

***Friends Meeting House, Oswestry***

*Oak Street, Oswestry, SY11 1LJ*

*National Grid Reference: SJ 28855 29901*



***Statement of Significance***

***This small meeting house was built in 1934 as an Anglican mission hall, and adapted as a meeting house in 1962. It has local heritage value and contributes to the conservation area.***

***Evidential value***

***The building has low evidential value, and the site is thought to have low archaeological potential.***

***Historical value***

***The building has medium historical value as an example of small Anglican mission hall built to serve this part of Oswestry in the 1930s, later used and extended for a photographic studio. The meeting house use since 1961 adds to its historical value***

***Aesthetic value***

***The building is modest architecturally, and its domestic scale and simple style fits well with adjoining brick terraced housing. The main feature on the front is the partly infilled arched doorway; the rear of the building has less aesthetic value interest, although the garden is attractive.***

### **Communal value**

***The meeting house has high communal value as a meeting house also used by community groups, and as a building that is part of a conservation area.***

#### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *North Wales*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005340*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Shropshire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Oswestry*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/A*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Oswestry Town Centre*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date: *1934, adapted 1961, extended 1987*
- 1.13 Architect: *Not established (1934 and 1961), Adam Voelcker 1987*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *16 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Names of contacts made on site: *Margaret Clarke and Frank Brown*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
  - D.Butler, *The Quaker Meeting House of Britain*, 1999, Vol 2, p511
  - Excerpts from the Minute Book of Oswestry Meeting from 1954
  - The Friend, July 1962, pp6-7
  - Local Meeting Survey by Margaret Clarke, 2015

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

##### **2.1. Historical background**

Before the Second World War Quakers in Oswestry travelled to Shrewsbury for meetings, but during and after the War, they met as an Allowed Meeting in Oswestry using hired rooms. From 1952 meetings were held at the Toc H on Bailey Street and from 1954 at a room on

Castle Street (at the Independent Order of Good Templars). Between 1941 and 1956, Oswestry meeting was part of Worcester and Shropshire Monthly Meeting. In 1961, Friends bought the current building on Oak Street for £1100; it was registered for worship on 4 August 1961 and after some minor alterations the first meeting was held on 1 July 1962. The building was originally built in c.1934 as an Anglican Mission Hall associated with the parish church. Prior to 1961, and from an unknown date, the building was used as a photographer's studio; the rear extension with glazed roof was built to serve this purpose. In 1961-62 a suspended ceiling and oak veneer wall panelling were installed in the former photographer's studio to create a meeting room. In 1984, double glazed windows were installed. In 1987, an adjoining building to the south was purchased and the site used to build a small 2-storey extension to provide a new entrance lobby, kitchen and upper room, designed by Adam and Frances Voelcker; this cost about £40,000. The original central front entrance was blocked around the same time.

## 2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The front of the meeting house comprises a former Anglican mission hall built in 1934. This compact 2-storey range is built of red brick in a type of Flemish garden wall bond: three courses of stretchers to one course of alternate headers/stretchers). The roof is covered with Eternit artificial slates with terracotta ridges and a terracotta finial to one gable, windows are steel or uPVC and rainwater goods are plastic. The main feature of the front is the central semi-circular headed doorway with a terracotta hoodmould and impost; the lower half is infilled with brickwork laid in a herringbone pattern with a plain window in the upper part. Either side are small windows with flat brick lintels, and to the first floor are three windows all with concrete lintels. To the rear of the 1934 range is a single-storey twentieth century addition with asymmetric roof (top right hand photograph, page 1); this is built of brick in stretcher bond and the roof has Eternit artificial slates to the smaller south pitch and is fully glazed to the larger north pitch. The rear of the former studio has a gabled timber canopy over the double timber doors to the meeting room, and one plain modern window. The south elevation is blind brickwork. The 1980s south addition is built of matching red brick with a slate roof, with a large open gabled porch facing south, on brick piers. The extension has circular windows to east and south, and a 2-light window facing west.



Fig.1: glazed roof over meeting room, formerly a photographic studio

The interior of the meeting house is the result of several phases of alteration, and the original form and internal appearance of the 1934 mission hall is not legible. The building is entered

from the modern side porch which leads into a small lobby, part of the 1987 addition; from here stairs lead up to the first floor. A small kitchen is off the west side of the lobby. The ground floor of the 1934 building is used as a foyer and contains a small library (bottom right hand photograph on page 1); walls and ceiling are plain plastered and there are fitted cupboards and shelves. On the north side of the foyer are WCs which retain steel 1930s windows. The meeting room is off the west side of the foyer, with a short ramp from the internal doorway to deal with a change in level; the room is top-lit from the north glazed roof, with a suspended ceiling of translucent polycarbonate panels. The walls are lined with recent timber panelling, and the floor is carpeted. The first floor contains a small meeting room or children's room, plainly finished and lit by windows facing the front and the rear

### 2.3. Loose furnishings

There are no historic furnishings. Seating in the meeting room comprises loose upholstered chairs, bought in 1998 from Godfrey Syett Ltd.

### 2.4. Attached burial ground. N/A

### 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is situated in a street close to the town centre, with early twentieth century terraced adjoining to the north and to the rear. To the south and close to the main entrance there is a large shed used as a meat warehouse; an unattractive building which has an ugly gable end looming over the narrow yard to the side of the meeting house. Across the street there is a large public car park and a recently rebuilt youth centre building, managed by the local authority and set in landscaped open grounds. The meeting house directly fronts the street and has no private space to the front, but to the rear there is an attractive small garden with some mature trees, plants and paving. Some adjoining houses have historic rights of access across the garden and along the side of the meeting house, which sometimes conflicts with Friends need for quiet at Meeting on Sundays.

### 2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed and its date and the level of alteration mean that it would not meet criteria for listing.

### 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The previous use of this site is not known, but as it is close to Oswestry town centre it is possible that there was activity here which may give the site some archaeological potential.

## **Part 3: Current use and management**

### 3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The last quinquennial inspection was undertaken in 2010 by Morris Marshall and Poole, surveyors. Another QI is due in 2015. Since the last QI, minor works to address the key issues have been completed: a tree has been trimmed, rainwater goods repaired and a fire door installed.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/A

### 3.2. Maintenance

The building is generally well-maintained and the meeting has a 5-year maintenance plan. They have adequate funds for maintenance.

### 3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Waste is recycled as much as possible, and double glazing has been installed.

### 3.4. Amenities

The meeting does not have all the facilities it needs; the kitchen is too small and the toilets are in need of upgrading. The meeting space is sufficient for Meeting on Sunday but is too small for a large gathering.

There is public transport on weekdays only. There is a long-stay car park opposite, which is fairly cheap. The meeting house is walking distance from the town centre.

### 3.5. Access

The meeting house has level access into the building, and a ramp down into the meeting space, but the first floor can only be reached by a steep staircase. An audit has not been undertaken but the meeting is aware that the toilets are not adequate for people with some disabilities as they are not wheelchair-accessible. There is a hearing loop.

### 3.6. Community Use

Friends use the building for three or four hours a week, and the building could be used by the community for up to 70 hours. It is currently used for about 15 hours per week by community groups. There is a draft lettings contract, which is in the process of being finalised. Lettings are at the discretion of the person designated by the meeting to manage room lettings, with advice from the Business Meeting; users are generally those where the group is run by a Friend, which benefits other members/attendees or those the meeting wishes to support.

### 3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been some anti-social behaviour in the past, associated with young people attending the youth centre across the road; for example the glass over the external poster case was smashed and was reported to police who resolved it. There has been no heritage crime.

### 3.8. Plans for change

The kitchen is considered too small; there is space to extend it to the rear, subject to agreement that this is a priority and to fund-raising. The meeting does not have funds for capital projects.

## **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 building could be adapted further to meet the needs of the meeting, and a rear addition or alterations would not affect the conservation area.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use.* The building could be adapted further to meet the needs of the meeting or extended community use, and a rear addition or alterations would not affect the conservation area.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House.* The building is an interesting element in the conservation area and as it has some local heritage value, the local authority would probably expect it to be retained and a new use found, in preference to demolition. It could be sold for residential, community or business (B1) use.

**Part 5: Category: 3**