

Friends Meeting House, Leek

Overton Bank, Leek, ST13 5ES

National Grid Reference: SJ 98200 56563



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was purpose-built in 1697 and has high heritage value, as an attractive building extended in the eighteenth century and set within a historic former burial ground. The building has associations with one of William Morris's students, Walter Crane a prolific children's illustrator and active in the Arts and Crafts movement.

Evidential value

The building and site have medium evidential values primarily associated with the potential to yield information from the fabric about the buildings past use and construction.

Historical value

The meeting house has high historical value. The meeting house purpose-built in 1697 has associations with early Quakerism in the Staffordshire Moorlands. The building was used as a William Morris Labour Church for a number of years until the early twentieth century and has connections with one of Morris's students Walter Crane, who painted murals in the meeting house. Crane is known for his children's illustrations along with being a founding member of the Art Workers Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.

Aesthetic value

The building is a good example of vernacular architecture and with its burial ground it makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. The meeting house interior retains some historic panelling and joinery and overall it is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has variously been a Quaker meeting house and a William Morris Labour Church before returning to a place for Quaker worship. Today the building is used by local community groups as well as a place for worship. The meeting house has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Staffordshire*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0017220*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Staffordshire Moorlands District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Leek*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1268552*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Leek*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1694; 1794*

1.13 Architect (s): *Not established; not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *24 November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Peter Kent-Baguley and Linda Skellam*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp.558-559.

Dennis, S., *The Early Quaker Movement in Staffordshire 1651 – 1743: From open fellowship to closed sect.* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2001.

Kent-Baguley, P., *Local Meeting Survey*, September 2015.

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

2.1. Historical background

Quakerism had early beginnings in the Staffordshire Moorlands; owing to its isolated location Quakers could meet safely in each other's homes during the seventeenth century. By 1693, a group of Quakers from the Moorlands obtained land and in 1697 the present meeting house was built. The building was rectangular in plan with two entrances one to the north and the west (now infilled).

In 1715, the furniture of the meeting house was apparently burnt during the Jacobite rising and during the Jacobite rising in 1745 soldiers cleared the contents of the building and used the meeting house as a stable. Between 1750 and 1780 the meeting house was used as a school. In 1794 the building was extended to the east by one bay and a forward wing added to accommodate a new porch, staircase, larger loft and the elders stand was installed at this time.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century a decline in membership resulted in the meeting house closing. It opened on occasions between 1850 and 1895, then closed again. The building was subsequently taken over by the William Morris Labour Church, who undertook a number of repairs and redecoration. Walter Crane a student of William Morris decorated the internal walls with decorative panels. It remained in use by the William Morris Labour Church until 1932 when it was passed to the Friends for a place of worship, and redecorated to return the building to a state of simplicity.

In 1964, the gallery and room underneath were converted to provide hostel facilities. By 1998, this space had ceased use as hostel accommodation and now provides an additional meeting room.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

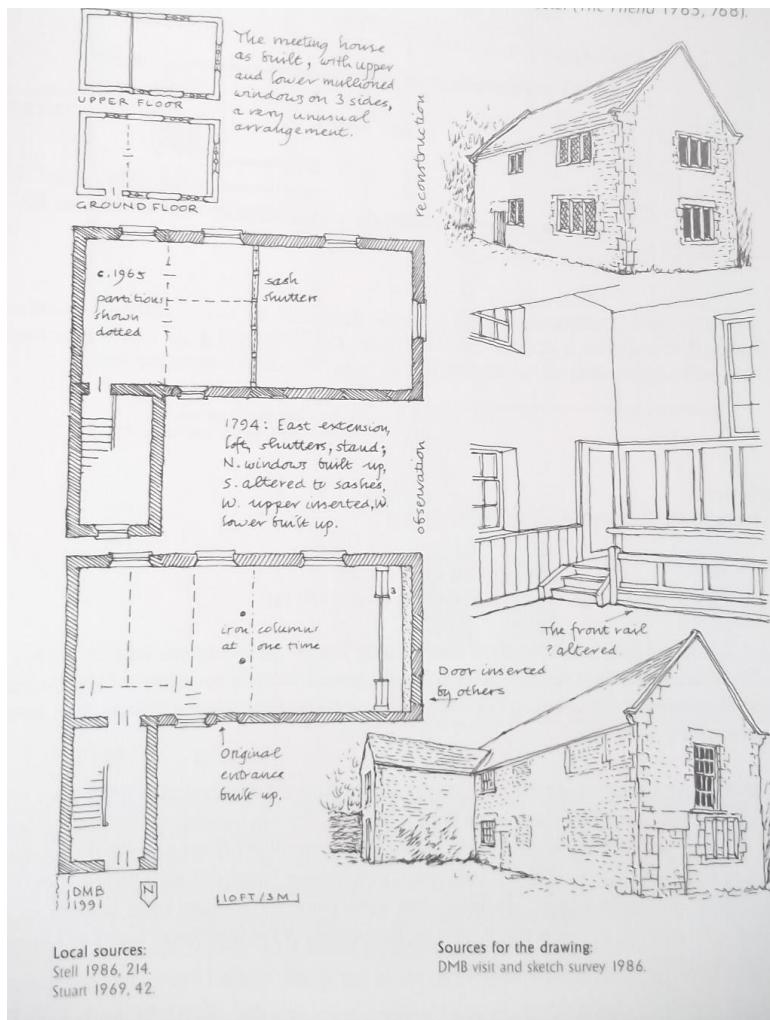


Figure 1: Ground floor plan as reconstructed by Butler
(north is at the bottom: not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. II, p.559)

The meeting house was built in 1695 and extended in 1794. The building is constructed of roughly coursed and squared stone, with a plain-tiled roof and coped gables and string course. The L-plan building has a projecting wing to the north-east containing the entrance with timber panelled door, and 16-pane sliding sash window above. The north elevation of the meeting room has a 12 pane sliding sash window with an 8-pane sliding sash above, the rest of the elevation to the main body of the meeting house has an infilled doorway and infilled windows (two at ground and first). The gable to the west has another infilled doorway and a 3-light mullioned window also infilled, above is a 16-pane sliding sash window. The south elevation has three 18-pane windows with three 12-pane windows above.

Internally, a passage way in the forward wing, with stone flags and tongue and groove panelling to the walls, leads to the meeting room, and a stone staircase provides access to the additional meeting room (former gallery) above and ancillary facilities. Remnants of the Walter Crane murals can be still seen in the passage (Fig.2).



Figure 2: Remnants of Walter Crane's murals

The meeting room has tongue and groove panelling to the north and south walls, with a raised elders' stand to the west with fielded panelling. The east end of the meeting room has a former gallery with panelled front and the upper section of panelling opens by a vertical sliding mechanism. The room is lit by natural light from the west and south with pendant lighting.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The main meeting room is furnished with modern furnishings but also includes historic benches which have been obtained from various former meeting houses.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is to the west of the meeting house. Butler (1999) notes that there were approximately 240 burials recorded by 1837. The date range of the burials is between 1697 and 1950. The burial ground is no longer used for burials and records of the burials can be located at the Staffordshire Records Office. In line with early Quaker practices the burials do not have gravestones.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The market town of Leek is located 10 miles north east of Stoke-on-Trent. The meeting house is located in a central location in Overton Bank, which falls within the boundaries of Leek Conservation Area. There are a number of buildings along Overton Bank which are listed at grade II including the Georgian Swan Hotel, Overton Bank House, 2 and 1 Overton Bank and a modest row of eighteenth century cottages which were built to accommodate poor Quaker families. The meeting house has a corner location on Salisbury Street and Overton Bank,

which is raised fronting Church Street and bounded by the grade II listed wall, with access to the meeting house via a timber planked door. The outer boundary wall is constructed using uncoursed dry stone with rough copings, the inner wall roughly coursed and squared, and the rear boundary wall brick with stone copings. Outside the boundary wall along Overton Bank the road is laid with setts. The grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which add to the mature landscaped character of the area. To the east of the meeting house is a council-owned car park.

2.6. Listed status

The building is properly listed at grade II, along with the boundary wall which is also listed at grade II.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The Staffordshire Historic Environment Record was consulted and no former building is recorded on site. Overall, the archaeological potential of the site is considered to be medium.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. In 2010, major refurbishment work took place, including window repairs and redecoration.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Fair, whilst the burial ground itself is regularly maintained. A section of the Grade II listed wall has collapsed and in need of repair.

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting house does not have a five-year maintenance and repair plan. Friends currently do not have the funds to maintain and repair the meeting house. In 2010, Friends received a £15,000 loan as part of refurb works which is still being repaid.

3.3. Sustainability

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

- Resource use, recycling and waste management: the meeting house recycles where possible.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: Ongoing review.
- 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 fully-equipped kitchen, WCs (one fully accessible), main meeting room and smaller meeting room with kitchen at first floor.

No car parking is available on site. To the east of the meeting house is a car park (High Street) owned by Staffordshire Moorlands Council, it is pay and display costing £1.40 for 3 hours on weekdays and free on Sundays. The meeting house is served by a local bus services which runs seven days a week, less frequent on Sunday's.

3.5. Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken. Level access is available into and throughout the ground floor of the meeting house. There is restricted access to the smaller meeting room on first floor. There is no hearing loop installed and no facilities specifically for partially sighted people.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately one hour and in community use for 10 hours a week and can be available for 174 hours each week. There is a lettings policy. The building may be used by spiritual, educational or social groups. The use of alcohol on the premises is prohibited. There are no groups able to use the meeting house for free. The meeting house is popular for lettings due to its convenient location, price, and peaceful ambience.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, and the area is generally well cared-for. 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: The historic meeting house has been altered and extended in the past. In 2010, the meeting house underwent a programme of refurbishment and decoration and at present fulfils the needs of the meeting. Any further alterations would need to be carefully considered to take account of its character.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is currently in local community use and following the refurbishment in 2010 the meeting house has the facilities to support the local groups.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: In the regrettable event of closure, the meeting house might continue in community use; as a listed building it would need to have a sustainable future and for any changes to be sensitively managed.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List descriptions

Name: **SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1268552

Location

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, OVERTON BANK

County: Staffordshire

District: Staffordshire Moorlands

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Leek

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 13-Apr-1951

List entry Description

LEEK

SJ9856NW OVERTON BANK 611-1/4/102 Society of Friends Meeting House 13/04/51

II

Society of Friends meeting house, apparently purpose built. c1694. Roughly coursed and squared stone with plain-tiled roof. L-plan, with advanced wing to left (its gable wall refronted) containing staircase. EXTERIOR: 2 storeys. Off-centre door with 16-pane sash window above, both with flat stone lintels. Main body of meeting house has 3-window range, but most of the windows now blocked. Horizontal openings, possibly originally mullioned, with sash windows of 8 and 12 lights in left-hand windows, the others blocked. Blocked doorway to left of centre, with heavy chamfered lintel. Plain string course and quoins to former window openings. Similar blocked doorway in gable wall, and blocked 3-light mullioned window to its right. Tall upper window a later insertion (16-pane sash). Similar window openings in rear wall, all now sashes with heavy stone heads and quoins. Coped gables, and moulded string course. INTERIOR: stone staircase in advanced wing, the former galleried meeting room now subdivided under the gallery, which is itself now screened off with wood panelling. Meeting room has raised dais at one end, with dado panelling. The meeting house was used by the Labour Church in the late C19-early C20, and contains murals by Walter Crane which have been painted over.

Listing NGR: SJ9819956560

Name: **BOUNDARY WALL TO SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1268553

Location

BOUNDARY WALL TO SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, OVERTON BANK

BOUNDARY WALL TO SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, SALISBURY STREET

County: Staffordshire

District: Staffordshire Moorlands

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Leek

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 14-Oct-1996

List entry Description

LEEK

SJ9856NW OVERTON BANK 611-1/4/103 (South side) Boundary wall to Society of Friends Meeting House

GV II

Includes: Boundary Wall to Society of Friends Meeting House SALISBURY STREET. Boundary wall. Late C17 and later. Uncoursed rubble, and roughly coursed and squared stone, and brick. The wall encloses the ground of the Society of Friends Meeting House, from which it also divides off a small allotment. Outer wall is uncoursed dry stone with rough copings, the inner wall roughly coursed and squared. Rear boundary wall brick with stone copings.

Listing NGR: SJ9818056569