

Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge

23a Watford Road, Birmingham, B30 1JB

National Grid Reference: SP 04744 79838



Statement of Significance

The building has medium heritage significance as a meeting house purpose-built in 1964, in a modernist style with a striking butterfly roof by local architect Frederick W Gregory.

Evidential value

Cotteridge meeting house has an overall low level of significance for evidential value. The Birmingham Historic Environment Record has not identified the site for any archaeological interest.

Historical value

Being of relatively recent date, the meeting house has low historical value. Together with the former Mission Hall on the site, it provides some local context into the recent history of Quakerism in Cotteridge.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has a functional modern design, typical of the post-war period; it has medium aesthetic value. The butterfly roof is an attractive feature and creates a dramatic space internally.

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 1964. The building has in recent years provided a local community focus and its facilities are used by many local and social groups with diverse interests.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0026440*

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: *1964*

1.13 Architect: *Frederick W Gregory*

1.14 Date of visit: *7 November 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Harriet Martin*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

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.624-625.

Hopper, M., *Cotteridge Friends: A Quaker Meeting in Birmingham 1906 – 1985*, 1985

Religious History: Places of worship, in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham* ed. W.B. Stephens (London, 1964), pp. 434-482 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/pp434-482>.

Harriet Martin, *Local Meeting Survey*, October 2015.

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

2.1 Historical background

In the late nineteenth century Cotteridge (which was known at the time as The Cotteridge) was predominately rural in character, located on the outskirts of Kings Norton. The villagers either worked in agriculture or at the Cadbury brother's factory in Bournville. Following a Quaker conference in Manchester in 1895 with a strong focus on liberal thinking, a small group of Friends from the Bournville Meeting, who were influenced by liberal ideas, were inspired to form a Meeting which did not follow the evangelism of the Bournville or Selly Oak Meetings.

At the expense of George and Edward Cadbury a Mission Hall was built in 1901 in Cotteridge, for £2, 500. George Cadbury was a strong believer in ensuring the knowledge of Christianity was spread among his employees. The hall was owned by West Birmingham Hall

Trust which was set up by George Cadbury. In 1906, the Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting received a request from the Friends in Cotteridge, who were meeting at the Mission Hall, for their Meeting to be recognised as a Preparative Meeting. In 1908, it is recorded that Cotteridge had a membership of seventy-one.



Figure 1: Cotteridge Mission Hall (Cotteridge MH Archive)

The Monthly Meeting took over the management of the hall from West Birmingham Hall Trust in July 1950. Six years later, Mr H M Grant of Grant Estates who was responsible for housing development in Cotteridge from the beginning of the twentieth century offered £12,000 to purchase the meeting house, but Friends declined the offer as it was insufficient to fund new premises or the building of a new meeting house. Instead, Friends repaired the frontage, created a car park and undertook internal decoration. However, there was growing concern relating to the condition and the cost of maintaining the meeting house by the late 1950s, leading to a decision to build a new purpose-built meeting house. A site on Middleton Hall Road was rejected before the Meeting decided to build on the rear of their existing site. The land immediately under the old meeting house was leased and a block of shops with flats above was built over it. Friends received ground rent from this property until 2013 when they sold the freehold for £120,000. The proceeds were invested as an endowment fund for the Meeting.

The architect Frederick W Gregory prepared proposals for a new meeting house on the existing site which required extra land, from adjacent properties (backs of gardens of 7, 9 and 11 Northfield Road). Gregory's proposals were accepted in March 1961 and the Friends Hall was sold at auction for £36,000 and later demolished. The contractor for the new meeting house was Grieves Ltd. During the construction period Friends temporarily met at a Social Club until the meeting house opened on 26th September 1964. The cost of the new meeting house was approximately £35,000.

Following, when Butler visited (Fig.2), the north range of the building had one very long classroom. Partitions could be inserted by hand to make three separate rooms, each with a door onto the corridor. In 2004 the space was redesigned to make a small classroom at the west end opening through double doors into one larger classroom. Throughout the building the original storage heaters have now been replaced with air source heat pumps.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

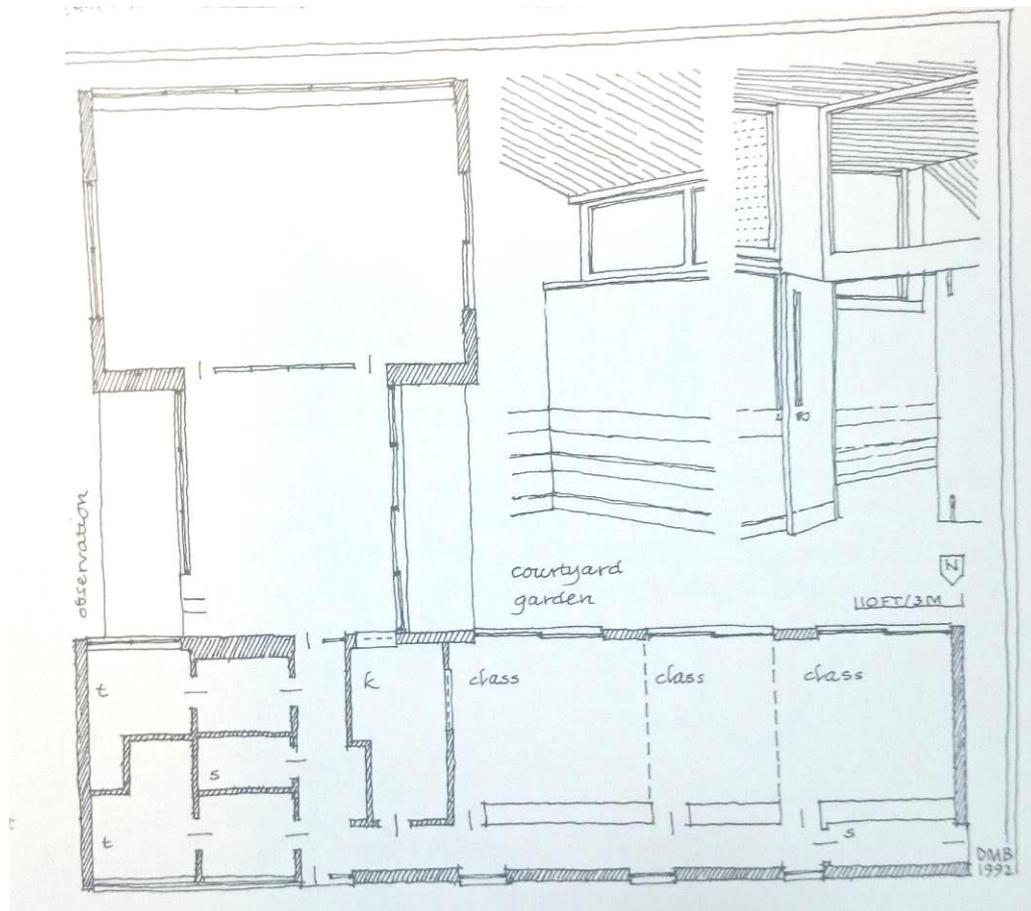


Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the bottom; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.624

The meeting house was built from designs by Frederick W Gregory in 1964. The building is built in brown and red brick laid in Flemish bond, with some stone panels to the east elevation and the butterfly roof is covered in a single layer membrane (over 1600mm insulation) with a solar photovoltaic array to the north range. The plan consists of two single-storey ranges; the meeting room and lobby are in the south block and ancillary spaces and classrooms are in a linear block to the north. The asymmetrical east elevation forms the principal frontage with the entrance slightly recessed in the centre, with double doors, natural stone panels and clerestory windows above. The roof consists of mono-pitched roofs to each block forming a butterfly shaped-roof form overall. The east wall facing the carpark has high level trapezoidal windows which follow the slope of the roofs. There are five high level windows in the south wall of the meeting room. The building's tall north wall has a line of six high level windows. Of those along the north long corridor two are part of vertical 3-light windows and two are above glazed doors. Originally five sets of overlapping plate glass panels, each 2m by 2m, formed sliding doors opening onto the garden from the meeting room, the foyer and the three classrooms. The door in the foyer was framed by full height

plate glass windows. Although admired by Pevsner, these were not energy efficient. By 2004 wooden framed full height double glazed windows had replaced the glass walls. There are now double doors from the middle classroom and a single door from the meeting room into the garden. The high level windows above these walls have now all been replaced with double glazed units set into the original wooden frames.

Internally, the main meeting room, ancillary facilities and classrooms are accessed via a spacious and light lobby area. The main feature of the meeting room is the V jointed parana pine ceiling, with spotlights, that gently rises at an angle to the south, the flooring is parquet and to the south the lobby is separated from the meeting room by removable partition panels. The room is well-lit from the combination of clerestory lighting to the south and large windows to the east and west. The walls have plain painted and plastered walls. There is fixed seating to the east, south and partially the west walls. Originally four night storage heaters heated this room. The south and north walls contain alcoves to accommodate the heaters.

The ancillary facilities are located to the east end of the north range, with a corridor leading to two classrooms. Separating the classrooms and the corridor are fitted timber storage facilities. These include cupboards which originally housed storage heaters. The classrooms and lobby have parquet flooring and a sloping ceiling.

2.3 Loose furnishings

No furnishings of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground

None.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Cotteridge is a suburban area located approximately five miles south of Birmingham city centre. The meeting house is located in Watford Road, the main commercial area of Cotteridge. The buildings date from the beginning of the twentieth century and consist of a series of Victorian red brick terraces with modern shop fronts below. In the 1960s a flat-roofed block with shops and flats was built on the site of the original meeting house to one side of the drive that leads back to the present meeting house. The meeting house is set back from the road behind blue metal gates and cannot be viewed from the street; it is accessed via an opening between buildings on Watford Road. To the east of the meeting house is a large car park with a warden's bungalow in the north-east corner. To the west of the meeting house is a garden developed in 2012 with a variety of insect-friendly planting. Ramps give wheelchair access to the garden from both the meeting room and the classrooms. A detached burial ground is located at Lodge Hill Cemetery, with a section dedicated to Quaker burials (NGR: SP 02848 82446).



Figure 3: Cotteridge Meeting House Garden

2.6 Listed status

Not listed. The meeting house is not considered to be a future candidate for listing. Frederick Gregory was responsible for the design of a number of Quaker meeting houses in the West Midlands including Barnt Green and Wolverhampton. Each meeting house is characterised by its unique roof forms. The building may merit inclusion on Birmingham's local list.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Birmingham Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site. The present meeting house is built on gardens to the west of a former Mission Hall built in 1901, it is therefore likely to be of low archaeological potential.