

***Quaker Meeting House, Ross-on-Wye***

*3a Brampton Street, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7EQ*

*National Grid Reference: SO 60101 24489*



***Statement of Significance***

***Ross-on-Wye meeting house was built in 1804 on the site of an earlier meeting house and has an early eighteenth century burial ground. It has high significance as a good example of a purpose-built meeting house with a little altered interior and many original fittings.***

***Evidential value***

***Part of the fabric of the small meeting room may incorporate structure from the earlier building, and the burial ground to the west dates from at least the early eighteenth century. The 1804 building retains features and fabric that***

**may yield more information about its construction and use. The building and site has high evidential value.**

**Historical value**

**The building and site has high historical significance as a good example of a purpose-built Quaker meeting house, on the site of a late seventeenth century meeting house with a burial ground. It illustrates the long history of Quakers in the town and is associated with local Quakers who were prominent in the town.**

**Aesthetic value**

**The building and site has high aesthetic significance as an attractive example of a late Georgian meeting house characterised by the hipped roofs, sash windows, tall proportions and good quality internal joinery. Although the building and burial ground is hidden from the street, this is part of its charm, and the arched screen to the front contributes to the street scene.**

**Communal value**

**The meeting house site has been associated with Quakers for 350 years and is also valued by community groups who use it. It has high communal value.**

**Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Southern Marches*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0033020*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Herefordshire Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Ross-on-Wye*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1098727*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Ross-on-Wye*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1805*
- 1.13 Architect: *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *12 January 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contacts made on site: *Jane and Doug Turnbull*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Cottage*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

### 1.19 Information sources:

David Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, Vol.1*, 1999, pp249-250

RCHME, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meetings in Central England*, 1986, p114

Peter Thacker, *Quakers in Ross-on-Wye*, 2008

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

### 2.1. Historical background

Quakers are first recorded in Ross-on-Wye in 1655 when Thomas Goodaire and George Scaife walked here from the North to meet with a small group of Friends, and stayed with James Merricke, a tanner who lived off the Market Square. Meetings were held in Merricke's house and in 1663 and 1668 when George Fox visited Ross, he stayed with Merricke. In 1675, Merricke gave a plot of land, some timber and £40 to Morgan Watkins and others to erect a house. Quakers in Ross were persecuted during this time, and 16 were sent to Hereford jail. By 1677 the meeting house had been built on the present site, and a burial ground was created in part of the garden; there was also a cottage on the front part of the site. The long narrow plot is typical of early post-medieval urban development. From 1663, there was another burial ground in New Street, but this was sold in 1868. Alterations and repairs were proposed to the meeting house in 1798, and by 1805 works to rebuild it were complete. The new building comprised two parts; the smaller women's meeting room to the east, probably partly incorporating the earlier meeting house, and a large meeting room to the west, the date 1804 is inscribed on a quoin below the south-east eaves. The arched screen wall was probably created at the same time, using part of an earlier wall.

The meeting declined during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and closed in 1916, but was revived in 1926, with support from Arthur Williams of Gloucester Meeting. During the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the meeting was small and by the 1970s there was just one member, E.Constance M.Richardson. The meeting almost gave up on the building, and the west part of the garden was sold for £12,500 in 1982. Then a revival began when in 1989-1990 the meeting house roof was repaired with grant-aid from English Heritage, and further repairs were undertaken to the interior in 1992-93, with labour provided by young offenders. The meeting house was formally re-opened in 1994. In 1992, the cottage on the south side of the building was remodelled to provide two flats and in 1995, an infill extension was built between the east screen wall and the small meeting to provide a kitchen and toilets, designed by Ian Geddes.

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

The 1804 meeting house is built of coursed red sandstone, with a hipped roof laid with Welsh slate or concrete tiles, lead rolls and cast-iron rainwater goods. The almost square large meeting room forms the west arm of the L-plan building, with the narrow smaller meeting room to the east and a lobby and staircase in the angle between the two ranges. The street frontage facing east is formed by a stone screen wall with flat copings and a pair of semi-circular arches, the arch to the right is blind with recessed coursed stone and the left arch forms the entrance, with timber and metal gates. Each arch has an ashlar surround with impost and has been lime-washed or painted; the arches appear to be early nineteenth century in date but set into an older wall, perhaps the remains of the earlier meeting house. Behind the wall is a small stone infill extension built in 1992, attached to the east end of the small meeting room, with a plain boarded door facing south and flat roof. The south elevation of the small meeting room has two 16-pane sash windows facing the side passage,



with stone sills and flat heads. The north elevation is blind, with evidence for rebuilding that may relate to the earlier meeting house.



Fig.1: the front screen wall and the north wall of the small meeting room may be part of the earlier meeting house, built in the 1670s

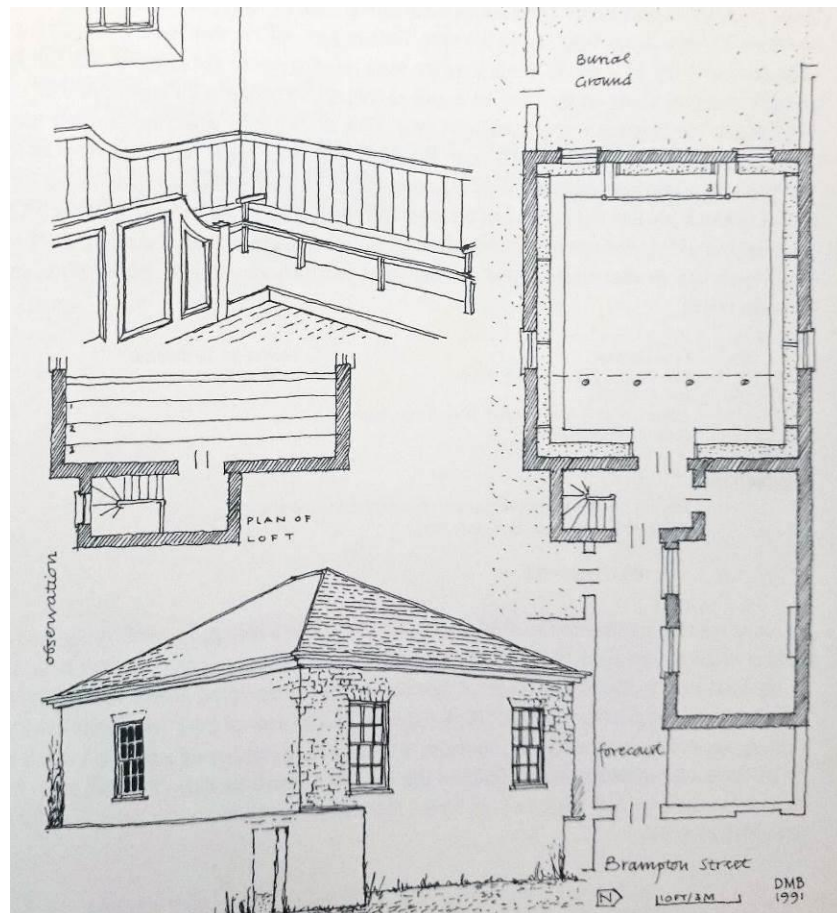


Fig.2: plans and sketches from Butler, 1999, Vol.1 page 249

Attached to the west end of the small meeting room is the large meeting room; this has lean-to projection on its east side facing along the entrance passage and contains the lobby and staircase under a catslide roof. The doorway has a flat timber canopy on console brackets, moulded timber architrave and double boarded doors with iron furniture. To the left of the doorway is a fixed 12-pane stair window with stone sill and flat head (the head resembles gauged brick but is stone). Left of the entrance, the east wall is blind but with the ghost of a former smaller lean-to addition in the angle of the walls. The roof to the meeting room has deep eaves, and below the south-east corner the top quoin is inscribed 1804. The south and north elevations each has one sash windows and the west elevation has two sashes, all are 12-pane and have horns (probably replacements). Set low into the west wall are four stones inscribed A, B, C and D that relate to burial grounds rows.

The interior is entered by the lobby on the east side of the large meeting room; from this double pine doors with fielded panels lead into the large meeting room, the staircase leads of the south and to the north a small lobby leads to the small meeting room. The panelled door from the lobby has been re-set in a stud wall inserted in 2006, to form a disabled WC on the north side of the lobby. The dogleg staircase has pine stick balusters, square newels and elm treads. The large meeting room is a lofty well-lit space with a gallery along the east side, and the ministers' stand to the west. The gallery is supported on four cylindrical timber columns with simple moulded caps and bases; one has been temporarily removed due to structural concerns and a steel prop inserted. The front of the gallery and the stand has pine fielded panels, and walls are lined to dado level with plain vertical pine boards; the top rail swept up behind the stand. The raised platform to the stand continues along the other walls, with fitted pine benches. The walls and ceiling are plain-plastered with a moulded cornice, and the floor is laid with plain pine boards (probably renewed). In the centre is a stone base for a heating stove. The latter is now ex situ but retained in the room.



Fig.3: cast-iron stove, ex situ



Fig.4: fitted wall benches and pine dado panelling in large meeting room

The small meeting room to the east is a narrow rectangular space with a projecting chimney breast on the north wall, with cast-iron fireplace in plain stone surround. The alcove to the right has fitted cupboards with plain panelled doors, in painted pine. Walls and ceiling are plain plastered, with a reeded cornice, and the floor is carpeted. A door inserted in the east wall leads to the 1992 extension with two WCs and small kitchen, also served by a hatch.



### 2.3. Loose furnishings

Seating in the large meeting room is arranged in a square with a mixture of modern chairs and old benches. There are eight pine benches which appear to be 19<sup>th</sup> century in date; all have open railed backs, open arms and tapered legs and two have solid bench ends. Lining the walls below the gallery, there are various bookshelves given by Friends, and in the centre of the room either a square oak table of mid twentieth century date or an early nineteenth century circular hardwood pedestal table is used.



Fig.5: pine benches in the meeting house



Fig.6: circular table

### 2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground dates from the early 1700s and is on the west side of the meeting house, hidden from the street. The L-plan plot is enclosed by stone walls with flat copings, and is mainly laid to grass with a few shrubs and trees, with a small pond for wildlife. A public footpath runs along the south edge of the plot, connecting Brampton Street with the street to the west. The ground is no longer used for burials; the last burial was in the 1920s but ashes are scattered. The burial plots are laid out on a grid, with the rows marked by letters and numbers on small metal plates and inscribed stones set in the boundary walls and the west wall of the meeting house (Fig.7). Burials are recorded on a framed copy of the burial ground plan dated 1823, hung inside the meeting house (Fig.6). The marker stones are all laid flat; the oldest dates from 1765. Prominent local Quakers buried here include Thomas Prichard (died 1843) and Henry Southall who established a weather station in Ross (died 1916).



Fig.7: view of burial ground from the south-east



Fig.8: inscribed stone and metal marker with row number

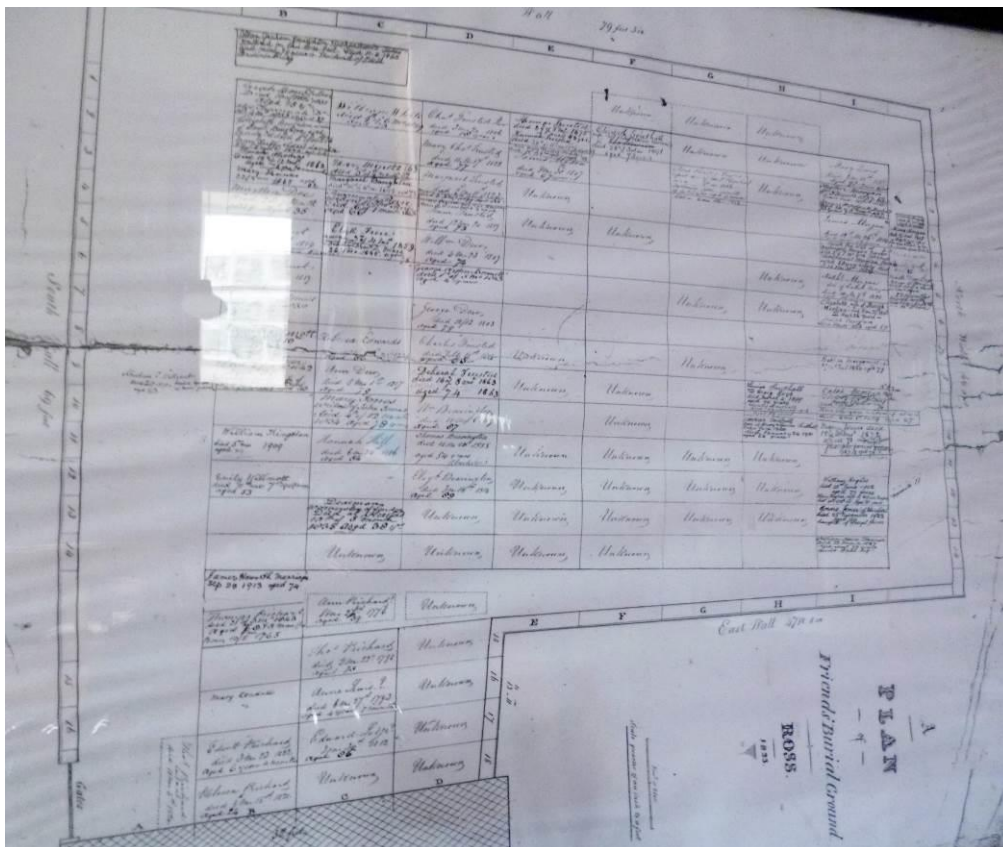


Fig.9: plan of the burial ground, dated 1823

## 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is at Fiveways on the south-west side of Brampton Street, a narrow street on the north side of Ross-on-Wye. The buildings are set back from the street behind a screen wall fronting a forecourt (now partly infilled); access is via a narrow passage through an arch in the screen wall and the meeting house is largely hidden in views from the street. The meeting house is on a long plot that is narrowest at the front end, and widens to the west for the burial ground. The 2-storey cottage (now two flats) is on the south of the access passage and has been part of the Quaker premises since the late seventeenth century; this is built gable-end to the street. Brampton Street is mainly residential with twentieth century housing estates towards the north, and older properties to the south end.

## 2.6. Listed status

The building is correctly listed at Grade II, at the higher end of the grade due to the quality of the fittings. The list description is extremely brief and the C18 date is misleading; it also contains no reference to the fine interior and would benefit from being revised and expanded.

## 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The Herefordshire Historic Environment Record has an entry for the meeting house (SMR Number 17340-MHE10983). The meeting house and burial ground stands on a long plot that is within the medieval and post-medieval northward expansion of the town; there may have

been earlier buildings on the site although no records are known. The existence of an earlier meeting house on the site, and the burial ground gives the site high archaeological potential.

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

*See completed volunteer survey by Jane Turnbull*

#### **3.1. Condition**

i) Meeting House: Fair. The meeting house was last the subject of major repairs in the 1990s. The last QI was in 2015. The building is generally sound although some issues need attention; externally the soft stonework is eroding with some stone and sill replacement and repointing required. External redecoration is required and the front door canopy needs repair. The east roof has an accumulation of moss on the concrete tiles and needs re-laying in Welsh slates. Inside, the structural integrity of the gallery columns is currently under investigation; access is restricted at the moment. There is some furniture beetle damage to the staircase. These works recommended in the QI have not yet been tackled.

ii) Attached burial ground: *Satisfactory/optimal*

#### **3.2. Maintenance**

The meeting has a 5-year maintenance plan, but it is unclear whether it has adequate funds to maintain the building and undertake major repairs. The meeting reports that the listing is a constraint that gives them problems. Maintenance is done by volunteers. There is a maintenance plan covering the burial ground and a bequest is used to pay for the regular mowing of grass in the burial ground.

#### **3.3. Sustainability**

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has undertaken some measures.

Climate change & energy efficiency: The roof space has been insulated above the ceilings and two windows in the small meeting room have secondary glazing. A study on heat loss was conducted by Richard Hankins to inform the meeting. The heating is on a timer.

Resource use, recycling and waste: The meeting uses the Council's recycling scheme and food waste is composted.

Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: There is a pond in the burial ground

Transport: the meeting is undertaking a survey to find out about how Friends travel to meetings.

#### **3.4. Amenities**

The meeting has the facilities it needs, including a kitchen and WCs. There is no warden on-site although there are two flats in the adjoining cottage (these are let). There is no car parking on the site.

#### **3.5. Access**

The meeting conducted an access audit in 2006 and the same year installed a permanent ramp from the street into the entrance passage. Access into the meeting house itself is eased by a portable ramp which can be placed at the entrance, but there is a step down into the



large meeting room. There is a disabled WC, and a hearing loop. There is no access to the gallery.

There is limited parking on the street on Sundays and a pay and display car park nearby. There is some public transport and the meeting house is not far from the town centre.

### 3.6. Community Use

The building is used by Friends for around four hours per week, and is potentially available for others users for 120 hours a week. Actual hours for community use average 20 hours a week. The meeting has a lettings policy that does not allow smoking, alcohol and gambling (including raffles). The large meeting room is let for £15 a session (half-day or evening) and the small room for £7.50 a session. The meeting house is popular as it 'well-priced, welcoming, quiet and has a nice garden'.

### 3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting reports no incidents of anti-social behaviour or heritage crime. The area is generally well cared for with low crime, but there is moderate deprivation and community confidence.

### 3.8. Plans for change

No changes are planned at the moment.

## **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 historic building retains many fitted features and any change would need to respect these and the character of the building; some sensitive changes have been made with success but there is not scope for much more.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* the building is fairly well-used by the community, and has the amenities needed for this. Changes are constrained by the heritage of the building.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* the meeting has contemplated leaving the building in the past. Due to its secluded position, intact historic interior and lack of vehicular access it would not be straightforward to sell and adapt for a new use. The building's listing limits the scope of future remodelling.

## **Part 5: Category: 2**

## **Part 6: List description**

List entry Number: 1098727

FRIEND'S MEETING HOUSE, BRAMPTON STREET

County: Herefordshire

Parish: Ross-on-Wye

Grade: II

Date first listed: 04-Aug-1972

Details

BRAMPTON STREET 1. 1560 Friend's Meeting House SO 6024 3/28

II GV

2. C18. 1 storey. Red stone with hipped slate roof. On street is a high wall with 2 arched sinkings. Left hand contains doorway to yard; right hand is blocked.

Nos 1 and 3 and Friend's Meeting House form a group.

National Grid Reference: SO 60102 24486