

Friends Meeting House, Penrith

Meeting House Lane, Penrith, CA11 7TR

National Grid Reference: NY 51643 30404



Statement of Significance

The meeting house at Penrith has high heritage significance as a late seventeenth-century building used as the first dissenting place of worship in Penrith. The meeting room retains original furnishings dating from 1803.

Evidential value

The meeting house and burial ground is in an area of medieval and post-medieval domestic and industrial activity, confirmed by recent medieval finds from the site. The meeting house and site have high evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house is a late seventeenth century building which is significant as the first dissenting place of worship in Penrith. It retains most of its historic layout (i.e. the meeting room with two upper galleries). The meeting house and burial ground have high historic value associated with the documentary evidence and building fabric.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is very much part of the distinctive character of Penrith, making use of local materials in Georgian vernacular style. The exterior design is characterised by plainness. The meeting room has a distinctive plan, the result of the additions and alterations, including the now enclosed galleries which are more intricate than typical examples in other meeting houses. The burial ground has unmarked graves and simple headstones following Quaker tradition, which adds to the aesthetic value of the site.

Communal value

The Meeting house has high communal value as a building developed for the Quakers which has been in use since 1699. The building now provides a local community focus and its facilities are used by different groups.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Cumberland*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0000030*
- 1.3 Owner: *Strickland Monthly Meeting Property Trust*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Eden District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Penrith*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1326914*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Penrith*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *Seventeenth century*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Unknown*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *5th May 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *June Hall, John and Adela Atkinson*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Not applicable*

1.18 Attached burial ground: Yes

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp.107-109.

Eden District Council, *Penrith Conservation Character Appraisal*, 2010.

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd, *Archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief at Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane, Penrith*, 2008.

Penrith Friends, *Penrith Quaker Meeting House Tercentenary*, 1999.

John Atkinson, *Local Meeting Survey*, March 2015.

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

2.1. Historical background

From the late seventeenth century, Friends were meeting regularly at a private house in Clifton, a village south of Penrith. In 1699 Friends decided to purchase a property for Meetings in Penrith. Friends acquired a farmhouse known as Layne House in Sandy Lane (now Meeting House Lane) for £80. The farmhouse had a simple rectangular plan form with a stable to the south-east. Nineteen years after the purchase, records show that £27 was spent on internal alterations, in 1718.

The first major alterations occurred in 1730; an external stone staircase was built up to the stable loft, and at a cost of £12 another loft to the north side was created with an internal newel staircase.

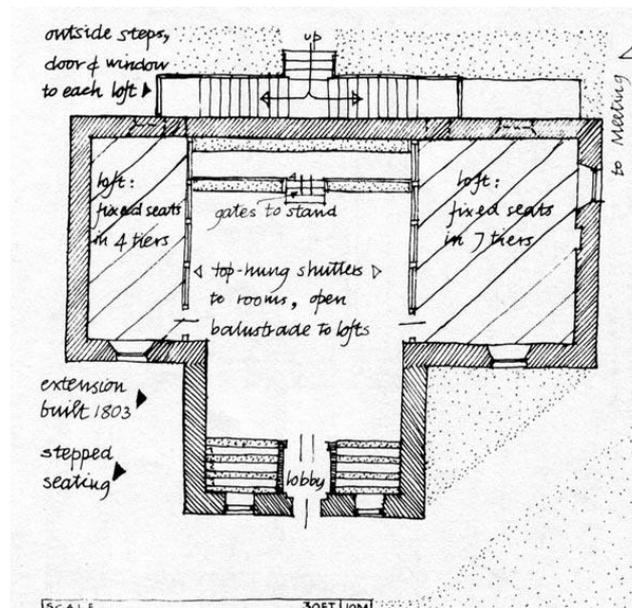


Figure 1: meeting house as extended in 1803, by Butler no to scale (north is to top left) (David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties*, 1978).

Proposals to enlarge the meeting house were drawn up in the late eighteenth century, and in 1803 a new wing to the south west was built to provide more seating. The lofts were modified and internal furnishings and fittings introduced at a cost of £251. The external stairs were removed at an unknown date.

The third edition OS map dated 1925 shows an outbuilding had been built by this date, to the north-east elevation facing Meeting House Lane.

In order to meet the modern needs of Friends, a children's room was added in 1991 to the southwest in the same architectural style as the meeting house by ADL Keswick. Further work at this time included installing new kitchen facilities, and land was purchased to accommodate the spacious car park.

In 2008, two extensions were constructed designed by local architect John Bodger. A former outbuilding was demolished and a small single-storey addition to the north-east elevation was constructed to accommodate WC facilities and a store room. Additionally, a garden room to the south-west was added in a contrasting modern architectural style.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The Quaker Meeting House dates from the seventeenth century, altered in the early eighteenth century and extended in 1803. It is built of coursed square sandstone with flush sandstone quoins with a lime-based roughcast render and painted stone window surrounds. The roof is covered in Cumbrian slates with stone ridges. The core of the historic building has a T-plan, with later additions forming an irregular L-plan. Most of the building is a tall single-storey; the only first-floor rooms are above the kitchen and reception area which formed the former lofts, which are been enclosed. The historic T-plan of the building divides into the 1803 wing containing the lobby, the meeting room (with enclosed galleries) and kitchen. Additions include a single-storey rectangular range to the south-west for the children's meeting room, a single storey range to the north east for WC and store and a single storey range to the south-east (garden room).

The south-west front elevation is formed by the 1803 gabled wing with two 12-paned sash windows flanking a stone chamfered doorway. The main range behind has a 6-pane window at first floor level to the left and right of the wing. To the right of the wing is a modern single storey garden room built of timber and glazing. To the left, the gable end is the 1991 children's meeting room range in similar style with a central 9-pane sash window. The north east elevation faces Meeting House Lane has no external openings; the 2008 lean-to range is built against this wall. The north-west gable-end of the meeting house has sash windows, and the children's room has two window openings. The gable end to the south-east has a 9-pane sash window to the east corner, and to the garden room.

Inside, the lofty meeting room is rectangular in plan. The panelled minsters' stand is against the north-east wall, accessed via central steps with a panelled gate. The north-west and south-east walls at ground floor level contain vertically-sliding screens, with tongue and groove panelling blocking the lofts at first floor level, set behind the original turned balusters to the front. All the joinery is unpainted pine. The 1803 wing has plain plastered walls.

The rooms northwest and southeast of the meeting room form rectangular spaces with vertically-sliding screens to the meeting room, and a sloping ceiling soffit (to accommodate the raked lofts above). The northwest room is used as the kitchen which also gives access to the children's room. The southeast room is the reception area, this has a cast iron fireplace. The toilets and stores in the north east extension can be accessed from this room.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The seating consists of a mixture of historic benches and modern loose chairs arranged in a circle around a central table. The main meeting room contains historic pine benches (Fig.2) possibly dating from 1803 or earlier, with later upholstery.



Figure 2: Historic pine bench

The reception area contains an oak document cabinet (Fig.3) with a large single top drawer and two pairs of drawers below with brass fittings. The cabinet contains a message: *“this box was made by John Rullson of April in the year 1794 for the soul use of the Monthly Meeting of Great Strickland to preserve securely all the deed writings and other papers belonging to the said meeting and paid for at the public expense.”*



Figure 3: Cabinet in reception area dated 1794.

2.4. Attached burial ground

The rectangular burial ground adjoins the south east side of the meeting house, enclosed by stone walls. Registered burials date from 1835 until 1995. A plan of the Friends burial ground

dated c 1869 notes 108 marked burials (Fig.4). Along with a number of unmarked graves, the burial ground contains two styles of gravestones; the characteristic Quaker headstones, small, round-topped and inscribed with only the most basic information are set along the south-west boundary and a series of flat gravestones are located to the south-east next to the stone boundary wall. The burial ground is set within a landscaped grounds, for which the Friends have a care and maintenance plan which includes tree maintenance, grass and hedge cutting.

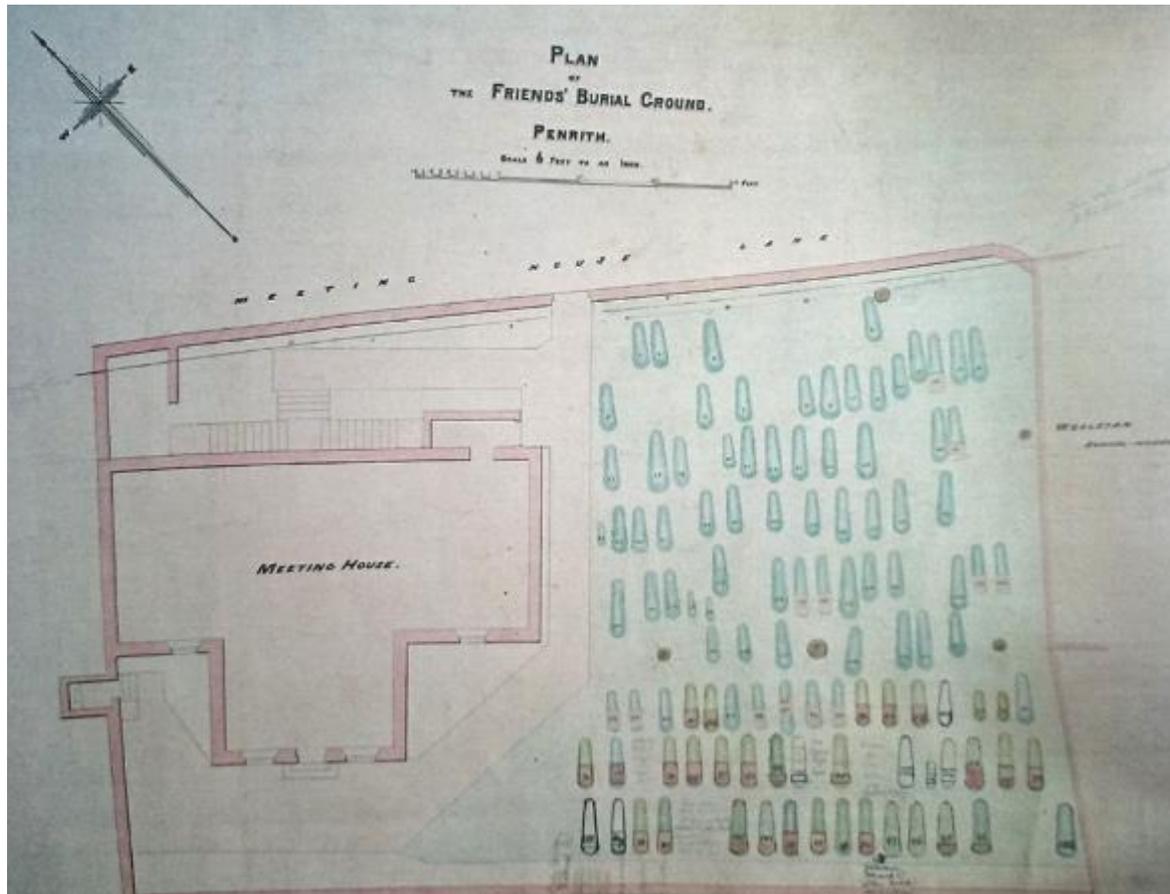


Figure 4: Plan of the Friends burial ground 1869 (northeast at the top; not to scale)(Penrith Meeting House archive).

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located within the area of medieval Penrith. The immediate setting is defined by a low stone boundary wall along Meeting House Lane, with two red sandstone gate piers and an iron gate providing the main pedestrian entrance into the site. The attractive burial ground provides an enclosed open space on the south-east side of the site. The grounds are well maintained and a number of trees and shrubs add to the character of the area. The rear of the meeting house faces Meeting House Lane, with key views to the meeting house from the car park and the burial ground.

To the west of the meeting house is a spacious car park and beyond this the street is lined with terraced housing dating from the late eighteenth century and built in the local red sandstone. To the south is an allotment garden which obscures the view of Sandygate car park and Penrith bus station beyond. Meeting House Lane is lined with buildings built of the local materials, but varying according to architectural style and age.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed at grade II which is considered appropriate. The list entry for the meeting house would benefit from being updated.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

As part of the extension work in 2008 John Bodger Chartered Architects commissioned North Pennines Archaeology Ltd to undertake a desk based assessment and archaeological watching brief. The results from this work have identified the site as an area of both medieval and post-medieval domestic and industrial activity. As part of the watching brief a sandstone culvert and other stone built structures relating to the meeting house were found along with a piece of medieval pottery. The findings revealed that there is still potential for the survival of archaeological features and structures on the site.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. A quinquennial survey was commissioned in 2014. No urgent works were identified. Works recommended in the next 12 months have been completed or are near completion. Essential works in the next 5 years included redecorating external joinery and metalwork, to be undertaken in 2015.
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The boundary wall is in good condition. No signs of bowing and no fallen stones. The burial ground itself is well maintained.

3.2. Maintenance

The friends have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan, following recommendations in the quinquennial survey, which includes regular gutter maintenance and treatment of car park and gravel to avoid weeds.

3.3. Sustainability

Although the meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, steps have been taken to improve sustainability.

- Climate change and energy efficiency: loft insulation and the use of low energy light bulbs.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: garden waste is recycled by the contractor who maintain the grounds.
- Wildlife, ecology and conservation: the grounds are well planted with trees and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has all the amenities it needs. These include a kitchen area (usage has been limited by fire regulations), WCs (including one fully accessible) and a meeting room.

3.5. Access

A Disability Access Audit was undertaken in 2008. Following this survey an accessible disabled toilet was installed promptly in 2009, and steps removed.

The meeting house has level access throughout, a fully accessible WC and facilities for the partially-sighted including clear signage.

The meeting is accessible by public transport and close to the town centre. Penrith bus station is 300 metres away and the railway station is a ten minute walk. On-site car parking is available for approximately twenty cars and on-site parking for bicycles is available.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting house is used by the Friends for three hours each week and by community groups for twenty hours a week. There is a lettings policy. All groups wishing to hire rooms must be first approved by the local business meeting. Room hire is free for Quaker activities and ecumenical meetings.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has been subject to occasional littering on site which the Friends have reported to the police; they have subsequently developed liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

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. The meeting house has already been modified on a number of occasions since 1991 to meet the Friends' needs.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The meeting house is already used for community use and has the facilities to support this.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. In the regrettable event of being laid down it would be desirable to investigate the possibility of the building being taken over by a trust to enable its future preservation.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List descriptions (s)

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1326914

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, MEETING HOUSE LANE

County	District	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	Eden	District Authority	

Grade: II

Date first listed: 24-Apr-1951

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

1. 5165 MEETING HOUSE LANE

Friends' Meeting House NY 5130 1/141 24.4.51

II GV

2. Late C17 foundation, but present building circa 1690, enlarged 1718, north gallery 1720, enlarged again 1805. Roughcast over stone. Plain windowless wall to street. Entrance in gabled rear wing, with boarded door in chamfered doorcase, two 12-paned sash windows. Small room on south end formed out of space under gallery, with a fireplace. Pine panelling. The first dissenting place of worship in Penrith.

Listing NGR: NY5164330404