

Friends Meeting House, Central Manchester

6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS

National Grid Reference: SJ 83780 97991



Statement of Significance

Manchester meeting house has high significance as a good example of an urban late Georgian meeting house in the region, designed by the leading Manchester architect of the day, to replace an earlier meeting house on the site. The interior has less heritage significance due to many phases of alteration, but is important as a popular venue for a wide range of community activities.

Evidential value

The sequence of changes in the interior illustrates alteration to accommodate Friends' changing needs. The burial ground has some archaeological potential and the site and building as a whole has high evidential value.

Historical value

The present meeting house replaced an earlier meeting house on this site and illustrates late Georgian style, reflecting the ambitions and resources of Manchester Friends in that era. The meeting house has important historical associations with leading members of Manchester society such as the architect Alfred Waterhouse, and represents a good example of an architecturally ambitious meeting house in a major regional centre. The meeting house, burial ground and boundary walls have high historic value.

Aesthetic value

The exterior has high significance as a very good example of the Greek Revival architectural style of the early nineteenth century which illustrates the architect's use of drawings of specific ancient Greek buildings to create a restrained but very impressive composition externally. The building and its precinct contribute to the character of the city centre. The altered interior has medium significance.

Communal value

The meeting house is a very popular centre for use by a wide variety of different groups and an important embodiment of Quaker presence in the city centre. The board outside the building (and the use of banners in the past) displays changing quotations and aphorisms which communicate aspects of Quaker values and are appreciated by a wide audience. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Manchester & Warrington*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0015830*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Manchester City Council*
- 1.5 Civil parish: *Manchester*
- 1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1291062*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *St Peter's Square*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Dates: *1828 – 31, altered 1860s, 1923 and 1962*
- 1.13 Architects: *Richard Lane; A. Waterhouse; Hunter, Cruickshank and Seward; Halliday and Agate*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *30 June 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Clare Hartwell*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Clare McCann*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Jackson's Row*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Allen, T., *Lancashire Illustrated from original drawings by S. Austin, J. Harwood J., & G. & C. Pyne (London 1832) p. 61-2*

Johnson, W., *A Plan of the meeting House and Grave Yard in Manchester 1833.*

Anon., *A Short History of the Mount Street Meeting House (June 2002).*

Butler, D. M. *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 318–323*

Hartwell C., *Manchester (Pevsner Architectural Guides 2001) p. 175-6*

Hartwell C. & Wyke, T., eds., *Making Manchester Aspects of the history of architecture in the city and region since 1800 (Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Society 2007) p.18-35*

AHP, 'The Friends' Meeting House Manchester Significance and Impact Assessment' September 2010.

Nick Clifford, *Local Meeting Survey, June 2015*

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

2.1. Historical background

The Manchester Society of Friends was formed in the 17th century. A meeting house was erected on Jackson's Row in Manchester in 1693, replaced by premises on Mount Street in 1795. By the 1820s it was decided to build larger premises on the site, for which money was raised by subscription. The architect Richard Lane was appointed and the contractors were David Bellhouse. Work started on demolishing the old building in 1828 and the new Meeting House was completed in 1831, though it had been in partial use for eighteen months by that time.

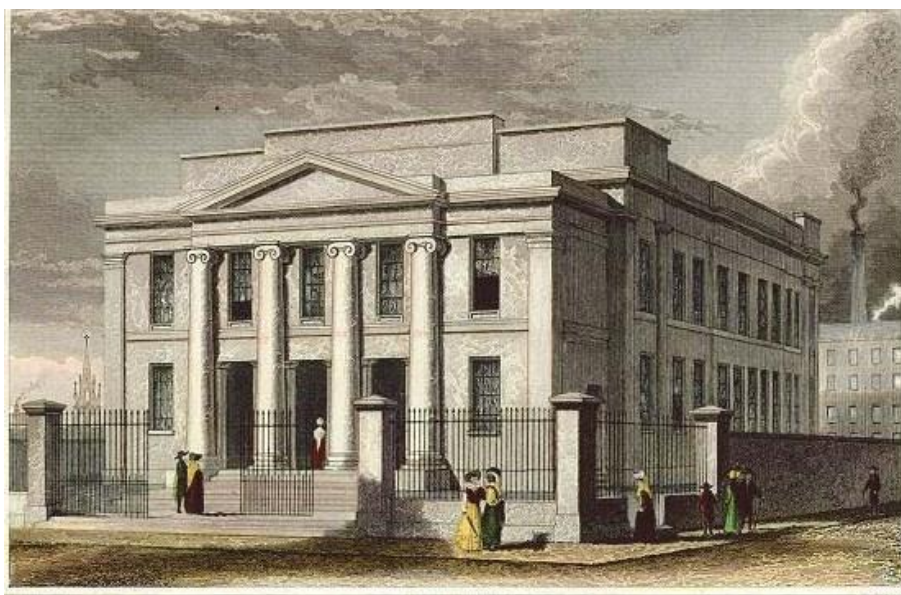


Figure 1. The Meeting House shortly after completion (Friends' collection)

The architect responsible for the design, Richard Lane (1795-1880), was Manchester's principal architect during the 1820s and 30s who built or remodelled some of the city's most important public and institutional buildings. His principal source for the design of the building was the measured drawings and illustrations which appeared in *The Antiquities of Athens* by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, published in four volumes 1762-1816. The building received notice and praise almost as soon as it had opened, for example in a book of engravings which was published in 1831 to highlight recent architecture and buildings in the region; *Lancashire Illustrated* (T. Allen 1832). The book described the meeting house saying: 'its simplicity is perfectly accordant with the unostentatious character of the Society for whose use it was erected.'

The building was altered in the 1860s, when Alfred Waterhouse, a member of the Manchester Friends, designed small-scale alteration, although it is not known exactly what was done. The work may have included the partial infilling of the original entrance to provide doorways, and the projecting addition to the basement on the south side for WCs. The first major phase of alterations took place in 1923 to designs by Hunter, Cruickshank & Seward. The women's meeting room was subdivided horizontally and vertically to create a central concourse, new staircase and a series of smaller rooms on both floors. A new small meeting room was provided on the north-east side of the ground floor. The work was undertaken to accommodate the Friends' Institute and the Friends' Byrom Street school. The original staircases and the vertically-sliding screen between the meeting rooms were removed, although the lifting mechanism for the latter was left in the roof space. Externally, some of the sash windows were widened and steel windows installed to provide more light. The basement was adapted and used for employment projects during the 1930s.



Figure 2. The main meeting room before alteration (Friends' Collection)

The main meeting room survived intact until 1962 when a second phase of alterations was carried out to the designs of Halliday & Agate of Manchester. The late Georgian meeting room interior was replaced by raised raked seating on the north and south sides of the space with a stage to the west. The floor was replaced in concrete with a parquet finish and the solid gallery fronts faced in vertically boarded timber. The void beneath the new galleries was

designed to provide additional headroom to basement rooms below, reducing the floor area of the meeting room. The 1920s work in the eastern part of the building was removed and a new arrangement of rooms and circulation was created, allowing rooms to be let commercially to provide an income stream to maintain the building. A new concrete staircase was inserted with direct access to a new fire exit on the north side. All the 1920s joinery was removed and replaced with plain flush doors and plain functional detailing typical of the 1960s. At basement level a series of meeting rooms and spaces for letting were created. The principal front elevation was unaltered, but exterior alteration included blocking ground-floor windows at the west end of the building, new basement windows on the north and south elevations and new roof glazing. The 1920s north doorway was blocked and a new fire exit door inserted to its right. The Bootle Street entrance to the basement was probably created during the 1960s.

More recently, in 1999 and 2012 the Bernard Taylor Partnership upgraded the concourse and small first floor rooms, with new moulded plaster cornices and panelled doors in architraves, modelled on an original door from the first floor. The frontage to Mount Street was remodelled in 2000, with new ramped access and the reinstatement of stone gate piers.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

Friends' meeting house built in 1828-31 to designs by Richard Lane. The principal entrance front is of ashlar and other elevations are of brick laid in Flemish bond with stone dressings. The rectangular plan building is aligned with the entrance facing east to the street, set within a walled precinct. The building is of two storeys over a basement and is designed in Greek Revival style. The main elevation is of five bays with giant end pilasters and a portico of attached giant Greek Ionic columns, a frieze with the words 'Friends' Meeting House' engraved upon it and a pediment. Windows are generally twelve-pane sash windows. The north side elevation is of ten bays with similar windows (some later steel windows and some blocked) and notional brick pilasters. There is a parapet and a stone sill band. An entrance to the basement is an insertion of 1960s date. The south elevation is similar with a small single-storey extension probably of late nineteenth century date and inserted entrances to the basement areas. The rear elevation is also of brick with giant end pilasters; the central three bays project slightly and the parapet is raised to give emphasis and movement to the façade. All the windows except those in the end bays of the upper storey are blind or blocked.

The interior has a wide entrance hall with doors leading off to rooms on each side, a result of remodelling of various different twentieth century dates. Ahead, hardwood doors lead to the main meeting room which has features relating to a remodelling in the 1960s by Halliday & Agate. Walls are lined with acoustic panelling and the ceiling is divided into a pattern of square translucent panels beneath roof lights. Stairs lead up on each side to galleries with raked seating. A stage has a lower sliding section to increase its depth and the stage recess is backed with an angled screen of veneered panels; finishes are generally in the type of hardwoods popular at the time, including a wood block floor. Rooms in the upper floor are broadly similar to those of the foyer below, largely with modern finishes. In the basement area there have been successive alterations and subdivisions of the space keeping the original arched spine wall and some of the original vaulted ceilings. In the roof space the original roof construction of Baltic pine is largely intact; the pulleys and chains attached to the timbers are the remains of a system which allowed the original early nineteenth century smaller and

larger meeting rooms to be divided by means of a partition which could be moved by raising vertically.



Figure 3. Part of the mechanism for raising the screen between the meeting rooms

2.3 Loose furnishings

Furnishings are largely of twentieth century date.

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground retains a few headstones which have been laid flat in order to facilitate maintenance. The brick walls of the precinct are marked with Roman numerals to facilitate identifying the grave locations.

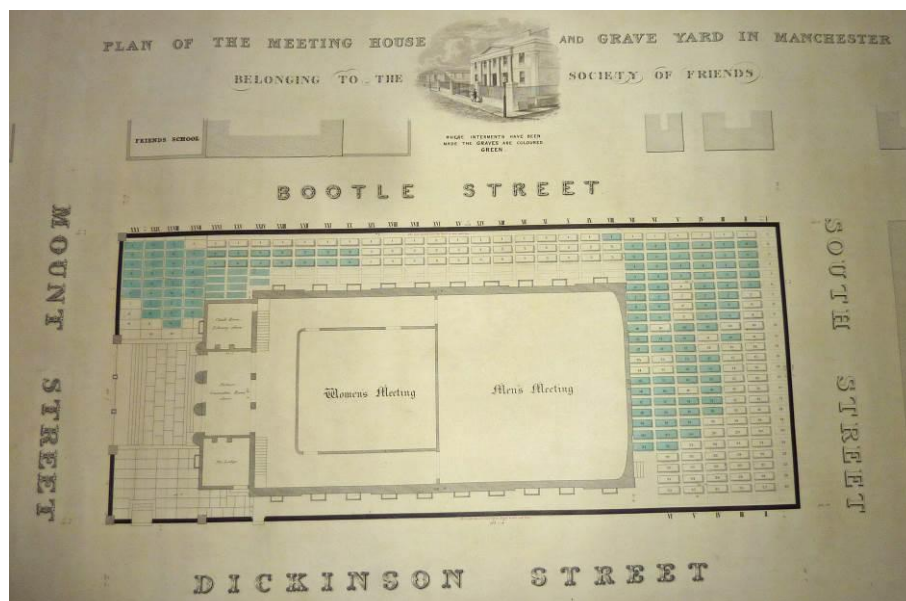


Figure 4. A plan dated 1833 showing the meeting house and burial plots (Friends' collection)

The area to the rear of the building has been cleared to provide car parking. At the front there is a small area of grass and some trees of different ages which do not seem to form part of a design for the layout, but create a pleasant green setting. No trees or planting are shown on the 1833 plan.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is situated on an island site in Manchester city centre close to the civic ensemble formed by the Town Hall, Town Hall Extension and Central Library. These and other buildings in the immediate area are all of later date than the building and dominate in terms of scale. Historically the meeting house formed part of an ensemble of fine Georgian buildings around St Peter's Square. The building retains strong presence within the street scene and makes a very important contribution to the conservation area, adding to the diversity of building types and date ranges in the area. The previous meeting house site on Jackson's Row has been destroyed and all the interments removed to Sale meeting burial ground (q.v.).

The front boundary wall is ashlar surmounted by replacement steel railings to Mount Street; these walls return along the sides of the forecourt, with stone piers. From this point they continue around the site in brick laid in Flemish bond with stone copings. On the south side the wall incorporates a stone panel with the date 1828.



Figure 5. Stone panel in the precinct wall

Towards the rear of the site, the wall has been altered to form a car park entrance on the corner of Central Street and Southmill Street but is otherwise largely intact. The inner sides of the walls incorporate small headstones with Roman numerals to identify burial plots. The wall and piers form an important element in the setting of the listed building and date from the construction of the original building.

2.6. Listed status

The building is listed grade II. Although much original interior detail has been lost, the building as a whole has strong architectural and historic interest; the existing listed building description would benefit from amendment to reflect this and to give more detail. The boundary walls and gate piers have suffered some alteration but they have integrity and retain many original features. They are part of the original design, with the potential for being separately listed grade II.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The Historic Environment Record does not record any items or find spots earlier than the present building on the site, but it is known that there was a meeting house here in the 1790s. The site was open fields in the eighteenth century and is unlikely to retain earlier evidence of archaeological significance.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. A QI was carried out in 2014 by BTP architects and a work schedule was prepared. Repairs to the roof and to the boundary walls will be carried out during 2015.

ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory but with minor localised problems. The burial ground has been altered in order to provide car parking and it is generally maintained as hard landscaping. There are some trees which are not part of a designed scheme but they contribute to the streetscene; they may need to be assessed and potentially controlled so that they do not undermine the boundary wall.

3.2. Maintenance

The condition of the building is monitored by staff on the premises.

3.3. Sustainability

All the properties of the Area Meeting were subject to an Energy Assessment Report by Purple Consulting Engineers in 2012, which supplies the basis for understanding and improving energy efficiency. The Sustainability Toolkit is not used, but the following measures are in place:

- Energy-efficient boiler installed
- Secondary glazing has been fitted to most windows
- Lighting control system introduced
- Recycling is undertaken and recycled materials used
- Surplus food is given to a city-centre project

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has very good facilities with modern WCs, kitchen and numerous meeting rooms of varying size.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is fully accessible, with a ramp up to the main entrance, level access inside and a lift, WCs suitable for disabled people and a hearing loop. Measures to assist the partially sighted are being trialled. The meeting house occupies a city centre location readily accessible by bus and tram services, with links to railway stations. There is parking on site and secure parking for bicycles.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting house offers a wide range of facilities and is used by other groups for around 100 hours per week. The venue is popular because it offers rooms in the city centre at a competitive price, with good supporting facilities. There is a standard lettings policy which provides for decisions on use by groups which may be in conflict with Quaker principles on a case by case basis.

3.7. Vulnerability to Crime

Crime is not considered to be a serious problem, and a spate of recent break-ins was successfully dealt with.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no immediate plans for change. A scheme for subdividing the main meeting room was drawn up in 2010 by the Bernard Taylor Partnership, providing a basis for extending the amount of accommodation offered should this be desired in the future.

Part 4: Impact of Change

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

i) As a meeting house only: There is scope for change if required, but the needs of the meeting seem to be met by the current arrangements.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local meeting use: There is a very high take-up of available lettings and exploration of possibilities for increasing the space has been undertaken, though no definite course of action has been decided upon.

iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a meeting house and passing into secular use: The building would theoretically lend itself to an alternative use, such as office premises, however there would be challenges in protecting the historic character of the building. The meeting house is amongst the largest and most architecturally distinguished in the region and discontinuance of use by Quakers would be regrettable.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List Description

Listed building Entry

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1291062

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, MOUNT STREET, MANCHESTER

Grade: II

Date first listed: 18-Dec-1963

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

SJ8397NE MOUNT STREET (West side) 698-1/31/243 18/12/63 Friends' Meeting House

GV II

Meeting House of Society of Friends. 1828-30, by Richard Lane. Brick carcase with sandstone ashlar facade, slate roof. Rectangular plan set back and at right-angles to street. Classical style. Two-storey 5-bay facade, symmetrical, with plinth, corner pilasters, frieze, cornice and blocking course, and central parapet; engaged 3-bay pedimented Ionic portico with frieze inscribed "FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE", central doorway with C20 glazed double doors and overlight with margin panes flanked by large 2-light windows also with overlights (flights of 3 and 4 steps to centre and flanking bays respectively); 12-pane sashed windows at 1st floor and on both floors of the outer bays. Interior not inspected.

Listing NGR: SJ8378097991