

Friends Meeting House, Purley

7a Downs Court Road, Purley, London, CR8 1BE

National Grid Reference: TQ 31680 61164



Statement of Significance

An attractive Arts and Crafts design of the Edwardian period by Pepler & Allen, notable figures in the garden city movement and the development of modern town planning. Overall, the meeting house has high significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house retains much of its original fabric and character, but later alterations have reduced its value. Overall it is of medium evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house was built in 1909, and belongs to the early twentieth century suburban development of Purley. Its primary historical interest is perhaps as a design by George Pepler and Ernest G. Allen, significant figures in the garden city movement and the development of modern town planning. As such it is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is an attractive arts and crafts design, retaining many external and internal features of note, including a meeting room with scissor braced roof (comparable to that in the contemporary Adult School at Croydon). The appearance of the building has been undermined by later alterations, but overall it remains of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is used by local groups, but the nature of the site and the lack of car parking limits the scope for wider community use. It is not a prominent building in the local townscape. It is of medium communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *South London*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0010070*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts managed by Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Croydon*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Purley 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): *1909*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Pepler & Allen*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *14 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Lesley Oldmeadow and Veronica Aldous*
- 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, p. 593

Copies of 1985 plans held at meeting house

Meeting house website, <http://www.purleyquakers.org/history.php>

Website (re George Pepler), <http://strathclyde.ica-atom.org/george-pepler-papers:isad>

Local Meeting survey by Lesley Oldmeadow, June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background



Figure 1: The meeting house as newly built, c.1909 (from meeting house website)

Purley Meeting House was built in 1909, from designs by George Pepler of Pepler & Allen, at a cost of £1,600. A photograph of its original appearance is shown at figure 1 (the apparent dip in the ridge is thought to be due to the plate being moved in the camera during exposure, rather than any inherent design fault; this and the overhanging eaves almost give the impression of a thatched roof, but the building was always tiled). The main room seated 160, and had a folding screen to create a separate lobby. Butler describes the original provision for the warden as 'rather inadequate'; this part of the building was adapted and extended in 1985-8 at a cost of £60,000 (architect John Marsh of the Marsh, Eddison, Brown Partnership, London WC2, Surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting).

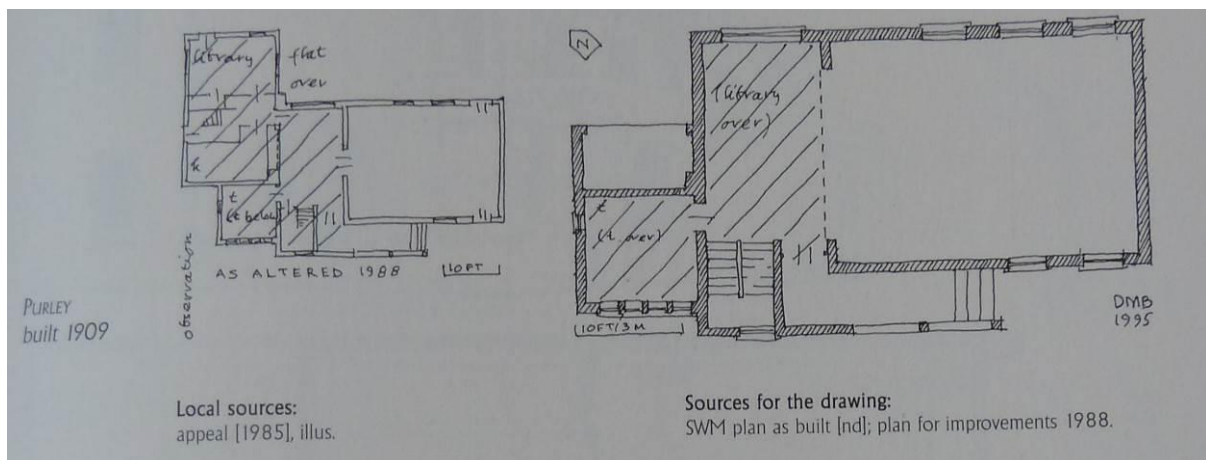


Figure 2: Plans, as altered in 1988 (not to scale), from Butler, Vol. II, p. 593

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house (plan at figure 2) was built in 1909 from designs by Pepler & Allen. It is an asymmetrical design of Arts and Crafts character, built of white painted and rendered brickwork with a plain tile roof, and with a pattern of flint diapering on the gable of the main meeting room. Cast iron rainwater goods have mostly been replaced in uPVC but two original hopper heads remain, one of them (at the front) bearing the date 1909. The windows, originally mullion and transoms with leaded casements (as shown in figure 1), have been replaced in uPVC. There is a rebuilt brick stack, originally an end stack. The sweeping roof incorporates a long dormer/clerestory on each side, both retaining their timber mullions but the windows themselves replaced, providing high level light to the meeting room. The roof continues down over a hipped porch or loggia, with short square posts. Alongside this a gable bay houses the stair to the upper floor, the window openings altered and the windows replaced, and the original weatherboarding (or possibly tile hanging) in the gable now lost. On the rear roof slope is a corresponding large triangular weatherboarded dormer, originally to the library. The warden's accommodation was altered and extended in 1988, and more recently, like the rest of the building, has had its windows replaced.

Brick and tiled steps lead up to the entrance loggia, in which is placed an oak bench and a wall-mounted board in memory of Friends of Purley Meeting. This leads into a lobby with folding timber doors which separate this space from the main meeting room. The latter is a double height space with a roof structure of scissor braced trusses with long raking struts to the perimeter posts. The bays are linked by slender purlins with plastered panels between. Long clerestory lights on either side light the roof space, while the ground floor area is lit by casement windows on either side. There is a high boarded dado around the perimeter of the meeting house space, and the floor is of woodblock. There are a number of original boarded doors, some with their iron door furniture. A smaller meeting room, kitchens and WCs give off the lobby, along with the stairs up to the warden's accommodation (not inspected).

2.3 Loose furnishings

Apart from the (chained) oak bench in the loggia no loose furnishings of note were recorded. At the entrance from Downs Court Road there is an oak framed noticeboard inscribed with the Pax symbol and text 'to the memory of our friend Ida Margaret Hayman, for many years our District Secretary, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom'.

2.4. Attached burial ground

None.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies on a steeply rising site, within a suburban residential area consisting mainly of large detached Edwardian houses, with some later blocks of flats. The open quality shown in the photograph at figure 1 no longer applies; over a century of tree growth has given the building and its neighbours a more secluded, sylvan setting. The main entrance is from Downs Court Road, where there are a couple of steps and a steep ramped approach to the meeting house. There is also a rear pedestrian entrance from Friends Road, with steps and handrail down through the densely planted garden. There is no off-street parking.

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. The meeting house is by Pepler & Allen, a partnership (from 1908) of George Pepler and Ernest G. Allen. Born in Croydon, George Pepler (1882-1959) was a Quaker, surveyor and town planner. With Raymond Unwin he was a founding member (and later twice President) of the Royal Town Planning Institute, and was closely involved with the

preparation of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. His early partnership with Allen bore fruit in new development at Hampstead Garden Suburb and Letchworth Garden City. In 1908 they won two gold medals at the Wolverhampton Model Housing Exhibition.

The meeting house is an attractive Arts and Crafts design, the main room a handsome and relatively unaltered space. Being a Quaker and coming from Croydon, Pepler would no doubt have been familiar with the Adult School at the meeting house there, built at the same time from designs by W. Curtis Green; the interior structure at Purley certainly bears similarities with this, albeit on a much smaller scale. The building retains a number of original elements, including cast iron hoppers (one dated), the entrance loggia, flint diaperwork in the gable and internal doors. If the building had survived more completely in its original form, it would probably have been a good candidate for listing. However, it has been altered, with additions to the warden's accommodation, loss of weatherboard/tile hanging in the front gable and replacement of the mullion and transom leaded casements with uPVC windows. These alterations may mean that the building is no longer listable. At the least it would merit inclusion in a local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

None known.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

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

3.2. Maintenance

The most recent inspection report (2015) has identified a number of repairs, some pressing (localised tile repointing/replacement) and others routine (gutter clearance). The number of surrounding trees means that clearing the gutters and keeping the paths clear is a constant priority.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. The questionnaire does not report any measures to improve energy efficiency, although it can be noted that double glazing has been installed. Recycling of waste and car sharing helps to reduce environmental impact (the latter is also necessitated by the absence of on-site car parking).

3.4. Amenities

There is a meeting room, kitchen and WCs. Warden's accommodation is on the first floor. The meeting considers that it has all the facilities it needs.

3.5. Access

No disability audit has been carried out. The building is not accessible for wheelchair users; there are steps and a steep ramp at the entrance from the street, and a further set of steps to the meeting house porch/loggia. The topography of the site means that there is no obvious or easy solution to this. Because the building is not wheelchair accessible, it has not been found necessary to make the WC accessible to wheelchair users. There is a hearing loop.

3.6 Community Use

The building is used by the meeting for four hours a week. The two rooms are let for about twenty hours a week out of a possible eighty-four. There is a lettings policy; users have to be charities, or engaged in activities commensurate with Quaker values. Users value the buildings because it is peaceful, warm and reasonably priced. The lack of parking facilities and access issues are likely to hinder more extensive letting.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reported incidents of heritage crime or antisocial behaviour. The area is affluent, with no obvious signs of deprivation.

3.8. Plans for change

None at present.

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 offers a series of flexible spaces which meet the needs of the meeting. It is desirable that the remaining historic features and finishes, internal and external, should be respected. There are no loose internal furnishings of particular note.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building and its facilities already lends themselves to a certain level of extended use, but as stated above, this is (and is likely to remain) constrained by access and parking issues.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building is of at least local architectural and historic interest, and in the event of closure it is desirable that an alternative use should be found. The character of the building and site, and its location, would suggest a residential use. It is desirable that this should avoid major subdivision of the space of the main meeting room.

Part 5: Category: 2