

Quaker Meeting House, Central Edinburgh

7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2JL

National Grid Reference: NT 25557 73505



Statement of Significance

Edinburgh Meeting House has high heritage significance as a good example of late nineteenth century ecclesiastical and domestic architecture on Victoria Street in the Old Town, but its association with Quakers is relatively recent. The two buildings occupied by the meeting house are an important part of the Edinburgh street scene and retain some original internal features.

Evidential value

The site probably has low archaeological potential, as this area was substantially redeveloped in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the building may have some archaeological potential in relation to physical evidence for the original uses (church and tenement).

Historical value

The meeting house has high historical value as part of the planned rebuilding of Victoria Street in the 1860s, and for the original uses of the two elements; the Original Secessionist Church and the tenement block on Upper Bow. The association with Friends dates from the late 1980s.

Aesthetic value

The front meeting house building has high architectural value as a former church designed in Italian revival style, and part of Victoria Terrace. The

tenement block on Upper Bow is a typical example of a Victorian tenement in the city. Both buildings are little altered externally, but their interiors are altered, due to changes made in the late twentieth century.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value as the latest in a sequence of Quaker meeting houses in Edinburgh. It is well-used by the wider community and in August is used as Venue 40 for the Edinburgh Festival.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *South East Scotland*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0015880*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *City of Edinburgh Council*

1.5 Historic Environment Scotland: *Edinburgh and the Lothian*

1.6 Civil parish: *Edinburgh*

1.7 Listed status: *Category B*

1.8 Reference: *LB47903*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Old Town*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Dates: *1865; 1882: 1960s*

1.13 Architects: *Paterson and Shiells; Thomas Moncur: Basil Spence*

1.14 Date of visit: *29 June 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Andrew Farrar*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

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. II, pp. 875-878.

Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House (Booklet)

Commentary on condition, maintenance and finances prepared by John Phillips, October 2016

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

2.1. Historical background

The first recorded meeting of Friends in Edinburgh was in 1657, when Lt-Col William Osborne invited George Fox to the city. By 1665 meetings were being held in a house in the West Port owned by James Brown who was a tanner. A burial ground was acquired in The Pleasance in 1675. During the late seventeenth century, Edinburgh Quakers suffered persecution and meetings were held in the Tollbooth prison. Friends met in various rented or adapted places before a purpose-built meeting house was built in Peebles Wynd in 1730. Friends declined in the eighteenth century, and the meeting house was demolished 1789 to make way for the South Bridge development. From then until 1944, Friends met in a new meeting house built in the Pleasance (Fig.1), which is now owned by the University. A small meeting formed in the city centre in 1924, which grew to become Edinburgh Central Meeting, using a building on Stafford Street from 1938 until 1987 when the remodelling of the present building was completed.

The present building was acquired for Central Edinburgh Quakers in 1987 from the Boys' Brigade and altered for a meeting house by architects Walmesley and Savage, with a lift inserted into the light well. It was first built in 1865 as the United Original Secession Church, designed by architects Paterson & Shiells, as part of the Victoria Street improvement scheme, initially planned in 1827 by Thomas Hamilton. The church originally occupied a double-height space on the first floor, accessed by a staircase from an entrance from Victoria Terrace, with a shop adjacent. Basil Spence architects designed the remodelling for the Boys' Brigade in the 1960s, when it was known as Kirk House; the former ground floor shops were adapted as a spacious lobby with an office and a floor inserted in the former church to create a second floor hall, reached by a new staircase. A lift was installed by Friends in the light well in the 1980s, as part of a remodelling by architect Gerard Walmsley, a member of the meeting. The rear part of the building incorporates a tenement block built in the 1880s and designed by Thomas Moncur; this was adapted for ancillary functions in the late twentieth century.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The frontage building facing Victoria Terrace was built in 1865-66 as a church for the Secession Church, designed by Paterson and Shiells. The 3-storey 4-bay frontage is faced in squared and snecked stugged sandstone with polished dressings, and has a steeply pitched slate roof. Designed in Italian gothic style, the gabled front elevation is articulated with moulded string courses at floor and impost levels. The ground floor is in the form of a 4-bay open loggia to accommodate the footway of Victoria Terrace, with a semi-circular arcade on chamfered rectangular piers with moulded capitals, and iron railings to the south side. 'ORIGINAL SECESSION CHURCH' is painted on the east side of the east pier. The inner wall of the loggia has four semi-circular headed openings, comprising the main entrance doorway with panelled double doors to left of centre, flanked by windows with modern glazing and joinery and an entrance leading to the staircase to the right. A ramp with steel handrail has been inserted to the entrance. The fenestration to upper floors comprises round-arched 2-light windows with plate tracery and colonnettes, with modern glazing. The front and side elevation gables have moulded coped verges, with multi-foil roundels in the front central and side gables.

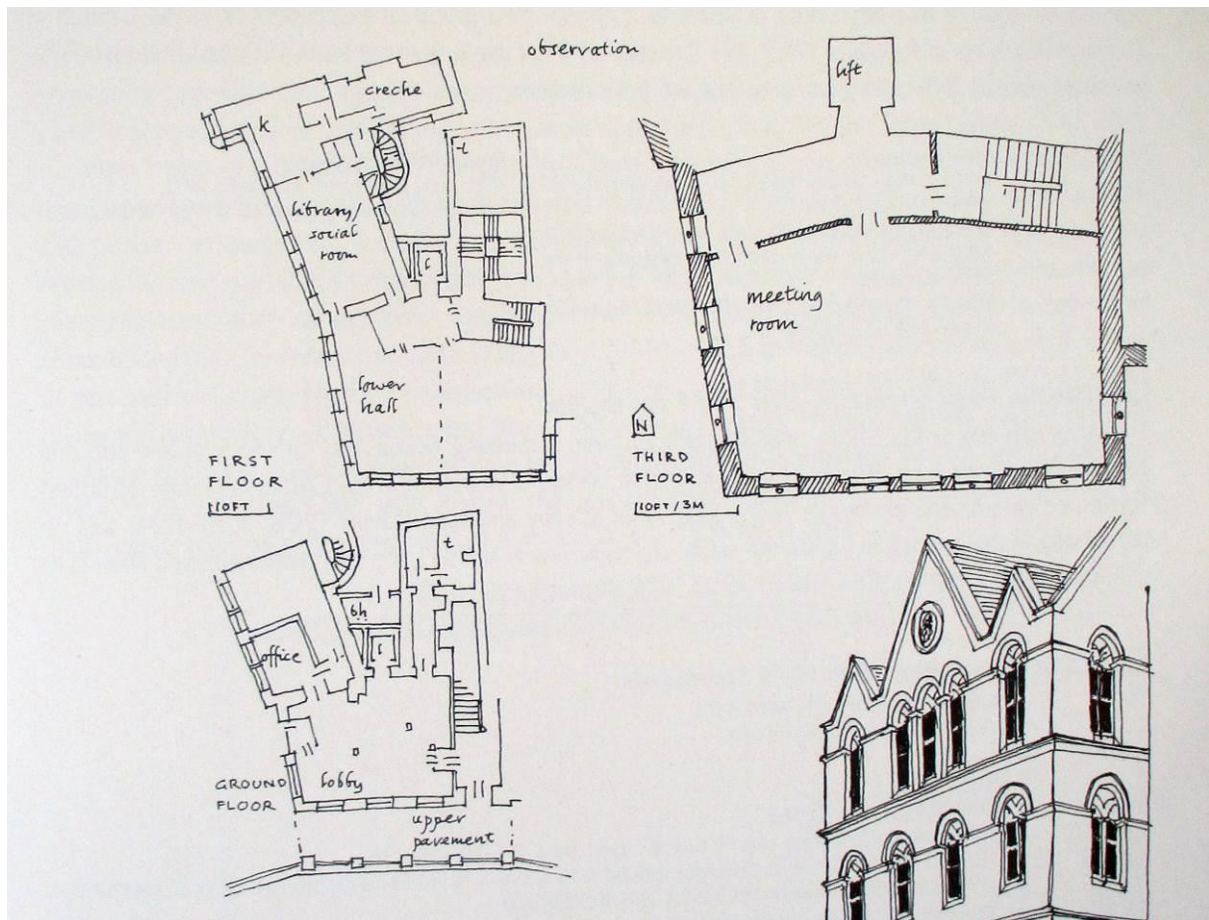


Fig.1: Plans from David Butler, Vol.2, 1999, page 877

Facing Upper Bow, behind the frontage range is a 4-bay, 4-storey (plus attic) tenement block built in 1882 and designed by Thomas Moncur with Scottish revival details. This is faced in rock-faced squared and snecked sandstone with polished dressings, quoins and a slate roof. The ground floor has a shop front framed with chamfered stone pilasters (painted), moulded stone cornice and modern glazing. The tenement entrance is via a glazed door with fanlight. The fenestration comprises single or paired timber 6-pane sash windows, all in tabbed surrounds. The second bay from the north has a corbelled ashlar chimney stack to the upper floors and a worn date plaque below this which is carved with initials and the 188?.

The interior of the former church was remodelled in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, but the staircase to the first floor with iron balustrade and moulded handrail survives from the 1860s church. The arrangement of the ground floor and the upper floor halls dates from the late twentieth century alterations, along with an inserted staircase and lift. The ground floor office has a vaulted timber-lined ceiling and painted brick end wall, probably designed by Spence in the 1960s. The lower hall (first floor) has a suspended ceiling and modern fittings. The hall used as the meeting room is on the second floor and retains a moulded plaster ceiling cornice and moulded beams on corbels.

In the tenement to the west side of the building, the late nineteenth century plan form is intact with some original features retained including a moulded plaster cornice in the present library and a winding staircase within a stair turret in the light well.



Fig.2: The library is in a former tenement, with plaster ceiling cornice

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house is mainly furnished with modern furniture but there is a set of 12 oak benches with solid backs and plain arm rests, brought here from Stafford Street and probably made in the early twentieth century. A table in the meeting room was made by Tim Stead in c1990.



Fig.2: Oak bench in the meeting room

2.4. Attached burial ground

N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is on the south side of Edinburgh Old Town, within the World Heritage Site. The building is situated on Victoria Terrace above the north side of Victoria Street, a distinctive curving street that leads from George IV Bridge down to the Grassmarket (Fig.3). The building is part of the planned redevelopment of this part of Old Town in the mid nineteenth century, and part of a group of eclectic Victorian buildings designed in various revival styles. There is a closed burial ground at The Pleasance, on the south-east side of the Old Town; the site includes the former meeting house built in c1810 and the burial ground contains graves but the grave stones have been moved to the perimeter. The Pleasance site is now owned by the University of Edinburgh.



Fig.3: the meeting house is part of Victoria Street, located on Victoria Terrace, built 1860s

2.6. Listed status

The south part of the building facing Victoria Terrace is listed in Category B. The north-west element of the building facing Upper Bow is separately listed, Category C, as Numbers 5-8 Upper Bow. The pavement and railings of Victoria Terrace and the steps to Upper Bow on the west side of the building are also separately listed. The descriptions do not refer to the interiors.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site was part of a major redevelopment of this part of Old Town in the 1860s and it is likely earlier archaeology was destroyed or damaged by this process.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The last quinquennial survey was undertaken in 2013 by Richard Shorter, architect. In 2011 safe roof access anchor points were installed and in 2013, the north roof slope was re-slatted. The 2014 QI report recommended some immediate or urgent inspection and repairs to the high level 'skew' stones of the west, east and south gables, the central flat roof (zinc), to stonework around windows, to the east elevation cornice and the rear gutter to the service wing. The estimated cost of these major roof works is around £60,000 and a grant has been obtained from the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund. The works went out to tender in October 2016. Fire doors and the fire safety regime are also in need of urgent attention.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): *N/A*

3.2. Maintenance and Finances

The building is generally well-maintained with a team of building managers closely involved in all day-to-day issues. The managers make sure that minor repairs and maintenance are carried out, on behalf of the Trustees. However, income does not cover the cost of running the building and major repairs. The meeting reports that building costs are therefore subsidised by members' annual contributions for AM funds. Undertaking all urgent repair and maintenance work has led the area meeting into deficit in a number of years and it is hard to maintain funding for BYM under these circumstances. External grants are essential to meet the cost of major works, but match funding also has to be provided by the area meeting and fund-raising makes heavy demands on a small number of Friends. AM reserves have been run down and need to be rebuilt, but the meeting is reliant on potential future legacies.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting has improved the building to reduce their energy and resource use; double glazing was installed to all the windows in the main meeting room and hall at a cost of £120,000 (with a grant from Edinburgh World Heritage Trust). In 2005, insulation was provided above the meeting room ceiling, and in 2010 sash windows were draught-proofed. Heating is currently electric and the meeting is considering the potential for a heat-pump coupled with improved ventilation (detailed design not yet commissioned).

3.4. Amenities

The building has a wide range of facilities, including the meeting room, a spacious ground floor lobby, office, the lower hall (first floor) and smaller rooms for meetings on lower floors and a library. There is a ground floor kitchen, children's room (the Bow Room) and adequate lavatories. There are two flats at the top of the 1880s tenement, one is let and the other is used by the building managers (made up of two small flats combined).

3.5. Access

The building's accessibility is generally good with a ramp to the main ground floor entrance (installed in 2004), with new doors. There is level access along the terrace from George IV Bridge. The side doorway from Upper Bow was remodelled in 2014 to provide wheelchair access to the Bow Room (and crèche). The lift which serves the main rooms on the upper floors was upgraded in 2007, but some small rooms to the rear of the building are only accessible by staircases. There are toilets suitable for disabled people, and three meeting rooms are fitted with a hearing loop (new loop installed in meeting room in 2005).

The meeting house is in the heart of the city centre, within walking distance of Edinburgh Waverley railway station (up a steep hill) and good public transport links.

3.6. Community Use

The building is reserved for Quaker use on Sundays (6 hours), and there are also half-hour Meetings for Worship 3 times during the week; Friends use the building for an average total of 10-12 hours per week. The lettings are managed by a team of building managers; in theory the building's maximum capacity for a week is in the region of 300 hours, but in practice the total average hours of use is around 90 hours. Rooms can be let six days a week, if staff are available on Saturdays. The building is not available for community lettings during August when it is used as a Fringe venue (Venue 40) for the Edinburgh Festival.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

Due to the city centre location, the meeting experiences some issues around homelessness, and often there are people sleeping rough in the doorway overnight, but the building manager reports that this rarely causes problems apart from a bit of clearing up from time to time. There are no reported incidents of heritage crime.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans to alter the building in the near future, although a more sustainable heating system is being considered and major repairs are due to the roof.

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 previously been remodelled and altered, and both parts could be adapted again in the future if required, subject to listed building consent.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The same principles apply as above.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. If Edinburgh Central Meeting were to relocate, this large building could be capable of sensitive adaptation to mixed uses, including residential, community, arts or commercial use, subject to listed building consent. There is little scope to alter the exterior due to its listed status and its prominence in the street scene and World Heritage Site.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List descriptions

7 VICTORIA TERRACE, QUAKER MEETING HOUSE

Information

- Ref. LB47903
- Category: B
- Date Added: 14/12/1970

Location

- Local Authority: Edinburgh
- Planning Authority: Edinburgh
- Burgh: Edinburgh

National Grid Reference

- NGRNT 25547 73514
- Coordinates 325547, 673514

Description

Paterson and Shiells, 1865-6. 3-storey Italian gothic church with open arcaded loggia to ground floor with corniced, chamfered piers; 4 bays to Victoria Terrace, 3 bays to Upper Bow. Squared and snecked stugged sandstone with polished dressings. Moulded string courses between ground and 1st floors and between 1st and 2nd floors. Finialled gables with roll-moulded decoration. Cusped 2-light Plate-traceried windows in round-arched surrounds.

S (VICTORIA TERRACE) ELEVATION: regular windows to 4 bays at 1st floor; three-light window to 2nd floor under broad gable with blind multifoil opening, flanked by narrow gables over outer bays.

W (UPPER BOW) ELEVATION: 2 bays to right gabled with blind multifoil opening; single bay to left; shop to ground in left and centre bays.

E ELEVATION: projecting single bay with open arcade to ground and gable above.

Modern glazing with top hoppers. Grey slates.

Statement of Special Interest

Ecclesiastical building still in use as such. Original Secession Church, now Quaker Meeting House.

References

Dean of Guild 16th June 1865. BUILDER 19th August 1865. Ill. Grant OLD AND NEW EDINBURGH (1885) p 293. Gifford, McWilliam and Walker EDINBURGH (1984) p 235

5-8 (INCLUSIVE) UPPER BOW

Information

- Ref. LB29865
- Category: C
- Date Added: 11/01/1989

Location

- Local Authority: Edinburgh

- Planning Authority: Edinburgh
- Burgh: Edinburgh

National Grid Reference

- NGRNT 25547 73524
- Coordinates 325547, 673524

Description

Thomas Moncur, 1882. 4-storey and attic 4-bay tenement with 17th century Scottish Revival detailing, stepped with slope of street. Rock-faced squared and snecked sandstone with polished dressings (painted ashlar to ground). Corniced ground floor; corbel table to attic. Long and short quoins; stop-chamfered corners to ground. Windows in tabbed surrounds. Advanced gabled bay to outer left: glazed door with plate glass fanlight in re-entrant angle. Recessed 3-bay block to right: stop-chamfered pilastrated openings to shops at ground floor (modern glazing); bipartite windows to right; carved panel with initials and date (188?-worn) between left and centre bays, with corbelled-out chimneybreast above, rising to wallhead gable flanked by windows; piend-roofed dormer to right.

6-pane glazing in timber sash and case windows. Grey slates.

Statement of Special Interest

Until after the 1827 Improvement Act West Bow was a steep Z-shaped street which climbed from the Grassmarket to Upper Bow at the foot of Castlehill. Most of the old buildings in West and Upper Bow were swept away to make room for the northern side of Victoria Street, built to link the Grassmarket with the new George IV Bridge. Before their demolition, Thomas Hamilton, the architect for the scheme, made careful elevational drawings of the buildings

References

TRANSACTIONS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND 1861-62, NMRS edd/228/19-25. Grant OLD AND NEW EDINBURGH (1885) pp 309-321. Gifford, McWilliam and Walker EDINBURGH (1984) p 198