

***Friends Meeting House, Bull Street***

*40 Bull Street, Birmingham, B4 6AF*

*National Grid Reference: SP 07175 87159*



***Statement of Significance***

***The meeting house designed by the eminent Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter in 1931-33 in a cubic neo-Georgian architectural style. The site has been in Quaker ownership since 1703, with two former meeting houses previously on this site. The building has high significance for communal and historical value and for the architectural significance of the main meeting room, although the buildings external aesthetic value has been reduced by major changes.***

***Evidential value***

***This is a purpose-built structure which dates from the early 1930s, built on the site of a former Quaker burial ground and two previous meeting houses. It is of high evidential value.***

***Historical value***

***The building has medium historical significance. As an important city meeting house designed by Hubert Lidbetter, it has strong associative value with the architect and his other Quaker work. The site itself has a high historic value for its association with Birmingham Quakers since 1703, and provides the local context of the Birmingham Meeting.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***The 1930s building has high aesthetic value as a larger meeting house designed by Lidbetter and influenced by his design for Friends House in London (1925-27), although it has been altered. Its setting is dominated by Lewis's department store and it makes a fairly neutral contribution to the character of the townscape. Internally, the main meeting room retains fittings and furnishings and this element of the building has high aesthetic value.***

### **Communal value**

***The meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers which has been in use since it opened in 1933. The building provides a local community focus and its facilities used by a number of local group and commercially.***

### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007390*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Birmingham City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Birmingham*
- 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): *1931 -33; 20<sup>th</sup> century; c.2001*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Hubert Lidbetter; not established; Peter Hing and Jones*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *25 November 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Beth Sadler*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Lodge Hill: SP 02800 82600*
- 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. II, pp.615-622.

Gawne, E., *Buildings of Endearing Simplicity: the Friends Meeting Houses of Hubert Lidbetter*, *The Twentieth Century Church*, *Twentieth Century Architecture* 3, 1998, pp87-92

*Local Meeting Survey*, October 2015.

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

### 2.1. Historical background

Quakerism in Birmingham dates back to the seventeenth century when Friends are recorded to have been meeting at the houses of William Reynolds in 1659 and of William Baylis in 1660. In 1681, Joseph Hopkins conveyed a house and yard (used as a burial ground) in a lane called Colmore's Lane to the Friends and this was registered as a place of worship in 1689. The building was converted into a dwelling in 1793 and subsequently demolished in 1726 but the burial ground remained in use until 1821.

Land for a new meeting house in 1703 was purchased in Bull Street from John Pemberton at a cost of £25, further plots of land were purchased in 1778, 1803 and in 1853 to accommodate expansion. The meeting house was built in 1703 and the site included space for a new burial ground. A number of repairs and alterations took place over the years and by 1806 proposals had been drawn up by George Jones for a new meeting house or conversion of the existing building into three shops. Neither of the two proposals took place and instead the existing building was enlarged in 1824 by the architect Edward Jones. By 1857, the meeting house had been demolished and a new meeting house built to the designs of Thomas Plevin on the same site. Bull Street in Birmingham, by this time, had become a main shopping district; Benjamin Cadbury had a drapers at 92 Bull Street and his brother John Cadbury had a neighbouring property selling cocoa and chocolate. Shortly before the new meeting house was built, David Lewis opened a department store on the corner of Corporation Street and Bull Street in 1855.

In 1859, further land was purchased on Upper Priory for the construction of a girl's Sunday School, and the Priory Rooms were built in 1861. By 1882, a building to accommodate the Friends Society library, the Monthly Meeting office housing the Bevan-Nash library and a caretaker's house had been built. These buildings were demolished in the early twentieth century as part of road works by the Birmingham Corporation.

The neighbouring Lewis's Department Store required more space in 1930 and by agreement with the Birmingham Corporation and the Friends the land boundaries were altered. In 1931 the 1850s meeting house was demolished and a new meeting house designed by Hubert Lidbetter and built in 1931-33. It was originally built as a two-storey building, the principal elevation to the south west was of 5-bays, with 12-pane sash windows at first floor and four 8-pane windows at ground floor with an open porch. During the late twentieth century the building was extended in a sympathetic style in order to create a third floor to accommodate a warden's flat.

In 1963-4, Doctor Johnson House designed by Clifford Tee and Gale was built to provide space for halls, offices and lettable rooms. A covered passage linked the building with the meeting house. By the 1990's Doctor Johnson House was in need of repairs and major refurbishment. A decision was made to demolish the building and part of the site was let for the building of One Colmore Square. The architects Peter Hing and Jones were appointed and they put forward proposals for an atrium, new courtyard, and basement extension. The plans were approved by the City Council and the new Priory Rooms were built in 2002. The burial ground was excavated and burials re-interred to Lodge Hill Cemetery.

## 2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

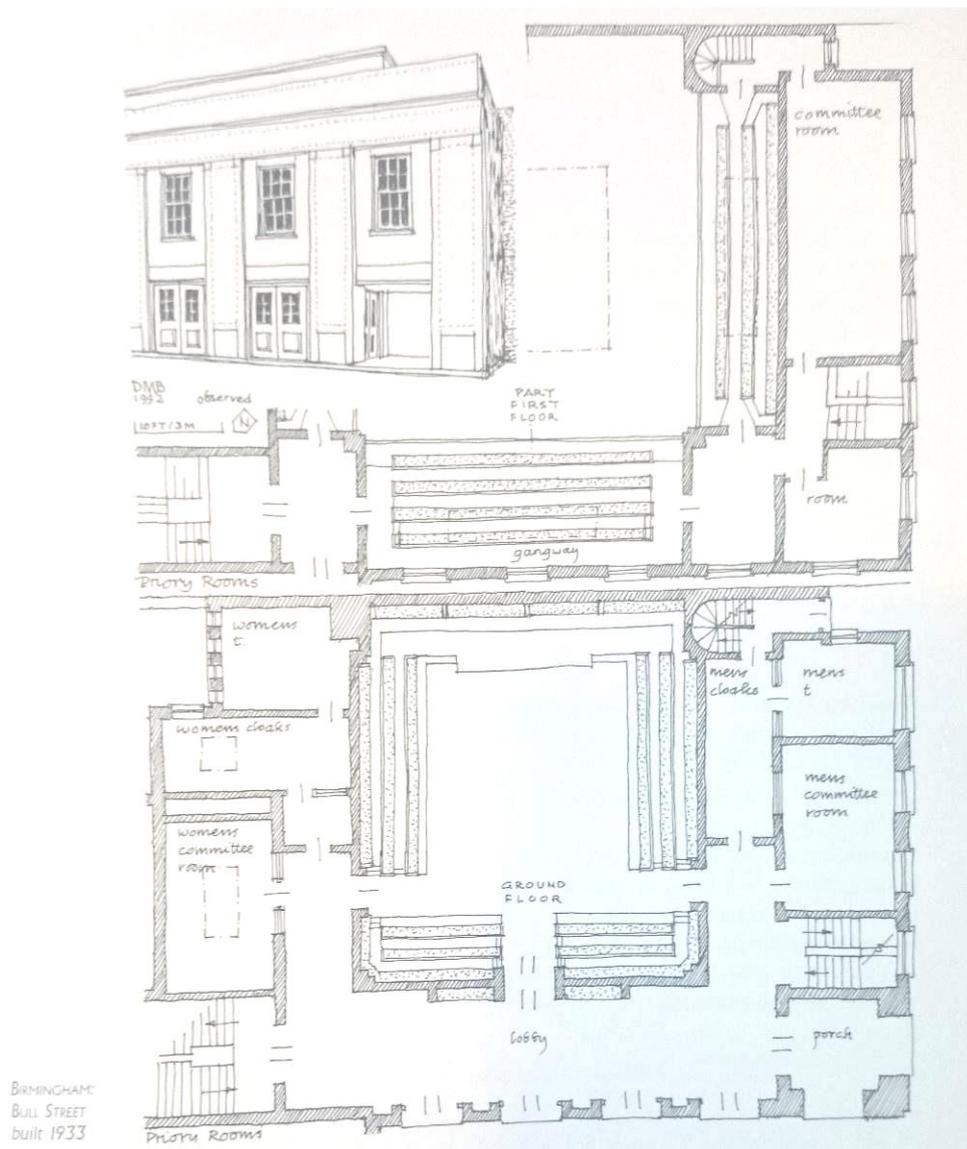


Figure 1: Lower floor plans of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is at the bottom left; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.621)

The present meeting house was built to the designs of Hubert Lidbetter and opened in 1933, extended in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Rectangular in plan the three-storey 5-bay building is designed in a cubic neo-Georgian architectural style. It is faced with multi-coloured sand-faced bricks laid in Flemish bond, with artificial stone plinth and dressings. The original fenestration on the principal entrance to the south west was replaced in the late twentieth century when a roof-top extension was added. The ground has three 2-light and one 3-light windows all with artificial stone lintels, the first floor has five uPVC sash windows and the added second floor has five top-hung casement windows. The entrance is to the west bay of the elevation is via double timber doors introduced in the late twentieth century. The first two storeys are articulated with recessed panels separated by a flat pilasters carrying a plain deep fascia previously topped with a plain parapet. The south east and north east elevations are obscured by the neighbouring high rise buildings. The new glazed Priory Rooms adjoin the north-west elevation.

Internally, the former open porch contains a plaque detailing the history of previous meeting houses on the site. The foyer area retains its oak panelling and fitted seats, along with the architraves. The original doors have since been replaced. The parquet flooring has been covered with carpet. The foyer provides access to the main meeting room, stairway and lift to the upper floors and to the new Priory Rooms. The main meeting room is spacious in design. Oak panelling lines the room with galleries to the south-west, and north-east walls with corridors beneath, a feature also used at Friends House. On each wall is a platform lined with oak benches. The high plastered ceiling is divided into two levels, the lower level has a soffit with mutules frieze with clerestory windows to the upper level.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

The main meeting room includes oak benches which date from the 1930s, probably designed by Lidbetter. Within the Southall Room there are a collection of paintings by Joseph Edward Southall (1861 – 1944) a Quaker who was President of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists.



Figure 2: Self portrait by Joseph Edward Southall

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The site formerly contained a burial ground. Gravestones remain to the north west of the meeting house, in front of the Priory Rooms, including those for Charles and Mary Lloyd, Mary Capper, Lucy Ann Cadbury and Emma Cadbury. The graves were interred and sent to Lodge Hill Cemetery during work to construct the Priory Rooms in 2001.



Figure 3: Plaques of those who were once buried at Bull Street

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located in a central position in Birmingham's city centre. The building is set back from the road, and access is provided via an opening off Bull Street. The meeting house sits within a courtyard enveloped by tall buildings. To the south west is an area of car parking and to the north-west is an area of landscaping surrounding the Priory Rooms. The general area is part of a city centre commercial district with a series of shops and offices lined along Bull Street.

## 2.6 Listed status

Not listed. The building has strong associations with the renowned Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter, but it is not considered to be a candidate for listing due to the extensions and alterations that have taken place in recent years.

## 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The Birmingham Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. However, the site has been in Quaker use since 1703, and two previous meeting houses have previously been located in the footprint. Depending on the level of ground disturbance, the site has medium archaeological potential.