

Friends' Meeting House, Bolton

50 Silverwell Street, Bolton, BL1 1PP

National Grid Reference: SD 71991 09200



Statement of Significance

The purpose-built meeting house is typical of 1970s design. The architecture is modest, but the building provides flexible, well-lit and spacious rooms, creating comfortable and attractive surroundings for worship and community use. It is set in attractive gardens on the east edge of Bolton town centre, and has overall low heritage significance.

Evidential value

The building is constructed of materials and to a plan very typical of the third quarter of the twentieth century. It has been altered in the twenty-first century and is considered to have low evidential value.

Historical value

Friends have had a presence in Bolton since the late seventeenth century. The present building is evidence for the resources of Bolton Friends towards the latter part of the twentieth century. The building and site have low historical significance.

Aesthetic value

This is a typical design for a building of the date and it embodies attractive qualities of good natural light, views of the garden and a relaxed atmosphere. It is considered to have medium aesthetic significance.

Communal value

The meeting house is situated near the centre of Bolton and is very well used by local groups. It stands as witness to an active Quaker presence and engagement with the local community, with high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Pendle Hill*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0008050*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council*

1.5 Civil parish: *Bolton*

1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/A*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Churchgate*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1971-2*

1.13 Architect (s): *W.T. Gunson & Son*

1.14 Date of visit: *16 June 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Clare Hartwell*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Phil Kane, Warden*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 294-295

Hartwell, C., Hyde, M., & Pevsner, N., *The Buildings of England: Lancashire Manchester and the South East* (Yale University Press New Haven and London, 2004) p. 139

Architectural History Practice, 'Churchgate Conservation Area Draft Conservation Area Appraisal' (Bolton Council, July 2008)

<http://bolton.quaker.eu.org/>

Norma Lee, *Local Meeting Survey*, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

There are records of Quakers meeting in Bolton during the seventeenth century when Phineas Pemberton and James Harrison started meetings at Harrison's house, for which the latter was fined. Groups of Friends from the Bolton area later emigrated to Pennsylvania. A permanent meeting house was not established until 1721 when Friends built a building on Acresfield. In 1820 this was replaced by a new meeting house on Tipping Street, on the then north-west edge of town.

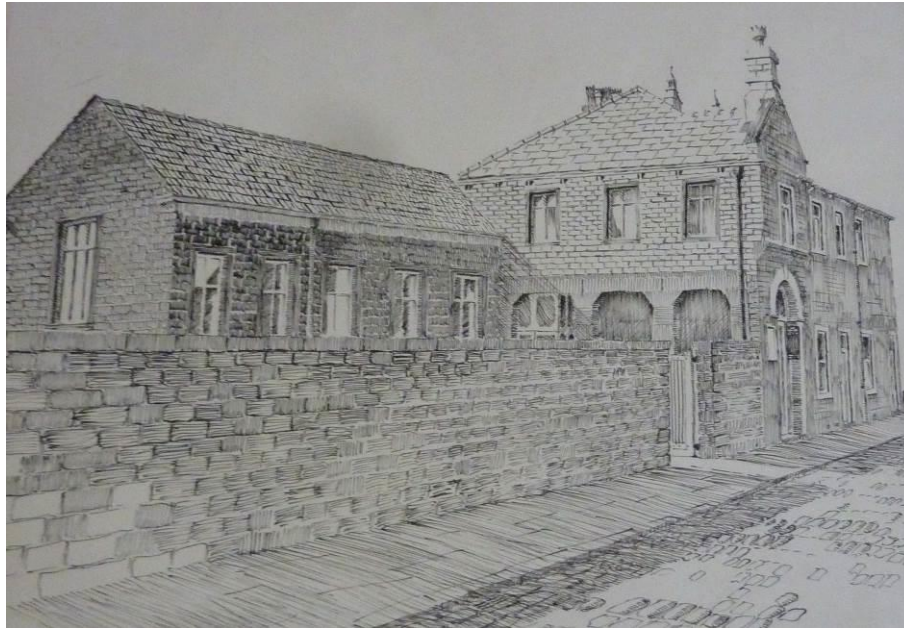


Figure 1. The meeting house on Tipping Street (Bolton Meeting)

The Tipping Street premises were demolished in 1969 after compulsory purchase for road improvements. A site was acquired by the Friends close to the centre of town on Silverwell Street, where the present building was erected to the designs of W.T. Gunson & Son, in 1972. The building was altered in the late 1990s or early 2000s when the main entrance was modified to facilitate disabled access. Further alterations were undertaken in 2007, including a rear extension and a new entrance into the main meeting room. During the same phase of work all the WCs were upgraded and other minor alterations made.

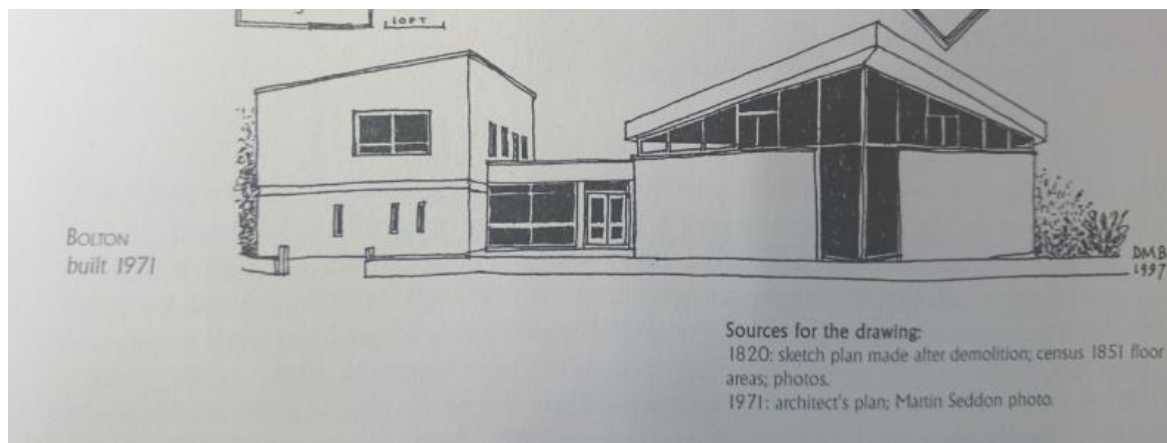


Figure 2. Drawing of the meeting house in 1997 (Butler) showing the entrance before alteration

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The 1972 meeting house is of brick and is characterised by a spreading plan with elements of differing heights and outlines linked by a central entrance lobby. The principal meeting room to the right takes the form of a square double-height volume set on the diagonal with tall

corner windows facing towards the street and clerestory windows. The 2-storey block to the left is plainly treated with a monopitch roof, narrow ground floor windows and larger rectangular windows to two upper meeting rooms.

The main meeting room has a sloping hardwood ceiling, plain plastered walls and carpeted floor. Rooms to the rear form an L-shape and include a reception area and kitchen. The design is typical of the day, employing bold forms and interesting roof shapes. WCs are in the ground floor of the two-storey block, which contains caretaker's flat to the rear. Interiors generally have hardwood finishes and there are large windows with views of the garden to the rear.

2.3 Other furnishings

There are a few items of older furnishings such as a chair, table and sideboard which appear to be of nineteenth or twentieth century date. These are not of intrinsic interest but may have associations with the previous meeting house.

2.4. Attached burial ground N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is set within its own grounds with a car park and a garage at the front and gardens behind. It stands close to the centre of Bolton, on the east side and immediately south of the parish church; the Friends' garden abuts the Anglican graveyard. Silverwell Street is lined with some brick domestic terraces of late Georgian or early Victorian character. There are also some twentieth and twenty-first century buildings, with most local premises being occupied as offices. The area is situated in the Churchgate Conservation Area, but the meeting house is not identified in the conservation area appraisal.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed and is unlikely to a candidate for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential

There is no specific record of find spots on the Historic Environment Record, but the site is close to the historic centre of medieval Bolton. Historic maps suggest that this area south of the parish church was largely undeveloped prior to the early nineteenth century when there was a timber yard on the site, later followed by a church institute. The site has high archaeological potential for medieval and post-medieval archaeology.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1. Condition

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

3.2. Maintenance

A QI was carried out in 2011 by a firm of chartered surveyors. This identified works, generally of routine maintenance, to the roof and gutters. These have now been carried out. There is a system in place for monitoring condition and planning maintenance. The gardens are well-maintained.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the sustainability toolkit and has implemented the following measures:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: insulation to walls & roof space, solar panels
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: bottle/paper recycling, garden compost, half-flush toilets, ten-second air dryers, LED and low energy lights, new energy-efficient gas boiler
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: Bird boxes/feeders/bath; flowers chosen to encourage bees & butterflies
- Transport: Bicycle stands

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has good facilities including WCs, a well-equipped kitchen, and several meeting rooms of differing sizes.

3.5. Access

There is a car park outside the building and a ramped entrance. The whole of the ground floor is level and suitable for wheelchair use and there is a fully accessible disabled toilet.

The meeting has its own car park and there are good transport links, with the main Bolton transport interchange situated a five to ten minute walk away.

3.6 Community Use

The premises are very well used by a variety of organisations with take-up of up to 200 hours per week. There is a lettings policy which prohibits gambling, alcohol and smoking on the premises and use for party political or commercial purposes.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

While there is no record of persistent anti-social behaviour and vandalism, the building is vulnerable to general levels of crime common to many town centres, including nuisance caused by drunken behaviour. There have also been attempted break-ins. These have been reported and the warden is in touch with the relevant police authorities.

3.8. Plans for change

Plans are being considered for making alterations to the car park to rationalise the space and accommodate more cars. Consideration is being given to alteration of the two meeting rooms upstairs by replacing the dividing wall with foldable shutters to increase the flexibility of the space. The possibility of creating a separate kitchenette upstairs to serve these rooms and avoid carrying hot drinks upstairs is also being considered.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a meeting house only: The building was designed for flexibility and while the needs of the meeting appear to be amply met there is scope for change if required.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local meeting use: The building appears to be used at close to capacity and plans for improving the facilities and parking are being considered.

iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a meeting house and passing into secular use: The popularity of the building for use by a wide variety of other groups demonstrates a local need for community facilities, suggesting that the building might find a new use of this type if necessary.

Part 5: Category: 4