

Quaker Meeting House, Great Yarmouth

Howard Street South, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk NR30 1LN

National Grid Reference: TG 52330 07546



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has exceptional significance as an early fourteenth-century religious building, adapted for a meeting house in the late seventeenth century. Its plain external appearance and interior, mostly dating from 1807, have high significance.

Evidential value

There is substantial existing evidence of mediaeval occupation and much of the fabric is also mediaeval though the extent of this has not been assessed. The fitting out of 1807 survives essentially intact, though there have been some minor alterations. The building and site clearly have very high evidential value.

Historical value

The building is of very high historical value as part of an Augustinian Friary for two centuries from c1340, and has been in use by the Quakers for over three centuries since the 1690s. There is ample physical evidence of both periods of occupation.

Aesthetic value

The principal aesthetic value currently rests in the meeting room, which has retained many of its 1807 fittings and is a good example of a late-Georgian meeting house interior. The building has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house was at first intended for Quaker meetings, which were private gatherings. From the beginning of the nineteenth century it was also used by an Adult School. The building is now used both for worship and for community purposes and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Norfolk and Waveney*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032800*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Great Yarmouth Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Great Yarmouth*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1271267*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Conservation Area No. 2: Market Place, Rows & North Quay*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c1340, 1807*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not known*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *25 June 2014*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Fleur Bradnock & Les Cockrill*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *no*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *yes (disused)*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 462-3
Great Yarmouth Quaker Meeting House, a brief history, 2009
C.J. Palmer, *The Perilustration of Great Yarmouth*, 1872, pp. 323-324
Typescript note on the excavation on the cellar in 1981 by George Rye
Local Meeting survey by Fleur Bradnock and Les Cockrill, 2014 and 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

Quaker meetings were held in Yarmouth from the 1670s, and in 1694 the Quakers purchased from Richard Robbins a plot of land which included the remains of an early fourteenth century building which had originally been part of a non-conventual cell of the Augustinian Friary at Gorleston. This building was adapted to serve as a meeting house, with a small burial ground adjacent. An account of Yarmouth published in 1872 noted that, 'Some remains [of the mediaeval building] are still to be seen facing Howard Street, having a cut-flint front, with stone dressings; the whole now disfigured with whitewash. An arched doorway, with a square heading having quatrefoils in the spandrils, all of Caen stone, led to an apartment admeasuring sixty-five feet from north to south, and eighteen feet from east to west, with several splayed windows towards the west, all of which are now blocked up. The upper part of this doorway...may be seen from Howard Street, but the floor of the apartment is now some feet below the external level. The walls remain intact, but, as to the lower part, are bare internally. The upper part of this building has been formed into a chamber by a boarded floor place on cross-beams a few feet above the level of the street, and the room thus obtained which is approached by some stairs on the east side, has been for nearly two centuries used as a place of meeting for the Society of Friends....In 1807 their place of meeting was enlarged and fitted as we now find it'.

This description suggests that the walls of the present building are substantially mediaeval, but the whole of the exterior is now covered with render and neither the cut flintwork nor the ornamental door-head mentioned in the 1872 description are now visible, although the windows on the Howard Street front are visible internally. The present principal entrance from the burial ground on the east side of the building was probably formed in 1807, with a small projecting porch. In 1981 the hitherto unused space below the 1807 inserted floor was converted into an additional meeting space. The porch was enlarged in 2009 to provide additional facilities.

An Adult School was started at Yarmouth in 1818, using the Meeting House, and continued to meet until 1981.

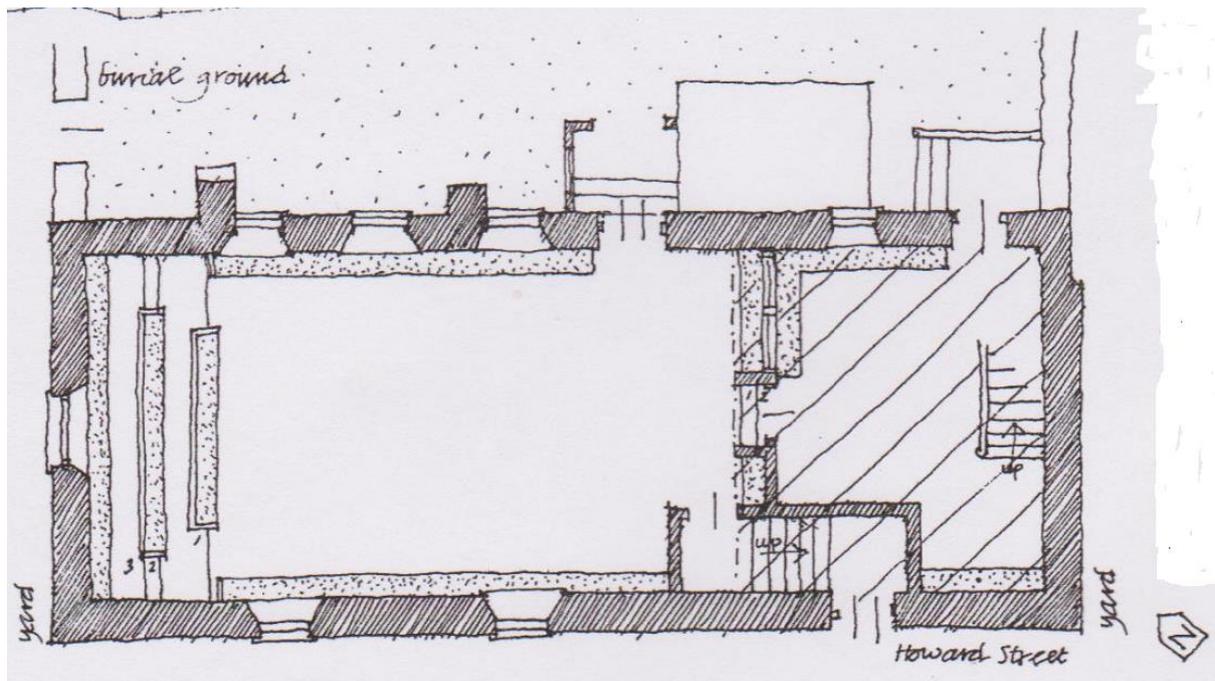


Fig. 1 Ground Floor Plan of the meeting house in 1958 (Butler (1999) vol.1, p462)



Fig.2 A mediaeval doorway on the Howard Street front, now no longer visible (from Palmer, *The Perustration of Great Yarmouth* (1872) p.323-324)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The building is rectangular on plan, with rendered walls and a pitched pantiled roof. It is possible that the main fabric of the external walls is substantially fourteenth-century in date and it seems likely that the main walls are principally constructed of stone and flint, rather than brick as stated in the current list description. The building was adapted for use as a meeting house in 1694 and completely re-fitted in 1807. The west side towards the street has a modern stone reinforced plinth, a modern six panelled door with a plain fanlight and two 6/6 timber sash windows at higher level which light the meeting room. The North return elevation has a small square opening at low level and a single 6/6 sash window at high level. The South return is similar but with a modern 3/3 horned sash. On the extreme right hand side of this wall is half of a rebated stone arch probably of C15 origin surviving from the earlier building. This arch is not the same as that illustrated by C J Palmer (see fig.2 above) which was apparently on the Howard Street front.

On the east side of the building, towards the burial ground is a substantial lean-to porch (recently enlarged) and a smaller-lean to which originally contained the outside lavatory. At the south end of the east wall is another entrance door with a timber Doric surround reached

up steps with a swept wrought-iron handrail. The meeting room which occupies the northern two-thirds of the building presumably dates from 1807. It has a boarded floor and a panelled dado of painted timber which is swept up at the north end for the elder's dais and bench which has a panelled front. The walls are plain plastered and rise to a simple timber cornice. At the south end is a gallery with a panelled front. The space beneath the gallery has been enclosed and is now a kitchen, but retains some wall panelling. The gallery space itself has also been closed off but survives intact with its raked floor and simple fixed bench seating. Within the gallery space the roof construction is visible, which consists of modern timber principals and purlins.

Beneath the meeting room is a basement space formed in 1981. The lower part of the Howard Street wall is here exposed. It is made of stone and flint and has four large window or door reveals, the openings now blocked with brick. The 1807 timber floor structure is also visible, apparently made of re-used timbers and reinforced in 1979 with rolled steel joists and cast iron columns. The floor has modern paving.

The small burial ground on the east side of the meeting house is enclosed on three sides by an old wall of brick and flint with modern brick corner piers.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The furniture in the main meeting room and elsewhere includes several plain painted timber benches. They have the same arm pattern as the fixed seating in the former gallery and may date from 1807.

2.4 Attached burial ground

On the east side of the meeting house is a small rectangular burial ground. It is completely enclosed by a substantial wall of brick and flint, which is included in the listing. The burial ground is now laid out as a garden and contains several mature trees. There are no grave markers.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house and its enclosed burial ground stand in central Yarmouth, one street back from the quay. Some other old buildings remain in the street but immediately to the north is a large cleared area which now serves as one of the principal town car parks and blights the setting of the meeting house.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house with its burial ground wall are currently listed at grade II. There is some uncertainty about the extent of the surviving mediaeval fabric but it is very possible that all the walls are substantially mediaeval, and also that there may be ornamental features concealed behind the present render. The galleried meeting space is a well-preserved late Georgian interior of 1807 and internal alterations (like the closing up of the gallery front) are easily reversible. The combination of the mediaeval and late Georgian elements might justify a II* listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site clearly has high archaeological potential as the location of mediaeval religious house. Finds (mainly pottery) from excavation in connection with the cellar improvement in 1981 have been deposited with Great Yarmouth Museum.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory. The enclosing wall is covered by the Quinquennial Inspection regime and was found to be in fair condition in 2011. The garden planting is maintained by volunteers.

3.2 Maintenance

The most recent Quinquennial Inspection report (2011, Christopher Codling) identified no urgent work. The meeting has enough money for routine upkeep but not for any major works. It has a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: secondary glazing, draught excluders, thermostats
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: recycling programme
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: Quinquennial inspection and consequent maintenance
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: is very much in mind with garden planting and management
- Transport: has been considered but is difficult as this is a small meeting scattered all over East Norfolk

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. There is no resident warden. The meeting house is accessible by public transport. There is no on-site car parking but there is an adjacent public car park. There is on-site bike parking.

3.5 Access

The meeting has no level access, no accessible toilet, no hearing loop and no facilities for the partially sighted. There has been no Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2.5 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 78 hours per week. It is used for an average of 15 hours per week. There is no lettings policy but a lettings conditions document. Acceptable users are social inclusion groups and religious groups in accord with Quaker values. Excluded are commercial groups, especially those providing free alcoholic drinks to customers. Free of charge use of the meeting house is only available to Quakers. Users value the meeting house for its central location, discretion and confidentiality, and for its lack of neighbours (for example, by the Great Yarmouth Bagpipers).

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area suffers from high crime. Crime and anti-social behaviour at the site include graffiti and rubbish thrown over the wall into the garden. In 2009, the lead was stripped off the toilet block roof. Other reported crimes include 2 attempted break-ins. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but Friends might consider making contact.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for alterations at the present (2015).

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. Some new seats have been introduced. The early bench furniture should be retained.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already used for other purposes besides worship. The former gallery space is not in regular use because the fixed seating makes that difficult. The likely future use of this space is unclear. The changes of level within the building and lack of level access limit the types of use which are possible. Adaptation of the building to meet DDA requirements might be destructive.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: The building could doubtless serve a wholly secular use, although there would almost certainly be some loss of original character in the main meeting space.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE INCLUDING BURIAL GROUND WALLS

List entry Number: 1271267

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE INCLUDING BURIAL GROUND WALLS, 17, HOWARD STREET SOUTH

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Norfolk	Great Yarmouth	District Authority	

Grade: II

Date first listed: 05-Aug-1974

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

Details

GREAT YARMOUTH

TG5207NW HOWARD STREET SOUTH 839-1/12/53 (East side) 05/08/74 No.17 Friends Meeting House including burial ground walls

II

Friends' meeting house. 1692. Rebuilt 1807, on the site of a cell of the Augustinian Priory of Gorleston and re-using some material. Rendered and colourwashed brick under a pantiled roof. EXTERIOR: 2 storeys. West facade with a plinth course and a 6-panelled door to the right under a plain overlight. Two 6/6 horned sashes under segmental heads are set to left at upper level and there are 3 ventilation grilles to the cellar. North return with a cellar grille also and a 6/6 upper sash. South return also with a cellar grille, and, in the apex of the gable, a late C20 3/3 horned sash. To the right is half of a rebated stone arch probably of C15 origin surviving from earlier building. Gabled roof with rebuilt stack on west slope. INTERIOR: main hall with a plank dado and a raised bench to the north end with a panelled screen. At south end is a panelled balcony, now blocked, but with 4 rows of benches behind it at first-floor level. Roof of C20 principals carrying purlins. Undercroft opened out 1979-81. 1807 floor beams overhead. 1979 cast-iron columns and rolled steel joists. West wall with 4 C15 splayed window embrasures with stone jambs and sloping sills. Walls of flint and brick. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: 3 ranges of wall enclose a burial ground to east. North range of flint and brick with rendered coping, east range of brick is rendered over, south range of coursed flints. (Edwin R: Archive at Norfolk Archaeology Unit).

Listing NGR: TG5225807755