

Friends Meeting House, Wolverhampton

8b Summerfield Road, Wolverhampton, WV1 4PR

National Grid Reference: SO 90591 98765



Statement of Significance

The building has medium heritage significance as a meeting house purpose-built in 1969, by the architect Frederick Gregory who experimented with novel roof forms.

Evidential value

There are no known earlier structures on the site, and the building has low evidential value.

Historical value

The present meeting house has low historical significance. However, the Wolverhampton Meeting has a long history and the building helps provide the local context for the modern history of Quakerism in Wolverhampton.

Aesthetic value

The 1969 meeting house has a functional modern design, set well back from the street; it has medium aesthetic value. The interplay of mono-pitch roofs are a distinctive aspect of the building's design by architect Frederick Gregory.

Communal value

The meeting house was built for Quaker use. However, it is also a community resource. The building is used by a number of local groups and has a high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Staffordshire*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0004370*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wolverhampton City Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

- 1.6 Civil parish: *Wolverhampton*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Park*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1969*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Frederick W Gregory*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *20 January 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *John Babb and Win Sutton*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites:
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Former burial ground Broad Street NGR: SO 91673 98892*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Babb, J., *Local Meeting Survey*, November 2015.

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp.565-566.

Jones, C., Clark, H and Turner, E., *Wolverhampton Quakers 1704 – 1988*, 1989

Wolverhampton City Council, *Park: Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals*, 2008.

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

2.1 Historical background

Quakers began to meet in Wolverhampton from the late seventeenth century. By 1704, land with two cottages in Rottons Row (known today as Broad Street) was given to the Friends for use as a meeting house and burial ground by Robert and Joan Hill. The meeting continued here for the following 102 years until 1806 when the meeting closed due to a decline in members. The building was in subsequent use as a school until it was sold in 1840 for £400. By the late nineteenth century Friends in Wolverhampton were emerging again and began to meet in rented premises, the Y.M.C.A at the corner of Darlington Street. Friends approached the Warwickshire Monthly Meeting for assistance with a new meeting house for Wolverhampton. The Monthly Meeting agreed that the Friends could pursue the construction of a small meeting house. By 1903, Thomas Parker had given Friends land in Horsman Street, on which a meeting house was built at a cost of £717.3s.2d; it opened in March 1903.

Similar to Birmingham Quakers, Friends in Wolverhampton were involved with the Adult School Movement and active in other areas such as a Peace Committee from the 1930s and in the 1940s assisted with Friends' Victims Relief Committee, hosting elderly evacuees from

East London. The Woodlands in Penn later became a permanent home for the elderly from 1945. By the mid-1960s, due to the number of activities the Quakers were involved in, the meeting house in Horsman Street was becoming increasingly inadequate. This along with proposals by the local authority to construct a new ring road resulted in the meeting house becoming isolated. The Preparative Meeting established a committee to consider locations for a new meeting house.

In 1965 Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries Limited offered the Friends a site in Summerfield Road in exchange for the meeting house in Horsman Street. This offer was agreed a few years later with much deliberation relating to whether land should be accepted from a brewery. The new meeting house was built to the designs of Frederick Gregory and opened in 1969. The cost of the building was £26,000.

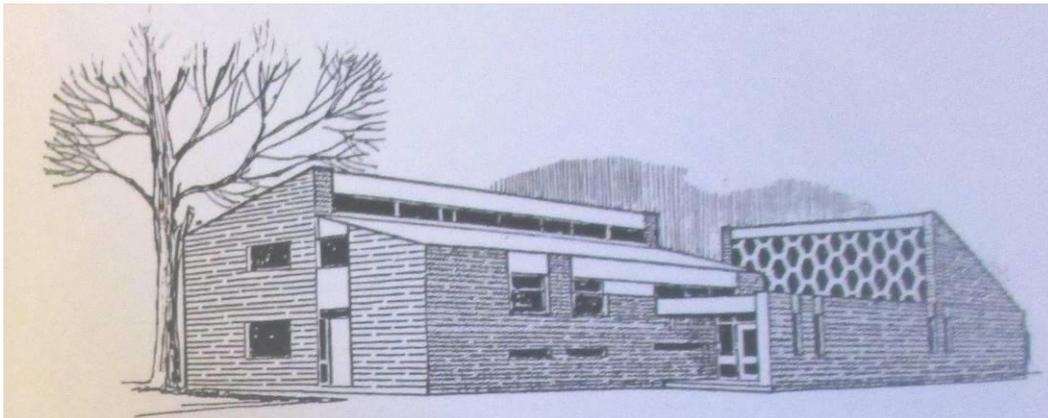


Figure 1: Sketch of Wolverhampton Meeting House as built in 1969 (Wolverhampton Meeting House Archive)

Since the construction of the meeting house minor alterations have taken place internally including the replacement of the sliding timber screen separating the meeting room and lobby, windows replaced with uPVC. A major change to the exterior of the western mono-pitch range of the meeting house is shown by comparison with Figure 1; the upper tiled and glazed section of the range originally consisted of a tessellated concrete screen which was later replaced by glazed panels and hanging tiles.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built to the designs of Frederick Gregory and opened in 1969. The building is formed of three components; a 2-storey western range with mono-pitch roof containing the ancillary rooms, library, children's room and warden's flat; a central flat-roofed range forming the lobby area and a mono-pitch roof range to the west forming the meeting room. It is built in brown brick laid in stretcher bond and the roofs have recently been re-laid with Marley fibre cement slates. The east elevation of the central L-shaped range which wraps around the north-west corner of the eastern block forms the principal entrance into the building via a canopy. The eastern block is characterised by the mono-pitched roofs, with clerestory fenestration to the north elevation, below this two 2-light windows connected by a single light window, and three horizontal slit windows below. The fenestration on the other elevations comprises of 2-light windows, with two doorways to the south. The meeting room block to the west has a 4-light window to the south, the west side has a small mono-pitch roof with an additional adjoining mono-pitch connecting with the main roof, the north has a single 1-light window with the rest of the elevation blind, the tile-hung east side has three square windows.

Internally, the light and spacious lobby area with parquet flooring and exposed brick walls leads to the main meeting room, ancillary facilities, children's room, library and the warden's accommodation. Due to the mono-pitched roof form of the meeting room it creates an

impressive internal space, with the sloping ceiling carried on rafters meeting at a v joint. The walls are plastered and painted apart from the east wall which is of exposed brick, with three rectangular windows and a folding screen separating the room from the lobby area. There is fixed seating to the west, south and north walls.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of historic pine benches from the former meeting house in Horsman Street, probably of nineteenth century date.



Figure 2: Pine benches from Horsman Street meeting house.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located to the north west of Wolverhampton city centre. The building is within the Park Conservation Area designated in 1975; the main focus of the Conservation Area surrounds West Park, a Victorian park that is a Grade II* Registered Historic Park and Garden. Summerfield Road is one of the oldest roads in the area characterised by mid-nineteenth century stucco villas, some of which are listed at Grade II including Numbers 7-8 and 1-4. Views of the meeting house cannot be seen from Summerfield Road as the building is set back behind Beechwood House. The meeting house is accessed between two stone gate piers and a long driveway which first leads to Beechwood House and then onto the meeting house. There is a small area of parking for cars and bicycles to the north of the building and to the south is small garden and area of planting, including a sculpture by local Friend Neville Stanyer.

2.6 Listed status

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

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Wolverhampton Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site, it is likely to be of low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. The meeting house appears to be well looked after and cared for by Friends. Major repairs have recently been carried out to the roof.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house does not have a five-year maintenance and repair. However, a resident warden and Friends regularly monitor the condition of the meeting house. There is enough money to allow for the basic upkeep of the building.

3.3 Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Energy saving bulbs where possible, off-peak heating and in solar photovoltaic panels are due to be installed in 2016.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: Garden waste is composted.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees which provide wildlife habitats.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs, including a lobby, meeting room, kitchen and toilet facilities (including one fully accessible with shower), children's room, library and a resident warden lives on the first floor.

An on-site car park is available along with bicycle racks to the north of the meeting house. The meeting house is served by local bus services which run seven days a week, less frequently on Sundays.

3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. Level access is available into and throughout the meeting house. A hearing loop has been installed and there are facilities for partially-sighted people including bold clear signage and stair nosings in contrast colours. A fully accessible toilet with shower is available. Entrances to the meeting house have ramped access along with hand rails.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 3 to 6 hours and in community use between 20 and 80 hours each week, and the meeting house has the potential to be let for

120 hours each week. There is no lettings policy. The meeting is used by a wide range of users including several meditation groups, counselling of different types, and for Alexander Technique sessions. Geo Amet regularly have bookings Monday to Friday during the day when it is used to run courses for prison officers. The users who have free use or reduced fee are currently Aquarius (a group for those with alcohol dependency), Gamblers Anonymous, and Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary (for refugees and asylum). To enable use at no charge or reduced charges it is considered at a local business meeting first. The meeting house is popular due to the facilities available at a reasonable cost.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, however the meeting house is subject to anti-social behaviour. The meeting house is located opposite West Park, a historic public park which is vulnerable to anti-social behaviour in the evenings. The meeting has not developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

No future 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 used only by the local Meeting: There are no heritage constraints on future change to the property. However, it would seem the meeting house meets the current needs of the Friends.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is currently being used for wider community by a number of groups as well as by the local meeting and has the required facilities. There is scope for further change and no heritage constraints.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: In the event of being laid down, there may be scope to continue the existing community use. The building has no heritage constraints, but the reallocation of historic furnishings should be considered.

Part 5: Category: 4