

Friends Meeting House, Glasgow

38 Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow, G2 4PS

National Grid Reference: NS 58103 65788



Statement of Significance

Glasgow meeting house has medium heritage significance as a typical example of a remodelled city centre terraced house. The former residential building was built in the 1860s and is typical of early Victorian planned development in Scottish towns and cities, continuing Georgian architectural traditions. The building has been associated with the Quakers since 1992, and was previously occupied by the Royal Artillery Club.

Evidential value

The building and site has low evidential significance and limited archaeological potential.

Historical value

The building has medium historical value as the only surviving element of a formal Victorian development in Glasgow city centre. It was associated with the Royal Artillery Club from the mid twentieth century and has been a Quaker meeting house for less than 25 years; it has low significance for this connection.

Aesthetic value

The building has medium architectural value as a typical example of former terraced housing, built as part of a formal street layout in the Georgian

tradition, but now an isolated fragment in the streetscene. The interior has been altered and retains features of several phases.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value as a place of Quaker worship since 1992 and as a building valued by the wider community.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *West Scotland*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0010780*

1.3 Owner: *West Scotland Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Glasgow City Council*

1.5 Historic Environment Scotland: *Glasgow, Clyde and Ayrshire*

1.6 Civil parish: *Glasgow*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 Reference: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Central*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1860s; 1992*

1.13 Architect: *Not known; Frank Burnet Bell and Partners*

1.14 Date of visit: *30 June 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Martin Mansell*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *None*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 878-882.

Glasgow meeting house website: <http://www.glasgowquakers.org/where-we-are/building-history> and <http://www.glasgowquakers.org/who-we-are/quakers-in-glasgow>

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

2.1. Historical background



Fig.1: extract from 19th century OS map, illustrated on the Glasgow Meeting website.

Friends first met in Glasgow in about 1660 and used a meeting house near Trongate. By 1730 Friends were meeting in a building in Stirling Square, which they sold in 1791. The meeting was relatively small at this time; in 1815 they moved to a meeting house on North Portland Street, which closed in 1921. After this, they held meetings at the Literary and Philosophical Society on Bath Street until 1944 when the meeting acquired a former townhouse at 16 Newton Terrace, which eventually proved too small and was sold in 1991. The present meeting house building was bought in 1992 from the Royal Artillery Club and refurbished by architects Frank Burnet Bell and Partners. The building was originally built as a townhouse in the mid nineteenth century, as depicted on the map in Figure 1; the area has since been transformed by redevelopment. A lift was installed and an internal wall removed to create a large full-depth meeting room on the first floor, as part of the 1990s work.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building was first built as a house or tenements in c 1860, the designer is not known. It is built of sandstone, with render to the front elevation, and a slate roof. The frontage facing north is two storeys plus attic and basement, and three bays wide, in classical style. The entrance door is up steps to the left, with outer double doors below a cornice on console brackets. The windows to the right and to the first floor are plate glass sashes set in matching moulded architraves. The parapet to the attic is balustraded above a moulded cornice. The front basement area has solid walls flanking the steps and pavement. The rear elevation is plainer, with fair-faced sandstone and paired or single sashes to four storeys. The west elevation is now exposed and rendered, following the demolition of attached buildings, with a modern fire escape stair.

The interior has an inner panelled and glazed door below a transom light, leading into the staircase hall. The two lower flights of the staircase were remodelled for the Royal Artillery Club in the mid twentieth century in coloured cement render; from the first floor the staircase has a cast-iron balustrade and moulded treads, and is top-lit. Some plaster cornices and architraves survive on most floors from the original domestic building, but the internal layout has been altered in several phases with recent partitions, a lift and some spaces combined.

2.3. Loose furnishings



Fig.2: pine benches, originally in The Pleasance meeting house, Edinburgh

In the first floor meeting room there are six pitch pine benches, originally from The Pleasance meeting house in Edinburgh, which closed in 1939; the benches were bought for the Newton Terrace meeting house in 1944. They probably date from the mid 1800s and have open railed backs and solid bench ends.

The meeting also owns a desk said to have been used by Elizabeth Fry, which they are considering giving to a museum in Glasgow.

2.4. Attached burial ground

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting



Fig.3: the site east of the meeting house is being cleared for redevelopment

Elmbank Crescent was laid out and developed with townhouses in the mid nineteenth century, but all of these except the meeting house building have been demolished. The character of the area has been transformed by late twentieth and twenty first century high rise development, including an ugly multi-storey car park on the north side of the street. West of the meeting house a 1970s office block has been partly demolished and the site (owned by Glasgow City Council) is awaiting redevelopment. East of the meeting house is an early twentieth century sandstone block, now the offices of Scottish Opera. To the south, the rear of the site is dominated by a tall office block, recently constructed. The street is on the north-west side of the grid of streets forming Glasgow city centre, a densely urban cityscape. Charing Cross railway station is at the north-west end of the street.

In Partick, off Keith Street there is a tiny burial ground used by Quakers in Glasgow from 1711 to 1857. There is also a burial ground in a field near the village of Kirkintilloch, still maintained by the meeting (exact location not known).

2.6. Listed status

Not listed

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site was on the north-west edge of the expanding Victorian city centre, developed for housing and railway infrastructure. The building's basement will have destroyed any early archaeology below the building, and the archaeological potential of the site is considered to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Fair. A QI has not been undertaken but the meeting is aware of the issues. The condition of the meeting house was affected by the demolition of the neighbouring office block, due to debris blocking the rainwater disposal system and causing water ingress to the roof. The roof is being monitored, and requires full repairs. The top floor flat is not currently occupied because of water damage. The gable end wall to the west has been rendered since the adjoining terrace was removed; some cracking on this wall was assessed by Effective Engineering in 2016, but not thought to be serious. The rest of the building appears to be sound.

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

3.2. Maintenance

The condition of the building is annually assessed by the meeting, and professional advice sought when required. The meeting does not use a 5-year maintenance plan.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting has referred to the Sustainability Toolkit, and taken some steps to reduce its environmental impact, such as recycling waste, but the building requires considerable investment to improve its thermal efficiency. An air-tightness test has been undertaken, and windows, doors and roof are in need in upgrading to improve insulation and draught-proofing. Improvements will not be addressed until the meeting has decided whether or not to stay at this property.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has good facilities in the building. The large meeting room is on the first floor (two rooms combined by removing a wall) and there is more than one kitchen, WCs on all floors, various rooms available to let, a library for Friends' use, young people's rooms and a warden's office. There is a 2-bedroomed flat on the top floor (not currently in use due to condition). The building has gas central heating. There is a small car park to the rear let to Scottish Opera during the week, but available for Friends on Sunday mornings. There is no garden area.

3.5. Access

The meeting house access was improved when first acquired, when a lift serving all floors was installed towards the back of the building. This can be reached from the rear basement entrance which is close to a parking space available for disabled people. The front doorway is reached by several steps, and so there is no easy access from the front. For visually impaired people, stair nosings have contrast strips, and there is a hearing loop.

There is good public transport in the area.

3.6. Community Use

The building has several rooms available to let, for a total of about 130 hours per week. There is a lettings policy and lettings are managed by the wardens (non-resident). Actual lettings average 92 hours per week. The building is popular due to its central location, good transport links, quiet and warm rooms with good facilities and reasonable rates.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There have been no recent incidents of crime or anti-social behaviour. No contact has been made with the local police.

3.8. Plans for change

The meeting is currently reviewing options for either remaining in the building and investing in a major refurbishment, or moving to another site. There may be scope to negotiate with the developer of the adjoining site, to achieve a new building better suited to the needs of the meeting.

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 is not listed and so there is scope to remodel the interior, but demolition and work to the exterior may be restricted by the conservation area.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The points in the above paragraph also apply to community use.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the meeting is currently considering whether to continue using the building, or to relocate; in the event of the latter, the building could be sold for redevelopment, subject to planning.

Part 5: Category: 3