

Friends Meeting House, Aberystwyth

Maes Maelor, Penparcau, Aberystwyth, SY23 1SZ

National Grid Reference: SN 58901 80304



Aberystwyth meeting house is a 1950s former Methodist mission hall, acquired as a meeting house in 1995. The recently refurbished building has an attractive frontage and some heritage significance as a mid-twentieth century religious building.

Evidential value

The building and site appears to have has no evidential or archaeological value

Historical value

Aberystwyth meeting has a history stretching back to 1895, but this is the first meeting house to belong to Quakers in the county. As a 1950s former mission hall, the building has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a simply designed building that meets the needs of the meeting and local community; it has modest architectural value.

Communal value

The building has high communal value as a meeting house, also used by local community groups.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Wales*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0004410*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Ceredigion County Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *N/A - Cadw*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Aberystwyth*
- 1.7 Listed status: *No*
- 1.8 Cadw reference: *N/A*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1953-4*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Unknown*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *17 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Elizabeth Darlington*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burials grounds are at Llangurig SN 945802 and on the coast at Llwyngwril SH 59214 10163.*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Aberystwyth Meeting House Appeal leaflet, 1990s

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

2.1. Historical background

The meeting at Aberystwyth dates back to 1895, with short breaks, and met in rented rooms until they were able to purchase the present building in 1995, the first meeting house ever in the county. The building was first built as a Penparcau Methodist mission hall in 1954, to serve a local authority housing estate built on the south edge of the town in the 1930s. The original architect is not known, but the building was part-funded by the Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust, as recorded on a plaque in the lobby dated December 1954. The Friends paid £75,511 for the building in February 1995 and raised a further £59,000 to improve the building including re-roofing, new windows and a ramp to the side, designed by architect Lionel Curtis, a member of the meeting.

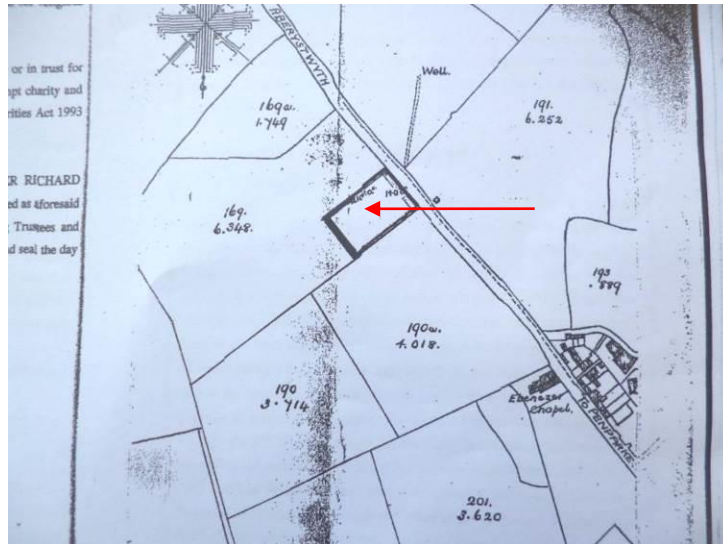


Fig.1: the site of the meeting house prior to the development of housing in Penparcau (Aberystwyth Meeting archive)

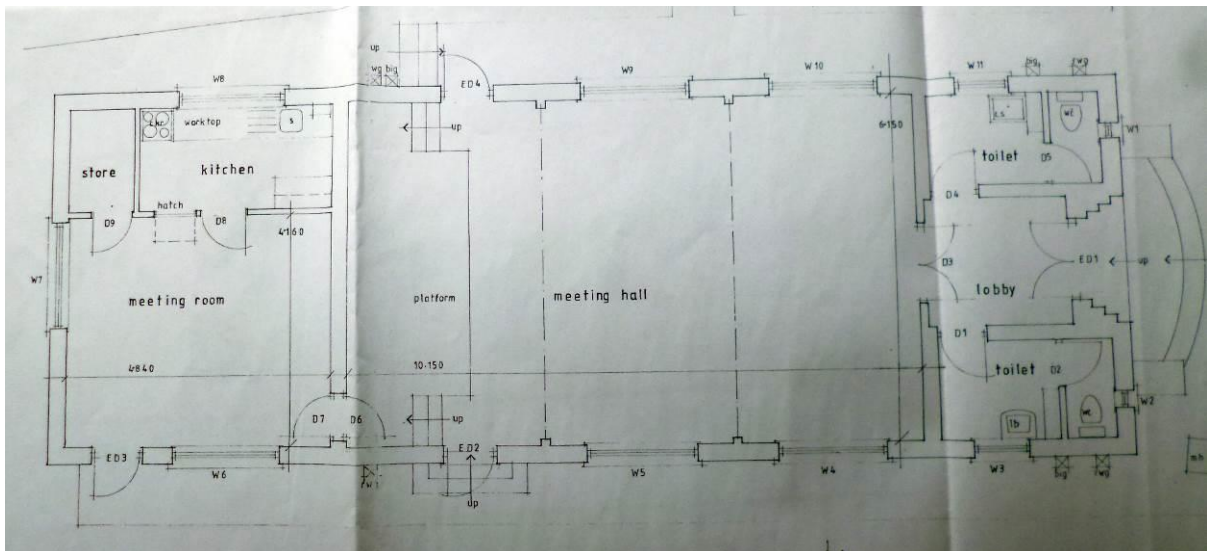


Fig.2: the building in the 1990s prior to refurbishment (Aberystwyth Meeting archive). NB. North is to the top right

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The single-storey building was built in 1954 as a Methodist mission and adapted for use as a Quaker meeting house in the 1990s. The building is constructed with a concrete portal frame, brick cavity walls, finished in render. The roof is now laid with Marley concrete tiles. The original steel windows were replaced with aluminium double glazing in the 1990s. The building is aligned with the main entrance in the gable end facing the road to the north-east, elevated above the road and reached by a steep flight of steps. The entrance is the building's most striking feature (Fig.3), a Romanesque-style semi-circular arched doorway with four recessed brick arches, keystone and fanlight over the double panelled doors. The Quaker use of the building is expressed in individual lettering above the doorway, in Welsh and English.



Fig.3: main entrance

The interior retains some 1950s details such as the oak parquet floor in the main hall, a stage at the far end of the hall with an oak boarded floor, quarry tiled floors in the cloakrooms and flush doors. The main hall has a 3-bay roof with exposed concrete portal trusses; the roof has recently been insulated and the sloping soffit is now lined with tongued and grooved pine boarding. Walls are plain plastered. At the south-west end of the building behind the stage, and reached by a short staircase, is a smaller meeting room and a kitchen.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting uses loose upholstered chairs, which are modern, and owns a mid-20th century table that was a gift from Joanna, granddaughter of Corder Catchpool (1883-1952) a notable Quaker.

2.4. Attached burial ground: N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is situated on a sloping site overlooking the Rheidol valley, close to the road from Aberystwyth to Cardigan. It lies within a residential estate of social housing called Penparcau, built on the south edge of Aberystwyth. The housing is semi-detached or in short terraces and dates from the 1930s and 1950s. There are open fields used for grazing behind the meeting house and to the north-west side there is a small car park, at the same level as the meeting house; this belongs to a housing association and serves the adjoining houses, but the meeting has the use of one space for disabled people. To the front, the lawned garden is bounded by timber fence, with brick gate piers and steel gates. The flights of steps to the entrance have steel handrails.

The area meeting looks after two detached burials grounds, both over an hour's drive away; one inland at Llangurig, south of the A44 at NGR SN 945802, and one on the coast road north of Twywn at Llwyngwrl, at NGR SH 59214 10163.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed and as a modest 1950s building that has been altered, it is unlikely to meet the criteria for designation by Cadw.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site appears to have been a field prior to the building of the mission hall (Fig.1), and the archaeological potential is probably low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey by Elizabeth Darlington

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/A

3.2. Maintenance

The building is well-maintained on an ongoing basis by the premises committee of the meeting, and they do not have a formal maintenance plan or commission quinquennial inspections. The committee are ably advised by retired architect Lionel Curtis, who designed the remodelling work.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has taken measures to improve sustainability:

Energy efficiency: New insulation has been installed under the roof and there are new double-glazed windows.

Resource use: The meeting switched their electricity supplier to Ecotricity, they recycle waste using local facilities and have a compost bin

Wildlife: the garden includes trees and shrubs; the grass is regularly mown.

Transport: the meeting house is close to a bus route and bicycles can be securely parked.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs, including a kitchen, WCs, large and small meeting rooms.

In terms of transport access, there are four buses on a Sunday from the south, and on weekdays services are more frequent. There is some parking on-site and secure parking for bicycles.

3.5. Access

Although the meeting house is elevated above the road with a steep flight of steps to the entrance, there is a dedicated parking space for a disabled person on the same level as the meeting house, to the side. Inside the meeting house there is a short flight of steps from the main hall to the level of the kitchen and small meeting room, which can be by-passed by the recently built covered ramp against the south-east side of the building. There is a WC suitable for a disabled person, and a hearing loop. The meeting regularly reviews what it can do to improve access.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting uses the building for at least four hours a week, with sometimes also a study group or area meeting. The meeting is hired by community groups for 40 hours a week, and is available for 74 hours. The meeting has a hiring policy, which excludes gambling, alcohol and meetings for political purposes. All Quaker activities are free, and occasionally, other charitable bodies may hire the building for free. The open policy and low rent makes the building an attractive place to hire; the rent is deliberately set low as part of Friends' charitable activities. Users also like the atmosphere and cleanliness of the meeting house.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reports of recent crime, but in the past some windows were damaged by local boys and reported to police. Minor anti-social behaviour such as littering is not reported, but police are involved as necessary; for example, after an incident of 'rabbit remains' being strewn around the site. The meeting also liaises with the local housing association over incidents such as fly tipping.

3.8. Plans for change

The meeting is considering further improvements and may enclose the covered walkway and ramp, and also insulate the cavity in the external walls.

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 serves the meeting well and offers flexibility for further alteration as required. There are no heritage constraints.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The meeting house provides good facilities for community use, and there is scope for further alteration as required. There are no heritage constraints.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. As a relatively modern building, there are no heritage constraints and if the meeting was laid down, the building could be adapted for community or another use.

Part 5: Category: 4