

Friends Meeting House, Watford

150 Church Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD17 4QB

National Grid Reference: TQ 10333 97876



Statement of Significance

A small modernist meeting house of the 1950s by Hubert Lidbetter which has been much altered with later additions, though the original meeting room survives. The building is of low heritage value.

Evidential value

The meeting house dates from 1953 and is of low evidential value because it has little potential to yield evidence for human activity in the more remote past.

Historical value

The Watford meeting was established at this location in 1953. The building and site have low historical value.

Aesthetic value

The original design by Hubert Lidbetter has been virtually submerged in later additions, though the original meeting room survives. It is a pleasant space, but as a whole the building is of low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building has been in continuous use by Quakers and other local community groups for over sixty years and is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Luton & Leighton*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005410*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Watford Borough Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Watford NPA*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *None*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1953; upper floor added 1970; fore-building added 2004*

1.13 Architect (s): *Hubert Lidbetter, upper floor by Norman V Hyde; fore-building by Terence Williams*

1.14 Date of visit: *29 September 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Evelyn van Dyk*

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.1, p.268

Wilkins, B. (ed) (*Mostly*) *After the Tin Hut: In our own words, a History of Watford Quaker Meeting* (2011)

The Friend 1903, p.772

Local Meeting survey by Evelyn van Dyk, June 2015

Local meeting archives

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

2.1. Historical background

A meeting house built by Quakers in Watford was in regular use by 1682 but the meeting was discontinued in 1764. A temporary iron room was erected in 1903 on land acquired for the purpose but a different site was purchased in 1947 for the building of a larger meeting house, which was opened in 1953. This was a single storey, flat-roofed building, designed to accommodate the addition of projecting wings on either side if required and reinforced to take the weight of an upper floor at some later date. An upper floor was added in 1970 and a

new single-storey fore-building was added in 2004 but neither followed the design that Lidbetter had prepared. These additions have almost completely obscured the original 1950s structure.

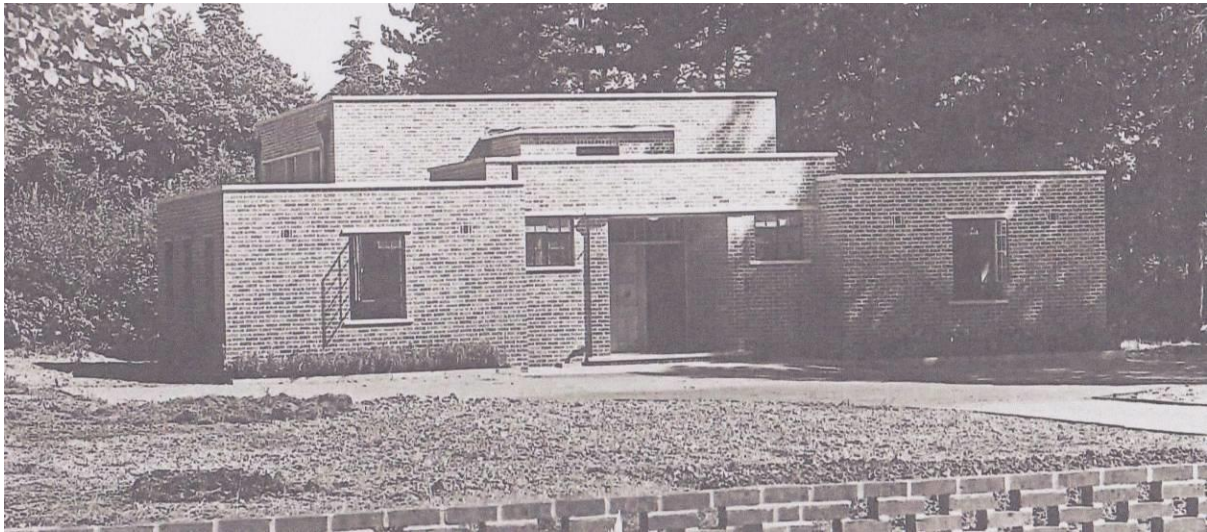


Fig. 1 The new meeting house in 1953 (Local Meeting archives)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

Hubert Lidbetter's 1953 building, shown in fig.1 above was a single-storey flat-roofed red brick building designed in a 'modernist' style. A tall square meeting room was placed behind a lower range containing an entrance lobby flanked by toilets and smaller rooms. Apparently Lidbetter prepared designs for an upper storey to be added later, but the commission was given instead to Norman Hyde, who in the 1970s added a new upper storey over the front range containing a warden's flat. The addition had red brick walls and a pitched roof. A second pitched roof was later added over the meeting room. Both the 1970s roofs are covered in concrete tiles.

Lidbetter was a classicist and his original plan was strictly symmetrical. The most recent addition to the meeting breaks this symmetry and consists of a single-storey fore-building across the original main front, faced in render rather than brick and with two canted sides breaking forward from the centre at different angles. At the rear of the building Lidbetter's original meeting room can still be discerned, with its double height elevations, though a small flat-roofed addition now obscures part of the east side.

Inside the meeting house, the original 1950s meeting room remains virtually unaltered, with a wood-block floor and plain plastered walls articulated by pilaster strips of white brick. The same brick is used for the surrounds of the two internal doorways which originally led to an inner lobby. Elsewhere on the ground floor the original plan has been somewhat altered.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are some timber benches in the meeting room which are probably of late nineteenth or early twentieth century date. Apparently they come from the previous Watford meeting house in Derby Road.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

N/a

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a generous site in a twentieth century suburb north of the centre of Watford.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed. The original 1953 building has been very considerably altered and is not a candidate for the statutory list or the local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The building was erected on a greenfield site and has low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/a

3.2. Maintenance

There has been no recent quinquennial inspection. The Premises Committee make an annual inspection in accordance with Trustees requirements. The meeting has adequate funds to cover the costs of maintenance and repair. The meeting does not have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan, but there is an annual maintenance and repair schedule which is updated at the annual inspection.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- The building is fully double-glazed and both roof and walls are insulated
- Solar panels have been installed
- Where possible, all waste is recycled

The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate and would not consider obtaining one.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house - a good-sized kitchen, separate ladies and gents toilets and a large meeting room. There is a resident warden, whose accommodation is on the first floor of the meeting house.

There is reasonable public transport, although the bus service operates on weekdays only. There are 12 car spaces (2 designated disabled) and secure storage for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building, an accessible WC, a hearing loop in the main meeting room and facilities for partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for about 11 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 234 hours per week and is used for approximately 39 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy and is not let for political parties' promotional activities. Quaker-led groups are allowed to use the meeting house for free. Users value the good location, on-site parking, neutral environment and well-maintained and comfortable spaces

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been no heritage crime and there are no signs of general crime at the site. In the last seven years, two bicycles have been stolen and the wire boundary fence damaged. The locality is generally well cared-for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team at present, but maybe in the future if the need arises.

3.8. Plans for change

There are currently no plans for change.

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 has already been considerable change to the original building to provide additional facilities. There is probably scope for further change if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: as in (i) above, there has already been considerable change to the original building to provide additional facilities. There is probably scope for further change if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could doubtless find another use.

Part 5: Category: 3