

***Friends Meeting House, Canterbury***

*6 The Friars, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 2AS*

*National Grid Reference: TR 14866 58037*



***Statement of Significance***

***An attractive design of the 1950s, combining neo-Georgian and Arts and Crafts elements, located close to the historic core of the city, and on part of the site of the medieval Blackfriars. The building is of medium significance, the site is of high significance.***

***Evidential value***

***The building is of post-war date. It retains some reset headstones from the former burial ground. It is relatively unaltered and is of medium evidential value.***

***Historical value***

***Quaker observance in Canterbury goes back to the late seventeenth century, but the present building is of post-war date. The meeting house is of medium historical value, representing one strand in the story of the post-war reconstruction of Canterbury. The site is of high historical value.***

***Aesthetic value***

***The building is an attractive and little-altered design by J. L. Denman, combining neo-Georgian and Arts and Crafts elements. It is set back from the lane behind a well-maintained garden, with the River Stour running alongside. The building and site are of high aesthetic value.***

### ***Communal value***

***The building and site are of high communal value for their Quaker witness, for their contribution to the local townscape, and for the facilities they offer.***

#### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *East Kent*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032590*
- 1.3 Owner: *East Kent Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Canterbury City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South East*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Canterbury NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1005491 (for SAM)*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Canterbury City*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *Yes*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1956*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *J. L. Denman*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *1 December 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Elizabeth Birmingham*
- 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. 1, pp. 279-281

Newman, J., *The Buildings of England: North East and East Kent*, 2013

Local Meeting Survey by Elizabeth Birmingham, July 2015

Website, [http://www.susseparishchurches.org/spc\\_V31/architects-and-artists/331-architects-and-artists-d-e](http://www.susseparishchurches.org/spc_V31/architects-and-artists/331-architects-and-artists-d-e)

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

### 2.1. Historical background

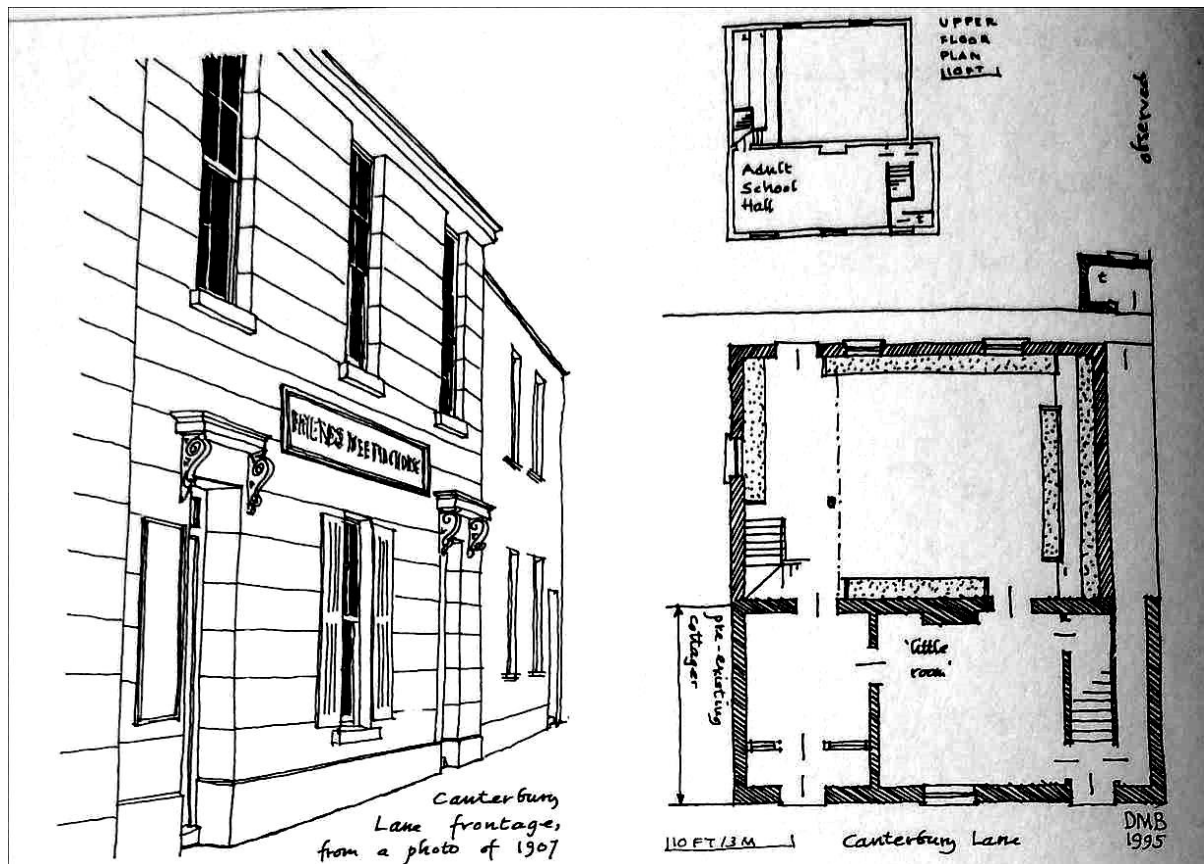


Figure 1: Plan and elevation of the previous meeting house, destroyed in 1942, from Butler, Vol. 1, p. 280

In 1661 Quakers acquired a burial ground outside the city walls at St Dunstan's (5 Forty Acres Road), first used in 1658. In the 1680s funds were raised for the purchase of three small tenements in Canterbury Lane, and a meeting house was built in their back gardens in 1688. This is said to have been largely rebuilt in about 1772. At some point in the nineteenth century, the frontage buildings were demolished and replaced with a new frontage building with small meeting below and adult school above. The plan and elevation of this building, as extended and rebuilt, is shown in Butler's drawing at figure 1.

The building was destroyed on 1 June 1942, during the most destructive of the so-called Baedeker raids on Canterbury, which left much of the historic city centre in ruins (but the cathedral largely unscathed). Post-war rebuilding involved what Newman (p.160) calls a 'battle of the styles', with the Dean and Chapter, advised by their architect J. L. Denman, holding fast to historicism and the civic authorities, led by the City Architect, embracing architectural Modernism. It would appear that Friends took the side of the traditionalists, for when designs were drawn up for a new meeting house, on a new site purchased in 1946 (a sensitive, historic location, being part of the site of a medieval Dominican friary) it was Denman who was chosen to prepare the designs. The cost (about £12,000) was met in part by a payment from the War Damage Commission. The new meeting house opened in 1956. It had large and small meeting rooms seating 100 and 30, a committee room and a warden's flat. In 1971 alterations were made to extend the kitchen and build a storeroom (architect Norman Frith) and in 2011 a small extension was built providing improved WCs (architect Alan Foster).

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

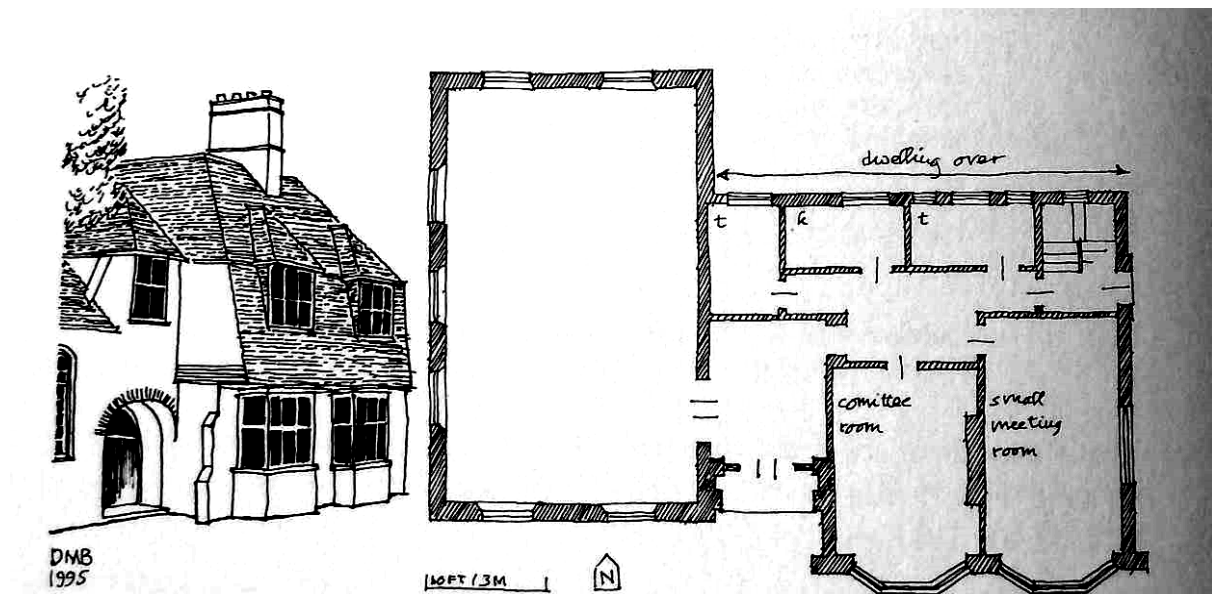


Figure 2: 1995 Plan and elevation of the present meeting house, from Butler, Vol. 1, p. 280

The meeting house was built in 1956 from designs by J. L. Denman. It is built of multi-coloured brick laid in stretcher bond under steeply-pitched tile roofs and consists of two elements: a large rectangular meeting room of vernacular Georgian character, with a hipped roof and large multi-paned sash windows under cambered heads and with raised and angled tile surrounds, and the smaller rooms and warden's accommodation, arranged in two storeys and of a more domestic, Arts and Crafts character, with a gambrel roof, hipped dormers, bay windows, casements and leaded lights. The windows are double-glazed replicas of the originals. The main entrance is placed off-centre between these two elements, the timber boarded doors with arched top and side lights set within an arched recessed porch.



Figure 3: Large meeting room interior (Photo Canterbury Meeting)

The porch leads into a hallway with woodblock floor and original two-panelled doors leading to the large meeting room and committee room. The plan-form at the back of the hall has been altered since drawn by Butler (figure 2); the removal of the WC partition means that there are now two arches leading to the rear accommodation – WCs, a kitchen and a small meeting room. The large meeting room was in use at the time of the visit and was not

available for inspection. A photograph supplied by the Meeting (figure 3) shows a plain rectangular space with plastered walls and flat ceiling and a woodblock floor.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings calling for special mention. The only survival within the building from the previous meeting house is a small brass plaque in the hallway.

### 2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

There is no attached burial ground, but some headstones from the previous burial ground have been reset against the boundary wall in the front garden (photo bottom right at top of report). These appear to be of nineteenth or early twentieth-century date.

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

The meeting house lies in The Friars, close to the medieval city centre and a short walking distance from the cathedral (see photo upper right). It lies on the east bank of the River Stour, on the other side of which is the new Marlowe Theatre (opened in 2011). The meeting house is set back from the lane with a good-sized garden area in front. The site lies within the city conservation area and over the part of the site of the medieval Blackfriars. Amongst the surviving friary buildings, the former refectory to the rear (listed Grade I) was later acquired by a Huguenot surgeon and a Unitarian meeting house was built (closed in 1913). The former Guest House (also Grade I) is on the other side of the river, behind the theatre.

The site of the former burial ground (TR 14253 58405) was sold in the 1990s and has been redeveloped with housing.

### 2.6. Listed/scheduled status

The building is not listed. It is a well-detailed design by John Leopold Denman of Brighton. Denman (1882-1975) usually worked in a neo-Georgian idiom, although some of his post-war rebuilding projects in the cathedral precincts at Canterbury (such as the Archives Building of 1951-4) were appropriately medieval in character. A number of his interwar designs (including several in Brighton) are now listed. However, as far as the writer is able to establish, none of his post-war buildings is listed. By this time his son John Bluet Denman (1914-2002) was increasingly involved in the practice, and may well have had a close involvement in the design of the Canterbury meeting house. While the building is not considered to hold the special architectural and historic interest required for statutory listing, it may merit inclusion in the City Council's local list.

The building sits on part of the site of the medieval Blackfriars, a scheduled ancient monument. According to the scheduling description (see part 6, below), the area to the east of the river where the meeting house is located was in medieval times largely orchards and gardens. Butler states that it was the friary burial ground. No up-to-date scheduling description is available but from the scheduling map (also reproduced below) it would appear that the meeting house itself is excluded, although the ground below may be included.

### 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

High. As well as being part of the site of the medieval Blackfriars, the site is within the Roman and Saxon town.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### **3.1. Condition**

i) Meeting House: Good

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable. There are some reset headstones, whose condition appears to be optimal/generally satisfactory.

### **3.2. Maintenance**

The meeting house is well maintained. The recommendations of the most recent QIR – repairs to the roof, external redecoration and repairs to woodwork - have been implemented. The Meeting considers it has sufficient resources to maintain the building.

### **3.3. Sustainability**

The Meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures taken to improve energy efficiency include the installation of double glazing and lagging of the attic. Waste is sorted and recycled where possible. The meeting house is well placed for local bus and train services. There is secure parking for bicycles, and parking space for up to eight cars.

### **3.4. Amenities**

The Meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs – these include three meeting rooms, modern kitchens and WCs. There is a warden's flat above.

### **3.5. Access**

There has been no access audit, although access has been reviewed informally. The building has step-free access and circulation, an accessible WC and a hearing loop. Signs are reasonably clear.

### **3.6 Community Use**

In addition to the six to seven hours a week in which the building is used by Friends, the three rooms are used for 50 to 70 hours a week out of a possible 135 by third parties (letting is not available on Sundays, in August and preferably not on Saturdays). There is a lettings policy. Users cite the good location, good price, and the personal contact with the Meeting.

### **3.7. Vulnerability to crime**

There have been instances of petty theft from the building. Otherwise, there are no reported instances of crime or antisocial behaviour. The area is considered to be well cared-for, with low levels of crime and social deprivation. Friends have developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### **3.8. Plans for change**

None.

## **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 is fit for purpose and has been updated to meet current requirements. It is a well-detailed design and future changes should respect its character, as previous changes have. Work involving ground disturbance (e.g. for drains or an addition) would have possible archaeological implications and would require scheduled monument consent.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building is already well used by the wider community, and similar considerations and constraints apply.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* The building is of local interest and in the event of being laid down would lend itself without difficulty to residential or perhaps office use. Site redevelopment would be more contentious, given the building's local interest, its location within the conservation area and, most important, its location within a scheduled ancient monument.

## **Part 5: Category: 3**

## **Part 6: Scheduling entries and map**

### *Online version*

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Name: Blackfriars

List entry Number: 1005491

This record has been generated from an "old county number" (OCN) scheduling record. These are monuments that were not reviewed under the Monuments Protection Programme and are some of our oldest designation records. As such they do not yet have the full descriptions of their modernised counterparts available. Please contact us if you would like further information.

National Grid Reference: TR 14812 58069, TR 14866 58041, TR 14869 58095

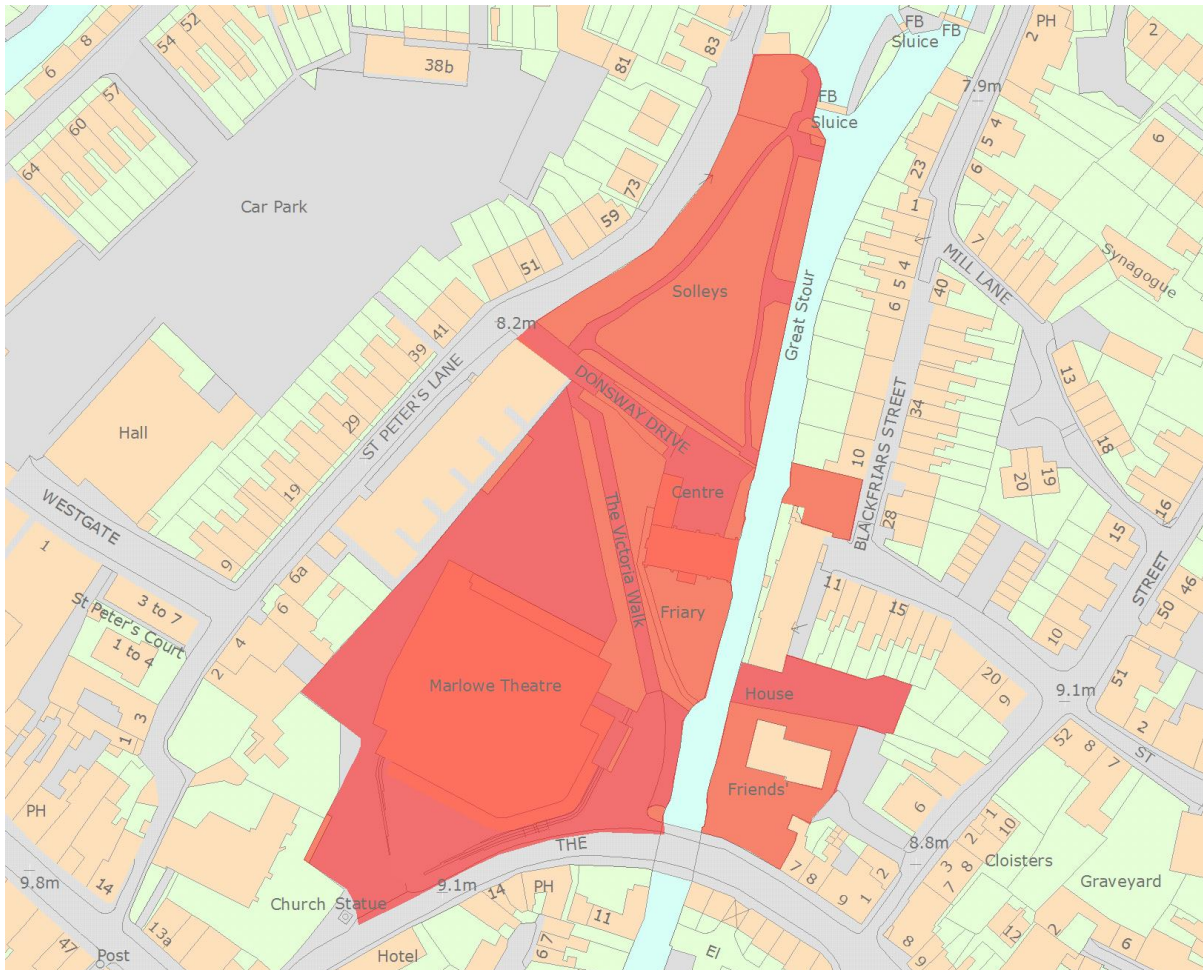
### *Typescript version (1978, supplied by Historic England)*

Open areas include Blackfriars precinct and archaeological areas of the Roman and Saxon town. W of the R Stour – Two garden areas on the site of the Blackfriars (c1236). The southern area lies over part of the nave and choir, and the smaller northern area over part of the main north range, probably the kitchen and east end of the dorter.

E of the R Stour – At the time of the Blackfriars largely orchards and gardens, but previously within the Roman and Saxon town. One surviving monastic building is included, now used by the Boy Scouts. The Guesthouse of the Blackfriars, it is in flint with stone dressings. Very much restored 1936/7, and all doors and windows are modern. The first floor is concrete (1949) but the supporting offset and corbels are medieval. At the west are the remains of an

original flue (incorporated in a modern furnace) with blocked medieval windows to either side.

### Map



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