

Friends Meeting House, St Albans

Neil Burton, The Architectural History Practice

This report forms part of the Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage Project (2014–16), which was commissioned by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and Historic England as part of HE's *Taking Stock* programme. The aim of the project is to assess the significance of the buildings and their vulnerability to change, which will inform their future management. The reports were prepared by the Architectural History Practice and the copyright for the reports is held by the Religious Society of Friends.

Friends Meeting House, St Albans

7 Upper Lattimore Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3UD

National Grid Reference: TL 15199 07181



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a small former schoolroom of the 1890s with mid and later twentieth century additions. It has medium heritage value for the former schoolroom.

Evidential value

The former schoolroom, the oldest part of the building, has been considerably altered, but still has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is a relatively recent building, but is associated with a strong Quaker tradition in St Albans dating back to the 1670s. This gives it a medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The schoolroom is a very simple structure and the later additions are also modest. The building has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been used by Quakers and other local groups since the 1930s and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Luton & Leighton*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0012370*
- 1.3 Owner: *Information not supplied*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *St Albans City and District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *St Albans NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Locally listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *St Albans*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c1895, enlarged 1957 and 1995*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *original architect not known; minor alterations 1937 by Hubert Lidbetter; 1957 additions by Paul V Mauger (local meeting survey says Patrick Wilson); 1995 additions by Donald Insall Associates*
- 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: *Mark Percival*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial ground in Victoria Street*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1 pp.264-5
Crellin, Clifford, *Where God had a People; Quakers in St Albans over Three Hundred Years*
(1999)
Local Meeting survey by William Randles, July 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

A site in Dagnall Lane was purchased in 1672 and a small meeting house built there. Land in Longback or Longbutt Lane (now Lattimore Road) was acquired in 1676 for use as a burial ground. The Dagnall Lane site was enlarged in 1721 and a new meeting house built facing Spencer Street, with space for burials behind. The meeting closed in 1830 and the building was sold and converted into a school, but replaced by a new school building in 1846. The St Albans meeting revived after 1900. A small former schoolroom in Upper Lattimore Road built c1895 was bought in 1910 for use as a meeting house seating about 50 people. It was

slightly altered in 1937, the bay window on the main elevation was removed and buttresses added on the long south wall. A new meeting room designed by Paul V Mauger was built alongside in 1957, leaving the old chapel as a classroom. Further improvements were made in 1981 and again in 1995 when a new larger entrance lobby was built.

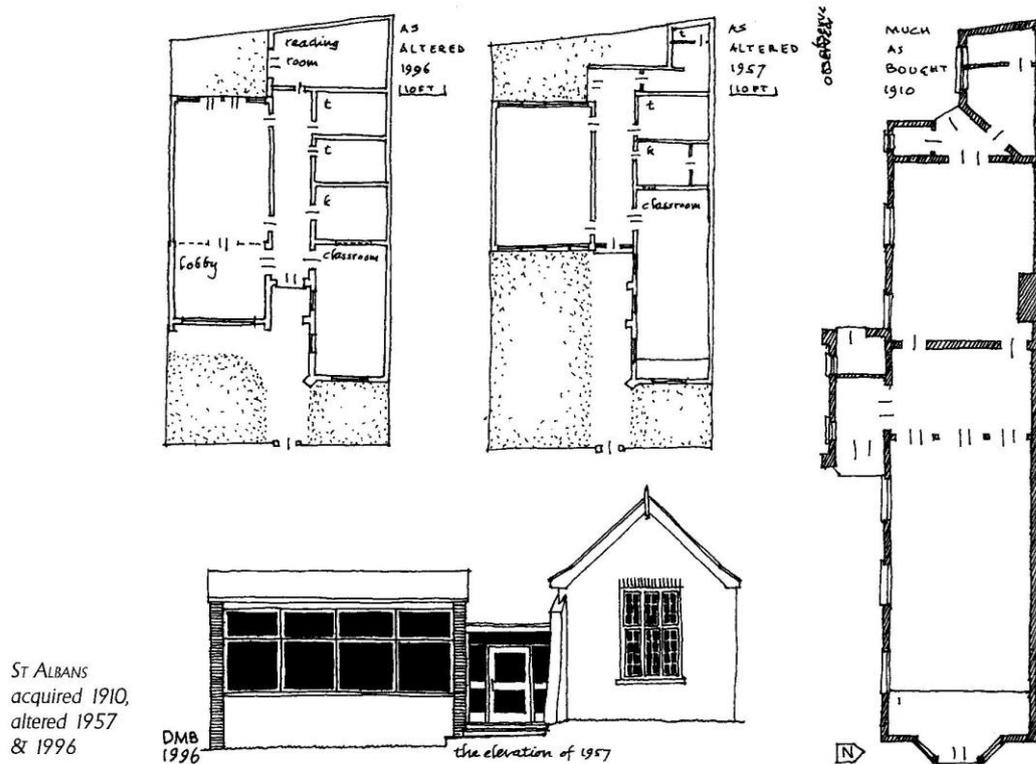


Fig.1 The evolving ground plan of the meeting house and a perspective view of the present front elevation, from *Butler*, vol.1, p.265

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The original 1890s school building is a single range with its gable end to the street. The walls are of red brick laid in Flemish bond, the roof is covered in slate. The later additions also have walls of red brick and a mixture of flat and broad shallow-pitched roofs. The meeting room is a simple rectangular space, lit by a strip clerestory on the rear (west) wall and with folding glazed doors to the lobby added in the 1990s.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of old wooden benches in the meeting room.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is situated on the eastern edge of central St Albans and fronts a road lined with substantial late nineteenth century houses. One detached burial ground in Victoria Street (Grid.ref. TL 14927 07209) is maintained by the local Council. Others identified by Butler are not maintained and are partly built-over.

The former British School building in Spencer Street built on the site of the 1721 meeting house survives, now converted to offices. Behind is a small car park on part of the original attached burial ground. Butler records that both the Longbutt Lane and Spencer Street burial grounds were still in possession in 1903 (Butler, vol.1 p.265).

2.6. Listed status

The building is not considered to be a candidate for the statutory list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house is on the outskirts of St Albans in an area which was open fields until the late nineteenth century, so the archaeological potential is low.