

Friends Meeting House, Street

36 High Street, Street, Somerset, BA16 0EB

National Grid Reference: ST 48502 36935



Statement of Significance

The building was erected in 1850 on the site of an earlier meeting house of the 1680s. It was designed by J. F. Cotterell, a Quaker architect from Bath who was a friend of the Clark family, the Quaker proprietors of the shoe-making business sited next to the meeting house which bears their name and flourished in Street from the 1820s. The two main meeting rooms still retain much of their original character and the whole is of high heritage significance.

Evidential value

The burial ground may contain burials dating from the late seventeenth century. Overall, the site and building are of medium evidential value.

Historical value

The strong association with the Clark family of Street gives the building high historical value.

Aesthetic value

J. F. Cotterell's building is a handsome structure, and the main elements of his elegant and practical design have survived more or less intact. The building makes an important contribution to the character of the town and is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building has been used by Quakers, since its opening in 1850. More recently the building has also been much used by other local groups. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0002820*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Mendip District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Street*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1308052*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Street*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1850*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *J. Francis Cotterell of Bath*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *26 August 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Bernard Cremier-Alcan*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *gate piers (listed Grade II), attached cottage*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.2 pp 546-8
Local Meeting survey by Caroline Gould, May 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

A Quaker meeting had been established in Street by the late 1650s with a Quaker burial ground. In the 1680s a meeting house was built on a site given by Harriet Banks and John Goodwin. From the beginning of the eighteenth century the meeting included members of the Clothier family and the Clark family. In 1825 Cyrus Clark and his younger brother James established a shoe-making business which became very successful (and still continues as C. & J. Clark International Ltd). The original factory, built in 1829, and the houses of the owners stood in the High Street immediately west of the Quaker meeting house. In 1850 the old meeting house was taken down and replaced by a large new building in a classical style designed by J. F. Cotterell of Bath, a Quaker and friend of the Clarks. The building contained two meeting rooms, and at one end a two-storey dwelling for a caretaker. Between about 1880 and the 1920s the factory expanded hugely and the Clarks company paid for a major expansion of the community, with modest public buildings and extensive workers' housing. The Quaker burial ground was greatly extended in 1899. The meeting house was re-roofed 1976 and some internal alterations were made in 1989 (Butler).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house and burial ground occupy a large site immediately north of the former Clarks shoe factory complex. The entrance from the road has simple stone gatepiers (which are separately listed). The meeting house is a handsome rectangular classical building with walls of coursed blue lias stone ashlar above a rusticated stone base, with raised corner quoins and a heavy moulded cornice. The slate-covered hipped roof has a prominent louvred timber ventilator on the ridge and chimneystack at the east end to serve the former caretaker's house. The main (south-facing) elevation has a projecting pedimented porch of Bath stone, with two tall sash windows to the left and three to the right. The east end bay is divided into two storeys which are expressed externally on the east front which has three openings on each floor with a door to the right. The west elevation has a full-width lean-to addition with a single window opening above.

The porch leads into a small lobby which opens to both the large meeting room at the west end of the building and a smaller meeting room to the east. The large room has a dado of unpainted vertical boards, a timber stand with an open-railed front across the west wall, fixed benches along the walls and a number of moveable benches which are probably original to the building. In the centre of the east wall is a full-height panelled timber screen which can apparently be raised into the roof-space. The smaller meeting room east of the screen also has a panelled dado and wall benches but no other original fittings. East of the small meeting room is what was originally the Caretaker's dwelling. The ground floor rooms have boarded painted walls with original chimneypieces. The original stair survives. The former living spaces are now used to supplement the meeting room accommodation.

Linked to the north east corner of the meeting house is an irregular range of buildings, partly single-storeyed and partly two-storeyed. Now converted to serve as the wardens' cottage and garages, it is possible that these buildings may have originated as stables and coach house serving the main meeting house.

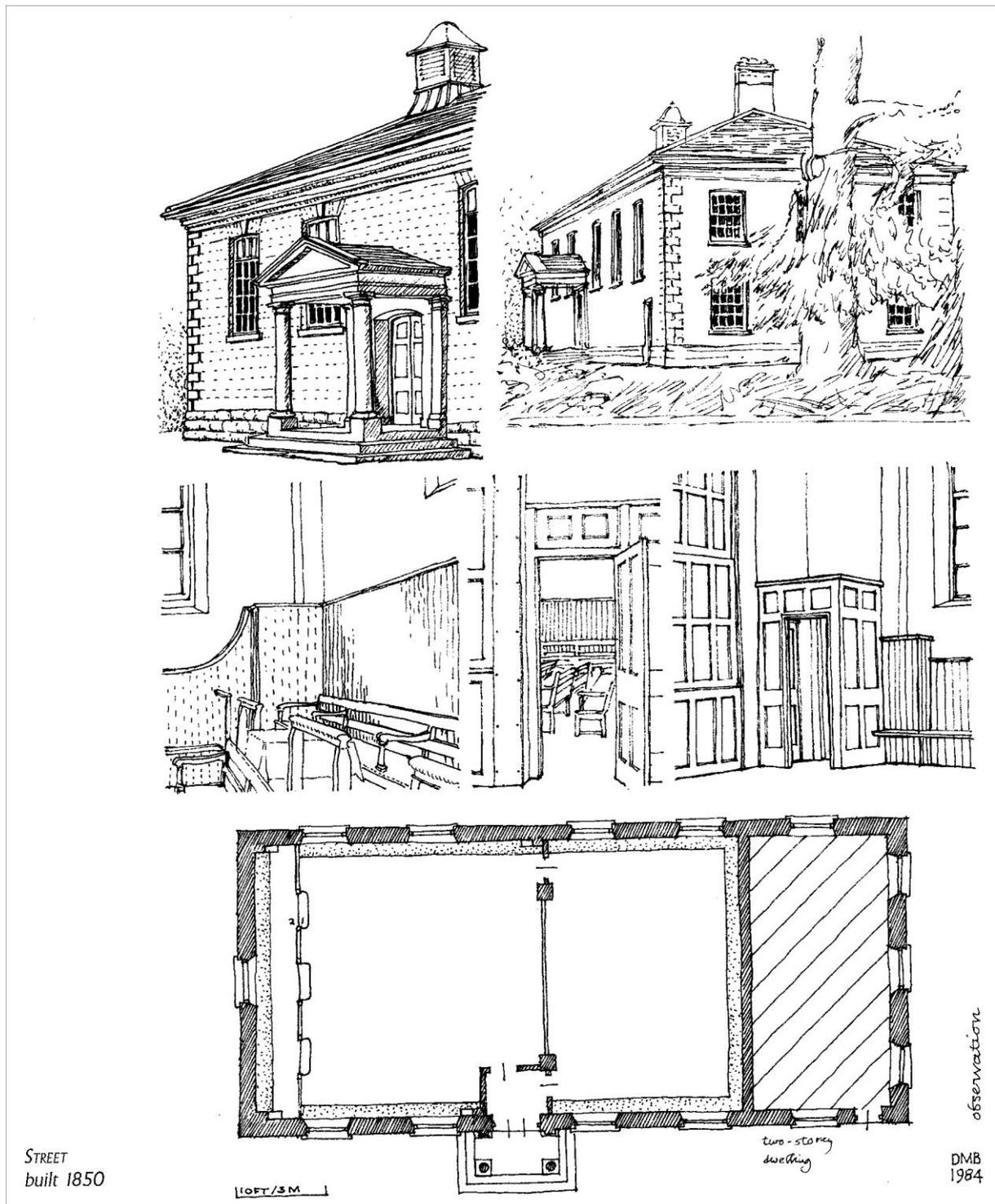


Figure 1: ground plan, two perspective views, section and details from the main meeting room. North is to the top of the plan. (Butler, vol. 2, p. 547)

2.3 Loose furnishings

The main meeting room contains a large number of timber benches with open backs and shaped arms with turned uprights. The detailing of the moveable benches is the same as the fixed seating on the stand. All the furniture probably dates from 1850, though Butler notes that the stand was altered in the late nineteenth century.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The large burial ground lies to the west of the meeting house on the side away from the road. The original burial ground here which may date from the 1680s was considerably enlarged in 1899 (Butler). The ground is an attractive space, enclosed by stone walls and contains several mature trees. The wall on the south side, which forms the boundary between the meeting house property and the former Clarks shoe factory, has been taken down and is to be rebuilt. There are a large number of stone burial markers including many to members of the Clark family, including Cyrus Clark (1801-66) and his younger brother James Clark (1811-1906) the founders of C. & J. Clark (Shoes). None of the markers appears to predate 1850.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house stands in prominent position in the centre of Street, on the High Street and immediately next to the former Clark's shoe factory, which has been the mainspring of the town's development and is now a major shopping destination. The meeting house grounds, including the large burial ground, are an important element in the townscape.

2.6 Listed status

The building is properly listed at Grade II.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site has apparently been occupied by a Quaker meeting house since the 1680s, perhaps with some burials from before that date, and is of medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Generally satisfactory but with one significant localised problem. The wall between the burial ground and the former Clarks factory became unstable and had been taken down at the time of the visit (August 2016). It is to be rebuilt on the same line.

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in 2012. The building was found to be generally in good condition but with various minor defects, principally to do with rot, damp-penetration and building maintenance. All the priority 1 works and some secondary works have been carried out. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. There is 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:

- A sectional heating layout, green energy suppliers, added insulation where possible and draught excluders
- Local recycling

- Garden and pond used by children.

The Warden's cottage does not have an EPC.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs within the meeting house. There are 4 meeting rooms, a kitchen and 4 WCs, including one adapted for the less able. The meeting house is served by daily bus services from Wells, Taunton and Bridgewater but cars are needed for transport from rural areas. There is ample dedicated parking on site as well as secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. Access is by ramp and platform lift. All the main rooms are on the ground floor. There is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop and internal steps have contrasting nosings to help partially-sighted people. There has been no formal Disability Access Audit, but various improvements have been made. An external ramp was formed in 1995 and an internal platform lift installed in c.2000 to overcome ground floor changes of level.

3.6 Community Use

The building is used by Friends for about 3 hours per week (when all 4 rooms are in use). The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 200 hours per week) and is let for an average of 20 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. No alcohol or gambling or loud music is allowed. Members of the Society and, exceptionally, other groups may have free use of the building. Users value convenient location and reasonable prices.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There has been some general crime (chiefly theft). In 2013 the garden store was burgled and mowing equipment stolen; in 2015 the warden's cottage was burgled and keys taken to open the meeting house. The warden's computer and some cash was stolen. Both incidents were reported to police. There has also been some anti-social behaviour in the past, chiefly the misuse of the burial ground for drinking and urination. There has been no heritage crime. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low levels of deprivation and high community confidence. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no current plans for changes to the building.

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 is limited scope for change within the building, which is subject to the constraints of listed building control.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: as above there is limited scope for significant change within the building.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the meeting house is a large and handsome listed building in a good location but with large burial ground attached. If the meeting were to be laid down, the building might find another public use, but scope for conversion is limited because of the internal fittings and the burial ground might also deter other prospective users.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description(s)

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
List entry Number: 1308052
Location; FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, HIGH STREET
County: Somerset
District: Mendip
District Type: District Authority
Parish: Street
Grade: II
Date first listed: 08-Nov-1949
Legacy System: LBS
UID: 267779
STREET CP HIGH STREET (North side) ST43NE
10/70 Friends Meeting House
8.11.49

GV II

Quaker Meeting House. 1850 on an earlier site, by J. Francis Cottrell of Bath. Blue lias ashlar, that to plinth quarry faced, emphasised rusticated quoins, moulded stone eaves cornice, hipped slate roof with wide eaves, louvred cupola to roof ridge with pyramidal lead capping and spirelet. Rectangular on plan, plain elevations. Two storey frontages; entrance frontage of 2:3 bays, tall 20-pane sash windows with cambered heads. Door opening between the bay sets; paired 2- panelled doors; projecting Tuscan portico, triangular pediment; further door opening to right, 4-panelled door; 16-pane sash windows with cambered heads on 2 floors to frontage facing High Street; door opening, 4-panelled door. Simple interior divided into 2 large rooms with panelled divider, room to North with bench, dado panelling. (McGarvie M., Guide to Historic Street, unpublished).

Listing NGR: ST4850236935

Gatepiers and gates

Name: GATE PIERS AND GATES ON ROADSIDE AT DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE TO FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
List entry Number: 1345070
Location: GATE PIERS AND GATES ON ROADSIDE AT DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE TO FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, HIGH STREET
County: Somerset
District: Mendip
District Type: District Authority
Parish: Street
Grade: II

Date first listed: 13-Jan-1986

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 267780

STREET CP HIGH STREET (North side) ST43NE

10/71 Gate piers and gates on roadside at driveway entrance to Friends - Meeting House
GV II

Gate piers and gates. Probably 1850. Three coursed and squared rubble piers, square on plan; broad wrought-iron gate with cresting; similar narrow pedestrian gate with cresting. Included primarily for group value.

Listing NGR: ST4852336906