

Friends Meeting House, Stoke-on-Trent

2 Miller Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 1QJ

National Grid Reference: SJ 85470 46308



Statement of Significance

A modest building of 1978 that provides good facilities for both the Quakers and community groups, but has low architectural interest and low heritage value.

Evidential value

It is likely that there are below-ground remains of earlier terraces dating from the eighteenth century and features associated with the former railway in the surrounding area. The site has medium evidential value for the potential to derive information relating to the areas industry.

Historical value

The meeting house itself has low historical significance, as a property built for the Staffordshire Football Association in 1978 and converted to a meeting house in the 1990s.

Aesthetic value

This modern building is typical design for its date and has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has medium communal value. It is situated on the outskirts of Newcastle-under-Lyme and is well used by local groups.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Staffordshire*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0006520*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Newcastle-under-Lyme*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1978*

1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *24 November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Paul Bugeja*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial ground, Aquinas St, Stoke: SJ 87470 45345*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Bugeja, P., Local Meeting Survey, October 2015.

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp.560.

Dennis, S., *The Early Quaker Movement in Staffordshire 1651 – 1743: From open fellowship to closed sect*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2001.

Staffordshire Area Meeting, *Stoke Quaker Meeting*: <http://www.staffs-quakers.org.uk/Stoke.htm>

The city of Stoke-on-Trent: Protestant Nonconformity, in *A History of the County of Stafford*: Volume 8, ed. J G Jenkins (London, 1963), pp. 276-307 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol8/pp276-307>.

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

2.1 Historical background

In the seventeenth century a small group of Friends began to meet in each other's homes in the Keele area. It was not until the early eighteenth century when an informal meeting was established in 1821, better known as the Penkhull Meeting, and formed part of the Leek Preparative Meeting. By the mid-1830s the meeting had become independent and the meeting name changed to Stoke-on-Trent meeting. It was at this time the Friends were in need of a permanent venue for worship. A former Congregational Chapel built in 1823, located in Thomas (now Aquinas) Street in Stoke-on-Trent was acquired by 1834, which was converted for use as a meeting house and the grounds of the chapel were used as a burial ground. By the late nineteenth century this Meeting is recorded to be the largest meeting in the county. In the early twentieth century the repair and maintenance of the meeting house was becoming difficult and costly. As a result, land at Priory Road was acquired for a new

meeting house, however, the Second World War halted any future building. The new meeting house was not completed until 1952 (Fig.1). The one-storey concrete framed building was constructed at the cost of approximately £1,800. The former meeting house was sold to the British Red Cross in 1954. The Friends retained the burial ground.

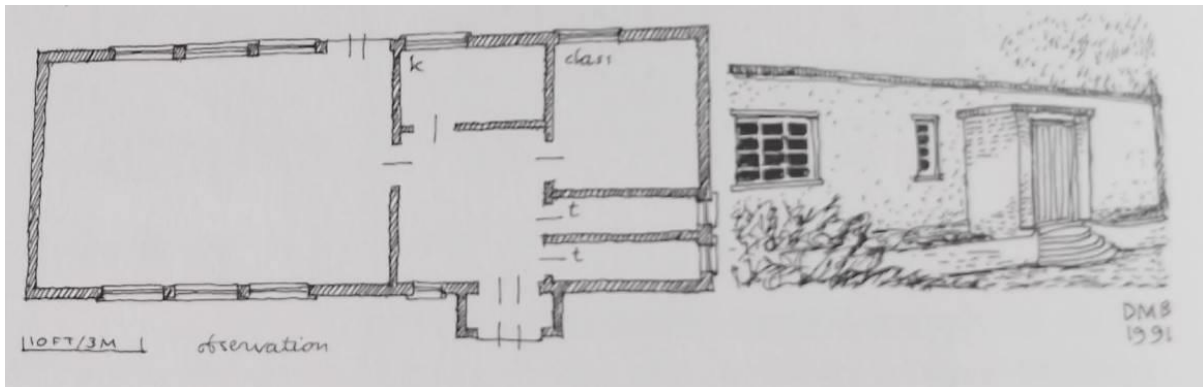


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of the Priory Road meeting house, 1952 as reconstructed by Butler (not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.560)

The Meeting remained at Priory Road until 1988 when it was sold for £62,000. The money was used to acquire the former premises of the Staffordshire Football Association in Miller Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, built in 1978. The building was converted for use as a meeting house and planning permission was obtained in 1994 to undertake alterations to the meeting house to transform the one-storey flat roofed structure to its present form with a pitched roof to provide storage facilities within the roof space.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house occupies the former premises of the Staffordshire Football Association, built in 1978. It is of hard red brick laid in stretcher bond and a tiled pitched roof constructed in 1995. The plan takes the form of a large meeting room divided from the children's and ancillary rooms by a corridor. The east front elevation has a gabled porch with tongue and groove detailing supported on gallow brackets. To the north of the porch three window openings and to the south a wall mounted bicycle rack. Each gable end has a single window lighting the loft space, and at ground floor a central doorway flanked either side by windows (three to the north gable). The rear elevation to the west is comprised of five windows.

The main meeting room, children's room and ancillary facilities are accessed via a small lobby and corridor. The walls in these areas are a mixture of exposed buff coloured brick and plastered walls, with the floor covered in tiles in the lobby and carpet in the corridor. Access to the loft space is via a small stairwell with a timber balustrade from the lobby area. The interior of the main meeting room is rectangular in shape. The room is well-lit by windows to the south and west. The walls and ceiling are plastered and painted, the floor covered in carpet. A mixture of modern loose chairs arranged in a circle along with three benches from the Leek meeting house which closed in 1839 and two tables crafted by Arthur Robinson in the 1950s which were formerly located at the meeting house in Priory Road.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The main meeting room is furnished with modern furnishings but also includes pieces of furniture from other meeting houses. Three benches dating from the eighteenth century which were once located in the Leek meeting house. In addition, two tables were crafted by Arthur Robinson at a time when the Stoke-on-Trent meeting house held their meetings in Priory Road in the 1950s.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located on the outskirts of Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre, to the west. Miller Street consists of eighteenth century buildings at its entrance and twentieth century buildings to the south, once the former railway tracks had been covered in the 1960s. To the south and south east of the meeting house is Earl Court, sheltered housing, formed of one-storey ranges with a large area of car parking. To the north Miller Street General Practice. The area immediately in front of the meeting house has a small area of landscaping which covers the area to the south of the meeting house. To the north side of the meeting house is a driveway leading to the car park to the west.

The detached burial ground (NGR: SJ 87470 45345) is located at Aquinas Street (formerly Thomas Street) which was once the location of the Stoke meeting in the former Congregational chapel from 1834 until the beginning of the twentieth century. The meeting house no longer remains.

2.6 Listed status

The building is not listed, and it is not considered to be a future candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Staffordshire Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. From early OS maps (1878), the west side of Miller Street was once formed of a row of terraced houses and to the south of the street was a railway cutting. The Newcastle-under-Lyme train station was a short distance away from Miller Street. By 1973, the terraced housing along Miller Street had been demolished and the railway station and track had been covered over. The site has medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. A quinquennial inspection was carried out in September 2013 by Bill Whalley and Paul Bugeja. The report found the building to be in good condition. Recommendations related to minor repairs, including repairs to the soffit, replacement of over flow pipes, cleaning of guttering, and insulation to the roof space.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): *Not applicable*

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house does not have a five-year maintenance and repair plan. Members regularly monitor the meeting house along with undertaking the recommendations stated in the quinquennial report. The meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building when needed.

3.3 Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: lights are switched off in rooms not in use and the heating system is on a timer.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house uses the local authority recycling scheme.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: Improved insulation in the loft space.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds to the south are planted with trees which provide wildlife habitats.
- Transport: the meeting house provides bike racks.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs, including a fully-equipped kitchen, WCs (two fully accessible), four meeting rooms and reception area.

The meeting house is a ten minute walk from the bus station, with regular bus service running seven days a week. Onsite car parking is available to the west of the meeting house and secure parking for bicycles is available.

3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. Level access into the meeting house is via a portable ramp, however, there are plans for a more permanent solution. Internally, there is level access through out but there will be restricted access to the planned meeting room within the loft space. A hearing loop has been installed.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 2 hours and well used by community groups during the week. There is a lettings policy. The building may not be hired for politics, inebriation or gambling. Charities with limited funds are able to use the meeting house for free. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to its convenient location, price, facilities and Wi-Fi access.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, and the area is generally well cared-for. The meeting has developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

The Friends plan to utilise the loft space which is currently being used for storage into a meeting room and separate storage area (Fig.2). Planning permission was granted in the summer of 2015 for an external fire escape staircase to the south elevation which will be installed in spring 2016.



Figure 2: Loft space due to be converted into a meeting room with storage facilities.

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 no heritage constraints on future change to the property. However, it would seem the meeting house meets the needs of the Friends.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is currently undergoing improvements to provide an additional meeting space in the loft.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: In the event of being laid down, there may be scope to continue the existing community use with some adaptation, subject to viability. Other uses may include expansion by the NHS, with a general practice and a health and wellbeing clinic in Miller Street there may be a need to expand services in the area. Reallocation of historic furnishings should be considered.

Part 5: Category: 4