

Friends Meeting House, Darlington

6 Skinnergate, Darlington, DL3 7NB

National Grid Reference: NZ 28702 14395



Statement of Significance

Darlington Meeting House is a large and handsome brick meeting house built between 1839-1846, replacing a meeting house of the 1760s on the same site and adjacent to the site of a 1678 meeting house. Behind the meeting house building is a large burial ground, originally of the 1670s but enlarged several times and containing memorials to several notable local Quakers. The building was damagingly altered in 1960 but many of the original fittings still survive. The site as a whole is of high heritage significance.

Evidential value

The original interior was altered in 1960 but many original features still survive, including the sliding sash partitions and the stand in the south meeting room. Other features have been covered-up and but still provide

evidence of the original arrangements. The building and burial ground have high evidential value.

Historical value

A fairly well-preserved example of a substantial early nineteenth century meeting house, with strong connections to some local Quaker families of national significance, such as the Backhouse and Pease families. The building and site is of high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The street front is handsome. The rear of the building containing the meeting rooms is more utilitarian in appearance. The interior was originally extremely impressive and still preserves something of its original character despite the unfortunate alterations of the 1960s. The building is of high aesthetic value, and retains an attractive burial ground setting.

Communal value

Quakers have worshipped in Skinnergate more or less continuously since the 1670s. In more recent times the meeting house has been used by other community groups. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Teesdale & Cleveland*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0013410*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Darlington Borough Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *North East*

1.6 Civil parish: *Darlington*

1.7 Listed status: *II**

1.8 NHLE: *1121255*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Town Centre*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1840-46, internal alterations 1960*

1.13 Architect (s): *possibly by Joseph (or Joshua) Sparkes; architect for 1960s work not established.*

1.14 Date of visit: *17 May 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *David Simpson*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites:

Walls around south west corner of the burial ground, listed Grade II.

2-5, Friends' School Yard, Grade II. This building is no longer in Quaker ownership.

1.18 Attached burial ground: Yes

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1 pp.157-160
Stell Christopher, *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting houses in the North of England*,
RCHM, 1994, pp.61-2
Durham HER ref: DCC PRN H35076
Local Meeting survey by David Simpson, January 2016

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

2.1. Historical background

Friends bought a house and land in Skinnergate in 1678 and converted the building for use as a meeting house. In the 1760s additional land was acquired immediately north of the original site and a new meeting house with men's and women's chambers side by side was built behind a row of older buildings on the street frontage. Darlington was a prosperous meeting and included members of the Backhouse family (bankers) and Pease family (prime movers in the pioneering Stockton to Darlington railway and the development of Middlesbrough). In the 1839-40 the old buildings on the street front were replaced by a handsome new two-storey building containing committee rooms and lobbies and in 1846 the 1760s meeting house was replaced by a large building with two equal chambers separated by sliding sash shutters. The building has been attributed to Joseph Sparkes (1817-1855), a master carpenter and member of a Quaker banking and mercantile family based in Exeter, but Sparkes only took up residence in Darlington in 1847 and at present his involvement in the meeting house is not documented. His other buildings in the town include the Mechanics' Institute (1853) and the carriage works of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (1853). Both of these had strong Quaker connections.

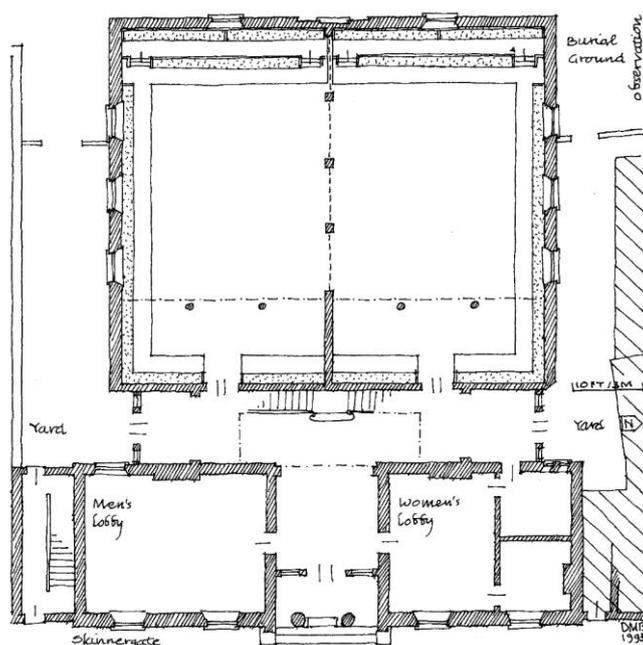


Figure 1: The plan of the meeting house before the major alterations of 1960. *Butler*, Vol. 1, p. 157-60.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, new buildings for a Sunday School and an Adult School were erected on the north side of the meeting house and by 1886 the complex included the meeting house itself, a large school room, eight classrooms, tenements on Skinnergate, a caretaker's house, two almshouses and the burial ground.

Major internal alterations were made to the meeting house building in 1960; the galleries were converted into separate rooms, suspended ceilings were installed, one of the flights of stairs in the front lobby was removed along with most of the stand in the north meeting room. At about the same time the adjoining school buildings were demolished; this part of the site is now used for car parking. The almshouse in the former school yard adjoining the burial ground (a modest eighteenth century brick building) was sold and then enlarged and refurbished as sheltered housing. The properties on the Skinnergate frontage were retained to provide an income.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The street front of the building is two storeys high and five bays wide, built of red brick laid in Flemish bond with a sandstone plinth, stone string course between the floors and a moulded stone cornice. The centre is set forward and has a wide porch with two Tuscan columns *in antis*. Above the porch is a three-light window with a stone architrave on curved brackets. Above the cornice is a stone upstand with the words FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE. The central bay is flanked by two widely-spaced windows on both floors with 8/8 small-paned timber sashes. Behind the front range is the meeting house proper. It is rectangular on plan with walls of grey brick laid in English garden wall bond and a broad overall pitched roof. The north and south side walls each have three large segmental-headed window openings with timber sashes and margin lights. The west gable wall has a recessed centre flanked by windows of a similar pattern to the side walls. The west gable has a moulded stone cornice and is topped by a chimney stack with moulded stone coping.

Inside the building, the front range contains several small rooms, some with surviving nineteenth century details. A full-height top-lit lobby between the front range and the meeting house contains one flight of what was originally an elegant timber double stair providing access to the galleries. The meeting house building originally contained two large rectangular meeting rooms with galleries at the east end and stands across the west end, both with curved sounding boards. The meeting rooms were divided by timber 'sash' shutters which could be retracted into the roof-space. The interiors were altered in 1960 but many of the original fittings still survive. The south room, which is now the principal meeting room, has a boarded floor and a dado with painted raised and fielded panelling in two tiers. Across the west end is a panelled stand with a front rail carried on Doric colonettes and a curved timber sounding board. The sliding sash screens survive intact, but the gallery has been enclosed and a suspended ceiling inserted across the whole meeting room. The stand in the north room has been removed but the gallery survives above the suspended ceiling.

2.3. Loose furnishings

There are several unpainted pine benches with arm-rests in the main meeting room, probably of mid-nineteenth century date. The library contains drawings of the former meeting house and a long-case clock of c1820.

2.4. Attached burial ground

There is a large burial ground behind the meeting house to the west, which was enlarged in 1844 and 1886 and contains over 1,000 burials. The earliest burial markers date from the 1850s. The ground is mainly laid to grass, but also contains several mature trees. The burial ground is fully walled and the sandstone wall on the south and west sides is separately listed.

Many local notable Quakers are buried here, including members of the Backhouse and Pease families.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house building fronts directly onto Skinnergate, an ancient street on the east side of the old town, now lined with slightly down-at-heel shops and commercial premises but including the former Mechanics' Institute building. The walled burial ground behind the meeting house is almost wholly enclosed by other buildings, including the presbytery of the Roman Catholic Church.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house and burial ground walls are properly listed at grade II* and Grade II, respectively. The short list description should be amended to include mention of the meeting rooms behind the street frontage with the correct building date (1846), and the interior fittings.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

This is a town centre site with a burial ground which contains the site of an earlier meeting house; it is considered to have high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good

ii) Attached burial ground: Generally satisfactory with minor localised problems. The condition of some of the mature trees is a cause for concern.

3.2. Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection report was carried out in 2014 by a suitably-qualified person. The building was found to be generally in good condition, with some maintenance requirements, including re-pointing and new coping stones, which have mostly been attended to. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the interior; external works are the responsibility of the area meeting. The meeting does not yet have a 5-year management plan, but a contract has been let for the regular cleaning of gutters.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented a few measures to reduce environmental impact, such as recycling through the local authority scheme and the burial ground is managed to encourage wildlife and nature conservation. The building does not have an Energy Performance Certificate.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house, including three meeting rooms of different sizes. The toilets are currently being refurbished and kitchen improvements are under consideration. There is a resident warden.

The meeting house is in central Darlington and there is good public transport. There is some on-site car parking but no secure storage for bicycles.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access to all rooms used for public purposes. There is an accessible WC and a hearing loop but no aids for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit has not been carried out.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for 3 hours per week. The building is available for community lettings for a maximum number of 252 hours per week (2x12x7) and is used for approximately 40 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Users value the meeting house because the accommodation is well-priced, the location is good and the welcome is friendly.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been no general crime or heritage crime at the site, but the meeting house occupies a town centre site and there is some antisocial behaviour, though nothing has been reported to the police. The locality is becoming run-down and is not particularly well cared-for. It has high crime levels, some deprivation and low community confidence. There is no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8. Plans for change

No changes are currently planned for the meeting house, apart from minor upgrading of facilities.

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: Although the meeting house is listed Grade II* there is still some scope for change within the building, not least in reversing some of the unfortunate work of the 1960s.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: As above, the Grade II* listing need not prohibit change and improvement to the building.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: If the meeting were laid down, the high listing grade would limit the range of suitable alternative uses and a sensitive scheme would be required.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: **FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1121255

Location

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, SKINNERGATE

District: Darlington

District Type: Unitary Authority

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 28-Apr-1952

List entry Description

SKINNERGATE 1. (West Side) 5195 Friends' Meeting House NZ 2814 SE 8/128 28.4.52.

II*

2. 1839-40, building of 2 storeys, 5 wide bays, the centre slightly broken forward and having a stone Tuscan porch in antis. Three-light window over h.as stone architrave and bracketed cornice. Pinkish brick; stone plinth, 1st floor band, cornice and blocking course with central name panel. Sash windows with glazing bars under flat gauged brick arches. Six-panel double door with flanking windows. On north return tall segment-headed sash windows with delicate glazing bars and margin lights.

Listing NGR: NZ2871114394

Name: **WALLS OF THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AROUND SOUTH WEST CORNER OF QUAKER BURIAL GROUND**

List entry Number: 1161282

Location

WALLS OF THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AROUND SOUTH WEST CORNER OF QUAKER BURIAL GROUND, SKINNERGATE

District: Darlington

District Type: Unitary Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 06-Sep-1977

List entry Description

SKINNERGATE 1. (West Side (off) 5195 Walls of the Friends Meeting House around south-west corner of Quaker Burial Ground NZ 2814 SE 8/362

II

2. Probably late C17. Large roughly coursed sandstone rubble with flat stone coping Entrance doorways at west (blocked) and south have large quoins and single segment- arched stone lintels. They are set in recesses and the coping and top courses of the wall continue above them.

Listing NGR: NZ2860814404

Name: **2-5, FRIENDS' SCHOOL YARD**

List entry Number: 1121293

Location

2-5, FRIENDS' SCHOOL YARD

District: Darlington

District Type: Unitary Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 06-Sep-1977

List entry Description

FRIENDS SCHOOL YARD 1. (West End) 5195 Nos 2 to 5 (consec) NZ 2814 SE 8/260

II

2. C18 house with alterations, now divided and extended. Two storeys, 3 bays in all, wide proportions. Pantiled roof with left end chimney. Pinkish brick. Gauged flat brick arches to ground floor left window. Right window concealed behind one-storey projecting addition. Between are two 4-panel doors with oblong fanlights set in a stuccoed panel under modern flat hood. First floor 2 original sash windows with glazing bars in wood architraves, and a small central light. Rear elevation has 4-paned casements.

Listing NGR: NZ2866614420