

Friends Meeting House, Kendal

Stramongate, Kendal, LA9 4BH

National Grid Reference: SD 51778 92808



Statement of Significance

Kendal Friends Meeting House has exceptional heritage significance as a fine example of a purpose-built meeting house erected in 1818, on the site of an earlier meeting house. It retains many late Georgian fittings and the original layout is still legible despite 1930s alterations. The building has an unspoilt burial ground and garden to the south, and is an important community asset in Kendal.

Evidential value

The meeting house has high evidential value for its fabric which includes good quality joinery fittings. The site has high archaeological potential as it was in medieval Kendal and the site of an earlier meeting house.

Historical value

The purpose-built meeting house illustrates the resources and confidence of Kendal Friends over time, and is associated with a long history of Quakerism in the town, which included a school active from the late 17th century until the 1920s.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of this handsome building is typical of early nineteenth century Georgian meeting houses, constructed in local materials and designed by a well-known local architect Francis Webster. The attractive burial ground

adds to its aesthetic significance. The exterior, interior spaces and the historic fittings have exceptional aesthetic value.

Communal value

Kendal Meeting House has high communal value as a place for Quaker worship, and for the celebrated Quaker Tapestry which has been here since 1994. The building is a popular community venue and the tapestry attracts tourists to the building. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Kendal & Sedbergh*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007790*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting & Friends Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *South Lakeland District Council*

1.5 Civil parish: *Kendal*

1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.7 Listed status: *II**

1.8 NHLE: *1319001*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Kendal*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1816*

1.13 Architect (s): *Francis Webster*

1.14 Date of visit: *10 June 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Roger Paddison*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial grounds: Sedbergh Road, Kendal (SD527927), in use and Sepulchre Lane (SD514928), disused and owned by Kendal Town Council*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lakeland Counties* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1978), pp. 99 – 109.

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 654–660.

Arthur Kincaid, *The Cradle of Quakerism*, 2011 (London: Quaker Books) pp47-49.

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

2.1. Historical background

Quakers have a long history in Kendal; in 1650 Thomas Taylor debated against infant baptism in the parish church and in 1652 George Fox preached in the Moot Hall. The town gave its name to the Kendal Fund established by Margaret Fell and Quaker women to support travelling Quaker missionaries and teachers. The first meeting house was built on this site in Stramongate 1687-89, on land bought for the purpose by Friend Thomas Wilson for £11. The narrow burgage plot was adjacent to Wilson's where he had a tannery. Wilson adapted and furnished an existing building for meetings, and conveyed the building and site to the meeting in 1688 for £50. The Friends opened a school in 1698, on the same street. The meeting house was extended in 1703 for a women's meeting room, in 1708 and in 1716-18 for a new gallery. Kendal meeting hosted the quarterly Westmorland meetings and so large premises were needed.

In 1814, Friends decided to construct a new building as the old meeting house was no longer fit for purpose. The meeting house was designed by Kendal architect Francis Webster (designer of Miller Bridge and houses nearby and on Thorny Hills) and the interior joinery by William Fisher a Quaker and the clerk of works. The porches were added late in the building process, just before the meeting house opened in October 1816. It accommodated up to 850 people, and cost over £3,600.

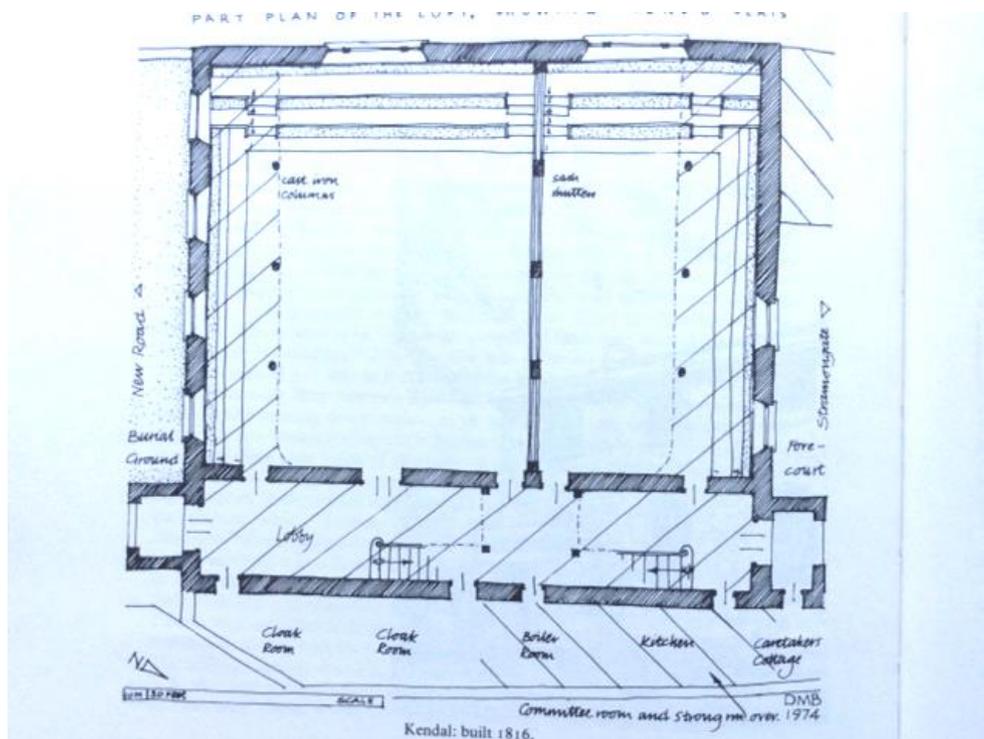


Fig.1: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1978), p.102)

The meeting house was altered internally in 1934, by inserting a floor over the women's meeting room to the north side, to create first floor classrooms with a hall with stage below.

The moveable shutters were fixed shut at this point. In 1936, the building was extended to the east side by a narrow single-storey range for WCs, kitchen and a boiler room.

The meeting declined in the late 20th century and contemplated moving out of the meeting house; this was avoided after it was decided to establish a permanent home for the Quaker Tapestry here in 1993-94. The Quaker Tapestry was first created by Ann Wynn-Wilson from Taunton in 1981. The display for the tapestry panels was installed in the meeting room on the south side of the building, with a shop, and in 2000 the cottage to the north-east side of the building was adapted for café with a flat above for tapestry volunteers, in 2000. Meetings for worship are held in the north room. The building has been leased to Quaker Tapestry Ltd (QTL) since 1994.

In the 1780s, the scientist John Dalton taught and was the principal at the Quaker school in Kendal, before leaving for Manchester. The astrophysicist Sir Arthur Eddington was born at this school in 1882 when his father was the headmaster.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1816 to designs by Francis Webster, altered internally in 1934, and extended eastward in 1936. The 2-storey, double-pile building is faced in hammer-dressed limestone ashlar with a plinth, eaves cornice and blocking course. The parallel pitched roofs are laid with graduated Cumbrian slate with a lead valley and gable end chimneys. The deep rectangular plan is arranged with the large meeting room to the south and the smaller former women's meeting room to the north, divided by a panelled partition, with a pair of staircases and a long lobby along the east side. The 5-bay principal elevation faces east to the river with a square porch on right with double panelled doors, and a lunette immediately above, and four semi-circular-headed sashes to the left. The first floor has short 8-pane sashes to the gallery level. The north elevation to Stramongate is similar, with porch on left and two semicircular-headed sashes to right; an adjoining building abuts the western part of the elevation. The three first floor windows were enlarged by dropping their sills in 1934. The left return to the west has one large tripartite sash to the south side, and a 1930s steel window to north side. The right return has a single-storey addition with a slate roof and small steel windows. The cottage to the north-east is built of rubblestone with sashes and steel windows.

The internal lobby has a stone floor and two original cantilevered stone staircases (fig.2) which meet at a landing serving the galleries and the 1930s first floor to the north. Each staircase has stone treads, a mahogany wreathed handrail and stick balusters. The landing is supported on semi-elliptical arches on pilasters. The large meeting room, now used by the Quaker Tapestry, retains vertically-sliding pine shutters in four elliptical-arched frames, now fixed shut, to the north side. The ministers' stand on the south side retains two tiers of pine fitted benches with mahogany ramped top rails and turned posts to the free-standing front rail (Fig.3). The gallery on west and south sides is supported on cast-iron columns, with fixed benches and turned balusters to the front. In the former women's meeting room, the north face of the movable shutters is hidden by an inserted lining and all the fittings have been removed; the ceiling/floor structure over this room dates from the 1930s (Fig.4). On the first floor, the north side layout and partitions also date from the 1930s (bottom left image on page 1).



Fig.2: one of a pair of staircases



Fig.3: former ministers' stand



Fig.4: Lifting gear in the roof



Fig.5: meeting room on north side

In the roof space above the meeting rooms the original winding gear to raise the shuttered partitions is in situ (Fig.4). The 4-bay roof has king post trusses with raking struts and two tiers of purlins.

2.3. Loose furnishings



Fig.6: pine bench in entrance lobby

The meeting house contains some loose pine benches but these are generally not used for meetings (Fig.6). There is a 3-legged oak table of eighteenth century date, possibly from the earlier meeting house. Meetings for worship use loose chairs arranged in a circle in the small meeting room.

2.4. Attached burial ground



Fig.7: burial ground from the east

The burial ground is recorded as being on both sides of the meeting house; the north side is now a car park and the south burial ground is maintained as a garden with a lawn, flower borders and trees. Burial records are kept in the meeting house strong room; the burials pre-date the 1818 meeting house, and range in date from c1687 to c1840. Some memorial stones are laid flat along the east side of the lawn. The south burial garden is enclosed by drystone walls to the west and east with a dwarf wall of dressed stone, copings and corner piers to the south; originally this had iron railings, but these were removed (probably in the war) and replaced with steel railings in the post-war period. A large magnolia grows against the south side of the meeting house. Meadow saxifrage unusually grows in the lawn, and Friends take advice from Cumbria Wildlife Trust on an appropriate grass mowing regime.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Kendal was the county town of Westmorland until 1974, and since then has remained an important market town serving a large rural area in the southern Lake District. The meeting house is on the east side of the town centre, on a block that is now surrounded by part of the one-way road system, so traffic is busy. To the south, New Road runs along the right bank of the river Kent, with a large free car park. The open space of Goose Green is across the river. To the west across Blackhall Road is the gothic revival Catholic church, also designed by the Websters. Stramongate is lined with shops, offices and eating places, with a recent block of flats on a site to the east. There are two detached Quaker burial grounds; one on Sedbergh Road, on the east side of Kendal (at SD527927) is still in use, but the former burial ground at Sepulchre Lane (at SD514928) was developed for housing in 1989.

2.6. Listed status

The building is rightly listed at Grade II*. The list description could benefit from fuller detail on the fittings.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The Cumbria Historic Environment Record contains no records relating to this site, but the site is likely to have high archaeological potential as it was within the east edge of the medieval town, on a burgage plot. As well as archaeology relating to the medieval town, the site may also retain buried archaeology relating to the first meeting house, its later additions and the burial ground.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The last QI was in 2007. All the recommended works have been carried out except for the removal of garden wall ivy and the re-pointing of the north-east wall. Recent works include extensive repointing of the damp south-west wall, replastering in lime and replacement of the large window lintel

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The grass and gardens are well-maintained. The walls need some attention to remove ivy. The lawn is managed to preserve a rare urban instance of meadow saxifrage (in flower in June).

3.2. Maintenance

Friends do not have a 5-year maintenance plan and there is not enough funding to maintain and fully repair the building. They do, however, keep a close eye on the building and are aware of the issues and what needs to be done to care for this historic structure, such as using lime-based plasters and mortars.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit and has taken steps to reduce its environmental impact:

Climate change & energy efficiency: Roof insulation, upgrading of heating system, new gas boiler.

Resource use, recycling & waste management: QTL has a contract with waste processors and has fitted motion-sensitive lighting in toilets.

Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: Cumbria Wildlife Trust advice on the Sedbergh Road burial ground maintenance and on the meadow saxifrage in the Meeting House front lawn/burial ground.

Transport: Friends are encouraged to walk, cycle or car-share

3.4. Amenities

The Meeting has access to good facilities that are all shared with QTL who manage the building and run the café and exhibition centre. The meeting has access to part of the café kitchen, and there are WCs and baby-changing in the meeting house. There is a car park to the rear of the meeting house with space for 12 cars. There is no warden resident in the cottage, but the top floor is a flat used by visiting Tapestry volunteers.

3.5. Access

QTL have a very full Access Statement on their website. The meeting house has good disabled access into the ground floor from the rear, and most facilities are on the ground floor. There is no disabled access to first floor rooms and offices. There are handrails on the steps next to the south doorway from the garden. There is a WC suitable for disabled people, and a hearing loop in the main meeting room. There are some facilities for partially-sighted people, but the meeting says it could probably do more. The meeting house is close to the bus station and it is ¼ mile to the railway station, but services are poor on Sundays. There is a car park to the rear and a lockup for bikes.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the meeting room for 5 hours a week plus committees when required. There are three rooms of varying size available from 10am to 10pm 6 days a week – in total available for 216 hours (minus any Quaker use in a given week). QTL say that over the last 8 weeks (up to June 2015) the average total use of all the let rooms was 46 hours per week. QTL have a lettings policy with the usual Quaker guidelines. Only Quaker groups have free use of space. People like to use the building as it has a central Kendal location, is competitively priced, QTL offer a personal service, food and drink is available in the café, it is quiet and calm, and for the historical significance of building.

3.7. Heritage Crime

There is some anti-social behaviour such as littering. The attempted theft of lead from the roof 3 years ago was foiled by the occupants of the cottage flat who called the police. Since then Friends have liaised with the local police and QTL have implemented a number of recommended crime prevention measures such as security lights and fitting key pads to entry doors. The meeting house is in a part of Kendal that is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, does not suffer from low deprivation and has high community confidence.

3.8. Plans for change

QTL lease and manage the building, and a new lease is being currently being re-negotiated with a new Management Plan, due in 2015. The meeting is looking into photovoltaic panels for the hidden inner pitch of the roof.

Part 4: Impact of Change

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

i) As a Meeting House only: the building has already shown it can be adapted, as needs change, and there may be scope for further sensitive alteration, subject to listed building consent.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local meeting use: the meeting is a popular venue for community use with good facilities; it could probably be further adapted, subject to listed building consent.

iii) As a consequence of the meeting being laid down and the building passing into secular use: it would be regrettable if the meeting house was no longer used for Quaker worship; changes for future alternative uses would be constrained by the historic features of the building related to its Quaker purpose, such as the galleries, staircases, joinery fittings and dividing screens.

Part 5: Category: 1

List description

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1319001

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, STRAMONGATE

CountyDistrict	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	South Lakeland District Authority	Kendal

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 24-Apr-1951

SD 5192 NE KENDAL STRAMONGATE (Off South side)

8/146 Friends' Meeting House

G.V. II*

Meeting House. 1816 (built partly on site of late C17 Meeting House) by Francis Webster. Altered internally in 1934, extended eastward in 1936. Hammer-dressed limestone blocks on plinth; eaves cornice and blocking course. Graduated slate roofs with parallel ridges; stone end chimneys. 2 storeys, 5 bays. Stramongate elevation: Porch on left has lunette immediately above and 2 semicircular-headed sashes to right; three 1st floor windows are 1934 insertions. New Street elevation: Porch on right has lunette immediately above and 4 semicircular-headed sashes to left; five 1st floor sashes. Tall tripartite sash to west return. Both porches have cornices and blocking courses, with panelled inner double doors. All windows have glazing bars. Interior: originally 2 rooms separated by full-height timber partition of 4 elliptical-headed arches carried between panelled pilasters; the arcade was infilled by movable, panelled shutters which were permanently fixed in place when an upper (classroom) floor was inserted on the north side in 1934. Cast-iron columns support the gallery, with turned balusters, carried around 2 sides of the south room.

Listing NGR: SD5177892808