

Quaker Meeting House, Pales

Llandegley, Llandrindod Wells, LD1 5UH

National Grid Reference: SO 13798 64058



Statement of Significance

The Pales has exceptional heritage significance as the earliest purpose-built meeting house in continuous use in Wales, the burial ground in continuous use since the 1670s and the present building dating from 1745. It is also rare for its thatched roof, one of only two thatched meeting houses in Britain. It retains the historic plan form and some original fittings such as the stand and shuttered openings, although some fittings were removed or renewed in the late twentieth century. Its unspoilt rural setting adds to its peaceful atmosphere and spiritual significance. The vernacular building is 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 late nineteenth century, illustrating incremental repair and renewal. The burial ground also has high archaeological potential.

Historical value

The site is associated with early Quakerism in rural Radnorshire, and also with a revival associated with Victorian evangelism in the late nineteenth century, when an American anti-slavery campaigner Yardley Warren taught at the school here. The meeting house was built between 1716 and 1745 next to the burial ground which has been in continuous use since the 1670s. The building and place have exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of the building is typical of early eighteenth century vernacular meeting houses, constructed in local stone and unusually retaining a thatched roof. The attractive setting on a remote hillside with fine open views adds to its aesthetic significance. The interior has been slightly altered as the fabric has been renewed and some original features have been lost. Overall, the building and place has high aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is primarily a place for Quaker worship but is also important to visitors who value its spiritual significance and remote beauty. The building makes a positive contribution to the scenery and has high communal value, although its location limits wider community use.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Southern Marches*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *2018667*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Powys County Council*
- 1.5 National heritage body: *Cadw*
- 1.6 Community: *Penybont*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 Cadw reference number: *8649*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date: *1716-1745*
- 1.13 Architect: *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *14 January 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *John Senior*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Warden's cottage*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

David Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, 1999, Vol 2, 1999*

The Pales Quaker Meeting House, leaflet produced by Menter Powys, 1998

Coflein website:

<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/8264/details/THE+PALES%2C+FRIENDS%27+MEETING+HOUSE%3BQUAKER%2C+COED-SWYDD%2C+LLANDEGLEY/>

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

2.1. Historical background

Friends in the area first met in each other's homes in the second half of the seventeenth century, and soon required a burial ground; a plot of land was donated for this purpose by David Powell in 1673. The remote location was probably chosen in response to the persecution suffered by Radnorshire Quakers, and there may have been a temporary structure at the burial ground used for meetings. In 1716 or 1717 more land was acquired to build a meeting house next to the burial ground, licensed for meetings from 1716. The origin of the name Pales is thought to relate to the fenced enclosure surrounding the building. There is some confusion about the sequence of events, but Butler states that the existing building was built in 1745 to replace the earlier meeting house although this may be a completion date and work to build the present meeting house may have begun in 1716. The date 1745 is painted on the door to the former women's meeting room. The meeting dwindled during the next 100 years, until a school was established at the Pales in 1867 by William Knowles. From 1876 this was run by Yardley Warren, an American Quaker who campaigned against slavery, and his wife Anne; the warden's house was built for them in 1878. This was a period of evangelism and mission which lasted until the school closed in 1889.



Fig.1: the meeting house in the 1880s (framed photograph by W.G.Hall in the meeting house)



Fig.2: the meeting house interior from the west, mid 20th century (RCAHMW ref.C594968)

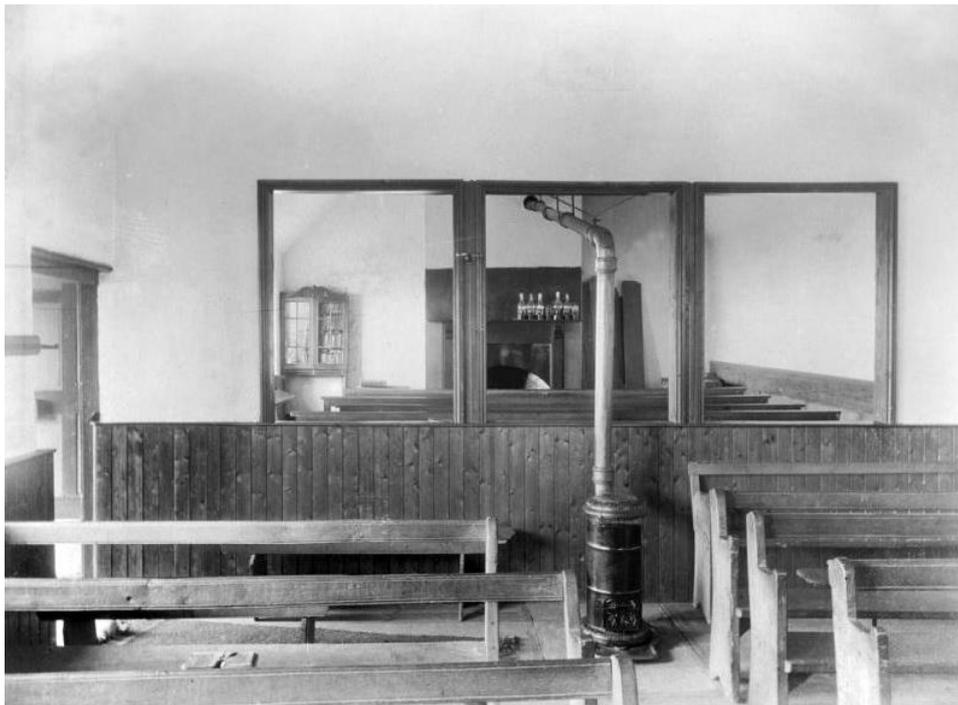


Fig.3: interior from the east, looking through the open screen to the women's meeting room, mid 20th century (RCAHMW ref.C594969)

After the late nineteenth century there was a period of low activity until the meeting house was repaired in the mid twentieth century; ceilings were inserted in the 1950s, and in 1979, the east wall panelling was renewed, the roof re-thatched and casement windows installed in place of horizontal sliding sashes. The solid fuel stove and flue pipe seen in Fig.3 was removed at an unknown date. In recent years wardens Lynda and Martin Williams helped revive the place with extensive work on the garden, a new external toilet block (2006) and successful fund-raising enabled the roof to be re-thatched.



Fig.4 Painted date 1745 on the door to the west room



Fig.5: fixed bench to the stand

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house built in 1745 is constructed of roughly coursed rubble stone, with a thatched roof. The single storey building has a single aspect facing south with a gabled porch to the central entrance; the outer doorway has a segmental head and a boarded door. To either side are two small-paned casements and the east gable end has one 2-light casement window towards the north end. The north elevation is blind. The exposed south section of the west gable is rendered with a slated coping (compared with the historic thatched detail in Fig.1); the rest of this gable is abutted by the red brick house built in 1878. This has a slate roof and 3-light timber casements, and a twentieth century porch.

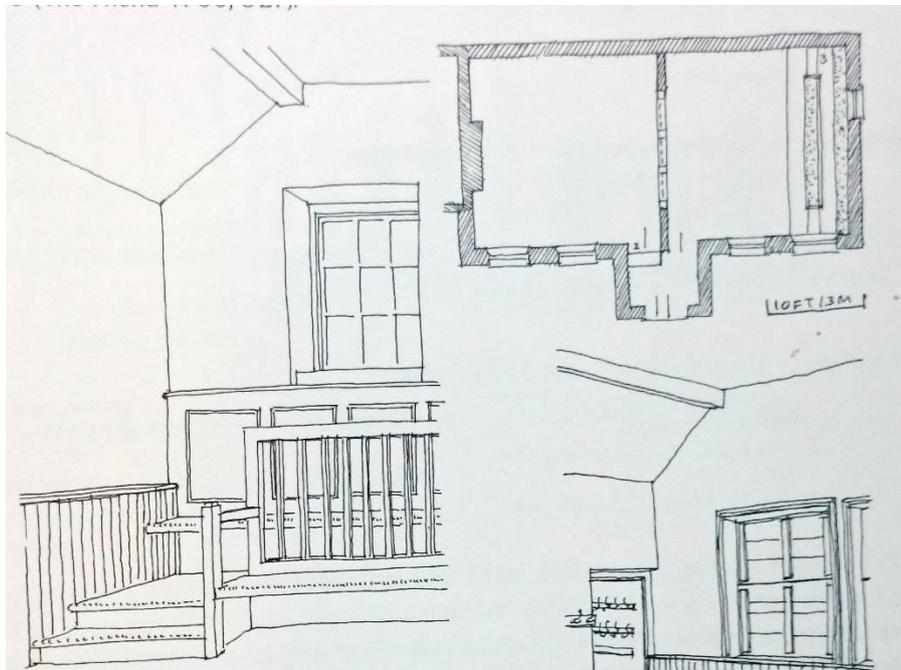


Fig.6: plan and sketches by Butler, 1999, Vol 2 p861 (north is to the top)

The interior is arranged with two rooms of equal size, the main meeting room to the east and the former women's meeting room or school room to the west, the latter at a high floor level than the former. Both rooms are entered by adjoining doors from the porch; the doors have six plain panels and iron latches and below the modern white gloss paint painted dates have

been uncovered; 1745 on the west door and 1828 on the east door. While this seems to suggest a building of two phases no documentary evidence has been found for this. The main meeting room has a stand along the east wall, with plain panelling (1970s) and two book shelves behind the fixed wall benches with a plain balustrade with fixed bench in front. The rest of the walls are plain -plastered; the tongued and grooved dado shown in Fig.3 was removed at an unknown date. The west wall has three timber shutters in moulded architraves; these are each in two sections and hinged at top and bottom. In the west room there is a late nineteenth century chimney piece on a projecting chimney breast on the west wall, now with a wood stove in place of the fireplace seen in Fig.3. In both rooms the purlins are exposed and the ceiling is at collar level. The floors are laid with modern ceramic tile with a stone border in the west room and modern pine boards in the east meeting room

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house retains six historic benches with plain railed backs and solid bench ends, arranged around the walls of both rooms. Most of the seating in the main meeting room is modern loose chairs arranged in a circle around a plain oak table. In the west room there is a timber bier, of unknown date.



Fig.7: historic bench in meeting room



Fig.8: bier in west room

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground lies to the west of the meeting house, on sloping ground. It is bounded by post and wire fences with some native species hedges. It probably dates the 1670s, and the burial records run from 1777 to the present. The plain semi-circular headed burial stones date from the nineteenth and twentieth century. The burial ground is still open for use with space for more burials.



Fig.9: the burial ground from the east

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The remote meeting house lies on the south-east side of a steep hill with spectacular open views of the surrounding hills to the south and east. The site is reached via a narrow hill road that passes through farmland used for grazing sheep. The nearest place is Llandegley, less than 2 miles to the south and Llandrindod Wells is 8 miles to the south-west. The meeting house and warden's house have extensive gardens to the south and south-west which have been newly planted in the last twenty years. There is a detached toilet block in the garden, which can be used by groups camping in the gardens.



Fig.10: adjoining warden's cottage built in 1878

There are no detached burial grounds associated with the meeting.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is listed building II*, which reflects its national importance as Wales' oldest meeting house in continuous use, and one of only two in Britain that have thatched roofs.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The building and site, including the burial ground, are considered to have high potential for archaeology.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey by John Senior

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Good. The meeting has raised funds to re-thatch the roof which was done in 2014. The last QI was in 2014. There is some making-good needed after re-thatching.

ii) Attached burial ground: Optimal/satisfactory.

3.2. Maintenance

There is a 5-year maintenance plan, but the meeting does not have sufficient funds to maintain and upgrade the building, apart from thatching; a recent fund-raising appeal for the thatched roof was successful and generated surplus funds but this can only be used for the roof. A wider fund-raising appeal is in progress, including an application to the Meeting Houses Funds Committee.

There is a plan for maintenance of the burial ground

3.3. Sustainability – no info provided

3.4. Amenities

The meeting house contains two meeting rooms, the west room has a kitchenette with a hot water urn and sink for making hot drinks, and also contains recent interpretation and information on the building and Quaker heritage, funded by Menter Powys. The large warden's cottage attached to the west end of the Meeting House has been occupied by wardens in the recent past, but there is currently a Friend in residence. There is some informal parking in a nearby quarry up the lane, by arrangement with the landowner. There are toilet facilities in a separate block in the garden.

3.5. Access

This is a remote location with narrow, steep single track road access and no public transport. In 2015 the Meeting conducted a Disability Access Audit; this recognised that the building is not easily accessible and disabled access is poor. There are steps into the building via the porch and this would not be easy to address. There is a WC suitable for disabled people in the outside toilet block. There a hearing loop.

3.6. Community Use

The building is used for two hours a week by Quakers and for an average of four hours by other groups. While it is in theory available for 50 hours and there is a lettings policy, the location makes more use unlikely. Those who visit and use it find it an inspiring venue, and reasonably priced. The building is kept open for visitors to see inside.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reports of crime or anti-social behaviour.

3.8. Plans for change

The Pales is now directly the responsibility of the Trustees, while plans for its future are considered, but the Llandrindod Friends continue to meet there intermittently. The main option under discussion is the renovation of the Warden's Cottage including installing better insulation (appeal for £61,000) and the replacement of oil central heating with a wood pellet burner and solar power (appeal for £30,000). In the medium and long term, the Trustees are considering whether the warden's cottage could be remodelled to provide a cottage that can be let for visitors on short breaks and retreats, as well as providing accommodation for a warden or Friend in residence.

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 particular historic character of the building limits the scope for alteration and change, but there is scope to alter the cottage which is of lower significance.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The remoteness of the meeting house is the main limitation on its wider use, although there is scope for extended use for activities such as retreats if the cottage is upgraded.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. The meeting house and this site has been in continuous use for Quaker worship since at least the early 1700s and it would be very regrettable if it were to close for this purpose. The significance of the building, protected by the Grade II* listing, limits the changes that could take place to the meeting house.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List Description

The Pales, Friends Meeting House

Primary Reference Number (PRN): 32164

Trust: Clwyd Powys

Community: Penybont

NGR: SO1379464057

Site Type: Post-Medieval Friends meeting house

Legal Protection: listed building II*

Description:

Early to mid-eighteenth century meeting house built of rubble stone, single storey with porch, four timber casements and thatched roof. It replaced an earlier meeting house dating back to the 17th century (at least from 1673). Meetings licensed in 1716.

Adjacent plot used as Quaker burial ground. School established in 1856.

Extensively renovated in 1979.

Listed building

Built in 1717 (Gregory, D, 1994)

Sources:

Gregory, D , 1994 , Radnorshire: A Historical Guide

Cadw , 2000 , Database of Listed Buildings in Wales

Society of Friends , 1995 , title unknown - The Pales (Quaker Meeting House)

Payne, Ffrancis (trans by Dafydd y Garth) , 2009 , Exploring Radnorshire [Crwydro Sir Faesyfed] Part Two , The Transactions of the Radnorshire Society : 79 : 23-191

Cadw, 2008 , Database of Listed Buildings in Wales (© CPAT)