

Friends Meeting House, Herstmonceux

West End, Herstmonceux, East Sussex, BN27 4NR

National Grid Reference: TQ 63268 12676



Statement of Significance

This small meeting house was built in 1734 and extended in 1898-99. It has medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The building's fabric has the potential to reveal more information about its history and development. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

This is a small rural meeting house which has been altered and extended. It has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a small, plain building with few decorative features. Its appearance is dominated by the 1890s extension with earlier fabric hidden under render. It has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building has been used as a Quaker meeting house for most of its history. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Sussex East*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0017350*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wealden District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Herstmonceux*
- 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): *1734 and 1898-99*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*
- 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: *William Penn*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Friends' Cottage, Penn Cottage*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 605
Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in Eastern England*,
2002, p. 343
Stewart, W.C., 'Notes on Herstmonceux Meeting', undated
Lewes Monthly Meeting, 'Particulars of Trust Properties', 1978, typescript
Local Meeting survey by Susan Walton and Jean Farebrother, July 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

Butler records the existence of a meeting house by 1713, possibly at the present site. A small meeting house was built on the current site in 1734. The owner, John Hands, a surgeon and Friend, conveyed the land in 1740 for £90 to the Monthly Meeting. The meeting was discontinued in 1791 (Butler) or 1793 (Stewart) 'for want of resident members'. For the next 100 years, no regular meetings were held. In 1892, the Monthly Meeting opened negotiations with the Home Mission Committee. As a result, the meeting house was reopened the following year, initially as a mission meeting. In 1897, the meeting was recognised as a regular Meeting for Worship, Penn Cottage was built and the burial ground closed by order

of the Monthly Meeting. In 1898-99, the meeting house was extended for £150, doubling its size. (A photo taken before the extension shows the meeting house having a tile-hung gable above a brick wall with burnt headers similar to the adjacent Friends' Cottage (figure 2).)

In 1907, Friends' Cottage was enlarged. In 1945, the meeting house was altered and in 1962, Penn Cottage was converted into two flats. In 1972, a small kitchen and toilet were inserted in the meeting house lobby. In 1977, the meeting house and Friends' Cottage were re-roofed for £1,204. Friends' Cottage and Penn Cottage are now both rented out.

Today's site was acquired incrementally: The 1,000-year leasehold of the site of the meeting house, Friends' Cottage and the burial ground was acquired in 1740; the copyhold of the site in front (to the northeast) was acquired in 1818 and its freehold in 1896; the copyhold of the plot of Penn Cottage was acquired in 1841 and its freehold in 1896; and the garden for Friends' Cottage (at the rear) was given to the Society of Friends in 1972 on the death of William Dorset.

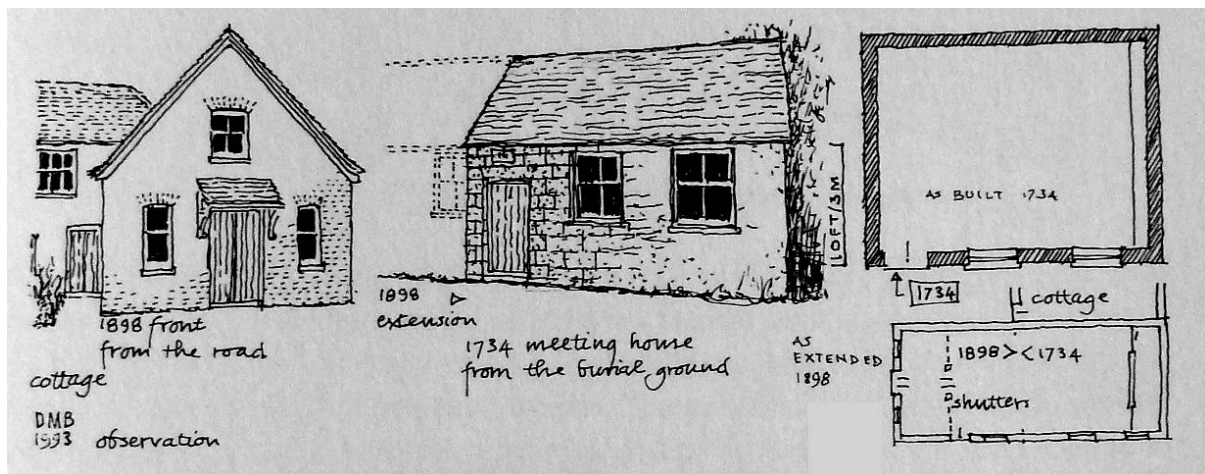


Figure 1: Elevation, perspective and plans (northeast is to the left on the plan; not to scale) (Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 605)



Figure 2: Pre-1897 photo of the meeting house without the 1898-99 extension (Herstmonceux Meeting House)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house has an oblong plan which is aligned southwest-northeast, with the street elevation facing northeast. The 1898-99 extension was built using red brick laid in stretcher bond. The brick of the older part is hidden under render to the northwest and full-height modern tile hanging on the rear (southwest) gable wall. The gable roof has modern interlocking concrete tiles. The main elevation has the main entrance under a lean-to tiled canopy, flanked by narrow plate glass sash windows under segmental heads. In the gable is a 2-over-2 sash window. All three windows have sash horns and brick sills. The southeast wall has no windows. The northwest wall has a door and a 2-over-2 sash window in the extension, with a blocked door and two similar sash windows in the rendered wall of the 1734 building. Above the blocked door is a date stone inscribed 'B*H 1734'. W.C. Stewart has interpreted the letters to refer to B. Hands, the father of John Hands who originally owned the site. Butler thought the blocked door was the original door into the meeting house (figure 1); however, the pre-1897 photo appears to depict a side door further to the rear (near the west corner), as well as what may be a door in the front gable wall (figure 2). The rear wall has another sash window in the gable.

Just inside the entrance are a toilet and a kitchen. A timber partition with clerestory windows screens them from the meeting room. The meeting room has a canted boarded ceiling with three metal ties. The side walls have dado panelling. The southeast wall has a disused door to the adjacent cottage.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are 12 open-backed benches of grained timber as well as a table with barley twist legs.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

By 1845 the burial ground had 33 recorded burials. It was closed in 1897, by then comprising 160 square yards. It is now a private garden for Friends' Cottage and has no gravestones. The garden has an outbuilding with an external.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house and the two cottages are located in a residential street with houses dating from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Penn Cottage is close to the road, while the meeting house and the attached Friends' Cottage are set further back. Penn Cottage (1897) is a two-storey brick house with a tiled roof, a tile-hung upper storey, and two bay windows. It is now divided into two flats. Friends' Cottage may date to 1734 when the meeting house was built. It is a two-storey house of brick in Flemish bond with burnt headers and a tiled roof. Its roof is gabled to the east and hipped to the west where it joins the meeting house roof. The rear elevation is tile hung as a continuation of the meeting house's rear wall.

Attached to the other side (east) of Friends' Cottage are three cottages known as Bedlam Green listed at grade II (figure 2). Friends' Cottage and the meeting house may therefore be deemed listed by attachment or as curtilage buildings.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed. It is considered to be too much altered to be eligible for listing. It would be a suitable candidate for inclusion in the Council's local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

It is not known if there was a previous building on the site. The site has high archaeological potential 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 took place in 2011. Most of the recommended works were undertaken in 2012 which included redecoration and roof repairs. The meeting uses the QIR as a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- Resource use, recycling & waste management: use of Council recycling scheme
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: implementing energy efficiency measures at the time of the next programme of works
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the garden is maintained in and environmentally friendly way.
- Transport: car share where possible

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

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has a small kitchen and toilet. There is also an outdoor toilet. These are considered inadequate by the meeting. There is no resident Warden or Friend.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is partially accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building. There is no accessible toilet, no hearing loop and no facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in May 2004 but its recommendations have not been implemented.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of about 48 hours per week. It is currently used for an hour per month. The meeting has a lettings policy (which is the standard policy provided by the Area Meeting). Users value the meeting house for its convenient location and cheap rates.

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. The locality is generally well-cared for, has 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 currently 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: There are currently no heritage constraints, although the building might be considered listed by virtue of attachment and/or curtilage. Therefore, any alterations should be carefully considered and the appropriate consents sought. The provision of better kitchen and toilet facilities might need to be addressed in the medium term.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: Community use is currently very limited and it is unknown if improvements of the facilities would increase the use by community groups.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the case of closure, a new sympathetic reuse would be preferable to demolition.

Part 5: Category: 3