

Friends Meeting House, Brigflatts

Brigflatts, Sedbergh, LA10 5HN

National Grid Reference: SD 64089 91155



Statement of Significance

Brigflatts has exceptional heritage significance as the earliest purpose-built meeting house in the north of England, retaining a richly fitted interior and an unspoilt rural setting. The vernacular building is Grade 1 listed, and important as a destination for visitors as well as a meeting house for Quaker worship.

Evidential value

The meeting house has high evidential value for its fabric which incorporates historic joinery and fittings of several phases, from the early eighteenth century through to the early 1900s, illustrating incremental repair and renewal. The burial ground and ancillary stable and croft buildings also have archaeological potential.

Historical value

The site is associated with a 1652 visit by George Fox to the area, and to the growth of Quakerism in this remote rural area. The meeting house was built in 1674-75 and fitted out over the following decades, according to Quaker requirements and simple taste. The burial ground has been in continuous use since 1656 and is the burial place of the poet Basil Bunting. The building and place has exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of the building is typical of late seventeenth century vernacular architecture in this area, constructed in local materials and expressing Friends' approach to worship. The attractive setting of the walled garden, paddock and outbuildings adds to its aesthetic significance. The exterior, interior spaces and historic fittings and furnishings have exceptional aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is primarily a place for Quaker worship but is important to visitors to this western part of the Yorkshire Dales. The building makes a positive contribution to the local area and has high communal value, although it is not suited to community use.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Kendal & Sedbergh*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0033600*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority*

1.5 Civil parish: *Sedbergh*

1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*

1.7 Listed status: *I*

1.8 NHLE: *1384080*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1675*

1.13 Architect: *Henry T. Fowler designed refurbishment in 1900-05*

1.14 Date of visit: *10 June 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Phil Satchel and Pam Coren*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *stables, schoolroom, warden's house*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses in the Lake District*, (London: Friends Historical Society, 1978), pp 145-152

Arthur Kincaid, *The Cradle of Quakerism, Exploring Quaker Roots in North West England*, 2011

www.brigflatts.org/themeetinghouse.html

Pamela Coren, Tess and Phil Satchell, *Local Meeting Survey*, March 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

In June 1652 George Fox visited Richard Robinson who owned the farm at Brigflatts; Richard Robinson introduced him to other sympathetic local farmers including Gervase Benson at Borrat where he addressed a gathering of Seekers. Fox then spoke to a large outdoor meeting on Firbank Fell, about 4 miles north west of Sedbergh at NGR 619937. In 1660, Friends bought an orchard at Brigflatts for use as a burial ground, from Robinson; the site for the meeting house was bought in 1674, from John Dawson Whitesmith (previously owned by Robinson who had died by then). The new meeting house opened in 1675, the date recorded by a datestone over the doorway. George and Margaret Fox visited in 1677. On the south side of the burial ground a stable and gig house building was built, extended to the west in 1709 with a room above it, the latter later used as a schoolroom. The meeting house was gradually improved internally; a wooden floor was laid in 1681, in 1711-15 the west staircase and L-shaped gallery were built (the latter work done by John Coupland cost £5), a plaster ceiling was installed in 1715, and the gallery balustrade made in 1720. In 1749 a partition was installed to separate the women's meeting room in the west gallery.



Fig.1: undated nineteenth century view of interior prior to 1900 repairs (Brigflatts archive)

A stove was installed to heat the meeting room sometime in the nineteenth century (Fig.1).

In 1900-1905 a warden's cottage was created by adapting the women's gallery and the room below, with a kitchen in a lean-to to rear and a new staircase; the architect was Henry T.Fowler of Kendal. At the same time, internal joinery was restored or renewed by Kendal cabinet maker Arthur Simpson. In 1965 a bathroom extension was added to the rear, for the warden.

In 1989, the house next door, Rosebank, was bought from the Quaker Wilson sisters, to provide a warden's house, freeing up internal space in the meeting house. In 1995 disabled access was improved and a disabled toilet added to the rear.

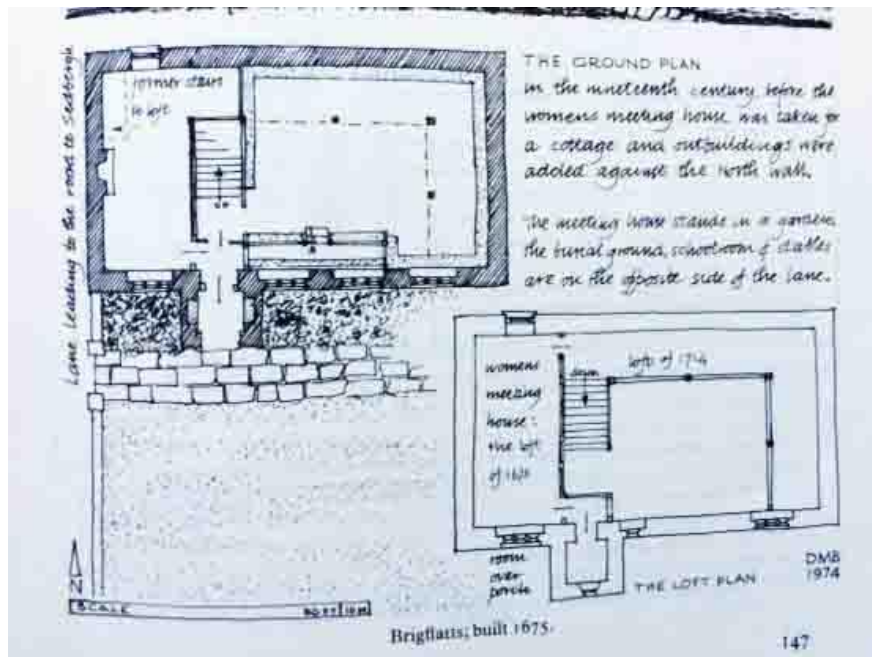


Fig.2: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (north at the top; not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. 1, p.147)

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1675, and altered in phases in the eighteenth century and refurbished in 1900, the latter by architect Henry Fowler. The building is constructed of random rubble, mostly lime-washed but with the porch fair-faced. The roof is laid with graduated stone slates with stone ridges, cast-iron rainwater goods on metal brackets and a gable end stack to the west. The rectangular building is aligned east-west with the porch facing south. The full-height 3-bay meeting room is to the east with the former women's meeting room (now part of a cottage) to the west. The south elevation has a 2-storey gabled porch with a round-arched outer open doorway with chamfered stone surround. Above the doorway is a replica of the original datestone inscribed "ANNO/ DOM / 1675", and in the gable a single round-arched window with chamfered surround. The meeting room to the right has two 3-light windows with cavetto-moulded mullions and flat stone-slate drips, a single high level casement and two 2-light mullioned windows to ground and first floors. The west bay to the left of the porch has similar windows to both floors, the upper originally for the gallery (later women's meeting room and cottage bedroom). All windows are leaded. The left return to the lane has horizontal drip courses but no windows except for a single attic light. The right return is blind but with a lean-to external WC (1905) with modern addition behind. The rear has nineteenth sash windows to the right (west bay) and a single-storey lean-to extension to the left.

Inside, the porch has a stone floor, stone benches to either side, and a square-headed inner doorway; this has a fine studded oak door in a beaded oak architrave, with wrought-iron fittings. An internal draught lobby leads to the meeting room and a doorway to the left leads into the library. The meeting room has a boarded pine floor and a wealth of mainly oak joinery of different phases, including the minister's stand on the south side, fixed benches to the east, dado panelling, galleries on three cylindrical oak posts on the north and east sides with turned balustrades, wide staircase to the west side with a dog gate with splat balusters

and a moveable (now fixed) screen to the west wall with fielded panelling and turned hat pegs. The ceiling and roof were renewed in 1905, with plastered beams. In the west bay of the building the library/sitting room on the ground floor has a blocked fireplace, and a bedroom to the first floor with cast-iron fireplace and a stud partition. The staircase in the north-west corner dates from 1905.



Fig.3: ministers' stand and fixed benches to south side Fig.4: staircase and panelling to west wall

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house has a fine collection of historic furniture, including several plain benches ranged around the edge of the meeting room and an oak table in the centre of the room. On the gallery are some benches, a fine oak chair dated 1671 with the initials MH, and a settle made by Simpson, dated 1911, for Friends Constance Fry and John Barlow, a wedding gift.



Fig.5: settle made by Arthur Simpson, 1911. Fig.6: chair dated 1671 Fig.7: oak table, c1700

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground lies on the west side of the lane, opposite the meeting house. Still in use for burials and cremation burials, this has been used continuously since 1656 and contains about 700 burials. In 1906, part of the Sedbergh market cross where William Dewsbury preached in 1653 was set up in the burial ground. The burial records are held in the strong room at Friends House, Kendal, by the Burial Ground Supervisor and the wardens. The

rectangular area is enclosed by dry stone walls and laid to grass, with the plain round-headed headstones arranged in rows aligned east-west. The headstone of poet Basil Bunting (died 1985), author of the poem Brigflatts, is along the north side. On the north wall of the stable building are recent memorial tablets recording cremations.



Fig.8: burial ground from the east

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting



Fig.9: Rosebank, the wardens' house



Fig.10: gig house, stable and schoolroom

Brigflatts lies at the end of a narrow lane in the Rawthey valley, on the south west side of the market town of Sedbergh in the Yorkshire Dales. The meeting house, gig house, stable and schoolroom across the lane and the wardens' house, Rosemount form part of an attractive group of Quaker buildings. The stable and gig house range (Fig.10) are separately Grade II listed (List entry No. 1384081) and comprise a single-storey, 3-bay stable with gig house to the east with a 2-storey, 1-bay addition known as the 'croft' to the west, the latter with external stone steps to the first floor. Inside, the stable has a cobbled floor but the stalls have been removed, and tie-beam and collar roof trusses. The interior of the croft has chamfered

beams and chamfered purlins and a blocked fireplace to the west wall. The paddock or small field between the rear of the meeting house and Rosemount also belongs to Friends (Fig.9). The farmhouse (in private ownership) just south the meeting house was where George Fox came to stay with Richard Robinson in 1652. The meeting house is surrounded by pasture fields and has a beautiful, rural setting. In the neighbourhood are other places associated with Fox including Firbank Fell where Fox spoke at an outdoor meeting on 13 June 1652, and Draw-Well where Friends met before the meeting house was built.

2.6. Listed status

The building is rightly listed at Grade I. The stable and school room is appropriately listed Grade II. Rosemount is typical of many Victorian villas and is not listable.

2.7. Archaeological potential

The whole site has high archaeological potential for its association with early Quaker activity, including the burial ground, the stable building and the meeting house itself. Prior to future works to refurbish the stable, recording is recommended. There is not thought to be evidence of earlier buildings on the site.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good. The last QI was held in 2010, and the following works since carried out: Limewash removed, cement pointing replaced with traditional lime mortar and the application of new lime-wash now due. Roof repairs undertaken to all buildings, with improved access for inspections provided. Improved ventilation installed in the croft (stable building). Works still to be addressed include rainwater goods and stone paving to the stable building, and inspection and repairs to the schoolroom purlins.
- ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/generally satisfactory.

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting has a 5-year maintenance and repair plan, jointly agreed with the Area Meeting. There is a special Fund, the Brigflatts Heritage Fund, available for the maintenance of the Meeting House and the support of the wardenship, in addition to the usual Area Meeting property Funds; this meets the key issues.

Routine maintenance of the burial ground is managed by the Brigflatts' premises committee and the Burial Ground supervisors. The grass is mown to encourage wildlife and wild flowers.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit, and has made as many changes as possible, within the constraints of the listed building:

Climate change & energy efficiency: Energy supply switched to provider using renewable sources. Door-closers and draught-proofing fitted. Heat loss imaging survey carried out.

Resource use, recycling & waste management: recycling is dependent upon local authority provision.

Building maintenance & refurbishment: Recent re-pointing, roofing work, traditional lime-washing will reduce damp.

Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the burial ground is managed to encourage wild life, and the meeting have plans for the paddock (see 3.8).

Transport: Cycle rack is provided and car-sharing is used whenever possible for meetings. Most visitors walk across the fields from Sedbergh and this is incorporated in our planning whenever possible. A car can collect those less able to walk from Sedbergh.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house has good but basic amenities including three toilets (one disabled), an adequate kitchen and bathroom, and one basic twin bedroom for letting to visitors on the first floor. In the Meeting House there is only one small ground floor room (which houses the library, tourist and historical displays) available for meetings in addition to the main Meeting Room. The Meeting House is an important tourist venue and is open until dusk every day of the year. Tours and talks, led by the Wardens, are available for visiting groups. Facilities for hot drinks and somewhere to picnic are offered to visitors. The croft over the stable provides a potential room for children's activities but is hard to heat, has limited access and so is currently under-used. The meeting benefits from resident wardens who live in Rosemount, adjoining.

3.5. Access

The Meeting lacks safe and adequate parking space for its members and visitors. A public layby on the opposite side of the A683 is used. There is one designated parking place close to the Meeting House for those who cannot walk down the lane, in addition to one for the wardens' car. The potential to acquire or rent parking space in a field from a farmer has been explored in the past, but so far without success. Public transport is very poor, with none on Sundays. In 2005 an access audit was undertaken and works undertaken to improve disabled access; there is now level access into the garden and the meeting room and a WC suitable for disabled people. There is a hearing loop but no changes have been made for people with sight impairments.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the meeting house 4-5 hours per week. No 'lettings' as such are possible at the Meeting House, due to its remoteness and location on an unlit cul de sac; there is little or no demand for community use and so there is no lettings policy. There are occasional public meetings and concerts, led by Friends or those known and sympathetic to Friends, and held at no charge.

3.7. Heritage Crime

The meeting house is in an area that is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels and low levels of deprivation. There has been no heritage crime or anti-social behaviour, although a small porcelain figure of Gorge Fox disappeared in c2006, presumed stolen. Liaison with local police is not felt necessary.

3.8. Plans for the future

A ground array of photovoltaic panels is planned for the paddock north-west of the meeting house, but planning permission has recently been turned down (2015) by the planning authority, Yorkshire Dales National Park; talks are ongoing. The meeting also plans a small plantation of young trees (provided by the Woodland Trust) and heritage apple trees, beehives and vegetable beds in the paddock. The under-used rooms in the croft have

potential, but this requires planning and a source of funding for the refurbishment to be viable.

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; there is very little scope to further improve energy use, improve facilities or make alterations.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local Meeting use: the existing facilities, lack of parking and location make the building unsuitable for further community use.

iii) As a consequence of the meeting being laid down and the Meeting House passing into secular use: it would be highly regrettable if the meeting were to be laid down and the meeting house to close. Transfer to a trust to continue to manage it as a centre for Quaker heritage would need to be explored, as any new use would probably cause substantial harm.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description

Name: THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AND ADJOINING COTTAGE TO WEST

List entry Number: 1384080

THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AND ADJOINING COTTAGE TO WEST, BRIGFLATTS

CountyDistrict	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	South Lakeland District Authority	Sedbergh

National Park: YORKSHIRE DALES

Grade: I

Date first listed: 16-Mar-1954

Date of most recent amendment: 19-Oct-1999

Details

SEDBERGH

SD6491 BRIGFLATTS, Marthwaite (East side) 162-1/19/378 16/03/54 The Friends' Meeting House and adjoining cottage to west (Formerly Listed as: BRIGG FLATTS The Friends' Meeting House and adjoining cottage to west)

GVI

Friends' Meeting House, with integral cottage. Dated 1675 on porch; slightly altered in C18. Mixed random rubble, mostly white-washed, graduated stone slate roof. Simple rectangular

plan on east-west axis (at right-angles to lane) with integral 1-bay cottage at west end and 2-storey porch next to junction with this. EXTERIOR: the cottage is 2 low storeys and the meeting house is one storey to the same height, the whole range 1:1:3 windows, with a plinth to the main range. The cottage has one 3-light mullioned window on each floor, and a short square gable chimney. The porch is 2-storeyed and gabled, has a round-headed outer doorway with chamfered surround, a square-headed inner doorway with a heavy pegged oak door and simple wrought-iron furnishings. Over the outer doorway there is a C20 replica of an original datestone with raised lettering "Anno / Do / 1675" over a 5-pointed star, and at 1st floor a round-headed 1-light window with chamfered surround and hollow spandrels. The main range has two 3-light windows at mid level, both with chamfered mullions and straight stone-slate drip courses over them. To the right 2 similar windows vertically-aligned, the upper (lighting the gallery) without a drip-course. INTERIOR: muntin-and-rail panelling to walls, with plain benches; raised bench against south wall with simple panelled front and rail with ball finials to stair top. Gallery to north side and both ends (added 1711) supported by wooden columns, protected by wooden turned-baluster railings and approached by a wide wooden staircase (opposite the door) at the foot of which wooden gates form an enclosure for sheepdogs; west end partitioned with wooden panelling on both levels to form Warden's cottage. HISTORICAL NOTE: third oldest Friend's Meeting House.

Listing NGR: SD6408691159