

Friends Meeting House, Keswick

Elliot Park, Keswick, CA12 5NZ

National Grid Reference: NY 26252 23546



Statement of Significance

As a meeting house built in 1995, the building has low heritage significance for historical and evidential values, but it has high communal value as a well-used community resource in Keswick and the focus of an active Quaker community. The aesthetic character of the building reflects the local vernacular.

Evidential value

A modern building constructed on a green field site, the building and the site have low evidential value.

Historical value

The present building replaced a meeting house in the town centre used for most of the twentieth century, and is the latest in a sequence of meeting houses in the Keswick area, where Quakers first met in the mid seventeenth century. The present building and site has low historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is typical of buildings constructed in the Lake District National Park designed to reflect local vernacular traditions, and it fits well into the local street scene. As a modern building it has no historic features, and its aesthetic heritage value is low.

Communal value

The meeting house was purpose-built for Quaker and community use and embodies Quaker values of simplicity, sustainability, welcome and community service. These social values give the building high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: Cumberland

- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0005980*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Lake District National Park Authority*
- 1.5 Civil parish: *Keswick*
- 1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.7 Listed status: *No*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/A*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1995*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Elliot Manning Partnership*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *16 June 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Bill Bewley*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Bibliographic references:

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1978), pp. 51-52.

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, Volume 1, 1999 pp 94-96

Historical note by H.E. Winter, nd, in the meeting house

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

2.1. Historical background

In 1653, High Tickell of Portinscale near Keswick was inspired by William Dewsbury's mission to follow Quaker values. Friends met for worship at Tickell's home for about thirty years, and the Keswick meeting was known as the Portinscale Meeting even after it moved into the town. In 1685 Tickell bought a house and orchard on the west side of Keswick, on the river Greta, which he gave to Friends. A new meeting house was built on this site in 1715, and in use until 1775 when the meeting closed. The building later became a girls' National School, then three cottages and still survives as a house called Quaker Cottage. Friends did not establish a meeting again until 1919 when they met in a rented terraced house on Lower Church Street (Fig.1), on the south side of the town centre. Friends bought this

building in 1920. By the end of the twentieth century, this was considered impractical and the building was sold in 1994. In 1995, a new purpose-built meeting house opened on Elliot Park on the west side of Keswick, using a legacy from Friend Doris Liversidge.

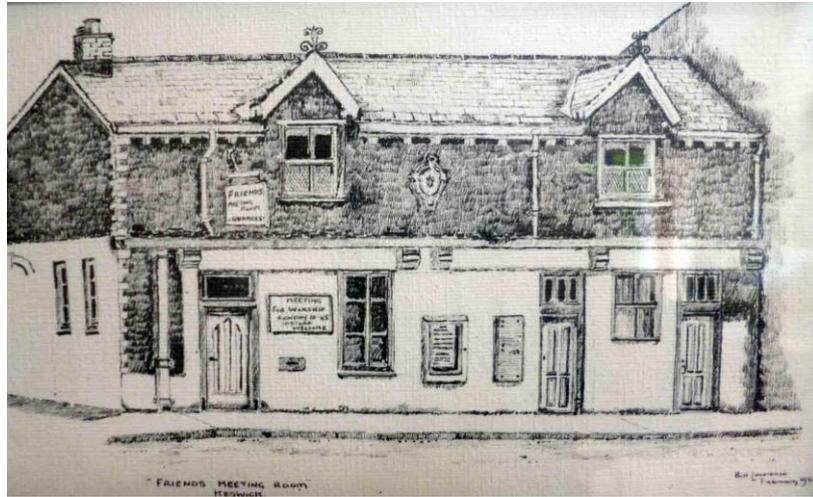


Fig.1: sketch of the Church Street meeting house in 1984, by Bill Lawrence

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

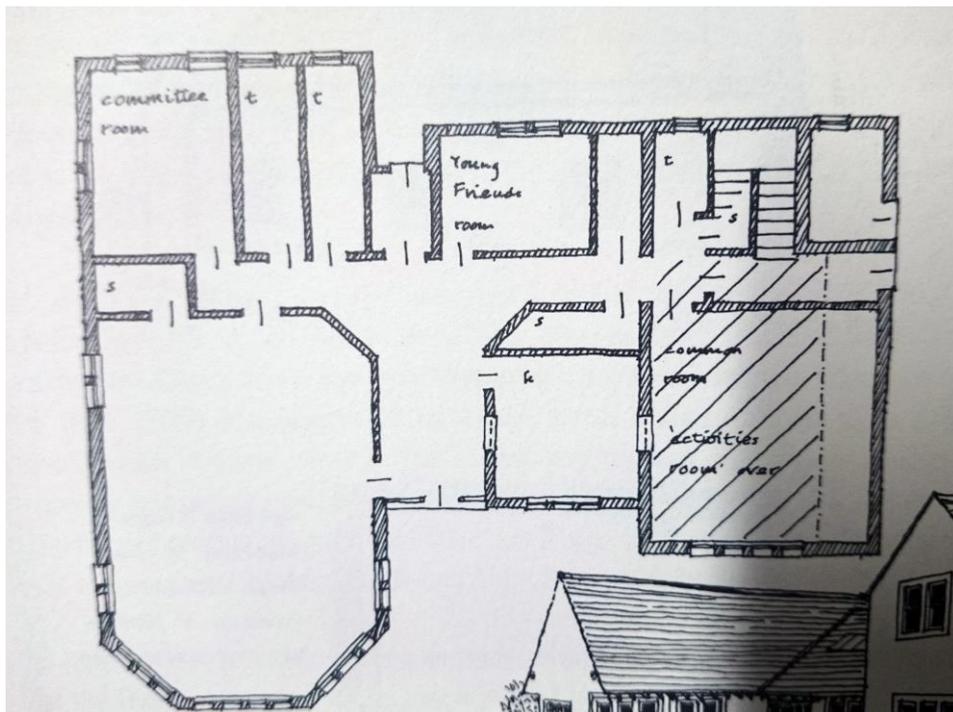


Fig.2: plan of the meeting house built in 1995 (Butler, 1999, p.96). North is to the left, approximately, not to scale.

The meeting house was built in 1995, designed by architects Elliot Manning Partnership. Faced in white-painted rough cast render, the building has a Cumbrian slate roof with photovoltaic panels on the south slope. The roughly H-plan building is planned with large meeting rooms in wings either side of a central entrance and lobby area; it is mainly on one floor, except for the 2-storey wing at the south-east end. The recessed entrance faces the road to the north-east, with glazed doors. Windows to all

elevations are small timber sashes set in groups, all with architraves painted a contrast colour, to complement local vernacular architecture. The meeting room used for worship has a half-octagonal gable-end overlooking the garden to the south-west.

Inside, the meeting room has been designed with simplicity and utility in mind, and provides a range of rooms to suit different purposes. Walls and ceilings are plain plaster, the former tanked to the lower 1 metre to withstand flood damage. Floors are also laid with a flood-resistant material.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains mainly modern furnishings, arranged in a circle in the large meeting room. In the entrance hall is a twentieth century table made by William Stanley, brought here from the Church Street meeting house.

2.4. Attached burial ground

N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Keswick is a small market town in the heart of the Lake District, surrounded by mountains and popular with tourists throughout the year. The meeting house was built on a green-field site on the west edge of the town, as part of a new development that included 1990s housing on Elliot Park, in a similar architectural style. The rugby field adjoins the site to the west, and Booths supermarket is to the east of the road. The bus station and a residential care home are close by. The meeting house is set in spacious grounds enclosed by stone walls, with a car park to the south side and attractive gardens to the west side. The site is on the flood plain and has been subject to two serious floods in recent years (2005 and 2009).

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. This modern building would not be eligible for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The site is not thought to have archaeological potential; the meeting house was built on a green field site and is outside the historic extent of Keswick.

Part 3: Current use and management

NB. A volunteer survey was not completed for this building.

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The ten year old building is in good condition. Major repairs were completed in 2010, after the last flood in 2009.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): N/A

3.2. Maintenance

There is not a specific maintenance plan, but the building appears to be well-maintained. Most tasks of maintenance are undertaken by Friends, such as painting external joinery and masonry, and gardening. A QI has not yet been undertaken as this is a relatively new building. Keswick Friends are resourceful, and the cost of building maintenance is covered by revenue from letting rooms for community use.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting house has implemented several measures to ensure the sustainability of the building and the meeting.

Energy efficiency: The building was designed to be thermally efficient. Photovoltaic panels were installed on the roof in 2011 and the meeting expects the installation cost to be recouped in ten years.

Climate change: The building was refurbished after the last flood, with tanking to ground floor walls and floor, and electric circuits raised 1 metre above the floor.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the facilities it needs, including a kitchen, WCs, baby changing, a range of meeting rooms and a library. There is a car park on-site and room for bicycles.

3.5. Access

There is level access into the building and throughout the ground floor, a hearing loop and a WC suitable for people with disabilities. The first floor meeting room does not have a lift, so is not fully accessible. The meeting house is within walking distance of most of Keswick and next to the bus station; there is a fairly good service into the town from surrounding areas on weekdays, and a limited Sunday service.

3.6. Community Use

The building is used for Area Meetings, as well as Sunday worship and other Quaker events. It is also well used by the community, with rooms let for an average of 40 hours per week in total; regular users include the WI, piano lessons and yoga lessons. The meeting house is popular due to its town centre location, attractive rooms and reasonable prices.

3.7. Heritage Crime

The meeting house has a coded lock on the entrance door to prevent unauthorised access. There are no social problems or heritage crime affecting the meeting house, although the car park attracts some illicit parking.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans for change at this meeting house.

Part 4: Impact of Change

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

ii) As a place of worship only: The building meets the worship needs of the meeting and is flexible internally. As a new building, there are no heritage constraints on future change.

ii) With extended use, additional to worship: The building is well-used by the community, and there are no heritage constraints on future change.

iii) As a consequence of closing as a place of worship and passing into secular use The location and character of the building would enable it to be adapted for public/community use if Keswick Meeting no longer required it for worship, which seems unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Part 5: Category: 4