

Friends Meeting House, Whitehaven

105 Scotch Street, Whitehaven, CA28 7NN

National Grid Reference: NX 97551 18031



Statement of Significance

The closed meeting house has medium significance as a former Sunday school built in the 1870s by a Non-Conformist Church in Whitehaven, but is hidden from surrounding streets by adjoining buildings.

Evidential value

The building and site have medium evidential value associated with the potential to yield information about the site's use prior to the 1870s, from below-ground archaeology.

Historical value

The meeting house site has medium historic value, associated with the previous Non-Conformist school and complex of adjoining church buildings. There are few historic features, except for a plaque from 1879, but the external fabric of the building remains.

Aesthetic value

The building is typical of small Victorian church school buildings, with a high open roof and gothic-style windows associated with schools built by religious organisations. The interior is plain without features of architectural interest.

Communal value

The building is no longer in use, and its communal value is currently low, relating to the short-lived presence of the Friends' Whitehaven Meeting and former school use.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Cumberland*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0010290*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust Ltd*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Copeland District Council*

1.5 Civil parish: *Whitehaven*

1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/A*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Whitehaven*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *Yes*

1.12 Date(s): *c.1879*

1.13 Architect (s): *Not known*

1.14 Date of visit: *16 June 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *David Day*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 116-118.

M. Hyde and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, Cumbria*, 2010, p675.

David Day, *Local Meeting Survey*, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background



Fig.1: Former meeting house of 1725, Sandhills Lane

Whitehaven developed as a planned town to serve a harbour built for the export of coal by the landowner, the Lowthers of Lowther Castle near Penrith. The town was laid out on a grid-pattern by Sir John Lowther from the 1660s, and gradually built-up over the next 100 years. Non-Conformist chapels were built in a group around Scotch Street in the eighteenth century; the Friends Meeting House was the earliest to be built in 1725. In 1716, a plot of land was bought on Sandhills lane from Sir John Lowther, and the meeting house opened in 1725 (Fig.1).

In 1829 the burial ground was enlarged on adjoining land, after a house and garden were purchased for purpose. This meeting house continued in Quaker use until 1926 when the meeting closed and the site was sold in 1931 to the Christian Brethren, who still use the building for worship. Friends did not meet in Whitehaven again until 1982, when a former Sunday school behind the Methodist Church on Scotch Street was purchased for £7000. The meeting house opened in 1984, after refurbishment.



Fig.2: Whitehaven meeting during the 1980s (photo from Cumberland Area Meeting)

The large Methodist Church fronting Scotch Street closed in the 1990s, leaving the Meeting House and other adjoining buildings vulnerable and difficult to maintain. The Whitehaven meeting closed in 2013, as maintenance and safe access were no longer viable, and it was considered too large for the meeting.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building was constructed as a Sunday school for an adjoining Presbyterian church (demolished), in c.1879. The architect is not known but may have been T.L.Banks who designed the adjoining gothic revival Methodist church. The small single-storey building is built of red sandstone, with render to the south gable-end, the south-east elevation is modern cavity brick construction. The Welsh slate roof is hipped with glazed rooflights and cast-iron rainwater goods. The building is roughly square and aligned north-east to south-west with the entrance facing north-west onto a narrow alley. The doorway to the left is plastic, with two pointed timber windows to the right, which rise above the eaves with gabled dormers. The south-east elevation has high level hopper windows, and the south gable-end is blind.

The 3-bay interior is divided by a cross wall into a 2-bay room to the south-west, and a small lobby and ancillary spaces in the north-east bay of the volume. The roof has two collar trusses, which are exposed below collar level in the larger room, with a boarded roof lantern. Walls and ceiling are plain plastered and the floor is suspended timber. There is secondary

glazing to the large windows on the north-west side. Between the windows is a plaque recording that the school was dedicated to William Walker in 1879.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The building contains no historic furnishings.

2.4. Attached burial ground

N/A

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Scotch Street is part of the grid of streets laid out in Whitehaven in the late seventeenth century, and is now part of the one-way traffic system. The site is on the east side of the town centre, on a block largely built-up with post-war public buildings including the police station, magistrates' court, telephone exchange and record office. The intersection with Lowther Street is dominated by a large gothic revival Methodist Church built in 1877 (Fig.4), which has been closed since 1990; this building is now vacant and 'at risk'. The former school used as a meeting house is tucked behind this large church, only accessible via an alleyway from Scotch Street (Fig.3). The building is bounded to the north-east by another former Sunday school building (also vacant and in poor condition) with other properties abutting the south-west and south-east sides. To the north-east of the former Non-Conformist schools the late twentieth century police station is built in on the site of a demolished Presbyterian Church. The 1725 former meeting house on Sandhills Lane is about 100 metres to the north.



Fig.3: alley access to meeting house from Scotch Street



Fig.4: closed 1877 Methodist church on Scotch Street/Lowther Street junction

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed, but is sited behind the Methodist Church which is a Grade II listed building. It appears to not be a curtilage building as it was apparently built as a school for the Presbyterian Church (demolished), not as an ancillary building for the Methodist Church. It could be a candidate for a future local list managed by the local planning authority, subject to resources.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The previous use of this site is not known, and no information is recorded on the Cumbria Historic Environment record for this site. However, this part of Whitehaven developed from the seventeenth century and it is possible that there may be some archaeological potential

relating to buildings or activities on the site that pre-date the Victorian Non-Conformist church development.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Fair. The last quinquennial inspection was completed in April 2013 by Day Cummins. The roof is intact, but building is suffering from damp and a lack of ventilation, exacerbated by the adjoining empty Methodist Sunday school building, and an adjoining flat roof which is poorly drained.

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

3.2. Maintenance

The building is not in use or maintained, but is currently inspected weekly by a local estate agent to comply with insurance terms for insuring the empty building.

3.3. Sustainability

The building is not in use

3.4. Amenities

The building is not in use, but has a small kitchen and WCs.

3.5. Access

The building is not in use, and access is difficult, via a narrow passage past vacant and unsafe buildings.

3.6. Community Use

The building is closed and not in use by community groups

3.7. Heritage Crime

There have been no reports of crime, or anti-social behaviour, although the building may be vulnerable due to its hidden location and disuse.

3.8. Future plans

The Trustees plan to market the building for sale.

Part 4: Impact of Change

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

i) As a Meeting House only. The building is not in use as a meeting house.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local Meeting use. The closed meeting house is not available for community use at present due to the difficult access.

iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a Meeting House and passing into secular use. The building could be adapted for a new use, provided that access could be improved and the use of the adjoining buildings can be resolved at the same time, perhaps as part of one development. The building is in the conservation area and next to a listed building, so there are some heritage constraints, but demolition may be an option.

Part 5: Category: 3