

Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green & Redditch

6 Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, Birmingham, B45 8NR

National Grid Reference: SP 00784 73572



Statement of Significance

The building has medium heritage significance as a meeting house purpose-built in 1969, with an innovative approach to the design of the roof structure, a timber hyperbolic paraboloid roof. This technique was pioneered in Britain and was briefly popular during the mid-twentieth century.

Evidential value

This is a purpose-built structure of relatively recent date, on site of a former meeting house dating from the twentieth century. It is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has low historical significance, however Barnt Green Meeting provides a local context for the evolution of Quakers in the area from the beginning of the twentieth century.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has high significance for aesthetic values due to the quality of the timber hyperbolic paraboloid roof which demonstrates the advancing construction technologies being developed by architects in the post-war years. Internally, the roof design creates an interesting ceiling of both concave and convex curves, lit by clerestory windows.

Communal value

The meeting house was built for Quaker use. However, it is also a community resource. The building is used by a number of local groups and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*

1.2 Property Registration Number: 0001050

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Bromsgrove District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Barnt Green*

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): *1969*

1.13 Architect (s): *Jolley Edward Associates*

1.14 Date of visit: *26 October 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Sean Tomás Beag*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Resident warden's bungalow 6b Sandhills Drive.*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Booth, L.G., *The design and construction of timber hyperbolic paraboloid shell roofs in Britain: 1957-1975*, Construction History, Volume 13, pp.67-90, 1997

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp.83-87.

The Village, *Are we Christian?*, pp.34-35, January 2015.

Michael Andrews, Local Meeting Survey, September 2015.

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

2.1 Historical background

The founding of both a local meeting and a meeting house in Barnt Green was a result of work by a local Quaker, John Gibbons. In the late nineteenth century John Gibbons and his family lived in Barnt Green and travelled to Longbridge, the nearest place for Quaker worship every Sunday. John Gibbons purchased a plot of land on Sandhills Road, in the centre of Barnt Green Village in the early twentieth century. Butler (1999) notes that Mission work is recorded to have been carried out in Barnt Green in 1904 under the care of Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting. Gibbons constructed a building which was better known as the 'tin tabernacle' (Fig.1) in 1904. It was built to accommodate 110 people and cost £150. This became the home for local Quakers for the next sixty five years until it was replaced by the present building in 1969. The meeting house was built to the designs of Edward Jolley Associates and cost £14,000. For many years the building was used as both a village hall and a place for worship.



Figure 1: Barnt Green's 'tin tabernacle' (1904) to the right, date unknown
(Barnt Green Archive)

In 2004, a ramp was installed to the main entrance of the meeting house and a small extension was built to the west side of the south block to accommodate a fully accessible WC.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

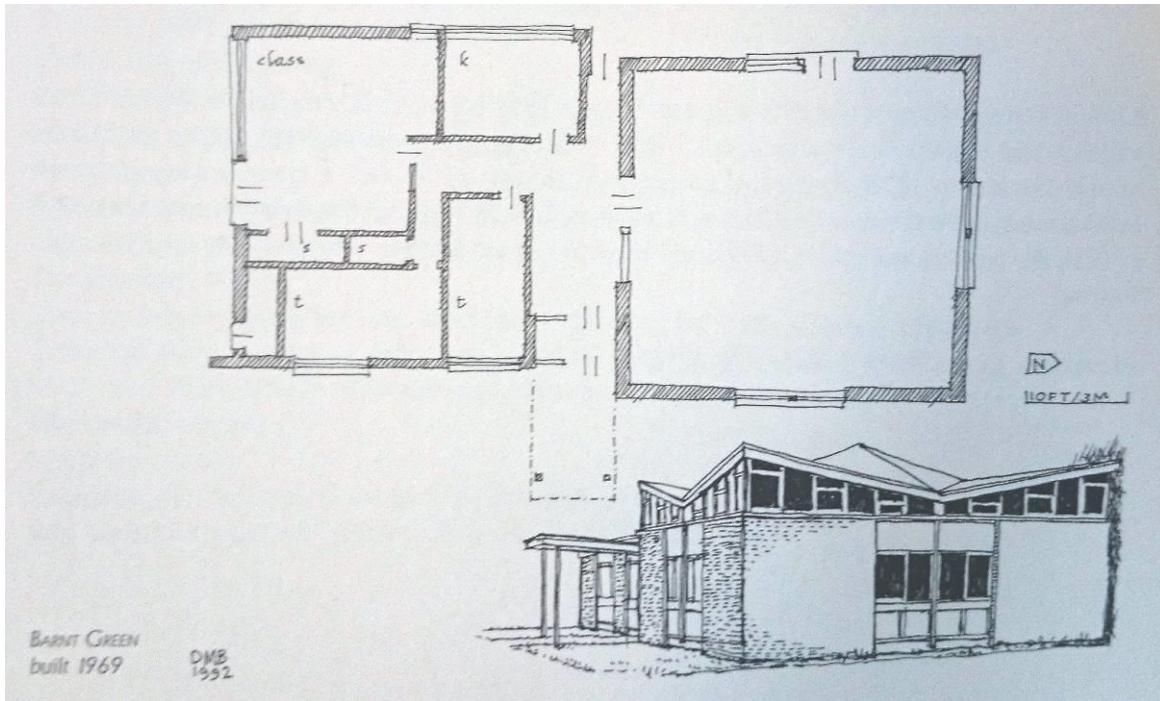


Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.692)

The meeting house was built from designs by Edward Jolley Associates and opened in 1969. The building is formed of two components; a higher single-storey block for the meeting room to the north, with a hyperbolic paraboloid roof, and a single-storey flat-roofed element containing ancillary rooms and lobby to the south, the two square elements are slightly offset with a connecting lobby. The building is built in red / brown brick laid in stretcher bond and the roofs are covered in felt. The east elevation forms the principal frontage, an entrance with timber canopy is located to the northern end of the single-storey southern block. To the north, the block used as the meeting room is expressed with wedges of clerestory lighting immediately below the eaves of the hyperbolic paraboloid roof, with a central 4-light window with uPVC panelling to each north, east and west elevation. To the south the ancillary block has two sets of 3-light clerestory windows with plain timber panels below. The south elevation of the south block has a 5-light window with double doorway and a door opening to the east of this elevation. The west elevation has a set of clerestory lighting and a small brick projection to accommodate the 2004 WC extension.

The main meeting room, smaller meeting room and ancillary facilities are accessed via a pleasant well-lit lobby area. The lobby is plastered, walls painted white, with hardwood flooring. The interior of the main meeting room is square in shape and well lit. The striking feature is the ceiling lined with tongue and groove panelling; the parabolic roof structure creates internal concave and convex surfaces, supported by a steel frame. The walls are covered in narrow tongue and groove panelling. The hardwood flooring is laid in a herringbone pattern. There are no fitted furnishings.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no furnishings of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Barnt Green is a village located in the Bromsgrove District of Worcestershire, twelve miles south from Birmingham city centre. The meeting house is located in Sandhills Road, a gentle curved road with a number of Edwardian properties expressing Arts and Crafts detail and the grade II listed Anglican Church, St Andrews; this was built in 1909-14 to the designs of A. S. Dixon. The defining characteristic of the dwellings are gables facing the road. The road also includes infill development dating from the mid-twentieth century, including the meeting house. To the south of the road is Hewell Road, a linear shopping street.

The meeting house is set back from the road, bounded by a wooden fence and the grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which add to the mature landscaped character of the area. A modest car park is located to the north, with two bungalows to the south (resident warden and one privately let).

2.6 Listed status

Not listed. The use of hyperbolic paraboloid roofs in places of worship includes the grade II* listed St John the Baptist Parish Church in Lincoln, constructed in concrete. An example of a timber hyperbolic paraboloid roof is the former Silhouette Factory in Shropshire, built in 1961 and listed grade II. The list description for this now demolished factory notes that Britain pioneered the use of timber for hyperbolic paraboloid construction. The meeting house has a smaller and slightly later version of this roof form; it does not retain original fenestration but the interior is relatively intact. It is considered that the meeting house would merit inclusion on a local list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Worcestershire Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. A former meeting house was located on this site previously, however, as the site of an early twentieth century meeting house it is likely to be of low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The most recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) found the building to be in good condition. Recommendations for the next twelve months include repairs to the meeting house roof.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2 Maintenance

The building is well-maintained by the meeting, and the Friends have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan. Central England Area Meeting issue an 'Annual Inspection of Premises Questionnaire' each year. The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

1) Maintenance items of a routine or cyclical nature. For example, have the gutters and down pipes been cleaned out regularly?

2) Structural and other defects which may give cause for concern, and actions required or taken as a result of the quinquennial survey. For example, does the roof leak?

The questionnaire completed by Michael Andrews in 2014 did not record any problems or issues. The Friends have sufficient funds for the maintenance and repair of the building.

3.3 Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: improved insulation, installation of low energy light bulbs and new boiler fitted.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house uses the local authority recycling scheme.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: ongoing review.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.
- Transport: the meeting house is in close proximity to the railway station.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs. These include a kitchen area, a smaller meeting room, WC facilities for ladies and men with a separate accessible WC. The meeting benefits from a resident warden who lives in 6b Sandhills Road, a bungalow to the south of the meeting house.

Barnt Green railway station is a five minute walk from the meeting house with frequent services to Birmingham available. The local bus services run Monday to Saturday. An on-site car park is available for up to twelve cars and additional free parking is available on nearby streets in the area (parking is restricted outside the shops on Hewell Road). There is no secure bicycle parking available.

3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken, but access improvement works have been carried out. In 2004, a ramp was installed to improve access into the meeting house and a WC with an alarm system installed suitable for disabled persons. A quinquennial inspection carried out in 2015 by Barnsley Bate (chartered building surveyors) identified the WC as being non-compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and have recommended that alterations are considered in the future. The nosings on the external stairs into the meeting house are in a contrasting colour (white) to assist partially-sighted people. An induction loop for the hard of hearing is installed in the main meeting room.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 3 hours and in community use for 36 hours each week. There is a lettings policy. The building may not be hired for commercial use and only Quaker groups have free use of space (meetings for worship, weddings or funerals). There are two meeting rooms that can be hired separately or in combination which include full use of the kitchen facilities. A number of different groups currently use the

meeting house including for yoga, dance and painting groups. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to its convenient location, quiet ambience and on-site car parking.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, and the area is generally well cared-for and has low levels of crime and deprivation. The meeting has developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

The meeting has no future plans for change.

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: There are no heritage issues to constrain any change that might be desired by Friends.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is well used by community groups and with no heritage constraints, changes could be made to accommodate increased community in the future, if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The meeting house is located in a residential area and if a community use was not viable, the meeting house could be adapted for a compatible use. It would be preferable to retain the paraboloid roof in any new intended use.

Part 5: Category: 3