

Friends Meeting House, Wakefield

Thornhill Street, off George Street, Wakefield, WF1 1NQ

National Grid Reference: SE 33442 20580



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is an example of a functional modern mid-twentieth century building and has low heritage value. The present building replaces a former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on this site, in use as a meeting house from 1805. It occupies an attractive site set within a burial ground acquired in 1835.

Evidential value

The current meeting house is a modern building with no evidential value. However, it was built on the site of an earlier meeting house, a former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, with an attached burial ground. The site and the burial ground to the rear have high evidential value.

Historical value

The present meeting house has low historical significance, but the site has high historical value as the meeting place of Quakers since 1805. The burial ground dates back to 1835 and contains nineteenth-century gravestones.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has low aesthetic value but is an example of the functional modern traditions of mid twentieth century architecture.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers and in use since it opened in 1965. The building provides a local community focus and its facilities are used by a number of local groups.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Central Yorkshire*

1.2 Property Registration Number: 0005350

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wakefield Metropolitan District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *Yorkshire*

- 1.6 Civil parish: *Wakefield*
- 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: *1965*
- 1.13 Architect: *P. T. Holroyd*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *7 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Roger Gardner*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial ground NGR SE 34252 19655*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Josephine Beaumont, *Memories of Wakefield Meeting House*, 2010

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 840

Roger Gardner, *Local Meeting Survey*, June 2016

Helen E. Roberts, *Researching Yorkshire Quaker History: A Guide to Sources*, University of Hull, 2003, pp. 73 <http://hullhistorycentre.org.uk/quaker/quakerguide.pdf>

John W Walker, *Wakefield: Its History and People*, 1939

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

2.1. Historical background

Yorkshire has strong associations with the early Quaker movement; George Fox the founder of the Society of Religious Friends, travelled through the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire in 1651 and 1652. Important 'First Publishers of Truth' in this area included William Dewsbury, James Nayler and Thomas Goodaire. Early meetings took place in the homes of Friends; from 1716 meetings were held in the home of Richard Frostard in Kirkgate, a nominal rent was paid each year for use of a room. Friends later purchased this building which remained in use for meetings until 1722. From 1722 meetings moved to a newly built meeting house in Agbrigg. The meeting house in Agbrigg was sold in 1805 and Friends acquired a former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Thornhill Street for £500 in the same year. The foundation stone for the chapel is believed to have been laid by John Wesley in 1773. Land to the rear of the property was purchased in 1835 for use as a burial ground.

A description of the interior of the meeting house by Josephine Beaumont (2010) records an Elders' stand to west, and fixed seating to the north and south. To the east of the meeting room was a passage leading to the school rooms, ancillary facilities and a caretaker's house.

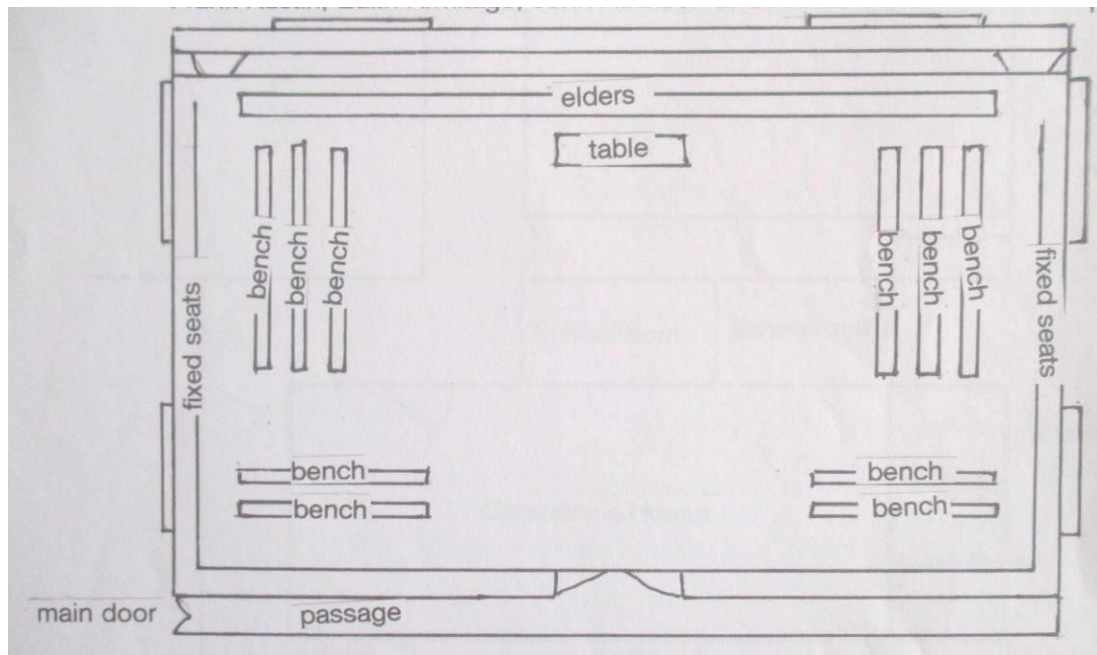


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of former meeting house, north to the right, nd (Beaumont, 2010).

By the 1950s, the meeting house was deteriorating and in need of extensive repairs. A decision was made to demolish it and build a new purpose-built meeting house on the same site; this was designed by P T Holroyd and opened in 1965. During the construction of the meeting house Friends met at the YMCA. During the works, the flat stones marking the graves were relocated to the boundary edge.

During the 1980s the meeting house was also let to Age Concern; together with the Friends, they extended the property to the north to provide an accessible toilet and storage facilities. More recently, the lower level window panes at first floor facing the west elevation were replaced with upvc panels for health and safety.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built to the designs of P. T. Holroyd and opened in 1965, extended in 1986. The two-storey rectangular building was designed with the meeting room at first floor above the ancillary facilities and smaller meeting room. The flat-roofed building is built in buff brick laid in stretcher bond. The west elevation forms the principal frontage facing Thornhill Street, it has a double doorway with an 8-paned window, above a 9-paned window (lower panes now upvc panels). To the eastern end of the south elevation 3 top hung upvc casement windows at ground and first floor level are within a recessed area. To the eastern end of the north elevation is a single storey flat-roofed extension of 1986 for storage facilities and accessible toilet facilities. The north elevation of the meeting house has a 6-pane window at ground floor level with tile-hung walls to eaves level. The rear elevation to the east comprises of pairs of single windows to the ground and first to the southern end whilst the northern end has three sets of 2-pane windows at first and two at ground floor, separated by an area of wall tiles and a rear exit.

Internally, the foyer provides access and circulation to the ground floor rooms including smaller meeting room, kitchen, toilet facilities, storage area. The first floor is accessed via a staircase. The principal space at upper level is the generously lit main meeting room, which has a suspended tiled ceiling, three roof lights, plain painted walls, a pine floor and a vertical window to the south wall which leads onto the landing area (formerly used for a projector). The upper level landing also contains a well-lit library area.

2.3. Loose furnishings

There are no furnishings of particular note but the main meeting room contains a plain table donated by Friend Ernest Hebblethwaite [1903 – 1990], and a sycamore table made by Graham Buckley in memory of Ernest.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is located to the east of the site. The burials cover a period approximately from 1826 to 1953. This is no longer used for burials but is still used for the scattering of ashes. Formerly, flat stones were laid in rows; however these were relocated to the perimeter in the 1960s (Fig.3). The burial ground is mainly laid to grass with low level planting and trees around the edge. The burial ground is enclosed by red brick walls dating from the nineteenth century.



Figure 2: Burial ground



Figure 3: Relocated gravestones

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located in a central position in Wakefield in a predominately commercial area. On the opposite side of Thornhill Road is a two-storey red brick early twentieth century building flanked by modern buildings, to the north is a terrace of Grade II listed almshouses, and to the south east is a Grade II listed nineteenth century villa.

The immediate setting of the meeting house is formed by a small front garden area with modern paving and to the rear is the large open space of the former burial ground, bounded by a red brick wall dating from the nineteenth century, with stone copings (stolen in the past).

A detached burial ground is located in Doncaster Road (*NGR SE 34252 19655*).

2.6. Listed status

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

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service was consulted and no Historic Environment Record for this site was identified. The present meeting house is located on the site of a former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel which was in use as a meeting house from 1805 to the 1960s, and the land to the rear has been in use as a burial ground since 1835. Overall the site has medium to high 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): Optimal / satisfactory.

3.2. Maintenance

A quinquennial inspection has not taken place. The meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the meeting house. A 5-year maintenance and repair plan is in place for the building.

3.3. Sustainability

The Meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but the following measures have been implemented to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: double glazing installed and new gas central heating system introduced.
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: On-going maintenance programme is in place.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: All groups are encouraged to recycle paper, plastics and glass. Fairtrade products are used within the meeting house.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.

- Transport: car sharing used where feasible.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has most of the amenities it needs; the building has a kitchen, spacious foyer, toilets, library area, and two meeting rooms. The ground floor meeting room has sound insulation issues and the meeting house does not have baby changing facilities. There is no resident warden. An on-site car park is available and bicycles can be stored inside the meeting house if required. The meeting house is served by a local bus service, with a limited service on a Sunday

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and throughout the building, with a stair lift providing access to the meeting room and library on the first floor. An accessible toilet is available and enquiries are currently taking place regarding the installation of a hearing loop. There are currently no facilities for partially-sighted people and a Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about one hour each week. The meeting house is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 26 hours per week and is used for an average of 18 hours each week. The meeting has a formal lettings policy. Public meetings are acceptable only after gaining permission with the meeting. Free use of the meeting house is allowed for the City of Sanctuary for asylum seekers and refugees for meetings. Users value the building for its central city centre location, low rent and warmth.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has been subject to both anti-social behaviour and heritage crime in the past. In the past York stone copings were stolen from the whole length of the burial ground wall and incidents of anti-social behaviour have included graffiti and fly tipping. The Friends have reported crimes and incidents of anti-social behaviour to the local police. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, high deprivation and low community confidence. Friends have developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

The meeting are considering the possibility of installing solar panels.

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 appears to have all the facilities it needs. There are no heritage constraints to significant change if required in the future.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is already in use by local community groups. At present, it has all the required facilities to support these.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The meeting house is located in a central location and if a community use was not viable, the meeting house could probably be adapted for another use such as business use. In any new use the future of the burial ground would need to be taken into account.

Part 5: Category: 4