

## ***Friends Meeting House, Nailsworth***

*1 Quakers Close, Chestnut Hill, Nailsworth, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL6 0RA*

*National Grid Reference: ST 84793 99520*



### ***Statement of Significance***

***A late seventeenth-century meeting house which was adapted from an existing high status farmhouse and further adapted and refitted in the early nineteenth century. The interior is little altered and retains its historic furnishings and atmosphere. Externally, the meeting house and adjoining property make a positive, albeit low-key contribution to the local conservation area. A detached burial ground nearby is also of late seventeenth-century origin and remains in use. The meeting house is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value and significance.***

### **Evidential value**

***The building has been a meeting house since the late seventeenth century, and has undergone several changes over time, not least in the early nineteenth century. These changes reflect the varying fortunes of the meeting, and can be read in the fabric and fitting out, redolent of a traditional meeting house. The site also is of evidential value for the previous use of the adjoining building as a high status farmhouse. The building and site are of high evidential value.***

### **Historical value**

***George Fox visited Nailsworth twice, and the meeting was active by 1655. The present meeting house dates back to the late seventeenth century, and historic graffiti on the first floor bears witness to the early days of the meeting. The table in the meeting room is reputed to have been given by Fox. The detached burial ground at Shortwood also dates from the late seventeenth century and remains in use. Both sites are of high historical value.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***The mellow Cotswold stone and roof tiles of the building, its architectural combination of polite and vernacular architectural elements, its group value with the adjoining former farmhouse, and the relatively complete and little altered interior combine to give the buildings high aesthetic value.***

### **Communal value**

***The building and its facilities are used by the wider community as well as by Friends. The contribution that the building makes to the local conservation area adds to this high communal value.***

## **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Gloucestershire*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0033470*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Stroud District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Nailsworth*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1299075*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Nailsworth*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *Registered 1689*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *1 June 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Colin Gerard, Eliot Walker*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *1 Quakers Close (Grade II), detached burial ground at Shortwood*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 219-20

Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, pp. 19, 27, 67

Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England*, 1986, pp. 90-91

*A brief history of Nailsworth Meeting House*, undated flyer

Local Meeting Survey, by Eliot Walker, April 2016

Quinquennial Survey, April 2014

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

### 2.1 Historical background



Figure 1: Undated (early twentieth century?) photograph showing Georgian Gothic glazing and panelled doors (photo courtesy of local meeting)

George Fox's journal records two visits to Nailsworth. Friends were active in the area by 1655 and, according to Butler, rented a cottage in what is now Quakers Close, part of which was later purchased and incorporated in the present meeting house. This was registered in 1689. It is not certain whether the meeting house was a new building, added to an existing cottage at the north end (now a library and upper room) - which retains graffiti dates of 1683 and 1684 on the first floor window cills (see photo bottom right on page 1) - or whether it was a conversion of an existing farm building. The building has some similarities to the slightly

earlier meeting house at Cirencester (1673, *qv*), not least in the central doorway and small mullioned windows. A burial ground was acquired nearby at Shortwood by 1695, and there is also a small burial area in front of the meeting house.

Nailsworth became the venue for the monthly meeting for central Gloucestershire, including Cirencester, Painswick, Tetbury, and Stinchcombe. According to Stell, repairs were carried out in 1794 and 1819, and Butler says in 1807 too. During one of these refurbishments the building was refitted, with an internal lobby, ministers' stand, panelling and shuttered partition between the two ground floor spaces. It was probably also about this time that the mullioned window to the right of the main entrance was possibly enlarged and provided with Georgian Gothick sash windows with intersecting glazing bars, similar to those provided at Cirencester in 1809-11 (see undated photograph provided by the local meeting at figure 1; the photograph also shows Georgian panelled doors at the main entrance, now replaced with boarded doors). On the south elevation one window was reduced in size and provided with a sash window (since renewed) while another opening (behind the present noticeboard), which looks like it may have been a door rather than a window and has a timber lintel rather than a stone label, was blocked.

Membership of the meeting declined in the nineteenth century, with only six people attending meeting for worship at the time of the 1851 census, but the fortunes of the meeting revived in the twentieth century. Photographs at figures 2 and 3 show the interior in 1957. Figure 2 shows an earlier solution to a longstanding problem of support for the central valley gutter (more recently these ungainly timber supports have been replaced by a substantial beam supported by two circular steel posts placed nearer to the side walls). It also shows the borrowed light received from a three-light mullion and transom window which also offered visual communication between the upper room and the main meeting room (this window is now covered over).



Figure 2: Meeting house interior, 1957 (photo courtesy of local meeting)

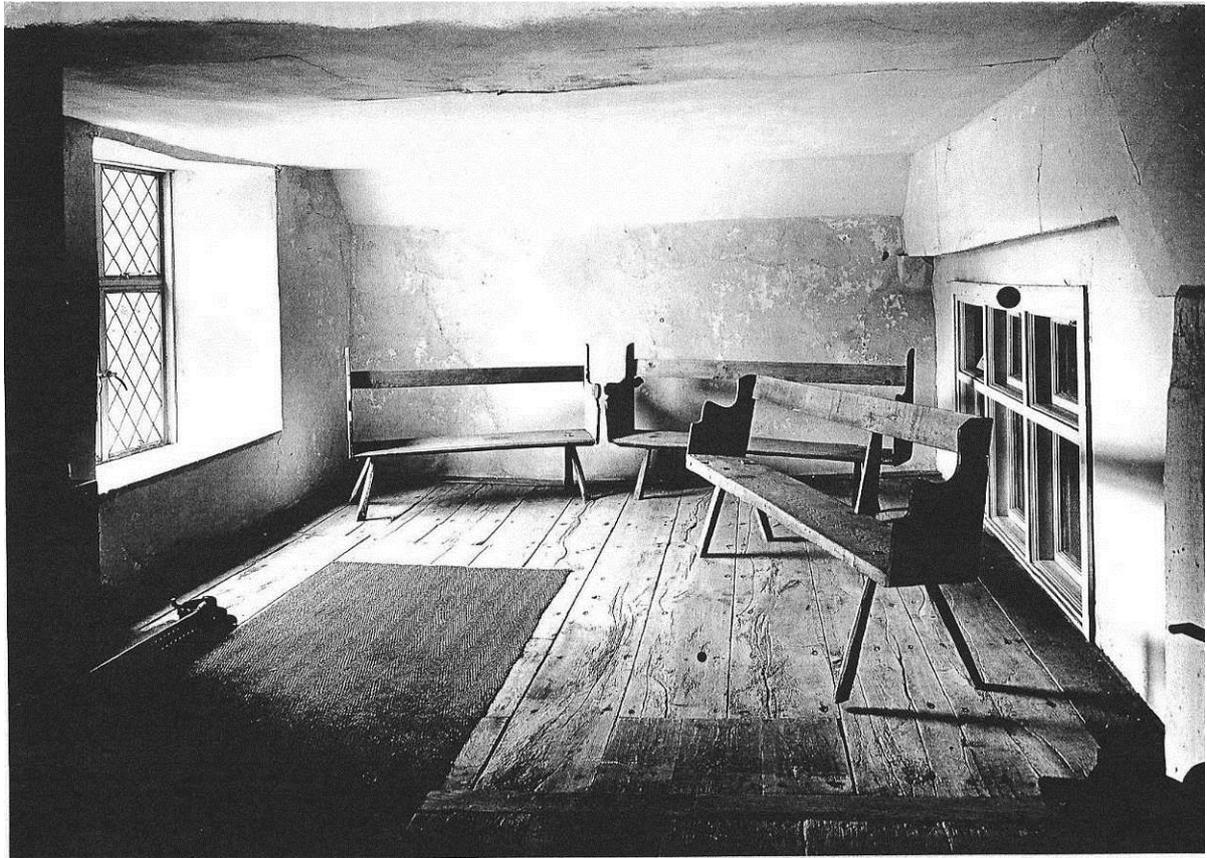


Figure 3: Upper room in 1957 (photo courtesy of local meeting)

The east (rear) wall of the meeting house was refaced and the roof repaired in 1985, and in 1991-92 a single-storey lean-to addition at the rear was extended and the adjoining cottages refurbished, adapted and part incorporated into the meeting house (architects Meers & Swindell). Further major repairs were undertaken in 1994 and 2010.

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

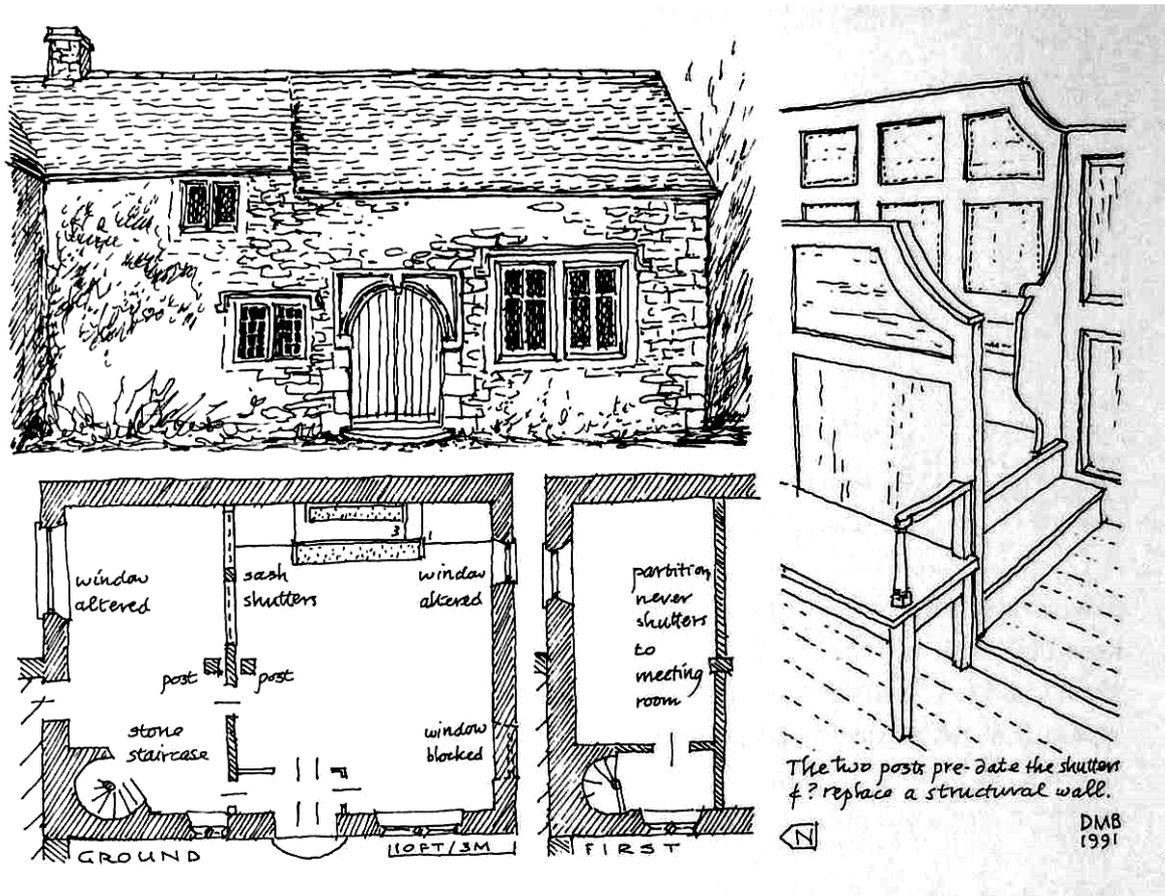


Figure 4: Plan, elevation and detail, from Butler, vol.1, p. 220

The meeting house is attached to an earlier seventeenth-century house, the two forming a right-angled plan. The earlier house (nos 1 and 2 Quakers Close) includes the warden's accommodation and a flat, and is separately listed (see list entry below). The following describes the meeting house only, and expands upon the list entry (also below).

The meeting house is a late seventeenth-century Cotswold vernacular building, of rubble stone construction, with a stone tile roof. Rainwater goods are of cast aluminium, with a lead hopper bearing the date 2010 at the junction with the house. The meeting house appears to incorporate elements from an earlier building, which formed part of the adjacent house; the junction of the two phases is expressed in the change in roof pitch visible on the front (west elevation). This front elevation faces the courtyard and has an arched central doorway with a half-round stone step at the threshold and boarded doors. The door surround has stop-chamfering, a central keystone (with attached light fitting), and spandrels framed by a square label with unusual panelled diagonal stops. To the left of the door, straddling the earlier building and the meeting house addition, is a pair of small mullion windows with diamond-leaded iron casements and stone label. Above this, to the left, a similar mullion window which lights the upper room belongs to the earlier phase. To the right of the door, a larger opening has two pairs of mullion and transom windows with stone label, now fitted with twentieth-century Crittall-type metal windows with diamond panes. The return (south) elevation has two steep gables, one with a blocked door with timber lintel and one with a ground-floor modern sash window in a reduced opening for a three-light mullion window with stone label. Above this in the gable is a two-light mullion window with stone label, possibly originally for a loft and now providing high-level additional light to the meeting room. The rear (east) elevation is plain and was refaced in the late twentieth century. The

north elevation is also double gabled, with evidence of stone infilling in the central valley. One gable (linked to the house) is windowless and covered in part by a later (and extended) lean-to addition. It is topped by a square chimney stack. The second gable has a modern three-light window with diamond leaded panes to the ground floor (library) and an altered two-light window to the upper room.

The main entrance gives onto a small early nineteenth-century timber panelled lobby, with doors leading from the left to the secondary space (now library) and from the right into the main meeting room. Overall, the interior measures 24ft 4ins x 33ft 4ins (7.41m x 10.16m), roughly divided two thirds meeting room, one third library. Between the two are vertically-sliding shutters flanked by two chamfered posts on high stone plinths, supporting the valley gutter above. Two steel posts offer similar support in the meeting room. The fitting out of the meeting room essentially belongs to the early nineteenth century, with a raised and fielded high panelled dado around the perimeter, which sweeps up behind the stand on the east side. The stand has fixed seating and a panelled front, also with a fixed bench in front. The joinery is of stripped pine, which was previously (until the 1950s) painted dark green (information from local meeting). The floor is boarded, the walls and ceiling plastered. On the south side, an upper window, possibly originally serving a loft, has been adapted to give light to the space below.

In the corner of the smaller library space an ancient ledged and boarded door leads to a spiral stone stair (the treads now protected by oak boarding) leading to the upper room. This room retains its old elm floorboards and historic graffiti on the window cills, including the dates 1683 and 1684 (i.e. before the place was registered as a meeting house in 1689, see photo bottom right above). A window which once gave onto the meeting room from here (see figures 2 and 3) has been covered over but is presumed to remain in situ.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

According to the *Brief history* the table in the meeting room is believed to have been given by George Fox, the founder of Quakerism. In the corner by the stand is a small coffin bench, possibly seventeenth-century. There are several open-backed benches with arm rests in the meeting room (various lengths), probably of early nineteenth-century date and similar to those at Painswick (*qv*), as well as some modern copies of these. In the upper room are two older benches, described by Stell (p. 91) as 'crude open-backed benches with shaped oversailing ends and thin splayed legs, possibly seventeenth century with backs added' (there are two similar ones in the house next door).

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

There is a small burial ground of 22 square yards in the courtyard in front of the meeting house, with several headstones laid flat in a row (inscriptions not easily legible).

### 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies near the bottom of Chestnut Hill on the edge of Nailsworth Conservation Area. It is in a former industrial area, with larger stone-built mill buildings around it, now largely converted to residential use. Further up the hill there is more modern residential development, of mixed character.

A detached burial ground lies nearby at Shortwood, to the south west (NGR ST8397399274, figure 5). This was acquired in 1695 and was originally 1,500 sq. yds in area, but was reduced to 1,200 sq. yds by 1843. Roughly L-shaped, it contains about fifteen marked graves ranging in date from 1881 to 2013, and many more which are unmarked. One or two of the headstones and their inscriptions are uncharacteristically (in the Quaker context) large and wordy. The burial ground is still in use.



Figure 5: Gate to Shortwood burial ground

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house fully merits its Grade II listing. It is an important and relatively little-altered survival, and as such may merit upgrading to II\*.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

This is likely to be high.

## **Part 3: Current use and management**

*See completed volunteer survey*

### **3.1 Condition**

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

### **3.2 Maintenance**

The most recent QIR (2014) noted that the building continued to be well maintained. It identified the need for some lead repairs and an inspection of three beams and a post by a structural engineer.

### **3.3 Sustainability**

The meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures taken to reduce environmental impact include improved heating controls and insulation, secondary glazing and recycling of waste. In order to reduce car journeys, a shared travel map is being prepared.

### **3.4 Amenities**

The meeting has all the amenities that it needs. In addition to large and small meeting rooms, these include a children's meeting room in the adjoining cottage, refurbished kitchen, and an accessible WC. There is a resident warden. Outside at the back, there is a garden area for the use of the meeting. There is no parking on site (apart from for the warden and the resident of the flat), but there is secure parking for cycles and the meeting house is accessible by public transport (bus).

### **3.5 Access**

A disability audit was carried out in 2012. The building is fully accessible, insofar as the constraints of the listing allow, with step-free ground level circulation and an accessible WC (installed in 2013). A hearing loop is installed.

### **3.6 Community Use**

In addition to use by Friends (between five and ten hours a week), the three lettable rooms are used by third parties for between fifteen and thirty out of a possible 120 hours a week. There is a lettings policy which encourages lettings to other groups, including those that are new and informal or the subject of discrimination. Applications from Members of Parliament to use the facilities for surgeries or for hustings are encouraged, but uses deemed to be in conflict with Quaker values are not permitted. There is no charge for regular members or attenders. Users cite the good location, quiet atmosphere and reasonable price.

### **3.7 Vulnerability to crime**

There are no reported instances of crime, antisocial behaviour or heritage crime. The area is generally well cared for, with low levels of crime and social deprivation.

### **3.8 Plans for change**

None to the building.

## **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 building has been adapted and upgraded to provide the necessary facilities, while taking account of its sensitive and important historic fabric and character. In addition to its historic character, the interior has a tranquil atmosphere. There is limited scope for further change internally, and the location in a conservation area also limits the scope for significant external alteration or addition.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The building is already in community use, and this use could be extended, subject to the same constraints outlined above.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* This is the second oldest meeting house in the county, and largely retains its historic character and fitting out. The building would not lend itself easily to another use without harm to its special architectural and historical interest. In the regrettable event of it being laid down it would be desirable to investigate the possibility of its preservation as a community asset, possibly under the aegis of a building preservation trust.

## **Part 5: Category: 1**

## **Part 6: List descriptions**

### *Meeting House*

Name: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1299075

Location: FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, CHESTNUT HILL

County: Gloucestershire

District: Stroud

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Nailsworth

Grade: II

Date first listed: 30-May-1951

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 354650

CHESTNUT HILL 1. 5227 (south-west side) Friends Meeting House ST 8499 6/28 30.5.51

II GV 2.

Mid C17 possibly converted from farm buildings of adjacent house. Repaired 1794 and 1810. Rubble with stone tile roof. Arched double doorway to left with stop-chamfered surround, keystone (device obscured by lamp-bracket), and impost, square label with panelled diagonal stops and a half-round threshold stone. A pair of wide windows to right, set back chamfer surround and mullions, single label over. Two gables to right hand return, one with saddle stone and one range of windows - on ground floor a sash window inserted in opening of a former 3 light mullion window; part of the surround re-used. Two storey extension to left with one window on each floor, 2 light casements, on ground floor chamfered mullion, set back chamfered surround and drip, on first floor an old leaded casement. Linked to No 1

Quaker's Close (qv). Interior: plain room with raised and fielded panelling and oak benches. Small gallery. Listing NGR: ST8479399520

*1 Quakers Close*

Name: QUAKERS CLOSE

List entry Number: 1186687

Location: QUAKERS CLOSE, 1 AND 2, CHESTNUT HILL

County: Gloucestershire

District: Stroud

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Nailsworth

Grade: II

Date first listed: 30-May-1951

Date of most recent amendment: 17-Jul-1980

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 354649

CHESTNUT HILL 1. 5227 (south-west side) (Quakers Close) Nos 1 and 2 (formerly listed as Box Cottage) ST 8499 6/29

30.5.51

II GV

Probably mid-late C17. Two storeys, painted rubble with stone tile roof and 2 chimneys. Large gable to left with saddlestone, blocked roof-space and attic windows. First and around floor windows irregular one on each floor to gable [drip moulds, set back chamfers mullions], similar windows without drips flank doorway to right (No 1) which consists of Tudor arch with ogee moulded surround and drip over deep lintel. Plain chamfered 2-light mullion window over. Door to No 2 is a modern insertion with wood lintel and large window. Rear elevation similar to front. Elevation to New Market Road more regular.

Listing NGR: ST8478999508