

Friends Meeting House, Colthouse

Colthouse, Ambleside, LA22 0JU

National Grid Reference: SD 35887 98174



Statement of Significance

The Colthouse Meeting House has exceptional heritage significance as a fine example of a purpose-built meeting house erected in about 1689, retaining many historic fittings. The well-maintained building has a beautiful Lake District setting and stands close to a very early Quaker burial ground, laid out in the 1650s.

Evidential value

The meeting house has high evidential value for its fabric which includes an interesting collection of joinery fittings from several phases, dating from the late seventeenth century through to the twentieth century, illustrating incremental repair and renewal.

Historical value

Some of the early history of Friends in the Hawkshead area is documented by George Fox who travelled in the area in 1653. The detached burial ground laid out in 1658 is one of the earliest in the country, and also provided an open-air place for worship serving a wide rural area. The purpose-built meeting house illustrates the resources and confidence of Friends and its interior expresses several phases of investment and its function as a meeting house and school. The building and place has exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of the building is typical of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century vernacular meeting houses, constructed in local materials to a distinctive pattern. The attractive setting of the walled garden in the Lake District landscape adds to its aesthetic significance. The exterior, interior spaces and the simplicity of the historic fittings have exceptional aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is primarily a place for Quaker worship but is also visited and appreciated by visitors and tourists to this part of the Lake District. The remote location means that there is very little scope for community use. The building makes a very positive contribution to the character of the area and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Swarthmoor*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000190*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Lake District National Park*
- 1.5 Civil parish: *Claiife*
- 1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1087266*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1688-9*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *not identified*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *9 June 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Paul Milling*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *outside double privy in walled garden, detached burial ground close by at NGR SD 359 981*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lakeland Counties* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1978), pp. 126-131.

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 300-2

John Anderson, *Glimpses of Colthouse Meeting during Three Centuries*, 1988

Lake District National Park Historic Environment Record

Paul Milling, *Local Meeting Survey*, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background



Fig.1: detail from a painting by William Satterthwaite, 1889 (Colthouse Friends collection)

Colthouse is in '1652 Country', related to George Fox's tour of rural north Lancashire and south Westmorland in that year. The year after, in 1653, Fox recorded in his journal and 'book of miracles' that he healed a disabled boy while visiting the house of Hawkshead Friends with Margaret Fell and William Caton. In 1658, a plot was bought for a burial ground from a Friend, George Braithwaite at Town End, a farm in Colthouse, east of Hawkshead. This was also used as an open place to meet for worship, serving Quakers from a wide area, stretching from the Langdales in the north, to Claife in the east, Coniston in the west and to Satterthwaite to the south. This is the earliest purpose-built Quaker structure in the area and one of the first in the country. The walls are lined with stone seats used for meetings, referred to in a document dated 1669. In 1688 Friends bought land at Benson Orchard close to their burial ground, to build a meeting house, which was in use by 1689. The smaller room was used as a school room from soon after opening. The teacher Benjamin Towson and other names are scratched on the glass of the windows. Improvements included raising the height of the yard wall to the front in 1769, and sash windows to replace mullioned windows on the east wall in 1790, costing £6.2.9. At an unknown date, probably in the nineteenth century the building was refurbished the roof partly rebuilt and the interior re-plastered. A stove was also added in the large meeting

room (the flue pipe can be seen in Fig.1); this room may have been unheated originally. Butler's plan shows a fitted bench inside the door to the large meeting room but this was removed at an unknown date. Quakers did not need to build their own stables, instead leasing stables at nearby Town End Farm. In 1960, the south windows were re-glazed and in small meeting room windows re-glazed in 1967. 1977, an addition was built on the north side for a kitchen and toilets.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in c.1688, constructed of local stone finished in roughcast render with slate-hanging to the south gable-end, a graduated Cumbria slate roof with stone ridges and cast-iron rainwater goods. The rectangular building is aligned on a north-south axis, with the entrance facing east, the large meeting room to the south and the small meeting room to the north (Fig.2).

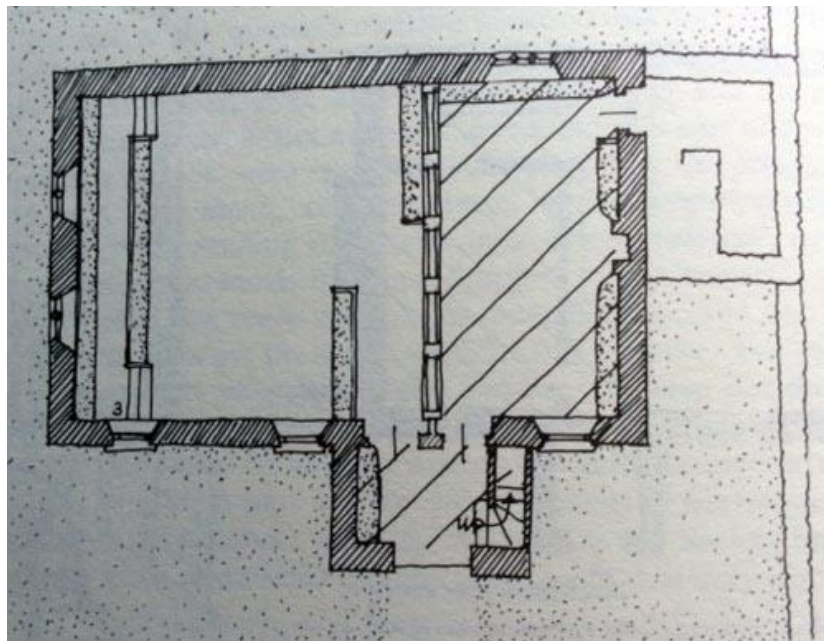


Fig.2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1978), p.126)

The east elevation is dominated by a 2-storey gabled porch to right of centre, with an open segmental-arched doorway and a 2-light window to the upper floor. The large meeting room to the left has two 24-pane sash windows, inserted in 1790. To the right of the porch, the small meeting room has a 20-pane fixed window, and the gallery over has a plate glass sash. The right return is blind with a gable-end rendered ridge stack, and a single-storey addition built in 1977. The left return facing south has two 2-light stone cross windows to the ground floor, below a continuous drip mould with slate-cladding and rough-cast render above. The roof has exposed purlin and rafter ends typical of nineteenth century roofing. The rear is blind except for one 3-light mullioned window to the small meeting room.

The inside of the open porch has a slate floor and fitted timber benches, with a pair of inner cross-boarded doorways leading to the meeting rooms, both with strap hinges and wooden lock boxes. The boarded door on the right of the north porch wall leads to the staircase, with a cupboard to the left with a boarded door and containing a hat peg rail; there is a hat peg rail on the south porch wall. The large meeting room has a floor laid with modern pine boards and plain plastered ceiling and walls incised to resemble ashlar, a nineteenth century feature, above dado level. The ceiling is divided

into four bays by chamfered beams (lower cords of tie-beam trusses). Unpainted panelled joinery characterises the space; this varies in date with eighteenth century oak panelling on the east wall and at the south end of the west wall and pine of similar date to the north screen; the oak dado behind the stand is nineteenth century and there is modern replacement pine plinth to the east wall. The north screen is made of a double layer of unpainted pine in raised and fielded panels with vertically sliding shutters on the south side and top-hinged shutters to the north. The gallery above has a balustrade of turned oak. The ministers' stand at the south end has a raised platform with fitted pine benches and steps at either end. There is a fitted eighteenth century oak bench against the west end of the north screen.

The small meeting room has a nineteenth century stone fireplace on the north wall, oak panelling and fitted oak benches on the north and the west walls, all probably eighteenth century. The flat ceiling has plastered beams carrying the first floor gallery, and wrought iron hooks for the screen when open. The winding oak stairs to the gallery are enclosed by a plank and muntin elm partition on the south side. The gallery and landing has wide floorboards in elm or oak, and the north wall retains some historic lime plaster. There is a simple fitted oak bench on the landing. The kitchen and toilets in the north extension have modern fittings and finishes.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains six loose benches set against the walls, made of pine with railed open backs and shaped arm rests. There is an oak chest of late seventeenth date and against the west wall a document cupboard or book press with open slatted front and sides; the meeting's minutes record that the Friends had a well-stocked library here from early on. There is a pine teachers' desk in the small meeting room. Modern chairs are arranged in a circle in the large meeting room.



Fig.3: document cupboard



Fig.4: pine bench and teacher's desk

2.4. Attached burial ground

None, but the detached burial ground is nearby (see 2.5).

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting.

The meeting house is situated on a narrow lane in Colthouse, a hamlet half a mile east of Hawkshead, a popular village in the heart of the Lake District. Near Sawrey, historic home of Beatrix Potter is a few miles to the south and the area is busy with tourists. There are fine views across the surrounding fields from the meeting house, but the meeting house is relatively hidden. The rectangular plot is enclosed with high dry stone walls with flat slate copings; there is one entrance through a gateway with flat slate canopy on the east side from the lane, with double boarded doors. Built against the high west wall of the enclosure is a gabled stone privy (Fig.5), still containing two wooden seats for the earth closet, probably a nineteenth century structure. The garden has lawns, fruit trees, flowering plants and a gravel path. The detached burial ground, laid out in 1658, is less than a hundred yards to the south at NGR SD359981 (Fig.6). This walls are listed Grade II (Listing No. 1087268) and are lined with stone benches inside the east and north walls (repaired in 2009, but some original stone benches are retained underneath). The burial records are held by the meeting. Further north along the lane are three cottages in the ownership of the meeting.



Fig. 5: privy behind the meeting house



Fig.6: inside the detached burial ground

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is rightly listed at Grade II*. The listing could be extended to also include the boundary walls and the privy. The detached burial ground walls are listed Grade II.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The site has some archaeological potential as an early meeting house site. The building and detached burial ground is HER Number 4421 on the Lake District National Park's Historic Environment Record. If alterations or major repairs are needed in the future, archaeological recording of the fabric may be required prior to the work.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The last QI was in 2009. All the recommended works have been undertaken, except for making good and painting the exterior.

ii) Attached burial ground: *N/A*

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting has a maintenance plan and sufficient funds to look after the building and the burial ground. The garden around the meeting house is maintained by a member of the meeting who rents one of the nearby cottages owned by the meeting. Contractors are brought in as necessary, and the exterior is painted on a 5-year cycle.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, and have undertaken some measures to improve energy efficiency including fitting low energy lightbulbs, but it has been found difficult to do more as this is a Grade II* listed building. The building has single glazed windows and poor insulation.

Resource use, recycling & waste management: Electric heating is on a timer, kitchen waste is recycled and there is a water meter. There are compost bins and a water butt in the garden and the sewage goes into a septic tank.

Wildlife: The garden is managed to encourage wildlife with two wildflower areas and four fruit trees grown against the south-facing walls of the garden. Bats roost in the building and forage nearby.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has access to all the basic amenities it needs, including a small kitchen, toilets and space for meetings.

3.5. Access

A disability access audit was carried out in 2006. Access into the meeting house is via steps from the lane, and portable ramps were purchased in 2006 to bridge the steps, but the gravel path is not an easy surface for people with walking difficulties or for wheelchairs. The WC is not suitable for some disabled people due its small size. There is a hearing loop, but no specific facilities for partially sighted people. There is parking for about six cars in the lane. Most people attend Sunday meetings for worship by car, two walk and one uses a bicycle. There is no secure bike parking and the bus service is very limited; the bus to Hawkshead requires a half-mile walk.

3.6. Community Use

The meeting house is not used for community lettings because it is fairly remote, difficult to heat, has poor parking and there are three better facilities within a two mile radius. Friends use the building for a total of three hours per week, and it is

open at other times for visitors and tourists to the area who informally call in (there is a sign to the meeting house from the end of the lane).

3.7. Vulnerability to Crime

No heritage crime has been recorded, and the area is generally well cared-for and has low levels of crime and deprivation. The meeting do not consider that they need liaison with the local police.

3.8. Plans for the Future

There are no changes planned for the near future.

Part 4: Impact of Change

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

i) As a Meeting House only: changes to this fine old building are constrained by its historic features and character, and make it difficult for the meeting to improve energy use, access and levels of comfort.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local Meeting use: the remote location and limited facilities such as parking make it unlikely that the meeting house could be used more for community lettings

iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a Meeting House and passing into secular use: it would be regrettable if this meeting were to close and it would be difficult to adapt it for a new use given its location and the sensitivity of the interior.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List Description

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1087266

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

CountyDistrict	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	South Lakeland District Authority	Claife

National Park: LAKE DISTRICT

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 25-Mar-1970

Details

CLAIFE COLTHOUSE SD 39 NE Friends' Meeting House 6/27 25.3.70 II*

Meeting house. 1688 with later alterations. Roughcast with some slate hanging and slate roof. 3 bays, the 3rd bay with 1st floor, and low wing to right return. 1st 2 bays

have tall sashed windows with glazing bars, inserted in 1790. 3rd bay has window with small-paned fixed glazing and opening pane under dripcourse; sashed window above. Large gabled porch has segmental-arched opening with 2-light casement above, with leaded glazing. Gable-end stack and small wing with C20 door and casement. Left return has 2 double-chamfered cross-mullion windows under label mould with slate hanging over, and roughcast apex. Rear has one 3-light double-chamfered mullioned window with transom to 1st bay. Interior: Porch has wide-boarded doors with wood locks and strap hinges to meeting room and schoolroom. To left, hat pegs; to right wide-boarded doors with H-L hinges, one to stair. Meeting room has beams with stepped stops and fielded panelling and possibly later dais. Partition to schoolroom with balustrade to gallery above; upper panels can be slid up to screen off gallery. Schoolroom has fielded panelling and fixed benches; upper panels to partition can be lifted up to open room into meeting room. Small stone fireplace. Winding stair to gallery has plank and muntin panelling.

Listing NGR: SD3588798174