

Friends Meeting House, Kings Heath

17 Colmore Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7PE

National Grid Reference: SP 06923 81288



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is characterised by its low-key design and plain materials. The building has relatively low heritage value and architectural significance and its value is mainly communal.

Evidential value

This is a purpose-built structure of relatively recent date. The Birmingham Historic Environment Record has not identified the site for any archaeological interest.

Historical value

The meeting house overall has medium historical significance. Internally, furnishings from the former Friends Institute provide a local context of the evolution of the Meeting and strong associations with the Cadbury family.

Aesthetic value

This modern building has medium aesthetic value and makes a neutral contribution to the character of the townscape.

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 1983. The building provides a local community focus and its facilities used by a number of local groups.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000470*
- 1.3 Owner: *South Birmingham Friends Institute*
- 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): *1983; 1989*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *S.T. Walker & Partners; Harry Bloomer Partnership*
- 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: *David Gough*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Geoffrey Collins, *New Growth at Kings Heath*, The Friend, May 1984, p. 657.

More Memories and Minutes, Mosely Road to Colmore Road, 1993

David Gough, Local Meeting Survey, November 2015.

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

2.1 Historical background

The Friends' Institute on Moseley Road was built at the expense of Richard Cadbury, to the designs of Ewan and James Alfred Harper in 1898. Cadbury, a Quaker, wanted to create a single venue which would provide a base for worship but also an adult school, Sunday school and a place for social work. The institute which opened a year after Cadbury's death in 1899 consisted of a coffee room, reading room, a lecture room at first floor level to seat 400, thirty-seven classrooms across two levels, a large hall which could accommodate 2000, and a gymnasium.



Figure 1: Friends' Institute, Moseley Road, 1899 (Kings Heath MH archive)

Prior to the Second World War, the minutes of November 1936 note that negotiations had been taking place for a plot of land in Kings Heath, for housing. The land was purchased in 1937 with the development of the land under the direction of Dorothy Cadbury. At her expense, ten much sought-after dwellings were built by 1938 and passed on to the Bournville Village Trust to manage.

By the mid-twentieth century, as a result of a decline in membership and the increasing costs of running the Friends' Institute, discussions were held regarding relocating the meeting to Kings Heath. There was still an undeveloped site on the land purchased in Kings Heath in 1937. It was also a time when other institutes such as Selly Oak and Northfield were relocating to smaller new purpose-built meeting houses and the institutes were given to the city for community purposes. Agreement was reached to build a new meeting house in Kings Heath, with provision planned for expansion if required in the future. The institute passed into the ownership of the city in March 1983 and the new meeting house in Kings Heath was built by S.T. Walker & Partners in January 1983. One of the ten properties which were built in 1939 was subsequently allocated as a warden's house.



Figure 2: New meeting house being built in Kings Heath (Kings Heath Meeting House archive)

Four years after the meeting house had been built more space was required for storage and for additional meeting rooms. A local Quaker, Geoffrey Collins suggested the meeting house should be extended, which was agreed. Collins, along with his colleagues at Harry Bloomer Partnership designed an extension consisting of a new rear entrance, storage rooms, an office and enlargement of one of the existing meeting rooms. The extension was completed in 1989.



Figure 3: 1987 extensions to Kings Heath meeting house (Kings Heath Meeting House archive)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

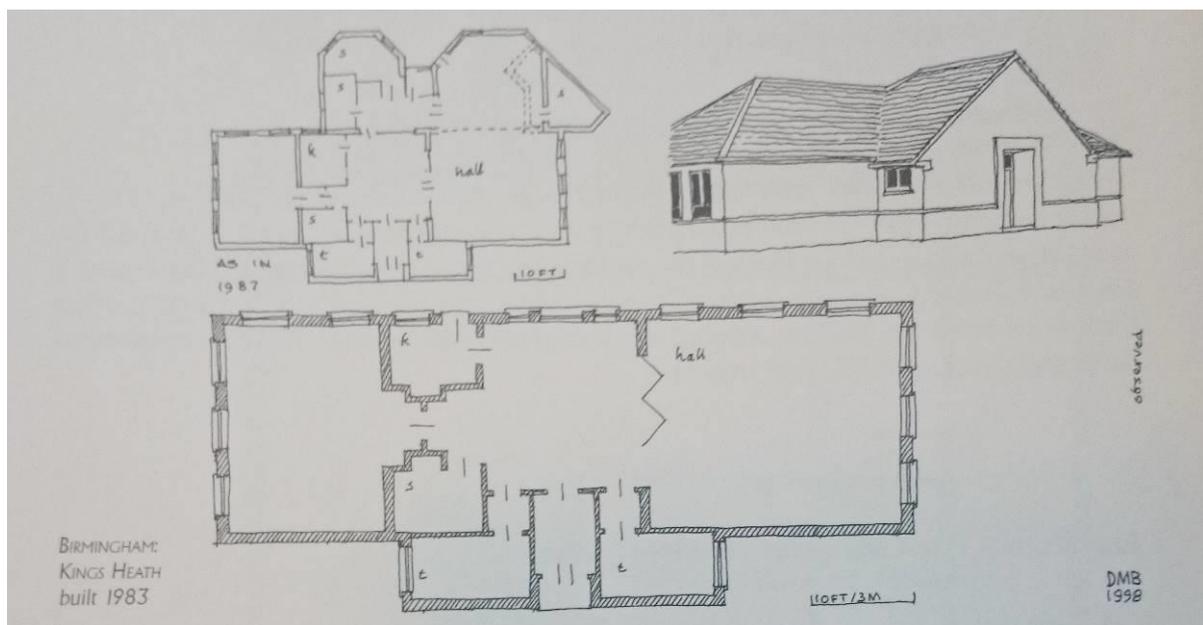


Figure 4: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.628)

The meeting house was built from designs by S. T. Walker and Partners of Birmingham and opened in 1983, and extended to the west in 1988 by Harry Bloomer Partnership. The building originally was rectangular in plan and as a result of the extension now has an irregular polygonal footprint. The one-storey meeting house is built with red brick laid in stretcher bond and the hipped and gabled roof is covered in concrete tiles.

The front elevation to the east comprises a central projecting gable with hardwood double doors. The north and south walls of the gable include single uPVC windows. Flanking the entrance is the main structure of the meeting house with elevations which are blind. There are three window openings to the north and two to the south with a side entrance. The rear of the property to the west consists of the 1988 extension by Harry Bloomer Partnership. The design is formed of two hexagonal structures divided by a ramp to provide better access into the meeting house.

The meeting rooms, kitchen, toilets, store rooms and office are accessed via a pleasant light and spacious lobby area. The lobby area is carpeted, with a suspended ceiling, plastered and painted walls to the south whilst to the north hardwood veneer sliding doors provide access into a meeting room. This meeting room was extended in 1988 and an additional sliding door separates the extension to the original footprint of the room. The main meeting room to the south has a suspended ceiling, carpeted flooring, plastered and painted walls. The room is well lit by windows from the south and west. A mixture of modern loose chairs are arranged around a central table.

2.3 Loose furnishings

A number of furnishings were brought from the Friends Institute, Moseley Road. Items include: a large oak table made by Lewis Willis (Fig. 5), a Bluthner grand piano in the large room (Fig. 6), a painting of Richard Cadbury located in the office and two oak chairs with the initials of Richard Cadbury (Fig. 7) located in the lobby area which were a gift presented to him at a private opening ceremony in December 1898 by adult scholars and members of the various branches of his Highgate work.



Figure 5: Oak table by Lewis Willis



Figure 6: Bluthner grand piano



Figure 7: One of two chairs with Richard Cadbury's initials

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

None.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Kings Heath is located five miles south of Birmingham city centre. The meeting house is located in Colmore Road, which consists of a number of dwellings built at the expense of Dorothy Cadbury during the inter-war period. The properties are a mixture of two-storey detached and semi-detached buildings, characterised by hipped roofs and front facing gables. The meeting house is set back from the road and is bounded by a hedgerow along with white metal fencing. To the west is a timber pagoda with an area of landscaping and a car park.

2.6 Listed status

Not listed. Not considered to be a future candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The Birmingham Historic Environment Record was consulted and no records have been identified for the site, it is therefore likely to be of low archaeological potential.