

Quaker Meeting House, Heswall

North Drive, Heswall, CH60 0BD

National Grid Reference: SJ 27334 81490



Statement of Significance

The building has high heritage significance as a meeting house purpose-built in 1963, in a modernist style by well-regarded post-war architects Beech and Thomas. The meeting room has been little altered and is a dramatically-lit internal space with some furnishings of note.

Evidential value

Heswall meeting house has an overall low level of significance for evidential value. The Merseyside Historic Environment Record has not identified the site for any archaeological interest.

Historical value

The building has high historic value associated with the documentary evidence and building fabric. The meeting house was built due to the efforts of the Creed family, notably William and Eileen Creed, prominent Quakers in Heswall, who were also instrumental in founding the local Meeting.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has high significance for aesthetic values due to the quality of the design which demonstrates the advancing technologies and ideas of the time. Heswall meeting house was designed by architects Gerald Beech and Dewi-Prys Thomas who designed buildings notable for their freshness of

design, meticulous and practical detailing. The meeting house provides a focal point and is a positive building of townscape merit along Telegraph Road. Key spaces and features survive within the meeting house, including the meeting room, staircase and kitchen. Despite loss and covering up of original fabric over the years in some areas, the form and aesthetics of the interiors can still be appreciated.

Communal value

The Meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers which has been in use since it was opened in 1963. The building has in recent years provided a local community focus and its facilities are used by many local and social groups with diverse interests.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Wirral and Chester*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0002980*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wirral Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Heswall*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 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(s): *1961-62*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Gerald Beech and Dewi Prys Thomas*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *23rd April 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Tom Miller*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Warden's House*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 296-297.

Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde, Edward Hubbard and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire*. 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp.397.

Donald Insall Associates, *Heswall Quaker Meeting House: Understanding and conserving a*

modern religious building, 2011.

John Noble, *Heswall Quakers; The story of the first seventy five years of a Quaker Meeting*, 2013.

John Menzies, Local Meeting Survey, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The founding of both a local meeting and a meeting house in Heswall was a result of the determination and passion of two individuals: William and Eileen Creed. From 1937 Friends held Sunday evening meetings in various venues in Heswall until the current meeting house was built in 1961-62. The Creeds lived in Heswall and were members of the Birkenhead Quaker Meeting. In September 1937, William Creed informed the Preparative Meeting that it was intended to commence meetings for worship in Heswall.

By 1938, the local meeting had been established and met in Heswall Parish Hall, but during the war other venues including the Creeds' home were used. By the 1950s the Milner Rooms became the venue for meeting. As a result of increasing membership the Milner Rooms became inadequate and in 1956 a decision was made to look for a property in Heswall that could be converted into a meeting house, but this was not successful and it was decided to build a new meeting house. In January 1958 a building fund was created and by July 1958 a piece of land at North Drive was purchased for £905.

William Creed was aware of the work by architect Dewi-Prys Thomas, who worked with Gerald Beech in Liverpool; they were appointed to design the new meeting house in 1958.

A 1958 report by Thomas (referred to in the 2011 Insall report) makes reference to the design of the building being influenced by the 'specific requirements of the local Society of Friends' and the 'particular qualities of this site in Heswall.' The raised topography of the site on a sandstone outcrop, its position on the corner site of Telegraph Road and North Drive and the neighbouring properties of two storeys influenced the design approach taken by the architects. The Thomas report explains the architects' design ideas for the building, for example:

'The 'yard' from the world outside is gained by a slight ramp which is sympathetic to the rise of the rock itself on the profile of the ground here. On passing through the cleft between the main block and Resident Friend's accommodation we feel that we are passing into a private part of the world, like the atrium of the Early Christian Church'.

The estimated cost of the meeting house and wardens flat was £12,400. Funds were obtained through a Meeting House Loan Fund, Deeds of Covenant, war damage claim (Balmoral Road, Liverpool) and through fund raising. The main contractors were Mohin (Bebington) Limited. The meeting house was opened on 19th April 1963.

As first opened in 1963, the ground floor space below the first floor children's room was an open yard. This was infilled as part of alterations in 1971, to designs by Beech, to provide a library, and at the same time, the main entrance was relocated with access between the warden's house and meeting house block. The work was also undertaken by Mohin Limited and cost £1,156.

In 1993, handrails were installed alongside the paths leading to the meeting house. Internal works in 1993 included installing a stair lift to the first floor, an emergency exit and a glazed

screen at the base of the stairs. A kitchen area was created on the landing outside of the meeting room in 1997 and the former kitchen utilised for storage. A glazed screen which separated the new room in 1970 was replaced by a solid partition in 1998.

Additional changes to the meeting house were made to either improve the building's carbon footprint or for health and safety which will be discussed in section 3.3 of the report.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building complex comprises two separate blocks linked by a first floor bridge: the larger meeting house block is to the north with the warden's house to its south. The Meeting House is set at diagonally to Telegraph Road. The two-storey building is faced in grey concrete brick with sections of vertical timber cladding to the warden's house, and mineral felt to the roofs. The east and south elevations to the meeting house are the most prominent with a series of vertical narrow windows in descending height lighting the meeting room. The roof to this space is low-pitched in a half pyramidal form with the apex to the south-east corner. The ground floor oriel window lights the curving entrance passage, with narrow vertical glazing of tinted yellow glass facing east. The ground floor of the meeting house block has horizontal windows, now uPVC.



Figure 1: Access to the first floor via the oriel window. North is to the left.

The warden's house has a similar form to the meeting house block, but with simpler elevations and a smaller scale. The main entrance is in the passage directly opposite the doorway into the meeting house. The south elevation has a projecting first floor clad in timber boarding.

The interior is arranged with careful attention to planning and natural light. The meeting room is located on the first floor, accessed via a ramp through a curving passageway within the oriel window, leading to a concrete staircase (Fig.1). The square room has a light and open feel, the walls are mainly plastered and painted white, the room is lit by narrow vertical windows to the east and south, with a sloping ceiling with spot lights. To the west of the

room are structural piloti, painted white. The original flooring is wooden and has been carpeted. The immaculate detailing of the interior includes mahogany joinery such as the original doors with vertical glazing and radii to the inner frame corners. On the ground floor, the lobby has concrete floor panels (part-carpeted) and fitted concrete window seating. The ground floor lavatories are reached via a curved corridor on the north side of the north block.

The original kitchen on the first floor link is now used for storage, but contains the original blue painted timber units.

2.3 Loose furnishings

Among the main items of loose furnishings are the meeting house chairs (Fig.2). The son of William and Eileen Creed, John, a professional metal-smith, designed the chairs. Fifty chairs were given to the meeting house as a memorial to William Creed.



Figure 2: John Creed chair

2.4. Attached burial ground

No attached burial ground.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Heswall is an affluent Wirral community, facing west across the Dee estuary. The meeting house is situated on a busy road, inland, in a suburban commercial setting; the meeting house forms a distinctive landmark along this part of Telegraph Road. The building is partially obscured from the main road by birch trees at the front of the building. The area immediately in front of the meeting house is landscaped with exposed sandstone and heather planting. To the south east of the building residential properties line North Drive (an unadopted road).

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. Gerald Beech and Dewi-Prys Thomas were each leading architects in the post war period in their own right; both were taught at the Liverpool School of Architecture from the late 1940s. Thomas worked for a T. Alwyn Lloyd before returning to lecture in Liverpool and was subsequently appointed head of the Welsh School of Architecture in Cardiff in 1960. During the 1950s, Thomas designed a number of houses in Liverpool and the Wirral, including the grade II listed Entwood in Birkenhead (1958). Beech was a lecturer who ran his own practice at the same time, Gerald Beech and Partners. His work includes Wyncote Sports Pavilion in Allerton, which won the Civic Trust Award in 1964. Beech and Thomas only collaborated on a limited number of projects including the Grade II* listed Cedarwood in Liverpool, Women's Journal House of the Year in 1960, and Heswall Meeting House. The meeting house is recorded in Pevsner's Buildings of England, Cheshire and described as having 'immaculate detailing'.

In 1970, Beech returned to Heswall to design an extension to accommodate a library, which does not detract from the overall interest of the building. Other minor changes such as the installation of uPVC windows and alternative access have had a minor impact. It is considered that the meeting house and warden's house complex are possible candidates for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site has low archaeological potential. It is unlikely that there would be any significant archaeological remains on the site; the site was not previously developed. At the time of this study, the site was not identified as a site of archaeological interest by the Merseyside Historic Environment Record.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The Friends appreciate the architectural quality of the building and take account of its character in maintaining the building, particularly since a conservation report was undertaken in 2011 by Donald Insall. The 2009 quinquennial survey made a number of recommendations, the majority of which Friends have addressed.

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

3.2. Maintenance

As part of the quinquennial survey dated 2009 some recommendations have been addressed including double glazing to the lobby and WCs, external decoration, repairs to the warden's house. Repairs of the uneven paths are currently being undertaken. The Friends have sufficient funds for the maintenance of the building and have a five-year maintenance plan.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: In 1994 the under-floor electric heating was replaced by gas-fired central heating for the whole upper floor to reduce the building's carbon footprint, wooden floor in the meeting room was carpeting in 1999, in 2006 a single boiler was replaced by two separate boilers to serve the meeting

house and warden's house, double glazing (uPVC) was installed, the roofs of both buildings were insulated, cavity walls were insulated and energy efficient light bulbs were introduced in 2008.

- Resource use, recycling and waste management: Recycling takes place in accordance with the local authority's scheme.
- Transport: Friends and other users of the meeting house car-share where possible.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs. These include a kitchen area on the first floor, WCs (including one fully accessible) and three meeting rooms.

3.5. Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken, but some access improvement works have been carried out. In 1993 a garden path leading to the meeting house was created with handrails running alongside. In addition, a stair lift was installed to provide access to the first floor. The meeting house uses a blue pyramid hearing loop. The nosings on the stairs to first floor level are in a contrasting colour (white) to assist partially-sighted people.

Adjacent to the meeting house is a warden's house and the warden works part-time.

The transport links for the meeting house consist of local buses with services running seven days a week. There is limited on-site car parking. Further car parking is available on the adjacent roads. Bicycles can be stored within the building if needed.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting house is in community use for 38 hours each week. There is a lettings policy. The rooms are not hired to political parties or groups.

Rooms are usually hired out in sessions of up to three hours. A number of different groups currently use the meeting house including for yoga, painting groups, Buddhists, a university history group and Unitarians.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The area has low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime at the site.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no immediate plans for change at the meeting house. However, the Friends have aspirations to remove the fittings of the original kitchen to provide a storage room.

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 modified on a number of occasions since 1963. Further internal alterations should be sympathetic to the original design concept and take account of the quality and character of the existing space, notably the meeting room which has been largely unaltered. The chairs designed by John Creed should be retained if possible.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local meeting use: The meeting house is currently being used for wider community by a number of groups as well as by the local meeting.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: There is a strong membership, and closure would appear to be unlikely. In the event of being laid down, there may be scope to continue the existing community use with some adaptation, subject to viability. Other uses could include commercial office or even residential use.

Part 5: Category: 2