

Friends Meeting House, Frenchay

Beckspool Road, Frenchay, Bristol, BS16 1NT

National Grid Reference: ST 64118 77884



Statement of Significance

An early nineteenth-century meeting house with attached burial ground, on the site of a seventeenth-century predecessor. The building has important historical Quaker connections, and makes a prominent and positive contribution to the local conservation area. It is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1809, replacing an earlier building, parts of which may be incorporated in the present structure. The interior furnishings,

including elders' stand and shuttered screen, are intact. The site is of high evidential value.

Historical value

Quaker witness is recorded in Winterbourne from 1654, and land at Down End was acquired for a burial ground in 1657. The present site was acquired in 1673, and a meeting house built soon afterwards. The present building dates from 1809, and was instigated by wealthy local Quakers, including the chocolate manufacturer Joseph Storrs Fry. Other notable Quakers associated with the meeting include Elizabeth Fry (who visited), Hannah Callowhill (wife of William Penn), Anthony Purver, 'literal translator' of the Bible, and Anna Sewell, author of Black Beauty. The site is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

This is an attractive stone built late Georgian building, more architecturally ambitious in its design and fitting out than most meeting houses of the time. The original furnishings are 'impeccable in their style and quality' (Butler). The large and well maintained former burial ground enhances the setting to the rear, and at the front the group makes a prominent and positive contribution to the local conservation area. The site is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is well used by community groups as well as the local meeting. The site is also of high communal value for its positive contribution to the local townscape.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Bristol*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0031850*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *South Gloucestershire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Winterbourne*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1128840*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Frenchay*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1809; 1814*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *1 September 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Roger Anderson, John Mayne, Rebecca Strong, Helen Watts*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Warden's House (included in Grade II listing)*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.2, pp. 215-6

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, p.28

Vintner, D., *The Friends Meeting House, Frenchay*, third edition, 1983

Local Meeting Survey, by Rebecca Strong and Helen Watts, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

Quaker witness is recorded in Winterbourne from 1654, when John Audlam and John Camm held a meeting for worship in an orchard belonging to Robert Cole. Meetings were then held at a building belonging to Hezekiah, son of Robert Cole. Hezekiah was a friend of George Fox, who stayed with him at Winterbourne in 1677. In 1657 land at Down End, Bromley Heath, was acquired to serve as a burial ground. This site was sold in the 1950s and was developed for housing (Quakers' Road); a plaque from the old burial ground survives at the present meeting house.

In 1673 George Cole conveyed the present site on Frenchay Common to six trustees, and a meeting house was built in 1673-6. The precise appearance of this building is not known. The early meeting suffered persecution, with meetings broken up, furnishings destroyed and Friends imprisoned.

In the eighteenth century Frenchay grew as an affluent rural suburb of Bristol, and wealthy merchants, many of them Nonconformists and Quakers, settled here. In 1791 Hannah Rogers gave land at the bottom end of the site as an extension to the burial ground. In 1801 Joseph Storrs Fry, who developed the eponymous chocolate business, arrived with his wife Ann. The seventeenth-century meeting house did not fulfil his or other trustees' aspirations, and in 1808 a decision was taken to demolish it and rebuild on the same site. A cottage attached to the rear of the present meeting house may be a survival from the earlier phase, and was used to accommodate travelling minsters.

The new meeting house opened in 1809 and cost £925 5s 10d. The identity of the architect, if any, is not recorded, but the builder is given as Good of Hambrook in the questionnaire return. The meeting house was set back from the road and had at its southern end a passage leading to the burial ground behind. In front of the building was a yard, a coach house (the present garage), a small stable yard and a stable block at right angles to the road. In 1814 a women's meeting room was built over the yard and coach house at a cost of £300; it was entered by its own staircase at the back of the coach house. The stable block and a former 'tenement' over it later became the warden's accommodation.

The prison reformer Elizabeth Fry was a first cousin by marriage of Joseph Storrs Fry and attended the meeting house when visiting. Other notable Quakers associated with the meeting were Hannah Callowhill of Frenchay Lodge, the wife of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, the porcelain manufacturer Richard Champion, Anthony Purver, 'literal translator' of the Bible, Francis Tuckett, mountaineer and Alpine explorer, Frederick Tuckett, founder of Dunedin in New Zealand, and Anna Sewell, author of *Black Beauty*.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures.

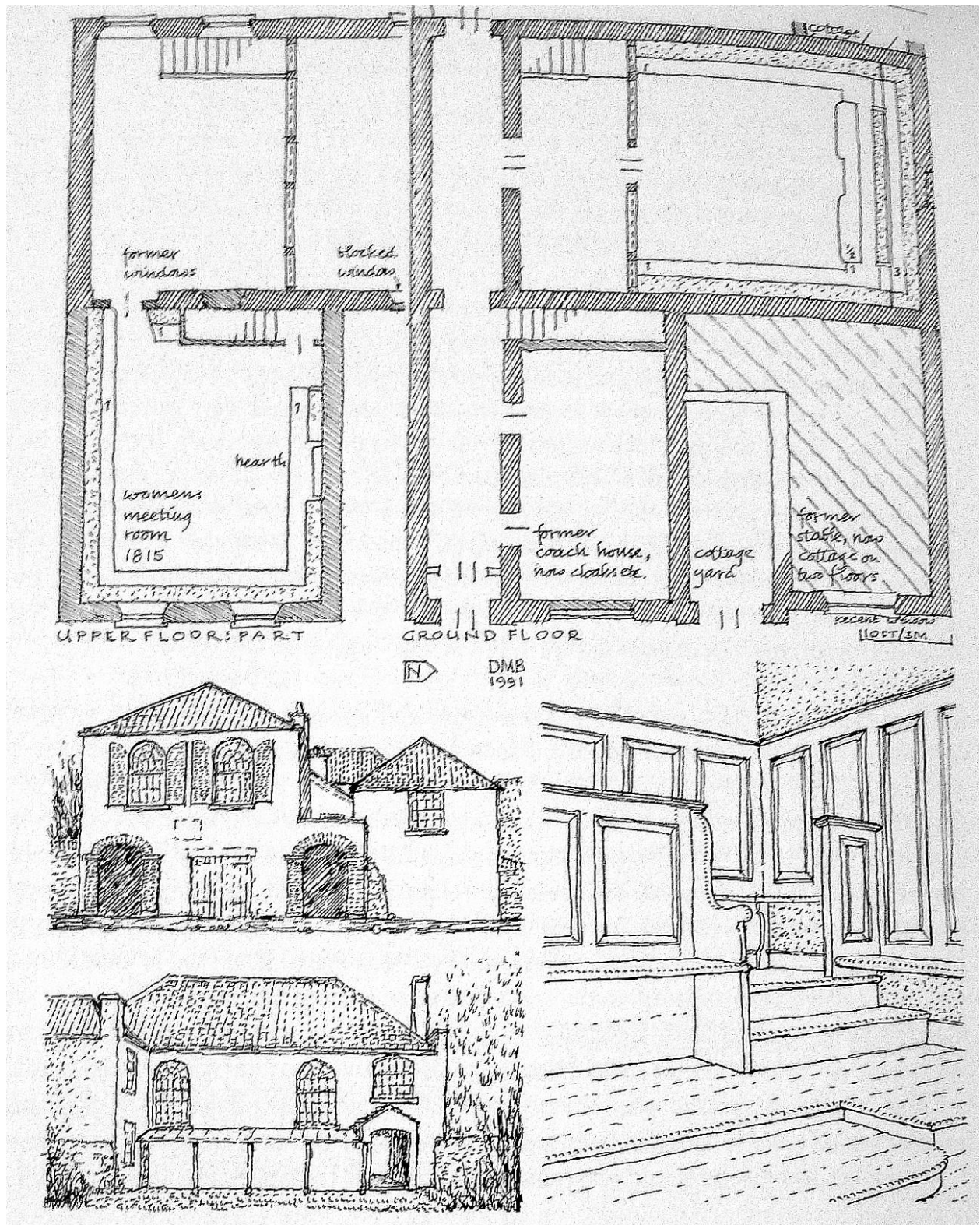


Figure 1: Plan, internal and external elevations, from Butler, Vol. 2, 1999, p. 216 (surveyed in 1970)

The meeting house was built in 1809. In front of it a yard and coach house were overbuilt in 1814 to provide a first floor women's business room; these and a former stable block (now warden's accommodation) largely obscure the original meeting house in views from the road. The buildings are of rubble stone construction, with a yellow ochre limewash finish. The

roofs are hipped, with double Roman and pantile coverings. A truncated stack at the southern end of the meeting house serves the loft, while further stacks serve the upstairs meeting room and the warden's house.

With the upper floor of 1814, the building forms an L-plan, with a narrow courtyard between these and the projecting warden's house in the former stables to the north. At the rear, an attached cottage may predate the meeting house. The front elevation has two Pennant stone arched entrances with keystones and flanking piers, that to the left leading to a passage to the meeting house and on to the burial ground, that to the right leading into the small courtyard between the coach house and former stables. Within this courtyard, an old plank door to the coach house has eighteenth-century graffiti, so the door must have been reused at the time of rebuilding. Between the arched entrances is a third, more utilitarian entrance, with boarded doors and timber lintel, for the coach house. The upper floor of 1814 has two round-headed glazing bar sash windows with shutters. To the right a wide sash window has been inserted in the ground floor of what is now the warden's house (not shown in Butler's survey drawing of 1970, figure 1, but present at the time of listing in 1984).

The rear elevation faces towards the burial ground and has two large round-headed glazing bar sash windows. To the right (south) a segmental-headed sash (five panes over ten) lights the loft and is placed over the side passage, the entrance to which is marked by a hipped porch. A covered way with lean-to pantile roof leads from this to a one up, one down cottage to the left, which has glazing bar sashes and may pre-date the meeting house.

The passageway leading from the side entrance to the burial ground/garden is paved with stone flags. Giving off this are WCs and storage spaces (formed out of part of the coach house) and a fairly narrow stair leading up to the first-floor meeting room. Beyond this, doors lead into a vestibule to the main meeting room, with stairs on the left leading up to the loft or gallery. The stair has a columnar newel, closed string, stick balusters and moulded handrail. A full-height timber screen separates the vestibule and the loft space above from the main meeting room, incorporating sliding panels that allow these spaces to be opened up to the main meeting room. This is a double-height space with coved ceiling, plastered walls, and a boarded floor. It is well lit by the arched windows to the west (towards the burial ground) and north (over the stand); Lidbetter comments that 'the high semi-circular headed window above the panelling at the back of the stand has an unusually ecclesiastical appearance, which is by no means unpleasing, even though not very Quakerly'. Below this window is the original stand, with ramped dado, and the dado and original fixed seating continue along the sides. All these original timber furnishings are of unpainted deal, described by Butler as 'impeccable in their style and quality'. Upstairs, the floor of the loft space was originally raked, but has now been levelled and a kitchen provided. The interior of the 1814 first-floor addition was only glimpsed at the time of inspection; it appears to retain its original perimeter dado panelling.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room retains a number of moveable forms or benches, open-backed and with columnar supports to the armrests. These are probably contemporary with the fixed furnishings.

2.4 Attached burial ground

There is an attached burial ground to the rear of the meeting house (photo bottom right at top of report). Leaning against the boundary wall on the south side is a stone tablet from the former burial ground, with pedimented frame to a plaque inscribed FRIENDS BURIAL GROUND 1657, followed by information relating to 750 interments up to 1800. Interments here include Joseph and Ann Storrs Fry. The headstones have been relocated to the perimeter and the burial ground laid out as a garden, but it is still in occasional use for burials.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Frenchay Conservation Area is characterised by a mixture of grand and more modest historic properties, with wide open spaces and commons. The limewashed stone elevations, historic joinery and hipped pantile roofs of the meeting house group make a prominent and positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house and warden's house were together listed Grade II in 1984. In view of its architectural quality and intactness and its important historical associations, the building may merit upgrading to II*.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site has been the site of Quaker worship and burial since the 1670s. It has high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory

3.2 Maintenance

The building and burial ground/garden are well maintained. Since the last QIR (2015) the building has been externally limewashed, insulation improved and the WCs upgraded. The meeting considers that it has sufficient funds to maintain and repair the buildings.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures taken to improve energy efficiency and to reduce environmental impact have included improved roof insulation and some secondary glazing (where this would not have a detrimental visual impact on the listed building). The usual recycling arrangements are in place.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs. As well as the main meeting room, these include an upstairs meeting room, garden cottage (suitable for one-to-one therapy sessions), kitchens and WCs. There is self-contained accommodation on site for the warden.

The meeting house is accessible by public transport – the bus service operates every day, including Sundays. There is on-street parking outside the meeting house, with no restrictions, but parking on the grass verges further up the road is inhibited by timber posts placed to discourage this. There is secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

An Access Audit has not been carried out, but the building and its facilities are accessible. There is step-free access into and around the ground floor of the main accommodation, and provision has been made for accessible WCs. There is a stair lift on the stair to the upper room, and hearing loops are installed in both meeting rooms.

3.6 Community Use

In addition to use by Friends for approximately two hours a week, the building and its facilities are hired out by other groups for approximately twelve out of a possible eighty hours each week. There is a lettings policy, which proscribes alcohol and political meetings. Hirers appreciate the reasonable price, good location, reasonable parking, kitchen, availability of rooms of different size, calm atmosphere and access to the garden.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

Frenchay is an affluent area, with low levels of crime and deprivation and high levels of community confidence. Nevertheless there have been instances of theft, which were not reported to the police.

3.8 Plans for change

None at present.

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 building has been sensitively adapted to meet the needs of the meeting. The historic importance of the building and the quality of its furnishings limit the scope for change in the main spaces, but careful adaptation in the former coach house and stable areas would be possible.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already widely used by the wider community, and these uses could no doubt be extended (although parking might be a problem). For the building, the same constraints apply as above.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The building was built as a meeting house over two hundred years ago, and largely retains its original character. In the regrettable event of its being laid down it would be desirable to explore the possibility of its being vested in a building preservation trust. It would not lend itself to residential conversion without harm to its special architectural and historical interest and character.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1128840

District: South Gloucestershire

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Winterbourne

Grade: II

Date first listed: 03-Aug-1984

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 35065

ST 67 NW WINTERBOURNE BECKSPOOL ROAD (west side), Frenchay 3/8

Friends' Meeting House

G.V. II

Meeting house and warden's house. Rebuilt 1809. Painted rubble, double roman and pantile hipped roofs. L-plan chapel and ancillary rooms, projecting warden's house in former stables leaves a narrow courtyard. 2 storeys, 3 windows, ground floor has 2 arched entrances with keystones, at left into chapel, at right into courtyard, between are plain stable doors, above are 2 round headed sashes with shutters, at right ground floor a C20 window is inserted in the warden's house below a glazing bar sash. Rear elevation: 2 very large round headed sashes, to right is one segmental headed sash above archway under a hipped porch flanked by an open lean-to; to the left an attached one up, one down cottage with glazing bar sashes.

Interior: very plain panelled chapel has sliding panels which open or close gallery and vestibule to main room. At rear is the former graveyard which contains remains of many local notables.

Listing NGR: ST6411877884