

Friends Meeting House, Dolobran

Dolobran Isaf, Meifod, SY22 6HU

National Grid Reference: SJ 12370 12419



Statement of Significance

Dolobran meeting house is a fine example of a vernacular Welsh meeting house built in a rural location in c1700; it has exceptional significance as the earliest purpose-built meeting house in Wales, although not in continuous Quaker use. The site is important for the adjoining burial ground, the setting and the building, which retains its plan-form and overall character. It has recently been acquired by Friends who cherish its simplicity and heritage.

Evidential value

The meeting house and adjoining burial ground have high archaeological potential.

Historical value

Dolobran meeting house has exceptional significance for historic values as a building built by Quaker Charles Lloyd on his land, and associated with early Quaker meetings in Wales. The plan form and character of the building reflects Quaker worship and principles in the early 1700s, and the remoteness probably expressed continuing concerns about persecution.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house has high aesthetic significance for its simple vernacular character and its rural setting in farmland, away from settlements.

Communal value

The building has high communal value to local Friends, and to a wider community of Friends and supporters who appreciate its history and unspoilt setting.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Mid-Wales*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032750*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Powys County Council*

1.5 National heritage body - *Cadw*

1.6 Community: *Meifod*

1.7 Listed status: *II**

1.8 Cadw reference number: *9304*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1700*

1.13 Architect: *Unknown*

1.14 Date of visit: *16 November 215*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contacts made on site: *Sophie and Simon Meade*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites:

Detached burial grounds: Llwyngwriil – NGR SH 59214 10163 and Langurig – NGR SN 945 802

1.18 Attached burial ground: Yes

1.19 Information sources:

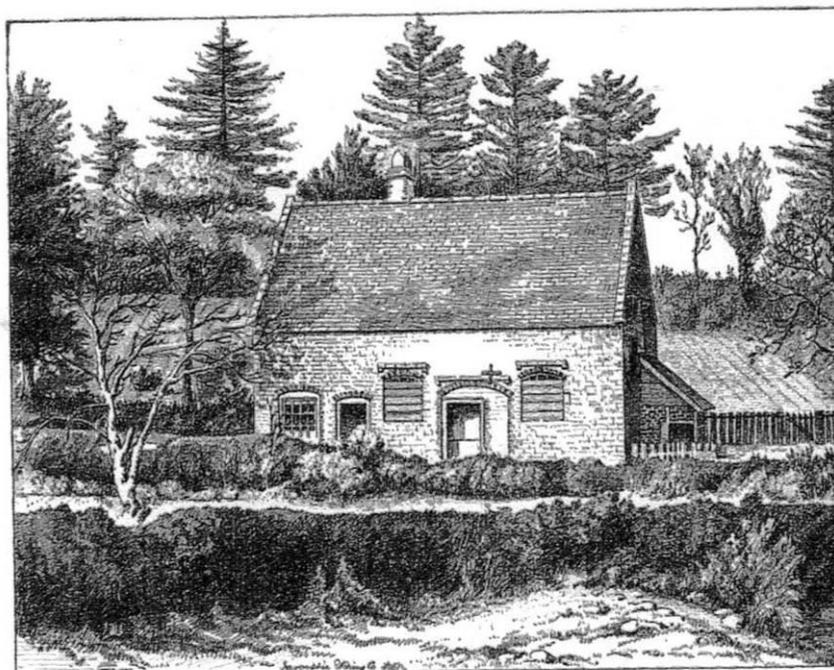
D.Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, 1999, Vol. 2.* pp853-854

Local meeting survey by Sophie Meade, and information on burial grounds from Owain Gethin Hughes, 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

At a Monthly Meeting in 1699, Friends resolved to build a meeting house and burial ground on land owned by Charles Lloyd of Dolobran Hall, on the track to another farm Coed Cowrhyd. Lloyd had been persecuted for being a Quaker and was imprisoned in Welshpool for ten years in the late seventeenth century. Around the same time, Quakers from the area emigrated to Pennsylvania to escape persecution. The Dolobran meeting house was built using bricks made in a nearby field and the first monthly meeting was held in the unroofed shell in 1701. A caretaker's cottage was provided at the west end of the building, also used for women's business meetings, with four shuttered openings in the cross wall. The stand was against the north wall and the gallery at the east end was reached by an external doorway from the north. John Kelsale lived in the cottage and taught at the school held in the building during the eighteenth century. By 1780, the meeting had declined and it was after this that a large bread oven was built into the cross wall, projecting into the meeting room. The Lloyds sold the land and the building to Joseph Jones in 1780 but the burial ground remained in use. The gallery and fittings were dismantled and in about 1850 the wall panelling was apparently shipped to Pennsylvania. In 1878 Samson Lloyd bought back the estate; by then the building was used as a store (Fig.1), although the cottage was occupied. At an unknown date a lean-to addition was built against the east gable-wall (Fig.1), and the 1880s view also shows coped verges to the roof, described as brick in the List Entry (Part 6); both these features are missing.



FRIENDS' MEETING-HOUSE, DOLOBRAN

From a Photograph taken 1882

Fig.1: Dolobran meeting house in c1882

The building continued to deteriorate in the twentieth century, until George Edwards, a Quaker from Liverpool rented it as a holiday home in the 1950s; he undertook some repairs and installed electricity. From 1955, yearly gatherings were held here. From 1975 weekly meetings were revived, and the meeting house and garden were cared for by Simon and Sophie Meade. John Lloyd, the land owner made substantial repairs including reinstating the gallery, renewing windows, doors and the meeting room floor, rebuilding the east wall and part of the south wall and re-roofing. Finally, in 2015, John Lloyd gave the building to Friends with an endowment in the form of shares, to be used only for repairs.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

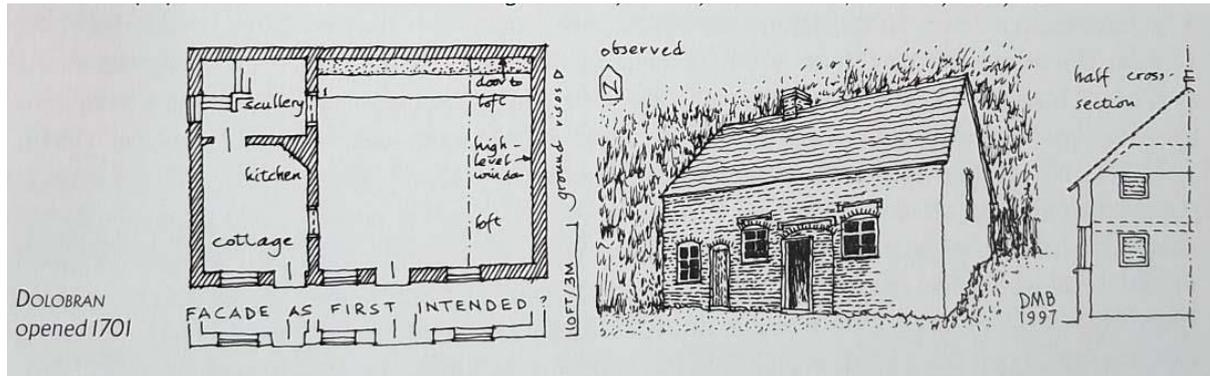


Fig.2: Plan and drawings from D.Butler, 1999, p853

The meeting house was built in 1700-1701, on land owned by Quaker Charles Lloyd. The structure is built of hand-made bricks laid in English garden wall bond, with a Welsh slate roof, brick stack and cast-iron rainwater goods. The building is aligned with the front facing south and is built into a steep bank, so that the gallery is reached from a first floor door to the rear. The west bay contains a 2-storey cottage with two rooms per floor, separated by a cross wall from the full-height 2-bay meeting room. The south elevation has one door and 2-light window to the cottage to the left, both with brick segmental heads. To the right, the meeting room has a wide central doorway, partly blocked with a single door in the left half of the opening (probably an alteration made during construction), flanked by 2-light windows; all these openings have segmental brick heads and brick hoodmoulds and the joinery is recent oak. The east part of the front wall was rebuilt in the 1990s, when steel pattress plates and straps were installed. The retained brickwork to the front elevation has traces of historic tinted limewash. The right return has a single tall casement window, to the gallery with segmental brick head and a brick hoodmould; the whole of this wall rebuilt in the 1990s. The left return is rendered and has three small casements. The rear is blind except for a doorway to the left bay leading to the gallery; the door and external staircase date from the 1990s refurbishment.

The interior of the meeting room is a full-height space with a flat plaster ceiling and plastered walls, lit from the south and east. There is a chamfered beam to the ceiling, carried on a rough timber post embedded in the front wall. Another chamfered beam is aligned below the gallery front, now supported on recent timbers; the joinery to the gallery front and floor was installed in the 1990s. The floor of the meeting room used reclaimed hard wood from Liverpool. In the north-west corner of the meeting room is a plastered projection, containing the bread oven. Rectangular recesses on the cross wall express three blocked openings originally with moveable shutters; a fourth was obscured by the bread oven. In the cottage, the ground floor is laid with red tiles, and the ceiling has exposed joists running north-south; the larger front room has a corner fireplace with twentieth century chimneypiece and the small room, a former scullery has a bread oven on the east wall with

painted stone and brick masonry, a cast-iron door and brick vaulted oven (Fig.2). Steep stairs lead to the first floor, with a plain balustrade with moulded handrail and flat balusters to the landing, all painted. The floor has wide elm or oak boards and there is a simple boarded door with iron latch between the rooms, which have sloping ceilings.



Fig.3 bread oven in cross wall between cottage and meeting room; inside the oven (right)

2.3. Loose furnishings

The historic benches and other furnishings were removed after the meeting ceased in 1780, but historic benches were gradually reintroduced in the late twentieth century. These comprise three different sets of historic benches from other meeting houses. A pair of pale yellow benches are from Ludlow, the provenance of the others is not known; these include a set of six simple benches with shaped bench end and a pair of more sophisticated benches with turned supports to the arms which are shaped. All benches are made of pine.



Fig.4: benches brought from other meeting houses during the late 20th and early 21st centuries

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground is contemporary to the meeting house built in c1700. It is laid out to the east of the meeting house, on a hillside facing south and is enclosed by dry stone walls. There are no surviving memorials or other grave markers, and it is not known whether any were ever provided. The enclosing walls are built using very large boulders, and in places have collapsed; the walls probably now stand to a reduced height. Against the west face of the west wall there is the remains of a mounting block, also built of large boulders, without mortar. Self-set trees that colonised the walls over the years are gradually being cut back, although a large sycamore on the south wall. A small timber shed has been constructed within the burial ground, containing a chemical toilet.



Fig.5: south wall to burial ground east of meeting house (left), and remains of mounting block against west wall (right)

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is notable for its remote location, set within farm land on the north side of the Dyffryn Meifod Efyrynwy valley and only accessible via a green lane through the fields past a farm. There is a small car park at the farm, from where Friends walk to Meeting. No other buildings are visible from the meeting house and burial ground, providing an unusually peaceful setting. The meeting house has a garden to the south, the burial ground to the east and beyond this to the east is a small wood. All these are enclosed by dry stone walls, with a rough track approach the meeting house along the south side of the wood. A path laid with small cobbles runs along the south front of the meeting house. The garden to the south of the building is lawned with shrubs and plants.



Fig.6: access to the meeting house is via a green lane through fields

There is a detached burial ground close to Llangurig at NGR SN945 802, about 25 miles to the south-west, cared for by Llanidloes Friends. The burial ground at Esgair Goch is no longer owned by Friends (NGR SN888 925).

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed Grade II* which is considered appropriate in the light of the historical significance of the building as Wales' earliest meeting house. However, the list description in Part 6 pre-dates the extensive repairs carried out since the list entry was compiled, and would benefit from being reviewed by Cadw to reflect the current character and features of the building.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site has likely to have high archaeological potential due to the burial ground, and the early date of the meeting house. Below ground archaeology may reveal information relating to the layout and use of the land around the meeting house, and potentially about outbuildings that may have existed in the past, but have been removed. Prior to new work, for example to build a WC and install new service trenches drains, archaeological evaluation should be carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist. Advice should be sought from the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust.

The meeting house building appears not to have been the subject of a detailed archaeological record, and it is recommended that this is undertaken in the future, prior to any further works of repair or alteration.

Part 3: Current use and management

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. A quinquennial inspection has not been carried out, but extensive repairs were undertaken by John Lloyd before he gave the building to Friends in 2015.

ii) Attached burial ground: The burial ground is considered to be in a generally satisfactory condition but with minor localised problems. These relate to the poor condition of parts of the boundary walls which have been damaged over a long period by tree growth. Recent work has been done to cut down invasive trees and clear plant growth from within the walls, but the walls have not been rebuilt.

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting house is cared for by local Friends, particularly by the Meades. An endowment was provided by John Lloyd in 2015, to be used specifically to maintain the building, and Friends consider that they have sufficient funds for the near future.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, and due to the listed status of the building and its location it has not been possible to upgrade the building's energy efficiency. The building is heated with a small portable electric heater, and at Meeting for Worship Friends come prepared, wearing outdoor clothing and using rugs to keep warm. Very few resources are used by the meeting at this remote site, and energy use is very low. Waste is recycled where possible, and the garden and burial ground is looked after to encourage wildlife. Friends usually walk to the meeting house on a green lane, but a car can be used to ferry elderly or disabled Friends to Meeting.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has a small kitchen and sitting room/library in the attached cottage, which also has two bedrooms on the first floor where Friends and visitors can stay. There is no indoor toilet, but a chemical toilet is provided in a wooden shed in the burial ground; there are plans

to upgrade this to a WC if a suitable site can be chosen and agreed with the local planning authority and Cadw. Surprisingly, mains water and electricity is connected.

3.5. Access

Access for people with disabilities is inevitably limited by the remote location, and the need to walk from the lane along a track to the building. Once inside the meeting room, the ground floor is on one level. There are no facilities for partially deaf or partially sighted people. There is no public transport.

3.6. Community Use

Friends use the building for up to two hours per week, and although the building is empty the rest of the time, it is not suited to community use in the usual sense due to the remote location and lack of facilities. The building has been used for occasional events such as poetry readings or Tai Chi, and Friends would like to make the cottage more available for lettings such as retreats to those who would value its tranquil simplicity.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There has been no heritage crime or anti-social behaviour, and Friends do not consider that crime is an issue here.

3.8. Plans for change

The meeting would like to improve facilities by installing a WC in a suitable location, and are keen to enable more people to enjoy this beautiful place without causing harm to its heritage significance and unspoilt rural setting.

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. The historic building is sensitive to change, and any alterations or proposals that could affect the setting or buried archaeology will need to be carefully considered and implemented.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The building is not suited to community use, and any increase in use would require Friends to improve the toilet facilities, which should be possible but needs care.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. As the meeting only became the owner of the building in 2015, and is determined to maintain the building and provide greater access, it is very unlikely that it will be close. As it is a listed building, any future use will have to take account of its heritage significance, and consent for any change obtained.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List description

Dolobran Estate, Friends Meeting House

Primary Reference Number (PRN): 32476

Trust: Clwyd Powys

Community: Meifod

NGR: SJ1237012420

Site Type: Post-Medieval Friends meeting house

Legal Protection: listed building II*

Description: Listed building

Single storey building. Walls faced externally with brick. Old tile pitched roof with small stack on ridge to one side of centre and with brick coping to end gables. Front wall has three casement windows with slightly cambered brick heads, one in centre and one at each end; dripmould over centre and right hand windows. Doorways in intermediate bays, one of them an old boarded door with wooden architrave frame and bearing a plaque inscribed: "Friendly/Meeting House/1700". The building originally had unglazed window openings which were glazed in 1747 when the window to the gallery in the meeting room was also bricked up; formerly the attached house had wooden partitions which could be opened so as to allow the people in the house to join those in the meeting room in meeting for worship. Burial ground adjacent to the building.

Thought to be the first purpose-built Friends Meeting House in Mid Wales.