

Friends Meeting House, Sheffield Central

10 St James Street, Sheffield, S1 2EW

National Grid Reference: SK 35301 87479



Statement of Significance

Sheffield Meeting House is the latest in a series of meeting houses built in this part of Sheffield city centre since the late seventeenth century. It was built in 1990; it has low significance for its heritage value.

Evidential value.

As a relatively modern building, the building has low significance for evidential and archaeological values. The site is considered to have relatively low archaeological potential although it is close to the core of medieval Sheffield.

Historical value

The building is associated with the long history of Quakers in Sheffield, but the current meeting house and site has low historical significance.

Aesthetic value

The building has medium significance for its architectural value. According Harman and Minnis it is ‘unostentatious but confidently Postmodern’. It makes a neutral contribution to the conservation area.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value, as a place for Quaker meetings and as a well-used community venue.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Sheffield & Balby*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0016300*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Sheffield City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *Yorkshire*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Sheffield*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *City Centre*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date: *1989*
- 1.13 Architect: *Michael Sykes of the Abel Sykes Partnership*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *1 August 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Faith Rodger*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *None*
- 1.19 Information sources:
 - D.Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses in Britain*, 1999, Vol 2, pp 829-837
 - R.Harman and J.Minnis, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Sheffield*, 2004
 - F.Stilwell, *Notes on Sheffield Quaker Meeting Houses and Places of Worship*, 1991
 - <http://www.sheffieldquakers.org.uk/history-quakers-sheffield>

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

2.1. Historical background

George Fox visited South Yorkshire in the 1650s and a meeting was established in Sheffield in 1669. Friends have used various buildings for meetings within a grid of streets on the north side of the city centre since 1668. In 1676 a site was acquired for a burial ground off Broad Lane; at that time members met in each other's homes or the open air. In 1707 land

and a building were bought to provide a meeting house and stable, west of Scargill Croft off Hartshead (now the top end of Meeting House Lane). An orchard was bought for a burial ground on the east side of Meeting House Lane in 1737, and a meeting house built there in 1738. In 1764 Friends built a new meeting house fronting the east side of Meeting House Lane, to seat 150. As this was too small, Friends temporarily moved to the upper floor of Mr Hoyland's warehouse before building a large new meeting house in 1806, as an extension to the 1764 building which was altered for women's meetings. The new meeting room seated 500 with 300 seats in the gallery. Sheffield Friends were involved in business and commerce; merchant Nicholas Broadbent was one of the most successful and built Old Bank House in 1728, now the city's oldest town house, and also part of Paradise Square in the 1730s. Thomas Broadbent ran a bank from Old Bank House in the later eighteenth century.

Facilities on the Meeting House Lane site gradually expanded with an adult school built in 1871 in the burial ground. Most of the buildings were destroyed in a bombing raid in December 1940. Temporary buildings were used for meetings until a new meeting house was built on High Court on the south side of Hartshead in 1964, designed by Hubert and H.Martin Lidbetter. This was found to be difficult to maintain and was sold in the 1980s; it was expected to be demolished as part of redevelopment but survived and is now used for commercial offices (Fig.1). Friends bought a new site for a new meeting house from the City Council, on the corner of St James Street and Vicar Lane; the site was then occupied by temporary buildings (see Fig.2). The new meeting house was designed by Michael Sykes, and built in 1989. The contractors were Wildgoose Construction Ltd.



Fig.1: 1964 meeting house by Lidbetter, sold in the 1980s and now in office use



Fig.2: the present site before the 1989 meeting house was built (Sheffield Meeting)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1989, designed by the Abel Sykes Partnership. It is faced in a pink/brown brick laid in stretcher bond, with sandstone dressings, a pitched slate roof and windows with brown aluminium frames. The building is arranged over three floors with a mezzanine, and is roughly L-plan, with the entrance off a small forecourt on the south-east corner of the rectangular site. The recessed entrance has glazed doors framed by red steel columns, with a corbelled brick feature above that carries part of a first floor garden (over the office). On the west wall of the forecourt is a slate panel with inscription (Fig.3) The range to the left (west) of the entrance projects up to the back of the pavement; canted corners have first floor oriels and there is a full-height arched feature to the gable-end containing a datestone inscribed 1989. The west elevation faces the steeply sloping Vicar Lane, with a stone plinth and full-height recessed central bay with framed glazing; either side are canted full-height bays with windows set in brick panels. To the rear, the basement is faced in stone, with two arched openings to a window and a glazed doorway. The flat brick elevation above has mostly small squarish windows except for the library which is expressed by French windows with a steel balcony.



Fig.3: inscribed panel adjacent to entrance

Inside, the large meeting room is on the ground floor, and occupies the full width of the west range. The tall, airy room has fitted benches to the walls which are partly lined with timber-framed panelling. Walls are painted blue, the floor is carpeted and the ceiling is lined with acoustic material. Globe pendant lights hang in a circle over the centre of the room. The meeting house has spacious circulation areas in the centre of the building with staircases to the north-west corner and south-east side. The library is to the north side of the ground floor and there are smaller meeting rooms on the upper floor, all with plain wall finishes and grid suspended ceilings. The young Friends' room in the basement was refurbished in c.2005. On the first floor, overlooking the forecourt there is an attractive terrace garden.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains no historic benches and all the seating dates from 1989. The meeting owns an oak chair dating from the seventeenth century, originally in an earlier meeting house off Hartshead. It is said to have been used by Gorge Fox.



Fig.4: seventeenth chair, said to have been used by George Fox

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is situated in central Sheffield, on the north edge of the retail area and just west of the Cathedral. It is on a corner site that slopes steeply to the north down to Campo Lane, an office area. St James Street is an attractive street lined with historic buildings of different dates, mainly now in office or leisure use. The 1960s meeting house by Lidbetter is within the same area, further east on Hartshead Square, and Meeting House Lane, the location of earlier meeting houses (demolished), slopes steeply to the north off Hartshead. The meeting house has no garden or grounds around it; the only ground level space is a small front forecourt enclosed by steel railings and gates, paved with brick.

There were burial grounds associated with earlier meeting houses in the area, but these have all been built over. At Woodhouse, on the south-east edge of Sheffield is a former meeting house with a burial ground at 9 Meeting House Lane (SK824847). The former meeting house is now a private house and the burial ground forms part of the garden.

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. This 1989 building is too recent to be listable.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

South Yorkshire Historic Environment Record was consulted but holds no records about this specific site. The site is on the north edge of the medieval town; the vicarage with its orchards and gardens was in this area before St James Street was laid out in the eighteenth century. There was a temporary building on the present site in the mid-twentieth century, and basements excavated for the present and previous buildings are likely to have affected the archaeology. Archaeological potential is probably low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. No recent QI; the building was refurbished within the last ten years.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): *N/A*

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting house is well-maintained and the Area Meeting has a building reserve of about £80,000 which is topped up annually. Lettings bring in an income which enables the maintenance costs to be covered.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, and has taken recent steps to reduce the carbon footprint of the building:

Climate change & energy efficiency: The meeting has installed one energy efficient hand dryer in the ladies toilet on the ground floor, and improved insulation.

Resource use, recycling & waste management: The meeting use eco-friendly cleaning materials where possible and have recycling bins in the meeting house.

Building maintenance & refurbishment: In the last ten years, extra loft insulation has been provided and double glazing has been fitted on the inside of most windows (which were single-glazed when new in 1989).

Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: The small terrace garden is used to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables, an oasis in this dense urban area.

Transport: The meeting's living witness support group completed a survey several years ago which made Friends think about how they travel to Meeting.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs, including sets of toilets and a kitchen on each floor; there is a baby-change facility in the lower floor toilet. On the ground floor there is a spacious social area, library and main meeting room, with three small meeting rooms to the first floor, and one large room and an office on the lower floor (basement). There is no

resident warden's flat. There are secure bike racks on the pavement outside building, installed in about 2004, but no car parking is provided.

3.5. Access

The meeting House is accessible to people with disabilities, with level access into the building and a lift to all floors (with braille signs). There is a hearing loop. The meeting won the Lord Mayor's silver award for accessibility in about 1998, after access improvements were made following an access audit. Works to improve access included adding stair nosings in contrast colour, braille signs, and a new disabled WC on the first floor. The three parking places on the street directly outside building are designated for disabled users, with a dropped kerb opposite the main entrance.

On the whole public transport is very good, being in the centre of a large city, although on a Sunday some people find their bus arrives far too early or late for meeting. There is on-street parking with meters; parking fees of £1 for Sunday parking and £2 for evening parking were introduced several years ago. There is secure bicycle parking.

3.6 Community Use

The building is well used by Friends and the wider community. Friends use the meeting house for about 30 hours per week and the building is available for a total average of 335 hours per week. Actual average weekly use is 160 hours.

The meeting has a lettings policy, and lettings are managed by the office staff. Friends wish the accommodation to be used to creatively support causes with which they are sympathy, and Commercial lettings are only acceptable if in accordance with Quaker values. Party political groups are not allowed to let rooms (but if several parties are represented that may be acceptable). If a member or attender of the meeting has a concern that a particular group should have a free booking they will bring it to the Local Business meeting for discernment. This is a popular venue because of the good location, welcoming atmosphere, and well-priced rooms.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been some graffiti and a few break-ins in the past (not reported). More recently an opportunist entered the building and stole a staff handbag when staff were not around, although this is rare; it was reported to police. Occasionally people go into the building to beg for money. There has been no heritage crime or lead theft. The building is located in a city centre area which is not particularly well cared for, has some crime and deprivation (homelessness) and community confidence is not high. Friends House staff liaise with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

None

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 relatively modern building has recently been refurbished and currently meets the needs of the meeting, but there would be no heritage constraints to future internal change.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The meeting house is well-used by the community already, and there would be no heritage constraints to

future internal change. External changes would need to take account of the conservation area.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. If Friends no longer required the building, it could be sold or leased for a different use. Demolition and site redevelopment would be subject to conservation area constraints.

Part 5: Category: 4