Friends Meeting House, Bewdley

Lower Park, Bewdley, DY12 2DP

National Grid Reference: SO 78860 75015

Statement of Significance

Bewdley meeting house is an interesting example of a brick-built vernacular building built as a meeting house 1691-1706. It has high significance for the historic building, fittings and the associated burial ground.

<u>Evidential value</u>
The meeting house and burial ground are considered to have medium archaeological potential and evidential value, relating to the fabric of the building and the archaeology of the site and burial ground.

Historical value
The meeting house has historic value for its links to Bewdley's prosperous past as a trading port on the river Severn, and for its association with a some notable Quakers including the Sturge and Tangye families. The building is a good example of a meeting house built at end of the seventeenth century on a discreet site, and the whole site has high historic value.

Aesthetic value
The meeting house is a good example of local vernacular architecture, built in the brick tradition of the area, retaining some historic internal joinery. The burial ground and edge of town setting contribute to its high aesthetic value.

Communal value
The meeting house is used by the Quaker community and for some community activities and has potential for wider use. Communal value is medium.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Worcestershire & Shropshire*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0029980*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Wyre Forest District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*

1.6 Civil parish: *Bewdley*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1300999*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Bewdley*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1691-1706; 1970*

1.13 Architects: *Not established; H. Martin Lidbetter*

1.14 Date of visit: *25 November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Moira Brown*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

D.Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses in Britain*, Vol 2, 1999, pp693-694

Edwina Newman, *The 'old library' of a provincial English Quaker meeting house, with particular reference to evidence for eighteenth century Anglo-Irish Quaker culture,* Historic Libraries in Context, 2011, Open University

http://www.derryraphoelibrary.org/web_conference_paper_newman.pdf

Photographs from 1960: https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/archive-collections/englands-places/

John Maynard, *The Living Part of the Meeting: A Short History of Bewdley Quakers*, 1691-1991, 1991, Bewdley Preparative Meeting

Local meeting survey by Moira Brown, 2016

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

2.1. Historical background

Quakers were active in Bewdley from the 1650s; in 1655 Margaret Newby and Elizabeth Cowart were imprisoned and in 1659 Elizabeth Deane was imprisoned for three days for speaking against an Anglican priest. A meeting is recorded from 1678, at the house of Jacob Cotterell, a currier. The Mucklow family of Areley Hall and some of their workers were Quakers from the 1660s. Soon after the 1689 Act of Toleration, Thomas Milner, an iron merchant, acquired a house and a plot of land from Humphrey Taylor. The land was on the south-east edge of the town, set back from the street. By 1691 Friends were meeting in the house and more adjacent land had been acquired for burials. The date of the present building is not entirely clear; Maynard states that 'by 1691 the meeting house had been erected' (page 5) but Butler quoting from Yearly Meeting 1707 notes in 1706, 'one new meeting house was built in the room of the old', perhaps suggesting a new building on the site of the old. Sometime in the eighteenth century a small addition was built onto the south-west end, probably for a women's meeting room with a chimney built to serve fireplaces in the new building and the main meeting room. A photo dated 1960 in the Historic England archive shows a brick fireplace (Fig.2), removed at an unknown date after 1960. The entrance moved from the west to the east elevation before eventually being inserted in the south gable end. Bewdley prospered from trade on the river Severn in the eighteenth century, and many early Friends were in trade. In 1781, Friends bought land for a new access to the meeting house; this was probably from the south-west. By the mid nineteenth century Bewdley's trade and the meeting had declined and one family, the Zacharys of Areley Hall kept the meeting going.

The meeting was revived in the late nineteenth century when prosperous Friends moved to the area from Birmingham including Charles Sturge, a successful grain importer who lived at the Summer House and the engineer Joseph Tangye (b.1826) who retired to Tickenhill Manor in 1873. Alice Parker (d.1960), daughter of Joseph, sustained the meeting in the early twentieth century, but by c1950 she was often alone at Sunday meeting. The building fell into disrepair until the meeting was revived by the Richardson family and Gerald Parker (son of Alice) in the late 1950s. In 1963, the south-west addition was extended to the north. In c1968 land to the north-west was bought to create the present drive and allow for a new classroom block and entrance; designed by H.Martin Lidbetter and built in 1970. In the 1980s, a kitchen was built to the west of this in the same style. Major repairs were undertaken in 2008, including re-roofing, re-pointing and re-wiring. OS mapping suggests that the south-west addition extended further south, so part of this may have been demolished during the twentieth century.

Fig.1: interior from the north-west in 1960 (Historic England image ref.AA60/03267)

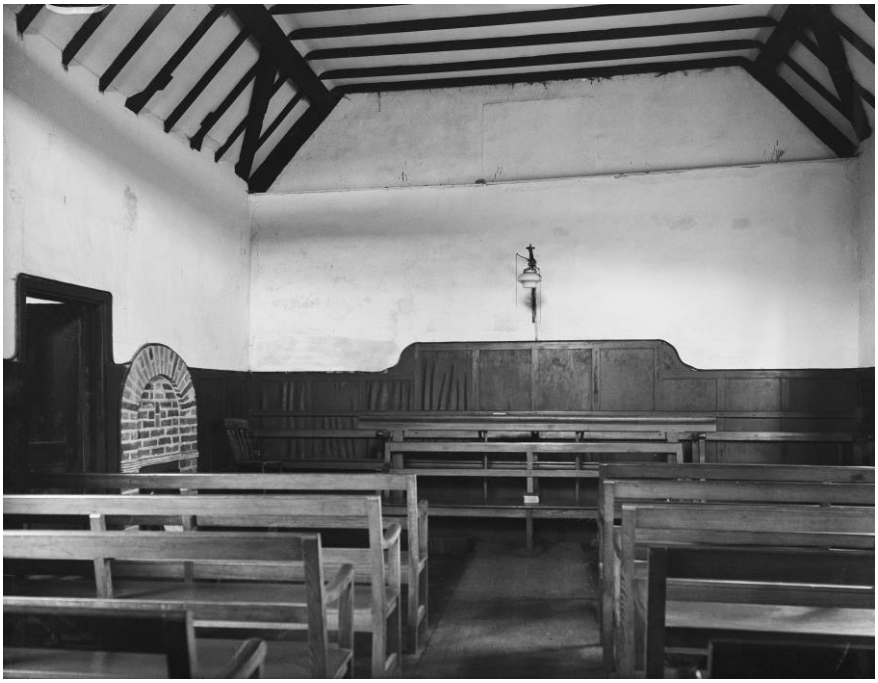

Fig.2: interior from the south-east in 1960 (Historic England, image ref.AA60/03268)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

Bewdley meeting house was purpose-built between 1691 and 1706. It is built of red brick laid in English garden wall bond with lime mortar and has a tiled roof, with a pyramidal louvred vent on the ridge. The building is aligned north-west to south-east with modern extensions to the north-west. The current entrance is via the 1970 extension on the north-east elevation. The historic meeting house has a central doorway (inserted) with panelled door and cambered brick head to the south-east gable end, with a 2-course plat band and 2-light

leaded casement to the first floor. The north-east east elevation has a blocked doorway to right of centre flanked by tall leaded cross windows with segmental heads and tiled sills; to the left is a small fixed leaded window, probably inserted (lighting the room below the gallery). The south-west elevation has a leaded cross window in a blocked doorway with inverted hoodmould above; the northern part of the elevation is obscured by an eighteenth century brick addition with tall brick chimney stack. The north-west gable end has a 2-light leaded casement to the first floor, the 1970 north-west extension abuts part of the gable-end. Both gable-ends and side elevations have a brick dentil course below the verge and eaves of the steep roof. The modern extensions are built of cavity wall brick, with a hipped Welsh slate roof with lead rolls.

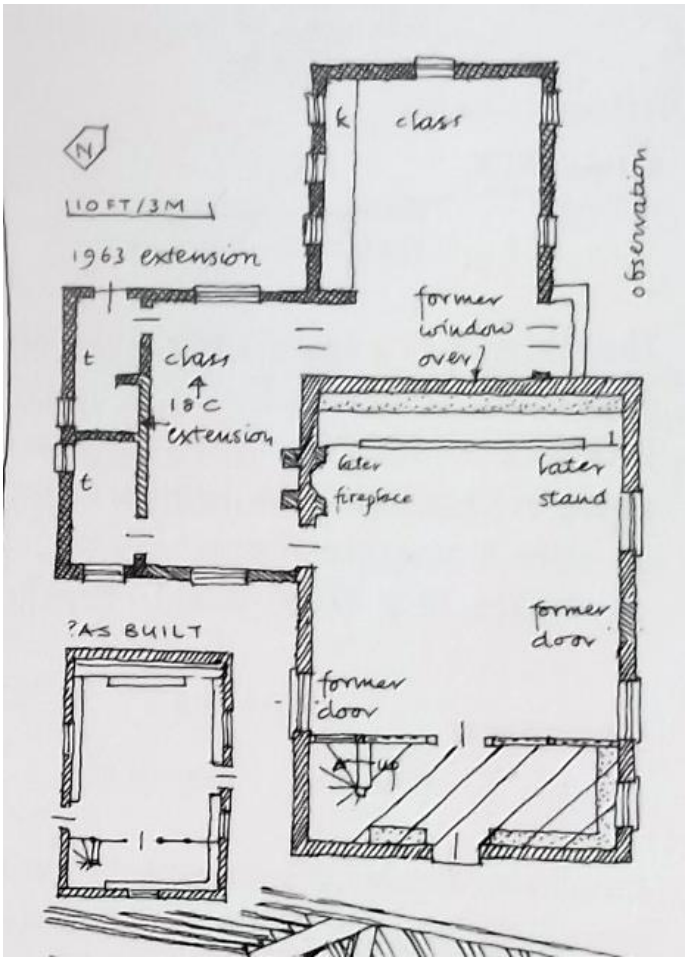

Fig.3: plan by Butler (1999), Vol 2, p 693. Not to scale.

The interior of the meeting house retains the historic layout with the stand to the north-west and the gallery to the south-east. Walls are plain plastered and painted and the floor is laid with wide boards. The 2-bay roof structure is exposed below collar level, with tie-beam truss, rafters, purlins and wind bracing. The flat soffit at collar level has exposed joists and two timber grilles for ventilation. The walls are panelled to about a metre high (higher behind the stand) with fielded panelling, recently painted white. The stand retains a nineteenth century pine rail on chamfered posts to the front, with a folding table, and fixed wall bench (unpainted). The meeting room was heated by a brick fireplace close to the stand, removed after 1960. The screen below the narrow gallery at the south-east end has bottom-hinged panels to the upper half, fixed below, all with fielded panels now painted white. There are turned hat pegs on the back of the hinged shutters, and the small former women's meeting room has plain wall panelling and fixed benches with shaped bench ends against the wall (now all painted white). The narrow gallery has a simple balustrade of splat balusters,

chamfered rail and square posts. It is reached by a winding staircase in the south corner, with a plain landing rail.

Fig.4: hinged opening shutters and hat pegs in the small room south-east of the main meeting room

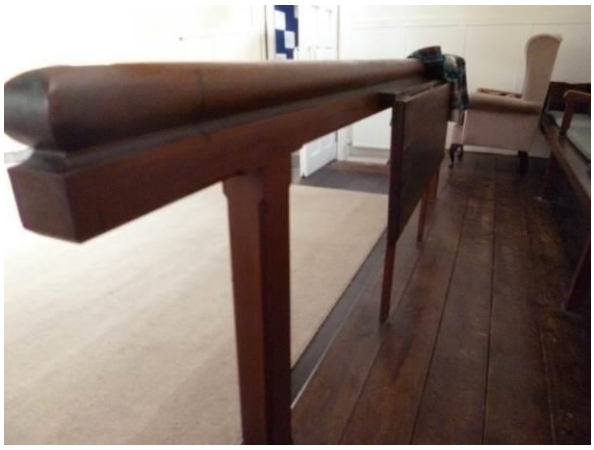

Fig.5: 19th century rail and hinged table on the stand

The meeting room is entered via a twentieth century fire door from the eighteenth century south-west addition. This space was refurbished in the 1960s and again more recently; it has exposed rafters and a wood block floor.

2.3. Loose furnishings and collection

The meeting house contains an historic collection of around 129 books in its library which form an interesting collection typical of Quaker literature. A scholarly article examining the social history significance of the collection was published by the Open University in 2011, by Edwina Newman. In the meeting room there are two pine benches of typical pattern, probably dating from the nineteenth century. Photographs dated 1960 in the Historic England archive show benches in rows facing the stand (Figs 1 and 2).

Fig.6: bench in the meeting room

2.4. Attached burial ground

Fig.6: the burial ground from the north.

The burial ground probably dates from 1690 and lies to the east of the meeting house. It is bounded by an old brick wall with brick coping, which is Grade II listed (List entry no. 1100794). There is a small brick outbuilding with a tiled roof built onto the inner side of the north wall; this may have been built as a privy, but it was not accessible at the time of survey. It is now used as a shed for the gardener. The area is laid to grass, with some 300 hundred year old yew trees and other shrubs. The grave marker stones are arranged in rows aligned south-west to north-east, with semi-circular heads and simple lettering, and date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To the south-west wall and adjacent to the neighbouring house (a former barn) there is a blocked semi-elliptical opening; this is a former entrance into the burial ground, probably the access dating from the late eighteenth century. Burials include members of the Tangye family, Mary Darby (wife of Abraham Darby of Coalbrookdale) died c1797 and Langley Kitching, botanist (died 1910). The records cover a date range of 1684-1787.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located at the east edge of Bewdley, hidden behind properties that front the street called Lower Park, with a vehicular access between frontage properties. Lower Park is lined with handsome historic buildings of various dates, mainly brick. Part of the brick building to the east appears to be a former barn and the north-east wall of this tall property forms the south-west boundary of the Friends' site. The north-west part of the site is laid out as a car park with a tarmacadam surface. A low brick wall separates this from the grassed burial ground to the east, previously this wall was the boundary of the Friends' site until the extra land to the north west was acquired in the 1960s.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II, and boundary walls to the burial ground are separately listed (also grade II). These grades are appropriate.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The Worcestershire HER has entries for the meeting house (WSM10808) and walls enclosing the burial ground (WSM41687); the latter entry also refers to the outbuilding at the north corner of the burial ground. Archaeological potential for the site is high.

Part 6: List Description (s)

Name: **FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1300999

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, LOWER PARK

County: Worcestershire

District: Wyre Forest

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Bewdley

Grade: II

Date first listed: 22-Apr-1950

List entry Description

SO 7875 SE BEWDLEY CP LOWER PARK (north side)

13/165 Friends' Meeting House

22.4.50

GV II

Non-conformist chapel. Probably 1691 with early C19 alterations and a late C20 extension. Brick with tile roof. Two roof bays aligned north-west/south- east, with C20 extension to north-west gable. North-east front: one storey with band above windows, three windows: small fixed casement to left, the other two are timber cross-windows with rectangular leaded quarries and cambered heads; roughly central a blocked opening, probably a former entrance; south-east gable: one storey with window lighting gallery in gable; dentilled brick cornice to gable, band above upper window and above ground floor which has a central entrance under cambered head with wooden architrave and door of four raised and fielded panels. Interior: gallery to south-east end with stick balusters to balustrade. Other fittings are plain and early C19.

Listing NGR: SO7886275017

Name: **WALL OF CHURCHYARD OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE WITH OUTBUILDING**

List entry Number: 1100794

WALL OF CHURCHYARD OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE WITH OUTBUILDING, LOWER PARK

County: Worcestershire

District: Wyre Forest

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Bewdley

Grade: II

Date first listed: 27-May-1986

List entry Description

SO 7875 SE BEWDLEY CP LOWER PARK (north side) SO 77 SE

13/166 Wall of churchyard of 5/166 Friends' Meeting House with outbuilding

GV II

Wall and outbuilding. Probably late C17 with mid-C19 and some mid-C20 repairs. Brick with tile roof to outbuilding. Square plan with outbuilding at north corner. About 1.5 metres tall with brick coping and brick internal buttresses at approximately 2.5 metre intervals. Outbuilding is C19, gabled to south-west and has an entrance with ledged and boarded door to south-east. Included for group value.

Listing NGR: SO7885175008