

## ***Friends Meeting House, St Austell***

*High Cross Street, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4AN*

*National Grid Reference: SX 01570 52528*



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

***The meeting house was built in 1829 using a planform and main elevation nearly identical to the earlier meeting house at Truro (qv). It retains many original features, such as the central flagstone corridor with sliding sash screens and the ministers' and elders' stand. It has high overall significance.***

### ***Evidential value***

***Though it has been extended, the original planform is still discernible and many fixtures and fittings are still in situ, which are evidence of Quaker tradition and worship. The building has high evidential value. The site with the attached burial ground has high archaeological potential.***

### **Historical value**

***The meeting house of 1829 is closely related to the Truro meeting house of 1825 as both share the same planform and elevational design. Further research might uncover the connection and possibly the name of an architect or builder. The meeting house has high historical value.***

### **Aesthetic value**

***The building is an urban meeting house built towards the end of the Georgian period. The main elevation was built to a high standard, with high quality Pentewan ashlar and symmetrical sash windows. Inside, there is fine woodwork, notably in the screens, the stand and panelling. The meeting house has high aesthetic value.***

### **Communal value**

***In addition to Quaker use, the meeting house is also well-used by the local community. It has high communal value.***

### **Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Cornwall*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0007560*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Cornwall Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *St Austell*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1212077*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *St Austell*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1829*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *9 May 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Tony Manasseh*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

### 1.19 Information sources:

- Beacham, P. and N. Pevsner, *Cornwall (Buildings of England)*, 2014, p. 498  
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 70-71, 74  
Lidbetter, H., *The Friends Meeting House*, 1979, p. 22  
Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991, p. 45  
Griffith, P., 'Quaker Burial Grounds in Cornwall', typescript, 2002  
'The Quaker Meeting House, St Austell', leaflet, 2013  
Cornwall Council, *St Austell Conservation Area Character Appraisal & Management Plan*, 2013  
Transcript of the minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Eastern Division of Cornwall, 1830 (at the meeting house)  
Cornwall & Scilly Historic Environment Record, HER entry 138800 (meeting house) and 140085 (burial ground)  
Historic England Archive, red box collection photos of 1969 and 1983  
Cornwall Council, online planning database  
Local Meeting survey by Tony Manasseh, April 2016

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

### 2.1 Historical background

The first meeting house in St Austell was acquired in c.1690 in Workhouse Lane (now Moorland Road), which possibly had an attached burial ground. A detached burial ground was in use by 1706 and still existing in 1855; its location is unknown. A second meeting house was built in 1726 near the police station in High Cross Street. It was either superseded or enlarged in 1788. (Pevsner and Stell interpret the evidence to mean that a new building was constructed at that date.) There seems to have been no attached burial ground, probably because Friends had by then the use of the detached burial ground in Tregongeeves. In 1830, the meeting house was sold for £91 (which sum went towards the new building). A new site was bought in c.1829 on the other side of High Cross Street and a new meeting house constructed there. (The date stone on the building is inscribed with '1829' but it was not registered as a place of worship until 1834.) By c.1880 (Ordnance Survey map) there was a north extension or lobby.

Electricity was installed in 1959. In 1983, internal alterations were made for about £45,000, inserting a new kitchen and a smaller meeting room in the former women's meeting room (architect: Giles Blomfield, who had made similar alterations to Truro meeting house (*qv*) the previous year). At the same time, the roof covering was replaced with an Eternit-style fibre reinforced slate. Also, a new entrance and cloakroom wing was built to replace an existing lean-to (planning permission and listed building consent of May 1982). In 2002-4, the northwest lobby was extended, comprising toilets and a boiler house for new gas central heating (architects: Blomfield Cartlidge, Truro). In 2006, permission was granted for the creation of an accessible toilet (architect: Baseline) and the installation of new gates in the boundary wall (replacing non-original wrought-iron gates). In 2014, the local meeting sought pre-application advice on the potential conversion of the meeting house to residential use. In 2015, the four windows in the southeast elevation were replaced on a like-for-like basis. (The previous windows were not the original sash windows but had a fixed bottom sash and a pivoting top sash.)

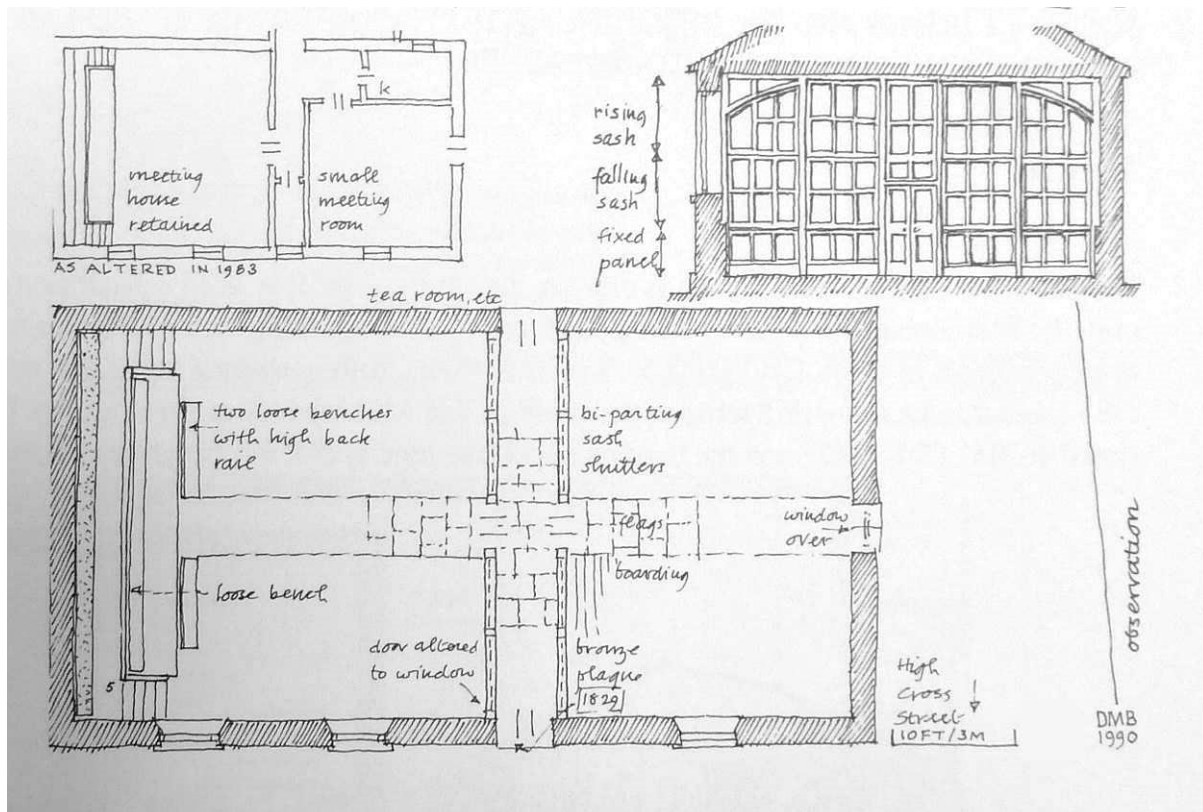


Figure 1: Reconstructed original plan (bottom), plan as altered in 1983 (without the north lobby) and drawing of screen (plans: southeast at bottom; not to scale) (Butler, vol. 1, p. 71)

## 2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house is orientated on a southwest-northeast axis. The main elevation with the date plaque faces southeast while the current main entrance is in an extension at the northwest.

The meeting house was built in 1829, possibly by the same architect or builder who built the meeting house at Truro (*qv*) in 1825 as both share a similar planform. The plan is oblong of originally two meeting rooms, separated by a corridor flanked by screens. (This is a variation of a Quaker planform found mainly in Yorkshire.) Butler's plan (fig. 1) shows three doors as at Truro; however, there seems to be no evidence for a door in the southeast elevation. (The door in the short end is now a fire exit; the main entrance is via the north extension.) The meeting house was built using Pentewan stone ashlar with some local Cornish killas stone, rubble stone and granite. The southeast elevation of Pentewan ashlar on a granite plinth is of a particularly high finish, while the other elevations have a mix of ashlar and rubble stone. The hipped roof is covered with artificial slate. According to the QI report, the roof has four principal king-post trusses and two hipped trusses, all of softwood.

The southeast elevation has four sash windows of 24 panes each, with the date plaque of 1829 at the centre. (The current windows are replacements of 2015; the previous windows were pivot-hung at the top and sliding sashes at the bottom.) The short northeast elevation has a sash window of 8 over 12 panes over a modern door in an original door opening. The north corner is chamfered. The short southwest elevation is blind, as is the northwest elevation from which an L-plan extension projects. The latter includes a projecting lobby of 1983 which has been altered and further extended in 2002-4 and c.2006 to provide toilets and a boiler house. The former external toilet beside the recessed entrance is now storage space.

The central corridor is flanked by tall screens and has a stone floor (apart from a short stretch near the southeast end which has timber floor boards, not shown on Butler's plan at fig. 1). The screens formerly had rising and falling sash-hung panels (no longer operable) and a fixed row at the bottom. Entrance to the main meeting room is via double swing doors in the west screen; a new opening in the east screen to the new kitchen was created in 1983. The southeast end of the corridor is partitioned off for storage. The main meeting room is ceiled and lit by two sash windows to the southeast with modern internal shutters. A central aisle of stone flooring continues close to the stand at the southwest (fig. 1); otherwise the floor is of suspended timber boards. The walls have vertical dado panelling. The full-width stand has a raised rear bench on shaped supports, accessed by five steps with panelled balustrades and circular newels on each side. The front panel has a balustrade on short, slender colonnettes; fixed to the front of this is another, lower bench. The former women's meeting room at the northeast is now subdivided and contains a small lobby, a kitchen and a small meeting room with a suspended ceiling and woodblock floor.

### 2.3 Loose furnishings

The main meeting room has twelve open-backed benches, two of which have taller backs with panelling in the lower part of the back. Under the top bench of the stand is a chest with the stencilled inscription 'East Cornwall Monthly Meeting of Friends'. The small meeting room has two further open-backed benches as well as two cupboards made from benches.

### 2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is no longer in use. It has been used since the acquisition of the plot in c.1829 until 1997. Most of the burials were to the west of the building (fig. 2). In c.1970, the Tregongeeves burials were reinterred here (plot 70 on the burial plan at fig. 2). All of the gravestones (about 74 in total), including those from Tregongeeves, have been moved along the outer walls of the building as well as the northwest boundary wall. The latter include a gravestone for Daniell Eliot of 1711, an unusual early survival of a Quaker gravestone as in 1717 Yearly Meeting agreed that all gravestones should be removed (fig. 3).

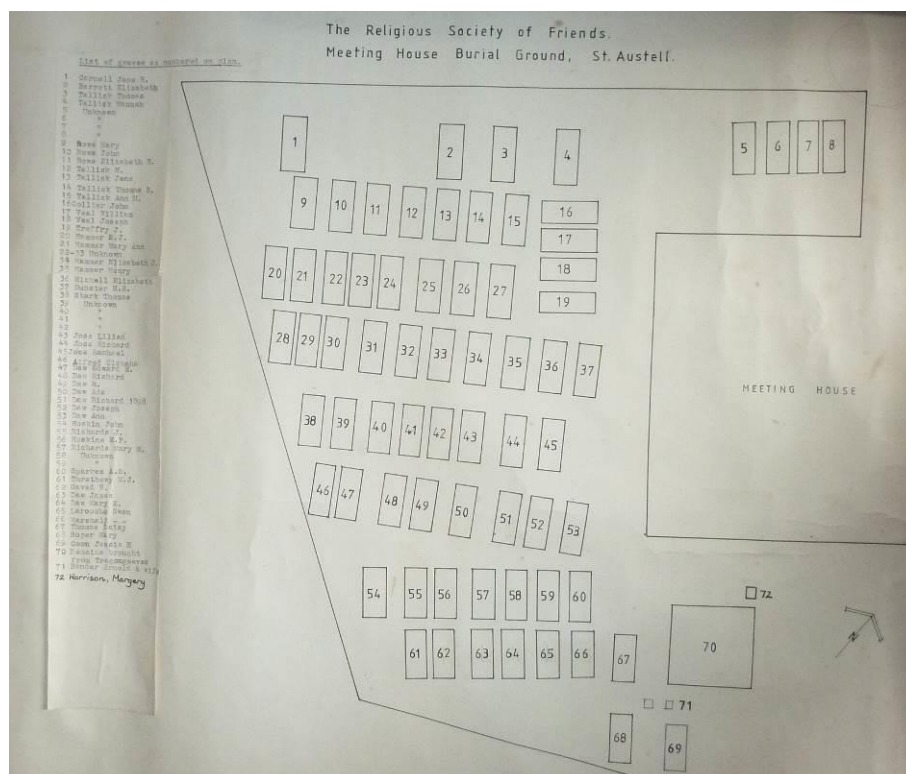


Figure 2: Burial plan for the attached burial ground (Local Meeting Archive)



Figure 3: Gravestone for Daniell Eliot of 1711 from Tregongeeves burial ground

## 2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house site is located near the centre of St Austell and just to the south of the railway station. As the station is at a higher level up the hill, only the tall stone containing walls are visible from the meeting house site. To High Cross Street, the meeting house site is bordered by granite boundary walls with a metal gate of c.2006. (This appears to be the main approach from at least 1880 (OS map); the statement in the HER entry that the historic approach was from the northwest appears to be wrong.) The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. The Conservation Area Appraisal states that the building's 'restrained and simple form [is] showing off the soft pastel colours of [Pentewan] stone to great effect' (p. 29).

The detached burial ground at Tregongeeves was acquired in about 1970 by the local council for road widening. The burials (dating back to 1664) and the gravestones were moved to the attached burial ground at St Austell. According to Butler, the burial ground had been given in 1706 to Thomas Lower and by him to Friends in 1717. Today, the site is marked by a road-side plaque on a stretch of remaining boundary wall.

## 2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is correctly listed at grade II. The list description (see part 6 below) is extremely brief and needs to be expanded to encompass the interior.

## 2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The site has been a burial ground since c.1829 and has high archaeological potential.

## **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 last quinquennial inspection by David Scott of Scott and Company took place in September 2012. Most of the recommendations have been acted on, except the repair of the garden wall. The local meeting has enough money for regular maintenance but not for major repairs. The QI report is used as a five-year maintenance and repair plan.

### 3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: use of low energy lightbulbs, programmable gas boiler
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: composting, recycling, waste removed after each event
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: new windows have improved thermal efficiency, roof insulation is proposed
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: nature conservation is key part of the garden/burial ground maintenance plan
- Transport: close to rail and bus stations, limited parking on site and public car park opposite

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would consider obtaining one.

### 3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden.

The meeting is accessible by public transport and rail and bus stations are close by. There is limited parking on site for a maximum of ten cars but no secure parking for bicycles (other than bringing them inside the meeting house).

### 3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access, an accessible toilet, a hearing loop and some facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in 2013 and the recommended changes have been implemented.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 48 hours per week. It is used for an average of 19 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy.

### 3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There have been two incidents of stolen lead (c.2012 and 2015). Otherwise, there have been no incidents which needed to be reported to the police since 2008. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, relatively low deprivation and relatively high community confidence for this part of Cornwall. There is currently no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team but the meeting house is the base of the local Street Pastors Team.

### 3.8 Plans for change

The local meeting has no plans for alterations to the meeting house.

## **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 meeting house has all the amenities required by the local meeting and the alterations of the last twenty years should obviate any major alterations or extensions.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* The meeting house is well-used by local community groups and it provides all the facilities they require.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting:* The meeting has recently asked the local planning authority for pre-application advice on the potential conversion of the meeting house to residential use. Such a conversion would probably require further subdivision of the building which would be regrettable. Should the meeting be laid down or decide to sell the meeting house, a new sympathetic use would need to be found for this listed building which would allow the meeting room and its furnishing and the corridor screens to remain in situ.

## **Part 5: Category: 2**

## **Part 6: List description**

Name: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1212077

Location: FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE, 43, HIGH CROSS STREET

District: Cornwall

District Type: Unitary Authority

Parish: St. Austell

Grade: II

Date first listed: 28-Nov-1950

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

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 396587

ST AUSTELL 1. HIGH CROSS STREET 1584A (North Side) No 43 (Friends' Meeting House)  
SX 0152 1/497 28.11.50.

II

2. Early C19. Plain rectangular building of ashlar. 1 storey. 4 windows. Entrance at side. Date stone 1829. Hipped roof.

Listing NGR: SX0157052528