

## ***Friends Meeting House, Countersett***

*Countersett, DL8 3DD*

*National Grid Reference: SD 91926 87938*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***Countersett meeting house has exceptional heritage significance as a meeting house closely associated with Richard Robinson who lived at Countersett Hall and was the first to be convinced of George Fox's preaching's in the area. Meetings were first held at Countersett Hall and subsequently moved to the present site, a former barn which in 1710 was adapted for Quaker use. The meeting house is set in an idyllic setting in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.***

#### **Evidential value**

***The meeting house has high evidential value. The building was a former barn associated with Countersett Hall and the fabric illustrates incremental repair and alteration from the eighteenth century to the present.***

#### **Historical value**

***The site is closely associated with Richard Robinson of Countersett Hall, where George Fox stayed when travelled through the Wensleydale area in 1652. The plan-form and internal features illustrates how the interior was used for meetings. The building and site have high historical value.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***The meeting house is a good example of vernacular architecture, built of local materials and similar in character to the neighbouring buildings. The small group of buildings in Countersett are set within the idyllic setting of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Overall, the meeting house and the setting have high aesthetic value.***

### **Communal value**

***The meeting house has variously been a Quaker meeting house and in use by the Methodists from 1872 until the 1980s, before returning to a place for Quaker worship. The meeting house has medium communal value.***

### **Part 1: Core data**

1.1 Area Meeting: *Wensleydale & Swaledale*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0110670*

1.3 Owner: *Wensleydale & Swaledale Quaker Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority*

1.5 Historic England locality: *Yorkshire*

1.6 Civil parish: *Bainbridge*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1132019*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1710*

1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *7 April 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Edna Rossiter*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites:

*Detached burial ground at Aysgarth NGR SE 00158 88349; Hawes NGR SD 87488 89837 and Low Ellington.*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 733-734.

David Hall, *Richard Robinson of Countersett 1628-1693 and the Quakers of Wensleydale*, 1989.

June Hall, *Step by Step round Quaker Sites in Wensleydale*, Unicorn Projects: Leyburn, 2001.

Helen E. Roberts, *Researching Yorkshire Quaker History: A Guide to Sources*, University of Hull, 2003, pp. 28-29.

Jan Reed, *Local Meeting Survey*, January 2016.

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

### 2.1. Historical background



Figure 1: Countersett Hall

Wensleydale has strong associations with the early Quaker movement; George Fox travelled through the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire in 1651 and 1652 and is recorded to have visited Wensleydale in May 1652. Richard Robinson of Countersett Hall was one of the first to be convinced of Fox's preaching's in the area, after hearing Fox at Askrigg. Robinson was influential in setting up a meeting in Wensleydale and became a minister travelling with other First Publishers of Truth, spreading the beliefs of Quakerism. The first Meetings were held in Robinson's house Countersett Hall, and it is recorded in Fox's journal that he stayed there in April 1677. Meetings were held at the Hall until his death. Following his father's death, Michael Robinson allowed Friends to meet in a nearby barn, from 1710, and this building was conveyed to Friends in 1778.

During 1778 alterations were made to the barn including lowering the meeting room floor, inserting three sash windows to the south-east; the panelling and the Elders' stand date from this period.

In 1872 the Meeting ceased and the Primitive Methodists then occupied the building up until the 1970s. In the 1980s, Friends began to meet again. During the 1990s the building was restored for Quaker use.



Figure 2: Meeting house before neighbouring property extension (Countersett Meeting collection)

Countersett meeting house no longer has a specific meeting, the building is available to the Wensleydale and Swaledale Area Meeting and used by Bainbridge Meeting as a venue for worship on the last Sunday of the month. In 2011, a small outbuilding adjoining the south-west wall of the meeting house was converted to provide kitchen and toilet facilities for the meeting.



Figure 3: Outbuilding prior to conversion.

## 2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

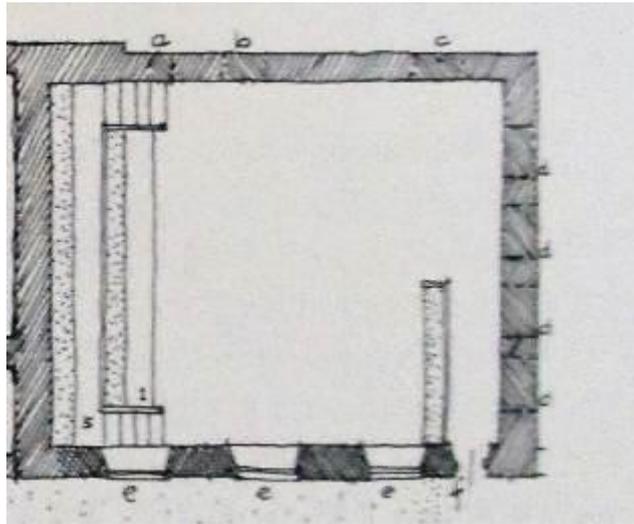


Figure 4: Ground floor plan (not to scale)  
(Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 7234)

The meeting house was adapted for Quaker use in 1710, from an earlier barn associated with Countersett Hall, of perhaps late sixteenth century date. The building was again altered in 1778. It is built of coursed rubble stone, with quoins, and drip moulds over the openings. The pitched roof is covered in stone slates with plain verges. The meeting house, outbuilding and stable (the latter not in Quaker ownership) form a linear group aligned north-east to south-west. The front elevation faces south-east and has three 12 pane sliding sash windows with stone sills and projecting stone lintels, with the entrance to the right, with a planked door with stone lintel and projecting small canopy. Adjoining the south-west gable is an outbuilding which was converted for ancillary facilities in the twenty-first century and has a single window; the original doorway has been infilled with brick and altered to form a window opening. The rear elevation to the north-west, as Butler (1999) notes, includes features which identify the building's former use as a barn, with two infilled windows and an infilled door. To the west of the elevation is a slight projection within the masonry. To the south-west of this is a stable block (no longer in Quaker ownership) located to the rear of the now converted outbuilding. To the north-east is an extension of the Grade II listed Chapel House in the late twentieth century.

The interior of the meeting room is rectangular in plan, and entered from the north-east end. A section of panelling with fixed seating is located at the entrance to provide a passageway before entering the main body of the room. The floor is laid with broad floor boards, the walls are plastered and lined with panelling to dado level, and the room is well lit from windows to the south-east. The elders' stand is located to the south-west; concealed in the panelling is a doorway which was introduced in 2001 as part of the conversion of the outbuilding for use as ancillary facilities. As part of this work additional panelling was introduced to the two corners. The north-west wall contains a slight recess which is said to be an opening when the building was in use as a barn. To the south west end of the floor is a stone slab which provided a base for a stove for heating.

### 2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains two styles of historic benches; simple benches with shaped bench ends which were introduced when the building was in use by the Methodists and open-backed benches with arm rests. The provenance of the latter benches are unknown but are either original to the meeting or were relocated from a nearby meeting house following its closure.



Figure 5: Two styles of benches at the meeting house

### 2.4. Attached burial ground

Not applicable.

### 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located within the hamlet of Countersett in Raydale, off the south side of Wensleydale in the north of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Countersett is set within picturesque unspoilt dales scenery with views of Semerwater, the second largest natural lake in the Yorkshire Dales. The buildings in the area are very much part of the distinctive character of Countersett, making use of local materials, typically local stone and are rectangular in plan. To the south-west is Countersett Hall dated 1650, the Grade II\* manor house of Richard Robinson where the first Quaker meetings in Wensleydale were held. Grade II listed buildings which surround the hall include an outbuilding, and the Boar and Whitehouse, both of which date from the seventeenth century. To the south-east of the meeting house is the Grade II listed former school house, which once included a stable beneath the school room; the building has now been converted for residential use. To the north-east of the meeting house is the Grade II listed chapel house which was extended in the twentieth century and now adjoins the northeast gable of the present meeting house.

The entrance to the meeting house is accessed via stone steps bounded with a dwarf dry stone wall and the area is well planted with mature trees. Adjoining the south-west gable end is a former outbuilding now converted for ancillary use and former stables (now privately owned).

### 2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II which is considered appropriate.

## 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

No previous buildings are thought to have been present on site prior to the former barn being built, but the site may have some archaeological potential associated with Countersett Hall.

## **Part 3: Current use and management**

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

### 3.2. Maintenance

The last quinquennial inspection took place in November 2015, undertaken by Jon Steel MRICS (chartered building surveyor). The report found the building to be generally in good condition. The Wensleydale and Swaledale Quaker Trust are currently devising a work plan to undertake the recommendations from the quinquennial inspection, and developing a five year maintenance and repair plan. There is sufficient funds to maintain and repair the building.

### 3.3. Sustainability

The Sustainability Toolkit is not used. The following measures have been implemented to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change and energy efficiency: installed central heating, switched to a green electricity supplier three years ago and ongoing energy management is discussed using the expertise of the Wensleydale and Swaledale Quaker Trust.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: members and attenders regularly work to improve recycling and waste management.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: The meeting house is set within a steep valley and the surrounding grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.
- Transport: Friends car share where possible.

### 3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs, including the main meeting room, kitchen and toilet facilities. There is no resident warden. There is no on-site car parking or secure parking for bicycles. The meeting house is not accessible by public transport.

### 3.5. Access

Access for people with disabilities is inevitably limited by the remote location, and the need to walk up a series of steps into the building. Once inside, the meeting room has level access. An audit has not been undertaken but Friends are aware that the toilets are not adequate for people with some disabilities as they are not wheelchair-accessible. There are no facilities for

partially deaf or partially sighted people. It is not known whether a Disability Access Audit has been conducted.

### 3.6. Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about 2 hours each month. The meeting house is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 50 hours per week. The building could be let more, but there is little demand due to the location. Past users value the building for its peaceful location, warmth, and its historic character.

### 3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has not been subject to anti-social behaviour or heritage crime. The locality is generally in an area which is well-cared for, has low crime levels, and high community confidence. Friends have not developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but would consider making contact in the future.

### 3.8. Plans for change

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:* At present the meeting house fulfils the needs of the Friends. The conversion of the adjoining outbuilding has provided WC and kitchen facilities.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building has the facilities it needs to accommodate wider uses. However, there is no demand for local community use at the moment.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* It would be regrettable if the building could not continue in use by Friends. Should the meeting be laid down, a new and sympathetic use would need to be found which would allow for the retention of the joinery fittings in-situ.

## **Part 5: Category: 2**

## **Part 6: List description**

Name: **QUAKER MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1132019

Location

QUAKER MEETING HOUSE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: North Yorkshire

District: Richmondshire

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Bainbridge

National Park: YORKSHIRE DALES

Grade: II

Date first listed: 09-Jul-1986

List entry Description

Details

BAINBRIDGE COUNTERSETT SD 98 NW 13/64 Quaker Meeting House GV II Quaker Meeting House. 1710. Rubble, stone slate roof. Single-storey, 3 windows. Quoins. Drip moulds over openings. To right, board door. Sash windows with glazing bars. Interior: dado of fielded panels, and panelled elders' gallery. Simple benches. Built after illicit Quaker meetings had been held in Countersett Hall (qv) and Carr End (qv).

Listing NGR: SD9192687938