

Access

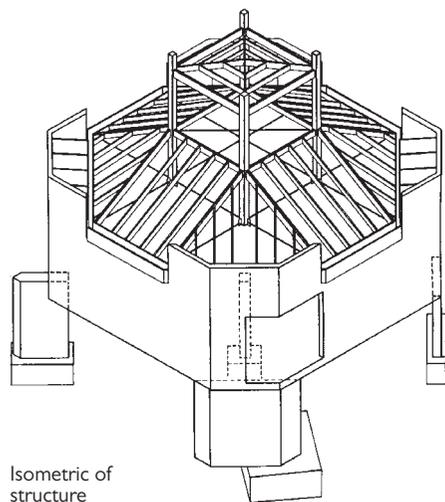
Each floor has stepless access from the adjacent road. In addition to the internal stairs, there are external steps between the two levels.

Quaker principles in the building

Quaker meetings are based on silent worship, and the main meeting room is behind two sets of doors. The transition from the lobby to the meeting room, through a 180-degree turn and via stepped walls and ceiling heights, encourages a sense of concentration ('centring down' in Quaker jargon) and of a progress into light – an important metaphor in Quakerism. In the absence of a minister, altar or other point of focus, seats are normally arranged in a circular or square pattern. Following the Quaker principle of simplicity, decoration is minimal; most wall surfaces are bare concrete or brick, or painted blockwork, although some are plastered. Quaker meeting houses normally contain no conventional Christian symbols, but the architect here included a discreet *croix pattée* – well out of reach.

History

Before the construction of the new Meeting House, Blackheath Quaker Meeting used to meet in the church hall of the adjacent Congregational Church, and had a close relationship with that church. The Meeting House was built on land leased from the Congregationalists, and included facilities that were originally for joint use. When the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches merged at national level, the main church building and its hall were sold. Also see the history and building pages at www.blackheathquakers.org.uk.



Isometric of structure



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Peace Garden

Part of a national initiative, the Peace Garden aims to define the threshold to the building, to utilise lost space and to form part of the 'centring' process – welcoming to all, open to passers-by yet easily supervised when used by children.

Usage

Meeting for Worship and Children's Meeting take place on Sundays at 10.30 am. Like most Quaker meetings, Blackheath aims to offer a service to the community by hiring out the Meeting House for other purposes. Current and past users include playgroups, children's music groups, other churches, AA, NA, and yoga and Pilates groups. The acoustics of the main meeting room offer an excellent compromise between the needs of speech and music.

Bibliography/links

Trevor Dannatt, 'Architects' approach to architecture' series, *RIBA Journal* (March 1969) 98–105
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David Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, Friends Historical Society, 1999
Roger Stonehouse, *Trevor Dannatt: Works and Words*, Black Dog Publishing, 2008
Historic England [citation 1462016](https://historicengland.org.uk/citation/1462016)
Architect's website: <http://trevordannatt.com>
[Wikipedia page](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackheath_Quaker_Meeting_House) for the Meeting House
Quaker websites:
www.blackheathquakers.org.uk Blackheath
www.londonquakers.org.uk London area
www.quaker.org.uk Central site for Britain

August 2020

Blackheath Quaker Meeting House

Lawn Terrace • Blackheath • London SE3 9LL

“ a good neighbourly building where the architectural concept is enhanced by the quality of detailing and workmanship of the finished product ”
Civic Trust Award citation

“ a small jewel-like Brutalist design ... ingeniously planned to overcome and then exploit the level changes presented by the site ... evokes a medieval chapter house ... of exceptional aesthetic value ”
Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage Report



Key facts

Client	Six Weeks Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), London
Brief issued	1967
Construction	September 1971 to September 1972
Contract price	£37842 (£136.1/m ²)
Upstairs room	82.12 m ² (884 ft ²)
Lower room	54.81 m ² (590 ft ²)
Upstairs lobby	57.97 m ² (624 ft ²)
Architect	Trevor Dannatt RA
Structural engineer	Ted Happold, Ove Arup
Acoustics consultant	Hugh Creighton
Main contractor	R. Mansell
Awards	Civic Trust Award 1973 Concrete Society Commendation 1974 Grade II listed by Historic England 2019



Structure

The major structure of the building is in reinforced concrete. The main meeting room has cavity walls with a 9" concrete outer leaf and a blockwork inner leaf. (This is believed to be the only Brutalist Quaker Meeting House in Britain.) On the lower floor the outside wall of the classroom is in blockwork. Other areas are in Warnham Wealden light stocks. Internal walls are in brick, concrete or blockwork.

The pyramidal roof of the main meeting room has an exposed structure of steel tension members and timber compression members, supporting a lantern. External covering is terne-coated stainless steel. The flat roof over the lobby and kitchen is in timber reinforced with steel at changes of level, and is finished in Sandene GRP with grey solar paint.

Upper floor

The plan is constrained by the limits of the 0.044 ha site and the route of a main sewer.

The main meeting room is square with chamfered corners, and seats 100 in the usual seat layout. Although there is one small conventional window facing the road, the room is lit mainly by the square lantern and by skylights in the corner 'turrets'. Artificial lighting is arranged around the lantern and in the skylights, with spots supported by the steel rods of the roof structure. The interior surfaces of the roof are lined with Kara Sea redwood. Ventilation is natural.

There is a large lobby with stairs leading to the lower floor, a kitchen with a serving hatch to the lobby, storerooms and a wheelchair-accessible toilet.

Flooring is cork tiles in the main meeting room, quarry tiles in the lobby.



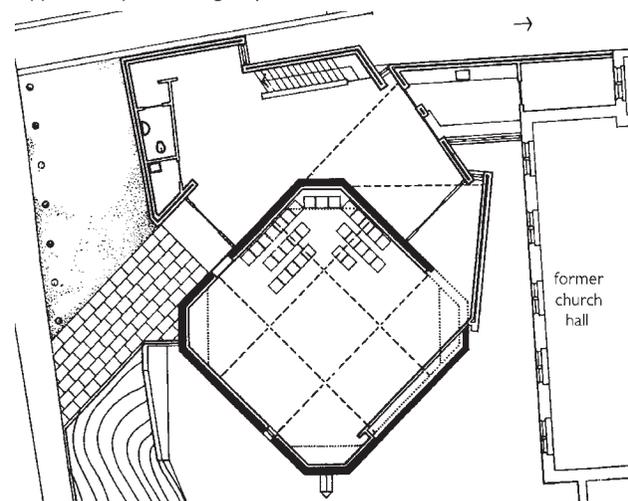
Lower floor

The lower floor can be accessed either from its own exterior door at the end of Independents Road or via the stairs from the upper floor. It can also be separated from the upper floor by a metal screen.

The single long room uses space that was originally to be left as a void. It has two doors and can be divided into two by a retractable screen. Cupboards were installed for the benefit of some users, e.g. playgroups, who need to store equipment between sessions. Also on this level are a lobby, a kitchen, storerooms and unisex toilets, one wheelchair-accessible.

Four parking spaces fit within the curtilage of the building to meet local authority requirements.

Upper floor plan, as originally built



Performance of the building

Built within a tight budget, the Meeting House is a success and continues to give pleasure to its users. Various elements of the building – heating, ventilation and wheelchair access – were of their time and would now be realised differently. The upstairs lobby is too noisy for comfortable conversation.

Essential renewal works have been carried out in the original idiom. Changes include

- Second set of doors to main meeting room added – part of original scheme, but initially omitted to save money.
- Heating changed from fan-assisted electric night storage heaters to h.w. system with fan-assisted convectors and gas-fired boiler.
- Kitchens renewed.
- Paint colour scheme for upstairs lobby changed: originally the colours changed gradually from dark neutral for the walls of the lobby to pure white in the meeting room.
- Main roof covering changed from original zinc.
- Vents in the lantern now motorised.
- Minor changes to lighting, including low-energy lamps.
- Noticeboards installed in lobbies.
- Hearing loop installed in main meeting room.
- Fire precautions updated to satisfy legal requirements.
- Cupboards built in downstairs room.
- Peace Garden constructed 2010.
- Refurbishment in 2013, including changes to downstairs entrances and toilets, and improved wheelchair access.

Lower floor plan, as originally built

