

Friends Meeting House, Leicester

16 Queens Road, Leicester, LE2 1WP

National Grid Reference: SK 59852 02815



Statement of Significance

A meeting house purpose-built on a new site in 1955 and slightly enlarged in 1968. The building is typical of the 1950s in style and is of medium heritage significance.

Evidential value

The building itself is wholly of the 1950s and 1960s; no earlier fabric is contained in the building. The site and building are of little evidential value.

Historical value

Quakers in Leicester have a history dating back to the 1680s, but the present site was only acquired by the Quakers in 1955 and the site and building have relatively little historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is typical of the 1950s and 1960s. It is not particularly distinctive in appearance, with the exception of the main meeting room with its exposed roof trusses; overall it is of medium aesthetic value

Communal value

The meeting house is well-used by the local community and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Leicester*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005530*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Leicester City Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Leicester*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/A*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1955, enlarged 1968*

1.13 Architect (s): *A H Gardner & Partners, 1968 enlargement by the Douglas Smith Stimpson partnership,*

1.14 Date of visit: *7 January 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Clive Sutton*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1 pp.355-8

Elliott, Malcolm, *A Short History of Quakers in Leicestershire and Rutland*

Local Meeting survey by Anthony Gimpel, October 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1680 Friends acquired a site in Soar Lane Leicester for use as a burial ground and built a meeting house on part of the site. The site was gradually enlarged to cope with the number of burials. A new meeting house was built in the centre of the site in 1768 and the old building was demolished. An important benefactor and member of the meeting was the wealthy industrialist John Ellis (1789-1862) who was responsible for the Leicester and Swannington Railway which opened in 1832 and allowed the Leicestershire Coalfields to prosper. John Ellis and his three spinster daughters lived in Belgrave Hall. In 1876 the whole property of

the Soar Lane Meeting House was acquired for development by the Manchester Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway, later called the Great Central Railway. A new site was acquired in Prebend Street, where a new meeting house was built to the designs of Edward Burgess, a prominent Leicester architect. This building still survives and is now used as a Sikh Gurdwara. In 1955 the present meeting house designed by A H Gardner & Partners was erected on a large site in Clarendon Park. The site was given by Charles Goddard (of silver plate powder fame) who was a member of the meeting. The building originally comprised a two storey range fronting the street with a single-storey meeting room set at right angles at the rear. The front range was extended across the end of the meeting room in 1968 to a design by the Douglas Smith Stimpson partnership. Douglas Smith is still a member of the Meeting. In the 1970s the southern part of the site was used to build Drayton House comprising 12 flats for the newly formed Leicester Quaker Housing Association.

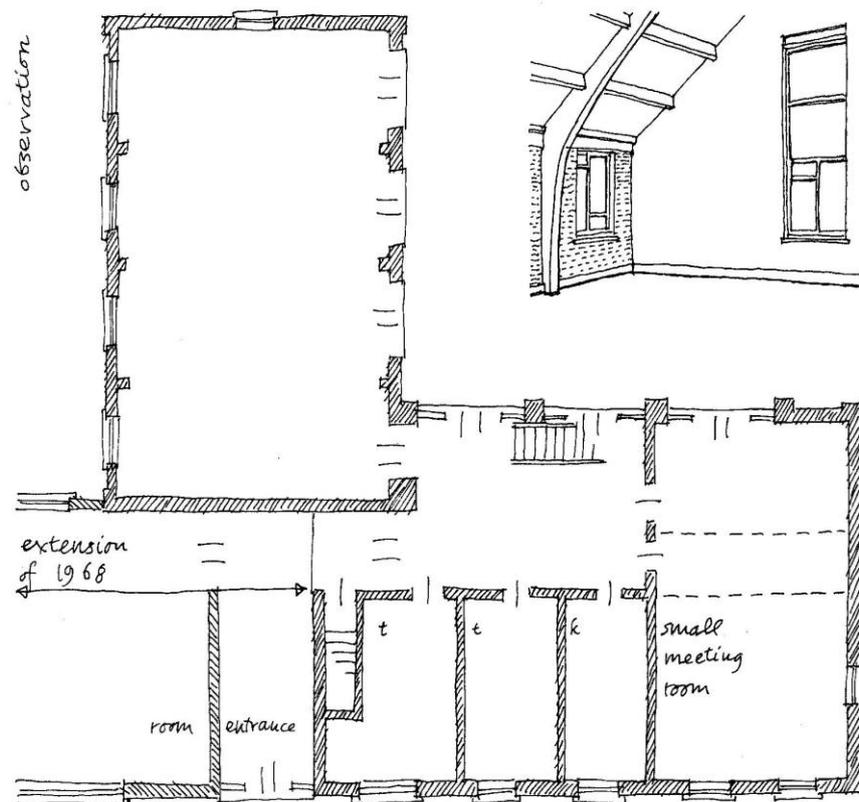


Figure 1: Plan of the original 1955 building (north is to the left), *Butler*, Vol. 1, p.357

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building now comprises a long two-storey front range under a continuous pitched roof, with a single-storey meeting room projecting at the rear. The right-hand (south) part of front range is faced with buff brick laid in stretcher bond with small domestic window openings; the later north part is faced in redder brick and has larger window openings. On the rear elevation, the first floor of the older structure is tile-hung. The meeting room is faced in buff brick. All the roofs are covered in plain clay tiles. The main entrance is at the rear and leads into a rectangular stair hall. The main meeting room opening off this hall is 4-bay and rectangular, with three windows on the north side, three French windows on the south side and a tall thin window in the end-gable. The interior of the room has a wood-block floor and walls of fair-faced brick, with the trusses of the concrete portal frame exposed.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The loose furnishings include an oak table in the main meeting room said to be by Ernest Gimson and a number of Victorian pine benches which came from the former meeting house in Prebend Street. There are four fine rush seated upright chairs and an extending leaf table in the Library. In the lobby is a decorative panel with clay figures made by the children of the meeting commemorating John Ellis and his railway.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house fronts Queens Road, in Clarendon Park. It is set in lawned gardens and there is no boundary wall to the open frontage. Five stones from the burial ground at Oakham (the earliest 1797, the latest 1869) were brought to Leicester when the Oakham burial ground closed, and are propped against the end wall of the meeting room.

2.6. Listed status

The 1950s building is not a candidate for the statutory list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was erected on a new site and the archaeological potential of the site is probably low.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2. Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection report is dated May 2014. No major structural issues were identified. The meeting has adequate funds to cover the costs of maintenance and repair. The meeting does not have a written 5-year maintenance and repair plan, but there is an annual report to the Trustees of Area Meeting and an annual visual inspection of the building.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented measures to reduce environmental impact. Most windows have uPVC double glazing; the ceiling of the main meeting room has been insulated and there is a new and efficient heating system with separate controls for all usable spaces. The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but the meeting would consider obtaining one.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house - including a kitchen, toilets and several meeting rooms of different sizes. The flat on the first floor is currently occupied by a Resident Friend and family. The meeting employs an Office Manager who looks after the lettings, etc, and has an office on the first floor.

The meeting house is fairly close to the town centre and two bus routes stop outside and connect to the railway station. The buses run hourly on Sundays and every ten minutes during the week. There is on-site parking for about 15 cars and newly-installed racks for bicycles.

3.5. Access

All the main rooms except the Activity Room are on the ground floor which has level access throughout. There is a stair-lift from the ground to first floor. There is an accessible WC and a hearing loop in the main rooms. There are no specific facilities for partially-sighted people. There has not been a Disability Access Audit.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the building for about 8 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum total of 390 hours per week (5 rooms) and is used for approximately 130 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. No political parties or commercial groups are allowed. Groups with a clear Quaker connection and involvement may be permitted to use the meeting house for free. Users value the good location, ample parking, variety of room sizes and good pricing.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are some signs of general crime and anti-social behaviour at the site. The car park has been used for illegal driving and bikes have been stolen from the garage. There has been no heritage crime. Police were informed about the bike theft. The locality is generally well cared-for and has low crime levels and low deprivation.

3.8. Plans for change

There are currently no plans for changes to the building.

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: there is scope for alteration or enlargement if required, subject to planning constraints.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: as above, there is scope for alteration, subject to planning constraints.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could potentially be adapted for another use if the meeting were laid down.

Part 5: Category: 3