

Friends Meeting House, Hall Green

1 Hamlet Road, Birmingham, B28 9BG

National Grid Reference: SP 10725 81471



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has high heritage value as a former Reading Room built in 1883 which was converted for use as a meeting house in the late 1920s. The Victorian building retains most of its external architectural detailing making a positive contribution to the street scene.

Evidential value

This is a purpose-built structure, built on former agriculture land and is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has high historical significance in terms of the local context, its former use as a Reading Room for the hamlet of Hall Green, use by the Baptists and the suburban growth of Hall Green. It reflects the history of local Quakers from the beginning of the twentieth century. The building has strong associations with the Severne families who were prominent in the hamlet.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has a high aesthetic value, it is an attractive late Victorian building which retains much of its elegant exterior detail. The interior of the meeting room includes significant features such as the stained glass leaded windows and exposed roof. The building makes a positive contribution to the townscape.

Communal value

The meeting house was originally built to serve the local community as a Reading Room, a venue for the Baptists and remained in community use following the purchase by the Quakers in 1903. It is still used by local community groups today and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0033430*

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: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date: *1883*

1.13 Architect: *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *25 November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Mina Tilt*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 627.

Tilt, M., Local Meeting Survey, October 2015

Hall Green Quaker Meeting House: Description and a brief history:
<http://www.hallgreenquakers.org.uk/our-historic-building>

Religious History: Places of worship, in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham* ed. W.B. Stephens (London, 1964), pp. 434-482
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp434-482>.

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

2.1. Historical background

Meetings in Birmingham were first held in Friends' homes from 1659. By 1681 Friends were meeting in a house in Colmore's Lane and this was registered for worship in 1689. This remained in use until 1703 from when Friends met in a purpose-built meeting house in Bull Street. The site of the new meeting house also included a burial ground to the rear of the property. The meeting house underwent a number of alterations to extend it in 1778, 1802 and in 1823. By 1853 a decision was made for a new meeting house to meet the Friends' needs. A new meeting house was built on the old site in 1857 to accommodate all Birmingham Friends, however, by the time the meeting house was opened a number of suburban meetings had been settled. Prior to the meeting house closing in 1931, to be rebuilt to the designs of Hubert Lidbetter, a group of Friends had begun to meet in Hall Green from the 1920s. They met in a Reading Room built in 1883 at the expense of the Severne family. Prior to the Friends acquiring the building in 1927, it was owned by solicitor John Simcox and from 1903 the building was better known as the Simcox Reading Room. During the 1920s the Baptists met here until their purpose-built church was completed a few years later.

In 1930 an extension was proposed to designs by Norris Edward Berks (Fig.1) which provided a link block between the meeting house (formerly the reading room) and the caretaker's house to the north, and an extension to form additional rooms including a committee room to the south. For reasons unknown, presumably due to a lack of funds only the link block was constructed.

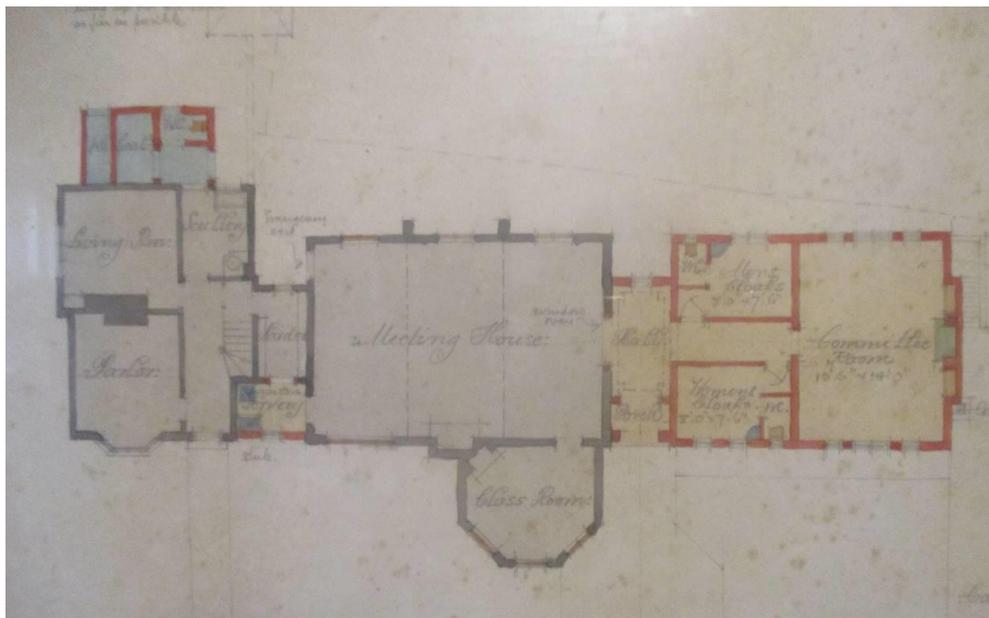


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of proposed extensions to the meeting house by Norris Edward Berks, 1930 (Hall Green MH Archive)

In 1963, the adjoining caretakers' house underwent alterations to create classrooms, at a cost of £3,400. In 2000, the ground floor of the former caretaker's house was redesigned to allow for a kitchen and toilet facilities, designed by Michael Potter of Balsall Heath.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The Victorian building is built in red brick laid in Flemish bond, with red terracotta and stone details, timber-framing to the gables, and a pitched roof covered in terracotta tiles with barge boards. The building is formed of two components; the two-storey former caretaker's dwelling and the one-storey meeting house linked by a link block built in 1930 by Norris Edward Burkes, together forming a rectangular plan.

The west elevation of the meeting house range to the north has a semi-circular bay with two 2-light cross casement windows and a doorway to the south. To the north of this bay is a 4-light mullioned and transom casement window with leaded lights with diamond panes. A double chimney stack with decorative stonework bearing the initials 'MS' and is dated '1883', it is suggested this is related to Meysey Severne or in memory of Marian Severne, from a local family. The south gable end has a large 3-light timber framed mullioned and transom window, with terracotta drip mould detailing. The east elevation consists of three 2-light cross windows with leaded lights, separated by brick buttresses.

The north range, the former caretaker's dwelling, is a two-storey building. It is characterised by strong gable features to each elevation with heavy barge boards and timber detailing. To the west elevation there is a canted bay window at ground level with oriel window above, to the south a large window infills a former entrance. A decorative gabled jetty is to the north face, with fishtail tile detailing, a central 3-light mullioned and transom window with timber detailing above. The jetty is supported on four large terracotta corbels, below is a further 3-light window leaded window. The east elevation is much plainer in comparison and has four inserted 1-light windows with a 2-light leaded casement window at first floor.

The two ranges are connected by a 1930's flat roofed link block by Norris Edward Burkes. This provides the main entrance into the building from the east, with a hardwood and vertical -glazed double door. To the east of the link block is a decoratively carved timber lintel over the former entrance supported on carved terracotta corbels with the inscription "FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE".

From the lobby area access to the main meeting room is to the south, with ancillary facilities in the former caretaker's house to the north with additional meeting rooms at first floor. The meeting room is spacious and well lit, with colourful stained glass decoration in the windows. The floors are laid with pine flooring, the walls plainly painted and plastered with a dado rail. The 3-bay roof has arch-braced timber roof trusses supported on decorative corbels. A fire place is located to the west side with only the chimneypiece visible; tongue and groove panelling now infills the fireplace. The semi-circular bay is to the south-west corner.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room contains a pine bench; its origin is unknown but it may have been given to the meeting from another meeting house.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located to the south of Birmingham, six miles from the city centre. The building is located on a corner plot, with Stratford Road to the west, with the attractive Hall Green Junior School opposite which dates from 1893 and Hamlet Road to the north. Hamlet

Road is predominately residential in character with housing dating from the early twentieth century, interwar period and later infill development. Properties are set back from the road, the streets characterised by low red brick boundary walls and lined with trees. The land surrounding the meeting house is well planted with trees and shrubs which add to the character of the area.

2.6 Listed status

Not listed. The building is designated as a locally listed building by Birmingham City Council at Grade B. This grade of building is for structures or features that are important in the city wide context, or make a significant contribution to the local environment. Positive efforts will be made to the council to retain Grade B buildings. It may be a marginal candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Birmingham Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. Historically the land was formerly farm land, and the site is likely to be 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 June 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) found the building to be in good working order. There were no recommendations for necessary works to be completed in the next twelve months.

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

3.2 Maintenance

The building is well-maintained by the meeting and Central England Area Meeting issue an 'Annual Inspection of Premises Questionnaire' each year. The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

1) Maintenance items of a routine or cyclical nature. For example, have the gutters and down pipes been cleaned out regularly?

2) Structural and other defects which may give cause for concern, and actions required or taken as a result of the quinquennial survey. For example, does the roof leak?

The questionnaire completed by Gill Coffin and Mina Tilt in September 2014 did not record any problems or issues. The Friends have sufficient funds for the maintenance and repair of the building.

The recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in June 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) recommended that in the next two years repairs be undertaken to the roof tiles, chimney, ironmongery to the fire exit door and form a ramp to the fire exit door.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does use the Sustainability Toolkit and the following steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: New heating and double glazing installed.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house uses the local authority recycling scheme.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: Installation of double glazing.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.
- Transport: Public transport used by Friends when possible and other car share.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs, these include a large kitchen, three WCs (one fully accessible), meeting room which accommodates up to 50 people and two classrooms.

Hall Green railway station is a ten minute walk from the meeting house with frequent services to Birmingham available. The local bus services run Monday to Sunday. An on-site car park is available to the east of the meeting house and additional free parking is available on nearby streets in the area. There is secure bicycle parking available.

3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. The meeting house is fully accessible at ground floor level, with restricted access to the classrooms at first floor. The meeting house has a fully accessible WC and a hearing loop installed. The most recent quinquennial inspection has made recommendations for a ramp to be installed to the rear fire exit and a demarcated parking space adjacent to the front of the premises if possible.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for six hours each week and is currently in community use for 64 hours each week. The meeting house has three rooms which are available for lettings for a total of 194 hours per week. There is great diversity in the groups that use the meeting house representing a range of religious groups and ethnic backgrounds reflecting the composition of the local population. The Friends do not have a letting policy but the agreement outlines the requirements. Prohibited activities include: no smoking, no alcohol and gambling, no stiletto heels (cause damage to the floors).

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The property has not been subject to heritage crime, however, there have been incidents of anti-social behaviour with late night drinking in the car park, which were reported. The Friends have developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

No future plans for change.

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 already been altered and extended. At present it fulfils the needs of the meeting. Any further alterations would need to be carefully considered against the character of the building.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is well used by community groups and currently meets the needs of current tenants, but there is scope for further change.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: In a regrettable event of closure, the most obvious new owner would be the nursery which is already the main user of the building. The exterior of the Victorian building and key internal features such as the main hall would be vulnerable to major change and should be retained if possible.

Part 5: Category: 3