

Friends Meeting House, Cardiff

43 Charles Street, Cardiff, Glamorganshire, Wales, CF10 2GB

National Grid Reference: ST 18636 76403



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a Victorian vicarage of c.1860 which was acquired for Quaker use in 1931. It has overall medium heritage value.

Evidential value

The building was built as a large Vicarage with a service yard and a rear garden. It largely retains its original planform and several features such as the main stair and the back stair. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house was part of the Victorian development of Charles Street as a middle-class residential area with several places of worship. It has been used as a Quaker meeting house for over eighty years. It has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building has a well-detailed front elevation and retains some decorative features such as chimneypieces. The building has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been in Quaker use and additional community use for over eighty years. Its positive contribution to the streetscape of the conservation area adds to its communal value. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *South Wales*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007930*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *City of Cardiff Council*
- 1.5 National heritage body: *Cadw*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Cardiff*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 Cadw ref.: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Cardiff, Charles Street*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c.1860 (acquired in 1931)*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *28 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Mike Tooby*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *burial ground in Rhyd y Grug (Quakers Yard), near Pontypridd*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 850-1
Meeting of Friends in Wales, *Towards the Sources. Quakers in Wales*, 2014
Local Meeting survey by Mike Tooby, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

By about 1657, Cardiff was a strong centre of Quakerism. There was a seventeenth-century Quaker burial ground outside the South City Gate whose site is thought to have been on the site of the new BBC Cardiff offices. (Butler's account of the Cardiff burial ground mistakenly refers to that in the village of Quakers Yard near Pontypridd.) Friends met in private houses until 1838. That year, they leased a house near the corner of Charles Street and Queen Street to be used as meeting house. In 1860 or 1861, the meeting was closed and the building was let to United Methodists (1856-64) and then to a school. The meeting was revived in 1872, soon after which the meeting house (by then in poor repair) was demolished. In 1888, a new purpose-built meeting house was erected on the same site for an estimated cost of £1,400. This building seated 300 and opened in 1889. In order to pay for the site, the coal below the building was reportedly sold. The meeting house was sold in 1931 and demolished.

In 1931, the current meeting house in Charles Street was bought. This is a Victorian vicarage of c.1860. (It is not known which parish church it was connected to.) In 1978, alterations were made costing about £7,000. In 1996-7, the ground-floor kitchen and toilets were refurbished for about £100,000. A number of the upper rooms are now rented out to six tenants (as offices and counselling rooms), while others are reserved for Quaker use.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house faces southwest towards Charles Street. It is a two-storey house with an attic and a basement; the rear wing is of one full storey with an attic. The materials are rock-faced Pennant stone and Bath stone dressings, cill bands and quoins (which are of white brick on the side and rear elevations). The plan is roughly L-shaped with a narrower rear wing and a walled service yard. The front wing has a gabled slate roof parallel with the street, at right angles to the two gabled roofs of the rear wing (with artificial roof slates). The rear slope of the main roof is lower than the front slope and has one rooflight and a dormer. There are two remaining chimney stacks, one at the south to the front range and one at the north to the northern rear wing. There is a small projecting parapeted porch to the southeast elevation; the current entrance is in a recessed bay to the northwest. The three-bay front elevation has a two-storey canted bay window to the left (north) and a shallow single-storey oblong bay window to the right. Above the latter is a pair of oblong window under segmental arches and relieving arches. The attic storey has three sash windows, of which the outer two push up into dormer gables. All the windows are plate-glass sash windows. The south elevation has the former porch with a pierced parapet and a cusped arch, as well as staircase windows over two levels and one attic window. The south elevation of the rear wing has two larger windows on the ground floor and three smaller two-over-two sashes above. The attached rear yard has outer walls of matching rubble and brick with a door to the south. The walls towards the rear garden were altered when another door was inserted which is flanked by brick piers of modern orange brick. The yard encompasses a small wing under a catslide roof and two outbuildings (now storage) with lean-to roofs. The rear elevation of the rear wing has a first-floor window under each gable and a door in the north bay into the garden.

The entrance is via a recessed bay to the north, with decorative leaded glass above the inner door and a modern skylight. This leads into the wide corridor which occupies the rear of the main wing. It contains a small fireplace and the large open-string staircase at the south (photo bottom right on page 1) which has a cast-iron newel, turned balusters and a mahogany handrail. The meeting room occupies the two former rooms to the front of the building (photo bottom left on page 1) which still retain their Victorian chimneypieces. The ground floor of the rear wing has the current kitchen (with a large window with original shutters), the small service stair and toilets. The first floor has five rooms, one of which retains its corbelled chimney piece. The second-floor rooms were until the 1990s the warden's flat but have been converted to four rooms and one lavatory. The basement was not inspected.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are several benches with X-shaped ends (a variation on the inverted Y-shaped benches common in churches from about the 1860s into the earlier twentieth century) which were acquired in the 1950s: two in the hall and seven in the meeting room. The meeting room also has a wall clock made in Bristol.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

To the south of the meeting house is a private lane which contains the tenants' car parking spaces. To the rear of the building is a small garden, one of the few remaining in the area. The meeting house is located in the centre of Cardiff, in a nightlife area. Opposite and further north are Victorian terraced houses. Further north again there are two local landmark buildings: the Roman Catholic cathedral of St David's (1880s) and the Ebeneser [sic] Chapel (1855). Directly to the north of the meeting house is a new five-storey office development of a scale which is unsympathetic to the Conservation Area. It replaced an end-of-terrace house but the new footprint is much further forward than the historical frontage, heightening the effect of its looming over the meeting house. Directly to the southeast is a recent neo-Georgian terrace (containing *inter alia* the offices of the Alliance Française). The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

There is a walled burial ground in the village of Rhyd y Grug (Quakers Yard), near Pontypridd (national grid reference: ST 09683 96520). This is located at the south corner of Caerphilly Road and the A4054, near the river Taff. It was leased from 1667 from Mary Chapman and she bequeathed it to Friends in 1669. It was damaged by floods in c.1770-80 when much of the topsoil was washed away.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is currently not listed. It is a large Victorian house with a well-detailed front elevation and its original service yard. Internally, it has been altered and adapted but retains some chimneypieces, window shutters and the original stair. Overall, it is not considered to be a candidate for listing but would be worthy of inclusion on Cardiff Council's list of locally listed buildings.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

Charles Street is close to the medieval suburb of Crockherbtown (along present Queen Street) and the walled city but was only developed in the early nineteenth century. The site has low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Fair. There are a few recent roof leaks as well as a structural crack between the entrance bay and the original house.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

3.2 Maintenance

The most recent inspection was undertaken in 2012-13 (no copy seen). A separate survey was undertaken by a surveyor in 2013-14 (no copy seen). Most of the recommendations have been carried out including the complete rewiring, fire safety improvements, the installation of central heating, and the eradication of wet rot in the entrance porch. The next inspection is due in 2017. The meeting generally has enough money for regular maintenance but this depends on the required work and the current level of fundraising.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: installation of an integrated central heating system; planned installation of double glazing
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: use of local authority business refuse and recycling scheme
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: provision of an urban garden

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden. The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is some parking on site but no secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is not fully accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into the building but not to the upper floors. There is an accessible toilet, a hearing loop and some facilities for partially-sighted people. No formal Disability Access Audit has been conducted for about ten years; the next is planned for the summer of 2016.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about 4-8 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 216 hours per week. It is used for an average of about 30-40 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy and the lettings are managed by the Ethical Property Company (since September 2015). Six tenants rent rooms on the upper floors. Users value the meeting house for its city centre location, simple and cheap facilities and the sympathetic context for some user groups.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

Due to the city centre location in a nightclub area, the meeting house has been subject to break-ins and anti-social behaviour (categories a-e, g-k). Heritage crime at the site includes the theft of lead from the roof and the rainwater goods in 2011 and 2012. Reported crimes and anti-social behaviour include burglaries and drug use. While there is regular liaison with the police there is no formal liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

It is planned to refurbish the interior and to replace the current entrance bay with a new entrance and an extension for a small meeting room.

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 has all the facilities required by the local meeting, except step-free access to the upper floors. The meeting is planning to install double glazing in the building. This should be done in a way which is sympathetic to the building and its location in a conservation area. Standard UPVC window units are unlikely to be suitable.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is well-used by both regular tenants using rooms in the building and lettings to community groups. Again, wheelchair access to the upper floors might be an issue but at present the ground-floor meeting room fulfils the needs of most groups.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the unlikely event of closure or disposal, the meeting house could easily be converted to a new sympathetic use which, due to the city centre location, is likely to be offices. Demolition would be regrettable and is unlikely to find favour due to the location in a conservation area.

Part 5: Category: 3