per week. It is used for an average of 40 hours per week. The meeting has a hiring policy. The aims and activities of users/hirers have to be compatible with Quaker principles. Gambling, the consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs, smoking or party political meetings are not permitted. People and groups who use the meeting house value it for its very central location, cheap hiring charges, warmth and welcome, and its easy accessibility by public transport.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There have been minor incidents of opportunistic theft at the site which have not been reported to the police. There has been no heritage crime at the site. The locality is generally well-cared for, has medium crime levels, some 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 currently no plans for any alterations 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: There are currently no heritage constraints affecting the building. It could be altered or extended if necessary, while retaining its historic character.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house has all the facilities currently required by its community users. The building could sustain further alterations if they are sympathetically managed.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the building cease to be used as a meeting house, a sympathetic reuse would be preferable to demolition.

Part 5: Category: 3