

Friends Meeting House, Alston

Front Street, Alston, CA9 3HP

National Grid Reference: NY 71938 46381



Statement of Significance

An attractive stone built meeting house with high heritage value as a good example of an early eighteenth-century meeting house. It is architecturally modest but retains original furnishings from 1859 and an attached burial ground.

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 and burial ground have high historic value. The meeting room retains its historic internal layout, as well as a number of original features, including the minister's stand and some seating.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is very much part of the distinctive character of Alston making use of local materials in a traditional manner. The interior of the meeting room has been well preserved and contains original historic furnishings. The burial ground has unmarked graves in line Quaker tradition, part of the aesthetic value of the site.

Communal value

The building is a place for Quakers to meet and also well-used by the community, local charities and as a place for social and fellowship meetings by the Methodists; it has a high community value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Cumberland*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0031940*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Eden District Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.6 Civil parish: *Alston Moor*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1144960*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Alston*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *Yes – Conservation Area*

1.12 Date(s): *1732*

1.13 Architect (s): *Unknown*

1.14 Date of visit: *5th May 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *June Hall and Pat Gundry*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Outbuilding*

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. 1, pp.77-79.

Alston Friends' Meeting House Appeal leaflet, nd.

Pat Gundrey, Local Meeting Survey, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The meeting house was built in 1732 with an attached burial ground funded by contributions by the Friends. By 1762 it was apparent the size of the building was insufficient to meet the Friends' needs. In order to enlarge the meeting house, work was undertaken and completed in 1764 to raise the height of the walls, build a gallery and insert a new 2-light mullioned window to light the loft space. Shortly after this work, in a year unknown, the mullioned windows were replaced by sash windows (excluding the loft) to provide more light into the meeting house. The former mullioned windows are still evident externally.

In 1859 the number of members attending Meetings began to decline. Around the time the gallery was removed and the opening blocked and plastered over, a new ministers' stand was installed, in addition panelling was added in the meeting room and the loft floor removed to provide a new ceiling in the women's meeting room. Externally, the porch was added around this date. The lintel dated 1732 was possibly recycled from the original entrance.

In 1902 the meeting was laid down. An organisation known as Toc H (a movement that emerged from a soldiers' club in Belgium during World War I) occupied the building for a number of years working with the community and supporting local charities.

Friends in Alston began to meet again in 1972 as a result of new Friends moving into the area. In 1996 the building was refurbished with external repairs (Fig.1) and new toilet and kitchen facilities added in the former women's meeting room. The work was managed by Peter Kempsey of Countryside Consultants.



Figure 1: External repair works 1996/1997 (Alston FMH archive)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

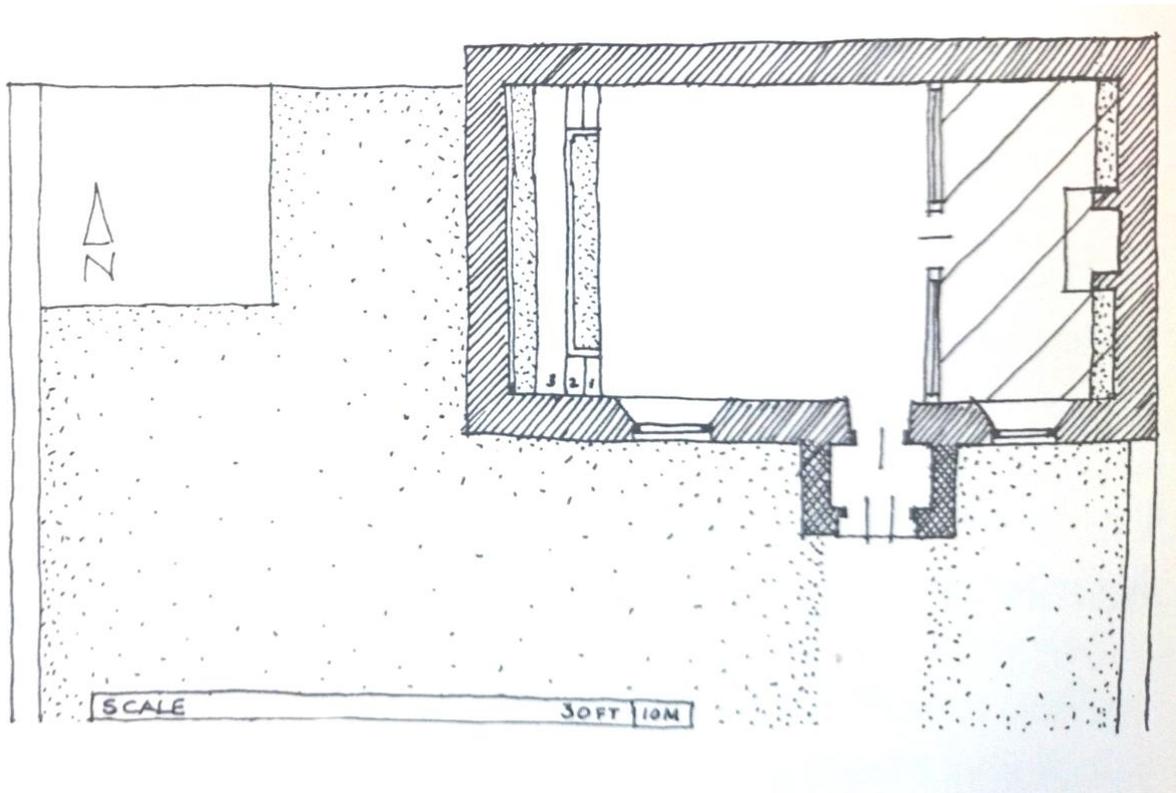


Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p.78)

The Quaker Meeting House was first built in 1732. It is built of coursed squared rubble stone, with stone quoins to the added porch, stone slate roof with copings, a single stone chimney to the east, and cast iron guttering and downpipes. The local Alston stone is a hard and durable sandstone.

The 3-bay building is rectangular in plan with a south porch, and is divided internally into two principal spaces: the larger meeting room to the west and the smaller former women's room, now an ancillary area to the east. The south elevation has a gabled porch to right of centre with a stone chamfered lintel above the planked door. To the left and right of the porch are sash windows with glazing bars and to the upper right of the elevation is a 2-light stone mullioned window (formerly lit the loft). The east gable end is built directly onto Front Street, in plain stone with a gable-end stack, whilst the west gable is lime-rendered. A two-storey stone building abuts the north elevation of the meeting house.

The meeting room is accessed via the porch on the south wall. The room is rectangular in plan, lit by a single window on the south wall, walls are plastered and painted and the south and west walls have tongue and groove panelling to dado level. The east wall is formed of vertical sliding timber panels with a central door to the ancillary space (formerly the women's room). The raised ministers' stand is located on the west wall with access via steps to the left and right. The stand is fronted with horizontal panelling and the fitted a bench has turned front legs.

The room is arranged with loose bench seating in a square around a central table.

2.3 Loose furnishings

No historical information about the benches is available (Fig.3). The turned front legs of the benches match the design of the fixed bench to the minister's stand, which suggests they date from 1859.



Figure 3: Meeting room benches

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground is located to the south side of the meeting house, enclosed by a dry stone front wall with simple metal gate from the street. The Alston burial ground expresses simplicity and contains no headstones. The Alston Meeting burial registers identify sixteen burials which include a number of early Quakers from the Pickering family. The earliest known burial was of John Pickering in 1805 and the last in 1874.



Figure 4: Burial ground (from the north)

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Alston is a remote hill town surrounded by areas of moorland and is located within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The meeting house is aligned east to west with the east gable facing Front Street, close to the town centre. The burial ground and meeting house are enclosed by a dry stone wall and a small path leads from the street to the meeting house. The open space of the burial ground makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. To the west of the meeting house is a small lean-to out building built of coursed squared local stone. The best view of the meeting house is from Front Street facing north.

Front Street contains mainly stone terraced houses that date from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. This is an attractive historic street, and the area by the town's market cross is cobbled.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house and walls to the burial ground are listed at grade II which is considered appropriate.

The list entry for the meeting house would benefit from being updated with an expanded description of the interior.

The list entry for the boundary wall has one slight inaccuracy; the twentieth century wooden gate has been replaced with an iron gate at an unknown date.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

It is not known whether there is an earlier building on this site, but the site may have some archaeological potential for earlier occupation. The meeting house was enclosed within the walled burial ground from the eighteenth century, and the burial ground has archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. Since the quinquennial survey dated 7th June 2012 a number of recommendations have been followed including: repointing the porch roof ridge, copings and verges and works to the outbuilding. Work recommended to be undertaken within the next five years included providing a rainwater hopper head and fall pipe to the outbuilding, additional sash locks to windows and lead cover flashing to the outbuilding roof.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/satisfactory. The drystone wall is in good condition. The top stones are all in place to the south and west walls. No signs of bowing or bellying and no fallen stones. The burial ground itself is well maintained.

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting house does not have a five year maintenance and repair plan. Members regularly monitor the meeting house and have the necessary funds to undertake repairs and maintenance when needed.

3.3. Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: renewed heating system and changed energy provider to a green energy supplier - Ecotricity.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. They are all in the meeting house and include a fully-equipped kitchen, a WC (fully accessible) and a meeting room.

3.5. Access

The meeting house has level access and an accessible WC. There are no specific facilities for the partially-sighted. A Disability Access Audit has not been carried out.

The meeting house is not accessible by public transport, but it is within walking distance of most of the town. There is no on-site bicycle parking or on-site car parking available. Free car parking is available in Front Street and a restricted on-street parking scheme operates between April and October.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by Friends for approximately 2 hours and in community use for 10 hours each week. The Meeting does not have a lettings policy. The meeting house is located in the centre of town and is ideal for small groups. The Methodists use the meeting house on a regular basis (three times a week) for social and fellowship meetings.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The area has low crime levels and there has been no heritage crime at the site.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no future plans for change.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting. This is a small meeting house and the scope for change is limited. The surviving historic fittings from 1859 should be retained.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The meeting house is already used for community use and has the facilities to support this.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. The meeting house was previously laid down in 1902 for approximately seventy years and used by Toc H which supported a number of local charities. If the meeting house was to be laid down once again, it would be necessary to find another, preferably community use for the listed building which retains some of the internal surviving historic features.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List descriptions

Name: QUAKER MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1144960

QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, FRONT STREET

County	District	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	Eden	District Authority	Alston Moor

Grade: II

Date first listed: 14-May-1984

NY 7146 ALSTON MOOR FRONT STREET, ALSTON (West side)

24/58 Quaker Meeting House G.V. II Meeting House, built at right angles to road, dated 1732. Coursed, squared rubble on plinth. Graduated stone-flagged roof with stone chimney to east end. Originally single-storey, 1st floor was added in 1764; originally 4-bay with mullioned 2-light windows, now 3-bay. Gabled porch has lintel dated 1732, but porch and single sashes with glazing bars on either side were added after 1848. Only one 2-light mullioned window has been retained; on 1st floor, it is blocked and painted in trompe l'oeil fashion.

Listing NGR: NY7193846381

Name: WALLS TO BURIAL GROUND IN FRONT OF QUAKER MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1144961

Location

WALLS TO BURIAL GROUND IN FRONT OF QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, FRONT STREET

County	District	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	Eden	District Authority	Alston Moor

Grade: II

Date first listed: 14-May-1984

NY 7146 ALSTON MOOR FRONT STREET, ALSTON (West side)

24/59 Walls to burial ground in front of Quaker Meeting House G.V. II Drystone walls with triangular coping stones to south and west sides; C20 wooden gate on east side is flanked by sections of drystone wall with flat copings. All these walls are c4 ft high, but the section of the east wall adjoining the Meeting House is c8 ft high of coursed rubble with segmental copings.

Listing NGR: NY7194746375