

***Friends Meeting House, Edgbaston***

*St James Road, Edgbaston, B15 1JP*

*National Grid Reference: SP 05803 85746*



***Statement of Significance***

***The late Victorian meeting house in Edgbaston Conservation Area has high heritage value. The purpose built meeting house by William Henman retains most of its original architectural detail and has associations with the Calthorpe Estate.***

### **Evidential value**

***This is a purpose-built structure of 1893, and the site is of low evidential value. The Birmingham Historic Environment Record has not identified the site for any archaeological interest.***

### **Historical value**

***The meeting house has high historical significance; it reflects the history of local Quakers from the late nineteenth century. The building has associations with the architect William Henman who also designed Birmingham General Hospital, connections with the Calthorpe Estate and wealthy Quaker families who lived in the area including the Sturge family and Richard Cadbury Barrow.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***The meeting house has a high aesthetic value. It is an attractive late Victorian building which retains much of its elegant classical-style exterior detail. Internally, the spaces and historic fittings add to the aesthetic value of the building. The site is a valuable part of the local scene and makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.***

### **Communal value**

***Since 1893 the meeting house has been a place for Quakers to meet and has a high community value. The meeting house provides a valued venue for local community groups.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0058980*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Birmingham City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Birmingham*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Local*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Edgbaston*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date: *1893*
- 1.13 Architect: *William Henman*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *20 January 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Julia Saunders*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial ground, Lodge Hill Cemetery: SP 02800 82600*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Birmingham City Council, *Edgbaston Conservation Area Character Appraisal*, 1998

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 2, pp.625-26.

Doley, K., *Edgbaston Friends Meeting House 1893 – 1993: The Story of 100 years of Quaker Worship in George Road*, 1993.

Saunders, J., Local Meeting Survey, December 2015.

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

### 2.1 Historical background

The rich history of Quakers in Birmingham begins in 1659 when meetings were held in Friends' homes. By 1681 Friends were meeting in a house in Colmore Lane, and by 1703 a purpose-built meeting house was in use in Bull Street, with a burial ground to the rear. After this was sold in 1856 (and subsequently demolished), a new meeting house was built on the old site to accommodate all Birmingham Friends. Overcrowding at Bull Street in the 1870s led to Friends settling new meetings in the suburbs.

Edgbaston Friends first met in a school room which they hired in Bath Row which continued to be used until 1892. By this date a plot was offered for a new building at the corner of George Road and St James Road, part of the garden of 17 Frederick Road (the home of Charles and Eliza Mary Sturge) which formed part of the Calthorpe Estate. Lord Calthorpe was willing to give the Friends a license to build a meeting house on the site provided it was a single-storey brick building to accommodate a meeting room, smaller committee room and ancillary facilities. The meeting house was built to the designs of William Henman and cost £143. The building opened in 1893 and was first known as George Road Friends.

By 1989, the meeting house was in need of investment and by 1991 sufficient funds had been raised following appeals; the two main roofs were replaced, new heating and lighting installed, the whole building was decorated, the suspended ceiling from the main meeting room was removed, and the ancillary rooms to the east were altered to create a larger kitchen. In 2009, internal alterations were made by architect Kevin Bramwell which consisted of creating a smaller meeting room by removing part of the hallway to the north and the kitchen and original toilets were removed.

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

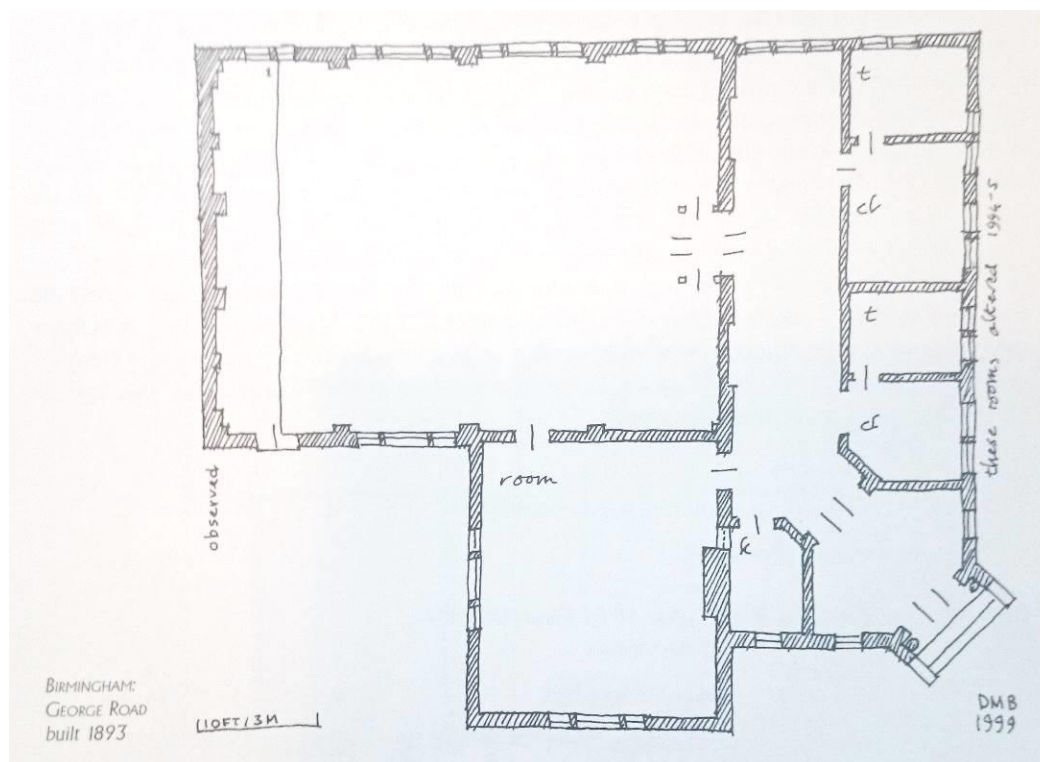


Figure 1: Ground floor plan Edgbaston meeting house, as reconstructed by Butler (north at the top, not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.626)

The meeting house was built to the designs of William Henman and opened in 1893. It was built in one phase and the plan comprises of three ranges; low entrance and ancillary facilities to the east, the taller main meeting room to the north-west and the smaller meeting room to the south. It is built of red brick laid in Flemish bond, with moulded brick cornices, stone for the entrance porch and window surrounds, and the roof is covered in Welsh slate. The principal entrance into the meeting house is to the south east corner of the eastern range, with a pedimented stone portico with 1893 date stone, pilasters with acanthus leaf detail and a semi-circular arched doorway. The double oak doors have fielded and carved panels and brass fittings. The eastern face of this range has a single-light window and four 2-light windows with stone surrounds. To the north are 2-light and 3-light mullioned windows. The main meeting room forms the taller northern range west of the eastern range. The east gable end of the meeting room has a Venetian window, above the lower east range. The north elevation has two Venetian windows with 2-light windows with pediments either side. The south elevation is similar with one Venetian window and a 2-light window with pediment to its left. The smaller committee room projects from the main meeting room to the south. The gable is in the form of an open pediment with moulded brickwork and a Venetian window, the west side has a tripartite window.

The porch leads into the lobby and a north-south corridor with terrazzo floor, tongue and groove panelling, and a 5-panelled doors with 3 panes of glass in the upper panels. The west wall contains an arched recess. The meeting room is decorated with classical features including a central pediment to the west wall with pilasters and entablature behind the stand. The latter has iron balustrade to the front. The east wall has a Venetian window with arched hoodmould. The north and south walls are decorated with pilasters and arcaded panels containing the windows, the doorways are plain. The walls have a tongue and groove dado, and the floor is of timber covered in carpet to the central area. The 4-bay roof has

exposed collar trusses on stone corbels and exposed purlins and rafters forming panels. The small committee room to the south has a similar ceiling with exposed roof trusses, and walls line with tongue and groove panelling.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room contains nine original Scots pine benches and a grand piano.



Figure 2: One of the original Scots pine benches

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

### 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Edgbaston is a suburb located to the south west of Birmingham city centre. The meeting house is within the boundaries of Edgbaston Conservation Area; the appraisal describes the area as being characteristically green, exclusive and suburban. The buildings in the area range from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century showcasing a variety of architectural styles by different architects including J.J. Bateman, J.H. Chamberlain, Frederick Martin and John Madin. This conservation area has the highest number of listed buildings within its boundary, and surrounding the meeting house are several Grade II listed buildings including St James House to the west and the original house and service coach house wings at the skin hospital along with 37 to 37 George Road to the east. Directly opposite the meeting house is the house where George Cadbury lived.

The meeting house is bounded by timber fences and hedge grows, with gate piers to the south. There are areas of landscaping surrounding the meeting house on higher ground, including a pond to the west. The planting of shrubs and mature trees slightly obscure the views to the meeting house but contribute to the green and suburban character of the conservation area.

## 2.6 Listed status

The building is not listed. It is noted as a locally listed building at grade A by Birmingham City Council. Grade A represents buildings which are of statutory list quality, although not currently nationally listed. The council policy is to seek national listing or to serve a Building Preservation Notice where grade A local list buildings are imminently threatened. The architect William Henman was responsible for the design of Birmingham General Hospital. The building is considered to be a candidate for listing.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Birmingham Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records identified. The site is built on the land which formed the garden of 17 Frederick Road; the site is of low 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 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) found the building to be in good working order. Recommendations for the next twelve months include clearing out all rainwater goods and roof details, clearing debris from external yard gullies, removal of bees' nest and making good fascia, replacement of temporary repair tape on front door. Since the survey the friends have repaired the cellar door and frame along with repairs to the guttering.

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

### 3.2 Maintenance

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The Meeting does not have a formalised five-year maintenance and repair plan, but undertake necessary work based on the quinquennial inspection and recommendations from eco groups. Overall priorities are understood and practical priorities always addressed. The Friends have the money to maintain and repair the meeting house but not to ideal standards and not enough to implement improvements that are long overdue.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The meeting has used the Sustainability Toolkit for reference, ideas and activities. The Northfield Eco Centre will be visiting the meeting house in due course for an assessment. The following steps have been taken to improve sustainability:

- Resource use, recycling and waste management: recycling and composting of waste.
- Climate change and energy efficiently: heating is on a timer, accessible roof space insulated, and meetings often held in one of the smaller rooms in winter which have secondary glazing. Eco light bulbs used where possible.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: members undertake repairs and redecoration where possible and safe, to reduce costs.

- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees which provide wildlife habitats. Garden has butterfly-friendly wild areas, water butt, nesting boxes and a pond.
- Transport: use of bicycles, public transport and some sharing of vehicles.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs although Friends acknowledge that these could be improved. The meeting house includes a large meeting room, a small meeting room and another room for children/social events, five toilets including disabled toilets and an adequate kitchen. Only during occasional large gatherings, such as an Area Meeting, are these facilities stretched. There is no resident warden but the meeting is looking to employ a part time non-resident individual to manage lettings.

An on-site car park is available along with bicycle racks. The meeting house is served by a local bus service which runs seven days a week, less frequently on Sundays and is a short walk away from Five Ways railway station.

### 3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. Level access is available into and throughout the meeting house. A hearing loop has been installed and there are facilities for partially-sighted people including bold clear signage and stair nosings in contrasting colours. A fully accessible toilet with shower is available. Entrances to the meeting house have ramped access along with hand rails.

### 3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 3 to 4 hours and in community use for 15 hours each week, and the meeting house has the potential to be let for 240 hours. This however would not be manageable as the use of different rooms might well conflict. The agreement of lettings also needs to be in accordance with the Charity Commission, Council and Calthorpe Estate regulations. In accordance with Quaker beliefs and purposes the meeting house is often let to community groups and not usually groups primarily for profit. It is by the discernment of the person responsible for lettings to consider short-term lets or of the whole Meeting (longer term lets). Criteria for use of the meeting house include safety for children and perceived inclusiveness of groups. The meeting house is available to be used for free by Quaker groups and for purposes agreed at by the local meeting. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to the pleasant ambience, quiet, access, fairly central location, garden, good acoustics, parking and reasonable rates.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has been subject to two incidents of lead theft in the last five years, which were reported to the police at the time. The Meeting has developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

The Friends would like to make improvements as indicated in the quinquennial survey including improving toilet facilities and undertake minor external repairs. In the near future Friends would like to install a wood-burning stove in the small meeting room and improve heating efficiency by increasing insulation and replacing the heating system.

## **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 been subject to internal alterations to modify the ancillary facilities to better suit the needs of the friends; its architectural interest and position in the conservation area are constraints.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The meeting house is used by community groups which meet the needs of their users, and there is scope for change subject to the conservation area and local listing.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* In the event of being laid down, there may be scope to continue the existing community use; it would be regrettable if this meeting house were to close as it would be difficult to adapt it for a new use, given its location in a conservation area and the quality of the interior.

## **Part 5: Category: 2**