

Friends Meeting House, Wells-next-the-Sea

Quaker Yard, Church Street, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, NR23 1HZ

National Grid Reference: TF 91978 43092



Statement of Significance

The building has high significance as a small late Georgian meeting house on an earlier Quaker site, which was extended in the early twentieth century. The heritage value of the building now lies principally in the exterior, as internal alterations in 1983 resulted in the loss of the aesthetic and historical value of the interior.

Evidential Value

The building stands on the site of an earlier meeting house which existed in 1697; the burial ground also came into use in the 1690s. The present mid-Georgian building has been altered and extended but there may be traces of early fabric both above and below ground. The building and site has some evidential value.

Historical Value

As evidence of Quaker heritage in Wells extending over three hundred years, the meeting house has high historical value.

Aesthetic Value

The older part of the building with its brick and flint walls has picturesque qualities, while the newer part is more institutional in character. The 1983 works eroded the character of the interior. The building has medium aesthetic value.

Communal Value

During its history the building has served several functions, as a place of worship, as a mission hall and more recently as a meeting place for the wider local community. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Norfolk and Waveney*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0011870*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *North Norfolk District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Wells-next-the-Sea*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1230509*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Wells*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1783, 1913*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *original builders not known; 1983 internal alterations by Peter Codling*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *27 June 2014*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Mary Cundy*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *adjacent cottages, which apparently belong to the meeting, and a large timber shed in the garden to the north of the burial ground*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 459–60
Local Meeting survey by the Wells Meeting Premises Committee, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

The earliest meeting house in Wells was acquired in 1697, with a surrounding burial ground, which was acquired in 1699. This first building was replaced by the existing building on the same site in 1783 (date on building). Immediately to the west was the parish workhouse. The meeting closed in 1882 and the building was used for a time by a Seamen's Mission. It was re-opened in 1903 as a Mission Meeting, for which an extension was added towards the road in 1913 to provide a larger meeting space which could be divided by a folding screen, together with small additions on the east and north sides for a porch and kitchen. Significant internal alterations were made in 1983 to provide a lettable upper storey in the older building and the ground floor was also subdivided by new walls to allow for the provision of modern amenities. The whole building was re-roofed in 2006.

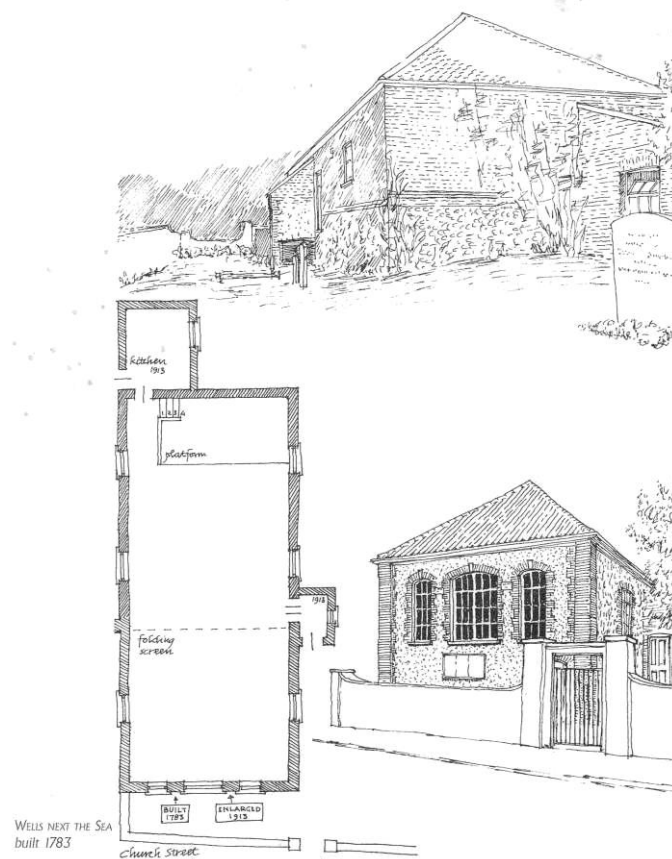


Fig.1; Front and rear views of the meeting house and the ground floor plan in 1981, before the internal alterations of 1983 (Butler (1999), vol.1, p.460). North is at the top.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The building is rectangular on plan, built with the south end to Church Street. The older northern part has walls of red brick laid in English bond, on a brick and flint base, with a brick on edge cornice. The 1913 southern part has walls of carrstone with red brick dressings. Both phases are below one roof, hipped at both ends and covered in blue pantiles. The Church Street elevation is three bays wide with large segment-headed windows, the

central window wider than those on either side. On the east side elevation are various sash windows of different sizes and set at different heights, with a small central projecting porch up steps set across the join between the two phases of building. The west elevation has similar fenestration, with a window lighting a basement below the south end. The north wall is blind.

The interior is now almost wholly of 1983, with flush doors and other fittings from this date. The meeting space occupies its original position at the north end of the building but appears to have no surviving early fittings. A small room has been formed at the south end next the street and there is a lobby with kitchen and toilet facilities in the space between the two rooms.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room has no early fittings.

2.4 Attached burial ground

There is a burial ground on the north and west sides of the building, laid out as a garden. Presumably the 1913 extension is built on what was once part of the burial ground. There are several small headstones of which the earliest, to Phoebe Lesley, dates from 1840. The burial ground is still in use for the interment of ashes only. Records of burials since 1840 are kept by the meeting.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house building fronts onto Church Street, once known as Workhouse Street, which runs at right-angles to the old High Street, which is itself some way inland from the Quay. The road was formerly the principal east/west route through Wells. The space between the building and the street is enclosed by a red brick boundary wall with brown brick gate-piers. West of the meeting house towards the parish church the road is lined with modest cottages; eastwards it is lined with mostly twentieth century houses. There is said to be a detached burial ground at Fakenham, at one time the private property of the Peckover family (NGR: TF 92189 29514). See also Butler (op.cit.). Wells is an area of low-waged employment and high property prices, the latter due to its popularity for the second-home market.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house was listed grade II in 1974; since then the alteration of the interior space took place in 1983. This seems regrettable, but the space may already have been compromised by previous alterations. The list entry is very brief and would benefit from amplification.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The original use of the site is not known, but it has been in almost continuous use by the Quakers since the late seventeenth century and there are also burials from this period. The site has at least medium archaeological potential, depending on the degree of disturbance to below-ground archaeology.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory. The burial ground is regularly maintained as a garden with beds of flowers along the side walls, and a lawn.

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in 2006. Since that time the building has been re-roofed and various internal health and safety issues attended to. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. The rolling maintenance and repair programme is reviewed annually.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting has used the Sustainability Toolkit in the past, but not recently.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: new electric heaters, new roof insulation in 2006, energy-efficient lightbulbs
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: waste is collected for composting. Use of the green bin collection and nearby recycling centre
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: eco-friendly paint now used for all refurbishment
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: considered in garden management
- Transport: Friends share cars whenever possible. Some make great efforts to use local buses, or to cycle, or to walk.

There is no Energy Performance Certificate but the meeting might consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

All the required amenities are in the meeting house. There is a resident warden whose accommodation is separate from the meeting house. The meeting house is accessible by a local bus route. There is no on-site car parking. There are spaces for bikes.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is not fully accessible. There is a hearing loop but no level access, no wheelchair accessible WC or facilities for the partially sighted.

3.6 Community use

Friends use the meeting house for about 6 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 80 hours per week. It is used for an average of 10-12 hours per week. The meeting house gallery flat and the chalet in the garden are well-used for holiday lets. There is no set lettings policy. Unusual requests are considered by the Meeting's Business Meeting. Charging is at the discretion of the warden. Users value the meeting house for its welcoming and quiet atmosphere and the fairly priced room lettings and holiday accommodation.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has generally low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime recorded at the site. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Police Team.

3.8 Plans for change

There are currently (2015) no plans for 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: the original worship space has already been altered. There is probably scope for further change, subject to statutory constraints.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: part of the building is already used for other functions besides worship

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: the listed building could be adapted to serve a wholly secular use if required, provided the exterior and the burial ground still being in use are respected.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1230509

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, CHURCH STREET

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Norfolk	North Norfolk District Authority		Wells-Next-the-Sea

Grade: II

Date first listed: 13-Jun-1972

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

1793 CHURCH STREET (North Side) Friends Meeting House TF 9143 615/3/62 II

1783 altered and with 1913 extension. Red brick, with part flint. Pantile roof o Casements with glazing bars, and segmental heads. Toothed eaves. Chamfered plinth.

Listing NGR: TF9197843092