

Friends Meeting House, Spiceland (Uffculme)

Uffculme, Cullompton, Devon, EX15 3AZ

National Grid Reference: ST 08315 14055



Statement of Significance

The present meeting house was erected in 1815 by a builder named Daniel Henson on the site of an earlier meeting house erected in the 1680s. It is a handsome stone building in a very attractive rural setting. The galleried interior of the main meeting room is very little altered and most of the woodwork is original. An old thatched linhay or cartshed survives next to the meeting house. The building and its immediate setting are of high heritage significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house stands on the site of a late seventeenth-century predecessor and the main meeting room contains most of its original fittings. The whole is of high evidential value.

Historical value

The site has been in Quaker ownership since the 1670s and has associations with significant Quaker figures and families; the former including George Fox, the latter including the Cadburys. The meeting house was erected on the site of an earlier building in 1815 and is a well-preserved example of an early nineteenth-century meeting house. The main meeting room appears to retain all its original furnishings. Both the site and the building are of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

A plain but handsome building. The interior of the main meeting room still preserves a great deal of its original character, with joinery of good quality. The building is of high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been in use for worship since 1815, with a fifty year interval after 1886, and has medium communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *West Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0031900*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Mid Devon District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Culmstock*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1147652*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1815*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Daniel Henson, builder (inscription on building)*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 October 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *John Bell*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Linhay or cart shed adjoining*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1, pp. 141/2

Stell, C. *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in South West England*, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1991, pp.72-5

Local Meeting survey from John Bell, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

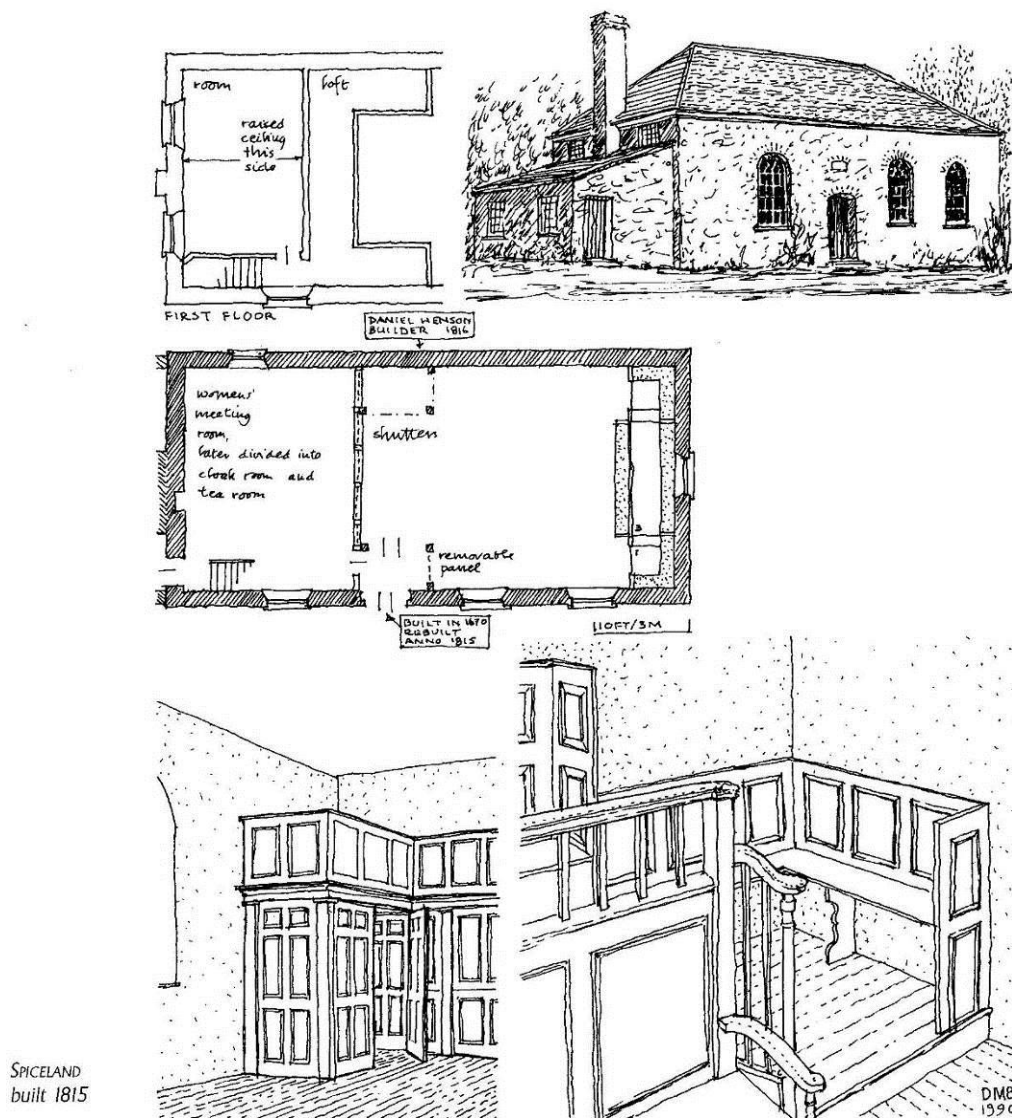


Figure 1: ground plan, a perspective view and details from the main meeting room. North is to the top of the plan. (Butler, vol. 1, p. 142)

George Fox is said to have held an outdoor meeting here in 1670. A substantial site on what was then the main road from Taunton to Exeter was purchased in 1679 and a 'large and convenient' building for a meeting house had been erected by 1689, with a burial ground attached. Most members of the meeting were associated with the local woollen industry in Uffculme and other villages; they included the Cadbury family, some of whose members are

buried here. The meeting house was taken down in 1815 and a new building erected on the same site. A stone on the rear north wall is inscribed 'Daniel Henson Builder 1815'. A lean-to extension was added at the west end some time in the mid-nineteenth century to enlarge the accommodation for the caretaker. The meeting closed in 1886 but the building remained in Quaker ownership. During the Second World War, Blackborough House a few miles away became a Quaker-run training centre for providing conscientious objectors with practical skills and the old meeting house was re-opened for worship. The building was restored in 1960 with the help of donations and a grant from the Historic Churches Preservation Trust. Since the 1970s the caretaker's accommodation has been let to provide a rental income. The old burial ground next to the meeting house remained in use until recently but a new burial ground elsewhere on the site was opened in 2009.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

See 1966 list description below (Part 6).

The meeting house is rectangular on plan, with walls of local rubble stone, which may originally have been rendered, and a pitched overall roof which is hipped at both ends and covered in natural slate. The main south elevation is of four bays with a segmental arched doorway between three round-headed windows, two of which light the large meeting room to the east and one the former small meeting room and gallery to the west. Over the doorway is a stone tablet inscribed 'Built in 1670, Rebuilt in 1815'. The original building date given is not correct. The windows have small-paned sashes with marginal lights. At the west end of the front is a single-storey lean-to addition with a modern timber porch. The west end wall of the addition has two casement windows, with two more windows at first floor level in the west wall of the main building. The east end wall of the meeting house has a single round-headed window of similar pattern. The north wall is blind but has a stone tablet inscribed 'Daniel Henson Builder 1815'.

Inside the building, the large meeting room to the east has a modern timber floor (probably installed in the 1980s), plain plastered walls (plaster all renewed in 2013) and a flat plaster ceiling. The windows all have timber internal shutters installed in 2013. Suspended from the ceiling is a timber and iron chandelier, which may be original (cf. Cotherstone meeting house in County Durham which has a similar fitting). At the east end is a minister's stand of unpainted pine, with two tiers of seats and steps at both ends to the upper tier with ramped handrails. The upper seat has a panelled back and front with a balustraded rail. At the west end is a gallery with a panelled front which is stepped forward at either end. The left hand step contains the entrance porch. The right hand step now shelters a modern kitchen. The wall beneath the gallery is partly panelled with what were originally moveable shutters between the large and small meeting rooms. The latter has now been subsumed into the residential accommodation at the west end of the building. The residential space was not inspected.

A short distance northwest of the meeting house is a single-storey linhay or cart shed. The rear (south) wall is of cob. Both the roof structure and the thatch have been renewed, probably in the 1980s. The roof is partly supported on massive timber posts and partly underbuilt in red brick at the east end. To the north east of the meeting house is a modern (1985) timber structure providing an additional meeting space and known as the Gingham room (from its Gingham curtains).

2.3 Loose furnishings

Eighteen loose benches with open backs and columnar supports to arm rests, presumably original to the building. The main meeting room has a chandelier with a large turned wooden boss and nine thin metal branches, again probably original. Stell reports 4 coffin stools (not seen).

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The old burial ground lies immediately to the east of the meeting house and contains a number of nineteenth-century grave markers. Burials include members of the Cadbury, Fox, Were and Fry families. A short distance to the south is the new burial ground opened in 2009, which at present is an open site laid to grass and bounded by hedges.

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house has a wholly rural setting on a minor road in attractive rolling country about 1 mile east of Uffculme village. The land sloping down to the south of the meeting house is laid out as a garden enjoyed by the tenants of the residential accommodation.

There are several detached burials ground sites having historic associations with Spiceland. They include:

1. Exeter Road, Cullompton, behind the Pony and Trap Public House (closed about 1709)
2. New Street, Cullompton (closed in about 1840)
3. Appledore, Burllescombe, Tiverton, near the Lamb Inn (recorded in 1830)

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is properly listed at grade II*. The adjoining thatched lincay is presumably covered by listing as a curtilage structure to the principal building, but should be specifically mentioned in the list description.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

There has been a burial ground and a meeting house here since the 1680s and the site is certainly of medium archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in 2008 and was carried out by Went Wheller of Taunton, chartered surveyors. Since that time, major works have been carried out to the building. Ground drainage has been greatly improved. In 2013 the south east corner was rebuilt, the external walls repointed and the internal plaster in the main room renewed. The building work was supervised by Jonathan Rhind, architects. The local meeting does not have enough money in its own funds to repair and maintain the building but hopes to seek outside assistance.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, but has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact.

- The roof space has been insulated, new internal window-shutters have been installed and a new heating system was installed in 2014.
- The burial ground is managed to encourage wild flowers and new hedges have been laid
- Friends are encouraged to share cars to come to meetings.

The meeting house does not have an EPC but the meeting would consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs on site. There is a small kitchen in the meeting house, with other facilities in detached buildings (toilets in the linhay, meeting space with kitchen in the Gingham Room). There is no resident warden or caretaker, but the present tenant is paid to carry out cleaning and some grass-cutting. The meeting house is not served by public transport. Access details are provided on the website and there is ample car parking space. There is no secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is one step at the entrance to the meeting room. There is an accessible toilet but it is damp and basic. There is a hearing loop but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. There has been no formal Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

The building is used by Friends for about 3 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings at all times but use is negligible at present. There is a lettings policy. No smoking, candles or incense are allowed. Groups attached to the local or area meeting may have free use of the building. Users value the peace and quiet in rural surroundings for retreats and workshops.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There has been no general crime and no heritage crime, but new direction signs 1 mile away on the A38 have been vandalised twice: the motive is unclear. The incidents were reported to the police. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, high community confidence and low deprivation. There is no established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but Friends would consider making contact.

3.8 Plans for change

A proposal is being considered to erect a partition in the gallery to divide the meeting house from the residential part of the building (for reasons of fire-separation). The external toilets could be improved and the Events Group are considering more use for the land owned by the Meeting.

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:* there is very limited scope for change within the building, which is subject to the constraints of listed building control. Any significant change could damage the character of the building and needs to be carefully considered.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: As above. There might be scope for replacing the 1980s Gingham Room with another structure.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the meeting house is not really a suitable candidate for alternative use, which would almost certainly be destructive of the historic character of the main meeting room.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description(s)

Name: SPICELANDS MEETING AND CARETAKERS HOUSE

List entry Number: 1147652

Location: SPICELANDS MEETING AND CARETAKERS HOUSE

County: Devon

District: Mid Devon

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Culmstock

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 05-Apr-1966

Date of most recent amendment: 04-May-1966

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 95893

CULMSTOCK ST 01 SE 9/43 Spicelands meeting and caretakers - 5.4.66 house - II* Friends meeting house with caretakers accommodation. A late C17 meeting house was completely rebuilt in 1815 according to the date plaque and another plaque records "Daniel Henson, builder 1815". Local stone rubble with brick dressing; stone rubble stack with brick chimneyshaft slate roof. Plan: the building faces south-south-east, say south. The main part to right (east) is the large meeting house with the left end occupied by the small meeting house and cloakroom with gallery over. There is a stack in the left (east) end heating the small meeting house and the small lean-to extension which forms part of caretaker's cottage. Exterior: the 4-bay front of the main block contains the doorway, left of centre between 3 full height round-arched windows containing sash windows with margin panes and top radial glazing bars. (There is another similar in the east end). The doorway has a segmental head and contains double fielded-panel doors. Above it is the date plaque inscribed "Built in 1690, rebuilt in 1815". The roof is hipped both ends. The lean-to extension has C20 door and C20 casements with glazing bars. Good interior: the principal division is that between the large and small meeting houses, and it is made up of fielded panelling including vertically sliding shutters. All the joinery detail including the doors with wooden catches, the small meeting house chimneypiece, the original furniture, the rostrum etc. is all of unpainted pine; the effect of this with whitewashed walls is simple and peaceful. Roof of C19 king post trusses. This Friends Meeting House is complete with all its original (1815) fittings. Stell regards it as

"an outstanding specimen of its kind". Source: C. Stell. Inventory of Non-Conformist Chapels RCHM (forthcoming).

Listing NGR: ST0831514055