

***Friends Meeting House, Stourbridge***

*Scotts Road, Stourbridge, DY8 1UR*

*National Grid Reference: SO 89908 84525*



***Statement of Significance***

***The meeting house has high heritage value as a purpose-built late seventeenth century meeting house with historic fittings dating from the eighteenth century, an earlier burial ground and connections to the local Crowley family.***

### **Evidential value**

***The building and site have medium evidential values primarily associated with the potential to yield information about the building's construction and past Quaker activity.***

### **Historical value**

***The meeting house retains its historic layout, as well as a number of features dating from the eighteenth century, including the gallery and seating. The land where the meeting house is sited was given by Ambrose Crowley a prominent blacksmith in Stourbridge. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***In keeping with Quaker principles, the meeting house is plain, but attractive building, and retains a good set of fitted oak benches, panelling and ironmongery to the windows and doors. The building has high aesthetic value.***

### **Communal value**

***The meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers which has been in use since it opened in 1689. It is also used by local community groups and is open to the public, in conjunction with Heritage Open Days each year in September.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0085030*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Dudley*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1262874*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Dates: *1689, 1960 & 1994*
- 1.13 Architects: *Not established, Folkes & Folkes & Alan Cotterell Partnership*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *26 October 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contacts made on site: *James Bradbury and Enid Carpenter*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

1.18 Attached burial ground: Yes

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 700-701

Stourbridge Quaker Meeting House, *Overview History*, Leaflet

Stourbridge Quaker Meeting House, *Visitor Information*

Enid Carpenter, *Local Meeting Survey*, October 2015.

## **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 were meeting in Stourbridge, at each other's homes. It was not until after the Toleration Act of 1689 that Friends were confident to build a meeting house; Friend Ambrose Crowley, an ironmonger, leased the land of the present meeting house to the Quakers at a peppercorn rent and reference is made to a 'newly erected edifice' in 1689. At this time the meeting house was a simple structure with a fireplace to the west end. Additions to the interior during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century included tongue and groove oak panelling and a gallery with folding screens to the east and a fireplace (south east corner of the gallery) for the women's meeting. Externally, a small lean-to was added to the south elevation.



Figure 1: Stourbridge Meeting House by C.S. Barthindate, 1949 (Stourbridge MH Archive)

The meeting house would remain little altered until the mid-twentieth century, when additional space was created during the 1960s for a children's room and toilet facilities. A separate flat-roofed building was built to the designs by Folkes & Folkes to the south of the meeting house with a small courtyard dividing the two buildings. In 1994, the two buildings were connected with a sympathetically designed extension to the east of the meeting house

combined with the construction of a new roof over the courtyard, providing a kitchen and lobby area.



Figure 2: Children's room and meeting house link (Stourbridge MH Archive)

In 2002, major repair work was undertaken which focused on the main ceiling beam at the front of the gallery, remedying damp issues and repairs to the lath and plaster ceiling. During these works two former windows to the north wall were discovered along with a lintel over the original entrance.



Figure 3: Internal works reveal former window openings (Stourbridge MH Archive)

The final major work undertaken was providing a hipped roof over the children's room in 2004.

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

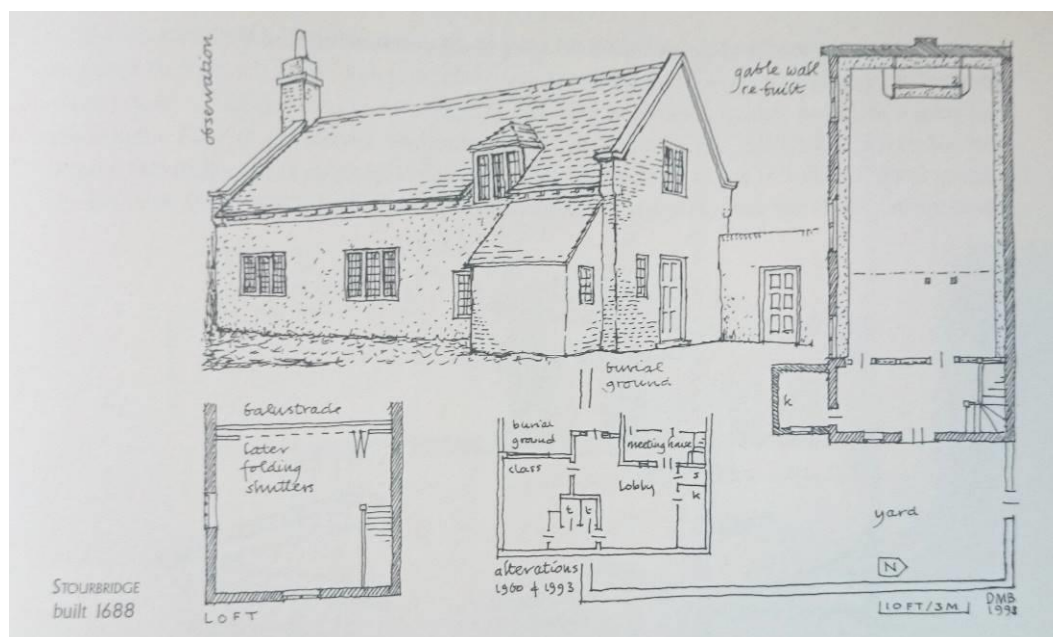


Figure 4: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.701)

The present meeting house was built in three phases. The original meeting house was built in 1689. It is single storey building, rectangular in plan and built of red brick laid in English Garden wall bond with render, some Flemish bond, brick dentil detail under eaves, and the pitched roof is covered in clay pantiles. The south elevation has two 3-light casement leaded windows and one 2-light window, with two hipped dormer windows that cut through the eaves (the eastern dormer introduced in 1994). To the east of this elevation is the 1994 link block which provided the principal entrance into the meeting house. Adjoining the link block to the south is the 1960s children's room designed by Folkes and Folkes with a hipped roof added in 2004. The north and west elevations of the main meeting room are blind with the north elevation rendered. The east of the meeting room is the sympathetically designed 1994 extension, the elevation has a rendered finish with a 2-light leaded window; adjoining this is the blind elevation of the children's room.

Internally, the spacious common room area with exposed modern timber ceiling supported on two timber trusses provides access to the main meeting room, ancillary facilities and children's room. The original external east wall of the meeting house remains, with a two 2-light leaded casement windows. The original lobby area of the meeting room is now the library with terracotta quarry tiles, rich oak fittings with ironmongery believed to be by Ambrose Crowley dating from 1689 and access to the gallery above. The meeting room contains horizontal oak tongue and groove panelling to dado height, with walls lime-plastered and softwood floor with a carpet covering. A raised elders' stand with fitted seats is to the west, with fixed seating along the north, south and west walls. To the east is the gallery, supported on two pillars, the gallery has folding oak screens and a splat balustrade. A cast iron fireplace is located to the south east corner of the gallery. The meeting room is lit by natural light from the south and the ceiling is fitted with pendant lighting. The roof is supported by two queen post trusses partially obscured by the lath and plaster ceiling.



Figure 5: Fireplace located in the south east corner of the gallery

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of historic benches dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is to the south of the meeting house. In the 1960s, as part of the children's room extension, some of the gravestones were relocated to the south boundary wall in front of the flowerbeds, these are laid flat. There are 57 recorded burials covering 1689 to 1945, identified on a plan held in the meeting house and within the archives of Bull Street meeting house in Birmingham. Whilst the burial ground is no longer used for burials ashes are still scattered in the garden area and small memorial plates have been laid.

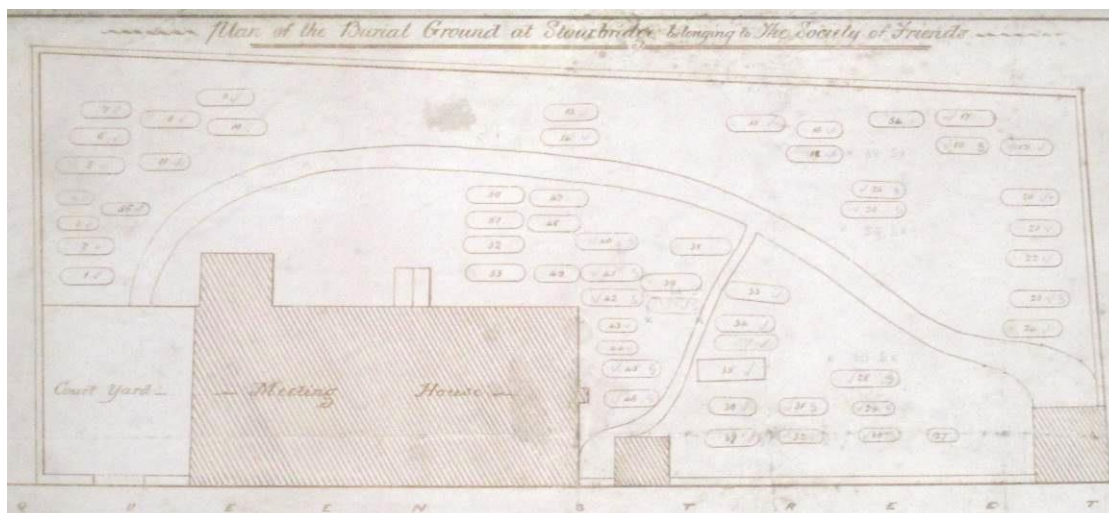


Figure 6: Plan of the burial ground, undated (Stourbridge MH Archive)

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Stourbridge is located on the edge of the Black Country, south west of Dudley and 15 miles west of Birmingham. The meeting house is located to the north-west edge of the town centre in Scotts Road, a residential cul-de-sac. The properties along this road are predominately inter-war, characterised by semi-detached properties with hipped roofs and small front gardens. To the west of the meeting house is a former school built in the nineteenth century, originally there were once two schools along this road formerly known as Wollaston Road, the open land on Scotts Road is the site of one of the schools now demolished. The school that still stands was later in use as an institute and then a Brotherhood Hall, it is now unoccupied and is deteriorating, creating a negative impact on the townscape. To the east of the meeting house is the busy main road, Bath Road.

The meeting house is bounded by modern metal fencing to part of the north elevation, whilst the rest of the boundary has a red brick wall, with arched entrance into the burial ground to the north. The grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which add to the mature landscaped character of the area. A gingko tree was planted in 1998 by Revd B.G. Crowley, a descendent of Ambrose Crowley, to celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the meeting house.

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is listed grade II which is considered appropriate. The list entry would benefit from being revised. The description notes that the building was formerly a smithy before being adapted in 1968 as a chapel; this is incorrect. The land on which the present meeting house stands was leased by Ambrose Crowley, whose occupation was an ironmonger. A document of 1689 refers to a 'newly erected edifice' on the site, indicating that it was a purpose-built meeting house.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The archaeological potential of the site is considered to be low, as no former building is recorded on site prior to the construction of the present meeting house. The building has archaeological potential.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. Since the last quinquennial survey in 2011 Friends have undertaken rendering to buttress and parapet, replaced some lead work and roof tiles, removed vegetation from parapets and cleared rain water gutters. The most recent quinquennial inspection (undertaken in May 2015 by Barnsley Bate, chartered building surveyors) found the building to be in good working order. Recommendations for the next twelve months included isolated repairs to the roof, repointing of ridges, investigation of render defects, minor adjustments to external gutter falls and insulation over front accommodation. The recommended work has now been completed.

ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory.

### 3.2 Maintenance

The building is well-maintained by the meeting and although there is not a five year maintenance and repair plan in place, Friends regularly undertake inspections of the building. Central England Area Meeting issue an 'Annual Inspection of Premises Questionnaire' each year. Maintenance needs are considered following the inspection. The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

1) Maintenance items of a routine or cyclical nature. For example, have the gutters and down pipes been cleaned our regularly?

2) Structural and other defects which may give cause for concern, and actions required or taken as a result of the quinquennial survey. For example, does the roof leak?

The questionnaire was completed by Enid Carpenter and Graham Beckley in September 2014 and there was no record of any major problems or issues with the building. The Friends have sufficient funds for the maintenance and repair of the building. The Property Fund has a reserve of £10,000 and access to the CEQ Building Fund for major expenditure.

### 3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change and energy efficiency: insulation of internal walls in the children's room, new efficient boilers and energy efficient light bulbs.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has most of the amenities it needs. This includes a meeting room, children's room, communal area, kitchen and WC facilities (which have been upgraded in February 2016). The meeting would benefit from private parking, but applications for creating a parking space have been refused in the past.

There is no on-site car parking; parking is available along Scotts Road. There are parking restrictions between the hours of 7am and 7pm and the maximum length of parking time is two hours. Stourbridge railway station is half a mile away from the meeting house and is served by local bus services which run seven days a week, with a reduced service on Sunday's.

### 3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken, although Friends have considered undertaking a formal audit in the past. There is level access into the meeting house. Whilst there is level access throughout the main body of the meeting house there are three steps to the children's room, to accommodate users there is a grab rail and a portable ramp can be used if required. Friends have undertaken improvement works to upgrade the WC facilities to become fully compliant with the Equality Act and can now be accessed from the ground floor. A hearing loop has been installed and there are currently no facilities to assist the partially sighted.

### 3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 6 hours and community use for 15 hours each week. The meeting house has the potential to be let for 72 hours each week. (three meeting rooms). There are two rooms which can be hired separately or in combination (the main meeting room and children's room). The common room contains the communal kitchen which can be used by all hirers. There is a lettings policy. The following activities are prohibited at the meeting house; the use of tobacco or other smoking materials, alcohol and gambling. The meeting house may not be used for commercial purposes. There is a lettings



policy. The meeting house is not let to political parties. The meeting house is available free for Local Meeting committees or events organised by the Local Meeting. The meeting house is popular for lettings due its peaceful location and is good value for money.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has been subject to anti-social behaviour including breaking-in, theft and graffiti. Friends and the Local Authority have worked together to introduce preventative measure at the meeting house including an intruder alarm. Previously there has been an incident of lead theft. All crimes have been reported to the local police. The area is generally well cared-for but has high levels of crime. The meeting has developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

Friends wish to introduce a fully accessible WC into the meeting house in the near future.

## **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 meeting house currently meets the needs of the Friends. It has in the past been altered and extended. More recently in February 2016 the Meeting has provided improved facilities for the disabled, within the later extensions.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The Meeting is well used by local community groups. As above, the Friends have improved the WC facilities.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* The Meeting has a strong membership and it would seem unlikely the building would close. In this regrettable event the building could be adapted to serve a secular use, such as community or business use, although the main spaces should retain their spatial character and fittings, to avoid damaging the original character and significance of the listed building.

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

## **Part 6: List description**

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1262874

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, SCOTTS ROAD

District: Dudley

District Type: Metropolitan Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 09-Dec-1975

List entry Description

1. 1682 SCOTTS ROAD, STOURBRIDGE

Friends' Meeting House SO 9084 2/28

II

2. C17. Originally two cottages and a smithy, converted in 1968 into a Chapel. Roughcast brick with brick dentil eaves. Tiled gable-ended roof. Wood mullion windows with leaded parted, and a flat roofed dormer, single storey. The simple interior contains a gallery with balustrade supported on two columns, panelling and benches.

Listing NGR: SO8990984523