

Friends Meeting House, Balby (Doncaster)

Oxford Place, off St James Street, Doncaster, DN1 3RH

National Grid Reference: SE 57363 02583



Statement of Significance

Balby Meeting House represents the latest in a series of meeting houses that have served Quakers in the Doncaster area since the early eighteenth century. It was built in the 1970s, and refurbished and extended in 2009; it has low significance for its heritage value.

Evidential value.

As a relatively modern building, the building has low significance for evidential and archaeological values. The re-set grave stones in the garden have some evidential value, related to burial grounds in Warmsworth and on West Laith Gate, both since closed.

Historical value

The building is associated with the long history of Quakers in Balby and Doncaster, but the current meeting house and site has low historical significance.

Aesthetic value

The building has medium significance for its architectural value, as a typical example of 1970s design, remodelled to form an attractive, but plain meeting house in 2009.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value, as a place for Quaker meetings and it plays an important role in the neighbourhood, providing space for activities that support the community, particularly disadvantaged people, asylum-seekers and refugees.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Sheffield & Balby*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0020560*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *Yorkshire*

1.6 Civil parish: *Doncaster*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1975; 2009*

1.13 Architect(s): *John Wallis & Associates; Place Architects Lincoln*

1.14 Date of visit: *August 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Jill Cooper*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Attached bungalow - 19 Oxford Place*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

David Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses in Britain*, 1999, Volume 2, p794-5

Richard Hoare, *Doncaster Quakers' 350th Anniversary: some historical notes*, September 2002

www.doncasterquakers.org.uk

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

2.1. Historical background

Balby has a long history of Quakerism and there were Seeker groups at Balby, Tickhill and Warmsworth when George Fox visited South Yorkshire in 1651. After trying to speak to the

priest in the church at Tickhill in 1651 Fox was assaulted and at Doncaster he was again assaulted and banned from the town by Magistrates. Fox returned in 1652 and spoke in the open air, under a walnut tree in John Kilham's Orchard, Balby. Prominent early Quakers included Richard Farnworth of Tickhill, the Kilhams in Balby and Thomas and Mary Aldam of Warmsworth; their son Thomas built the first meeting house with a burial ground at Warmsworth in 1706, now a private house. Before this, Friends probably met in Thomas Aldam's house. As Quaker membership grew in the later eighteenth century, meetings began to be held in John Clark's house in French Gate, Doncaster, as Warmsworth was too far for some Friends to walk. In 1800, it was decided to move the meeting from Warmsworth to Doncaster and a plot with a barn on West Laith Gate was acquired. The barn was adapted for a meeting house with a caretaker's cottage, and a burial ground was laid out behind the building. In 1897 the building was altered to create more space for an Adult School. The meeting house and burial ground were acquired by the Council under a CPO and vacated by Quakers in the 1970s. The burials were reinterred at Rose Hill cemetery and the headstones moved to the new site. The building was demolished and the site redeveloped for Trafford Court.



Fig.1: The meeting house on West Laith Gate before demolition in the 1970s (Balby meeting)

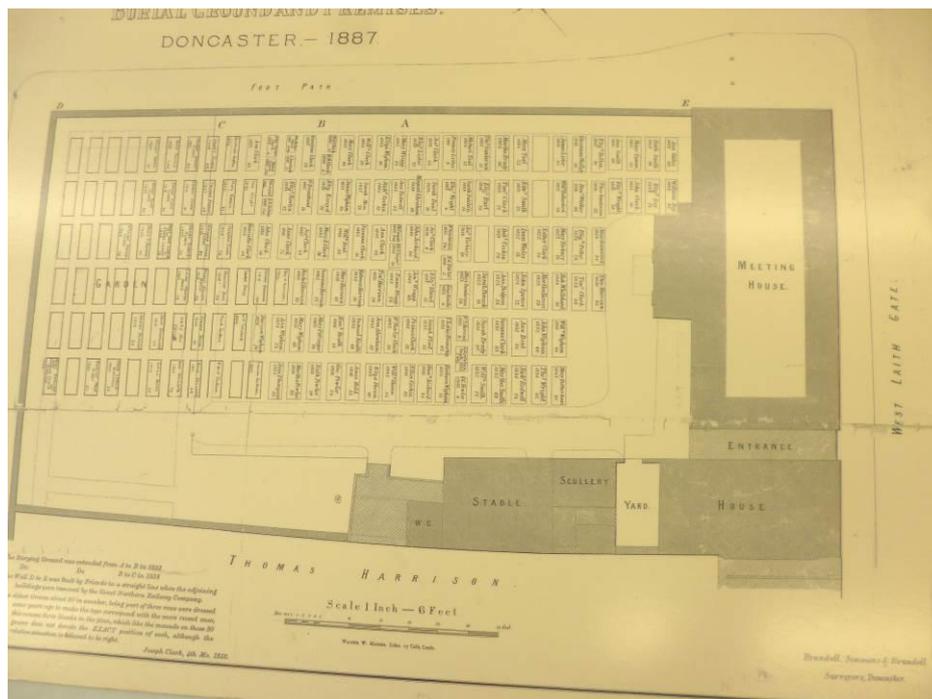


Fig.2: Plan dated 1887 of the meeting house and burial ground at West Laith Gate, Doncaster (Balby meeting)

As part of the CPO agreement with Doncaster Council, the meeting was given a new meeting house within a council estate in Balby Bridge; the new building was built by the Council, designed by *John Wallis & Associates* and was opened by the Mayor on 10 May 1975. The building included a large meeting room, children's rooms and had an attached single-storey house that could be used by a warden. The meeting house was extended and upgraded in 2009, by Place Architects.

The history of the meeting includes a significant letter written by Elders of Balby in 1656; wording from this is contained within the introduction to *Faith and Practice*, including the words 'these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided....'. Notable Quakers in Doncaster business and civic life include Benjamin Huntsman, clockmaker and inventor of crucible steel, and Richard Clark who was Mayor of Doncaster, revived the grammar school and campaigned for the town's water supply in the 1860s.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house built in 1975, and designed by John Wallis & Associates was roughly cruciform-plan with the chamfered square plan of the meeting house forming the taller northern arm, the bungalow to the west, children's rooms to the south and ancillary areas and entrance in an east wing. The 1970s building is cavity walled and faced in brown brick laid in stretcher bond, on a blue brick plinth. The flat roofs are covered with a membrane material, with slate to the meeting room hipped roof, and windows and doors are timber with double-glazing. The east wing has pale rendered walls, flat roofs and vertical windows, associated with the remodelling in 2009 by Place Architects; the main entrance with glazed doors is now on the north side of this wing, between the meeting room and the office. The square meeting room is expressed by its larger scale and hipped roof; the external walls are divided into five recessed panels with high level windows to alternate panels facing east and north and full-height windows (or doors) to the chamfered corners. The low single-storey adjoining dwelling has plain door and window openings, with an integral garage to the west end. The meeting rooms facing south have roller shutters to the full-height windows for security, with clerestory lights above, in panels with horizontal boarding.

The interior was refurbished in 2009; the entrance lobby is now from the north, leading into a top-lit inner foyer with a corridor to the east serving the toilets and cleaner's store. At the west end of the inner lobby is a large store for community groups. The pair of rooms on the south side overlook the garden and can be separated by a moveable screen. All the rooms are bright and spacious with plastered walls and ceilings, painted white, floors are covered with vinyl or carpet.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting owns a chair made of walnut wood (Fig.3). The walnut chair was made around 1931 by Quaker John Hirst, its style partly Jacobean, from two ancient trees under which Fox was traditionally thought to have preached. The modern design on the back shows the trees in an orchard, with a globe signifying his universal message.

Loose chairs for the refurbished meeting house were purchased from Winscombe Furniture in 2009.



Fig.3: walnut chair made in c.1931, commemorating George Fox's last visit to Balby in 1669

2.4. Attached burial ground

N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting



Fig.4: path laid with re-set grave stones in the garden

The meeting house is located in the centre of a housing estate in Balby Bridge, on the south-west edge of Doncaster town centre. The estate contains three point blocks and a mix of deck-access maisonettes and 2-storey housing built in the 1970s. Several other faith groups have premises nearby including the Salvation Army, the Methodists, an evangelical church and a mosque. Most of the residents rely on benefits and the meeting provides an important community resource in this deprived area. The meeting house has an open landscaped frontage with lawns and a group of birch trees which partly screen the attached dwelling (tenanted). Behind the meeting house is a small enclosed garden, with flowers and vegetables; the path is laid with grave stones West Laith Gate burial ground, including some to members of the Clark family. The Quakers have plots H25- H35 in a section of Rose Hill Cemetery (Doncaster Council), and burials from West Laith Gate were reinterred in

unmarked graves in August 1975 (plots H171-177 and H211-215). The cemetery is centred at NGR SE610 025.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and as a plain, altered 1970s building is unlikely to meet the Listing criteria.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

South Yorkshire SMR was consulted and they hold no records for this site. The archaeological potential of the site is likely to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The building was completely refurbished in 2009, and a quinquennial inspection (QI) has not been carried out.

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

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the Meeting House, and reports that over the last six years, they have had a positive income from lettings and are able to employ two part time paid employees to manage lettings and the office in the meeting house. Area Meeting supports the meeting when substantial repair work is needed, such as the recent refurbishment. There is a 5-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3. Sustainability

The Meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has undertaken various works to reduce their environmental footprint:

Climate change & energy efficiency: All cleaning products are environmentally friendly. The meeting encourages all users to consider environmental issues (see handbook)

Resource use, recycling & waste management: All waste is recycled into separate boxes for the users to segregate. The meeting is a Fair Trade Church and encourages local purchasing.

Building maintenance & refurbishment: new double glazing and insulation was installed in the building in 2009. The new heating system was selected for its efficiency.

Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: There is a wormery and bug house in the garden, and the meeting grows vegetables for use in cooking for the refugee group who use the building on a Thursday.

Transport: Shared and public transport is used where possible, but some members of the Meeting come from a distance and drive.

3.4. Amenities

Meeting has access to all the amenities it needs. There is a kitchen, sets of toilets, ample storage, a large children's room available for lettings (can be subdivided by a screen) and office as well as the main meeting room. The car park has space for 12 cars.

3.5. Access

The Meeting House is accessible to people with disabilities with level access into and throughout the building. It has good facilities for the disabled including an accessible toilet. The meeting was advised by DIAL, a local disability advisory service and an access audit carried out before the building was refurbished, in 2009. There is a hearing loop.

The meeting can be reached by bus with a walk to the interchange (rail and bus). There is a car park on site but no secure bicycle parking.

3.6 Community Use

This meeting house is well-used by the community. Friends use the Meeting House for three hours per week and it is available for up to 120 hours per week for other groups. It is used for an average total of 75 hours per week. The Lettings Policy is on the website. The meeting encourages groups whose philosophies are in line with Quaker testimonies. These include yoga, Choirs, health groups, reiki, Amnesty International, asylum seekers and refugees; Doncaster Conversation Club supports asylum-seekers and is based at the meeting house. The building is a popular venue because its attractive rooms are warm, there is easy access for wheelchair users, it is close to the city centre, and in the centre of a housing estate, so walkable for people on the estate.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting reports a small amount of theft, but has installed measures to limit this. The architect of the 2009 refurbishment incorporated 'security by design' principles into the plans. As the meeting house is situated in an area of deprivation, this does bring some minor vandalism, but the location also enabled the meeting to gain grants for the recent renovation and its position increases the use of the building by vulnerable and local groups. After the roof lead was stolen, the remainder was removed and the lead replaced by an alternative roofing product. Friends liaise with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans for change, as the building was recently refurbished.

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 building has recently been refurbished and extended and meets the needs of the meeting, but there would be no heritage constraints to future change.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The meeting house is well-used by the community already, and there are no heritage constraints to change.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. The meeting house plays an important role in the community and if the Friends no longer required the building, at least some of these activities could continue, subject to resourcing.

Part 5: Category: 4