

Friends Meeting House, Carlisle

Fisher Street, Carlisle, CA3 8RR

National Grid Reference: NY 39880 56166



Statement of Significance

The simple flat-roofed form of the 1960s meeting house creates a distinctive modernist aesthetic on Fisher Street. The site of the building has high historical significance as a Quaker burial ground acquired in 1681.

Evidential value

The site of the meeting house was formerly a burial ground and has the potential to yield evidence about past Quaker activity.

Historical value

The present meeting house has low historical significance, however the site and Fisher Street have high historical value for the long presence of Quakers in the area. Fisher Street has been home to Quakers since 1681 when land for the first of two burial grounds was purchased. There have been three separate meeting houses on this street.

Aesthetic value

This modern building has medium aesthetic value and makes a neutral contribution to the character of the conservation area.

Communal value

The site has been in Quaker use since 1681. The present meeting house is used by a number of local community groups.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Cumberland*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0028300*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Carlisle City Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.6 Civil parish: *Carlisle*

1.7 Listed status: *No*

1.8 NHLE: *Not listed*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Carlisle City Centre*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1963*

1.13 Architect (s): *Hodgson and Tritton*

1.14 Date of visit: *5th May 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *June Hall*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial grounds at Moorhouse NY 33578 56737, Beckfoot NY 0932 4962, Allonby NY 0818 4362, Newby NY 5850 2149 and Broughton NY 08123190.*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

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

Patrick Gray, Local Meeting Survey, March 2015.

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

2.1. Historical background

Quakerism in Carlisle began in 1653, when Friends first held meetings for worship in a house purchased in the Abbey and used until 1660. In the late seventeenth century, membership slowly increased and meetings were held in Friends' houses until 1702 when a property was

purchased on Fisher Street for £160. This meeting house was enlarged in 1711 but sold in 1776 due to the substantial repairs required. The same year Friends purchased a plot of land to construct a new meeting house, also on Fisher Street. In 1864 this meeting house was altered by the architect James Stewart. During the early twentieth century the size of the Meeting began to decline and the meeting house became difficult to maintain. The meeting house was sold in 1962 for £7,000.

The location of the present meeting house is to the north-west of Fisher Street on the site of a Quaker burial ground, land for which was purchased in 1681. The meeting house was designed by Hodgson and Tritton architects to seat 100 at a cost of £9,000 and opened in 1963.

In the late twentieth century alterations were made to the meeting house when the cloak rooms were converted for toilet facilities. In 2010, the toilets were altered to accommodate a fully accessible WC.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

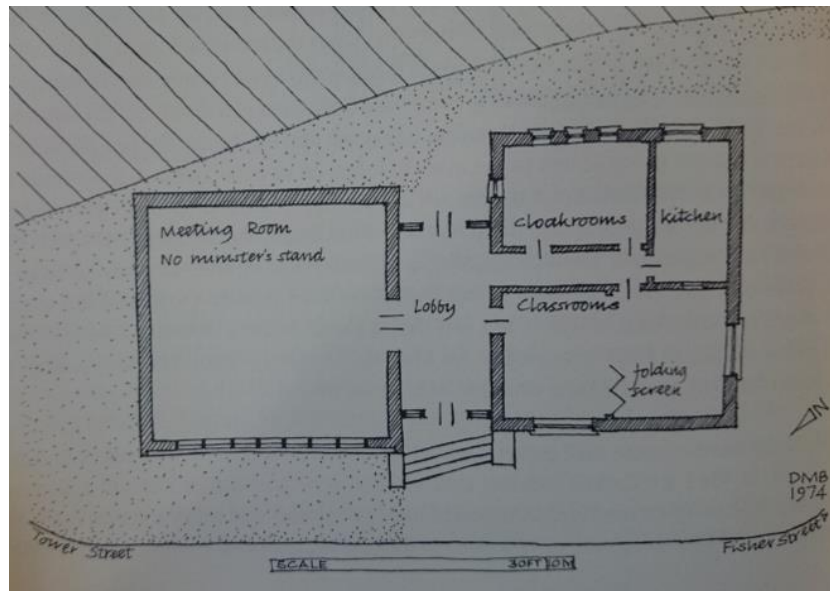


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of the meeting house by Butler (north is to the bottom left corner; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p.86)

The Meeting House was built from designs by Hodgson and Tritton and opened in 1963. The building is built in brown brick laid in stretcher bond, with some concrete panels with exposed aggregate. The plan consists of two single-storey flat roofed blocks connected by a glazed corridor; the meeting room is in the north block and ancillary spaces and a smaller meeting room are in a rectangular block to the south. The north-west elevation forms the principal frontage with a glazed central entrance with concrete canopy between the two blocks. To the left (north), the cube used as the meeting room is expressed by five vertical windows and the ancillary block to the south has a plain brick front elevation with a single window. The north cube is faced in concrete panels to the north-east and south-west, with plain brick to the blind rear elevation. The south block is faced in plain brick, with a single window to the south-west and three windows to the rear, south east elevation.

The meeting house is entered off the central corridor which forms a lobby. A passage and doorways to the right lead into the ancillary facilities and smaller meeting room. All principal rooms have plain plastered walls, carpeted floors and sloping suspended ceilings. The main

meeting room is square in plan with original double timber doors. There are no fitted furnishings.

2.3. Loose furnishings

Loose furnishings consist of a mixture of wooden benches and modern chairs arranged in a circle around a central table. The provenance the 19th century benches (Fig.2) is not known, but it is possible they were used in the former meeting house in Fisher Street.



Figure 2: Benches in meeting room, Carlisle Meeting House

2.4. Attached burial ground

The meeting house is built on a former detached burial ground land which was purchased by Friends in 1681.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located at the end of Fisher Street and faces Castle Way. To the north-west of the site is Carlisle Castle, a Scheduled Ancient Monument managed by English Heritage. The meeting house is within Carlisle City Centre Conservation Area. Fisher Street is an attractive setted street containing a number of Grade II listed buildings including the neighbouring properties numbers 1, 3 and 5 Fisher Street, all nineteenth century houses now in office use. The immediate setting of the meeting house is defined by a small landscaped garden to the rear and a car park to the south-west. Along the north-west boundary there are some intrusive railings. The meeting house is part of a forward looking architectural

design not based on surrounding buildings and makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.

Fisher Street is home to two former burial grounds, one at the site of the present meeting house and a further burial ground towards the middle of Fisher Street, purchased by the Friends in 1699; this site has now been built upon. There are a further five detached burial grounds in the area meeting, some associated with other meeting houses: Moorhouse NY 33578 56737, Beckfoot NY 0932 4962, Allonby NY 0818 4362, Newby NY 5850 2149 and Broughton NY 08123190.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed and is not considered to be a potential candidate for listing. The building has an interesting modern architectural style associated with the brutalist era and may merit inclusion on a local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site is likely to be of medium to high archaeological potential, depending on the level of disturbance. The Cumbria Historic Environment Record was consulted and no specific records relate to this site, although the site is in the heart of historic Carlisle. Fisher Street lies just east of the Roman fort and was within the walls of the medieval city. The Quaker burial ground on the site has some archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. Previous issues with the roof have now been resolved. Following, the last quinquennial inspection in 2012, new windows have been installed and a new electricity meter.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): *Not applicable.*

3.2. Maintenance

The Friends do not have a five year maintenance plan. Regular inspections are undertaken, following recommendations in the quinquennial survey. The Area Meeting and Local Meeting share the costs of any maintenance and repairs that need to be carried out.

3.3. Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit they have considered using the tool kit in the past. The friends have taken steps to improve sustainability:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Installation of new windows.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house has a thorough system for recycling.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: garden for wildlife habitats.
- Transport: the Friends encourage members to walk or cycle to the Meeting which is in a city centre location.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs, in the meeting house including a fully-equipped kitchen, WCs (including one fully accessible) and two meeting rooms.

3.5. Access

A Disability Access Audit was undertaken in 2010. As part of this survey the Friends have undertaken some of the recommended work including providing a ramp to the south-east of the meeting house.

The meeting house has level access from the street, an accessible WC and a hearing loop in the main meeting room.

The meeting house has good local transport links, due to its central location in the city centre. Bus services are available Monday to Saturday (none on a Sunday) with the nearest bus stop a short walk away from the meeting house. The train station is half a mile away. There is limited on-site car parking. No dedicated on-site parking for bicycles, however the boundary railings of the meeting house are used by cyclists who provide their own security locks.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 2 hours and for community use for 20 hours each week. The meeting house has two meeting rooms, however the Friends prefer to let only one room at a time. The Meeting does have a lettings policy and there are no groups / activities stated as being not acceptable. The meeting house is popular due to being located in the centre of town, well priced and non-judgemental.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house is in an area which is generally well cared for and has low crime levels. In the past five years there have been a couple of one-off incidents which were reported to the police. The Friends have not developed liaison with the local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

No plans for future change at present.

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 that would constrain any change that might be desired by Friends.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is currently being used for wider community use with a number of groups utilising the building, alongside use for local Meetings.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building is currently used by a number of community groups and the building could be adapted to serve a community use on a permanent basis. Alternatively, Fisher Street is used to accommodate a number of offices and it would be reasonable to convert the property for office use.

Part 5: Category: 3