

Friends Meeting House, Colwyn Bay

21 Erskine Road, Colwyn Bay, LL29 8EU

National Grid Reference: SH 85406 78739



Statement of Significance

The 1899 meeting house is an attractive late Victorian building that retains a little altered exterior and has some good quality original internal fittings. It contributes to the street scene in a part of Colwyn Bay that developed in the late nineteenth century

Evidential value

The meeting house site is likely to have low archaeological potential and the building has low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has medium historical value as a Quaker meeting house built to serve Colwyn Bay when it was a thriving resort, retaining a layout and interior that expresses Friends' past approach to worship and meetings. It is associated with the local Barlow family who paid for the building.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has some aesthetic significance as a typical example of a modest place of worship built in the late nineteenth century, part of a late Victorian residential and resort development. The interior has high significance for the intact pine panelled folding screens, ministers' stand, stained glass and other fittings.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value as a meeting house still used for Quaker worship, and as a community asset used for meetings and other activities.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *North Wales*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005750*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Conwy County Borough Council*
- 1.5 National heritage body: *Cadw*
- 1.6 Community: *Colwyn Bay*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/A*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1899*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *9 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Frank Brown*
- 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. 852.

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

2.1. Historical background

Colwyn Bay developed as a popular resort on the North Wales coast in the nineteenth century. A meeting was established in 1894 and the meeting house was built five years later, in a street of roughly contemporary houses. A granite plaque inside the porch records that it was built in 1899 'in accordance with the intentions of Thomas Barlow by his widow and sons John, Emmott, Frank and Percy'. A caretaker's house was integrated into the building, at one end. The building remained in the ownership of the Barlow family until 1987, when they conveyed the meeting house to Friends Trusts Ltd. In 2006, some improvements were made, including a small rear extension for a disabled WC and an access ramp to the front entrance, by HMA Design. In 2013, solar panels were installed on the roof.

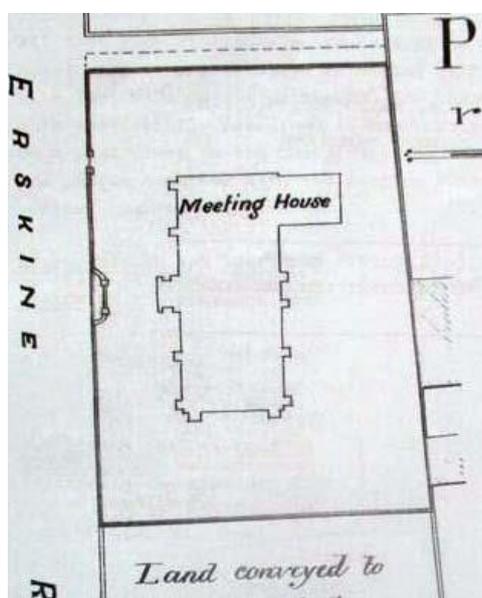


Fig.1: plan of the meeting house site from a deed plan dated 1906 (Colwyn Meeting House collection). Not to scale. North is to the bottom.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1899; the architect has not been identified. The building is constructed of red brick laid in English garden wall bond, with commons bricks to the rear elevation, a red clay tiled roof with terracotta coped verges, ceramic ridge cresting and brick ridge stack with six clay pots. The cast-iron rainwater goods have decorative fixings. The building is aligned north-south with the front elevation facing the road to the east and integral caretaker's house to the south-west; the meeting house element is single storey and the house is 2-storey over a basement. The large meeting room is at the north end with an entrance passage separating it from the smaller meeting room to the south. The front elevation of the meeting house is divided into five bays expressed as recessed panels with stepped brick buttresses; a gabled porch with terracotta coped verges occupies the narrower centre bay, with double panelled entrance doors in an arched opening and leaded side windows. The main meeting room is lit by two semi-circular headed timber windows to the right of the porch and a matching window to the left lighting the small meeting room; the windows have fixed small panes with hopper vents. The bay at the south end of the elevation has a smaller arched panel, containing two small sash windows with leaded glass for the

lavatories. The roof facing east is fitted with photovoltaic panels, and there is a ramp up to the front door, from the south, both part of 2006 works. All the windows have sandstone sills. The right return (north gable) has a single circular window. The 3-bay left return has a central doorway to the house with post-war flat canopy and sash windows to ground and first floors, a small circular attic window and basement windows; the right hand ground floor sash window has frosted glass and serves the meeting house kitchen. A short single-storey wing projects to the west part of the house. The rear elevation has semi-circular headed windows to the meeting rooms and a panelled rear door with arched over-light. There is a modern flat-roofed addition to the right, in the angle between the side wing of the dwelling and the rear wall of the meeting house.

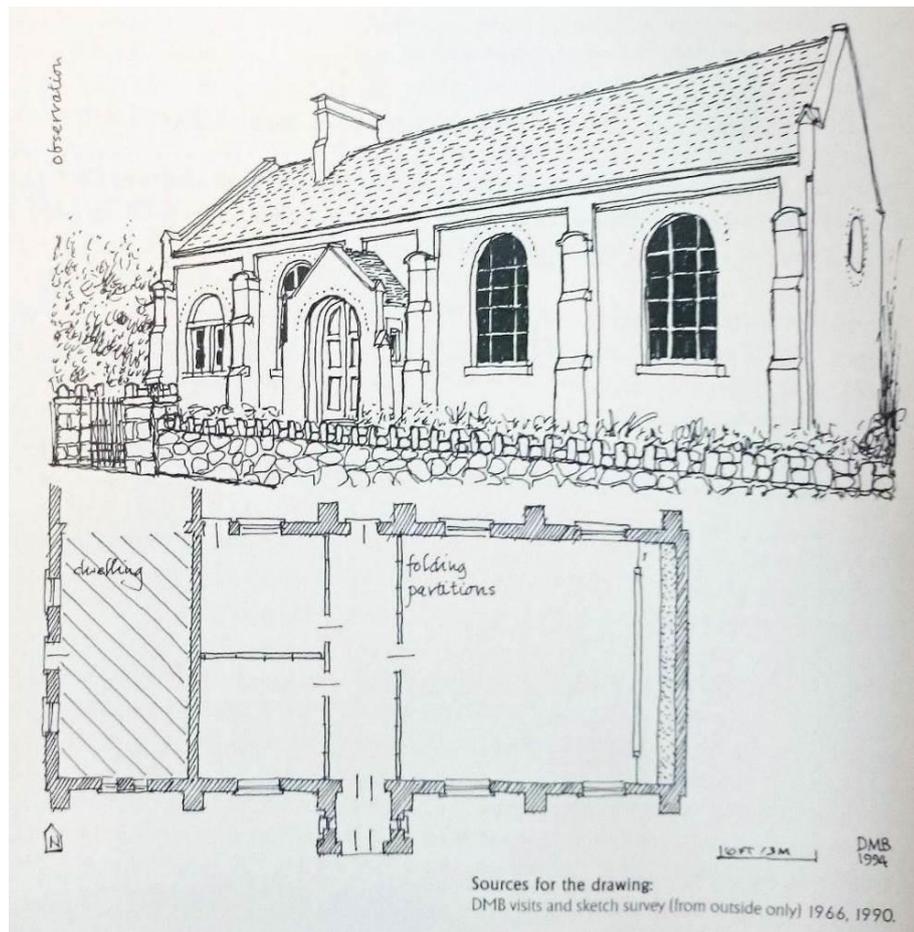


Fig.3: sketch and plan by David Butler, 1994. NB. The hatched area of the dwelling is not quite accurate as the meeting house kitchen and lavatories are in the south-east corner, and north is to the right, not at the top.

The interior is entered via the porch which has a tiled floor and a granite plaque on the south wall, recording the Barlow family's gift of the meeting house. The large and small meeting rooms are separated by a cross passage with moveable pine panelled screens on either side. The panels are glazed at the top and fitted with brass handles; a steel track set into the floor enables the hinged panels to fold open. The large meeting room has plastered walls and a plaster ceiling with moulded details. The floor is carpeted over pine boards. The ministers' stand at the north end has a panelled pine front with moulded handrail on brass supports, with folding table on the rear face, a fixed pine bench and panelling to the back wall. The glass pendant lamps appear original. The circular window on the north wall has Art Nouveau stained glass and leadwork. The small meeting room has a carpeted floor and a pine folding screen that can be used to divide the rectangular room into two small square spaces. There is an inter-war tiled fireplace towards the east side of the room. Off the south-east corner of the

small meeting room two pine doors lead to a kitchen and a lavatory; both have red tiled floors, original windows and there is a peg rail with brass pegs in the lavatory. Originally part of the lavatories, the kitchen was created by inserting a stud partition (late twentieth century).



Fig.2: interior details: brass door fittings (left) and stained glass in a meeting room window (right)

2.3. Loose furnishings



Fig.4: pine benches, probably contemporary with the meeting house

The meeting house contains a set of five pine benches with curved bench ends and plain horizontal rails to the backs; these are now set against the walls of the main meeting room and loose chairs, arranged in a circle, are used for meeting for worship. There are two pine book cases, provenance not known.

2.4. Attached burial ground

N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies on the west side of a residential street in Colwyn Bay, one of a several similar streets laid out in a grid pattern as part of late nineteenth and early twentieth century development. Erskine Road is lined with semi-detached or terraced red brick houses, set behind low stone garden walls; the walls to the meeting house grounds match the garden walls to the houses. The original iron gate is set between stone gate piers, but is no longer in use due to the recently installed ramp. There is a modern steel gate to the south garden of the house. The meeting house is on a roughly rectangular plot (Fig.1), bounded by low stone

walls to the front and sides, with lawns and borders to the garden planted with vegetables and flowers.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is not listed, but could perhaps be a candidate for listing as an unusual example of a little altered late nineteenth century meeting house in Wales. It would also qualify for local listing, subject to local authority resources.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house is part of nineteenth century Colwyn Bay and it is not known whether there were any previous buildings on the site. The archaeological potential is probably low, given the building was built with a basement and the ground levels have been altered.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey by Donald Saunders

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The last QI was on 28 February 2012. Since then, a new bathroom has been installed in the caretaker's flat

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

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting does not have a 5-year plan, but undertakes works as and when needed. Since investing in the solar roof panels,, the meeting does not have the funds needed to maintain the building, but is currently 'rebuilding resources'.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has taken steps to improve its energy efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint.

In 2013 solar roof panels installed. Recycling of waste is undertaken using the local authority scheme. A local improvement scheme is running which includes installing double glazed windows to dwellings; the meeting could participate in this to upgrade the windows to the caretaker's house.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has access to all the amenities it needs. There is a kitchen, men's and women's WCs, and two meeting rooms. The caretaker's house is part of the building.

The meeting house is a short walk from public transport and the town centre. There is parking on the road outside.

3.5. Access

No formal access audit has been carried out, but works were completed to improve disabled access in 2006, when a new disabled WC was built to the rear, and an access ramp was installed to the front entrance. There are no internal steps or staircase in the meeting house. There is no hearing loop.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the building for two hours per week, and other groups use it for an average of 66 hours a week. The lettings policy allows Quaker groups to use the building for free, and the meeting excludes political groups, and gambling and the drinking of alcohol. Charitable groups, local government users and those sympathetic to Quaker principals are acceptable users. It is attractive due to the location and being well-priced.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

No issues have been identified by the meeting; they have not experienced any heritage crime or anti-social behaviour. The local area has changed since Colwyn Bay declined as a resort and there are now some social problems in the locality; community confidence is not high.

3.8. Plans for change

The meeting has recently been reviewing whether to continue to use the meeting house, in the light of the ageing membership and changes to the locality; for now they have decided to remain here.

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 provides the facilities and space that is needed by the local meeting. It has been recently adapted to improve access and no further changes are required. The building contains some good quality original fittings and these should be retained, if possible, even if no longer used.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use

The building is fairly well used by the community, but there is scope to further adapt the spaces if this was desirable. The building contains some good quality original fittings and these should be retained, if possible, even if no longer used.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House

The meeting house is an attractive late Victorian building that retains a little altered exterior and has some good quality original internal fittings; these should be retained, if possible, in the event of the building closing and being converted for a new use.

Part 5: Category: 2