

Friends Meeting House, Milford Haven

Priory Road, Milford Haven, Wales, SA73 2DT

National Grid Reference: SM 90368 06081



Statement of Significance

The meeting at Milford Haven was founded by whaling families from Nantucket, who had been invited by Sir William Hamilton's agent to settle here and help develop the town and port. The meeting house of 1811 was built on a site acquired in 1801 for a burial ground. It is unique in Great Britain as a meeting house founded by settlers from America, the descendants of emigrants from Britain. Overall, the meeting house and burial ground have exceptional heritage value.

Evidential value

The architecture and layout of the building provide important information about the beliefs and lifestyle of the Quaker settlers in Milford Haven. The original planform is still discernible (although the screen between the two rooms has been replaced) and the original stand still in situ in the meeting room. The building has high evidential value.

Historical value

The local meeting was founded by whalers from Nantucket and their families who had been invited to settle in Milford Haven. They were also instrumental in building the meeting house and many of the early Quaker settlers are buried here, including members of the Starbuck and Folger families. The meeting house and burial ground have exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is typical of many small, late-Georgian meeting houses with its plain but elegant elevations and the original stand of high-quality woodwork. There have been two extensions and some other alterations. Nevertheless, the building of 1811 has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

Primarily a Quaker place of worship, the meeting house is also well used by the local community as well as by a nursery. The meeting house is a key focus for the early history of Milford Haven and is regularly open for visitors, including on the annual Founders' Day. The local meeting has produced leaflets on the history of the meeting house and on the Quaker involvement in the development of Milford Haven. All of this contributes the exceptional communal value of the meeting house.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *South Wales*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0028390*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Pembrokeshire County Council*
- 1.5 National heritage body: *Cadw*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Milford Haven*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 Cadw ref.: *12903*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1811*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Griffith Watkins*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *29 June 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Jean Lewis and David Doorbar*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial grounds at Sutton and Trewern (near Llanddewi Velfrey)*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 858-9

Folger, A., typed transcript of Abial Folger's diary, 1806-11 (copy at meeting house)

Griffith, S., *A history of Quakers in Pembrokeshire*, 2004

Lloyd, T., *The Buildings of Wales: Pembrokeshire*, 2004, pp. 290-1

Meeting of Friends in Wales, *Towards the Sources. Quakers in Wales*, 2014

Milford Haven Friends Meeting House, leaflet, 2011

A Quaker walk around Milford Haven, leaflet, 2011

Rowland, M., 'A Starbuck on every corner', undated news clipping

Dyfed Archaeological Trust HER, records 20395, 4502, 4529, 59058

Local Meeting survey by Jean Lewis, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

In the late eighteenth century, the town and port of Milford Haven were developed by Sir William Hamilton's agent in Pembrokeshire, his nephew Charles Francis Greville. (William Hamilton (1731-1803), a diplomat and art collector, had inherited land in the area through his first wife, Catherine (1738-82), daughter of John Barlow of Pembrokeshire.) In 1790, Hamilton secured a private act of parliament to 'make quays, docks, piers ...and establish a market' on his estates in Pembrokeshire. Greville invited whalers from Nantucket (now in Massachusetts) to settle in Milford Haven. (Nantucket Island had become a small Quaker colony following persecution by the Puritans in Boston. They had suffered further harassment during the American War of Independence in which they refused to take part.) About 50 or more Nantucketers arrived in 1792, including descendants of Quakers who had emigrated from Britain to America. Among known Quakers in the group were Samuel Starbuck senior (a descendant of Nathaniel Starbuck who had emigrated from Derby to America) and Timothy Folger (a cousin of Benjamin Franklin) who was appointed American Consul and a surveyor of ships. The American influence is said to have determined the gridiron plan of Milford Haven.

At the time Quakerism was in decline in Pembrokeshire but the arrival of the Nantucket Quakers (including the family of Benjamin Rotch who had initially settled in France but moved to Milford Haven in 1794) gave added impetus to the Quaker settlement. Initially, they joined the meeting in nearby Haverfordwest but also held meetings in their homes. By 1801 the current site had been acquired for use as a burial ground and for a future meeting house. The latter opened in March 1811 to plans of 1808 by Griffith Watkins (c.1745-1822), a builder and architect of Haverfordwest (whose drawings for the meeting house are in the Pembrokeshire Archives). The building is described in the diary of Timothy Folger's wife, Abial (1736-1816), as 'a snug neet [sic] thing' (1 March 1811). The cost of construction was about £358.

From about 1843, the local meeting was low in numbers and periodically closed until it was revived in 1909 due to evangelical work by Richard Watkins of Swansea. In 1907, Watkins described the meeting house at Milford Haven as being in 'good, almost perfect, repair'. The

meeting house was reroofed in c.1954. The Welsh poet Waldo Williams (1904-71) worshipped here, after becoming a Quaker in his mid-fifties. In 1971, a small annex was built to the north for a children's classroom with toilets (now used by a nursery). This appears to have replaced an earlier annex first shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1908. In 2007, the Nantucket Room extension was added to the south, providing another room as well as disabled access, a kitchenette and toilets (architect: Acanthus Holden).

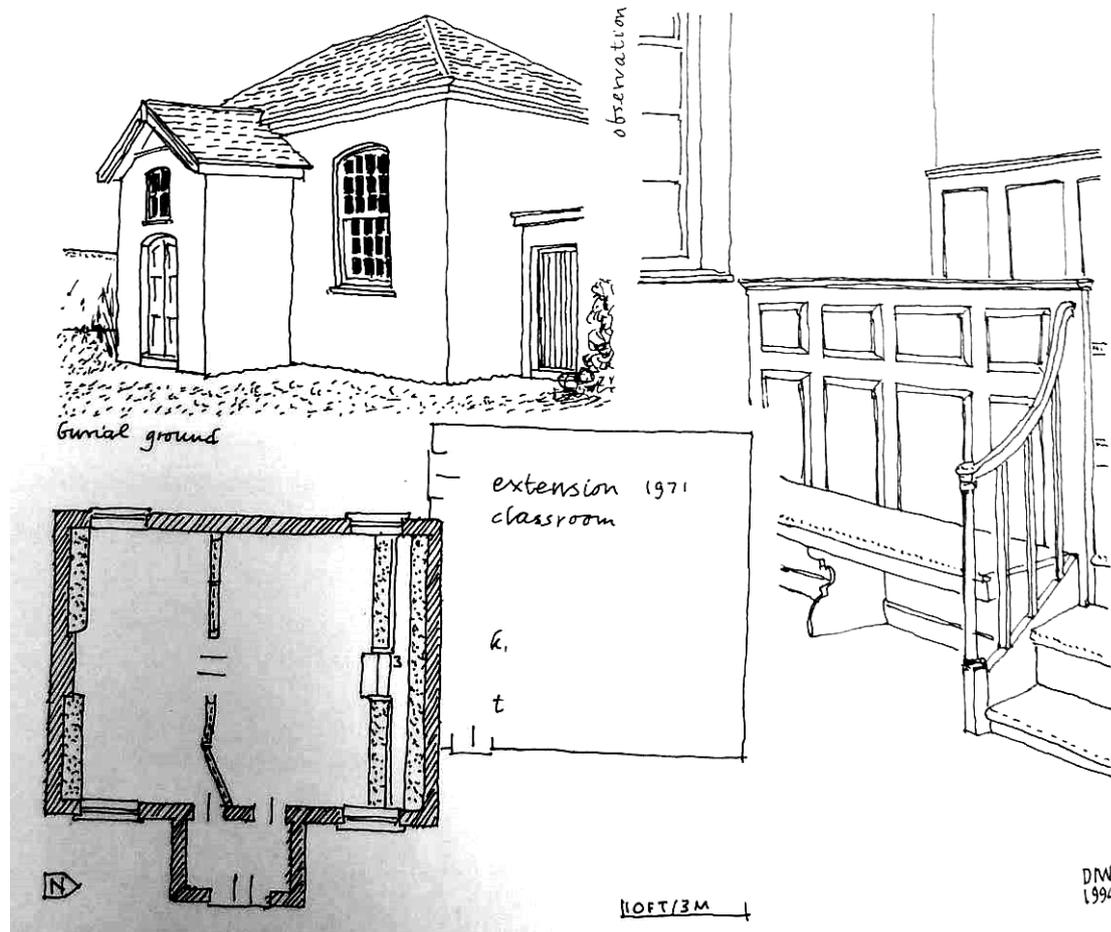


Figure 1: Plan without the Nantucket Room of 2007 (not to scale; the outline of the 1971 extension is not accurate; north is to the right), perspective and detail of stand (Butler, vol. 2, p. 858)

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building faces east towards Priory Road. The plan of the meeting house of 1811 is oblong with a central porch projecting to the east. The flat-roofed extension of 1971 to the north is L-shaped behind a small yard. The south extension of 2007 (containing the Nantucket Room) has an oblong plan set back behind the meeting house's east elevation and projecting to the rear. The walls of the meeting house and the 1971 extension are rendered and painted. The hipped roof of the meeting house is covered with slate, as is the gabled porch roof. The front elevation of the central porch has a short, segmentally-arched window of six panes above the segmentally-arched entrance door. On either side is a segmentally-arched sash window of 12 over 12 panes. Both extensions are unobtrusively set back from the entrance elevation. The rear elevation of the meeting house is similar to the entrance elevation, with two 12/12 sash windows with segmental arches. The front elevation of the Nantucket Room extension has a slate panel with a quote by Waldo Williams beside the glazed entrance door. The rear elevation is largely glazed. The front elevation of the 1971 extension is hidden behind the yard wall; its rear elevation has three UPVC windows.

The meeting house contains two former meeting rooms which are separated by a later partition (photo centre right on page 1). To the north is the meeting room with the elders' and ministers' stand; the room to the south is now the library but originally was the women's business meeting room. Both could originally be separately accessed by two panelled doors in the porch. While the two doors are still in situ, that to the meeting room is disused. The current partition has a bend to the east; the original partition (probably with removable or sash shutters) was probably further north, dividing the interior into two rooms of equal size. The library is a plain space; the wall-benches shown in Butler's plan (figure 1) have been removed. There used to be a fireplace at the centre of the south wall (see list description in Part 6) but no visual evidence remains. A new connecting door opening to the Nantucket Room extension was created just to the west of the centre of the south wall. (There is no internal connection between the meeting house and the 1971 extension.) The full-width, two-level stand is placed against the north wall of the meeting room (photo centre left on page 1). Its central flight of stairs has turned newels, stick balusters and ramped handrails. The lower bench has curved armrests on turned supports and a backboard of raised and fielded panelling. The cornice moulding on the panelling has been cut away at intervals, reportedly to allow for the wearing of hats. The panelling behind the upper bench has shallower mouldings and the panels are filled with vertical boarding. The woodwork of the stand was painted white at some stage but has since been stripped of paint. The meeting room ceiling has a deep cove and a slim moulded cornice to three sides. Both rooms in the meeting house have timber floors; some portions affected by rot were recently cut out and replaced. The floor of the porch is of concrete. The extension of 2007 includes toilets, a small kitchen and the Nantucket Room to the rear (west). The 1971 extension contains toilets and a small kitchen ranged along the entrance corridor to the east and an oblong room to the west. The small yard in front of this extension contains a small shed.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are eight loose benches on the site and in the building, of various designs. The library has a bench with shaped ends and chamfered back panels; two similar benches stand outside, in front of the rear elevation (photo bottom left on page 1). The meeting room has four open-backed benches, two of which have turned armrest supports. A third such bench is in the Nantucket Room. The Regency-style claw-foot table in the meeting room was a gift to the local meeting.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is no longer in use (other than for the scattering of ashes) and the plot has been diminished by sales of parcels of land over time. The first recorded burial, of Abigail Starbuck (wife of Samuel Starbuck senior), took place in 1801; the last one, of Mary Ann Adams, in 1908. Most of the Quaker founders of Milford Haven are buried here including Samuel Starbuck senior (died 1803), his wife Abigail, Timothy Folger (died 1814) and his wife Abial, writer of the diary. Their gravestones are among the eight older gravestones (dating from 1801 to 1829) which in 2006 were set against the walls of the meeting house (photo bottom left on page 1). These are of slate and, probably due to the material, not of the usual Quaker shape with an arched top but with canted or concave corners. The inscriptions contain only the initials, the year and the month. The remainder of the gravestones (with dates between c.1818 and 1908) have been laid flat in rows.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The boundary wall to the street (of red rubble stone, according to the list description) is rendered and painted, with raised sans serif lettering above the gateway spelling out 'FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE'. The modern gate of 2011 was designed by Roy Thedvall. Just inside this are the older gates on a concave plan with dwarf rubble walls, iron railings and openwork iron gatepiers (photo bottom right on page 1).

The site of the burial ground and meeting house was originally larger but by 1937 (map evidence) plots for two semi-detached houses in Priory Road (to the north and south of the meeting house) had been sold off and developed. (According, to Stephen Griffith's history, the Quaker Arthur Gwilliam built these four houses and lived in one of them, as acting warden.) Two further plots to the west had been sold by the 1960s for the purposes of building an ambulance station (north) and a mortuary (south). These plots have recently been redeveloped with houses (which now form the east end of Dartmouth Gardens). A gate in the burial ground's west wall leads into Dartmouth Gardens. A small area west of the north extension is a fenced playground used by the nursery.

There are detached burial grounds in Sutton and Trewern (both in Pembrokeshire). The burial ground at Mount Lane, Sutton (NGR: SM 91683 16502), was established in 1661 and belonged to a meeting whose meeting house was demolished in 1835. The boundary walls are listed grade II (Cadw record ID: 25149). According to the list description it contains two headstones from the 1860s and one seventeenth-century monument. Butler describes the burial ground as 'a unique arrangement of two enclosures of high stone walls, the outer over 100 ft sq, the inner about 75 ft sq, the space between and the long approach avenue planted with trees mostly of c.1850' (p.869).

There is another detached burial ground at Trewern, near Llanddewi Velfrey (NGR: SN 17134 17743). Established in 1663 on land owned by John Lewis, his descendants conveyed the burial ground and the adjoining cottage to Friends in 1876. This was the burial ground for the Redstone meeting which was discontinued in 1766 when Quakerism was waning in Pembrokeshire.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is currently listed at grade II and the listing specifically includes the boundary wall and the ironwork gates with railings. The building might be a candidate for upgrading to grade II*, due to its exceptional historical significance.

The architect and builder Griffith Watkins (c.1745-1822) was responsible for building the Pembrokeshire County Gaol (1779-80; since demolished) within the ruins of the medieval Haverfordwest Castle, for building the New Inn (now Lord Nelson Hotel) in Milford Haven (1795-1800), and for developing a row of houses (c.1806) in Robert Street, Milford Haven.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The burial ground has been used since 1801. Most burials appear to have been located to the rear (west) of the meeting house. An archaeological watching brief during the construction of the Nantucket Room reportedly found no burials in that area (south of the meeting house). It seems unlikely that there was an earlier building on the site, since Milford Haven was only being developed at the time. The site has high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Fair (as far as is known in the absence of a quinquennial inspection report). The meeting house suffers from damp problems which are caused by the cementitious render of the external walls. If these are not remedied soon the condition will further deteriorate. There are cracks and vegetation growth in the front boundary wall.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory

3.2 Maintenance

There is no established quinquennial inspection regime. It is recommended that a qualified conservation architect be appointed to undertake such an inspection, as is good practice for listed buildings. They will be able to advise how the render might be best removed and what the cost implications are. The local meeting has enough money for small-scale maintenance but not enough for any major works.

3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: changed to a provider of renewable energy, installation of double-glazing in the nursery room
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: wildlife-friendly management of the garden/burial ground and the pond
- Transport: use of car sharing where possible

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden.

The meeting is accessible by public transport but connections are patchy in some areas. There is no parking on site and no secure parking for bicycles. A public car park is nearby as well as parking on the road.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access (via the Nantucket Room extension), an accessible toilet, and a hearing loop. There are no facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was undertaken in 2005 and the recommended changes have been implemented, including the installation of the hearing loop, an accessible toilet and level access.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about 2 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 80 hours per week. It is used for an average of 36 hours per week. A nursery uses the north extension every weekday morning. The meeting use the lettings policy agreed by the area meeting. Users value the meeting house for its central location and cheap rates.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There has been no heritage crime, general crime or other incidents. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, high deprivation and low community confidence. The meeting has made contact with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but there is currently no reason to liaise further. The meeting has a Quaker police chaplain.

3.8 Plans for change

There are currently no changes planned for the building.

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 has all the facilities required by the local meeting. The amenities and extra space provided by the Nantucket Room extension should obviate any further extensions in the medium term. The lack of quinquennial inspections and the damp caused by the render are the most serious threats to this listed building.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The users of the meeting house and the nursery currently have all the facilities they need.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: The meeting house is a listed building whose history is inextricably linked to that of Milford Haven. In the unlikely event of closure or disposal, a new, sympathetic use would need to be found for the meeting house, which would allow the retention of the elders' and ministers' stand in situ. This might well be a community use in conjunction with the nursery.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description(s)

The Friends Meeting House, including boundary wall with doorway and ironwork gates plus railings

Record ID 12903

Local Authority Pembrokeshire

Community Milford

Location Situated set back between Robert Street and Trafalgar Road.

Easting 190373

Northing 206083

Date Listed 2/22/1993

Last amendment 2/22/1993

Grade II

History: 1811 Quaker Meeting House designed by Griffith Watkins of Haverfordwest for the community of Nantucket whalers who came to found Milford in 1792-3.

Reason: One of the most important Friends' Meeting Houses in Wales, and significant in the history of Milford as being built for the Nantucket whalers, who are mostly buried in the small graveyard behind.

Reference: Original plans showing flat-topped porch and letters in Haverfordwest Record Office D/BT/55 HDX/1018, copies in the meeting house. Estimated cost £358.

Interior: Within porch are two fielded-panel doors, reflecting the internal arrangement, where the N and S parts of the meeting-house were divided by a moveable screen, since made solid. Deep coved ceiling with modest cornice. The N end has the original elders'

gallery, a raised dais with simple bench and high back panelling, approached by centre steps with fielded panelled front each side. Steps have turned newels and ramped rails. Bench each side against dais front with end armrests. Five original open-back benches survive, some with added mid-rail. In S section, some original panelling and S wall fireplace.

Exterior: Unpainted roughcast with slate hipped eaves roof, single storey, small-scale with later centre porch and one window each side. Roof has swept eaves and boarded soffit, windows are large cambered-headed 24-pane sashes with stone sills, the two to front being matched by two on rear wall. The centre porch is gabled and bargeboarded with cambered-headed doorway, double doors and cambered-headed 6-pane window above under short stone shelf. Front wall to road: red rubble stone with roughcast on road front, camber-headed doorway with 'Friends Meeting House' in raised letters. Inside is small semi-circular enclosure with roughcast dwarf walls, spearhead iron railings and centre spearhead gate openwork iron gatepiers of four urn-capped iron stanchions, presumably the original entry.