

Friends Meeting House, Evesham

28 Cowl Street, Evesham, Worcestershire, WR11 4PL

National Grid Reference: SP 03856 43838



Statement of Significance

The origins of the meeting house go back to 1698 but that building was largely rebuilt in brick in 1870. Furnishings and fittings in the meeting room include wall-benches, the remains of an unusually long stand, and nineteenth-century cast-iron pillars. It is of medium heritage significance.

Evidential value

The fabric of the building has the potential to provide further details on the history of its development and particularly its reconstruction in 1870. There may well be surviving fabric of 1698 but further investigation is required to establish its extent. The attached burial ground dates back to at least 1721. The meeting house and the burial ground have high evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is the successor to the first purpose-built meeting house in Evesham. The meeting room retains some of the original furnishings, including the remnants of the stand. The building has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building has been altered over time, most extensively during 1870. Most traces of the external alterations have been hidden under the roughcast

render. The exterior of the meeting house is relatively plain, in keeping with Quaker tenets. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been in Quaker use since the late seventeenth century, with additional community use since the twentieth century. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Banbury and Evesham*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0012260*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wychavon District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Evesham*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Evesham*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1698; 1870 (largely rebuilt); 1982-3 (extension)*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *21 January 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Rory Duff, Paul Mobbs, Paul (warden), Ruth*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Warden's cottage (28 Cowl Street), 29 Cowl Street*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Brooks, A. and N. Pevsner, *Worcestershire (Buildings of England)*, 2007, p. 295

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 695-6

Matthews, G., 'A history of Quakers in Evesham', <http://www.evesham-quakers.org.uk/History.html>

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in Central England*, 1986, p. 249

Wood, J.V., *Some rural Quakers. A history of Quakers and Quakerism at the corners of the four shires of Oxford, Warwick, Worcester and Gloucester*, 1991

Historic England Archive, Red Box Collection, photos of 1971

Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER), WSM22594

Information panels in the meeting house

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1655, meetings were held at the house of Edward Pitway. In 1675, a burial ground was acquired for £5 behind his house on Waterside at Bengeworth (sold in 1838, now within the gardens of Northwick Arms Hotel). In 1676, the present site was acquired for £52 (on a 2,000-year lease), comprising two houses, a cherry orchard and a garden. The orchard was used as burial ground (according to Wood only from 1721). One house was divided into two dwellings (possibly on the site of the present warden's house). A temporary meeting house was built, which survived for some time after the construction of a permanent building in 1698; Butler's date of 1688 appears to be a typographical error.

In 1870, extensive repairs were carried out to the 1698 building, which seem to have amounted to a complete rebuild. The trust property book of 1872 reports the meeting house was 'rebuilt [in] 1870'; other sources record repairs for £198. The timber-framed walls were rebuilt in brick, iron pillars were inserted to support the roof, and an oak partition was removed. In 1892-4, further alterations took place to accommodate mission work. In 1982-3, a stove and some benches were removed from the meeting room and the toilets and kitchen were replaced (in an existing extension of c.1870). The front bench and panel of the stand were removed at the same time. In 2008, a major refurbishment took place.

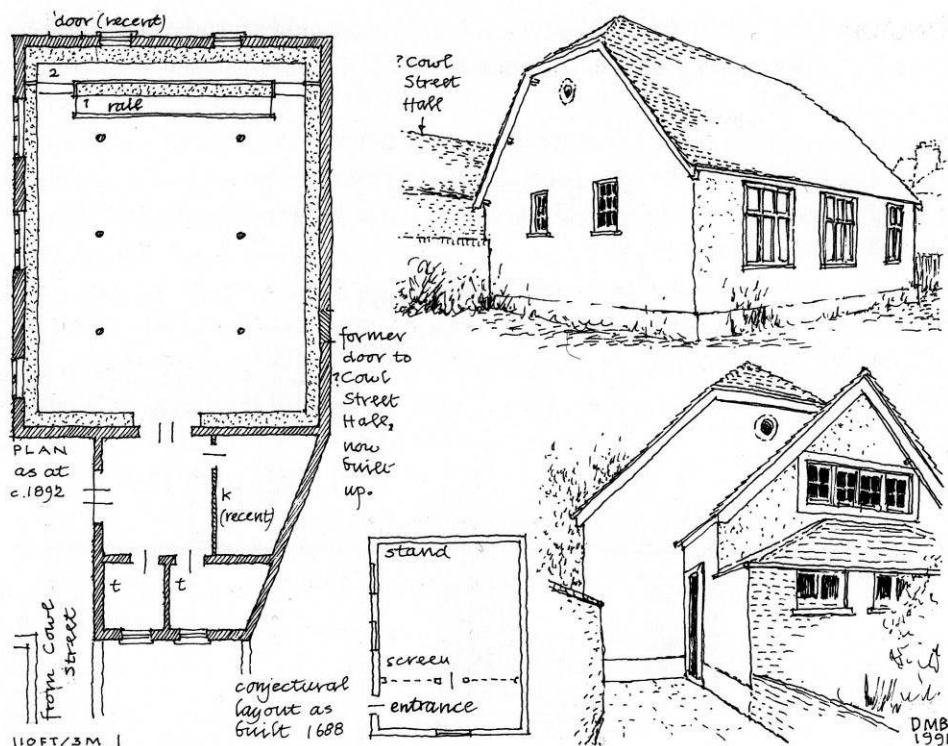


Figure 1: Plan as at c.1892 (left; southwest is to the left), conjectural plan as built (bottom centre) and two perspectives (Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 696)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house may incorporate fabric of 1698 but appears to be mostly a rebuilding of 1870. The walls are of brick with roughcast render and the half-hipped roof is tiled. The

meeting house was built with a northwest-southeast orientation; the entrance elevation faces southwest. The building comprises an oblong meeting room under the main roof, as well as an extension of c.1870 with a canted northeast wall under a gable roof (housing the lobby and the kitchen) and a lower hipped roof to the toilets. The main meeting room has circular ventilation grilles to the gables, three cross windows to the southwest, and two sash windows to the northwest. (All windows have internal secondary glazing.) The extension has a window band to the gable, as well as small toilet windows. The entrance door is modern. The northeast elevation fronting a side lane is blank with a former door opening blocked up (figure 1).

The meeting room has three large ceiling beams supported on six slender cast-iron pillars of quatrefoil sections. These were apparently introduced when the originally thatched roof was replaced with tiles. The meeting room has fitted wall-benches with sloping backboards along all four walls (figure 2). Above the backboards and in the west corner are reused pieces of oak panelling with graffiti, said to date from the earlier meeting room's use as a school in around 1713 (figure 2). Wood reports that various dates from 1698 and 1712 are among the graffiti but they are no longer legible. Of the unusually wide stand only the rear bench and front panel remains, with a later desk for the clerk at the centre. (The front bench (see figure 1) was removed in the early 1980s.) A fire exit door has been inserted near the west corner of the room. The floor is of woodblock in the meeting room and the lobby.

2.3. Loose furnishings

Around the sides of the room are six open-backed benches with turned legs and armrest supports (figure 2). There is also an oval gate-leg table with turned legs, as well as a German-made upright piano by Baum of Eisenberg, Thüringen.



Figure 2: Loose benches, wall-bench and re-used panelling (far right) in the meeting room

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The site was acquired in 1676 but burials may only have been taken place here from 1721. An additional piece of land was acquired in 1731. The burial ground (now peace garden) is no longer used, except for the scattering of ashes. Burial records are held in the meeting house, including a burial plan which records 93 burials between 1799 and 1908 (figure 3). There are about 25 gravestones (all laid flat apart from one which is propped against a boundary wall);

they date (where legible) from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. There is also a 2004 memorial plaque (laid flat like a gravestone). The burial ground is now maintained as a peace garden under a formal maintenance plan. In the last few years a boundary wall has been rebuilt.

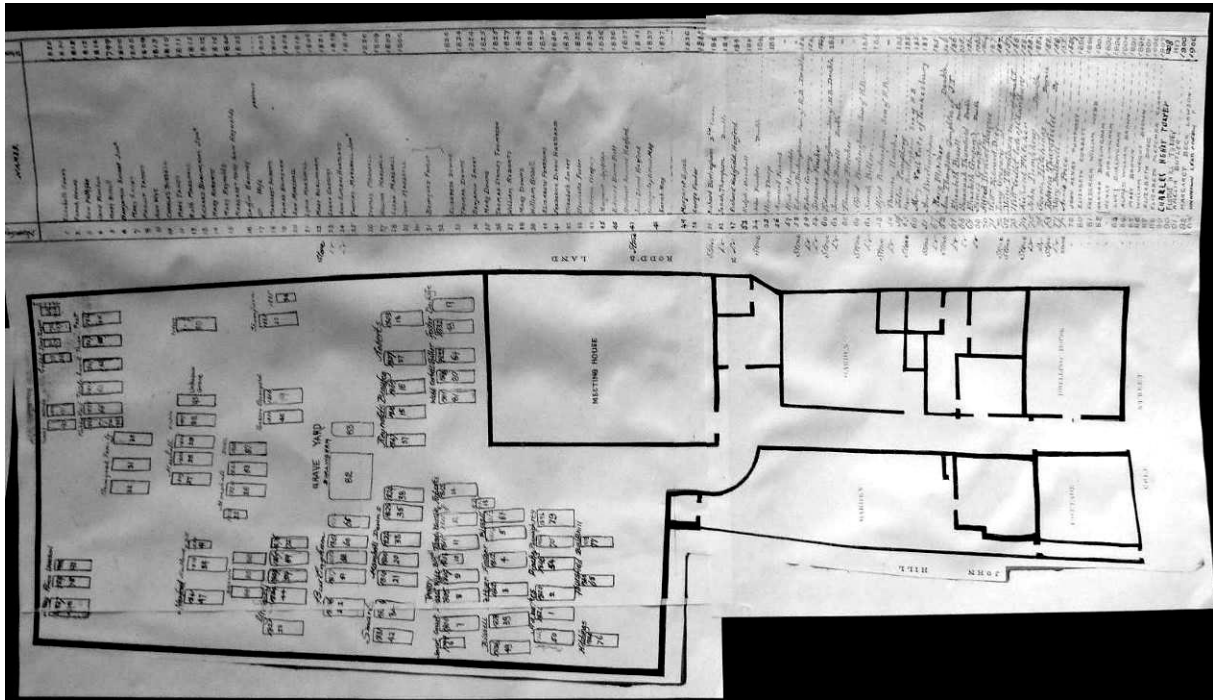


Figure 3: Copy of an historic burial plan in the children’s room at the meeting house

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located close to the centre of Evesham; Cowl Street is parallel to the High Street. It is situated behind 28 Cowl Street (the warden’s house) and is accessed via a shared passage (photo bottom left on page 1). The warden’s house is a three-storey house of the early nineteenth century with two gables to the street. According to Butler, it was largely rebuilt in 1874, while Wood describes the 1874 works as improvements. Its front elevation is said to be of stuccoed timber-framing. A children’s room (with a fine Gothic-style cast-iron grate) used by the meeting is located above the passage from the street, i.e. within the warden’s house. Number 29 Cowl Street, a brick cottage, was acquired in 1828; this is now rented out. The conservation area appraisal has identified 28 and 29 Cowl Street and the meeting house as ‘unlisted buildings of local interest’ and the burial ground (peace garden) as an ‘important boundary feature’.

Along the north side of the meeting house plot is an access road for an Iceland store. On the other side of the access road is a derelict brick hall (not in Quaker ownership). Wood has tentatively identified this as the ‘Cowl Street Hall’ built for Quaker mission work by William W. Brown in memory of his son Alfred W. Brown. A former Quaker burial ground (no longer in Quaker ownership) is now the site of the gardens of the Northwick Arms Hotel (NGR: SP 04034 43551).

2.6. Listed status

While it may incorporate seventeenth-century fabric, the meeting house mostly dates from 1870. It is not considered to be eligible for statutory listing but would be suitable for inclusion in a local list, should Wychavon District Council establish one.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

There were two houses on part of the site when it was acquired in 1676. The relevant entry in the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record reports the (undated) discovery of a seventeenth-century or c.1700 brick cellar with Gothic vaulted ceiling behind the present warden's house. This, the presence of the burial ground and the possibility that the 1870 building may incorporate earlier fabric lend the site high archaeological significance.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Fair. There are damp problems at the far end of the meeting room and a few roof tiles have slipped or are missing. At the time of the visit, there was condensation between the windows and the secondary glazing.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory

3.2. Maintenance

The most recent quinquennial inspection took place in July 2012 (Philip J. Cooper Ltd, chartered surveyor). It found the meeting house in generally good condition. Since then, a number of works have been carried out including the replacement of a beam and the refurbishment of the ladies' toilet. There is a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: roof insulation, secondary glazing in meeting house, double glazing in warden's cottage
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: renewable energy
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: new kitchen in meeting house, new kitchen and bathroom in warden's house
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: wildlife-friendly garden
- Transport: use of public transport where possible

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

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is a resident warden, who lives at 28 Cowl Street. The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is no parking on site but a public car park is nearby. There is secure parking for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building, an accessible toilet, and a hearing loop. There are no facilities for partially-sighted people. No Disability Access Audit has been conducted.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 4 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 80 hours per week. It is used for an

average of 12 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy but no specific criteria to include/exclude groups as this is at the discretion of the premises committee. Free use may be permitted for charitable purposes. Users value the building for its central location with nearby parking and public transport links.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. Past incidents include a break-in when fire extinguishers were damaged. Two years ago, a small amount of lead was stolen from the toilet block roof. All crimes have been reported to the police. The locality is generally medium well-cared for, has low crime levels, average (for a town centre) deprivation and high community confidence. Friends have developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

There are currently no plans for alterations to the meeting house.

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 local meeting considers that it has all the facilities it needs. The building is of local significance and its location in a conservation area would need to be taken into account, especially for any future extensions.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The building could sustain a higher level of community use. It does not appear that the present relatively low level of use is due to lack of facilities. Should community use increase and require alterations, these could probably be accommodated if designed in a sympathetic manner.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: Should the meeting be laid down, a sympathetic new use would need to be found for the building. Redevelopment of the site would not normally be acceptable due to the conservation area designation. Any new use would need to be agreed with the new owner of 28 Cowl Street as the meeting house can only be accessed through the passage.

Part 5: Category: 3