

Quaker Meeting House, Bedminster

Wedmore Vale, Bristol, BS3 5HX

National Grid Reference: ST 59247 70728



Statement of Significance

A purpose-built meeting house of the 1950s, of low evidential, historical and aesthetic value, but high communal value. Reset grave markers from Quakers Friars and the Central Meeting House site are of high evidential and historical value.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in the 1950s and there is little about it to denote its use (the original lettering outside the main entrance has been removed). The building is of low evidential value, but the reset burial markers in the car park area are of high evidential value.

Historical value

The site was formerly on farmland, possibly at or near the site of a pre-conquest estate. The farmland was sold to the local authority in 1929, and is now largely characterised by interwar and post-war council housing. The meeting house belongs to the post-war development of the estate, on a large site which had been judged unsuitable for housing. Its historical value as a building is low, but the reset grave markers (and possibly the site) are of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

Although the design of the meeting house is fit for purpose and not unpleasing, the building is of overall of low aesthetic value. The aesthetic value of the site resides more in the garden, and in the garden views from the meeting house.

Communal value

In addition to use by Friends, the building is well used by Dance Voice, a local charity, and by other community groups. It is of high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Bristol*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0031790*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Bristol City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *City of Bristol NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1954*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Imrie, Porter & Wakefield*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *31 August 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Graham Davey, Colin Milsom, Chrissie Williams*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No – but a large number of reset grave markers*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 525
Avon Archaeology, *Land at Lower Knowle Farm*, Desk-based archaeological assessment,
2015 (<http://winsomegriffin.com/Pelvin/LowerKnowleFarmarchaeology.pdf>)
Local Meeting Survey, by Colin Milsom, March 2016
Quinquennial Inspection Report, by Chris Goodsall, May 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

Adult Schools were established in Bedminster in 1894-5, and a meeting subsequently settled, lasting until 1899. This was re-established in 1911, meeting in Princess Street Hall, a mission hall given to Friends in 1926. The meeting served the community living south of the river between Bath Bridge and Radcliffe Bridge, a socially deprived area. The hall continued in use until 1954, when it was demolished after the building of the present meeting house. This was on a new site in Wedmore Vale, formerly part of Lower Knowle (Clancy's) Farm but from 1929 an area of council house expansion. The architects were Imrie, Porter & Wakefield of Warminster. The official opening was on 8 May, 1954. Grave markers from the Friars burial ground and the Central Meeting House site have been reset here.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

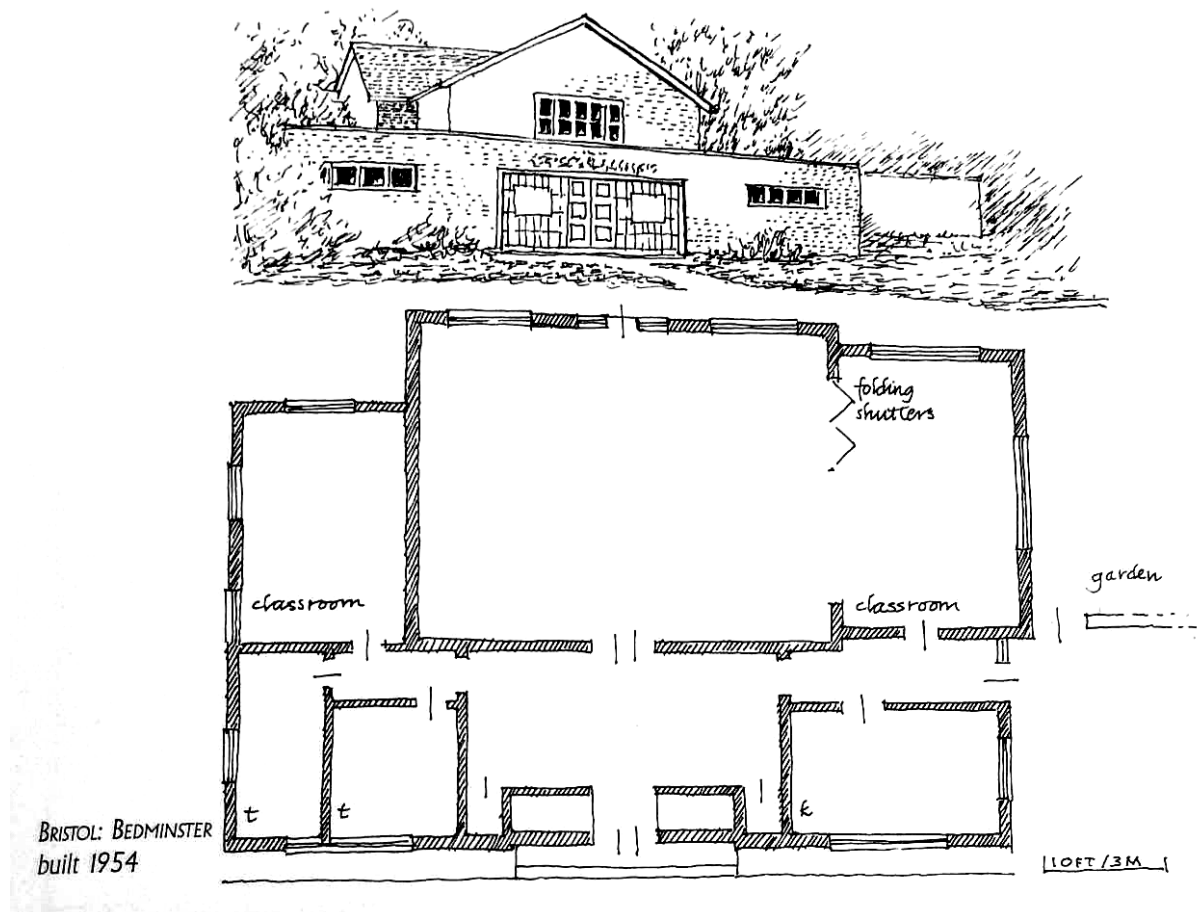


Figure 1: Plan and elevation, from Butler, vol. 2, 1999, p. 525

The meeting room is a double-height space with lower flat-roofed ancillary spaces arranged around the front and sides. A pitched roof with a ridge runs along the centre line of the main hall, and another one at right angles over the entrance lobby. The building is a fairly traditional design of 1954, built of brown brick laid in stretcher bond, with pre-cast concrete dressings and a pantile roof to the double height spaces and felt coverings over the lower flat roofs. The original metal, Crittall-type windows have in part been renewed in uPVC. The main entrance is placed centrally in the long, low horizontal front range, in a wide recessed entrance bay with solid double doors flanked by pre-cast panel cladding. On either side, four

square window openings light WCs and other service spaces. Above this, a five-light window is placed in the shallow-pitched gable. At the back, three full-height window and door openings bring light into the meeting house and afford views out to the garden.

The interior has been slightly altered since it was drawn by Butler (figure 1), insofar as the opening with folding shutters giving off the meeting room has been separated off in a more permanent way. There have also been minor alterations to the ancillary spaces at the front, to provide a store and an accessible WC. The meeting room is a rectangular space, lit by the large windows at the back and (to a lesser extent) by high level windows on the other sides. It has a wood parquet floor, plastered and painted walls and a flat panelled ceiling.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)



Figure 2: Relocated grave markers

There is no burial ground, but a large number of flat grave markers from Quakers Friars and the Central Meeting House site have been reset in the area of the current car park (figure 2). These stone and slate memorials include a number to members of well-known local Quaker families, eg Sturge and Gurney. The memorial to Joseph Storrs Fry II (1826-1913), head of the family chocolate firm, is here.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is set within the interwar and post-war development of Wedmore Vale, consisting mainly of low-rise, low density council houses. The meeting house has a substantial garden area at the back, with a stream and areas of orchards and seclusion. This was formerly land belonging to Lower Knowle (Clancy's) Farm; the sixteenth-century (or earlier) farmhouse survives nearby, listed Grade II. It is now converted to flats.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

A desk-based archaeological assessment of nearby Lower Knowle Farm carried out by Avon Archaeology states that the farm was once part of a much larger complex of farm buildings, including a large house, known as Lower Knowle Court, which was demolished in the second half of the nineteenth century. They suggest that this may have been on the site of the centre of the late Anglo-Saxon estate of Knowle. The large site belonging to the meeting house is relatively undisturbed and lies close to the historic farmhouse; its archaeological potential is therefore possibly high.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): No burial ground. The condition of the reset memorials is satisfactory, but with minor localised problems (frost damage and the possibility of vehicle damage).

3.2 Maintenance

The 2015 QIR found the building generally sound, well maintained and fit for purpose. A recent programme of refurbishment has addressed the major areas of repair and redecoration identified at the time of inspection. These were carried out by the local meeting, although Dance Voice, the main users of the building, are responsible for internal maintenance and repairs. The meeting has enough money in hand to maintain the building.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, and has undertaken various measures to reduce environmental impact. These include installation of solar panels, additional roof and cavity wall insulation and the start of a programme of installation of double glazed windows. The usual recycling arrangements are in place and vegetable matter is composted on site.

3.4 Amenities

The recent programme of upgrading and improvements means that the local meeting now considers that it has the amenities that it needs. These include meeting rooms, WCs, kitchen and storage space. There is also a freestanding portakabin in the garden which is used by Dance Voice. There is no resident warden.

The meeting is close to local public transport (buses pass the front door, albeit less frequently on Sundays) and some friends walk or cycle to meetings. There is secure parking for bicycles. There are also on-street and off-street car parking spaces for those who drive.

3.5 Access

The meeting has not conducted a disability audit. There is step-free access into and around the building. An accessible WC has been installed, and there is a hearing loop. Provision for partially sighted people is being improved.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for two to four hours on Sundays, but rarely at other times. Of the estimated 197 hours a week that the building and its facilities are available for hire, 126 of those (Monday to Friday, about 9.00 to 17.50) see them occupied by the charity Dance Voice. At other times the premises are available to other groups. There is no lettings policy at present. Users of the building appreciate the good location (in relation to south Bristol), the warm and fairly quiet building and the well-priced facilities.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There have been instances of petty crime in the past, but the situation is now improved. There are reported to be medium levels of local crime and low to medium levels of social deprivation. Levels of community confidence are thought to be improving.

3.8 Plans for change

None 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 building has been adapted and improved and now meets the present needs of the local meeting. There are no heritage constraints governing change should alterations be needed in future.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already well used by one charity, and by other groups when possible. Again, there are no heritage constraints governing change.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building could serve an exclusively community use, or alternatively the site might be redeveloped (subject to planning). The land conditions (the stream running through the site) and (possibly) archaeological constraints may limit the scope for redevelopment. In the event of laying down as a meeting house, appropriate provision would need to be made for the suitable relocation of the historic grave markers.

Part 5: Category: 4