

Friends Meeting House, Exeter

Wynards Lane, off Magdalen Street, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4HU

National Grid Reference: SX 92384 92353



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a Gothic Revival building of 1876 by Edward Appleton, of an unusual apsed design for a Quaker meeting house. It was built on the site of an earlier meeting house, and the attached burial ground with a fine yew walk was first used in 1691. Both are of medium overall significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house retains many original and historic features which provide evidence for the patterns of use of the building. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is the second on the site (built after a period at a meeting house elsewhere in Exeter) and the burials in the attached burial ground go back to 1691, shortly after the site was first acquired. Several local Quakers of note are buried here. The building and site have high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building was designed in the Gothic Revival style and built using high quality local stone. Although the extension of 1992 was sympathetically designed, some alterations such as the UPVC windows and the solar panels on the roof somewhat detract from the overall appearance of the building. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is well used, both as a Quaker place of worship and by local community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Devon*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000330*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Exeter City Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*

1.6 Civil parish: *Exeter NPA*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Southernhay & the Friars*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1876*

1.13 Architect(s): *Edward Appleton*

1.14 Date of visit: *11 May 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Chris Dent*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 135-7

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991, pp. 82-3

Thomasson, W.J.M., *Friends of East Devon and their Meetings 1654-1928*, 1928
Exeter City Council, 'Quakers' Meeting House, Wynard's Lane, Magdalen Street',
<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archsearch/record.jsf?titleId=1817317>
'The Friends' Meeting House in Exeter', leaflet
Local Meeting survey by Richard Oliver, March 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

John Audland and Thomas Ayrey were the first Quakers to visit Exeter in 1654. By 1656, a meeting appears to have been established and George Fox attended in September 1656 a meeting in the local prison where many local Quakers were being held at the time. Before 1690, they hired rooms, including in the Seven Stars Inn, and a private house. In 1690, the present site in Wynard's Lane off Magdalen Street was purchased for £77 3s 0d and a meeting house built there which opened in 1692. Prior to 1788 this building was either rebuilt or extended to the west to include a staircase, which suggests the construction of a gallery. It was again repaired and extended in 1806 for £690. But structural problems persisted and by 1830 it was decided to build on a new site. The old meeting house was sold and later demolished (in 1836 (Butler) or 1852 (plaque in burial ground)), while the burial ground was retained. In 1835, a new site in Friars' Walk was bought where a large meeting house to seat 700 was constructed for about £2,980. However, it was soon found to be far too large and expensive to run and it was sold in 1868 or 1869 for £1,000. (Initially used as a Temperance Hall, it was sold in 1882 to the Salvation Army who extended it in 1890. It is still used as a Salvation Army Temple.)

For a few years, Friends hired rooms in Exeter. In 1875, Francis Williams Dymond bought for £600 the original site, demolished the five houses which had been built in the meantime, and conveyed it to Friends for £300. The current meeting house was built on the site for £1,626. The architect was Edward Appleton (1832-1916) who had also built a meeting house at Torquay (*qv*) in 1853. The first Meeting for Worship was held on 17 December 1876. The following year, a small piece of additional land to the east was bought. The building sustained war damage in 1942. In 1967, the porch was rebuilt and internal alterations were made for £2,000. In 1979, the meeting house suffered some fire damage due to arson. In 1992, the porch was replaced by a larger extension which provided first-floor classrooms. The architects were the Percy Thomas Partnership and the cost was £157,000. In 2012, integrated photo voltaic panels were installed, sitting flush with the roof.

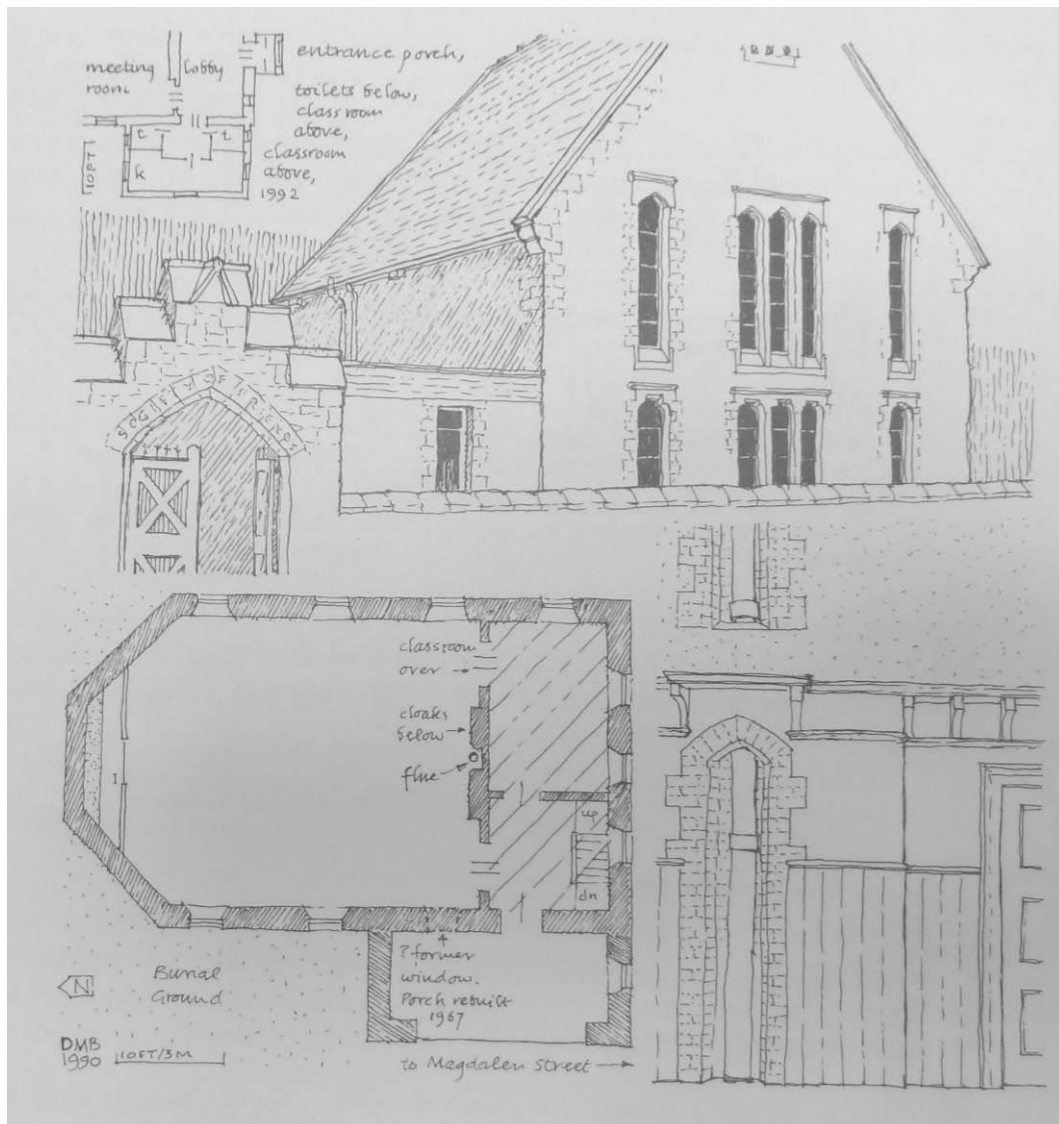


Figure 1: Partial ground plan above (post-1992), full ground floor plan below (pre-1992), perspective and details, including the former gate which now part of the porch (north is to the left on the plan; not to scale) (Butler, vol. 1, p. 137)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The entrance elevation faces south. The meeting house has a short L-plan, with the canted apse of the meeting room to the north and the 1992 extension to the west. The materials are random squared stone with limestone dressings. The gabled roofs are covered with slate and there is a slim stone stack roughly at the centre of the main ridge. Both gables have small stone fleurs-de-lis at the apex and stone kneelers. The three-bay gabled south elevation has a projecting stepped porch with the inscription 'Society of Friends'. According to Butler's drawing (figure 1), this was formerly a gate in the boundary wall which was incorporated into the new south porch in 1992 when the former west porch was replaced by a new extension. The south elevation was previously symmetrical with windows over two levels to the pattern 1-3-1. On either side of the porch are single-light windows with shouldered arches under horizontal drip moulds. The first-floor windows by contrast are pointed, with the three lights in the centre under a relieving arch of stone. The gable has three stepped ventilation openings. The south elevation of the west extension has two shoulder-arched windows matching those on the main south elevation. The west elevation of the extension has three vertically aligned windows, of which the top one has a pointed arch. The north elevation of

the extension has a much plainer window beside a door. The west elevation of the main meeting room has two windows with pointed arches and pointed hoodmoulds. The east elevation has three similar windows to the meeting room and in the south bay a short pointed window above a shoulder-arched one.

The main entrance leads into a lobby which in turn leads to the meeting room to the north, and to toilets and a kitchen in the west extension. The five-bay, full-height meeting room has a fine panelled and patterned ceiling with iron tie-bars. The dado is of vertical panelling. Between the two doors at the south is a heating pipe in a brick recess (photo bottom left on page 1), an odd feature, which is presumably part of the original heating system. Above the doors is a cornice or shelf on large brackets; another such shelf in front of the pipe has a large mantel clock. The southwest stair in the lobby has cast-iron balusters to the lower flight of steps and chamfered newels with ball finials. On the first floor is a children's room in the extension, which is lit by four rooflights, with a toilet and a sink. Above the lobby is a classroom with a pierced cornice and a blocked fireplace placed off-centre in the stack. The small basement with brick and stone walls and a brick floor is now largely used for storage.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting room has seven benches whose ends are a variation of the inverted-Y type. There is also a chair in the upstairs classroom inscribed with the date 19 May 1618. This has associations with George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, and will shortly be transferred to Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria.

2.4 Attached burial ground

The burial ground is no longer in use for burials. It has been in use from 1691 until 1907. It was not part of the mid-nineteenth-century sale of the meeting house. According to Thomasson, the gravestones had been removed from their original positions by 1928 and the ground levelled. In total, there were 146 recorded burials as well as three family vaults. Today there are about 60 gravestones, set in two rows on each side of a central yew tree walk and one row on the inside of the southern line of yew trees. (The line of yew trees was aligned with the first meeting house on the site.) Some of the gravestones date from the eighteenth century but most are from the nineteenth. The containing wall to the west of the meeting house has a stone plaque with the history of the site and a large ledger stone recording the death of Thomas Sanders (1763), his wife and daughter, who are buried in a family vault on the site. Not all of the gravestones are of the standard Quaker shape: many have elaborately shaped tops; others are extra wide to accommodate inscriptions commemorating whole families. Notable burials include those of the moralist and peace advocate Jonathan Dymond (1796-1828) and Joseph Sparkes (1776-1836), a partner in the General Bank which was a precursor of today's Lloyds Bank. (Sparkes was probably related to his namesake, the architect Joseph Sparkes (1817-55), who is credited with the design of the Darlington Meeting House (*qv*.) There is no step-free access to the burial ground as this is at a higher level than the meeting house and the access path.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house site is accessed from Magdalen Street via a narrow lane. It is located in an area of several historic hospitals (the former Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital is just to the west). To the rear (north) is a large new Premier Inn, whose height and massing are out of scale in relation to the small meeting house. To the southwest of the meeting house are the almshouses of Wynard's Hospital; on the other side of Magdalen Street is a Dissenter's graveyard (used from 1748 to 1854), which is currently being restored, and a Jewish burial ground (leased in 1757). The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the local conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed. It is an unusual example of a Victorian meeting house. Few meeting houses used the Gothic style or had canted apses, as this was too closely associated with church architecture. A canted apse also would not have suited the full-width minister's and elder's stand which was generally placed at the far end of a meeting room. (The details of the original stand at Exeter are unknown.) However, the design of the Exeter meeting house was not due to lack of knowledge about Quakers as Edward Appleton had previously built a Quaker meeting house in Torquay. In conclusion, the Exeter Meeting House is not considered to be a candidate for listing. It would, however, be a strong candidate for a local list, should Exeter City Council decide to establish one.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site of the meeting house and the burial ground is located in an Area of Archaeological Importance. Burials on the site go back to 1691 and a first meeting house was built in 1692. The site has high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal

3.2 Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection took place in February 2015 and was undertaken by John Murrin of Drew Pearce, chartered surveyors. He found the building generally in good condition although there is a long-standing damp problem in the cellar. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building. The quinquennial inspection report is used as a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: installation of solar panels
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: attempts to maximise recycling
- Transport: encouragement of walking, cycling or public transport where possible

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden. The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is parking for about ten cars on site as well as secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

Only the ground floor is accessible to people with disabilities. There is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop but no specific facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in about 2005 and most of the recommended changes have been implemented.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 6-8 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 220 hours per week. It is used for an average of 70 hours per week but can be much busier in college term-time. The meeting has a lettings policy. The building is not let to political parties. Rates differ according to whether the hirer is a commercial user or not. Free use is granted to groups in need and in accord with Quaker values. Users appreciate the ambience and relatively quiet location.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There has been no heritage crime, general crime or other incidents. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is currently no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but the meeting might consider making contact if necessary.

3.8 Plans for change

The local meeting is currently considering ways of tanking the cellar to reduce the damp problem.

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: Following the extension of 1992, the meeting house has all the amenities it needs. This should obviate any extension or major alteration in the medium term.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is well-used at present and the lack of level access to the upper rooms does not present a major obstacle to wider use.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the unlikely event of closure, a sympathetic conversion to a new use (for example a community use) would be preferable to demolition.

Part 5: Category: 3