

Quaker Meeting House, Welwyn Garden City

109 Handside Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6SP

National Grid Reference: TL 23149 12617



Statement of Significance

As first built in 1926 to the designs of H. Clapham Lander, an architect prominent in the Garden City movement, the meeting house was a simple and pleasing building but it has been very considerably enlarged in a way which has obscured much of its original character, although the original meeting room survives. The meeting house is of low to medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The meeting house dates from 1925/6 and is of low evidential value because it has little potential to yield evidence human activity in the more remote past.

Historical value

The building was erected on a new site to serve a new meeting and in itself is of low historical value.

Aesthetic value

H. Clapham Lander's original design was simple and not without appeal, but his building has been swamped by later additions which make the whole of low aesthetic value. The meeting room alone is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

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

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Hertford & Hitchin*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0001790*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting Trustees*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Welwyn Hatfield Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Welwyn NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Welwyn Garden City*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1925/6; additions in 1938 and 1968*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *H. Clapham Lander; 1968 additions by Paul V. Mauger*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *30 October 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Adam Coole*
- 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.269
Hertfordshire HER, ID no. 30886
Local Meeting survey by Adam Coole, May 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The Friends' Meeting House is part of the original development of the second Garden City which was founded in 1920. Development of Welwyn Garden City continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The 1923 OS map shows the site of the meeting house as a field; the 1928 map shows the meeting house surrounded by new residential streets. The site was purchased in 1924 and the building erected in 1926 to the designs of the architect H. Clapham Lander, a Fabian and an associate of Ebenezer Howard. Since then a number of alterations and extensions have been made. The Marsden Room was added in 1938. In 1968 two classrooms were added and a warden's flat was formed in a new upper storey across the front of the building. The architect for this work was Paul V. Mauger. The ground floor of the building has just (2015) been completely refurbished. The architects for the work were Kyle Smart Associates.

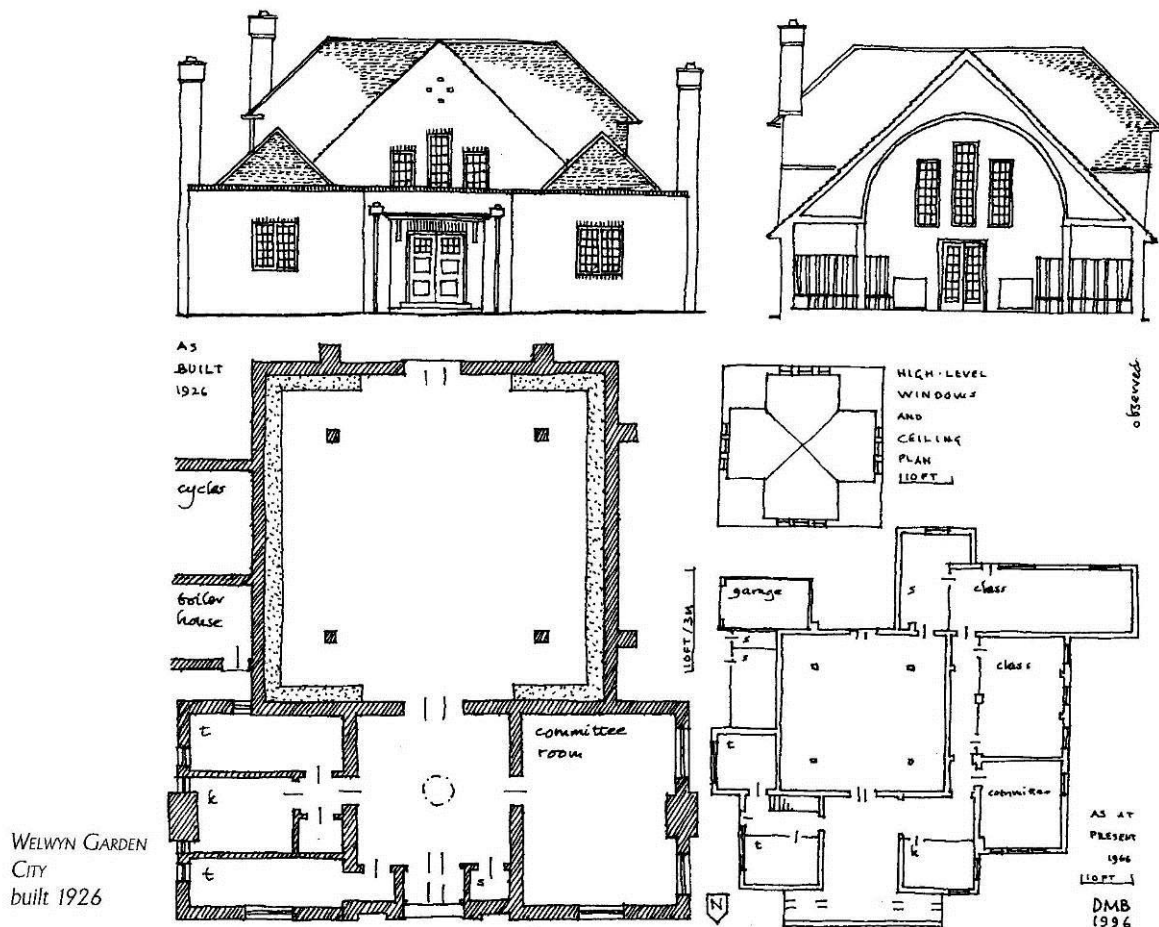


Fig.1 The original main front and a section through the meeting room, with the original ground floor plan and a plan showing the enlargement by the mid 1990s. *Butler vol.1 p.269* (Butler's compass direction is wrong: north is to the left of the plans)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

Lander's original meeting house (fig.1) was a vaguely Arts & Crafts vernacular style building comprising a large square meeting room with a lower fore-building containing toilets, a small kitchen and a small meeting room either side of an entrance lobby. As a result of later alterations, in particular the addition in 1968 of a tall pitched roof over the fore-building to contain a warden's flat, and the replacement of most of the original small-paned windows, the original character of the building has largely been lost.

The whole building is faced in red brick; the older brickwork is laid in Flemish bond, the later brickwork is in Flemish Garden Wall bond (three stretchers to one header in each course). The roofs are covered in tiles. The main (west) front towards the road is entirely post war and has a single storey under a tall pitched roof with a wide central gable. On the ground floor are French windows flanked by two further windows each side. In the gable above are three segment-headed windows. The end-gables of this front ridge are partly tile-hung and have long strip windows. Both the north and south side elevations have single-storey additions. On the north side are garages, on the south side a large flat-roofed meeting room. Rising behind these additions are the half-hipped gables of the original meeting house, both with stepped triple windows. The east gable is unhipped but has similar windows. Inside the building, the original layout of the fore-building has been considerably altered, but the original meeting room has survived virtually intact. It has a plaster cross-

vaulted plaster ceiling, with the vaults brought down onto timber corner posts with arched openings between them. The side walls have a panelled timber dado and a continuous fixed bench. Butler notes that the meeting room had some acoustic problems, and there is a notice in the room about the Ecophon acoustic tiling which was installed in 1966.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of heritage interest.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house fronts onto Handside Lane, an old road which was incorporated into the garden city. The 1920s houses, mostly two-storey, are set back behind broad grass verges, with plenty of mature trees. Next to the meeting house is an old timber framed barn which has been converted into a theatre.

2.6. Listed status

The building has been much altered and is not a category for the statutory list, or the local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was built on a greenfield site and the archaeological potential is 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 most recent quinquennial inspection was in June 2010 and was carried out by the architects Anderson, Wilde & Harris. A complete refurbishment of the building has just been carried out. The meeting has enough money to cover the costs of maintenance and repair. The meeting has an annual maintenance schedule.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- high efficiency radiators and water heaters have been installed, with additional insulation.
- dedicated recycling bins are provided
- only eco-friendly cleaning products are used.

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

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house. There are three meeting spaces of various sizes, a large servery (rather than a kitchen) and a unisex toilet area. There is a resident warden.

There is good public transport, with a bus stop opposite and a main line railway station 10 minutes walk away. A shared council car park is located adjacent to the Meeting House and parking is allowed on the road on Sundays.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. New signs are to be provided which will assist partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit but access was a key part of the recent refurbishment.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for approximately 6 hours per week. The building has three meeting spaces which are available for lettings for a maximum number of 220 hours per week and are used on average for 58 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy and hiring of the building is restricted to the following activities: Religious; Educational; Recreational; Cultural; Charitable; Historical; Humanities; Philosophical. Users value the location, parking and high quality of the facilities.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no current signs of general crime at the site, but there has been some heritage crime. A metal statue was taken from the garden two year ago. The theft was reported to the Police but the statue was not traced. The locality is generally well cared-for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. Friends have developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

There are 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: the meeting house has all the facilities it currently needs and has just been refurbished. There is scope for further change, if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house is already well-used by community groups and the level of use will probably increase as a result of the refurbishment. There is scope for further change, if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: if the meeting was laid down, the building could readily serve a wholly secular use.

Part 5: Category: 3