

Friends Meeting House, Worcester

Sansome Place, Worcester, WR1 1UG

National Grid Reference: SO 85012 55221



Statement of Significance

Worcester Friends Meeting House has high heritage significance as a good example of a purpose-built meeting house erected in 1701. The most significant part of the building is the exterior, which is little altered, but the interior was remodelled in the 1980s and retains no in situ features. The building has an unspoilt burial ground and garden to the south, with a terrace of Georgian cottages built by the Quakers. It is an important community asset in Worcester.

Evidential value

The meeting house has medium evidential value for its structural and external fabric but most of the interior is relatively modern and of no interest. The site has high archaeological potential as it was within medieval Worcester and has a burial ground.

Historical value

The purpose-built meeting house illustrates the resources and confidence of Worcester Friends over time, and is associated with some local families such as the Derbys a long history of Quakerism in the town.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of this handsome building is typical of early eighteenth century meeting houses, constructed in local brick with classical details and

symmetrical elevations. The attractive burial ground adds to its aesthetic significance. The exterior and setting have high aesthetic value but the interior has less significance due to the 1980s alterations.

Communal value

The Meeting House has high communal value as a place for Quaker worship, and is a popular community venue. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Worcestershire & Shropshire*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0026660*
- 1.3 Owner: *Worcestershire Friends Charities*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Worcester City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Worcester*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1390135*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Historic City of Worcester*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Dates: *1701; 1980*
- 1.13 Architects: *Not established; Geoffrey Elliott*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *25 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *David Baker*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Nos 4-9 Friends' Mews*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information sources:

David Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, Vol 2*, 1999, pp 701-701

Worcester Meeting website: www.worcesterquakers.org.uk/history

Quaker archives (ref.1562) in Worcester Archaeology & Archive Service, researched by Paul Mountain, 2015

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

2.1 Historical background

Quakers have a long history in Worcester; the earliest record of a meeting is in 1655 when Quakers met in the house of Sarah Drew on Darke Alley, close to the Cathedral. By 1670 the meeting was renting a building on Cooking (now Copenhagen) Street where they were locked out 'by the mayor's order' and instead met in the street. From 1681, a house off Friar Street was used as the meeting house; this had a burial ground to the rear and was later used as a school. It was demolished in 1982. George Fox was imprisoned in Worcester Castle in 1673 for 14 months where he wrote part of his journal. The present large site was acquired in 1700 for £70 and the meeting house built in 1701; the burial ground was established at the same time. The meeting house was one large space with a gallery to the east and the stand originally on the north wall (Fig.3). A single-storey east wing is depicted on an undated print, which also shows a different roof form (Fig.1). The adjoining terrace of four cottages was built during the eighteenth century to provide housing for poor Quakers. The meeting house was extended to the east in 1823, to provide a first floor women's meeting room with classroom below. This wing was taken down in the 1980s when this part of the site was redeveloped for social housing, designed by architect Geoffrey Elliott (costing £96,000). The housing scheme was awarded a Civic Trust Commendation. Major changes were made to the meeting house in the 1980s when the large meeting room was subdivided and a mezzanine floor was inserted in the east half to create small meeting rooms, kitchen and WCs.

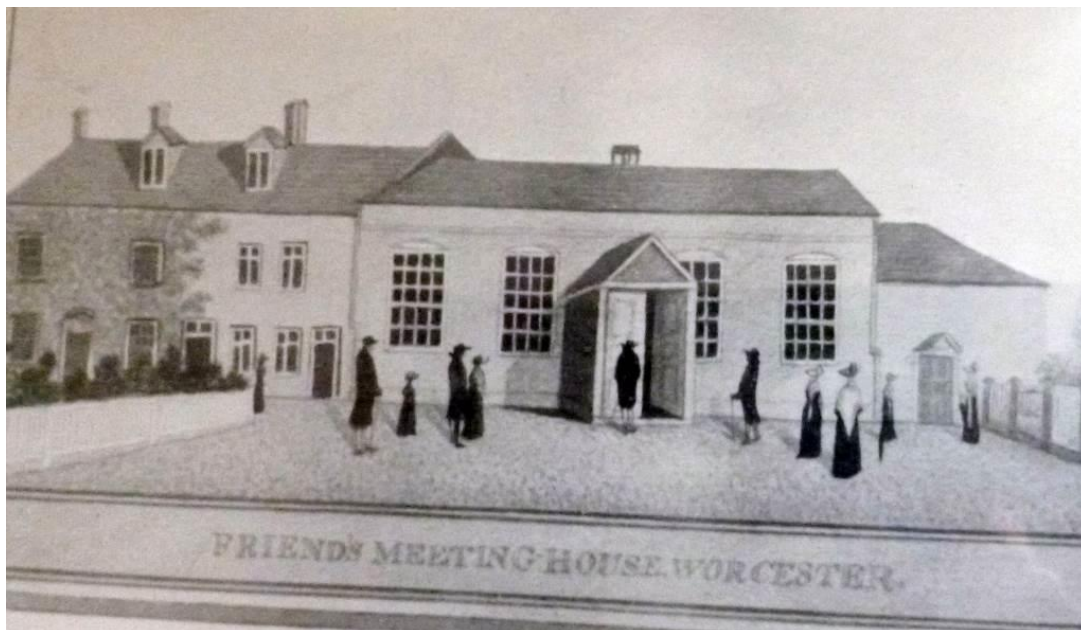


Fig.1: undated print of the meeting house, prior to 1823



Fig.2: undated photograph of the exterior, prior to 1980s alterations (Worcester archives)



Fig.3: interior of meeting house prior to 1980s alterations (Worcester Archives)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house built in 1701 is a single-storey building, constructed of orange brick laid in Flemish bond with a painted brick plinth. The hipped roof is laid with Welsh slates with ceramic grey ridges and cast-iron rainwater goods. The rectangular building faces south; the symmetrical front elevation has a central pedimented porch with double panelled doors below a gauged brick flat head. Either side are two 20-pane sash windows with segmental brick heads. There is a projecting plat band above the windows and dentil brick cornice to the eaves, features that continue on all elevations. The rear elevation backs onto a service lane and has two 16-pane sashes with segmental heads, the left and right returns are blind.

Inside, the meeting house was altered and sub-divided in the early 1980s; historically the entrance led directly into the main meeting room (Fig.3) but now leads into a large foyer that occupies the south-east corner of the ground floor. The main meeting room is to the west side, a full-height space lit from north and south, and retaining re-set Doric columns to a gallery constructed with new joinery in c.1980. The ceiling has a plaster cornice and roses, possibly nineteenth century, or renewed c.1980. The rest of the meeting house has modern partitions, joinery and fittings.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains some historic benches and oak 1930s chairs made at the Bryn Mawr furniture works.



Fig.4: oak benches in meeting room



Fig.5: oak chairs from the Bryn Mawr works, 1930s

2.4 Attached burial ground

The burial ground on the south side of the meeting house was created after 1700 when the site was first acquired by the Quakers. The attractive rectangular area is enclosed by brick walls and laid to grass, with a large London plan tree towards the west side (this is subject to a tree preservation order). There are rows of memorial stones, all laid flat, and many have accumulated moss due to damp levels. The burial ground is closed to new burials. An iron overthrow with lantern on the north side of the burial ground marks the gateway from the meeting house. The burial records are in Worcester Archives and mainly relate to nineteenth century burials (extract in Fig.8).



Fig.6: overthrow and lantern on north side of burial ground



Fig.7: Plane tree at west end of burial ground

The image shows a page from a burial record book, likely from the Worcester Archives. The page is filled with handwritten entries for various individuals, organized in a grid-like fashion. Each entry typically includes a name, a birth date (B.D.), and a death date (D.). Some entries also include the age at death or the date of burial. The handwriting is in black ink on a light-colored paper. There are some red markings and annotations throughout the page, possibly indicating specific records or corrections. On the left side, there are some vertical notes, including 'MARRIAGE' and 'COUPLES'. The overall appearance is that of a well-used historical document.

Fig.8: extract from burial records (Worcester Archives)

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located on a large site on the west side of Sansome Place, now a busy one-way street that runs parallel to and east of the main north-south street through the centre of Worcester. The street has a mixed character with some Georgian buildings along with nineteenth century and more recent development including a large modern block of student accommodation to the north of the meeting house site. The north and east sides of the site are bounded by high brick walls with brick copings, with brick gate piers and a pair of iron gates with spearheads to the street; this gateway is on an axis with the brick pathway in front of the meeting house. Immediately in front of the meeting house is a cobbled forecourt with a brick pathway; between this and the burial ground is a gateway with iron overthrow (Fig.6). A modern vehicular entrance has been created in the north-east corner of the site, with a car park. The burial ground lies to the south and south-east of the meeting house and attached to the west side of the building is a row of terraced brick houses, Nos 4-9 Friends Mews, built at various dates in the eighteenth century. These are separately listed Grade II (see below) and were subdivided in c1980 to create six small residential units. A group of 2-storey 1980s brick houses and flats are built in a roughly L-plan group on the east side of the meeting house, with a covered way through to the meeting house from the east which maintains the axial route through the site. These houses block views of the meeting house from the street, giving it a private, enclosed character.



Fig.9: the meeting house is hidden from the street

The former burial ground on Friar Street in Worcester is on the Worcestershire HER (Ref WCM96389).

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II, which reflects its historic and architectural importance as a good example of an early eighteenth century meeting house, despite the internal changes made in the 1980s.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The meeting house, terraced housing and the burial ground have entries on the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (refs.WCM96490 and WCM96389, respectively). The site may have some archaeological potential; it is just beyond the north line of the medieval city walls in an area that developed in the post-medieval period. It is not known what was on the site before 1700.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey by Paul Mountain

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. A quinquennial inspection is now due. The slate roof will need to be checked, along with the sash windows which are suffering from damp caused by condensation.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/satisfactory.

3.2 Maintenance

Income from meeting house lettings covers maintenance costs, and the meeting has adequate funds.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, but a few measures have been taken.

Climate change & energy efficiency: there is some roof insulation, but windows are single-glazed.

Resource use, recycling & waste management: The local authority recycling scheme and green bins are used.

3.4 Amenities

One of the adjoining houses provides accommodation for a warden. The meeting house has good facilities, with a ground floor kitchen, WCs and baby changing facilities upgraded in 2012. There are two smaller meeting rooms on the first floor in addition to the foyer and main meeting room. The first floor rooms are not well ventilated, as the sash windows cannot be easily opened due to the way in which the mezzanine was installed.

The meeting house is near the city centre and close to the railway station and bus stops. There is on-site parking for disabled people and the residents of the on-site housing, but there is on-street parking nearby. There is some secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The last access audit was undertaken in 2015, which recommended a new parking bay and some improvements, which have been undertaken. The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, except for the first floor. There is level access on the ground floor, a smooth and level brick path from the parking area, and a WC suitable for disabled people. There is a hearing loop but no particular facilities to assist people who are partially-sighted.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting provides access to a wide range of groups for meeting room lettings and supports social housing adjoining the meeting house; the residential units in the historic terrace and the 1980s housing scheme are managed by Rooftop Housing Association. The local meeting uses the building for an average of four hours per week. As well as the main meeting room there are two smaller rooms and the foyer available for hire. The meeting house is available for lettings for up to 216 hours per week and is actually let for an average total of 60 hours per week. There is a lettings policy and any queries are referred to the Clerks. The meeting house is popular as it has a good location, and is warm, quiet and well-priced.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

The meeting reports no incidents of heritage crime, but there has been some low level anti-social behaviour such as drinking or rough-sleeping in the garden. When this disturbs the residents, it has been reported to local police. The meeting liaises with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

The meeting is considering the refurbishment of the residential accommodation in the adjoining listed range managed by the housing association, but no changes are planned for 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 only: the building has already shown it can be adapted, as needs change, and there may be scope for further sensitive alteration, subject to listed building consent.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local meeting use: the meeting is a popular venue for community use with good facilities; it could probably be further adapted, subject to listed building consent.

iii) As a consequence of the meeting being laid down and the building passing into secular use: it would be regrettable if the meeting house was no longer used for Quaker worship; changes for future alternative uses would be constrained by architecture of the exterior and the setting with the burial ground and adjoining listed houses.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description (s)

Name: **FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1390135

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, SANSOME PLACE

County: Worcestershire

District: Worcester

Grade: II

Date first listed: 22-May-1954

Date of most recent amendment: 12-Jun-2001

List entry Description

WORCESTER

SO8555SW SANSOME PLACE (West side) Friends' Meeting House 620-1/13/497 22/05/54 (Formerly Listed as: SANSOME PLACE (West side) Former Friends Meeting House)

GV II

Meeting house for the Society of Friends. 1701 with later additions and alterations including interior re-ordering in 1980. Pinkish-orange brick in Flemish bond with stuccoed plinth and hipped plain tile roof. EXTERIOR: single tall storey, 4 windows. Plinth. Tall wide 12/8 sashes in near-flush frames and cambered-arched surrounds with cambered arches and sills. 3-course band over windows. Modillion eaves band. Central entrance in projecting pedimented porch, double 12-panel doors in plain architrave with flat arch of gauged brick; frieze and moulded cornice. Further entrance in right return under cambered arch, renewed

6-panel door. Rear has tall 8/8 sashes. INTERIOR: gallery to left part re-uses original panelling and original Doric columns, some re-used panelled dado. HISTORICAL NOTE: the Society of Friends began meeting in Worcester in 1655 and land for this building was purchased in 1700, meetings were then transferred from Friar Street. In its form and side wall entry plan, a characteristic example of Old Dissent architecture. (The Buildings of England: Pevsner N: Worcestershire: Harmondsworth: 1968-1985: 322; RCHME: Non-Conformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in Central England: London: 1986-: 259; County Record Office: Book of Abstracts; Folio 31, BA8769/1 (i)).

National Grid Reference: SO 85009 55217

Name: **FRIENDS' MEWS**

List entry Number: 1390136

FRIENDS' MEWS, 4-9, SANSOME PLACE

County: Worcestershire

District: Worcester

District Type: District Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 16-Feb-1976

Date of most recent amendment: 12-Jun-2001

List entry Description

WORCESTER

SO8455SE SANSOME PLACE 620-1/12/492 (West side) 16/02/76 Nos 4-9 (consecutive) Friends' Mews (Formerly Listed as: SANSOME PLACE (West side) 1, 2 and 3 (Friends') Meeting House Cottages)

GV II

3 houses, now 6 flats. For the Society of Friends. Dates of houses from left: 1789, 1755, 1737, with conversions c1980. Reddish-orange brick in Flemish bond with plain tile roof and left end and party-wall stacks with oversailing courses and pots. 3 stages of build. EXTERIOR: 2 storeys plus attics, 1:2:2 first-floor windows. Chamfered plinth. To left house are 8/8 sashes with flat arches of gauged brick; otherwise 6/6 near-flush sashes in cambered-arched surrounds and with flat arches of gauged brick. Entrances to right of each house: 6-flush-beaded-panel doors, that to left has fanlight with gothic glazing bars and pilastered doorcase with open pediment, otherwise divided overlights and gabled hoods on console brackets. Attic dormers: 2 gable-ended dormers to centre and right with casement windows. To left

gable end are casement windows in elliptically-arched surrounds to ground floor and in gable. INTERIOR: not inspected. Abuts Friends' Meeting House (qv) at right.

National Grid Reference: SO 84996 55209