

Friends Meeting House, Shrewsbury

Corporation Lane, Coton Hill, Shrewsbury, SY1 2NU

National Grid Reference: SJ 49075 13504



Statement of Significance

Shrewsbury meeting house has medium heritage significance as an attractive example of a former mission hall, built in 1930 to serve a new suburb.

Evidential value

The meeting house building has low significance for evidential value, and the site, once part of a villa garden, is considered to have low archaeological potential.

Historical value

The building has medium historical significance, associated with an Anglican church mission established in 1930 to serve the inter-war Coton Hill estate. Quakers have a long history in Shrewsbury, associated with a site on St John's Hill, rather than this site.

Aesthetic value

The building and site have medium aesthetic value; the former mission hall is an attractive example of inter-war domestic revival design and the hedged garden contains some specimen trees.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal significance as a building used for worship by the local meeting, and as a popular venue for a range of community activities. It also has some association with the former Anglican mission hall.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Worcestershire & Shropshire*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007300*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Shropshire Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Shrewsbury*

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): *1930-31*

1.13 Architect (s): *F.M.Drake of Shayler and Drake*

1.14 Date of visit: *16 November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Carol Thickins*

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, pp511-512

Lawrence Edbrooke and Gwen Stanier, *History of Shrewsbury Meeting House*, undated and unpublished

Shropshire Historic Environment Record, SMR entries 16743 and 31875

Research by Carol Thickins, Shrewsbury Meeting, 2015

www.search.shropshirehistory.org.uk

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

2.1. Historical background

Friends met in a house in Shrewsbury from 1670, following a decision in 1669 to buy ‘a meeting room and inclosure for a burying place’. This was on St John’s Hill, where Friends bought two houses and created a burial ground in the garden to the rear. The first meeting house was built on the garden in 1689 and was rebuilt in 1746, with £80 given by Owen Roberts. By 1806 this building was in poor condition and too small; it was taken down and replaced by a new meeting house on the same site in 1807, designed by architect John Carline, and still in situ (Figs.1 and 2). This is a plain brick building with tall sash windows. Only 30 Quakers were recorded in Shrewsbury in 1815, but the building was also used for the monthly meeting.

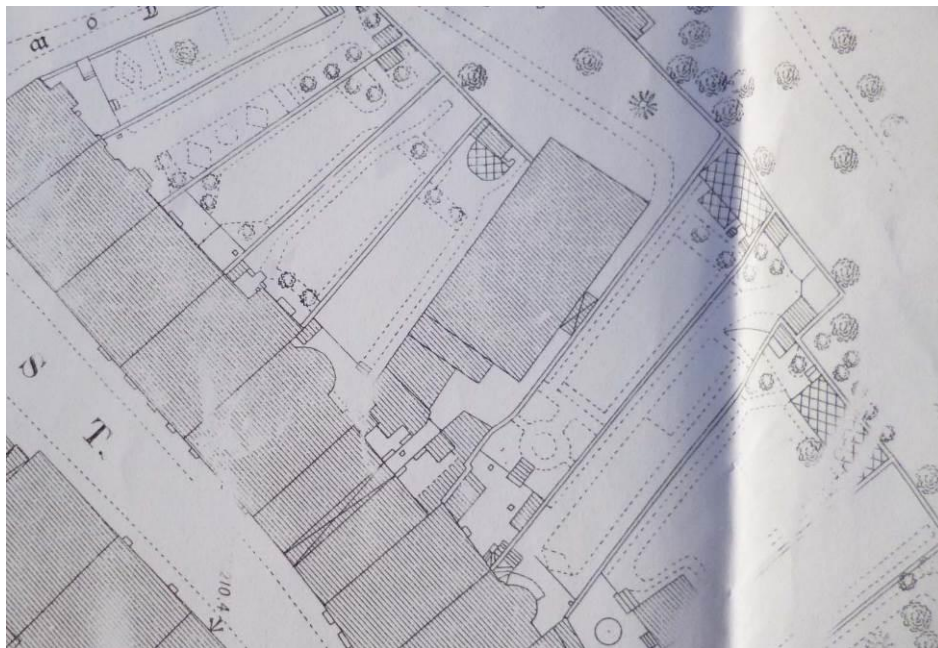


Fig.1: Former meeting house and burial ground behind Nos 24 and 25 St John’s Hill (1880-81 OS map, surveyed 1879-80). Courtesy of Shropshire Archives



Fig.2: Former meeting house built in 1807 on St John's Hill, now St Chad's parish hall (Shropshire Archives)

A mid-nineteenth century decline in Quakers in Shrewsbury led to the meeting house being leased from 1840, initially to the Baptists, then to the Atcham Union and later to Atcham Rural District Council to whom Quakers sold the building in c.1920. For a while it was used by Jehovah's Witnesses. It is now used by the Parish of St Chad's. Although the meeting was revived between 1872 and 1894, Quakers did not meet after this until around 1936, when a small group met in the homes of George and Helen Lansdowne, to begin with above Robinson's jewellers in The Square and later in Kemps Eye Avenue. Once the meeting was larger, various rooms in community buildings were hired for meetings, including at the Morris Hall in Belstone.

The present meeting house was built as an Anglican mission hall by St Mary's parish, to serve the 1920s estate built on Coton Hill. The plot acquired in 1928 was part of the garden of Coton Hill House. The architects for the mission hall, known as St Catherine's Hall were Shayler and Drake, and the foundation stone was laid by the Bishop of Lichfield on 20 March 1930. A perspective sketch by the architect was published in the Shrewsbury Chronicle on 21 March 1930. The hall was designed with a stage and a sanctuary at the west end, and was consecrated for worship in October 1930.

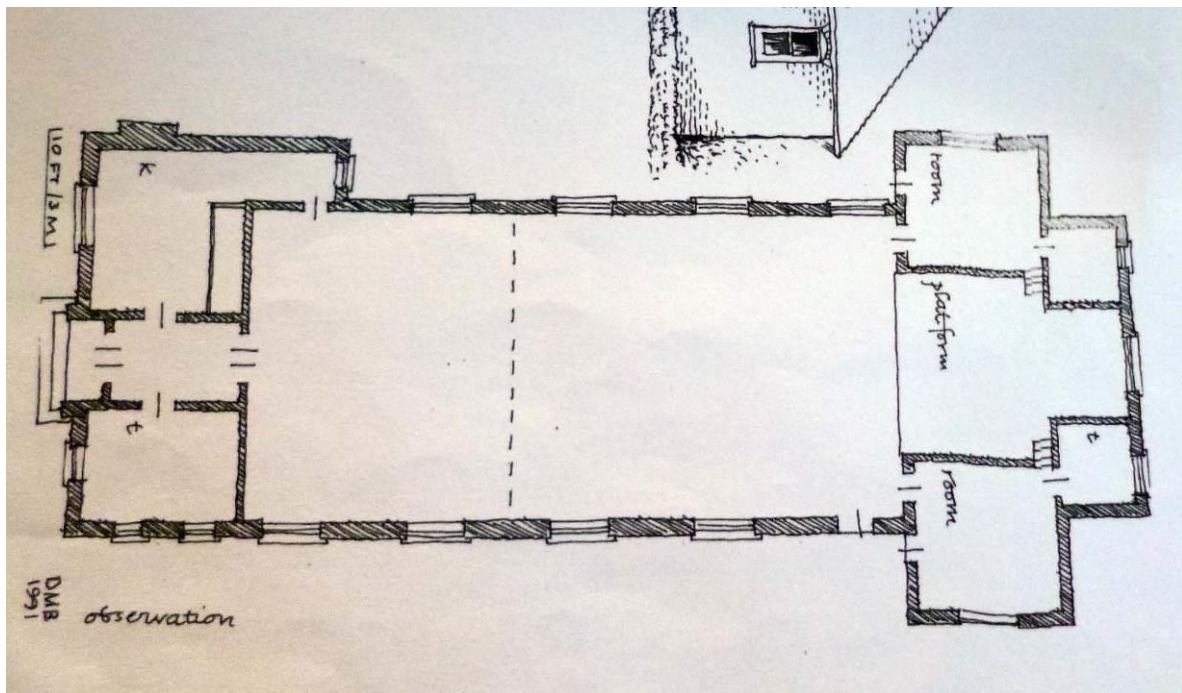


Fig.3: Former mission hall as it was acquired in the 1980s (D. Butler, 1996).
NB. North is to the bottom of the plan. Not to scale.

Friends bought the building in 1985 for about £30,000, and it opened in 1986; over the next twenty years it was refurbished and improved in phases for the meeting. In 1985-86 the interior was subdivided to create a smaller hall for worship, with a classroom, kitchen and separate rooms at the east end, and a staircase and first floor was inserted in the south-east corner. In the 1990s these attic rooms were converted into children's rooms by local architects Baart James Newall. In 2003, the former stage at the west end was adapted as a library and separate meeting room, and a ramp was built along the north side of the building. A photovoltaic array was installed on the south pitch of the roof in 2014.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1930 to designs by Shayler and Drake, as St Catherine's Hall, an Anglican mission hall used for worship. The building has a long rectangular plan with the east gable-end built facing the street, ancillary rooms at the west and east ends, and a 3-bay large hall between. The building is faced in a pale orange brick laid in English garden wall bond, with a clay tiled hipped roof and cast-iron rainwater goods. Windows are all uPVC, with original red tiled window sills. The entrance has a gabled porch with segmental-arched outer opening, concrete steps and recessed inner doors of uPVC. Above the outer arch the gable is timber-framed, with a wooden sign painted with the words Quaker Meeting House. Either side of the porch is a 2-light window, each with a segmental brick head and tiled sill. The basement below the left hand bay has blocked openings. To the right is the foundation stone of 1930. The right return has similar windows, with a taller gabled window to the centre, a steel handrail fitted to the wall serving the ramp to the rear side entrance. The left return has similar windows, and the roof on this side facing south is fitted with a photovoltaic array. To the rear is a cross wing with a side porch to the north, and to the west end facing the garden a French window has been inserted in what was the blind rear wall of the former sanctuary or stage area.

Inside, the entrance leads into a central lobby and passage flanked by ancillary rooms, the latter created by subdividing the original 5-bay hall. The hall is now three bays long, with modern partitioning to the east two bays and on the line of the former stage edge at the west

end. The collar roof trusses with steel tie-rods are pine and carry the 5-bay roof over the former hall. The hall has plain plastered walls and sloping ceiling, a carpeted floor and recent tongued and grooved pine to the dado. The library west of the hall, formerly the stage and sanctuary, has a shallow barrel vaulted plastered ceiling; the floor here has been lowered to match the level of the rest of the building. Some door joinery appears to be 1930s. A staircase was inserted in the south-east corner to serve two small rooms created in the roof space, in 1986.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house seating consists of modern upholstered chairs, of no heritage value. There is one small oak jointed table with a single drawer, which appears to date from the early 18th century; it was a gift from two local Friends to the meeting in 1986. In the first floor children's room there is a set of oak children's chairs, probably from an infants' school.



Fig.4: loose furnishings, an early oak table (left) and children's chairs on the first floor (right)

2.4. Attached burial ground.

The garden to the west of the meeting house is not used for burials, but is used for the scattering of ashes (1991-2013). The area was landscaped in 2003 and has been planted with two specimen trees as memorials - a Mulberry and a flowering Cherry, Crab Apple and an Acer. There are no memorial stones or markers, but records are kept in the meeting house.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is situated on the west side of Corporation Lane, a residential street in Coton Hill, a suburb on the elevated north-west side of Shrewsbury. The River Severn is very close to the south, on a lower level, and the town centre is less than half a mile away. The Coton Hill area was first developed in the nineteenth century for mainly middle class housing with large terraces built on Coton Crescent. New municipal housing was built on a grid pattern in the 1920s and 1930s, west of Corporation Lane. The housing on the latter streets consists mainly of semi-detached houses, and to the south there is post-war residential home on the site of the former Coton Hill House. The meeting house occupies a narrow plot bounded by privet hedges and laid mainly to grass with a garden to the west end. The front gates are steel and were recently installed by the Quakers, since the meeting house was bought in the 1980s.

A burial ground was associated with the former meeting house to the rear of Numbers 24 and 25 St John's Hill, Shrewsbury, at NGR 488126, but it is not known if any burials remain and the site is now covered with a tarmacadam car park.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting is not listed. Its modest architecture and the level of internal alteration means that it is unlikely to be a candidate for listing. It has some local heritage value and could be eligible for a local list, subject to the local authority resources.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site was previously part of the garden of Coton Hill House, built in the nineteenth century. The Historic Environment Record holds no records for the archaeology of this site, but its archaeological potential is considered to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. The building has been well-maintained and works recommended in the last quinquennial inspection (QI in 2010) have been undertaken.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): The garden used for scattering of ashes is in optimal/satisfactory condition.

3.2. Maintenance

The QI is undertaken by local architects Baart Harries and Newall, and the meeting ensures that regular maintenance is carried out and problems, such as defective rainwater gutters are addressed as they arise. The garden is maintained by the meeting, on an informal basis.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact, although it is not known whether the Sustainability Toolkit is used. The energy performance asset rating is 95 within band D (76-100).

Energy efficient and climate change:	all windows and doors are double-glazed; LED light bulbs are used; 35 photovoltaic panels installed on south roof pitch, commissioned on 31 October 2014; New insulation to loft.
Resource use, recycling and waste:	Use Council recycling
Building Maintenance:	double glazing New efficient radiators in library Regular servicing of boilers and heating system
Wildlife, ecology:	Garden designed to be wildlife and children friendly, gardened organically. Hedges not cut in nesting season.

Transport:

Some car sharing. Public transport is not available on Sunday. Friends living nearby walk to Meeting for worship, and others bike.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has access to the facilities it needs, including the main meeting room, large inner lobby, two small activity rooms, kitchen, WCs, new library to rear with kitchen and WCs. Attic rooms with WC. There is no off-street parking.

There is some public transport on weekdays but there are no trains in time for Sunday Meetings, and no Sunday buses at all. The meeting house does not have a car park and there is no room to provide one, but there is on-street parking nearby. Some Friends walk to Meeting, and there is secure cycle parking on the site.

3.5. Access

A formal access audit has not been carried out, but the meeting house has good access for people with disabilities, with a ramp to the side entrance to overcome the obstacle of the front steps. Once inside access is level and there are two WCs suitable for disabled people (one to the front and one to the rear). The first floor attic rooms are only accessible by staircase. There is a hearing loop, but so far work to improve the interior for people with sight impairments has not been undertaken, although this is planned.

3.6. Community Use

The building is used three hours a week by Friends, is available for a total of 180 hours per week, with an average of 25 to 30 hours of actual community use per week. The meeting has a lettings policy agreed recently, but this is verbal not written. Rooms are not hired to political parties for political use, and loose criteria are used to assess requests for room hire, each considered by the Premises Committee. The meeting house has a wide range of useful attractive rooms for letting, with good supporting facilities; it is a good location, the cheapest in town, warm and quiet.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of anti-social behaviour and there has been no heritage crime at the meeting house. One incident occurred but was not reported; an intruder at a Buddhist meeting set off the fire alarm, but this was resolved amicably. It is not known whether Friends have established liaison with local police but would consider it. The local area is considered to have 'reasonably' low crime levels and is 'reasonably' well cared for.

3.8. Plans for change

The meeting house has been the subject of extensive remodelling and improvement since acquired in the 1980s. The only change that may be considered in the future is to make better use of the first floor rooms; options for either a housing unit, or business space for let may be looked at, subject to Building Regulations being achievable.

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 serves the meeting well, and is also well used by the wider community; it could be altered further without affecting its heritage value.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building could be altered further without affecting its heritage value.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: This building could easily be adapted for an alternative use, whether for community, business or residential, but the lack of off-street parking could limit some uses.

Part 5: Category: 3