

Friends Meeting House, Coventry

Hill Street, Coventry, CV1 4AN

National Grid Reference: SP 32956 79176



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has medium heritage significance for historic and architectural value. The overall site has high heritage value as a site in use as a Quaker burial ground from 1668 and the site of a barn first used by Coventry Meeting for worship.

Evidential value

This building was purpose-built in the 1950s on a site which was in use for Quaker burials since 1668. The first place of worship for Quakers was within a barn also located on this site. The general area of Hill Street is identified as an Archaeological Constraint Area, Hill Street Medieval Suburb. The site has high evidential value.

Historical value

The site of the meeting house has high historical value, Hill Street was purchased for use as a Quaker burial ground and a barn on site was previously used for worship in 1668. The Coventry Meeting re-located to two other purpose-built meeting houses before returning to the location of the present day meeting house on the site of the old burial ground. The long history of the meeting provides a local context of the evolution of Quakers in the area.

Aesthetic value

This 1950s building has medium aesthetic value and makes a neutral contribution to the character of the conservation area.

Communal value

The meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers and in use since it opened in 1953. The building provides a local community focus and its facilities are used by a large number of local groups.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0006300*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Coventry City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Coventry*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Spon Street*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1953*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Alfred Gardner*
- 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: *William Waddilove*
- 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.636-638.

William Waddilove, Local Meeting Survey, December 2015.

A brief History of Quakerism in the Coventry area,
<http://www.coventryquakers.org.uk/index.htm#history>

Coventry Friends Meeting House, <http://www.1624country.org.uk/Coventry.htm>

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

2.1 Historical background

In 1668, a plot of land was purchased on Hill Street for use as a Quaker burial ground. An existing barn on site became a place of worship for the next twenty years, until land was purchased on Vicars Lane in 1689 for a purpose-built meeting house. The meeting house opened the same year and further land to the north of the meeting house was bought to allow for the expansion of the meeting house in 1742. This meeting house would remain in use

until the late nineteenth century, by this date the building had undergone a number of alterations and repairs and a decision was made to replace the meeting house. It was also at a time when Friends were heavily involved in mission work, and a larger meeting house was needed to accommodate this work by Friends.

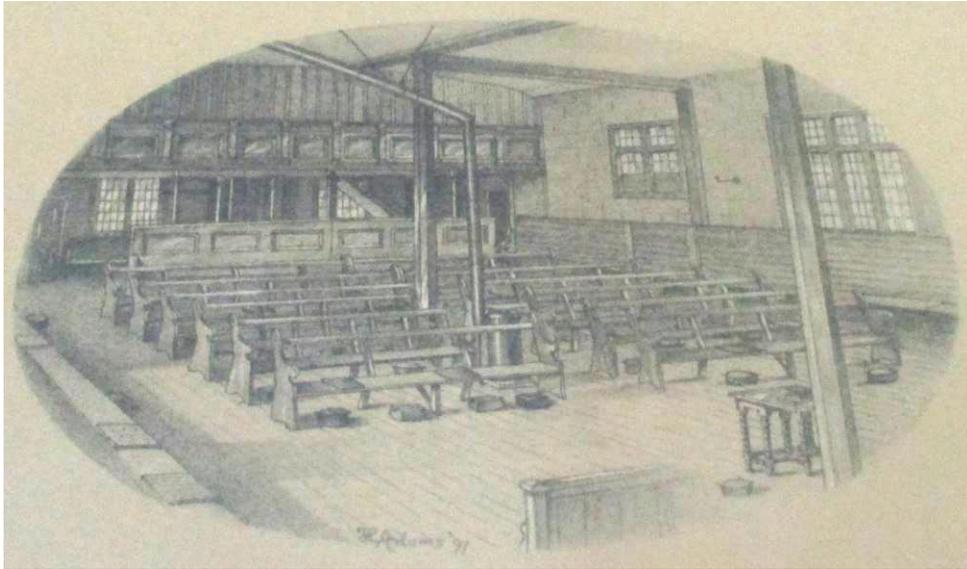


Figure 1: Drawing of the interior of Vicars Lane meeting house (Coventry MH Archive)

The third meeting house was built to the designs of Charles Smith and Son in 1897 on land purchased in Holyhead Road for £286. By the 1930's the meeting house, which contained a large meeting room, a number of class rooms and school rooms, became too large for the declining number of Friends. With the onset of the Second World War, Friends began to meet in smaller venues such as premises on Thomas Street, and in the YWCA building in Queens Road until a new meeting house was built on the Quaker burial ground first purchased for Quaker use in 1668 in Hill Street. The meeting house designed by Alfred Gardner was built in 1953 and cost of approximately £6,000. The meeting house was originally constructed with a flat roof and following the need for a number of repairs this was replaced with the present day hipped roof in 1995.



Figure 2: The Friends Meeting House on Holyhead Road

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

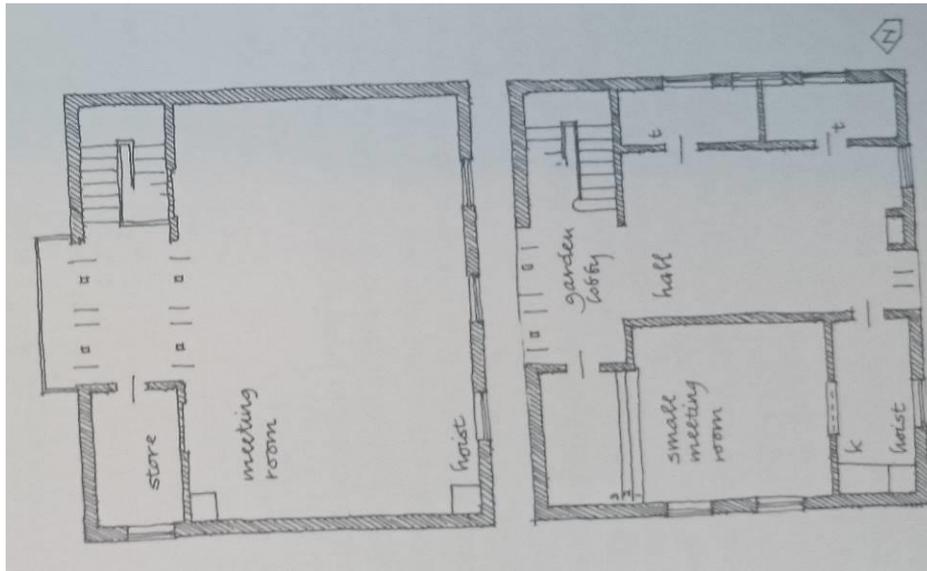


Figure 3: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the top right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.637)

The meeting house was built to the designs of Alfred Gardner and opened in 1953. The two-storey rectangular planned building was designed with the meeting room at first floor above the ancillary facilities and smaller meeting room below. It is built in red / brown brick laid in stretcher bond, a hipped roof covered in concrete tiles, with uPVC rain water goods, and uPVC windows. The principal elevation is to the north east and comprises three 1-light vertical windows at first floor, and a central entrance flanked by two 2-light windows. The south east elevation has two 1-light windows at ground level and a 2-light window at first and the northwest elevation has three windows at ground level. The rear elevation to the south west consists of two glass panelled windows flanked by two doorways, a balcony above with a large area of glazing and a doorway onto the balcony.

Internally, the lobby area provides access to the smaller meeting room, ancillary facilities and the staircase to first floor. The area is carpeted, the ceiling is formed of insulated panels and the walls are a mixture of exposed brick and plastered and painted finishes. The lobby can be separated by the garden lobby by a sliding screen to the south west. The terrazzo staircase with timber handrail leads to the main meeting room on the first floor. The room is large, spacious and well lit. The walls to the south west and north east are of exposed brick, cork-facing to the northwest and the remaining wall is plastered and painted. The ceiling is lined with insulated boards, and the floor is covered in cork tiles.

2.3 Loose furnishings

No furnishings of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is to the rear of the meeting house. Figure 4 is an undated burial ground plan which includes outlines of the present meeting house and driveway. This site in Hill Street was first purchased by Friends in 1668 for use as a burial ground and by 1953 the present day meeting house was built on part of the burial ground. The site is no longer used for burials and the approximate date range the burials cover is unknown. Burial records have been transcribed from the burial certificate held by Warwickshire Monthly Meeting and 58 Coventry-related burials were transcribed, the dates of the burials from the mid-nineteenth century. To the south west of the burial ground a small number of headstones laid flat remain in situ.

