

## ***Friends Meeting House, Redditch***

*Oxhill Close, Matchborough, Redditch, B98 0ER*

*National Grid Reference: SP 07104 66384*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***The building has medium significance as a meeting house purpose-built in 1974, by Quaker architect Selby Clewer. The building was built at a time when Redditch was expanding as a result of the New Town designation made in 1964 and is surrounded by housing built by the Redditch Friends Housing Association. The meeting house comprises a striking oval structure with a copper-covered roof which provides a focal point in the area.***

### ***Evidential value***

***This is a purpose-built structure of relatively recent date, on the site of former farm land. It is of low evidential value.***

### ***Historical value***

***The meeting house is located in Matchborough, an area of new development from the 1970s as a result of Redditch being designated a New Town in 1964. The meeting house has some historical value for its association with Selby Clewer, a Quaker architect who was the chief architect for the Bournville Village Trust. The area surrounding the meeting house was used by the Redditch Friends Housing Association to provide housing to those in need.***

***Collectively, the housing and the meeting house provide an important aspect of architectural and social history in the context of a New Town development.***

**Aesthetic value**

***The meeting house has medium aesthetic value. The most aesthetically pleasing elevation is to the south west, with the tall oval structure with a copper-covered roof, which provides a focal point. The remaining elevations are of more utilitarian appearance.***

**Communal value**

***The building is now used by a local dance group, and the west range is used by the tenants of the Redditch Friends Housing Association but is not used by other groups. It has medium community value as a place associated with the Quakers and the Redditch Friends Housing Association.***

**Part 1: Core data**

1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0015720*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Redditch Borough Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Redditch*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1974*

1.13 Architect (s): *James Selby Clewer*

1.14 Date of visit: *14 December 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *James Bradbury and Geoffrey Stollard*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Redditch Friends Housing Association – Oxhill Close*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 699-700.

Brooks, A. and Pevsner, N., *The Buildings of England: Worcestershire* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.545 - 573.

Redditch Friends Housing Association: <http://www.redditchfriendsha.co.uk>

Bradbury, J., Local Meeting Survey, September 2015

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

### 2.1 Historical background

Friends began meeting in Redditch from the late seventeenth century. Butler (1999) notes that in the year 1708 the Quarterly Meeting purchased Redditch meeting house and adjoining land at a cost of £40. Soon after, membership numbers declined and the meeting house only served for the purposes of the annual meeting until 1785. By 1805, the meeting house was converted into a dwelling and subsequently sold in 1820.

It was not until the twentieth century when a Meeting was established again, in 1936. Friends met in their homes until a former hall in Worcester Road was purchased for £1,450 in 1953. During the 1960s, the land occupied by the Friends was required by developers to form part of the planned New Town. From 1970 Friends met in the institute of St Stephens Church for the following four years.

Major change occurred in Redditch in 1964 when the area was designated a New Town. A series of self-contained neighbourhoods were planned by Hugh Wilson. The proposals included expanding existing areas of housing dating from the twentieth century and creating new areas of development to the east of the River Arrow including; Matchborough, Winyates and Church Hill. Development in Matchborough began in the early 1970s and during this time a group of Friends formed the Redditch Friends' Housing Association. Friends at the time were concerned with housing shortages for single persons and single parents. In order to mitigate this Friends obtained money from Redditch Borough Council, the Housing Association and from compensation received from having to relocate to build flats in Oxhill Close. A new meeting house was built to the north east of these new flats by the Quaker architect James Selby Clewer (better known as the chief architect for the Bournville Village Trust) in 1974. The meeting house was built with laundry facilities and a family resource centre for the tenants in the neighbouring buildings. Friends built further flats in 1987 and have since acquired a number of houses in the area.

A decline in membership resulted in the meeting house being leased to Worcestershire County Council from 2007 to 2015. At present the meeting house is leased to Latham School of Dance on a full time basis.

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

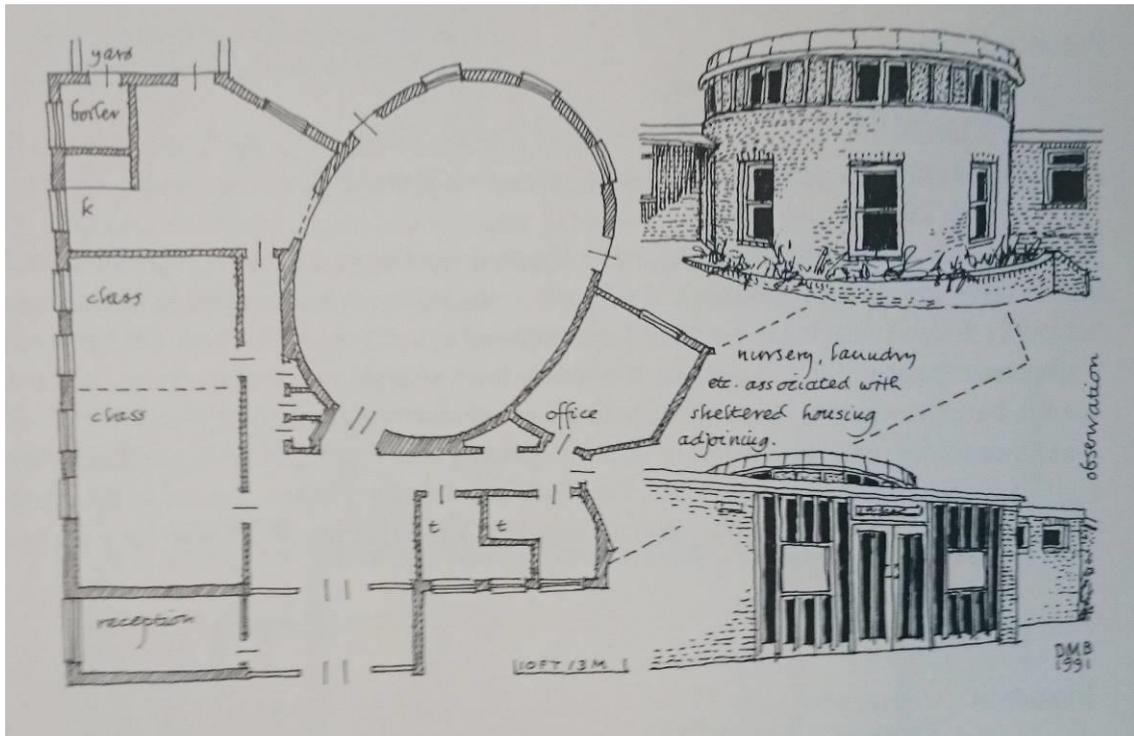


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is at the bottom; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.700)

The meeting house was built from designs by Selby Clewer and opened in 1974. The building has an irregular polygonal footprint, with a large single-storey oval structure to the south-west, containing the main meeting room. The meeting house is built with red brick laid in stretcher bond and the flat roof is covered in green copper, a material favoured and used on other Clewer designs (Quinton Methodist Church, Halesowen and St David's Church, Shenley Green). The copper covering is brought down over the upper part of the oval structure as an ornamental fascia.

The meeting house is accessed from the north, the walls flanking the entrance are blind with projecting header brick details and double doors with glazed side screens to the entrance. The north and east elevations have rectangular windows below the eaves, all with protective covering, and to the north projecting header details are used below the windows. The oval meeting room structure is the main feature of the south-west elevation, with clerestory lighting and two single window openings and doorway at ground floor. This component is flanked by two rectangular ranges, the laundry to the west and ancillary facilities to the east.

The main meeting room, smaller meeting rooms and ancillary facilities are accessed via a lobby area which leads into two small corridors either side of the main meeting room. The lobby and passageways have plastered and painted walls, with tiled flooring and are lit by a series of roof lights. The interior of the main meeting room is oval in shape. The room has a suspended tiled ceiling, with two large circular chandeliers dating from the 1970s. The flooring has recently been laid with a vinyl covering to accommodate the use by the dance group. The walls are of exposed buff brick laid in stretcher bond. The room is well lit by the clerestory windows and two large windows to the south-west. The Friends now worship at Barnt Green & Redditch local meeting; all the internal furnishings are associated with the dance company.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no furnishings of note. The meeting house has not been used for a place of worship since 2007 and Quaker furnishings have now been removed.

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

### 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located in Redditch one of the second generation 'New Towns' designated during 1961-66. As part of the expansion of Redditch, Matchborough was developed in the 1970s in an area south of the River Arrow. The area shares characteristic features associated with other new towns; areas of open space, low density residential with some industrial sites, and a road system with many roundabouts and in common with the later new towns, an emphasis on public transport and community facilities. To the north of the meeting house is a residential area designed by Mason Richards & Partners, distinctively characterised by mono-pitched roofs. To the south west of the meeting house is a series of flats built as part of the Redditch Friends Housing Association in Oxhill Close, which feature decorative concrete panelling (Fig. 2). Finally, to the east are a number of commercial properties which are set amongst a large area of open space surrounding Ipsley Brook.



Figure 2: Redditch Friends Housing Association, Oxhill Close.

The meeting house itself is situated to enable easy access to and from the housing estates to the north and south west, with a number of pedestrian walkways. To the south west is a boundary wall built of red brick between the meeting house and Oxhill Close, a children's play area with a small boundary wall constructed in red brick. To the east the meeting house is separated from Matchborough Way by grass verges lined with trees.

## 2.6 Listed status

Not listed. The architects department of the Bournville Village Trust designed a number of buildings in the Midlands for which Selby Clewer was Chief Architect. The Trust was involved in the design of a number of places of worship including St David's Church (not listed), in Henley Green. The oval structure of the meeting house with its copper-covered roof provides a focal point in the area but the building as a whole does not represent one of the better examples of building designs for which Selby Clewer was responsible. The building may merit inclusion on a local list.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Worcestershire Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. An OS map of 1955 reveals the area still being used as farm land; the site is likely to be of low archaeological potential.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The property is managed and regularly inspected by a professional property agent. Only essential work has been undertaken to make the property 'fit for purpose' as the long term future of the property is in doubt.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

### 3.2 Maintenance

Until February 2015 the meeting house was leased to Worcestershire County Council which was responsible for the maintenance and repair. When the lease was terminated, the council settled its liabilities for dilapidations by means of a negotiated sum. In addition, the property is managed and regularly inspected by a professional property agent, Stollard & Foreman, Construction Consultants. Extensive repair work has been identified, although this work is not major. Only essential work has been undertaken to make the property 'fit for purpose' as the long term future of the building is in doubt.

There is a Redditch Building Fund held centrally by Central England Quaker Trustees which is more than adequate to cover foreseeable repairs.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The Sustainability Toolkit is not used, and as the building is not managed or occupied by Quakers there appears to be less attention paid to the sustainability of the building.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs to accommodate the current use as a dance school. These include a reception, kitchen area, smaller meeting rooms, WCs (fully accessible) and laundry facilities still in use by tenants in the neighbouring residential properties.

There is no on-site car parking, the nearest available car parking is across Matchborough Way on the Matchborough centre car park owned by Redditch Borough Council. There is a regular bus service from Redditch bus station to Matchborough which runs seven days a week. There is no secure bike parking available.

### 3.5 Access

A Disability Access Audit has not been undertaken, but level access is available into and throughout the meeting house. There is a fully accessible WC within the building, however no induction loop or facilities for partially-sighted people have been installed.

### 3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is leased to a local dance group which is compatible with Quaker values, and it is not used by any other groups.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The property has been subject to anti-social behaviour but this is managed by basic security measures, such as window guards.

### 3.8 Plans for change

The long term plans for this property are uncertain, discussions are being held with the Redditch Friends Housing Association, which is interested in purchasing the meeting house, initially for extra office space but in due course for redevelopment (demolition for the creation of additional housing). If sold to Redditch Friends Housing Association in the short term the existing lease (to a dance school) would be assigned to the association, which would manage the tenancy.

## **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 meeting house ceased use as a place of worship by Friends in 2007 and has since been let to other organisations. Remaining Friends in the area now attend Barnt Green & Redditch local meeting for worship.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The meeting house is leased to a local dance group and currently meets their needs.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* There is no local meeting to use this building, and it has been adapted for a new use since 2007 first by Worcestershire County Council and more recently by a local dance group. If the property were to be sold it could continue to be leased to the dance group.

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