

Friends Meeting House, Claverham

Meeting House Lane, Claverham, Bristol, Somerset, BS49 4PB

National Grid Reference: ST 45262 66285



Statement of Significance

The present meeting house building was erected in 1729 to replace an earlier building of 1674 with a burial ground attached. It is a handsome structure with an elaborately decorated main front and originally incorporated dwellings for poor Quakers in the small side wings – a very unusual arrangement. The central meeting room retains much of its original character, with a tall panelled dado and the fronts of the original galleries, as well as some old timber benches. The interior of the wings has been much altered in modern times. The building and its immediate setting are of high heritage significance.

Evidential value

The burial ground has been in use since 1674, the foundations of the 1674 meeting house were still visible in the 1920s and the interior of the building has many original fittings. The whole is of high evidential value.

Historical value

A well-preserved example of an unusual type of early eighteenth-century meeting house. Although the building has not served its own meeting since 1867, it has remained in Quaker ownership under the patronage of the Clark family and it is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The main front is unusually elaborate for a Quaker meeting house and is a fine example of early eighteenth-century artisan design. The interior still preserves a great deal of its original character with the original dado and gallery fronts. The building is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house was in continuous use for worship since from 1729 until 1867. For much of the twentieth century it was preserved as a historic monument, but since the early 1990s it has been used both for Quaker Meetings and for a wide range of other activities compatible with Quaker values. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *North Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0099170*
- 1.3 Owner: *Claverham Meeting House Trust (Charity no.1052118)*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *North Somerset Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Yatton*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1320963*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1729, major refurbishment 1953, rear additions 2000*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *original architect not established; rear additions by Caroline Gould*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *2 September 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Tom Leimdorfer*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *stone outbuilding adjacent, now converted to a craft centre; former Meeting House in Yatton High Street, now a public library, with burial ground attached (now under concrete)*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 533-4

Stell, C. *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991

Scholl, Edith, *Claverham Meeting: A stronghold of Quakerism in Somerset 1673-1874*, 1935

Local Meeting survey by Tom Leimdorfer, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

In 1673 Robert Davis of Yatton gave half an acre of land 'for a burial-place for the people called Quakers and also that on the said ground may be built a house for the people called Quakers to meet together to worship the Lord their God and for some of their poor friends to inhabit therein'. It is clear from the detailed wording of the bequest that the burial ground was to be open to all nonconformists. A meeting house was built in 1674, presumably with some almshouse-like provision. According to Butler, the foundations of this building were still visible in 1925. A new meeting house was built elsewhere on the site in 1729, incorporating two small dwellings on the ground floor of the wings, with meeting house lofts above. One of the lofts was enclosed with shutters in 1755 for the newly-established women's business meeting. Following the arrival of the railway at Yatton in the 1840s, a new meeting house was built there in 1867 and the Claverham meeting closed. The meeting house at Claverham was retained by the Quarterly meeting until 1932, when it was sold to Roger Clark of Street, who repaired the building and gave it to the Friends Historical Society. It was again very extensively repaired at the expense of the Clark family in 1953-4, with some additions, and returned to the ownership of the Quarterly Meeting. In 1985 it re-passed into the ownership of the Historical Society but in 1991 a new trust was established with the aim of preserving the building and making it available for suitable uses. Further repairs were undertaken in 2000, when the 1950s rear additions were replaced by modern structures. At the same time the adjacent outbuilding was converted for use as a craft workshop.

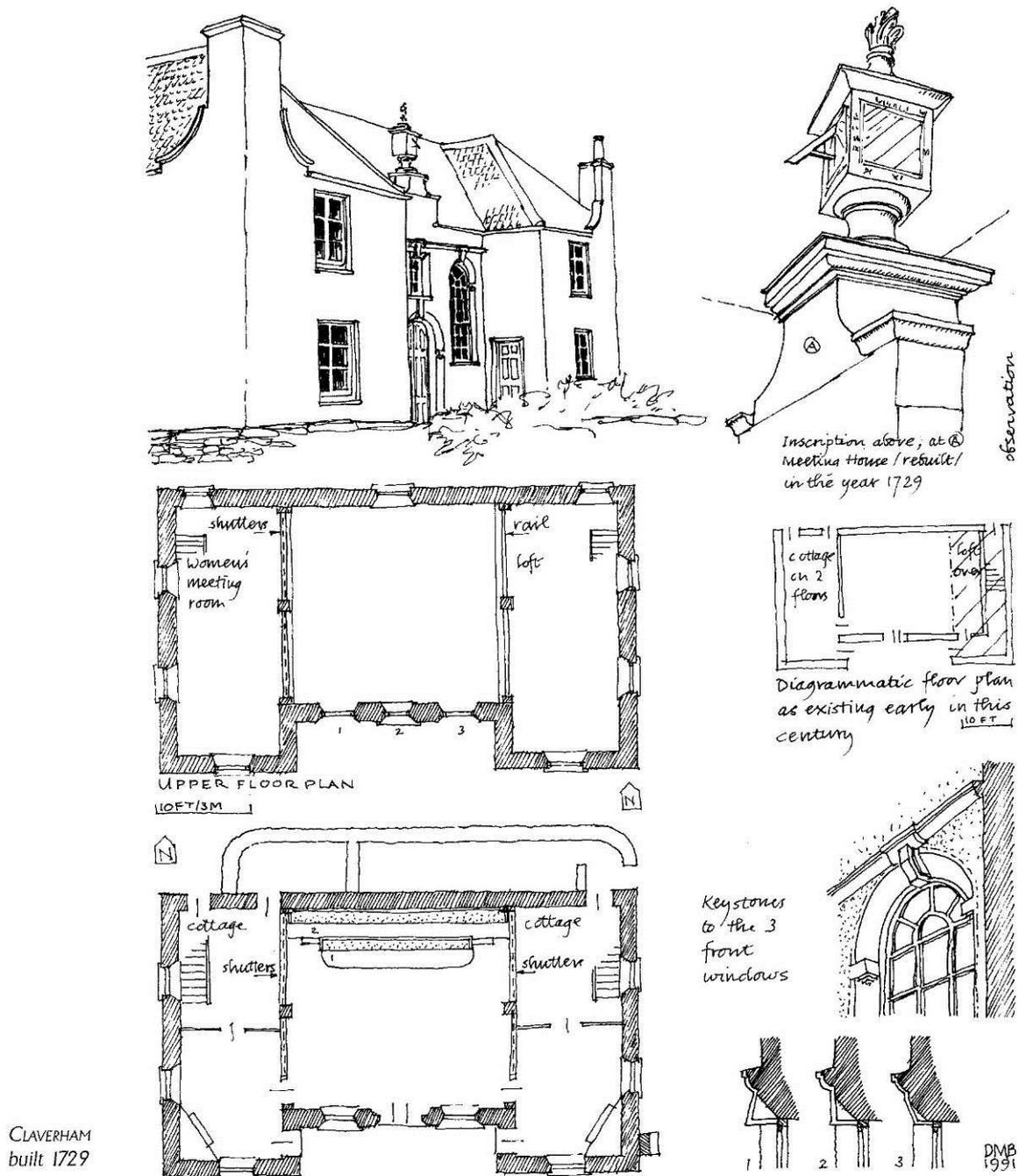


Figure 1: Ground and first floor plans before alterations, perspective view of main front and details, (Butler, vol. 2, p. 534)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

See list description of 1985 below.

The meeting house is built of limestone rubble with a coating of render and limewash. The roof is covered with pantiles, with a lead flat over the centre of the building. The plan of the original building is a half-H, with the meeting room in the centre between narrow flanking wings, which both originally contained dwellings on the ground floor. The recessed south-facing main front has a tall round-headed central doorway with a chamfered stone surround,

imposts and keystone and panelled double doors. To either side are tall round headed windows with stone surrounds and keystones and small-paned timber sashes with thick glazing bars. Above the main door is a small rectangular window opening of similar character. Immediately over this window is a moulded stone string and above the string the centre of the front is carried up to form the base for a stone pedestal carrying a square block sun-dial with a torch finial. The sun-dial base is inscribed 'THIS HOUSE REBUILT IN THE YEAR 1729'. Elsewhere the detailing is much simpler. The inner faces of both wings have modern half-glazed doors, the south end walls have a modern casement window on ground and first floor and the external corners of both wings are carried up as chimney-stacks. The east and west side walls both have two modern casement windows on both floors. At the rear of the building both wings have modern (2000) single-storey extensions with rendered walls, hipped lean-to roofs and strip glazing under the eaves.

The interior of the main meeting room has a timber floor covered with carpet, a tall timber dado with unpainted raised and fielded panelling, plain plastered walls above the dado and a flat plaster ceiling (renewed in 2000). Across the full width of the north end is a raised stand with a rail and fixed bench in front. The east and west side walls have raised and fielded panelling at lower level with panelled central and side piers which are carried up to the floor above which originally had open galleries. On the east side the handrail survives but the space behind has been walled-off. On the west side the panelling and shutters erected in 1755 to enclose the space for the women's business meeting still survive, but are fixed in place. The spaces in the side wings have been modernised and have a wholly twentieth-century character.

To the north east of the meeting house, between it and the burial ground, is a long stone building with a pantiled roof. It is thought to date from c.1800 and was probably a stable and cart shed. The roof was damaged by fire in the 1990s and partly renewed. The building now contains a garage and a craft space.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are a number of simple timber benches in the meeting room, which may be original to the building. Some have solid ends and all have open backs.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground lies to the north of the meeting house and outbuilding and is bounded by the stone wall which encloses the whole of the site. The ground is laid to grass and surrounded by trees and hedges. It is not used for burials, but scattering of ashes has taken place in recent years. There are some stone grave markers, but none pre-date 1750. When the burial ground at Yatton was sold in 1965, the stones were brought to Claverham. Stones in the burial ground dating from 1868 onwards are from Yatton. Several members of the Clark family of Street are buried here. There is no formal maintenance plan, but the burial ground is under the care of the Trust's maintenance committee.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a relatively isolated setting in open fields some way to the east of Claverham village. The meeting house is close to the road, but the burial ground is sheltered by mature trees. The former burial ground at Yatton (NGR: ST 431 655), next to the former 1867 meeting house, is now under tarmac.

2.6 Listed status

The building is properly listed at Grade II*.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The burial ground has been in use since 1674 and the foundations of the 1674 meeting house were still visible in the 1920s. The site has high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in October 2015 and was undertaken by Michael Greaves, a chartered engineer and surveyor. The building was found to be generally in good condition, with no major structural defects, but with some maintenance requirements including external painting and limewashing. Only urgent minor roof repairs and the Fire Risk Assessment have been carried out. The Meeting House Trust has enough money to maintain and repair the building. There is a 5-year maintenance and repair plan as a result of the recent survey.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: switching to 'Good Energy' as a supplier and monitoring the use of electricity.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: attempts to maximise recycling and composting
- Wildlife and nature conservation: the grounds are maintained to encourage wildlife.
- Transport: encouragement of public transport use where possible

The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs; besides the main meeting room there is a kitchen, two toilets/bathrooms, a small lounge and two bedrooms with accommodation up to seven. These are all in the meeting house. There is a Resident Friend in self-contained accommodation. The meeting is accessible by public transport (bus) all week; the meeting house is approximately 800m from the bus stop. There is parking on site for up to seven cars, and four more on the lay-by outside. There is secure parking for bicycles in a garage.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, with level access to the meeting room via one door and the kitchen and toilet via another. There is a step between meeting room and the kitchen/toilet. There is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop, but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit has not been carried out.

3.6 Community Use

A meeting for worship is held on the last Sunday of each month. Other use cannot be measured in hours because much of it is linked to residential bookings. There are conditions for bookings; activities deemed to conflict with Quaker values are excluded. Users value the

building for its unique setting, peace and quiet and availability of residential accommodation in a good walking area.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There is no recent evidence of general crime or anti-social behaviour and there has been no heritage crime. The locality is generally well cared-for and has low crime levels low deprivation and high community confidence. Friends have a liaison with the local police through one trustee's capacity as a local councillor.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for change, other than the fire alarm system required after the Fire Risk Assessment.

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: the meeting house appears to have all the amenities it needs, partly thanks to recent improvements. Both the exterior and the meeting room preserve much of their original character which could be adversely affected by change, although this is restricted because of the Grade II* listing.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the building is already in active use by the wider community and there is limited scope for further change, not least because of the listed status.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: Claverham is only used for a limited number of meetings for worship. If they ceased, the other current uses would presumably continue under the auspices of the owning charity.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description(s)

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1320963

Location: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, MEETING HOUSE LANE

District: North Somerset

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: Yatton

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 13-Oct-1952

Date of most recent amendment: 20-Jan-1986

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 33839

YATTON C.P. MEETING HOUSE LANE (east side) ST 46 NE Claverham 5/175 Friends' Meeting House 13.10.52 Formerly Listed as Claverham Meeting II* House) Friends' meeting house, now partly house. C17 origin, rebuilt 1729 with C19 and C20 alterations. Rubble, rendered, limestone dressings, pantiled roof hipped over side wings, stacks to sides. U-plan with hall in central range. 2 storeys, 1:3:1 bays; central 3 bays have central semi-circular-headed chamfered door opening with keystone, imposts, large panelled double doors, 6-pane light above in similar surround, to each side a round-headed 18-pane sash with thick glazing bars, splayed at head, similar imposts and keystone, moulded cills, keystones of side windows rise to moulded string course, above centre window an oblong stone pediment with cornice carrying pedestal with square-block sundial surmounted by stone "torch" finial; base of sundial has incised inscription "THIS HOUSE REBUILT IN THE YEAR 1729". Wing set forward to each side has 2-light casement at ground and first floor and 1/2-glazed door to inner side; from each front angle of building rises a tall square stack, one with moulded cap, the inside face of each stack being curved to eaves. Left return has 2 windows, all 2-light casements of 3 panes each, right return the same with buttress to left. Rear has small single storey C20 lean-to right and left with 1/2-glazed door and C20 light to inner side; first floor has 2-light casement right and left and central 20-pane sash under eaves with thin glazing bars. Interior: not accessible at time of survey (April 1985) but appears to retain original panelling in central hall.

Listing NGR: ST4525866288