

Friends Meeting House, Weston-super-Mare

High Street, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, BS23 1JF

National Grid Reference: ST 31969 61258



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was built in 1953-6 on the site of a mid-Victorian meeting house destroyed by bombing in 1942. The architect has not been identified. The building is a good example of 1950s design, retaining much of its original character, and is of medium heritage significance

Evidential value

It seems unlikely that there are any archaeological deposits beneath the meeting house which is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The site was previously occupied by a meeting house built in 1846 when Weston was a growing resort. The long continuous use of the site by the Quakers gives the building at least medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is a pleasing and typical example of 1950s architecture and is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The present meeting house has been used by Quakers since the 1950s and also increasingly by other local groups. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *North Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0017300*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *North Somerset Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Weston super Mare*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1953-6*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *2 September 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Adrian Shephard, Mary Marston and others*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 551-2
The Friend, 1956, 722
Local Meeting survey from Mary and Malcolm Marston, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

The meeting at Weston originated as a meeting for Friends visiting during the summer (like those at Hastings, Bournemouth, Redcar and Saltburn; see Butler, vol. 2, pp. 929-931). Land in High Street was given in 1846 by a local non-Quaker benefactor named Richard Parsley and the meeting house opened in that year, though the internal gallery was still unfinished in 1855. The building was destroyed by bombing in 1942. It was replaced on the same site by the present building, which was opened in 1953. The lower classroom range on the north side was added three years later.

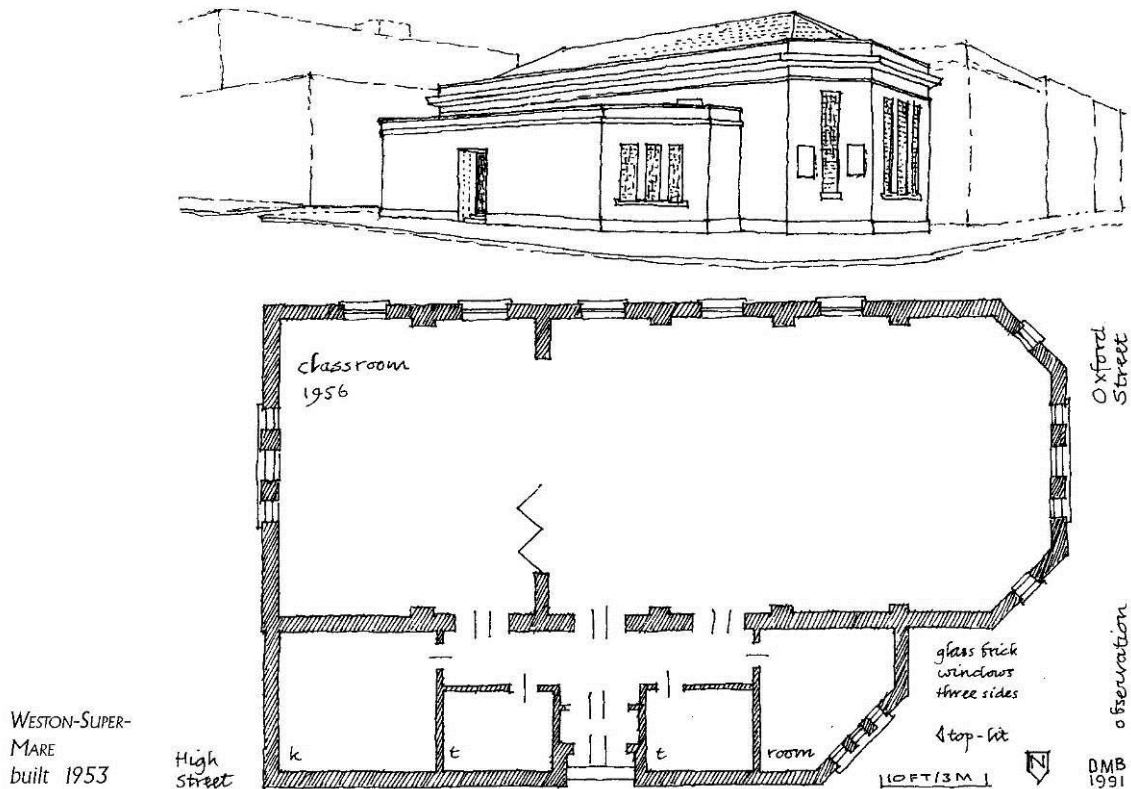


Figure 1: Ground plan and perspective view from the NW (Butler, vol. 2, p. 551)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house stands at the intersection of Oxford Street and High Street and is designed in a stripped modern Classical style. The building is single-storeyed and the walls are faced with Bath stone and rise to a bold projecting cornice with a plain parapet and a hipped tiled roof. The tall main block is rectangular on plan, with a canted end at the west towards Oxford Street with a triple window and side windows in tall plain openings glazed with glass blocks. The south side away from the street has five tall windows with modern glazing. On the north side is a lower-flat-roofed addition with a canted west end with triple windows. The main front of this addition to High Street is blind apart from the wide entrance opening.

Internally, the main block contains a large and a small meeting room. The main room has a parquet floor, plain plastered walls and a suspended ceiling of acoustic panels. At the east end is a timber folding screen closing off the classroom or small meeting room, which is similar in character to the main room but with carpet on the floor. The forebuilding contains the kitchen, toilets and a small snug ('quiet room'). All are top-lit and the latter also has glass-block windows.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of heritage interest within the building.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house stands at the extreme southern end of High Street, which is mostly lined with small commercial buildings of the inter and post-war period. Across Oxford Street to the north is a very large site, previously occupied by a post-war shopping centre but currently being redeveloped as a very large Leisure Centre, which will overshadow the meeting house and change the character of the area.

2.6 Listed status

The building is not a candidate for the statutory list. It might be a candidate for the local list, especially if the architect can be identified.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

It is unlikely that there are any archaeological deposits earlier than the mid-nineteenth century and the archaeological potential of the site is low.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/A

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in April 2015 by Jonathan Miles RICS. The building was found to be well-maintained with no major structural problems. All the urgent works recommended in the report have been done. The report also recommended the repainting of external ironwork and the renewal of the suspended ceilings in both main rooms. There is a 5-year maintenance and repair plan based on the QI report. The Meeting has enough money to pay for routine maintenance but any major work would need an appeal.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, whose format has not inspired the Local Meeting but has implemented some limited measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: the single glazed roof-lights have all been replaced with double-gazed units.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: water reduction in toilets. There is no waste disposal on site.
- Wildlife and nature conservation: This is a town-centre site with no green space.

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate and would not consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs within the meeting house. These include one large and one small meeting room and an even smaller quiet room, an adequate kitchen, one unisex disabled toilet and a men's urinal. There is no resident warden. The meeting is easily

accessible by public transport from the town and from Bristol and Taunton Transport to local villages is limited. There is parking space for 6 cars on site, at a pinch.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, but wheelchairs have to use a separate rear entrance. The whole building is on one floor and there is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop, but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit has not been conducted; the meeting relies on the QI for guidance on necessary improvements.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 4-5 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a 28 hours per week and is let for about 22 hours per week (the building is only let to one group at a time). The meeting has a lettings policy on the website. No alcohol is permitted, or activities which conflict with Quaker testimony. Free use is based on need and ability to pay. Users value the building for its town centre location, good size, good facilities and friendly approach.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

This is a town centre site with clubs and bars nearby; there has been no serious crime, but small amounts of graffiti and vandalism. A metal gate was stolen a few years ago, a small item was stolen from inside the building recently and a window has been broken twice and has now been bricked-up for security. These incidents were not reported to the police. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low levels of deprivation and high community confidence (though these questions are not really susceptible to a yes/no answer); there are some homeless people in the town, and some drug and alcohol abuse. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and the meeting is not sure it would be of benefit.

3.8 Plans for change

It is planned to upgrade the facilities and remain alert to the needs of the meeting and the community.

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 has all the facilities it currently needs. There is certainly scope for refurbishment and probably some scope for change, if required subject to Planning constraints.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house is already suitable for use by the wider community, though there is probably scope for improvement.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the buildings could doubtless serve a wholly secular use if closed.

Part 5: Category: 3