

## ***Friends Meeting House, Coventry***

*Hill Street, Coventry, CV1 4AN*

*National Grid Reference: SP 32956 79176*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***The meeting house has medium heritage significance for historic and architectural value. The overall site has high heritage value as a site in use as a Quaker burial ground from 1668 and the site of a barn first used by Coventry Meeting for worship.***

#### ***Evidential value***

***This building was purpose-built in the 1950s on a site which was in use for Quaker burials since 1668. The first place of worship for Quakers was within a barn also located on this site. The general area of Hill Street is identified as an Archaeological Constraint Area, Hill Street Medieval Suburb. The site has high evidential value.***

#### ***Historical value***

***The site of the meeting house has high historical value, Hill Street was purchased for use as a Quaker burial ground and a barn on site was previously used for worship in 1668. The Coventry Meeting re-located to two other purpose-built meeting houses before returning to the location of the present day meeting house on the site of the old burial ground. The long history of the meeting provides a local context of the evolution of Quakers in the area.***

#### ***Aesthetic value***

***This 1950s building has medium aesthetic value and makes a neutral contribution to the character of the conservation area.***

#### ***Communal value***

***The meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers and in use since it opened in 1953. The building provides a local community focus and its facilities are used by a large number of local groups.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0006300*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Coventry City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Coventry*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Spon Street*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1953*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Alfred Gardner*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *14 December 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *William Waddilove*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp.636-638.

William Waddilove, Local Meeting Survey, December 2015.

A brief History of Quakerism in the Coventry area,  
<http://www.coventryquakers.org.uk/index.htm#history>

Coventry Friends Meeting House, <http://www.1624country.org.uk/Coventry.htm>

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

### **2.1 Historical background**

In 1668, a plot of land was purchased on Hill Street for use as a Quaker burial ground. An existing barn on site became a place of worship for the next twenty years, until land was purchased on Vicars Lane in 1689 for a purpose-built meeting house. The meeting house opened the same year and further land to the north of the meeting house was bought to allow for the expansion of the meeting house in 1742. This meeting house would remain in use

until the late nineteenth century, by this date the building had undergone a number of alterations and repairs and a decision was made to replace the meeting house. It was also at a time when Friends were heavily involved in mission work, and a larger meeting house was needed to accommodate this work by Friends.

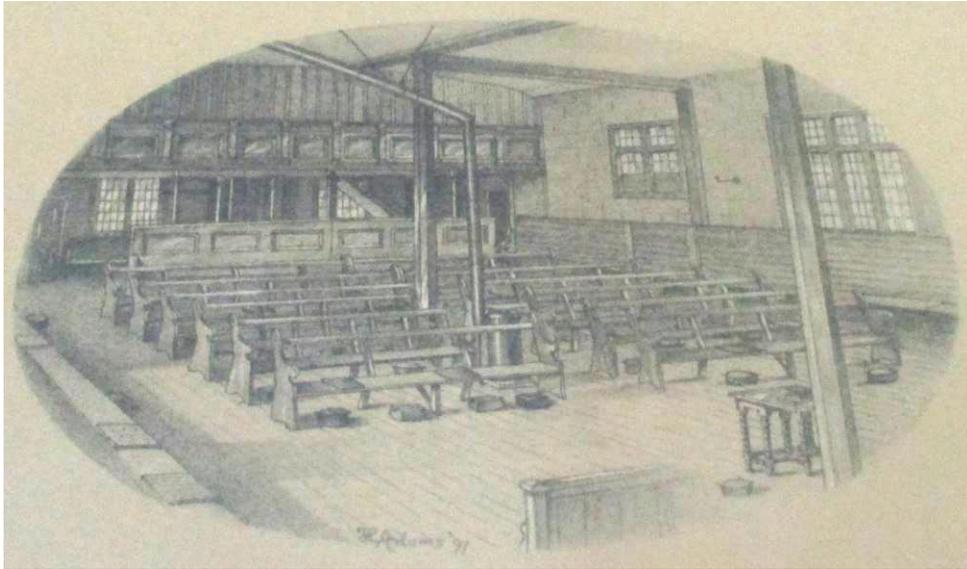


Figure 1: Drawing of the interior of Vicars Lane meeting house (Coventry MH Archive)

The third meeting house was built to the designs of Charles Smith and Son in 1897 on land purchased in Holyhead Road for £286. By the 1930's the meeting house, which contained a large meeting room, a number of class rooms and school rooms, became too large for the declining number of Friends. With the onset of the Second World War, Friends began to meet in smaller venues such as premises on Thomas Street, and in the YWCA building in Queens Road until a new meeting house was built on the Quaker burial ground first purchased for Quaker use in 1668 in Hill Street. The meeting house designed by of Alfred Gardner was built in 1953 and cost of approximately £6,000. The meeting house was originally constructed with a flat roof and following the need for a number of repairs this was replaced with the present day hipped roof in 1995.



Figure 2: The Friends Meeting House on Holyhead Road

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

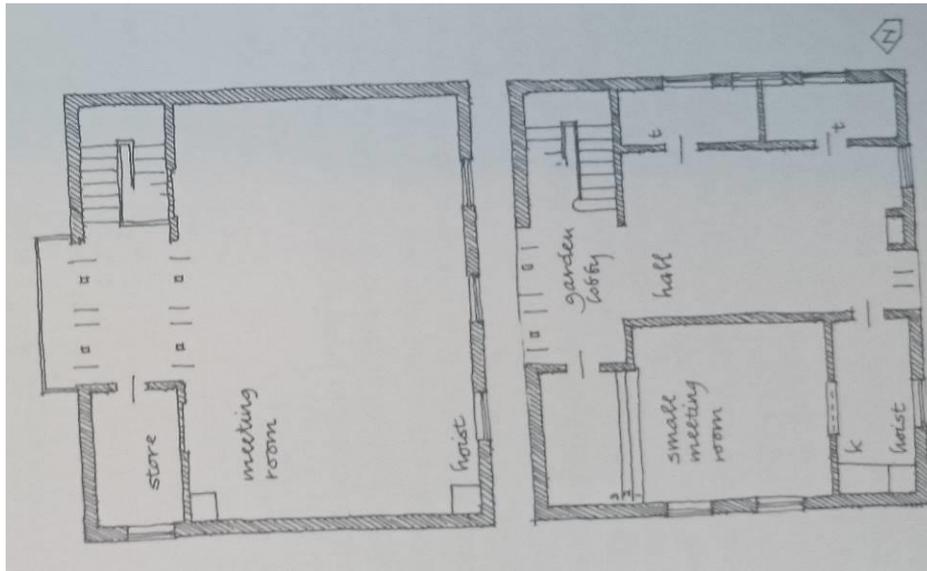


Figure 3: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the top right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.637)

The meeting house was built to the designs of Alfred Gardner and opened in 1953. The two-storey rectangular planned building was designed with the meeting room at first floor above the ancillary facilities and smaller meeting room below. It is built in red / brown brick laid in stretcher bond, a hipped roof covered in concrete tiles, with uPVC rain water goods, and uPVC windows. The principal elevation is to the north east and comprises three 1-light vertical windows at first floor, and a central entrance flanked by two 2-light windows. The south east elevation has two 1-light windows at ground level and a 2-light window at first and the northwest elevation has three windows at ground level. The rear elevation to the south west consists of two glass panelled windows flanked by two doorways, a balcony above with a large area of glazing and a doorway onto the balcony.

Internally, the lobby area provides access to the smaller meeting room, ancillary facilities and the staircase to first floor. The area is carpeted, the ceiling is formed of insulated panels and the walls are a mixture of exposed brick and plastered and painted finishes. The lobby can be separated by the garden lobby by a sliding screen to the south west. The terrazzo staircase with timber handrail leads to the main meeting room on the first floor. The room is large, spacious and well lit. The walls to the south west and north east are of exposed brick, cork-facing to the northwest and the remaining wall is plastered and painted. The ceiling is lined with insulated boards, and the floor is covered in cork tiles.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

No furnishings of particular note.

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is to the rear of the meeting house. Figure 4 is an undated burial ground plan which includes outlines of the present meeting house and driveway. This site in Hill Street was first purchased by Friends in 1668 for use as a burial ground and by 1953 the present day meeting house was built on part of the burial ground. The site is no longer used for burials and the approximate date range the burials cover is unknown. Burial records have been transcribed from the burial certificate held by Warwickshire Monthly Meeting and 58 Coventry-related burials were transcribed, the dates of the burials from the mid-nineteenth century. To the south west of the burial ground a small number of headstones laid flat remain in situ.

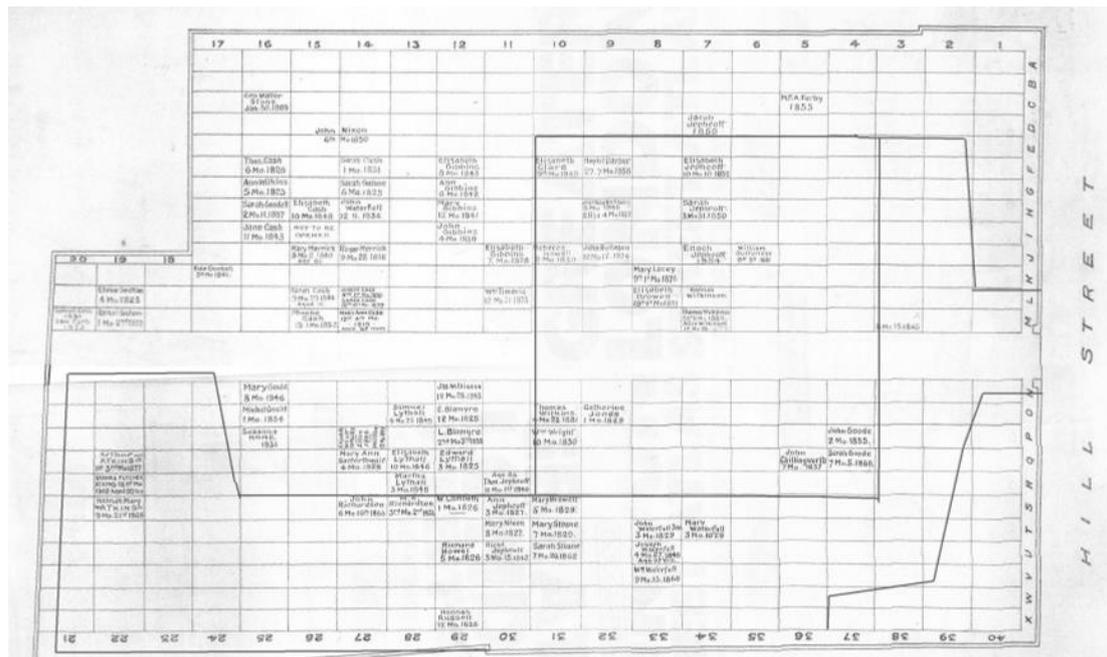


Figure 4: Hill Street Burial Plan, undated (Coventry MH Archive)

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located north west of Coventry city centre. Hill Street is located within Spon Street Conservation Area designated in 1969. The street itself contains the Grade II\* Bonds Hospital, founded by the will of Thomas Bond who died in the sixteenth century; it is a mainly close studded timber framed building. Located within the Bonds Hospital site are remains of the Coventry city walls. To the east of Hill Street is the Grade I listed Bablake School. In between Bond Hospital and the meeting house is a modern complex of flats which form part of the sheltered accommodation associated with Bonds Hospital. Opposite the meeting house is a an eighteenth century Grade II listed terrace known as early top-shops where workshops were located on the first floor along with a large area of open space earmarked for future redevelopment.

The boundary wall to the front of the meeting house is a mixture of red brick and sandstone, a driveway leads to the rear of the building, where a limited number of parking spaces is available. The grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which add to the mature landscaped character of the area.

## 2.6 Listed status

Not listed. The meeting house is not considered to be a future candidate for listing.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Coventry Historic Environment Record was consulted and identifies a burial ground; The Quakers purchased the land for a burial ground in 1668 and a barn on site was used as a meeting house until 1689. The general area of Hill Street has been identified as an Archaeological Constraint Area, Hill Street Medieval Suburb. The site is likely to be of high archaeological potential.

## Part 3: Current use and management

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The most recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in June 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) found the building to be in good working order.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is well maintained.

### 3.2 Maintenance

The building is well-maintained by the meeting and a five year maintenance and repair plan is in place. Central England Area Meeting issue an 'Annual Inspection of Premises Questionnaire' each year. Maintenance needs are considered following the inspection. The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

1) Maintenance items of a routine or cyclical nature. For example, have the gutters and down pipes been cleaned out regularly?

2) Structural and other defects which may give cause for concern, and actions required or taken as a result of the quinquennial survey. For example, does the roof leak?

The questionnaire was completed by Liz Nagra in September 2015 when there was no record of any problems or issues with the building. The Friends have sufficient funds for the maintenance and repair of the building.

### 3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change and energy efficiency: solar photovoltaics installed on the south west roof, cavity wall insulation, double glazing, and draft proofing.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: General rubbish collected by local authority scheme and a voluntary recycling scheme is in place for paper and cardboard.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.
- Transport: Car parking available.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs. This includes the main meeting room, committee room, library, toilets (including one fully accessible) and kitchen.

An on-site car park is available for two cars. Additional car parking is available at the Belgrade Plaza with a cost of £2.50 for three hours, £7 all day and £1 on Sundays. There is secure parking for bicycles available. The meeting house city centre location means it is served by local bus services which run seven days a week, reduced service on Sunday's. The meeting house is a fifteen minute walk from Coventry railway station.

### 3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit was undertaken in 2010. The front entrance is accessed by three steps with handrails on both sides or by a shallow ramp. The two rear doors are each fitted

with shallow wooden ramps with non-slip surface. The ground floor is fully accessible with fully accessible toilet facilities available in the foyer. The library has one step (with white nosing) but also a ramp to provide access. Access to the first floor is available via an electric stair lift. The main meeting room is fitted with a hearing loop.

### 3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 4 hours per week and is well used by community groups each week. The meeting house has three rooms available to let in three sessions, Monday to Sunday; morning, afternoon and evening. The main meeting room can accommodate 100 people, the committee room 8 and the library 30 people. Kitchen facilities are included in the lettings for tea and light refreshments. There is a lettings policy. Quaker groups are able to use the meeting house for free. There are currently 24 groups which use the meeting house on a regular basis this includes meditation group, Sahaja yoga, soul singing, Coventry Rambling Group, and Cycling Touring Group. The meeting house is popular due to its ambience, good location, being well maintained, flexible to use and the competitive price.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, and the area is generally well cared-for and has low levels of crime and deprivation. The Friends have in the past developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

In the near future plans for change relate to redecorating of the main 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 currently meets the needs of the Friends, and there are no heritage constraints.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building is already used for other community uses and has the necessary facilities to accommodate the community groups, but further change would be possible

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* The average attendance at a Meeting is between 20 and 35, so closure would therefore seem unlikely. In the unfortunate event of closure the meeting house could continue to provide a venue for community use without heritage constraints on further change.

## **Part 5: Category: 4**