

Friends Meeting House, Aberdeen

98 Crown Street, Aberdeen, AB11 6HJ

National Grid Reference: NJ 93898 05790



Statement of Significance

Aberdeen Meeting House has high heritage significance as a little altered and relatively rare example of a late Victorian Quaker meeting house in Scotland. It is one of only two purpose-built meeting houses still in use by Friends in Scotland and retains most of its internal fittings and features.

Evidential value

The building and site has low archaeological potential and as a single phase building its evidential value is fairly low.

Historical value

The meeting house has high historical value as the successor to a series of earlier Quaker meeting houses in the city.

Aesthetic value

The building has medium architectural value as a modest structure built using local stone and slate, with an attractive, but simple interior expressing Quaker values. It does not contribute visually to the character of the conservation area and the street scene as it is set behind the frontage property.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value as a place of Quaker worship since 1902 and as a building used by the wider community.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *North of Scotland Quaker Trust*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0009800*
- 1.3 Owner: *North of Scotland Quaker Trust*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Aberdeen City Council*
- 1.5 Historic Environment Scotland: *North and Grampian*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Aberdeen*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 Reference: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Bon-Accord/Crown Street*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date: *1902*
- 1.13 Architect: *William Kelly*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *27 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Anthea Mason*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial grounds at Kinmuck and Kingswells*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 872 – 874.
Aberdeen University Library Special Collections Catalogue:
<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/about/special/collections/cld/35/>
Volunteer survey by Anthea Mason, 2016

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

2.1. Historical background

There have been Quakers in Aberdeen since the late seventeenth century; they met in hired houses until 1672 when Friends established a burial ground and a 'new meeting house' on the east side of Gallowgate. The purchase of the land was funded by Robert Barclay and his

friend the Viscountess Conway of Ragley Hall (Worcestershire). On the site on Gallowgate, Friends also owned dwelling houses and by 1682 there was a school. Aberdeen Quakers were persecuted during this period, and the walls of the burial ground were repeatedly demolished by the town council. The Gallowgate meeting house closed in 1800 when Friends moved to a meeting house on land they owned Guestrow, although they only stayed there until 1825 (the Guestrow building was partly demolished in 1930 and the rest bombed in the war). There was a decline in members by the early nineteenth century; in 1825, Friends moved to Diamond Street where a new chapel-like meeting house was built on the site, which also included some dwellings. The meeting house and dwellings on Diamond Street were dilapidated by the early 1900s, and it was decided to acquire a new site and build a new meeting house on Crown Street on the garden behind No.100. The old site was sold, and the new building was in use by 1902. The meeting house was designed by William Kelly and cost about £800. It is one of only two purpose-built Quaker meeting houses in Scotland that is still in use (the other is in Dundee).

Friends were an important part of the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Numerous north-east people were attracted to the Quakers in the seventeenth century, such as Robert Barclay (1648-1690), theologian, Alexander Jaffray (1614-1673) and George Keith (1639?-1716). A collection of Quaker writings and printed material from the former Kinmuck meeting house, and from Aberdeen meeting, is part of the Special Collection at Aberdeen University Library.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The 1902 building is constructed of coursed granite blocks with galletting, under a slate roof which has lead rolls to hipped sections and stone coped verges to gables. The single storey meeting house is arranged with the entrance elevation facing east, the gabled main meeting room along the north side of the building and the library and ancillary rooms in a lower L-plan range to the south (with hipped roofs). The entrance elevation has a flat-roofed porch to left of centre with double doors with fielded panelling to the north and a fixed timber window to the south side. The meeting room to the north is expressed by three sash windows with leaded glass on the gable end. Individual lettering below the windows proclaims QUAKER MEETING HOUSE. South of the porch, the library is lit by a pair of sashes with leaded glazing. The west gable end of the meeting room has a pair of sash windows and a stone chimney stack. Two plain roof dormers on the south side of the roof have uPVC windows lighting the main room. A lower range on the south side of the main range has 9-pane timber sash windows overlooking a small yard. Steps lead to a cellar below, and there is a modern door from the rear lobby into the yard.

The interior retains fittings dating from 1902. In the main meeting room, the dado is of tongued and grooved boarding, walls and ceiling are plain plastered with simple cornice mouldings. The floor is carpeted, probably over parquet. The elders' stand at the east end of the room has a pine fitted bench and swept dado to the back wall and a mahogany rail to the front, with the gothic-style hinged brackets for a missing flap table (Fig.1). The room can be subdivided into two unequal parts by a pine folding screen fitted to an overhead track, towards the west end (Fig.2). The brass light fittings and octagonal ceiling vents are probably original. The library and passage have pine parquet floors, boarded dados, plaster cornices and panelled pine doors with original door furniture, in moulded architraves. Other original fittings include a rail with brass hat pegs in the passage, tiled floors in the WCs and a corner chimneypiece in the kitchen (blocked fireplace).



Fig.1: mahogany rail to front of stand



Fig.2: folding pine screen

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains some pine benches, but modern chairs are used for meetings.



Fig.3: pine bench in lobby

2.4. Attached burial ground

N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is on the west side of Crown Street, close to the centre of the city to the north. The building is set back from the street frontage behind No.100 which is a Grade B listed building, also owned by the North of Scotland Quaker Trust. Access to the meeting house is via a narrow lane between the frontage properties. There is a small yard to the front and the side, but no garden. Crown Street is a busy street that runs south from Union Street,

the principal street in the centre of Aberdeen. The street is handsome and mainly lined with stone Georgian-style terraced houses built in the mid-nineteenth century, and towards the north end of the street there are other places of worship and institutional buildings.

The detached burial ground at the former meeting house at Kinmuck (NGR NJ 816199) is still owned and maintained by Friends (the former meeting house is now a private house). The burial ground at Kingswells (NGR NJ856066) is also maintained by Friends. Alexander Jaffray (1614-1673), a Lord Provost, was buried at Kinmuck.



Fig.4: print of the former meeting house at Kinmuck, in the meeting house



Fig.5: the meeting house is set back behind the street frontage buildings

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed, but could be eligible for a local list if one existed. As a little altered and relatively rare example of a late Victorian Quaker meeting house in Scotland, it may meet criteria for listing. No.100 Crown Street is listed Grade B.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

There is no historic environment record maintained for the area, but the archaeological potential of the site is likely to be low, as the meeting house was built on the garden of the frontage house; both have basements.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey by Andrea Mason

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good

There has not been a formal QI. Recent works to the building have been carried out by local building contractor Richard Binnie Ltd, including renewing rainwater gutters, lowering ground levels against exterior walls, new interior joinery, plaster and panelling.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/A

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting has sufficient funds to maintain the meeting house, using rental income from the property at 100 Crown Street. There is a 5-year maintenance plan for the building.

3.3. Sustainability

The Meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, and has implemented the following measures to reduce environmental impact.

Climate change & energy efficiency: now using a green energy provider;

Resource use, recycling & waste management: paper recycling and compost collection;

Building maintenance & refurbishment: new and efficient boiler and radiators;

Transport: bicycle parking space for several bikes, not on view from the road, railing for security but no rack or cover.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the facilities it needs, spread between the meeting house and the basement of the former townhouse at 100 Crown Street. Inside the meeting house there is an entrance vestibule, library, large meeting room with folding doors for dividing, a kitchen, two lavatories (one for disabled users), and a cellar store. The basement of No. 100 is used as a young people's room and is available for lettings during the week, with a kitchen and lavatory shared with the office tenants of the building. There is parking on the site for four cars.

3.5. Access

An access audit does not appear to have been carried out, but the Meeting House is accessible to people with disabilities with level access via a ramp into the porch and the building is on one level throughout (apart from the cellar). There is one WC suitable for wheelchair users on the ground floor. There is a hearing loop and clear signs to aid partially sighted people.

The Meeting is accessible by public transport with a bus stop within a five minute walk (daily service) and the railway station a ten minute walk away. There is free on-street parking on a Sunday, and parking on site for four cars, with space for bicycle parking.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for four hours per week, and it is available for up to 36 hours per week for other users. It is used for a total of 10.5 hours per week by the wider community. The meeting has a lettings policy; single bookings are at the discretion and common sense of the lettings officer. Regular bookings are each decided on merit by meeting. Groups which have been excluded in the past are profit-making organisations and political groups who use non-peaceful behaviour / tactics. The ground, first and attic floors of No.100 Crown Street are leased for office use on a yearly basis, and the basement room of this building is also available for lettings (when not in use by the meeting).

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been no recent general crime or anti-social behaviour at the Meeting House, but some years ago there was some graffiti outside and theft from coats left in the Library. Lead has been stolen from the flat roof of the porch which was reported to local police. Friends have not developed a liaison with the local police. The Meeting House is within a city centre area that is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence.

3.8. Plans for change

No plans for change were reported.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting: the meeting house is not currently listed and there are no heritage constraints affecting future alterations to the interior but original features should be kept if possible. Works to the exterior would need to take account of the conservation area and the setting of No.100 Crown Street, a listed building.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The points in the above paragraph also apply.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: If the meeting house was no longer required it could be adapted for a new use. Demolition may be contentious as it is in a conservation area.

Part 5: Category: 3