

Friends Meeting House, Devizes

Sussex Wharf, The Nursery, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 2AE

National Grid Reference: ST 99877 61654



Statement of Significance

A small octagonal meeting room of the early 1990s designed by the Quaker architect William Barnes, which was added to a modest pre-existing dwelling of the 1960s. Taken overall the building is of low heritage significance.

Evidential value

Both the meeting house and the dwelling attached are modern buildings but there may be some archaeological remains of industrial structures from the period when the site was used as a canal-side wharf and the site as a whole is of medium evidential value.

Historical value

Quakers in Devizes have a long history but the present meeting house building is of little historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is unremarkable externally but the main meeting room is a pleasant space of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is well- used by Quakers and by other local groups and the building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *West Wiltshire & East Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0010270*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wiltshire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Devizes*
- 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): *1994*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *William Barnes*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *2 August 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Robin Brookes*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Former meeting house of 1701, 23 High Street Devizes, now a private house, listed Grade II. Detached burial ground at Hillworth Park, Devizes, now subsumed in a public park.*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 680-682
Local Meeting survey by Robin Brookes, May 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

The Friends meeting in Devizes dates back to the 1670s. A burial ground was established at Hillworth Park, Wicke, in 1665 and a meeting house was built on part of the burial ground in 1690. Friends found the location of this meeting house inconvenient and in 1701 a new meeting house was built on a site in the High Street, which was used until 1827 when the meeting was discontinued. It was sold in 1840, re-purchased in 1858 for a revived meeting which lasted until 1878, used again for meetings between 1903 and 1907, and finally sold in 1929. The building still survives as a private house at 23 High Street. A new meeting was settled in 1980 and in 1991 a plot of land at Sussex Wharf on the Kennet & Avon Canal purchased. The plot already contained a small modern house and warehouse which was used as a meeting room for the Plymouth Brethren. The warehouse was demolished and a new

octagonal meeting room was built, attached to the dwelling house, which was adapted to provide ancillary spaces on the ground floor and a flat for a warden above. The new meeting house opened in 1994; the architect for the new building was William Barnes.

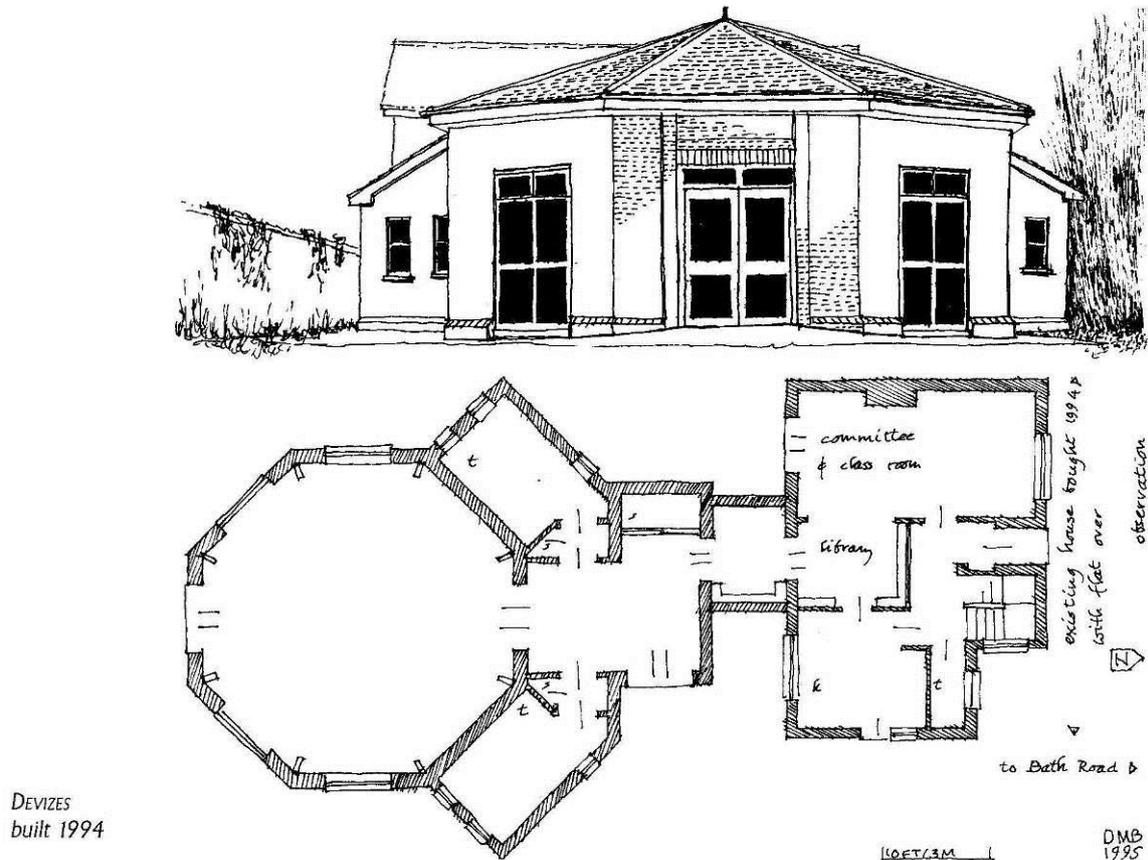


Figure 1: Ground plan and perspective view of east front towards the canal (Butler, vol. 2, p. 681)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building is formed of two parts. To the north is a modest 1960s dwelling house of two storeys with walls of purple brick laid in stretcher bond and roof coverings of concrete tiles. To the south is the single-storey octagonal meeting room added in the early 1990s, which is linked to the house by a lobby with ancillary spaces. The 1990s building has walls of red brick in stretcher bond and roof coverings of natural slate. The main meeting room faces south towards the canal and has large windows and doors in the principal faces, with smaller windows in the east and west faces. Inside the main meeting room the laminated timber trusses supporting the shallow conical roof are exposed. The room has plain plastered walls and a timber ceiling.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of heritage interest.

2.4 Attached burial ground

None

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a secluded site reached by narrow road sloping down off the main A361 to the Kennet and Avon canal. The site was formerly a wharf. Along the eastern side is a tall brick and stone wall enclosing the adjacent property. Along the western side is a bank with tall trees. The meeting has a partial responsibility for the upkeep of the wall.

The seventeenth-century burial ground at Hillworth Park (NGR SU005609) was sold in 1905 and the ground now forms part of the Hillworth Park public open space owned by Devizes Council.

2.6 Listed status

The building is not a candidate for the statutory list or the local list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

There have been previous buildings on the site associated with the canal. The site is of medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/A

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in May 2011. All the recommended works (minor repairs and external redecoration) have been carried out. The meeting has enough money to maintain the building. There is a 5-year maintenance plan. A new Quinquennial is scheduled for 2016.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: low energy light bulbs, new condensing boiler, weather compensation to heating controls, switching to green energy supplier
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: attempts to maximise recycling and composting
- Wildlife and nature conservation: landscaping of rented canal bank to encourage wildlife
- Transport: car sharing and cycling encouraged.

Both the meeting house and the attached dwelling have EPCs; the energy efficiency levels are F132 and D57 respectively.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs – a kitchen, toilets, 2 meeting rooms. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden. The dwelling attached to the meeting house is leased to a tenant. The meeting is accessible by public transport (bus) all week, with a bus stop adjacent. There is parking space for 12 cars and a public car park nearby. There is secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, with level access throughout. There is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was carried out in 2005.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about 5 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 144 hours per week. It is used for an average of about 40 hours per week. The meeting has no written lettings policy but printed terms of hire are given to each user. Quaker-associated events are not charged and there is a subsidy for Alcoholics Anonymous. Users value the building as a quiet, secluded and pleasant space.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There have been a few minor incidents (money was stolen from collecting boxes about 15 years ago and a heating thermostat was stolen in 2016) but these have not been reported to police. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low levels of deprivation and high community confidence. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

There are current plans for change to the building.

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 has all the facilities it currently needs but there is probably some scope for internal change, if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: as above, there is probably some scope for internal change, if required.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could doubtless serve another secular use if closed.

Part 5: Category: 4