

## ***Friends Meeting House, Peterborough***

*21 Thorpe Road, Crescent Bridge, Peterborough, PE3 6AB*

*National Grid Reference: TL 18596 98586*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***The building has medium heritage significance as a purpose-built inter-war meeting house which contributes to the local street scene, with some original furnishings and fittings.***

#### ***Evidential value***

***As a relatively plain inter-war building built on the site of an orchard, the meeting house and its site are of low evidential value.***

#### ***Historical value***

***The meeting house has medium historical value, due to its association with the architect Leonard Brown and Quaker workers at Baker Perkins.***

#### ***Aesthetic value***

***The building's design is typical for the interwar period, combining vernacular revival features (such as the pitched roof) with metal-framed windows. Later alterations somewhat diminish the simple quality of the design. The building has low aesthetic value.***

#### ***Communal value***

***The building has high communal value due to its primary use as a meeting house and its additional use by local community groups.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Cambridgeshire*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000440*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Peterborough City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *City of Peterborough*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed, not locally 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): *1936*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Leonard Brown*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 July 2014*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Daphne Lynas*
- 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. 2, p. 24  
*Peterborough Standard*, 10 April 1936

'A short history of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Peterborough', booklet, 1986

'Welcome to the Quaker Quiet Garden in Peterborough', leaflet, April 2013

Peterborough Local Meeting archive, historic photos

Peterborough City Council, planning database

Information from Peter Larke and Daphne Lynas

Local Meeting survey by Dorothy Ball, 2014 and 2015

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

### **2.1 Historical background**

There were several short-lived meetings in Peterborough before the present meeting was established in 1933. That year, the average attendance rose as the engineering firm Baker Perkins centralised their operations at Peterborough. Part of the company had been founded by the Baker family who were Quakers, and among the workers who moved to Peterborough in 1933 were several Quakers families. Initially, the meeting met at a room in a warehouse in King Street and at the museum.

In 1935 the present site was bought for £650. A meeting house was built to designs by the architect Leonard Brown, who was a member of Letchworth Meeting. It opened on 5 April 1936, having cost £1,900. Apart from a meeting room it contained three classrooms, toilets and a small kitchen. One of the classrooms was later converted to a larger kitchen. In 1950, Leonard Brown was in charge of small-scale repairs. In c.1953 additional land was bought. In the 1960s, a bicycle shed was built, faulty roof tiles were replaced, and metal railings and gates installed. In 1997–8, the entrance door was moved and a small extension added to provide toilet facilities (architect: David Neill). Planning permission was also granted for the provision of a warden's flat on the first floor but this remained unrealised. Instead the attic was converted into an additional meeting room with new dormer windows and skylights. In 2013, 17 photo-voltaic panels were installed on a south-facing roof slope.



Figure 1: External view of the recently completed meeting house from the north-east, 1936  
(Peterborough Meeting House archive)



Figure 2: Photo of 1936 showing the interior of the meeting room, looking north-west (Peterborough Meeting House archive)

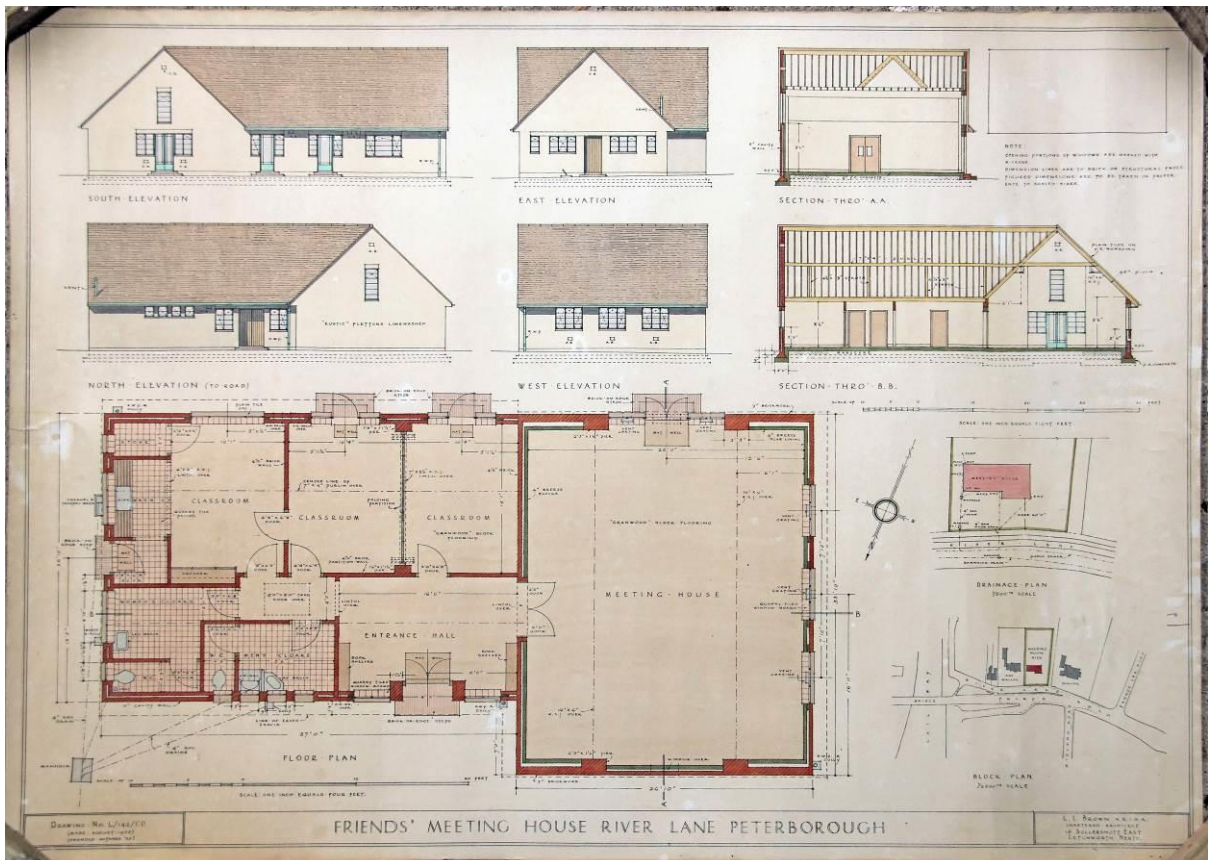


Figure 3: Original drawing, L.L. Brown, 1935 (north is roughly at the bottom of the plan; not to scale) (Peterborough Local Meeting archive)

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and furnishings

The meeting house was built in 1936 (architect: Leonard Brown) and extended and altered in 1997–8 (architect: David Neill). The building is faced in wire-cut bricks painted white and laid in stretcher bond, with a tiled pitched roof and metal windows. The plan is L-shaped, with the meeting room located in the short leg of the L. The north elevation which faces Thorpe Road has one long oblong window to the gable end, several metal-framed windows (including one in the location of the original entrance) and a new glazed entrance door. There is an external fire stair against the east elevation. The west elevation has three metal-framed windows which light the meeting room. The south elevation has a long gable window above a French door with side lights. Two similar French doors are in the neighbouring bays, beyond which are metal windows. The large dormer is tile hung and has two UPVC windows.

The meeting room has a canted ceiling with original circular light fittings (figure 2). The two surviving classrooms have a timber folding screen (photo bottom right, p. 1). In the attic are two rooms: the small Quiet Room at the east end, and the Upper Room to the west.

## 2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room has some of the original oak chairs (visible in figure 2) as well as more recent chairs.

## 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

N/a

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Directly behind the meeting house is a large garden, which is landscaped to reflect the five Quaker testimonies. It consists of two circular lawns, one of which has the outline of a circular labyrinth in bricks. The garden is used for meditation, by local community groups, and for the scattering of ashes. The garden is affiliated to the Quiet Garden Movement.

The site of the meeting house is to the west of the centre of Peterborough, close to the main railway line. The meeting house is accessed from River Lane which is at a lower level than the parallel Thorpe Road (A1179). The main views of the meeting house are from the street and from the garden behind. A number of trees on the site have tree preservation orders. On the same side of Thorpe Road as the meeting house is the Council's Register Office (to the west) and Orchard House of 1829 (grade II listed, with listed ancillary buildings) to the east. Opposite are the former District Hospital (closed in 2010 and sold in 2013 for development), warehouses and a railway waggon repair shop of c.1870 (grade II\* listed).

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed. It is a simple inter-war building which has been altered and extended. Little is known about the Quaker architect Leonard Brown. On balance the meeting house is not considered to be a candidate for listing as it is a modest design for its date. As an attractive place of worship it may be eligible for a local list.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house was built on the site of the kitchen garden and orchard of neighbouring Orchard House (built 1829). The archaeological potential of the site is considered to be low.



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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting house: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): *N/a*

### 3.2 Maintenance

The most recent QI (undertaken in 2011 by Cheffins) found no major problems, only maintenance issues. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building (helped by legacies and income from renting out parking spaces). It has a five-year maintenance and repair 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: Insulation-cavity wall & loft; solar PV 4KWp on roof; energy-efficient lighting
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: Compost; recycling; fairtrade
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: using Ecover cleaning materials; using local contractors
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: Bird boxes, log piles, bird feeders, survey by Buglife; safeguarding old apple-trees
- Transport: Car share where possible; details of access by bus & train on website; periodic survey of car-use

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but might consider obtaining one.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the required amenities. There is no resident Warden. The meeting house is accessible by public transport. There is car parking on-site, although 14 out of 22 spaces are let during the week. There are spaces for bicycle parking.

### 3.5 Access

The meeting house is fully accessible. It has level access, an accessible WC, and a hearing loop. There are no facilities for partially sighted people. The last Disability Access Audit took place two or three years ago. Most of the recommendations have been implemented, including wheelchair access into the garden.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 8 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 260 hours per week. It is used for an average of 39 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Groups with a political agenda or whose aims do not agree with Quaker principles are generally excluded, as are the consumption of alcohol and gambling (including raffles) on site. Groups whose aims are in sympathy with Quaker principles and who might not be able to afford commercial rents may be granted use of the meeting house free of charge. Users value the meeting house for its

good location with on-site parking, its vicinity to the bus and train stations, competitive pricing, the garden, its simplicity and flexibility, and its peaceful atmosphere.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The area has generally low crime levels but there have been incidents of break-ins, broken windows, and the theft of wrought-iron gates a few years ago. Criminal damage is generally reported to the police, while trespass and nuisance incidents tend not to be reported. There is an established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

The meeting is currently (2015) planning the complete re-design and refurbishment of the kitchen, the internal insulation of the meeting room, and the installation of cavity wall insulation. It is also investigating the possible installation of secondary glazing and is assessing the current heating system.

## **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 are currently no heritage constraints on the building. The building was extended in 1997–8 which should obviate any further alterations in the short term.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The meeting house is already in use by local community groups and has all the facilities to support these.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting:* In the event of closure, a sympathetic new use would be preferable to redevelopment. The meeting house would lend itself to a range of new uses.

## **Part 5: Category: 3**