

Quaker Meeting House, Chester

Union Walk, Frodsham Street, Chester, CH1 3LF

National Grid Reference: SJ40770 66490



Statement of Significance

A modest building of 1974/75 that provides good facilities for both the Quakers and community groups, but has low architectural interest and low heritage value. The site has high archaeological potential, as there was a previous meeting house and burial ground on the site, within the centre of Chester.

Evidential value

The site of the meeting house has high evidential value; it is within Chester Area of Archaeological Importance (one of only five designated in England). There is the potential for the survival of below-ground archaeology; a previous meeting house dating from 1703 and former burial ground were on this site.

Historical value

The meeting house building has low historical significance, however, the site provides local context for the long history of Quakers in the area.

Aesthetic value

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

Communal value

The site has been in Quaker use since the 1700s. The present meeting house is used by a number of local community groups.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Wirral and Chester*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0002250*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Cheshire West and Chester Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.6 Civil parish: *Chester*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Chester City Centre*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1974/75*

1.13 Architect (s): *Design Group Partnership – Neale T Evans*

1.14 Date of visit: *23rd April 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Tom Miller*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable.*

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.45-46.

Peter Spiers, *Local Meeting Survey*, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

Meetings have been taking place on the site of the present meeting house since at least 1701. The site in Frodsham Street, formerly known as Cow Lane once housed a farm building which was used by Friends as a venue for Meetings in 1701 or even earlier. The farm building was subsequently replaced by a purpose-built meeting house in 1703. From the 1800s a number of alterations and repairs took place and when death watch beetle was found in one of the principal roof timbers in 1964, Friends decided to demolish the meeting house and sell the site for re-development which would include a new meeting house. The site was purchased by a commercial developer who built a shop at ground floor and a dual purpose meeting house and warden's flat on the first floor level in 1975.



Figure 1: Meeting House on Frodsham Street in 1703. Drawing by Butler (1999, vol.1. p. 46)

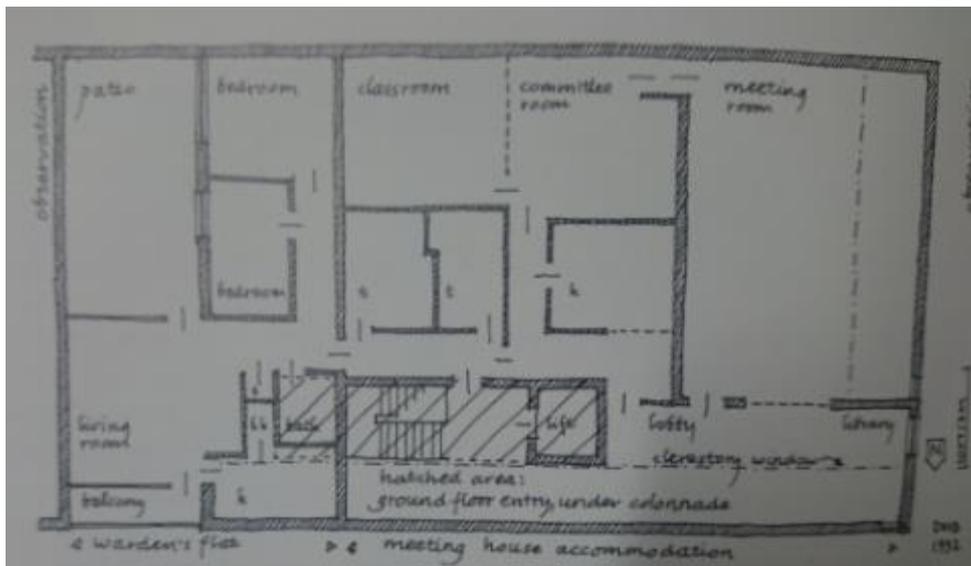


Figure 2: Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house in 1975 as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p.46)

By the 1990s it had become apparent that the warden's flat was unsuitable for living accommodation and at the same time there was a demand for extra meeting space. The internal layout of the flat was reconfigured and additional meeting rooms were provided. Figure 2 shows the internal layout in 1975 prior to the alteration to create further meeting space.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built from designs by the Design Group Partnership of Chester, in 1974-75. The meeting room is part of a mixed use building which includes commercial premises at ground floor and the meeting house at first floor. The building has a functional design on a rectangular plan. The walls are faced with red brick laid in stretcher bond, windows are uPVC, and two monopitch roof slopes to the east and south are tiled, whilst the

rest of the roof is flat and covered in felt. The entrance lobby is located on the south elevation and accessed via glazed electronic sliding doors with a glazed canopy.

The entrance lobby provides a small reception area with a small office, staircase and lift. A narrow lobby area at first floor level leads into the meeting rooms, WCs and kitchen facilities. The main meeting room is roughly square in plan with plain plastered walls to the north and east, the west wall is lined with tongue and groove panelling and the south wall contains timber sliding doors leading to the meeting room. The floors are carpeted. The monopitch roof is supported on exposed metal girders and provides clerestory lighting. Most of the fittings are recent and seating consists of loose chairs. The meeting house contains three further small meeting rooms all of which are rectangular in shape with no fittings or furnishings of particular interest. A small patio garden can be accessed from meeting room 2 and 3.

2.3. Loose furnishings

There are no furnishings of special note.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The previous meeting house on the site had a plot which contained a small burial ground. When the present meeting house was built in the 1970s the human remains were exhumed and moved to the city cemetery.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located north-east outside the city walls within Chester's historic city centre. Frodsham Street is lined with shops and connected to Foregate Street, the main retail street running east to west through Chester. The street has retained much of its historic character which includes a number of gable fronted properties built in brick and render including the neighbouring Temple Bar public house. The street also includes some modern infill buildings. The meeting house is located within Chester's city centre conservation area but the building makes a neutral contribution to the character of the area due its style and date.

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. The building is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site is likely to be of high archaeological potential. The Cheshire Historic Environment Record was consulted and the site falls within the Chester and Boughton Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI), one of only five AAIs designated in England. The HER record notes a previous meeting house dating from 1703 and burial ground on the site, although human remains were exhumed in the 1970s.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. A modern building which was repaired and redecorated in the 1990s and is currently undergoing a programme of minor internal improvements.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2. Maintenance

The friends are only responsible for the maintenance and repair of the internal spaces within the meeting house, for which they have sufficient funds. In 1975 the site was sold to a commercial developer; the building is owned by a property company which is responsible for undertaking repairs and maintenance to the structure and exterior.

3.3. Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: improved insulation, double glazing and the use of a renewable energy supplier.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house has a thorough system for recycling.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs. These include a kitchen area, WCs (including one fully accessible) and four meeting rooms.

3.5. Access

A Disability Access Audit was undertaken in February 2015. As part of this survey the Friends are undertaking some of the recommendations including enlarging the accessible toilet and providing facilities for partially-sighted people including improved signage.

The meeting house has level access from the street and the first floor is accessible via a lift, with an accessible WC. There are hearing loops in all rooms.

The meeting house has good local transport links, due to its central location in the city centre. There is no parking available on site apart from a single space for the warden. Public pay and display car parks are close by. Secure parking for bicycles is available as long as the owners provide their own security locks.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 4 hours and in community use for 130 hours each week. There is a lettings policy. There is a standard rate for hiring the meeting rooms but reduced rates are offered to voluntary, charitable or community groups. The meeting house has a no smoking and no alcohol policy. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to its warm and welcoming atmosphere, central city centre location, free Wi-Fi, presentation equipment being available for hire and easy access.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house is located in a city centre location; one of the neighbouring properties is a public house which has resulted in informal contact to the police to report minor incidents in the past. The Friends have made contact with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no future plans for change at the meeting house.

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 to influence any change that might be desired by Friends.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The central location of the meeting house has resulted in the meeting rooms being let for 130 hours per week as well being used by Friends. As there are no heritage constraints, changes could be made to accommodate increased community use in the future, if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The meeting house is above a commercial premises in a city centre location. It could be capable of conversion into an office or commercial use or remain as a venue for community use.

Part 5: Category: 4