

Friends Meeting House, Dorking

Butter Hill, South Street, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2LE

National Grid Reference: TQ 16447 49252



Statement of Significance

A meeting house of 1846 with an attached cottage and several extensions. The most significance feature is the unusual vertical sliding partition. Overall, the building has medium significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house has the potential to reveal further information about its development and use. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is one of probably only two in England with a vertical sliding partition. This lends the building high historical value.

Aesthetic value

Despite the extensions, the character of the original exterior is still discernible. Inside, the screen and the main meeting room are of particular aesthetic interest. The building has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

As a Quaker meeting house which is also in regular use by the local community, the building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *West Weald*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0020090*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Mole Valley District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Dorking NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Dorking*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1846*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Su Johnston and Keith Poulton*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 586-7

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in Eastern England*, 2002, p. 321

'Friends Meeting House, Dorking', leaflet

John Day, 'A vertically sliding partition at Dorking Friends' Meeting House', *Surrey History*, volume V, no. 2, pp. 94-98 and no. 3, p. 156

Information from Colin Gerard, October 2015

Local Meeting survey by Su Johnston, June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1704 meetings were held at the house of Friend Resta Patching. Five years later he gave a plot in West Street on which a meeting house was built for £161 which opened the same year. It included a dwelling which was separated by shutters from the meeting room. This building was let in 1746 for use as school and lecture room. In 1825, Joseph John Gurney, the eminent Quaker minister (and brother of Elizabeth Fry), visited Dorking and the floor of the meeting house reputedly collapsed under the weight of the assembled crowds. It was sold in

1852 for £420. A new site was acquired in 1846 on Butter Hill for £300, for use as a burial ground and for the construction of a meeting house. A new meeting house and attached dwelling were built that year for £1,200. The meeting house contains a rare vertically-sliding partition whose top half is winched into the roof space while the bottom half goes into a pit below the floor. Similar examples are said to be found at the meeting houses in Gloucester (1834-5, Samuel Daukes) and in Darlington (front block of 1839-40, meeting room of 1846). The meeting house at Darlington also has a similar porch with columns in antis and the same architect may have been involved at both sites. Repairs and alterations were made in 1959, 1960s (leaflet: 1966, Butler: 1969) and 1988-9 (for £27,000). A first-floor extension to the cottage was built in 1989.

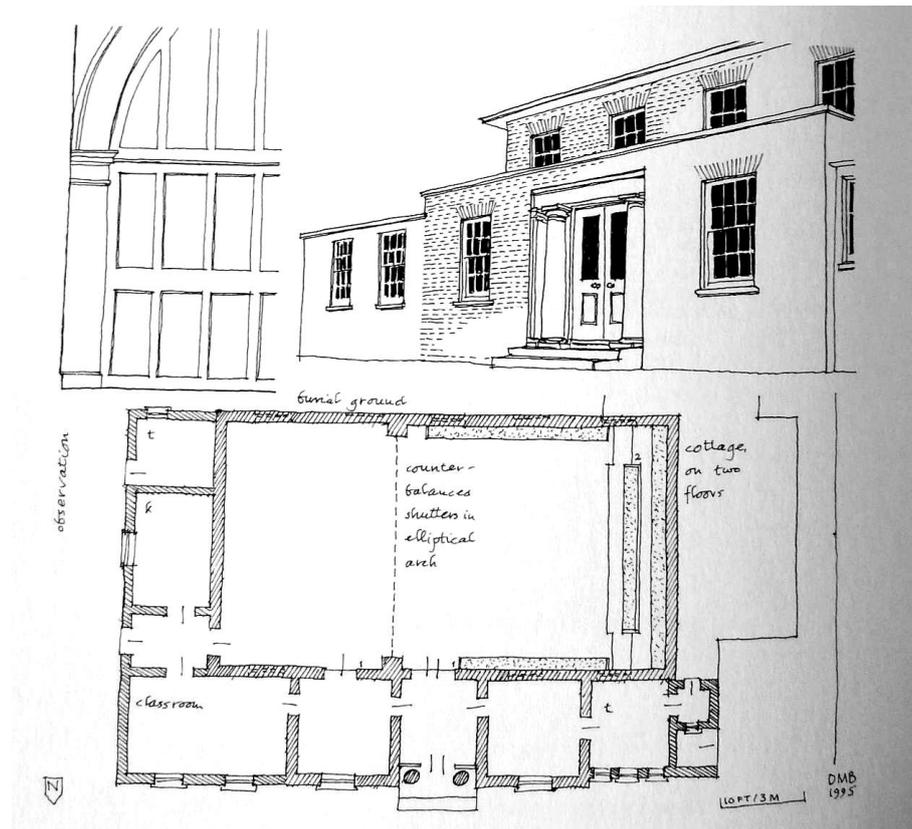


Figure 1: Plan, detail of shutter screen and perspective (north is roughly at the bottom of the plan; not to scale) (Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 586)

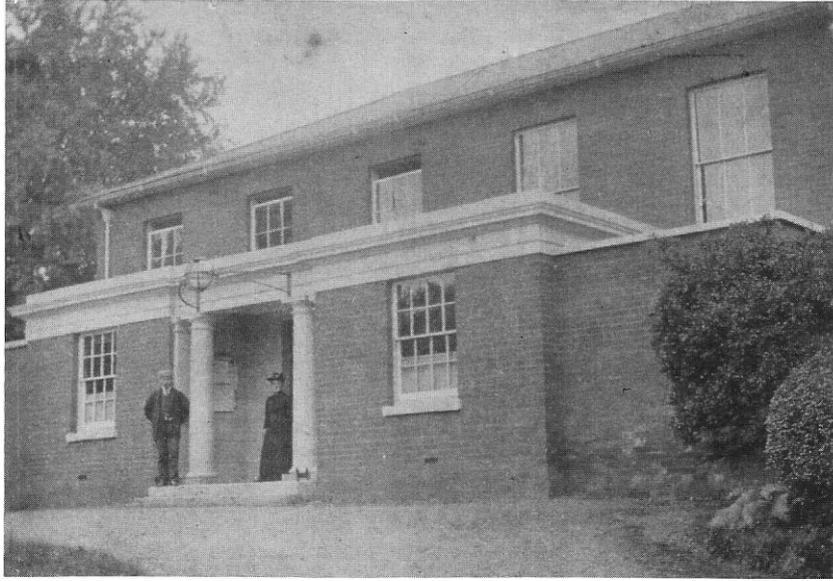


Figure 2: Undated photo of the meeting house ('Friends Meeting House, Dorking', leaflet)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The street elevation faces roughly north. The materials are red brick laid in Flemish bond (and stretcher bond for the later extensions). The main meeting house has an oblong plan and a hipped slate roof. The attached cottage is to the west. There is a flat-roofed extension to the front, flanked by hipped-roof extensions on either side. To the east is a flat-roofed extension (which is wider and longer than that shown on Butler's plan (figure 1), projecting further south than the rear elevation of the original building).

The three-bay porch has two 8-over-8 sashes on either side of the entrance with Tuscan columns in antis. (The porch's cornice, visible in an historic photo (figure 2), has been removed and replaced by a brick parapet.) The first floor of the main block has five 6-over-6 sash windows under rubbed and gauged flat arches. The toilet block to the east has frosted plate glass sashes, the block to the west has two 8-over-8 sashes. The rear elevation of the original building was also five bays wide, with a square brick stack off-centre. There are two 6-over-6 sashes to the first floor, which alternate with blind openings. The first-floor window at the far west is obscured by the cottage extension. On the ground floor, there is one modern double-leaf door in the second bay from the east, under a modern canopy which is a continuation of the east extension.

The entrance lobby leads into the information centre (a former classroom) to the left and an office to the right, with toilets beyond. The main building is divided into two rooms by a counter-balanced timber partition under a wide three-centred arch. The top half can be winched into the roof space, while the lower half simultaneously goes into a pit below the building. The winding mechanism is in the lobby and is still in working order. At the centre of the partition are back-to-back doors.

The meeting room ('large hall') to the west of the partition has a panelled dado and a timber floor. The west wall has a two-tier stand; the back panel of the front bench has turned columns which flank the steps to the top level. The room is lit by three windows to the front and one to the rear. There is a wall-mounted clock by Thomas Marsh of Dorking. The smaller room on the other side of the partition is plainer without a dado. It has doors to the main lobby, the east extension lobby and the garden, as well as an opening to the kitchen in the east extension. It is lit by two windows to the front and one to the rear. The east extension contains a kitchen, toilets, a store and a lobby.

The two-storey cottage has a narrow and rendered front elevation of two bays with sash windows. A small brick porch is the entrance and links it to the meeting house. To the rear is a two-storey brick extension of square plan (the first floor was added in 1989). The interior was not inspected.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are fourteen open-backed benches in the meeting room, probably contemporary with the meeting house. There are two further benches in the smaller meeting room and one in the lobby.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The attached burial ground was first used in 1847 and last in 1927. In 2013, the 20 remaining headstones were removed from the grave locations (where they had been lying flat since 1966) to lean against the south boundary wall. They date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A grid of painted letters on the rear wall of the meeting house and the flint boundary wall correspond to a burial plan. The burial ground is now laid out as a garden with a wildflower meadow in one corner.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located on Butter Hill, a hill above South Street which is a continuation of the High Street. There is a flint and brick boundary wall to Butter Hill, with a plain gap for steps at the east leading up to the meeting house, and brick and stone coped gate piers to the drive at the west. In front of the meeting house is a small lawn, while the rear garden is much larger. The garden's east boundary wall is of brick and flint, while those to the west and south are of brick. The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6. Listed status

The building is currently not listed. While it is of undeniable historical interest (the shuttered screen in particular), it is probably too much altered to be eligible for inclusion on the statutory list. It is suitable for inclusion on the Council's local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

It is not known if there was an earlier building on the site. The archaeological potential is high, due to the presence of burials.