

Friends Meeting House, Chichester

Priory Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1NX

National Grid Reference: SU 86336 04997



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was built in 1967 on the site of a meeting house of 1700. Part of the original burial ground survives on the site. The building has low heritage value.

Evidential value

The meeting house is a modern building with low evidential value.

Historical value

The building has medium historical value which is chiefly due to the association of the site with the previous meeting house and over 300 years of Quaker presence.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house was designed in an idiom typical of its time which was also influenced by planning restrictions. It has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is well used by the local Quakers and local community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Sussex West*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005610*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Chichester District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*

1.6 Civil parish: *Chichester*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Chichester*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1967*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *John Welland*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *18 August 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Simon Kitchin, Michael Woolley*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial ground at the Hornet, Chichester*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:
- Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 601-2
Chichester District HER, Event Report, Excavation at Friars Gate (Event ID 536)
Chichester District HER, Monument Report, Meeting House and Burial Ground at The
Hornet, Chichester (HER Number CD9977)
Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, pp. 17, 20, 24
Plans in Chichester Meeting House archive
Woolley, M., *The Quakers in Chichester 1655-1967*, fourth edition, 2006
<http://michaelwoolley.weebly.com/>
Local Meeting survey by Simon Kitchin, June 2015
Information from David Tregear, October 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The current meeting house is the third meeting house in Chichester and the second on the present site. George Fox visited Chichester in 1655 and from the late 1650s to the mid-1680s meetings were held in private houses. In 1672 (Butler: 1673) several Quakers leased a piece of land in the street called The Hornet for use as a burial ground. (The freehold was acquired in 1931.) By 1683, a building was rented nearby and used as a meeting house. The freehold was purchased in 1687. In 1700, the building was sold and a new meeting house was built on the present site in Priory Road which also included a burial ground. The meeting house closed in 1908 due to lack of members. It was briefly reopened in 1928, and in 1930 repairs were undertaken and gas lighting installed. In 1940 the meeting was re-established and Hubert Lidbetter advised on repairs in the late 1940s. By the 1960s, the meeting was growing rapidly and the old building was no longer sufficient. Planning permission for initial plans of 1962 for improvements was refused. After several new schemes and further refusals, the proposal for a new building by John Welland was given permission in May 1966. (The drawings are by Tecnic, architects and town planners, of Bognor Regis and London.) Construction began in February 1967 and the new meeting house opened in November that year. The builder was Robert Heasman, a Friend, and the overall cost was £15,000. (David Butler suggested that two walls (east and south) were retained from the old meeting house (see figure 1). This cannot be easily verified. However, it seems unlikely that any eighteenth-century fabric was kept. Butler's statement may have been based on the 1966 drawing by Tecnic which labelled adjoining walls as 'existing'.)

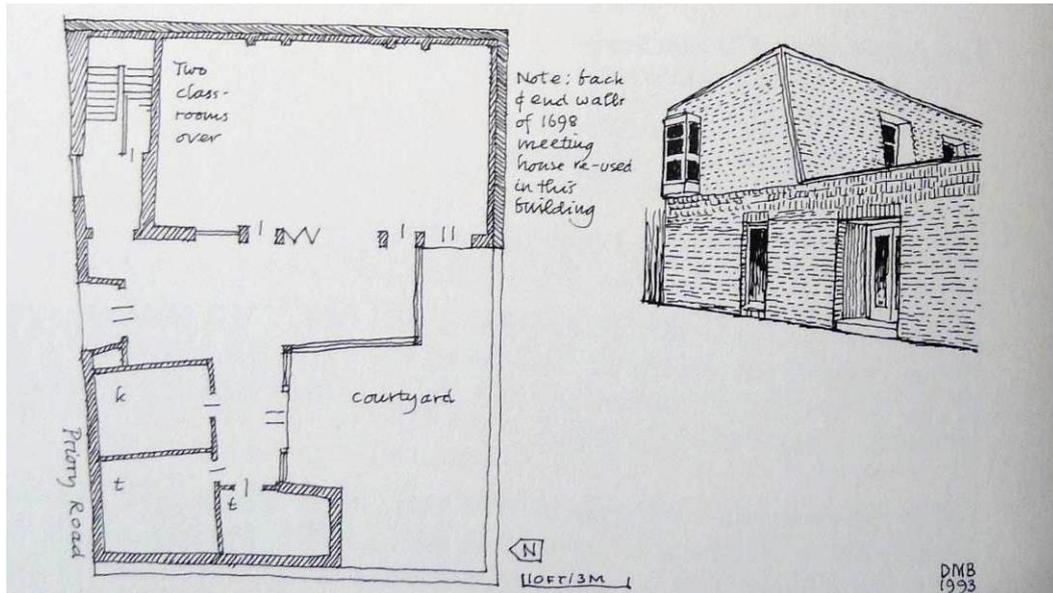


Figure 1: Plan and perspective of the current meeting house (North is to the left, not to scale) (Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 602)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The street elevation is to the north; the meeting room is aligned roughly north-south.

The meeting house was built in 1967 to designs by John Welland on the site of the previous meeting house of 1700. The plot is roughly oblong with a two-storey block to the east and a single storey range along the north. A small courtyard is in the southwest corner of the site. The walls are faced in brown bricks in stretcher bond; the walls to the street have a band of three soldier courses above ground-floor level. The two-storey block has a copper sheet roof and its slanting upper west wall is tile-hung. Due to planning requirements, the street elevation replicates the basic appearance of the predecessor building with a largely windowless brick wall to the street and the entrance beside the taller block. The latter has one ground-floor glazed door and a first-floor oriel window. To the west are three recessed dormer windows, lighting the first-floor room. The courtyard elevations are glazed UPVC units.

The entrance leads into a lobby with the kitchen and toilets to the west. The meeting room at the east is a plain oblong room lit by windows and clerestory windows to the west. There are two doors into the lobby. The ceiling has acoustic tiles and the floor is of woodblock. The east wall is timber panelled. The staircase to the north of the meeting room leads up to the first floor which has a large room, a smaller room and a small kitchen.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There is one open-backed bench (painted white) from the old meeting house. (Two others are at the meeting house at Brighton (*qv*) and one at Stansted House.) The seating in the meeting room includes elegant interlocking timber chairs of 1967 with black seats and back cushions. Matching chairs with armrests have been added since.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The site of the historic burial ground is partially under the lobby of the current building and partially below the small paved courtyard. During the 1960s construction work, about 20 burials were found in brick-built tombs and all were reinterred in the courtyard. None of the graves is marked and the site is no longer used for burials. In about 2005, a small strip of

land to the south was sold to the neighbour and a raised flower bed was established alongside.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located within the historic centre of Chichester, within the Roman walls and within a conservation area. It overlooks Priory Park, the site of the former Norman castle and the historic Guildhall (a remnant of a Franciscan friary). The Park is now a public park with a cricket pitch. The adjacent Friars' Gate house is a grade II*-listed building. The brick elevation of the meeting house visually continues the line of its brick and flint boundary wall.

There is a small detached burial ground in The Hornet (SU 86865 04805) which is now landscaped as a garden. The freehold belongs to the Quakers and it is let to the District Council.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site may have been originally a cockpit attached to what is now known as Friars' Gate (formerly Cockpit House). The current meeting house was built on the site of the meeting house of 1700 and its attached burial ground. While construction may have destroyed most of the below-ground archaeology the site still has high archaeological potential. In 1987-88, an excavation took place nearby at the corner of East Walls and Priory Road which found Roman ditches and the remains of a medieval building with a cellar or undercroft.