

Friends Meeting House, Newbury

1 Highfield Avenue, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 5DS

National Grid Reference: SU 47194 66829



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a large, detached house of 1922, currently under threat of demolition. It has low heritage significance.

Evidential value

The building is unlikely to reveal any unique evidence about the past. It has low evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house was the first of several houses built in the 1920s in Highfield Avenue. It has low historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building has several features typical of the period, such as half-timbered gables. It has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been used by Quakers and the local community for 60 years. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Thames*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0006550*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *West Berkshire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Newbury NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Newbury Town Centre*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1922*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *22 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Carolyn Fletcher*
- 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. 13-14

Tubb, R.B., *Newbury, Road by Road*, 2011

Gifford, S., *Quakers in Newbury*, typescript, 1986

Local Meeting survey by Carolyn Fletcher, June 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

By 1670, there was a meeting house in Mayor's Lane (not 'Manor Lane' as stated in Butler). In 1675, a burial ground and six tenements (demolished c.1936) were bought in the same location. In 1688, Friends moved out of the first meeting house. (Butler also mentions that the Curtis separation at Reading meeting (*qv*) during the Wilkinson-Story Controversy led to the erection of a second meeting house in Newbury at an unknown location (in use between 1698 and c.1718).) In 1710 (Tubb: 1702), a new meeting house opened off Bartholomew Street. In 1853, this closed and the building was later sold. In 1914, the old burial ground was sold to extend the cattle market and the burials were transferred to the municipal cemetery at Shaw.

In 1950, the meeting was re-started and from 1951 met at the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel (demolished in the 1970s). In 1955, the current house in Highfield Avenue was bought, close to the former burial ground in Mayor's Lane. The building is a detached house, originally known as 'Pebbles', built in 1922 for the coal merchant William Brain and his family. Between 1930 and 1955 it was in use as a nursing home. The ground floor was converted to a meeting room, while a flat was created on the first floor. In the 1970s, the house was extended. In 1992, an extension was built to increase the children's classroom accommodation and to provide a second flat (architects: Sweetman, Pope & Milsom).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building faces approximately north. It is a two-storey detached house on an L-plan. The building has a brick plinth, with the walls above pebble-dashed. The roof is tiled and the windows have tile sills. All chimneystacks have been removed above roof level. The front elevation has the entrance to the upstairs flats under a tiled lean-to roof which also extends above a bin store to the side. There are two ground-floor windows, one small first-floor window as well as three first-floor half-timbered dormers. There is another such dormer window in the west elevation, beside a lower-level first-floor window. The rear elevation has a gable with a two-storey bay window to the west, with lean-to canopies above two entrances to the main wing and the east wing. Above the entrance to the main wing is a vertical four-light window; the east wing's west elevation has another half-timbered dormer. The east wing's south gable is also half-timbered with two ground-floor windows and one first-floor window.

A large ground-floor room in the east wing serves as the meeting room. This has a foldable partition and a tiled mantelpiece of 1922. At the west is a smaller meeting room with three chamfered and stopped ceiling beams. A kitchen is to the front, with toilets nearby. The kitchen has an electrical bell board supplied by the Urban Electrical Supply Co Ltd, which indicates that the house originally had a front room, a dining room, a drawing room and two bedrooms. The two flats on the first floor were not inspected.

2.3 Loose furnishings

None of note

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located near the corner of Highfield Avenue with Mayor's Lane, near the centre of Newbury. The area is subject to development plans by the local council, and the meeting house has long been included in the development area. Under current plans it may not be demolished after all.

Highfield Avenue is a cul-de-sac accessed via Mayor's Lane to the east. Just in the angle of the two streets is a chestnut tree with a plaque below with the following inscription: 'This stone is fixed here to mark the location of the old Quaker Burial Ground. Newbury District Council, August 1975'. The burial ground was on this site from 1675 to 1914 and the burials have been transferred to the municipal cemetery at Shaw.

2.6 Listed status

The building is currently not listed and is not considered to be listable.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The street was laid out in the early 1920s and 1 Highfield Avenue was the first to be completed. The site has low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

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

3.2 Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection took place in 2009 (Edge Architecture). No major works have been undertaken while the decision on the compulsory purchase of the site was pending.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: low-energy lightbulbs
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: recycling, compost bins
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: garden with trees, bee-friendly plants and a semi-wild area
- Transport: use of public transport where possible

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider getting one once the building is no longer threatened by demolition proposals.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden. The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is limited parking on site and there is secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access, an accessible toilet, and facilities for partially-sighted people. There is no hearing loop. No Disability Access Audit has been conducted.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 3 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 130 hours per week. It is used for an average of 60 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. The Hirings Administrator decides who is permitted to hire the building. Any uncertain cases are decided by the Elders and Overseers, or the Business Meeting. Free hirings are generally invoiced first and the charge is then returned as a gift. Users value the meeting house for its convenient location, vicinity to transport links, reasonable charges, its homely atmosphere, privacy, the peacefulness and tranquillity of the house and garden.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There have been incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour (types: a, c, i, j) at the site. Heritage crime included the theft of lead flashings. All incidents were reported to the police and the meeting liaises with the community policing team over anti-social behaviour. The locality is generally not well-cared for, has high crime levels, high deprivation and low community confidence. There is an established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

Plans for the development area still evolve and the position of the meeting house is not yet secure, although under current plans it may not be demolished.

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 required by the local meeting. It could be altered if required. The main threat at the moment is the proposed residential development of the area.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is currently well-used and has all the required facilities.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the Quakers cease to use the building, it could easily be returned to full residential use.

Part 5: Category: 4