Friends House, London (with Drayton House)

173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

National Grid Reference: TQ 29617 82481

East front and garden

North front to the Euston Road

The Light (Large Meeting House)

The Light

Sarah Fell Rom (upper part of former Small Meeting House)

George Fox Room

Statement of Significance

A large and dignified building of the mid-1920s, designed by Hubert Lidbetter in a neo-Georgian style. Friends House succeeded Devonshire House in Bishopsgate as the administrative centre of the Society of Friends and as the home of Britain Yearly Meeting. The original large meeting house has been completely re-fitted in recent years and re-named The Light, while the small meeting house has been subdivided. The library, which is the principal national Quaker archive, and the public spaces still retain something of their original character. The western third of the building (Drayton House) has

always been in separate occupation. The whole building is of high heritage significance.

<u>Evidential value</u>
Friends House was built on a greenfield site and it is unlikely that there are below-ground remains of earlier structures. The building and site are of low evidential value.

<u>Historical value</u>
London has been an important Quaker centre since the 1660s but no early meeting houses survive in the central area. Friends House is the lineal successor of Devonshire House as the Quaker administrative centre and as such has Medium Historical Value. The library is the principal national repository of Quaker archives and is of exceptional historical value.

<u>Aesthetic value</u>
The exterior of Friends House is a typical example of 1920s careful neo-Georgian architecture of the 1920s, albeit on a very large scale. The interior has seen a great deal of alteration in the last few decades, but public spaces still have something of their plain but handsome character and Lidbetter's library is little altered. The original character of the Large Meeting House has been transformed in the recent refurbishment by John McAslan & Partners. The building has medium aesthetic value.

<u>Communal value</u>
Friends House appears to be an exceptionally busy and thriving centre of activity and houses a wide range of activities, some of which are Quaker-related and some wholly commercial in nature. Both are of value to local and/or national communities. The building is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *N/a*

1.2 Land Registry Title Number: *NGL681970*

1.3 Owner: *Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); registered charity number 1127633*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Camden*

1.5 Historic England locality: *London*

1.6 Civil parish: *Camden NPA*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1078321*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Bloomsbury*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1924-7*

1.13 Architect(s): *Hubert Lidbetter*

1.14 Date of visit: *13 September 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe and Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Adrian Brough, Senior Facilities and Properties Manager*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Architects' Journal, 23 November 1927

The Architectural History Practice, 'Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ, Conservation Plan', 2009

Architectural Review, October 1927

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, pp. 391-4

Clark, J., *Eminently Quakerly. The building of Friends House*, 2006

Country Life, 11 June 1927

Friends House Library, original drawings and historic photographs

Gawne, E., 'Buildings of endearing simplicity: The Friends Meeting Houses of Hubert Lidbetter', *The Twentieth Century Church (Twentieth Century Architecture 3. The Journal of the Twentieth Century Society)*, 1998, pp. 85–92

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979

RIBA, '2015 Awards', accessed 21 October 2016, https://www.architecture.com/StirlingPrize2010s/Awards2015/London/FriendsHouse.aspx

The Builder, 11 February 1966

The Friend, 4 March 1966

Westminster Gazette, 18 January 1925

Communication from Adrian Brough, Senior Facilities and Properties Manager

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

2.1 Historical background

The predecessor of Friends House as the administrative centre of the Society of Friends was Devonshire House, Bishopsgate, the former residence of the Dukes of Devonshire, which was used as a Meeting House after the Great Fire of London in 1666. Friends initially rented rooms there before obtaining a lease and building a new meeting house in 1678. In the 1790s two separate meeting houses for men and women were built which were further extended during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were used by a local meeting but also served the needs of the Quarterly and the Yearly Meeting. Over time, it became the principal London offices of the Religious Society of Friends. By 1911, the accommodation in Devonshire House had become cramped, poorly lit and ventilated. That year, a Special Premises Committee was set up to investigate options for improvement. After much debate, the consulting architect William Dunn swung the general opinion in favour of moving to a new site. In order to sell the old site, the freehold of all parts had to be acquired – a process which was not completed until 1923. The old site was sold in 1925 and the buildings were demolished in 1927. One sixteenth-century wall (listed Grade II) survives at the rear of 4-18 Devonshire Row.

The search for a new site began in 1914, focusing on the Bloomsbury area due to its convenient transport connections. After several sites had been considered, the freehold of Endsleigh Gardens came on the market in 1923. These were private gardens just south of Euston Road and opposite Euston Station. Originally part of the Duke of Bedford's Estate, by 1923 they were owned by Sir Alfred Butts, a financier, theatre-owner and Conservative Member of Parliament, who sold them to the Society of Friends for £45,000. The eastern third of the site was subsequently sold to raise money for the construction of the new building. The purchaser agreed to maintain a small garden between the projected buildings jointly with Friends but the planned temperance hotel failed to materialise. In return for permission to bring the building line forward by twenty feet, a thirty-feet wide strip of land had to be surrendered for the widening of Euston Road by the London County Council.

In 1923, five Quaker architects were invited to submit outline plans in a limited competition, namely Hubert Lidbetter, Peter R. Allison, C. Ernest Ellcock, Ralph Thorp and Frederick Rowntree. The architect William Curtis Green, who in 1908 had designed a Quaker adult school in Croydon, was appointed assessor of the competition. The brief asked for a large meeting room for 1500 people for the Yearly Meeting, a small meeting room for 200 to 300, a library with strongrooms for archives, and offices for the many Quaker organisations and committees. A substantial part of the building was to be rented commercially to provide a regular income to cover maintenance. Green selected Lidbetter's design as the most suitable and offering the most practical solution to the brief.

Lidbetter's neo-Georgian design divided the building into three blocks: firstly, an administration block to the east, with offices and committee rooms for Quaker staff, the library and a restaurant; secondly, a central block with space for two meeting houses, and lastly, a block at the west end (named Drayton House after George Fox's birthplace), which was to be commercially let (figures 1 and 2). All three parts had separate external entrances but were linked by internal corridors. Both outer blocks had courtyards; that to the east was designed as a gathering place for Friends and had folding doors on three sides. The roof was designed for a future mansard extension.

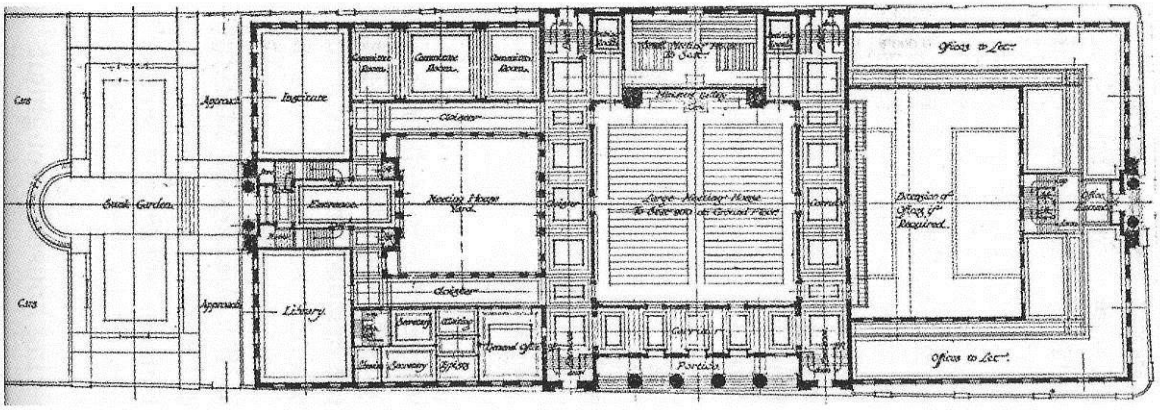

Figure 1: The ground floor plan as submitted by Lidbetter to the competition in 1923. Northwest is at the bottom (Clark, p. 19)

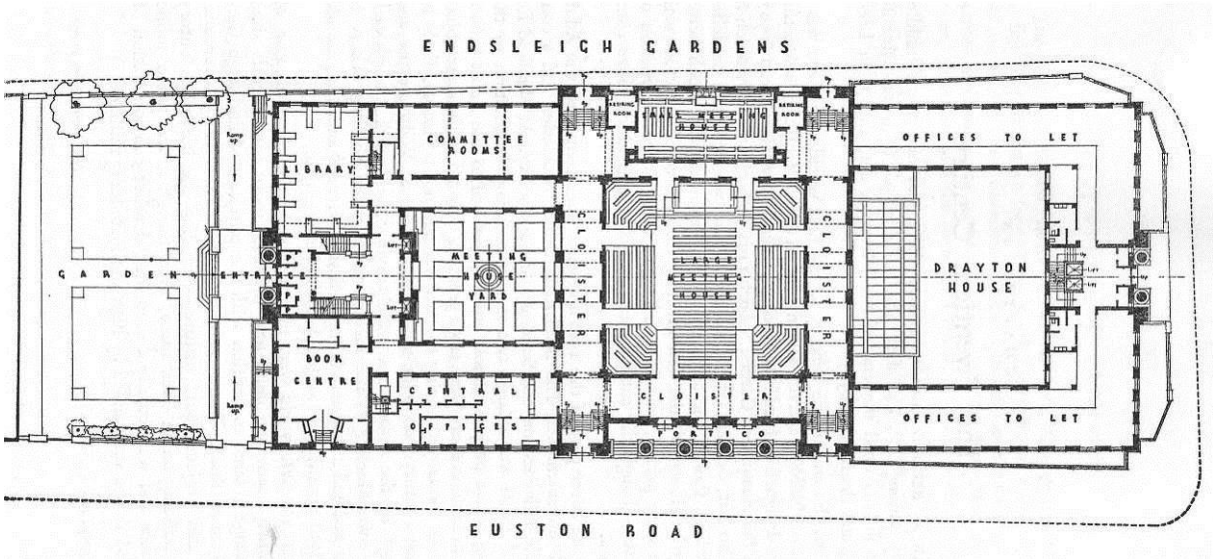

Figure 2: The ground floor plan as built. Northwest is at the bottom (Lidbetter, p. 41)

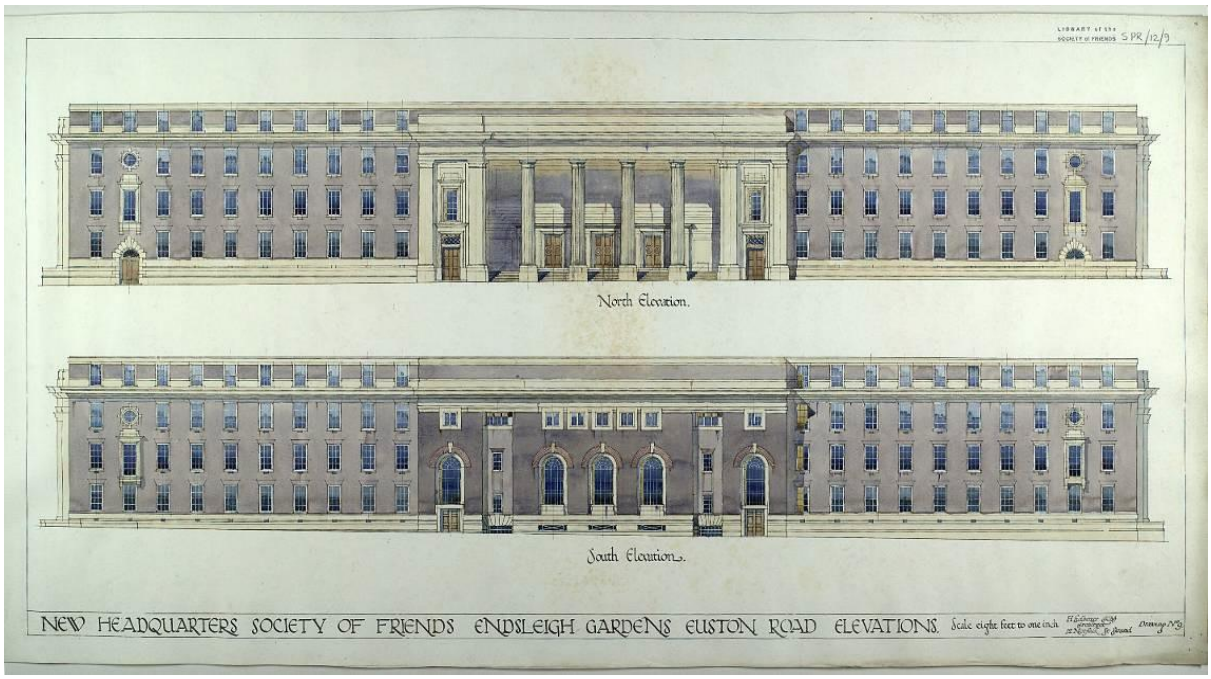

Figure 3: Lidbetter's design for the two long elevations, c.1927 (Friends House Library)

His success in the competition launched Lidbetter's career as the most prolific twentieth-century architect of Quaker meeting houses. Lidbetter (1885-1966) was to design two further large, urban meeting houses (Birmingham and Liverpool), as well as numerous more domestic, suburban meeting houses – the latter mostly in his capacity as Surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting. From 1950 he worked in partnership with his son, Martin, who succeeded to his practice and his post with Six Weeks Meeting and as consultant architect to Friends House.

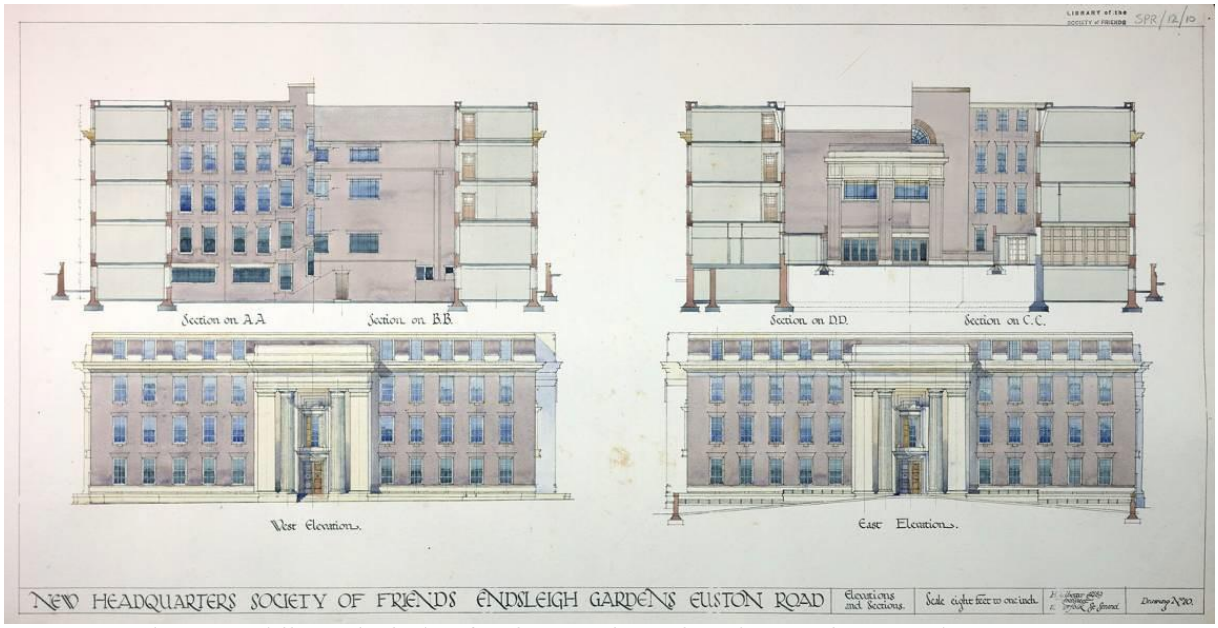

Figure 4: Lidbetter's design for the two short elevations and two sections, c.1927 (Friends House Library)

Figure 5: Left, a photo of June 1925 showing the foundations: right, a photo of October 1925 showing Drayton House and the meeting house block under construction (Friends House Library, Lidbetter Collection)

Lidbetter's design was formally accepted at the Yearly Meeting of 1924. The building contract was awarded to Messrs Grace & Marsh of Croydon, whose founding partners were Quakers. The interior wood panelling and much of the furniture were provided by another Friend, Malcolm Sparks, director of joinery works in Willesden. Work started in July 1924, the foundations had been dug by the end of January 1925, and by June 1925 work on the ground floor walls was underway. Devonshire House had to be vacated by 18 December 1925 and temporary office accommodation was found at the Penn Club in Bedford Place; by 9 January 1926, most offices in Friends House were ready for occupation. The library and bookshop were completed by the end of March 1926. The Large Meeting House was behind schedule

and further delayed by the General Strike; it was completed in late 1926 and the first Yearly Meeting held there in May 1927. This space was described by the *Architectural Review* as 'perhaps Mr Lidbetter's outstanding success', providing space for more than 1,500 people to sit on the tiered ground floor and in three galleries. Drayton House was completed last, in 1928. The total cost of the building, excluding the cost of buying the site, was £191,262. The plainness and simplicity typical of Quaker values made an impression on most architectural critics, with the *Architectural Review* of October 1927 describing it as: 'eminently Quakerly … [it] unites common sense with just so much relief from absolute plainness as gives pleasure to the eye'. The building won the RIBA bronze medal in 1927 for the best building erected in London that year.

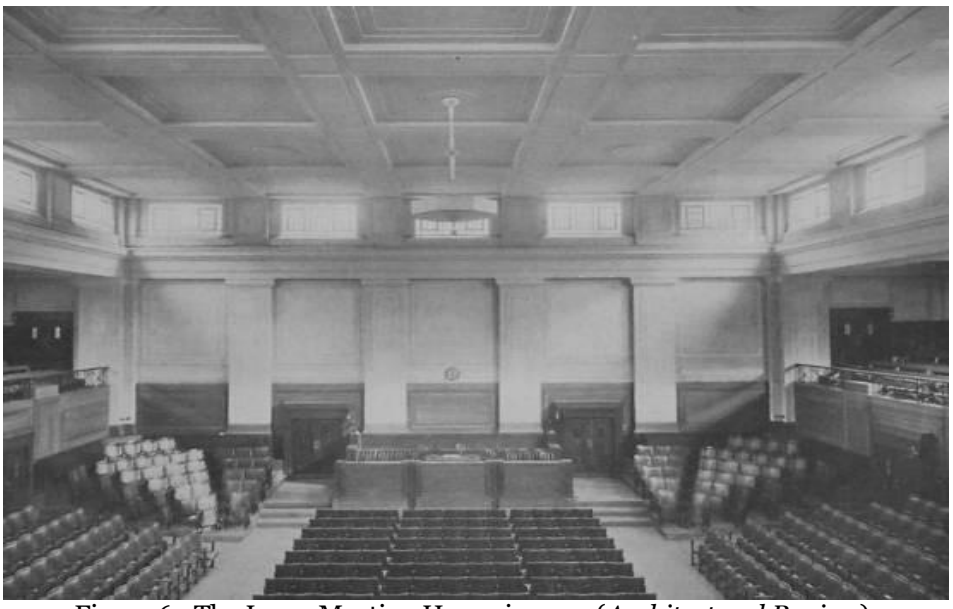

Figure 6: The Large Meeting House in 1927 (*Architectural Review*)

Figure 7: The Small Meeting House in 1927 (Friends House Library)

Figure 8: The library

Since its completion, there have been a number of repairs and alterations to Friends House. The first repairs to the stonework had become necessary by 1931 and in 1933 the platform of the Large Meeting House was extended. During the Second World War, the basement was used as an air raid shelter for which extra reinforcement and ventilation was installed. In 1941, the southeast corner suffered a direct hit; the cost of repairs was £11,300. In 1954, the last repairs of war damage were completed and at the same time the accommodation of the basement kitchen was rationalised, and the seating in the Large Meeting House replaced. In 1961, the latter space was also redecorated and new lighting installed. Proposals of 1961 to extend Drayton House by another storey or build in the southwestern courtyard remained unexecuted. Proposals of 1970 for improvements and changes to the use of Friends House also remained unexecuted.

In 1972, the roof was repaired. The architect Trevor Dannatt was consulted in the 1970s on new proposals to improve the accommodation in Friends House, which included the roofing over of at least part of the meeting room courtyard. Major works were abandoned due to cost but between 1975 and 1980 several smaller-scale alterations were made, including: a complete re-wiring, the installation of new heating and new lifts, further roof repairs, improvements to the library and archive spaces, and moving the central offices from the ground to the first floor.

Alterations continued throughout the 1980s. In 1983, a suspended ceiling was installed in the Large Meeting House, and the second-floor offices were remodelled. In 1985-6, the first-floor offices were likewise updated, and in 1986-7, the full-height Small Meeting House was subdivided horizontally to create three meeting rooms on the ground floor and a new small meeting room above (architect: Richard Betham and Associates).

The 1990s saw further incremental changes and alterations as part of a comprehensive refurbishment in two phases. Phase I (1992-6) and phase II (1996-7) included the creation of more library and archive storage space in the library galleries and in the basement, the redesign of the basement kitchen and dining area, new toilet facilities throughout the building, a new roof balustrade, high security gates, the remodelling of the offices on the upper floors, and the modernising of the book shop. Drayton House was used as temporary

office space until Friends House reopened in 1998. In 1996, Friends House and Drayton House were added to the statutory list of buildings of architectural and historic interest at Grade II.

In 2005-6, the internal and external stonework was cleaned and the interior redecorated. In about 2006, the residential use of the original warden's flat on the third floor ceased and the space was converted to meeting space. The bookshop café was added at the same time. In 2009, the café was enlarged and some of the offices and facilities on the upper floors re-designed and partly refurbished to designs by Theis and Khan.

Most recently, a refurbishment of 2015 by John McAslan & Partners focused on the Large Meeting House (renamed 'The Light'), to make it fit for purpose for both Yearly Meeting and for other events. The suspended ceiling of 1983 was removed and replaced by a pyramidal stepped ceiling of perforated white aluminium with an oblong skylight. New upholstered oak tiered seating was installed but many original features were retained. This refurbishment won the 2015 RIBA London Award. At the same time, several rooflights were replaced elsewhere in the building and wheelchair access improved.

During 2016 the garden to the east of the building was re-landscaped and replanted. Wendy Price of Headington Local Meeting, a horticulturalist and design consultant, developed the concept which was realised by Melissa Jolly of John McAslan & Partners. A further refurbishment of the first floor spaces has also been completed.

The space now regularly used for Meetings for Worship is the George Fox Room on the second floor of the building.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures (excluding Drayton House)

The building is described in the 1996 list entry (see Part 6). Confusingly, the list entry is titled Drayton House, although this is a subsidiary part of the building. Nor does the listing take account of the twenty-first century internal refurbishment and alterations to Friends House. The following description refers principally to Friends House. The interiors of Drayton House were not inspected.

The plan is a long rectangular block, bounded by Euston Road to the northwest, Gordon Street to the southwest and Endsleigh Gardens to the southeast. The main elevation overlooks Euston Road. In front of the main entrance at the north-east end of the building is the newly laid out Quaker-owned garden which separates Friends House from the buildings on the northeastern part of the site original site acquired in 1923.

The building is in the neo-Georgian style and has a steel frame with facings of grey Luton brick laid in Flemish bond and dressings and ornaments of Portland stone. There are three principal storeys with a basement and attic with a flat roof. The long north-west principal elevation to Euston Road has a central tetrastyle Doric portico *in antis* rising through three storeys which contains the entrance to the lobby outside the large meeting house. The portico is of Portland stone, as is the building's plinth, cornice and a band above the attic windows. On either side of the portico are ten bays of Georgian-style small-paned rectangular sash windows, the same size on each floor. The windows in the penultimate bays have Portland stone ornaments. Flat arched, small-paned sash windows punctuate the symmetrical neo-Georgian elevation.

The long rear elevation to Endsleigh Gardens is simpler in detail and the central seven bays of the meeting house block are set forward and have tall, arched, steel-framed windows. Above them are smaller casement openings which are the original clerestory windows for the Small Meeting House. The ten-bay sections on either side have a basement area enclosed by original iron railings.

The shorter north-east elevation and the south-west elevation belonging to Drayton House (30 Gordon Street) are largely identical. Both are of three main storeys and have a central full-height distyle *in antis* portico of Portland stone flanked by five bays of sash windows on all three storeys with a full-width attic storey.

The main entrance to Friends House is in the north east side and leads to a stone-lined entrance hall with stairs on either side serving the upper storeys. Beyond the hall is the north eastern courtyard, which has fully-glazed arched openings on all sides to a surrounding corridor which forms the main ground floor circulation route. In the south east corner of the building is the double-height library, which has been little changed in appearance since the 1920s. Beyond the courtyard and filling the whole of the centre of the building is the former Large Meeting House, recently refurbished and now known as The Light, with tiers of fixed seating on all sides, a gallery and a spectacular new ceiling of stepped aluminium rising to a large skylight. The Small Meeting House was originally set between the Large Meeting House and the Endsleigh Gardens elevation, but has now been subdivided. The upper floors at the east end of the building contain offices and meeting rooms and most now have a modern character, though some elements of the original building, like glazed doors, still survive.

2.3 Loose furnishings

A number of benches were brought from Devonshire House and initially placed in the Small Meeting House (figure 6). By 2009, most of these had been placed in corridors. Many pieces of furniture were designed for Friends House by Malcolm Sparks, of which the best surviving example is the table designed for the Meeting for Sufferings in the Small Meeting House.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Friends House faces north across the busy Euston Road towards the gardens in front of Euston railway station. Euston Road was widened in 1971, reducing the pavement in front of Friends House to its current extent. The long south side of the building faces the northern end of the Duke of Bedford's estate, which was developed in the mid-nineteenth century with stucco-fronted houses in a formal layout of streets and squares. Much of the area is now occupied by the University of London.

2.6 Listed status

Friends House is correctly listed at Grade II. The listing also includes Drayton House and the walls, railings and garden to the north east. The current address given in the list entry is confusing and should be revised to reflect the primacy of Friends House 173-177 Euston Road, with Drayton House (30 Gordon Street) as a secondary address. The 1996 list description should be up-dated to take account of the many internal changes since that time.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

Before development in the 1920s, this was a greenfield site. It is not located in an area of archaeological priority. It has low archaeological potential.

Part 6: List description(s)

Name: DRAYTON HOUSE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AND WALLS, RAILINGS AND GARDEN TO EAST
List entry Number: 1078321
Location: DRAYTON HOUSE, 30, GORDON STREET
FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AND WALLS, RAILINGS AND GARDEN TO EAST, 173-177, EUSTON ROAD
County: Greater London Authority
District: Camden
District Type: London Borough
Grade: II
Date first listed: 29-May-1996
Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

CAMDEN
TQ2982SE EUSTON ROAD 798-1/94/1819 (South side) 29/05/96 Nos.173-177 Friends' Meeting House and walls, railings and garden to east
GV II
Includes: No.30 Drayton House GORDON STREET. Central Offices of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, including offices, meeting halls and library; separate lettable office accommodation incorporated in Drayton House to the west of block, completing the symmetry of the main facade. Completed in 1927 to the designs of Hubert Lidbetter, ARIBA; Grace and Marsh Ltd. General Contractors. Steel construction sheathed in brick laid in English bond and Portland stone dressings; metal framed windows to rear elevation, otherwise wood sashes, all of original design.

EXTERIOR: 3 storeys and attic over basement. Long rectangular block divided in 3 by 2 interior courtyards; large meeting house at the centre, square in plan; library at south-east corner of block; small meeting house, formerly double height now subdivided, to rear of centre block, windows to south. Long elevation to Euston Road dominated by tetrastyle in antis portico, itself framed by bays; this central section, which marks the extent of the large hall, in Portland stone, with recessed ranges leading to hall's foyer. Slightly recessed side ranges of 10 windows each. All openings flat arched unless otherwise stated. The penultimate ranges to either side marked by the use of Portland stone, having a semicircular windows to ground floor, balconied window to first floor set in moulded architrave, and keyed roundel to second floor. Cornice band continuous to entire block and separating second from attic storey. East and west elevations identical and centred about a distyle-in-antis portico, slightly projecting from side ranges of 5 windows each. To east elevation series of terraces and walls lead down to garden, which is enclosed on north and south by a low Portland stone wall with railings similar in design to those enclosing basement areas. South elevation features projecting range of 5 bays, the openings round-arched with metal framed windows; bays one and 5 are separated from the centre 3 bays by a recessed range. The latter 3 windows mark the extent of the former small meeting house.

INTERIOR: main entrance to offices through east elevation, into low lobby with stairs to second floor; this overlooks the east courtyard with circular brick fountain and French doors opening from corridors to north and south. Most of the ground-floor corridors and stairs retain original fixtures and finishes; committee rooms, some of them with moveable

partitions, also retain original panelling, door furniture and fittings. The library is double height, 3 x 4 bays at east corner to Endsleigh Gardens. It was sensitively refurbished in 1993, retaining much of the original woodwork, and galleries to west and north. Great Hall with flat roof coffered, carried on square piers and pilasters, with galleries on three sides. Drop acoustic ceiling from line of architrave hides original ceiling, but this is said to be survive intact above. Railings and fitted furniture to hall also intact. 3 entrances to hall foyer from Euston Road; these doors of original design. Small meeting house of 3 bays to rear, south, has been divided to provide committee rooms on ground floor. Courtyard between Drayton House and central block has been partly filled in by recent 2-storey addition providing extra toilet and other facilities for Great Hall. The addition has been sensitively designed. The interior of Drayton House not inspected. It is said to retain much of its original finishes. The building retains most of its original character, fittings and finishes. The interiors are well designed and detailed, particularly in the east block around the courtyard. Hubert Lidbetter designed many buildings for the Society of Friends; this is the most ambitious. (The Builder: 24 June 1927: 1008).

CAMDEN
TQ2982SE GORDON STREET 798-1/94/1819 No.30 29/05/96 Drayton House
GV II
See under: Nos.173-177 Friends' Meeting House and walls, railings and garden to east EUSTON ROAD.
National Grid Reference: TQ 29617 82481