

Friends Meeting House, Rookhow (Rusland)

Rusland, Ulverston, LA12 8LA

National Grid Reference: SD 33223 89542



Statement of Significance

Rookhow Friends Meeting House has exceptional heritage significance as a fine example of a purpose-built meeting house erected in 1725 to serve Swarthmoor monthly meeting. It retains many historic fittings and the original layout along with a good collection of furniture. The building has an unspoilt Lake District setting with adjoining ancillary buildings and woodland, and is used as a holiday and retreat centre.

Evidential value

The meeting house has high evidential value for its fabric which includes good quality joinery fittings. The site and outbuildings have medium archaeological potential to yield more information about their construction and past use.

Historical value

The purpose-built meeting house illustrates the resources and confidence of Friends in this area, and the role of the monthly meeting in the eighteenth century. The building and place has high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of this handsome building is typical of early eighteenth century vernacular meeting houses, constructed in local materials to a distinctive layout. The attractive woodland setting in a quiet Lakeland valley adds to its aesthetic significance. The exterior, interior spaces and the simplicity of the historic fittings have exceptional aesthetic value.

Communal value

The Rookhow Centre has high communal value as a place used for holidays and retreats as well as for Quaker worship. The remote location means that there is limited scope for regular community use. The site makes a positive contribution to the character of the area and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Swarthmoor (SW Cumbria)*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0110730*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Lake District National Park*
- 1.5 Civil parish: *Colton*
- 1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1225464*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1725*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not known*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *9 June 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Robert Straughton*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Gig house, stables (Grade II) and adjoining woodland*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lakeland Counties* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1978), pp. 137-140.

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 334-36

Robert Straughton, *Rookhow History*, nd

<http://swarthmoorquakers.org/page20.html>

Robert Straughton, *Local Meeting Survey*, June 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

Quakers had an interest in this valley long before the meeting was built; Margaret Fell owned nearby Force Forge from 1659 until 1681. From c.1688, Swarthmoor monthly meetings were held at Causey End Farm near Haverthwaite. In 1724 the monthly meeting bought a plot of land from John Taylor for £65, at Rookhow, as it was well-placed between Colthouse, Swarthmoor and Cartmel Height. The building was planned with an integral dwelling house for a warden, and was constructed solely for the business meetings of Swarthmoor Monthly Meeting; it was not originally used for local meetings. As everyone had to travel some distance, stables were built next to the meeting house, and later a gig house across the forecourt. The first meeting was held on 7 June, 1725. The building cost at least £150. The spice cupboard in the cottage is carved with the date 1725, which is also inscribed on an iron latch on the meeting house door.

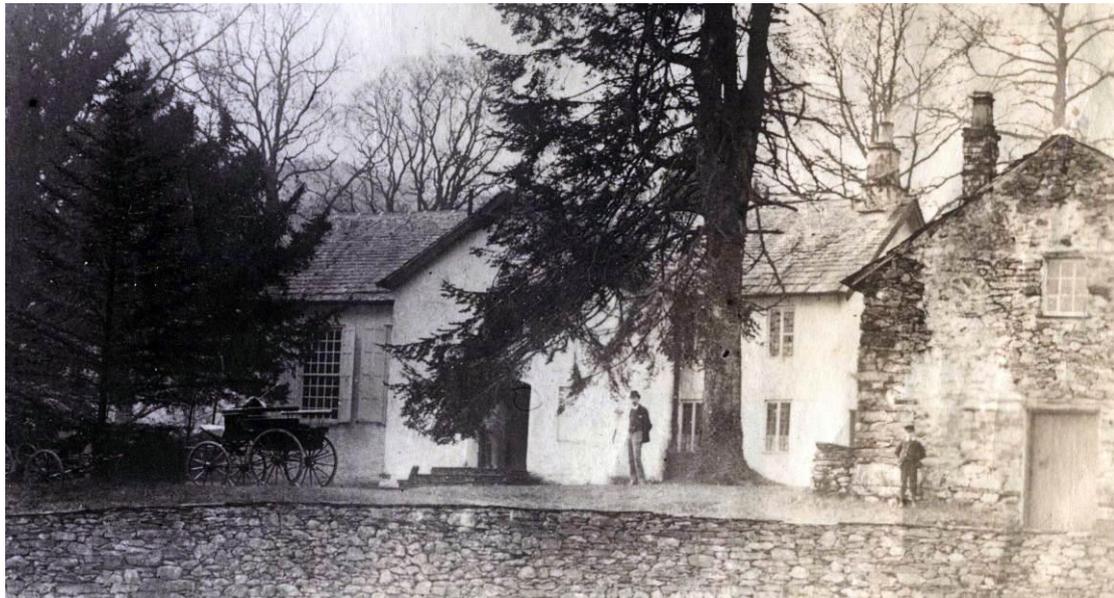


Fig.1: detail from late 19th century photograph (Rookhow Meeting House collection)

The meeting room was altered in the late twentieth century when the fixed benches were removed and the stone to part of the central aisle floor was removed; it is now all timber. Around the same time, the gallery was adapted to provide additional bedroom space for the warden's house and a door installed at the foot of the staircase. In the 1990s the stable building was adapted as the Rookhow Centre, a holiday and retreat centre with bunk house accommodation and an open-plan kitchen/living room. Paths were laid out in the woodland and spaces for tents and yurts created.

The meeting house is still used for area meetings, for regional annual meetings and meetings for worship are held once a month.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The Friends' meeting house was built in 1725, for the Swarthmoor monthly meeting. Constructed in local stone under a Cumbria slate roof, the elevations and cylindrical chimney are finished in roughcast render. The gables have barge boards and rainwater goods are cast-iron. The T-plan building is arranged with the entrance porch facing east, the tall single-storey meeting house to the south and 2-storey dwelling house to the north. The architectural style is Georgian vernacular; the form and appearance of the building shares similarities with other contemporary meeting houses in the area. The front elevation has a large 2-storey gabled porch to right of centre, with a set of five rectangular slate steps up to the boarded oak front door. The segmental-headed doorway is flanked by 2-light leaded casements, with a 3-light casement to first floor. The meeting house to the left of the porch has two tall 40-pane sash windows (originally with shutters see Fig.1), and the warden's house to the right has one 2-light and one 3-light leaded casement to ground and first floors. There is a later lean-to addition to the right return and the left return is blind. The rear elevation (not accessible at the visit) has casement windows to the left, and a central cross window to the stair.

The interior of the porch has a slate floor, exposed joists to ceiling, hat peg rail and a pair of oak boarded doors, leading left to the meeting house and right to the dwelling house. The staircase to the gallery is against the south wall, now with an inserted door to the foot. The ground floor of the porch is used as a library. The meeting room gallery is at the north end, carried on two timber posts; there is no movable screen below as this building was not built with a women's business meeting room below the gallery as was usual. The gallery front has turned oak balusters and plain handrail, and has twentieth century boarding behind inserted to form an enclosed room. The ministers' stand at the south end of the room has central steps, a fitted bench with nineteenth century pine panelling to the upper level back and a rail to the front. The room is heated by a free-standing wood stove, as it was in the nineteenth century.

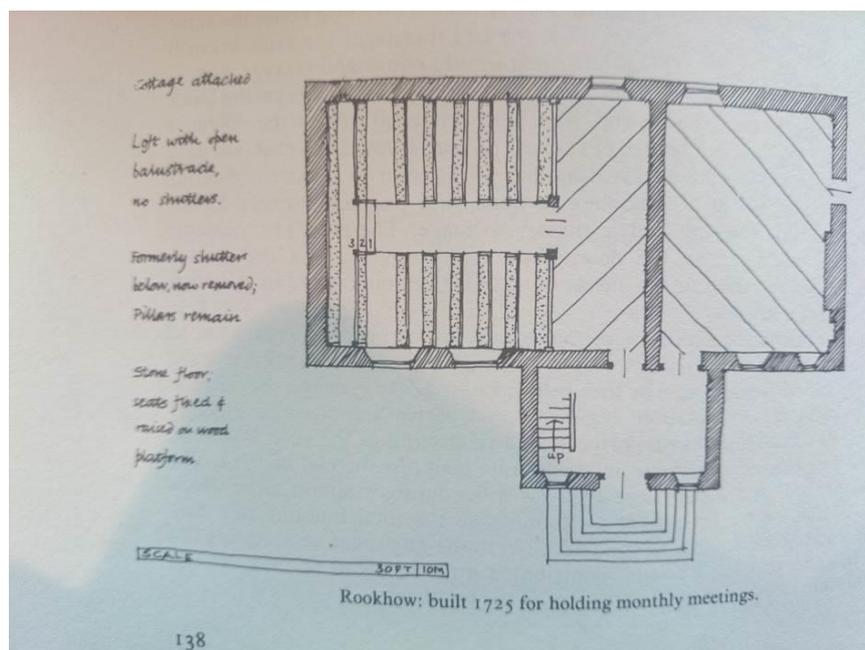


Fig.2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the right; not to scale) (Butler (1978), p.138)

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains a large collection of interesting furniture, including four benches from Bold Street meeting house in Birmingham, one bench from Swarthmoor Hall (originally from Friends House, London), a pine bench previously in Ambleside meeting house (now closed), one from Cartmel and one that may be original to Rookhow. There is an Arts and Crafts bench made by Stanley Davis and inscribed 1922, along with four chairs and a set of rush-seated chairs, an oak table with one drawer and a bookcase and drawers inscribed JB 1880 (from Swarthmoor).

2.4. Attached burial ground

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Rookhow is set on the west side of a small valley on the edge of Grizedale Forest, in the southern Lake District. It is in a remote area approached by narrow lanes, and not part of a village or settlement. Behind the meeting house is 12 acres of mixed woodland, known as Quakers Wood, which is owned and managed by the Friends for recreational use with space for camping. The meeting house is one of three buildings on the site, built around a forecourt facing east. A crescent drive leads in and out of the site from the lane, bounded by stone walls. The stables, now used for bunkhouse accommodation, is on the north side of the forecourt and is a large 2-storey structure. The gig house to the south is a single-storey partly open-fronted structure, probably built in more than one phase. Both date from the eighteenth century, are built of local stone and vernacular in character. The whole group has a distinctive character.

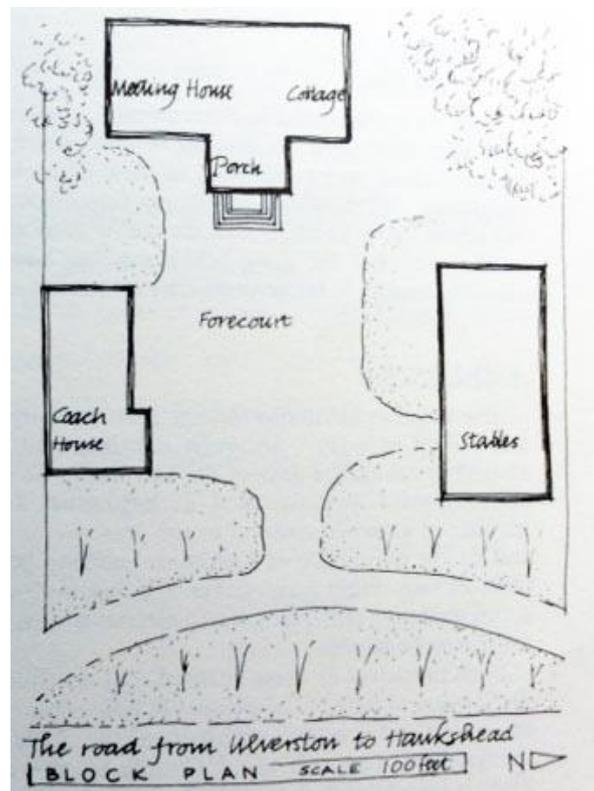


Fig.3: site plan from Butler, 1978, p139

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is rightly listed at Grade II*, and the former stables at Grade II. The gig house may merit being listed at Grade II, as part of the group.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The site has archaeological potential related to the construction of the Quaker buildings, but it is not known if there was a previous building on the site. It is said that the woodland may have been coppiced, a common activity in this area related to local iron bloomeries.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The latest QI report was not available, but it was reported that recent works have included new lead to roof valleys, render repairs, renewal of rainwater goods and roof repairs. The stone steps to the entrance were re-bedded in 2010.

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

3.2. Maintenance

The lettings in the stables help to provide revenue funding for the meeting house. The resident warden is involved in day to day maintenance.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, but has implemented measures:

Energy efficiency and use of resources: re-use of salvaged materials in the Rookhow Centre, heating by wood stoves using timber from the woodland, reducing electricity use, recycling waste and composting.

Wildlife: woodland is managed for nature conservation and no chemicals are used at any time

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has use of WCs, kitchen and additional meeting space in the former stables (Rookhow Centre). Robert Straughton is the resident warden. There is limited parking on the site.

3.5. Access

The meeting has not undertaken an access audit. There are steps up to the meeting house entrance, but level access can be arranged round the side via the warden's cottage, on request. Once inside, the floor is level. There is no internal WC suitable for people with disabilities, although there is a disabled portaloo outside. There is a hearing loop, but no specific measures to assist people with impaired sight.

3.6 Community Use

Through the Rookhow Centre, the meeting house provides a community resource for day or residential events, and is used for an average of 15 hours per week. The bunkhouse in the barn is available for lettings all year round and is used for approximately 3-4 days per week. Users include Quakers, Forest School training courses and academic workshops. People like to come here for the ambience, the quiet, the heritage and warmth.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There is no record of heritage crime or anti-social behaviour, except occasional signs of poaching in the woodland. Here have been some thefts of tools and the garage broken into, and the warden has been in contact with local police.

3.8. Plans for change

To improve facilities for visitors to the barn, there are plans to install a drying room and disabled accommodation and WC.

Part 4: Impact of Change

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

i) As a Meeting House only: changes to this fine old building are constrained by its historic features and character, and make it difficult for the meeting to improve energy use, access and levels of comfort.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local Meeting use: the Rookhow Centre is a special place to let for events, and the remote location and its simplicity is part of the attraction. The heritage of the building makes it challenging to improve facilities such as disabled access.

iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a Meeting House and passing into secular use: it would be regrettable if this meeting house were to close as it would be difficult to adapt it for a new use, given its location and the sensitivity of the interior.

Part 5: Category: 1

List Description

Name: ROOK HOW FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE AND COTTAGE

List entry Number: 1225464

ROOK HOW FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE AND COTTAGE

County	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	South Lakeland District Authority	Colton

National Park: LAKE DISTRICT

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 25-Mar-1970

Details

COLTON RUSLAND SD 38 NW 6/67 25.3.70 Rook How Friends' Meeting House and cottage

G.V. II*

Meeting house and house. Date 1725 on door latch and spice cupboard door. Roughcast stone with slate roof. 2 storeys, 5 bays, the 3rd bay projects as 2-storey gabled porch, the 1st 2 bays are single storey. Most windows have wooden mullions chamfered to inside, of 2 lights to windows flanking entrance and to 5th bay, of 3 lights to 1st floor of 3rd bay and to 4th bay; most, except for 4th and 5th bays of ground floor, have leaded glazing with rectangular quarries. 1st 2 bays have 40-pane sashes. Segmental-headed entrance has ledged and battened door with strap hinges and 5 three-sided steps. Gable-end stack with rounded shaft. Later lean-to porch to right return. Rear has casement windows to 2 bays to left hand end with central cross-mullion stair window with intermediate bars and leaded glazing, diamond quarries. Interior of porch has stair to former gallery and entrances to meeting house and house; that to meeting house has decorative ironwork to latch; including date. Meeting house has bench to dais and wall supports to other benches; now removed. Gallery on 2 round timber posts has balustrade, with timber partitioning dating from early C20 when gallery was converted to bedroom. House has plank and muntin partitions, with moulding to muntins, to ground and 1st floors; 2-panel doors; dog-leg stair. Spice cupboard door has date and H hinges; hat pegs to ground-floor room. A well preserved meeting house with house attached, also well preserved.

Listing NGR: SD3322389542

Name: STABLE TO NORTH EAST OF ROOK HOW MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1225408

STABLE TO NORTH EAST OF ROOK HOW MEETING HOUSE

County/District	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	South Lakeland District Authority	Colton

National Park: LAKE DISTRICT

Grade: II

Date first listed: 23-Jul-1987

COLTON RUSLAND SD 38 NW 6/68 Stable to north-east off Rook How Meeting House

G.V. II

Former stables. c.1725. Stone rubble with slate roof. Barn doors under pentice with former entrance with timber lintel to left, with inserted window. Right return has entrance with windows to right and above with small-paned fixed glazing. Window to left gable end. Interior has inserted floor at one end, with some partitioning to upper level.

Listing NGR: SD3325089554