

***Friends Meeting House, Warrington***

*1b Academy Place, Warrington, WA1 2NR*

*National Grid Reference: SJ 60772 88208*



***Statement of Significance***

***Warrington meeting house has high significance as an early nineteenth-century meeting house of simple but refined design which retains a very good range of original interior features. It has an attractive setting within the original burial ground.***

***Evidential value***

***The burial ground and related records have the potential to add to the fund of knowledge about local Quakers. The building has medium evidential value.***

### **Historical value**

***There has been a meeting house on the site since 1725; it is of great significance in the history of dissent and the development of the Society of Friends in the Warrington area. It illustrates expansion of Quaker influence from the eighteenth century and the building and site have high historical value.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***The building is a good example of late Georgian design, superficially of simple form, but incorporating high quality detailing, particularly in the fine brickwork, the sash windows and some of the internal fittings. The meeting house is of simple elegant appearance and has high aesthetic value.***

### **Communal value**

***The meeting house and burial ground provide a green space in an otherwise very tough urban environment. The building is let to a variety of local groups and has high communal value.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Manchester & Warrington*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0020680*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Warrington Borough Council*
- 1.5 Civil parish: *Warrington*
- 1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1329729*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *N/A*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1830*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *14 July 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Clare Hartwell*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *David Slater*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached house and former school*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 343-344

Pollard, R., & Pevsner, N., *The Buildings of England Lancashire: Liverpool and the South-West* (London and New Haven, 2006) p. 610

Anon, *The Quakers in Warrington* (nd, early 21<sup>st</sup> century).

Nick Clifford and David Slater, *Local Meeting Survey*, June 2015.

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

### 2.1. Historical background

The establishment of Quakers in the Warrington area has origins in a meeting held in the house of William Barnes of Great Sankey until 1681. A meeting house was subsequently built in the burial ground which had been established in 1671 in Penketh and was licensed in 1689. It was rebuilt in 1736 and survives, although it is no longer in Quaker use. Warrington Quakers held their own evening meetings from the early eighteenth century. They obtained permission to establish their own meeting and acquired the present site in 1725, where a meeting house was built. This was replaced by the present building in 1830. The building was designed to accommodate the monthly meetings covering the Manchester area and quarterly meetings of the Lancashire area. Alterations to the furnishings of the larger meeting room were undertaken at unknown date. The original benches appear to have been adjusted, and free-standing benches introduced into the main body of the room. Alterations were carried out in the 1970s when a partition was introduced into the gallery, set back from the line of the gallery front, in order to make the main space more manageable for heating, and to create a storage area. A small extension was made to the rear of the building in order to provide kitchen and toilet facilities. The architect Paul Mauger provided plans but it is not known if the alterations were executed to his design.

A cottage and school adjacent to the site were acquired in 1821 for use as a Quaker school with teachers' accommodation. Initially for children, it later catered for adults. The building is thought to have originated as a premises of another dissenting group, founded by Joanna Southcott, but the early history is obscure. The buildings are rented to tenants and the former school is in use as a workshop.

### 2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

Warrington Quaker meeting house was built in 1830 on the site of an earlier meeting house. It is constructed of red brick laid in Flemish bond on a rendered stone plinth, with a slate roof, gabled to the south-west elevation and hipped on the north-east side. Render has been applied to the south-west elevation. The single-storey building is rectangular on plan with a galleried south-west end and projecting staircase and entrance bay to the south-east front. This south-east elevation is of four bays with the semi-circular bay offset in bay two; the broad doorway with double doors is on the right return of the bay, beneath a head of gauged brick with double doors. There is a central curved sash window to the front of the bay, and a blocked doorway on the south-west side, which may have originated as a separate doorway for women. The rest of the windows on the south-east front are tall twelve-paned sash windows with stone sills and flat heads of gauged brick. The north-east elevation has a large recessed arched panel containing a large tripartite sash window with a fanlight. The north-

west side of the building has two large window openings which have been blocked and a single-storey twentieth century extension. Render on the south-west side conceals any former openings.

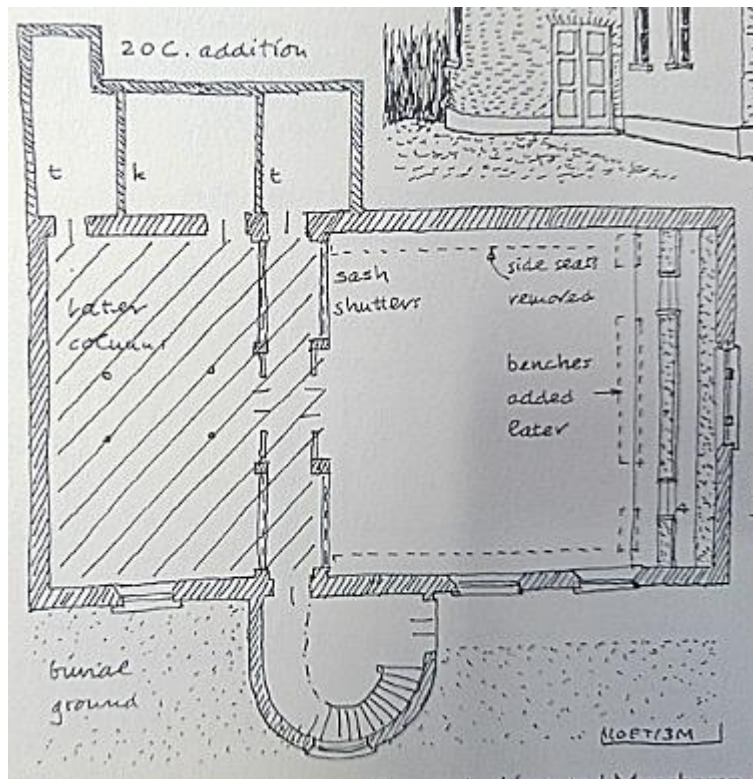


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the top right hand corner; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p.343)

The interior of the building is laid out on a tripartite plan with an entrance and staircase in the bay; the graceful cantilevered timber stair (Fig.2) has a wreathed handrail, stick balusters, open string and timber treads. A doorway from the hall into the meeting house gives to a corridor which has shutters worked on a vertically sliding sash principle on both sides and broad panelled doors to the respective meeting rooms. At the far end there is an extension with a disabled toilet. To the south-west a smaller meeting room is beneath the gallery, which is supported by four very tall cast-iron columns. A toilet and kitchen extension is reached from this room. The principal meeting room is on the north-east side of the corridor, with the ministers' stand on the north-east wall below a large arched window. The stand retains fixed seating on two levels, and the pine joinery has a grained finish; the upper bench has a divider in the centre and incorporates a hinged desk on brackets and there is a built-in bookcase at one end. The stand has sets of steps at either end, between fixed seating with tall panelled backs and ramped bench ends. The lowest tier of seating is in similar style but with shaped bench ends and has been slightly modified, indicating that it has been moved or repositioned. A panelled dado of matching grained pine runs around the room, ramped up to the stand and there are signs of fixings for former seating. The shuttered moveable partition and panelled gallery front at the south-west end of the meeting room have been painted, but probably originally shared the finish of the other furnishings. The gallery behind the partition is tiered. Original benches and wall surfaces have been removed.



Figure 2. The stair and the curved stair window

### 2.3. Loose furnishings

There are oak benches of simple design with slat backs and turned legs. They are possibly of early twentieth century date. There is also a small possibly original early nineteenth century oak table with a drawer and turned legs. A wooden box dated 1865 incorporates part of a box from the Penketh meeting house.

### 2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground was probably opened c.1725 when the first meeting house was built on the site. It is enclosed by a brick wall and there are two entrances on the north-west side. The burial ground is maintained as a garden, with a few fruit trees, and there are some visible headstones which have been laid flat in order to facilitate maintenance.

### 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The site is in a town-centre area which is very closely hemmed in by later buildings on the north-west and south-west sides. The immediate setting on these sides is a very hostile environment, essentially a service area relating to the rear of the shopping street (Buttermarket Street). A busy road runs along the north-east side of the site.

### 2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed grade II. It is a building of very strong historical and architectural interest which could be considered to be at the high end of the grade. The list entry says little about the interior and would benefit from revision; there is also an error in the wording at the start of the description.

### 2.7. Archaeological potential

The burial ground may have some archaeological potential, but it is not known whether any archaeology relating to the 1724 meeting house survives. There are no records on the HER for the site.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. A QI was undertaken in 2010 and identified minor works of repair to rendering.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory. The grounds are very well maintained as lawns with borders. The 2010 QI identified work required to the wall enclosing the burial ground, but this was not urgent.

### 3.2. Maintenance

The QI system is supplemented by procedures which are in place to undertake several inspections of the fabric each year.

### 3.3. Sustainability

The meeting has developed its own sustainability plan rather than adopting the toolkit. It was drawn up in 2012 covering eight areas of sustainability. A detailed assessment on energy performance has been completed and an action plan drawn up, and the current carbon emissions have been calculated and estimated values forecast. In 2014 the Warrington Friends undertook a community-based sustainability appraisal and developed proposals for consideration in the pending Quinquennial Review. Various measures already implemented include:

- Composting garden waste
- Managing the burial ground as a wildlife-friendly resource
- Promoting sustainable forms of transport and encouraging car sharing

### 3.4. Amenities

The meeting house is equipped with a kitchen and WCs, with ample areas of storage.

### 3.5. Access

There is a drop-off point by the main gates, and level access along paths to the main entrance. There are modern WCs including one which is fully accessible and there is level access throughout the ground floor of the building



### 3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is let for a small number of hours per week (varies from week to week) and detailed letting policies are in place. Community use is encouraged but groups with objectives in conflict with Quaker beliefs would not be accommodated. There are the usual restrictions on uses in breach of health and safety regulations, and decisions on hiring the rooms are taken on a case by case basis.

### 3.7. Vulnerability to Crime

The meeting house is in the town centre and there are persistent problems with trespass, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. There have been thefts of lead from the roof. Contact is maintained with the police but the problems experienced by the meeting house are common across of the whole of the marginal town centre area surrounding the meeting house.

### 3.8 Plans for change

There are no immediate plans for change.

## **Part 4: Impact of Change**

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change:

*i) As a Meeting House only.* The existing arrangements meet the current needs of the meeting. There is scope for refining the existing toilet and kitchen facilities if required. There is also scope for bringing the gallery back into use if required, subject to access. The quality of the joinery fittings (shutters, panelling, stand, staircase) means there is a presumption in favour of their retention.

*ii) For wider community use, additional to local meeting use:* The current arrangements appear to meet the needs of the groups served, and there is some scope to improve WC and kitchen facilities, but little scope for extending facilities.

*iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a meeting house and passing into secular use:* In the event of closure, finding an alternative use which would safeguard the historic character and appearance of the building, in particular the interior volumes and fixtures, could prove to be challenging.

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

### **List description**

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1329729

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, BUTTERMARKET STREET

Grade: II

Date first listed: 04-Apr-1975

BUTTERMARKET STREET Friends Meeting House 5150 SJ 6088 1/42 II GV

Oil enclosed site (sic), behind Buttermarket and Academy Streets, from both of which there are entrances. Originally built in 1728, the present building dates from 1830. Single storey, brick with stone base and eaves cornice, hipped slate roof. Semi-circular staircase projection on south side, with entrance. Plain sash windows with glazing bars, brick flat arched heads and stone sills, one triple sash with segmental head on entrance front. Plain entrance with 3 plain panels to double doors. Interior has gallery. Surrounded by old graveyard and garden, with modern iron gates to Buttermarket Street. The Friends Meeting House, and No '2 form a group with Nos 6, 8 and Nos 1 to 9 (odd) Academy Street.

Listing NGR: SJ6077288208