

Friends Meeting House, Sunderland

30 Roker Park Road, Sunderland, SR6 9PG

National Grid Reference: NZ 40381 59047



Statement of Significance

A substantial town house built at the turn of the twentieth century, notable for the quality and completeness of its internal fitting out, on a corner site overlooking Roker Park. It has been a meeting house since 1969. The building makes a positive contribution to the Roker Park Conservation Area, and is of overall high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

Evidential value

The building has only been a Meeting House since 1969 and as such its evidential value is not high. Its primary evidential value is as a little-altered, high status Edwardian town house.

Historical value

Quakers have worshipped publicly in Sunderland since the late seventeenth century, and the present building is their third in the city. It is a former residential property believed to have been built about 1901, when Roker was being developed as a high class seaside resort. Its first recorded owner was a timber merchant, and the house is notable for the quality of its internal fitting out. It remained a family home until 1969, when it was adapted for the Quakers by Martin Lidbetter, Architect. The building is of high local historical value.

Aesthetic value

The Meeting House has high aesthetic townscape value for its architectural design, contribution to the townscape of the Conservation Area, and in particular for the quality and richness of its internal fitting out. Original features include mosaic floors, decorative plaster ceilings, a fine staircase and timber and marble fireplaces with stained glass and decorative tile inserts.

Communal value

In addition to its use by Friends, the Meeting House is used by the wider community. It is also of communal value by virtue of its positive contribution to the character and appearance of the local Conservation Area.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Northumbria*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0004420*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Sunderland City Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *North East*

1.6 Civil parish: *Sunderland*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Roker Park*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1901; 1969*

1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *18 April 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Lesley Barefoot, Matthew Moore, Marjorie Trotter*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial ground at Bishopwearmouth Cemetery*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Anon, *Friends' Meeting House, Sunderland: A brief tour of the building*, undated notes
Anon, *Sunderland Quakers: A brief history*, undated notes
Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, pp. 168-70
Local Meeting Survey, by Lesley Barefoot, Dec. 2015
Sunderland City Council, *Roker Park Conservation Area: Character Appraisal and Management Strategy*, 2007

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

2.1. Historical background

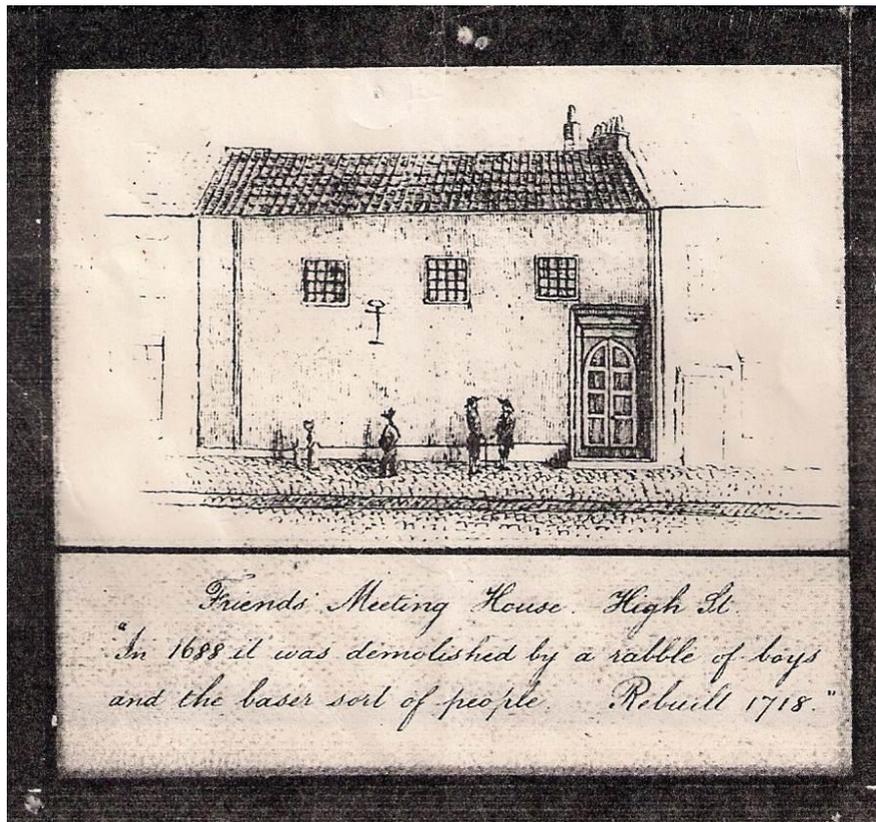


Figure 1: The Meeting House in the High Street as rebuilt in c1718, from a drawing of 1820, reproduced from *A brief history*

Records of Quaker Meetings in Sunderland begin in 1655. By 1670 a site on the High Street had been acquired for a burial ground, and Meetings were held in the house of William Maud. In 1688 this was 'demolished by a rabble of boys and the baser sort of people', but was immediately rebuilt. It was replaced by a purpose-built and probably larger Meeting House on the same site in 1718 (shown in a drawing of 1820 at figure 1). This building was a substantial presence on the High Street, with a door at the side leading through to the burial ground at the rear and three high square windows (probably an early nineteenth century adaptation; a drawing of c1785 shows lower and taller, round-headed windows).

In 1823 (Butler) or 1825 (*Brief History*), this building was replaced by a larger and more serviceable Meeting House in (Upper) Nile Street (figures 2 and 3). On plan, this originally consisted of a full-width lobby and two meeting rooms separated by large sash shutters. In 1859 a British School was built on part of the site, run by Friends until 1892. Over time a library, lecture hall, women's committee and cloak room, and caretaker's cottage were also

provided. There was a long narrow burial ground behind the properties on the Nile Street frontage, which closed in 1855 when one third of an acre of ground was purchased in the Chester Road municipal cemetery.

By the late 1960s the Nile Street building had become dilapidated, and it was demolished in 1974, five years after the Meeting had removed to the present Meeting House in Roker. The former British School survives as the Norfolk Hotel.

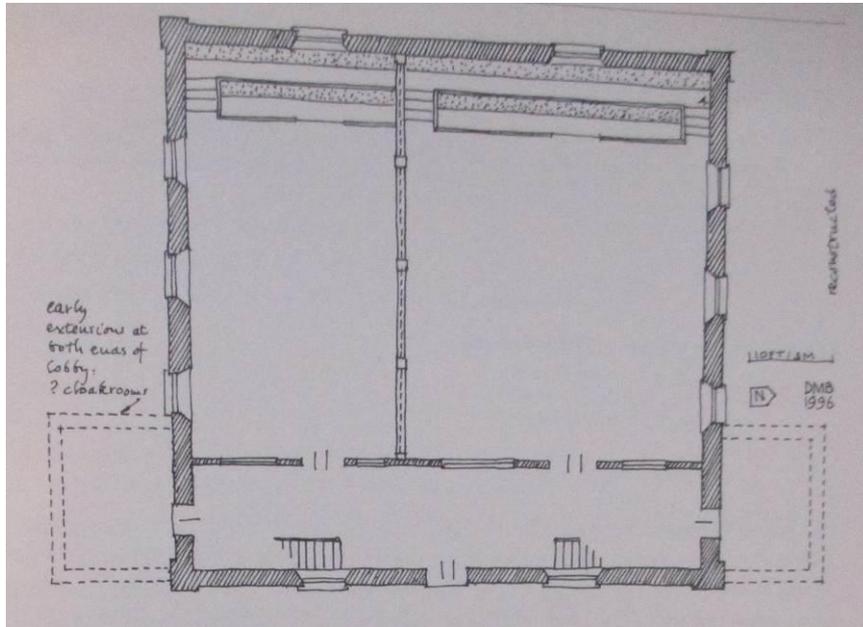


Figure 2: Plan of the 1823 Meeting House (from Butler, Vol. 1, p. 169)

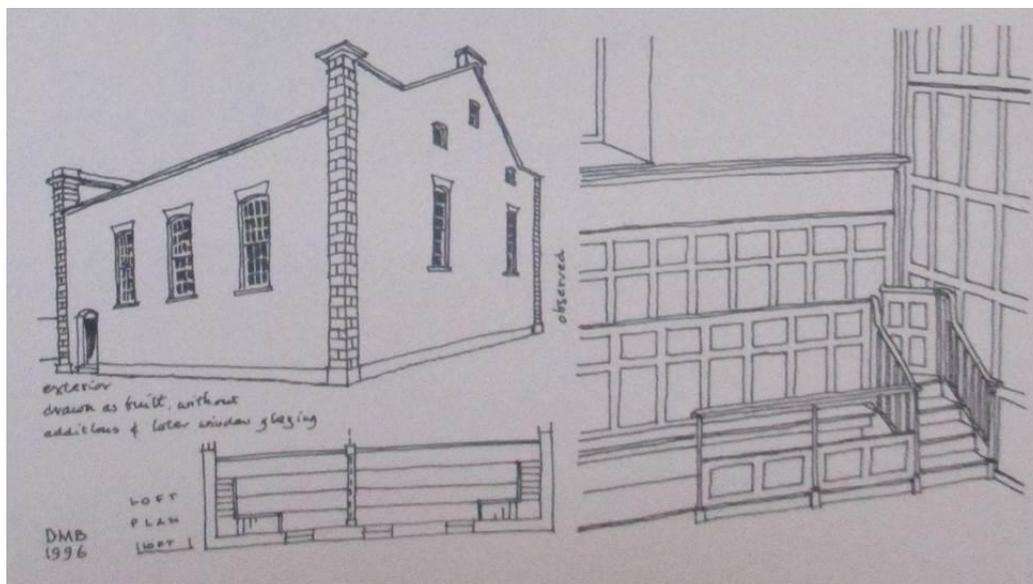


Figure 3: Elevations and internal details of the 1823 Meeting House (from Butler, Vol. 1, p. 169)

The present Meeting House is a former residential property believed to have been built about 1901, when Roker was being developed as a high class seaside resort. Its first recorded owner is a Mr Young, timber merchant, and the house is notable for the quality of its internal woodwork, as well as its Arts and Crafts detailing generally. It remained a family home until 1969, when the Quakers bought it for £7,750 from William Jackson, Chairman of Sunderland Town Council. It was adapted for Quaker use by Martin Lidbetter, Architect, with a flat for a

warden on the upper floor (cost £2,250). More recently (1990s and later) adaptations have been made to improve access, including a lift and accessible WCs.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

A large detached house built in about 1901, of two storeys and an attic over a small cellar area. It is built of large machine-made red bricks with stone for some of the dressings (principally the lintels), a slate roof with eaves and ridge stacks. The front elevation has two two-storey bays with large plate glass sash windows, overlooking the park. The entrance is at the side, via an original glass conservatory. At the rear, a lower range gives off the staircase half-landing. There is a small front garden and a yard at the rear.

The house is notable for the quality and completeness of its Edwardian Arts and Crafts fitting out. This is apparent in the conservatory/porch, with its encaustic tiled floor and etched glass in the windows. The main entrance hall has a moulded plaster archway, mosaic floor, dado leading through to the stair, with closed string and turned balusters, moulded handrail and elaborate oak newel of Jacobean character. A fine oak door with decorative copper doorknob and integral fingerplate leads into the ground floor meeting room, consisting of two rooms joined by the formation of an opening with wooden concertina doors. These spaces have fine original plaster ceilings and stone and timber fireplaces with tile inserts, one of which is set in a large and elaborate timber alcove with carved archway. Other alterations made for the Meeting include a lift in a former cupboard space giving off the stair hall, a new kitchen with suspended ceiling, and some new doors. However, several of the original doors survive, elaborate showpieces displaying the use of two or more varieties of wood (the first recorded owner is said to have been a timber merchant). Generally the original character of the house survives to a high degree, and is much valued by the Meeting.

2.3. Loose furnishings

No loose furnishings of particular significance were noted. Historic furnishings do not appear to have been brought over from the predecessor Meeting House.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The Meeting House belongs to the Edwardian residential development of Roker as a suburb and seaside resort and overlooks Roker Park, a registered Historic Park and Garden which opened in 1880 and is the centrepiece of a designated Conservation Area. The North Sea lies only a few hundred yards to the east, while the Anglican church of St Andrew to the north is an Arts and Crafts design of national importance. The Council's Conservation Area Appraisal identifies the house as a positive contributor.

Land acquired in 1855 at Bishopwearmouth Cemetery (NGR NZ 37280 56287) is still available for burials. The burial records are at Sunderland Civic Centre, with copies at the Meeting House. The Nile Street burial ground (NGR NZ 40051 56977) is now a car park. The burial records for this are at Tyne & Wear archives while those for the High Street site are at Durham County archives.

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. While possibly not of listable quality, the building would certainly merit inclusion in a local list.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Before the late nineteenth century the area was predominantly agricultural. The archaeological potential is likely to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Fair
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

3.2. Maintenance

A quinquennial inspection was carried out in December 2015, but at the time of the visit the report had not been submitted. The building appears generally to be in good condition and well maintained, but its condition is here categorised as fair on account of the need for repair/redecoration of the external joinery.

3.3. Sustainability

Sustainability measures undertaken by the Meeting include use of low energy light bulbs, installation of curtains, blinds and carpet underlay to improve insulation, and waste recycling. The Meeting House is near a bus stop and the Metro station is fifteen minutes' walk away. There is limited off-street-parking in the rear yard, while parking is also available in the street. There is secure parking for cycles.

3.4. Amenities

The Meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs. These include a large meeting room capable of being subdivided, a large ground floor kitchen, small upstairs kitchen and six WCs. There is no longer a resident warden.

3.5. Access

A Disability Access Audit was carried out in about 1995. A ramp provides step-free access to the building at the front door. There is level circulation around the ground floor, and a lift provides access to the first floor for those unable to use the stairs. Two of the WCs have been adapted for use by disabled people and a hearing loop is installed.

3.6 Community Use

The Meeting House is normally used by Friends and Attenders for about three hours a week. In addition to this, the facilities are used by other parties for ninety-five of a possible 600 hours a week. There is a lettings policy (2012).

7. Vulnerability to crime

No incidents of crime (including heritage crime) or antisocial behaviour are reported. The immediate area is attractive and fairly affluent, with low levels of crime and social deprivation. However, the Meeting House is situated in a council ward with high levels of multiple deprivation.

3.8. Plans for change

No specific changes are currently proposed, but a Buildings Manager has recently been appointed, and changes are likely.

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 has been adapted for its current use and meets the needs of the Meeting. Any further changes should take account of the high quality of the interior and its architectural fittings. Any changes to the extension should take account of the building's location in a Conservation Area, and of the Article 4 Direction in place, which removes permitted development rights and means that external alterations (such as window replacement) would be subject to planning permission.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building is already put to wider community use, and further expansion is proposed. The same constraints would apply.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The property was built as a private house, and could readily revert to this use.

Part 5: Category: 2