

## ***Quaker Meeting House, Neath***

*Castle View, Neath, West Glamorgan, Wales, SA11 3LY*

*National Grid Reference: SS 75354 97818*



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

***The meeting house was built in 1799-1800 on a site beside Neath Castle which had been donated by the lady of the manor who came from a Quaker family. Several original and historic features survive, including the elders' and ministers' stand with a panelled wall and former gallery opposite. The adjoining burial ground contains (relocated) headstones dating back to 1804. Overall, the meeting house and its burial ground have high heritage value.***

### ***Evidential value***

***Although there have been some alterations (notably the extension of the entrance porch and the enclosing of the gallery), the original planform still***

*survives, together with original and historic fittings and features. An investigation of the fabric of the building may provide further information about the building's history and development, and also elucidate the existence of a reputed tunnel under the meeting house. The building has high evidential value.*

#### **Historical value**

*The construction of the meeting house was prompted by the increasing industrialisation of the area and the move of the Price family from Cornwall to become partners in the Neath Abbey ironworks. This direct link to the industrial heyday of the area is further underlined by the use of slag blocks as quoins in the meeting house. It has high historical value.*

#### **Aesthetic value**

*The meeting house is typical of many Georgian meeting houses across the country, using local material, sash windows and a generally domestic appearance with few decorative features but generally of a high standard of workmanship. It has high aesthetic value.*

#### **Communal value**

*The meeting house is primarily a Quaker place of worship but is also used by several community groups. It has the potential to increase the level of its community use, once the current damp and condensation problems have been solved. It has high communal value.*

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

1.1 Area Meeting: *South Wales*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0033570*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council*

1.5 National heritage body: *Cadw*

1.6 Civil parish: *Neath*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 Cadw ref.: *11788*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Neath Town Centre*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *Yes (the burial ground is part of the scheduling of Neath Castle)*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1799-1800*

1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *28 June 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Peter Hunter*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 859

Newman, J., S.R. Hughes and A. Ward, *Glamorgan (Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and West Glamorgan)*, 1995, p. 459

Brief history on Local Meeting website, <http://www.neathquakers.org/350-years-Of-Quakers-in-Neath-Swansea>

Price, W.W., 'Joseph Tregelles Price', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*,

<http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-PRIC-TRE-1784.html>

Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record, 'Neath Quaker Meeting House', PRN 02250w

Local Meeting survey by Peter Hunter, April 2016

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

### **2.1 Historical background**

A meeting had been established in Neath by c.1785. The arrival in 1799 of the Quaker Peter Price from Falmouth as a partner in the Neath Abbey Ironworks appears to have prompted the search for a permanent meeting house. The same year, Mary (Molly) Ann Leigh (1776-1846) gave the current site beside the castle, for a burial ground and meeting house. (She came from a Quaker family and, together with her second husband Capel Hanbury Leigh (1766-1861), had inherited the Gnoll Estates (which included the lordship of the manor of Neath and Neath Castle) from her first husband, Sir Robert Humphrey Mackworth, baronet (died 1794).) The meeting house opened in 1800. Minor improvements were made in 1977 for £1,000 and the building was refurbished in c.1991.

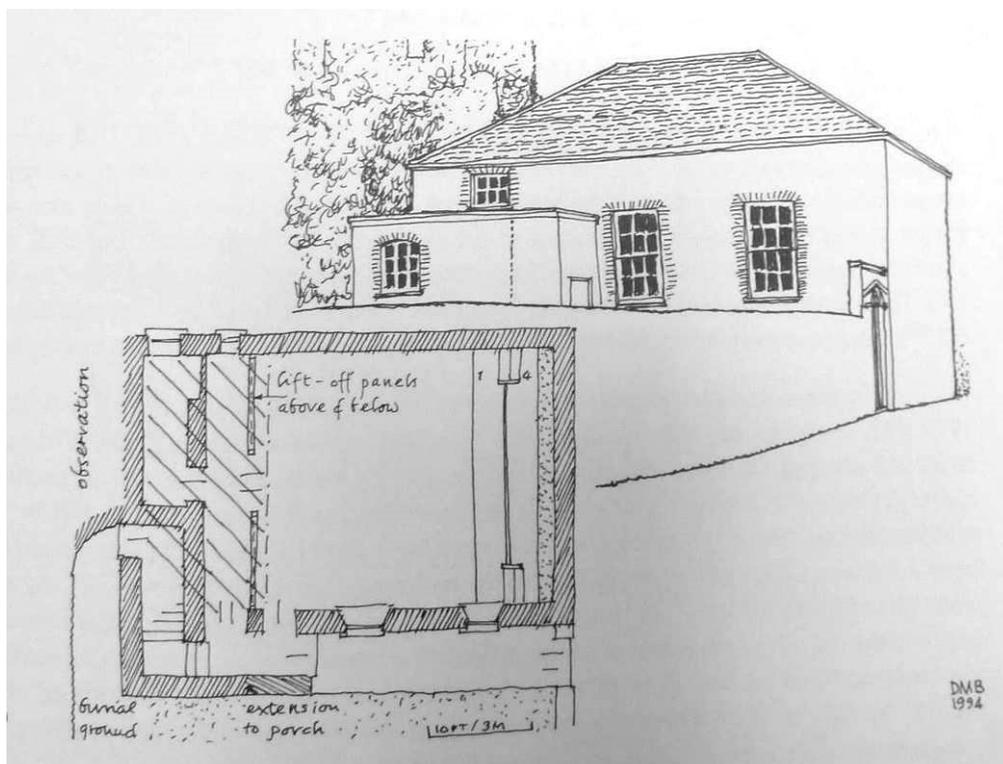


Figure 1: Plan (not to scale; north is to the right) and perspective (Butler, vol. 2, p. 859)

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house has an oblong plan which is aligned north-south, with the north elevation facing the street and the south elevation facing the castle. The entrance via a flat-roofed lobby is at the east. Only the south end with the former gallery is of two storeys. The materials are local sandstone rubble with some brick dressings (red brick for the windows, white brick for the door) and quoins of rubble stone with some blocks of slag. The hipped roof is of slate with clay ridge tiles. The east elevation has two large sash windows (six over six panes) with segmental heads to the meeting room, as well as a sash window to the lobby (three over six), a small window above the lobby (three over three) and a basement door near the northeast corner. The north elevation has no openings, while the south elevation has one small ground-floor window. The south bay of the west elevation has both a ground-floor and a first-floor window. (The ground-floor window faces into the castle compound.)

The lobby appears to have been extended to the north at some point to encompass the side entrance to the meeting house as well as to the gallery and staircase (figure 1). The meeting room is a full-height ceiled space with the elders' and ministers' stand at the north. This has steps to the upper level at either end as well as corner cupboards. On the wall behind the stand is a Tobin's Tube (a Victorian form of ventilation) which would have related to the former gas lighting and central stove in the room. The central light fixture is a converted gas lamp; the site of the former stove appears to be marked by a circular vent in the floor which may correspond with a pipe below the floor which is visible from the basement. (It is not known where in the outer walls or roof the stove's flue would have exited.) There is a fixed bench along the east wall. The floor is of modern carpet tiles over a suspended timber floor. The south wall is panelled: the ground floor has part-glazed double swing doors with a timber door latch flanked by small glazed panels, while the upper part encompasses the former gallery balustrade (the moulded balustrade is of a noticeable higher quality than the plain panelling above and below) and later panelling above enclosing the gallery. (Butler (figure 1) states that originally the panelling below and above the gallery balustrade could be lifted off.) Beyond the panelled ground-floor screen is a narrow corridor leading to a toilet, a cupboard (with a floor hatch to a reputed tunnel to the castle) and a small kitchen. A stair leads to the former gallery which is now enclosed towards the meeting room by a plasterboard partition to form a small room with canted ceiling which is lit by a window at each end. Beside the door into this room is a small glazed 'squint' or observation panel.

An external door near the northeast corner leads into the basement which consists of a brick-vaulted corridor at the north which gives access via two openings to the low space between the sloping ground and the meeting room floor above. Apart from a defunct potential gas pipe, there is a raised stone feature which might be the rumoured tunnel which connects the castle and the cupboard below the gallery stairs.

## 2.3 Loose furnishings

There are only two benches remaining, both open-backed, with shaped ends and probably dating from the early nineteenth century. One is in the upstairs room (figure 2) and one in the north basement. There is also an historic timber coat and hat rack with pegs, which was recently retrieved from the basement and which is now stored on the top tier of the stand.



Figure 2: Early nineteenth-century bench in the upper meeting room (former gallery)

#### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground has been in Quaker ownership since 1799 but is no longer used for burials. It is part of the scheduled ancient monument of Neath Castle (see Part 6). The burial ground has a central path of yellow brick pavements; the remainder is lawn. There are about 45 headstones grouped around the north, east and south walls of the burial ground, all of them oblong in shape. The earliest stone dates from 1804, the latest from 1913. Ten headstones for the Price family are set against the north wall. Notable people buried here include Joseph Tregelles Price (1784-1854), whose family had moved from Cornwall to Neath because of the ironworks and coal-mining. Joseph was managing director of the Neath Abbey Ironworks (from 1818), co-founder and the first president of the first Peace Society, a patron of the anti-slavery movement and a promoter of the ironworks school founded by his father, Peter Price (1739-1821) who is also buried here. (A photograph of a burial plan is held by the Neath Antiquarian Society Archives (reference: NAS Z 14/12/1-3).)



Figure 3: Gravestone of Peter and Anna Price

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The site is bounded to the east by a rubble boundary wall with modern railings and an arched and pedimented gateway (with a modern gate). This wall joins the meeting house's north wall, continues east and returns south where it joins the north wall of the castle's inner ward. Neath Castle (grade II\* listed and a scheduled ancient monument) is directly to the south of, and attached to, the meeting house. It originated as an earthwork castle during Norman times but the present structure, including the gatehouse, dates largely from the fourteenth-century rebuilding after the castle had been razed in 1321.

The wider area is mixed: there is residential infill development and the Neath Canal just to the north of the meeting house, a supermarket carpark to the west, and the town centre to the south of the castle. (The castle is managed by Neath Town Council who open it to the public.) The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is correctly listed at grade II. The statutory list entry (see Part 6) needs to be updated and amended to correct the date, to reflect the replacement of the two doors, to reflect the removal of the cement render at the west and the replacement of a fixed-paned window with a sash window.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site is directly adjacent to Neath Castle (which was founded in Norman times) and the burial ground contains burials from c.1799. As far as is known there has been no systematic archaeological exploration of the site or the reputed tunnel under the meeting house. The site has high archaeological potential.

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

*See completed volunteer survey*

### 3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Poor. There are long-standing damp problems, particularly in the wall facing the castle. The internal walls of the meeting room suffer from condensation and light mould. The slate roof has been repaired on an *ad hoc* basis (and not always with natural slate) and will need a comprehensive repair at some point. There is plant growth in the stonework of the archway (which also suffers from some spalling), as well as a rusting iron hinge from a former gate. Another rusting and expanding iron element in the northwest corner has already damaged some quoins.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Generally satisfactory but with significant localised problems. There are several large buddleia bushes in the (scheduled) castle wall overlooking the burial ground whose removal has been the subject of a dispute between the council who is responsible for the castle and the local meeting. The buttresses of the boundary wall are missing some of their coping stones.

### 3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house does not have a recent quinquennial inspection report, due to lack of funds. It would benefit from the advice of a qualified conservation architect who could advise on remedial measures to deal with the damp and condensation problems. It is recommended that a quinquennial inspection regime be instituted, as is good practice for listed buildings.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact, including adding insulation under the meeting room floor. The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

### 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. There is no parking on site and no secure parking for bicycles.

### 3.5 Access

The meeting house has limited accessibility for people with disabilities. There is a step from the lobby into the meeting room and into the south corridor. The only toilet in the building has been adapted to be as accessible as possible. There is a hearing loop. There are no facilities for partially-sighted people (except one white strip to the lowest step of the staircase). There are several steps to the upper level of the burial ground. No Disability Access Audit has been conducted.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 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 about 10 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Quaker groups are permitted use of the meeting house free of charge. Users value the building for its good location and reasonable pricing. However, the damp, condensation and inefficient heating mean the meeting house is not attracting as many users as it might do otherwise.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site but there have been incidents in the past during which windows were broken which had to be replaced. The wider area is a city centre location with some deprivation and localised lack of maintenance. There is an established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

The local meeting is aware that the building needs comprehensive repair but does not have the funds, the capacity or the professional advice to proceed with this.

## **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:* As a listed building which is attached to the listed and scheduled castle, the potential for alterations or extensions is limited. However, the main current issue is finding a solution to the damp and condensation problems and generally overhauling the building.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The current community users of the meeting house have all the facilities they need. The eradication of the damp and condensation and the improvement of the heating system would be welcomed by the current users and might attract new users.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting:* The local meeting is small and feels it cannot sustain the financial demands of an historic building. Thus, disposal of the building

might be on the cards in the medium term. In that case, a new sympathetic use would need to be found for the building, ideally one which would preserve the meeting room with its fittings and without any subdivision.

**Part 5: Category: 2**

**Part 6: List description(s)**

Friends Meeting House

Record ID 11788

Local Authority Neath Port Talbot

Community Neath

Location Situated to the N of the Castle gatehouse at right angles to the road; graveyard to the left.

Easting 275356

Northing 197818

Date Listed 11/26/1986

Last amendment 1/5/1989

Grade II

History: C1792.

Reason: A rare example of a Quaker Meeting House in Wales. Group value with Neath Castle adjoining. The graveyard lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument site.

Interior: Plain interior comprising tall square main meeting room to right with 2 tier dais to end wall and full height boarded and panelled screen to entrance end with doors through to narrow cross passage. Smaller upper meeting room.

Exterior: Rectangular late Georgian meeting house. Rubble Masonry with quoins and brick window dressings; hipped slate roof. Three-window E front with sash windows, one small-pane, to meeting room; lower flat roofed entrance lobby advanced to left with later alterations, small-pane fixed glazed window and raised scribed panelled door with brick lintel in the return angle. Short small-pane sash window above to upper meeting room. Low panelled basement door with brick surround to right beside gated arched entrance with roughly dressed pedimented architrave set into high rubble and iron railed boundary wall to sloping graveyard. The wall adjoins the plain, roadside end wall of the meeting house, with date plaque and curves around to the E incorporating the N boundary of the Castle inner ward. Rear (W) side is part cement rendered, rubble exposed where gable end of a row of cottages formerly adjoined; horned sash window to upper meeting room. Graveyard overgrown on the Meeting House rarely used at time of inspection.