

Friends Meeting House, Stourbridge

Scotts Road, Stourbridge, DY8 1UR

National Grid Reference: SO 89908 84525



Statement of Significance

The meeting house has high heritage value as a purpose-built late seventeenth century meeting house with historic fittings dating from the eighteenth century, an earlier burial ground and connections to the local Crowley family.

Evidential value

The building and site have medium evidential values primarily associated with the potential to yield information about the building's construction and past Quaker activity.

Historical value

The meeting house retains its historic layout, as well as a number of features dating from the eighteenth century, including the gallery and seating. The land where the meeting house is sited was given by Ambrose Crowley a prominent blacksmith in Stourbridge. The meeting house and burial ground have high historical value.

Aesthetic value

In keeping with Quaker principles, the meeting house is plain, but attractive building, and retains a good set of fitted oak benches, panelling and ironmongery to the windows and doors. 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 1689. It is also used by local community groups and is open to the public, in conjunction with Heritage Open Days each year in September.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Central England*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0085030*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *West Midlands*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Dudley*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1262874*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Dates: *1689, 1960 & 1994*
- 1.13 Architects: *Not established, Folkes & Folkes & Alan Cotterell Partnership*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *26 October 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contacts made on site: *James Bradbury and Enid Carpenter*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

1.18 Attached burial ground: Yes

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 700-701

Stourbridge Quaker Meeting House, *Overview History*, Leaflet

Stourbridge Quaker Meeting House, *Visitor Information*

Enid Carpenter, *Local Meeting Survey*, October 2015.

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

2.1 Historical background

In the seventeenth century a small group of Friends were meeting in Stourbridge, at each other's homes. It was not until after the Toleration Act of 1689 that Friends were confident to build a meeting house; Friend Ambrose Crowley, an ironmonger, leased the land of the present meeting house to the Quakers at a peppercorn rent and reference is made to a 'newly erected edifice' in 1689. At this time the meeting house was a simple structure with a fireplace to the west end. Additions to the interior during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century included tongue and groove oak panelling and a gallery with folding screens to the east and a fireplace (south east corner of the gallery) for the women's meeting. Externally, a small lean-to was added to the south elevation.



Figure 1: Stourbridge Meeting House by C.S. Barthindate, 1949 (Stourbridge MH Archive)

The meeting house would remain little altered until the mid-twentieth century, when additional space was created during the 1960s for a children's room and toilet facilities. A separate flat-roofed building was built to the designs by Folkes & Folkes to the south of the meeting house with a small courtyard dividing the two buildings. In 1994, the two buildings were connected with a sympathetically designed extension to the east of the meeting house

combined with the construction of a new roof over the courtyard, providing a kitchen and lobby area.



Figure 2: Children's room and meeting house link (Stourbridge MH Archive)

In 2002, major repair work was undertaken which focused on the main ceiling beam at the front of the gallery, remedying damp issues and repairs to the lath and plaster ceiling. During these works two former windows to the north wall were discovered along with a lintel over the original entrance.



Figure 3: Internal works reveal former window openings (Stourbridge MH Archive)

The final major work undertaken was providing a hipped roof over the children's room in 2004.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

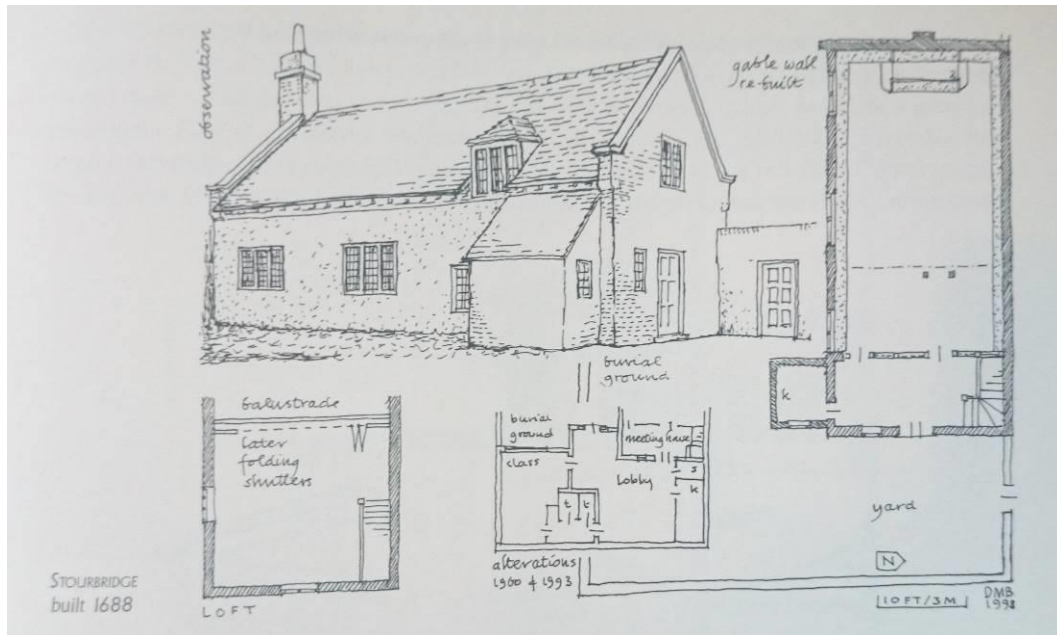


Figure 4: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 2, p.701)

The present meeting house was built in three phases. The original meeting house was built in 1689. It is single storey building, rectangular in plan and built of red brick laid in English Garden wall bond with render, some Flemish bond, brick dentil detail under eaves, and the pitched roof is covered in clay pantiles. The south elevation has two 3-light casement leaded windows and one 2-light window, with two hipped dormer windows that cut through the eaves (the eastern dormer introduced in 1994). To the east of this elevation is the 1994 link block which provided the principal entrance into the meeting house. Adjoining the link block to the south is the 1960s children's room designed by Folkes and Folkes with a hipped roof added in 2004. The north and west elevations of the main meeting room are blind with the north elevation rendered. The east of the meeting room is the sympathetically designed 1994 extension, the elevation has a rendered finish with a 2-light leaded window; adjoining this is the blind elevation of the children's room.

Internally, the spacious common room area with exposed modern timber ceiling supported on two timber trusses provides access to the main meeting room, ancillary facilities and children's room. The original external east wall of the meeting house remains, with a two 2-light leaded casement windows. The original lobby area of the meeting room is now the library with terracotta quarry tiles, rich oak fittings with ironmongery believed to be by Ambrose Crowley dating from 1689 and access to the gallery above. The meeting room contains horizontal oak tongue and groove panelling to dado height, with walls lime-plastered and softwood floor with a carpet covering. A raised elders' stand with fitted seats is to the west, with fixed seating along the north, south and west walls. To the east is the gallery, supported on two pillars, the gallery has folding oak screens and a splat balustrade. A cast iron fireplace is located to the south east corner of the gallery. The meeting room is lit by natural light from the south and the ceiling is fitted with pendant lighting. The roof is supported by two queen post trusses partially obscured by the lath and plaster ceiling.



Figure 5: Fireplace located in the south east corner of the gallery

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of historic benches dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is to the south of the meeting house. In the 1960s, as part of the children's room extension, some of the gravestones were relocated to the south boundary wall in front of the flowerbeds, these are laid flat. There are 57 recorded burials covering 1689 to 1945, identified on a plan held in the meeting house and within the archives of Bull Street meeting house in Birmingham. Whilst the burial ground is no longer used for burials ashes are still scattered in the garden area and small memorial plates have been laid.

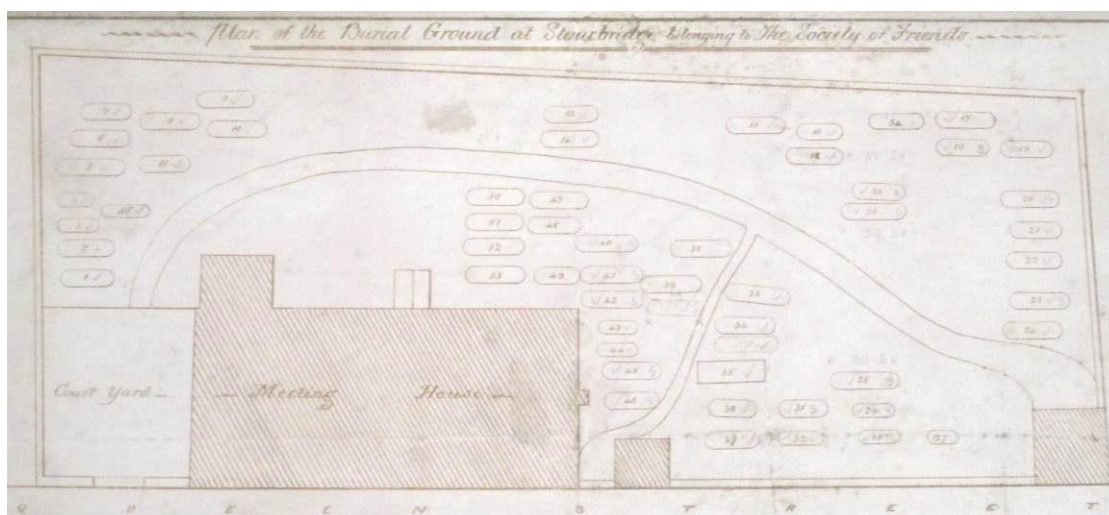


Figure 6: Plan of the burial ground, undated (Stourbridge MH Archive)

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Stourbridge is located on the edge of the Black Country, south west of Dudley and 15 miles west of Birmingham. The meeting house is located to the north-west edge of the town centre in Scotts Road, a residential cul-de-sac. The properties along this road are predominately inter-war, characterised by semi-detached properties with hipped roofs and small front gardens. To the west of the meeting house is a former school built in the nineteenth century, originally there were once two schools along this road formerly known as Wollaston Road, the open land on Scotts Road is the site of one of the schools now demolished. The school that still stands was later in use as an institute and then a Brotherhood Hall, it is now unoccupied and is deteriorating, creating a negative impact on the townscape. To the east of the meeting house is the busy main road, Bath Road.

The meeting house is bounded by modern metal fencing to part of the north elevation, whilst the rest of the boundary has a red brick wall, with arched entrance into the burial ground to the north. The grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which add to the mature landscaped character of the area. A ginkgo tree was planted in 1998 by Revd B.G. Crowley, a descendent of Ambrose Crowley, to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the meeting house.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is listed grade II which is considered appropriate. The list entry would benefit from being revised. The description notes that the building was formerly a smithy before being adapted in 1968 as a chapel; this is incorrect. The land on which the present meeting house stands was leased by Ambrose Crowley, whose occupation was an ironmonger. A document of 1689 refers to a 'newly erected edifice' on the site, indicating that it was a purpose-built meeting house.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The archaeological potential of the site is considered to be low, as no former building is recorded on site prior to the construction of the present meeting house. The building has archaeological potential.

Part 6: List description

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1262874

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, SCOTTS ROAD

District: Dudley

District Type: Metropolitan Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 09-Dec-1975

List entry Description

1. 1682 SCOTTS ROAD, STOURBRIDGE

Friends' Meeting House SO 9084 2/28

II

2. Cl7. Originally two cottages and a smithy, converted in 1968 into a Chapel. Roughcast brick with brick dentil eaves. Tiled gable-ended roof. Wood mullion windows with leaded parted, and a flat roofed dormer, single storey. The simple interior contains a gallery with balustrade supported on two columns, panelling and benches.

Listing NGR: SO8990984523