

Quaker Meeting House, Almeley Wootton

Almeley Wootton, HR3 6PX

National Grid Reference: SO 33276 52425



Statement of Significance

Almeley Wootton meeting house is an interesting example of a vernacular timber-framed building built as a meeting house in 1672, by Quaker Roger Prichard. It has high significance for the building, furnishings and the associated burial ground.

Evidential value

The meeting house and burial ground are considered to have medium archaeological potential and evidential value, relating to the fabric of the building and the archaeology of the site and burial ground.

Historical value

The meeting house has historic value for its association with a particular Quaker, Roger Prichard who built and gave the building to the local meeting, a typical example of late seventeenth century meeting house provision. The historic burial ground contains headstones of local Quaker families and the whole site has high historic value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a good example of local vernacular architecture, built in the timber-framed tradition of the area. The grounds, burial ground and rural setting enhance its high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is mainly used by the Quaker community and although it has potential for wider use, at present this is not realised. Communal value is medium.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Southern Marches*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032640*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Herefordshire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Almeley*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1157537*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Almeley*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Dates: *1672; 1956; 1981; 2013*
- 1.13 Architects: *Herbert J Powell (1956), Martin Baines (2013)*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *14 January 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Jeffrey Beatty*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

David Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, Vol 1, 1999, pp241-242*

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

2.1 Historical background

The meeting is said to have been established in 1672, when 'Roger Prichard built a meeting house upon his land, at his own charge, and gave it freely to Friends' (quoted from *First Publishers*, in Butler page 241). Some of the early members emigrated to Pennsylvania in the 1680s and Prichard's son was a founding member of the state, along with William Penn. By 1797 the meeting had ceased; from 1858 up until 1870, the building was in use by Primitive Methodists. Around this time the 2-storey part of the building was used as a cottage, and the bread oven is likely to date from this period. In 1881 the meeting house reopened, with a resident missionary and Leominster Friends arranged an annual meeting. In 1955-56 major restoration and repairs to the timber-frame were carried out by the architect Herbert J. Powell (Fig.1); the steel windows probably date from the same time. In 1981 a new wing was added for a kitchen, classroom and toilets. In 2013, an extension was added designed by architects Nicolette and Martin Baines of Leominster with engineer Mike Speak. The new wing was partly funded by the National Churches Trust, and was shortlisted for a design award in 2014 (West of England LABC Building Excellence Awards).

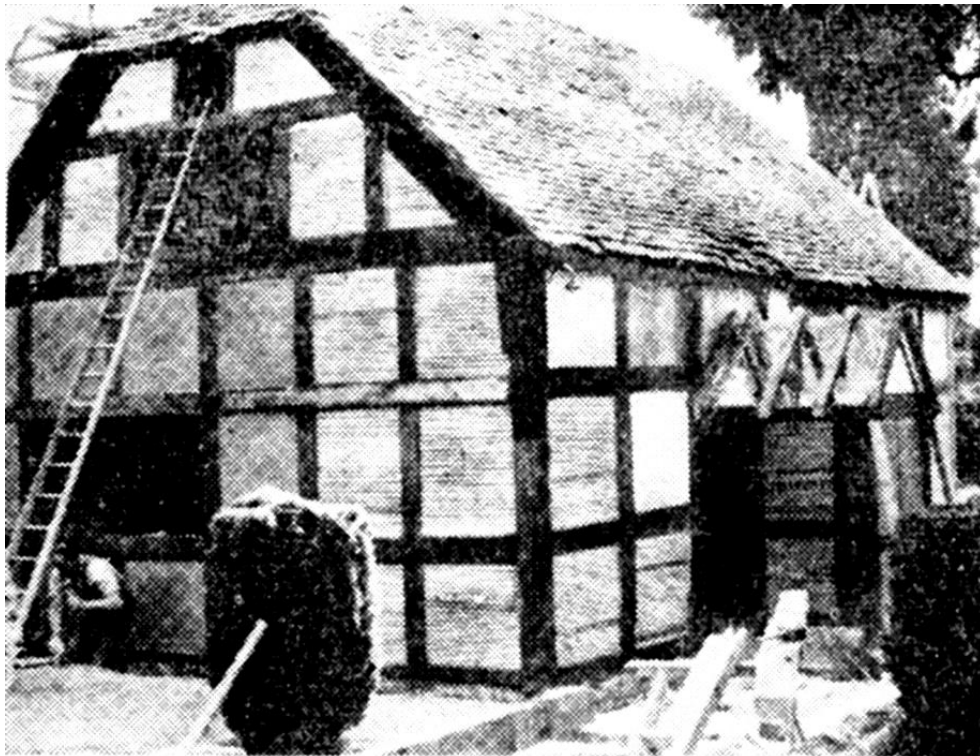


Fig.1: the meeting house during repairs in 1955 (Almeley meeting archive)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

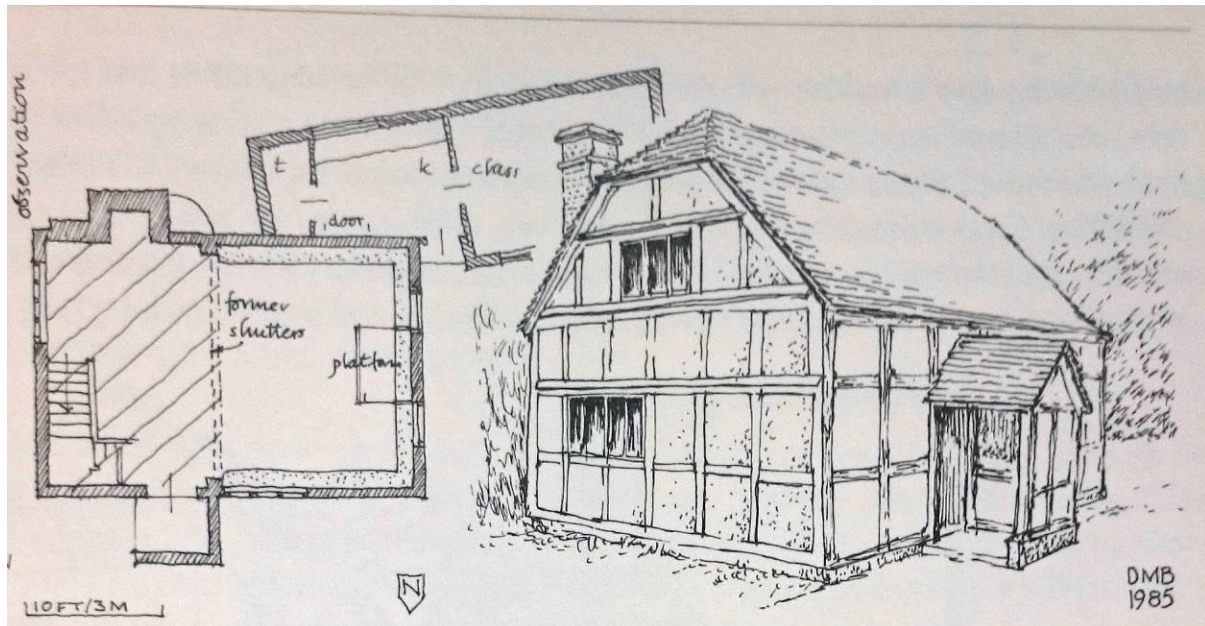


Fig.2: the meeting house prior to the addition of the 2013 wing (Butler, Vol.1, 1999, p242)

The meeting house was built in 1672, by Roger Prichard. The structure is timber-framed with square panels infilled with plaster, on a sandstone plinth, with a lateral rubblestone stack. The half-hipped roof is laid with plain clay tiles with clay ridges and cast-iron rainwater goods. The late seventeenth century building is aligned roughly west to east and divided into two structural bays, with extensions in two phases to the south-west corner. The principal entrance elevation faces north with a gabled timber-framed porch to left of centre; the boarded oak door is on the east side of the porch (the porch was open until the late twentieth century). To the right of the porch is a 4-light steel casement. The west gable end is clad in horizontal boarding, all renewed in the late twentieth century, with a pair of steel casements just below tie-beam level and a small hopper vent below collar level. The east gable end has a 4-light steel casement to the ground floor and a 3-light steel casement lighting the gallery, with a hopper vent above. The south elevation is dominated by an external rubblestone stack with a projection on its west side for a bread oven. The lower part of the wall to the east of the stack is faced in rubblestone, and to the west are attached single-storey additions, faced in render and horizontal timber cladding. The 1981 wing has a hipped slate roof and rectangular plan, and in contrast, the 2013 wing extending south and east is on a curved plan with a gently sloping metal roof. The latter wing has open verandas on timber posts to both sides, with a run of timber windows on the convex elevation facing south-west across a field, and a timber and glazed side door and small high level punched windows to the concave elevation.

The meeting room occupies the whole of the 1670s building; the single volume is open to the roof, with a floor across the north-east bay for a gallery. The principal doorway into the meeting room is from the porch on the north-west side; the oak door is made of four wide planks with an oak boarded screen and boarded door with strap hinges on its east side below the staircase. Below the gallery is an open fireplace on the stone south wall, with a brick-lined bread oven with cast-iron door to the west. There is no extant chimneypiece and the plaster has been stripped from the masonry. The oak staircase consists of two flights with a half-landing, with wide treads, plain splat balusters, moulded handrail and square newel

with faceted finial; this joinery could date from between the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, but the joinery of the landing balustrade and the gallery front appears to be of twentieth century date. The gallery floor is carried on a chamfered oak transverse beam, with secondary chamfered oak beams; the floor soffit is plastered. The floor is laid with oak boards and the timber-framing is exposed on the east, west and north walls, with plaster panels. The 2-bay roof has two tiers of purlins and one central queen post truss, but the tie beam has been truncated for access on the gallery, and an iron rod inserted on the line of the gallery front. According to Butler there a platform at the west end of the meeting room, but this has gone and there are no fitted furnishings. The 2013 extension has a light and airy meeting room known as the Roger Prichard Room, with timber ceiling and heated by a wood pellet stove.



Fig.3: staircase detail



Fig.4: fireplace and bread oven

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting house seating consists of a collection of loose historic benches and oak chairs. Below the gallery these are arranged more or less as shown in a photograph dated 1972. There are two patterns of bench, both pine with open railed backs and simple arm rests; these are probably nineteenth century. There are a few ladder back, rush-seated oak chairs, mostly of early twentieth century date in the Arts and Crafts tradition, although one may be earlier. The more recent furniture is by Harold Backhouse.

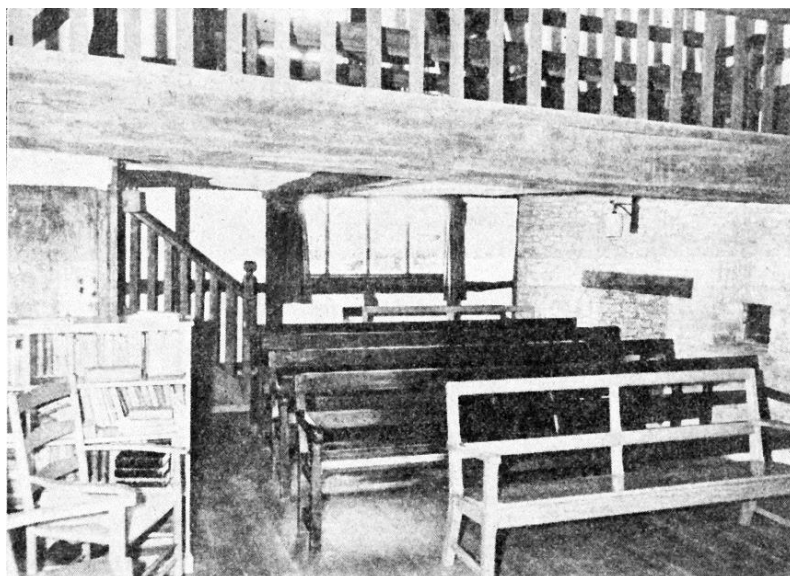


Fig.5: the interior with benches in rows facing west, 1972 (Almeley meeting archive)



Fig.6: historic benches and chairs, 2015

2.4 Attached burial ground

The rectangular burial ground lies to the west and rear of the meeting house, enclosed by dry stone walls and laid to grass, with simple semi-circular headed marker stones arranged in rows in the southern two thirds of the area. The headstones are inscribed with names and dates, from the 1890s onwards, although there has probably been a burial ground here since the late seventeenth century. The burial records are held at Hereford Records Office and by the Almeley Meeting Custodian of Burial Grounds. There is a plan of the burial ground with photographs of each headstone online at

[http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20100608013456/http://www.hmwquakers.org.uk/AW Quaker Meeting House burial ground plan 0606 .pdf](http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20100608013456/http://www.hmwquakers.org.uk/AW%20Quaker%20Meeting%20House%20burial%20ground%20plan%200606.pdf)

The north side of the ground is used for the interment of ashes, recorded on cast metal plaques mounted on the north boundary wall opposite the porch. The burial ground has a few mainly deciduous trees along the south, west and north sides, and there is a small vegetable plot and timber shed in the north-west corner.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is surrounded by fields in a rural area, and stands at a quiet junction of narrow lanes on the south edge of Almeley Wootton village, approximately 14 miles north west of Hereford. There is an attractive view of the building from the lane, which stands back from the boundary behind a lawned garden with clipped yews. The whole site is enclosed by dry stone walls, with a lower wall with flat stone copings along the front boundary to the lane, with a timber gate. The meeting house makes an important contribution to the historic character of the area. From the west side of the meeting house and burial grounds there are open views across fields towards the Black Mountains.

2.6 Listed status

The building fully merits the grade II* listing, although it has been repaired in several phases and some of the primary phase timber-framing has been replaced.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Herefordshire has an SMR entry for the meeting house, No. 5424 - MHE2018, which suggests that the building was originally built as a cottage, although this conflicts with the records relating to Prichard's role. The site and building probably has medium archaeological potential relating to the fabric of the late seventeenth century building and the burial ground.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey by Jeff Beatty

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/satisfactory

3.2 Maintenance

The last QI was in 2012 (previous QI was in 2005), and the recommended works were completed in 2014, including installation of secondary double glazing to the meeting house. The QI was carried out by a qualified professional. The meeting has adequate funds to maintain the building and there is a 5-year maintenance plan.

There is also a plan for the maintenance of the burial ground, but no particular works have been carried out in the last ten years.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, particularly for the recent extension, and has a sustainability group. Several measures have been taken recently:

Climate change and energy efficiency: The meeting would consider obtaining an EPC. Windows are double glazed, and electric heating is on a timer in the historic building. A wood pellet stove is used to heat the Roger Prichard Room, which is also designed and positioned to use solar gain.

Resource use, recycling and waste: Grounds are maintained using man power alone, except for grass cutting. Kitchen waste is re-cycled.

Building maintenance and refurbishment: The meeting follows the advice in quinquennial surveys

Transport: The meeting notes that this is a serious deficiency. Most members drive to meetings. After the extension was built there was an attempt to install an electric charging point of cars. This has not happened yet.

3.4 Amenities

Meeting has access to all the amenities it needs, including a large kitchen in the extension, spacious foyer, new toilets, and a new meeting space adequate for meetings except for Area Meetings. There is space for a couple of cars to park in front of the new extension. There is no warden's accommodation.

3.5 Access

The meeting has not undertaken an access audit, but the Meeting House is accessible to people with disabilities with level access into the new extension and into the old meeting house. There is a WC suitable for disabled people. The meeting house has a hearing loop.

Public transport is poor with no direct bus route, though there is an infrequent bus service on weekdays only to Almeley Village. There is some parking off road and on the road-side but for larger meetings an adjacent field is used.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the Meeting House for their own meetings for 2 to 5 hours each week. The meeting is available for lettings for about 40 hours each week, but is only used for an average of one hour per week. The meeting does not have a lettings policy.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The meeting has not experienced any heritage crime, general crime or anti-social behaviour. The meeting house is considered to be in an area that is generally well-cared for and has low deprivation and crime levels.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for change, the meeting having recently completed a new extension.

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 meets the needs of the local meeting with a well-designed recent addition. The historic building could not easily be adapted further.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The recent addition has provided a room suitable for community use and there is probably no need for further change.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: In the regrettable event that the meeting closed, the building would be protected by its listing, limiting the scope for change associated with a different use. Any future changes, for residential or another use would be tightly controlled to protect its character and special interest as an historic meeting house.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: **FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1157537

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

County: Herefordshire

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Almeley

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 02-Sep-1966

Details

ALMELEY CP ALMELEY WOOTTON SO 35 SW 1/19 Friends' Meeting House 2.9.66 GV II*

Meeting House. 1672 for Roger Pritchard. Restored 1957. Sandstone rubble plinth and timber-frame with plaster infill. Half-hipped tiled roof. Sandstone rubble side stack incorporating baking oven. Two structural bays aligned north-west/south-west. Two levels. North-east elevation has one window, a 3-light mid-C20 steel casement, above which is small square light. Ground floor has another steel casement of four lights to left of centre. Entry, via timber-framed porch, to right-hand return, has carved lintol to doorway and ledged door, probably C17, with strap hinges. Frame is three square panels high from cill to wall-plate. Interior has one truss with raking struts from collar to principals. Short two-flight staircase with moulded handrail. Square newel post with finial carved into facets. Plain flat balusters. Beneath the staircase is a ledged door, probably C17, with strap hinges. Upper level extends over north-east half of the building and has re-used oak floor boards. C20 balusters to south-east form edge of gallery aligned with sawn-off tie-beam. (BoE, p 65; RCHM, Vol III, p 6).

Listing NGR: SO3327752423

Selected Sources

Inventory of Herefordshire III North West, (1934), 6

Pevsner, N, The Buildings of England: Herefordshire, (1963), 65

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