

Friends Meeting House, Swarthmoor

Meeting House Lane, Ulverston, LA12 9ND

National Grid Reference: SD 28378 76875



Statement of Significance

Swarthmoor Meeting House has exceptional heritage significance as a meeting house closely associated with George Fox who gave the site to local Friends in 1687/1688. The building incorporates an earlier house and barn, and retains many historic Quaker fittings. The building has an attractive setting on the edge of Ulverston, close to Swarthmoor Hall with an attached burial ground used since c1702.

Evidential value

The meeting house has high evidential value for its fabric which incorporates some earlier structure and includes historic joinery and fittings of several phases, from the sixteenth century through to the twentieth century, illustrating incremental repair and renewal.

Historical value

The site is closely associated with the Fell family of Swarthmoor Hall and with George Fox who bought and gave the site to the Friends, with instructions on how to create a meeting house here, in 1687. The burial ground has been in continuous use since 1702. The plan-form and internal features illustrates how the interior was used for worship, teaching and meetings. The building and place has exceptional historical value.

Aesthetic value

The form and design of the building is typical of late seventeenth century vernacular architecture in this area, constructed in local materials and adapted for Quaker use to a distinctive pattern. The attractive setting of the walled grounds adds to its aesthetic significance. The exterior, interior spaces and the simplicity of the historic fittings have exceptional aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house is primarily a place for Quaker worship but is also valued by visitors to this part of the southern Lake District. The building is available for community use and makes a positive contribution to the local area; it has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Swarthmoor*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0033480*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trust Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *South Lakeland District Council*
- 1.5 Civil parish: *Ulverston*
- 1.6 Historic England locality: *North West*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II**
- 1.8 NHLE: *1270207*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1688*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not identified*
- 1.14. Date of site visit: *9 June 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*
- 1.16 Names of contacts made on site: *Jeff Lowden and John Cameron*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial ground at Sunbrick (Grade II).
Grid reference: SD2861973913*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*
- 1.19 Information Sources:

David M. Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lakeland Counties* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1978), pp.123 – 125.

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 349-341.

Harper Gaythorpe, 'Swarthmoor Meeting House, a Quaker Stronghold' in *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, Vol VI, 1906 pp237-283

Greenlane Archaeology, *Swarthmoor Meeting House Archaeological Building Report*, April 2012.

Jeff Lowden, *Local Meeting Survey*, April 2015

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

2.1. Historical background

The meeting house is less than half a mile from Swarthmoor Hall, the home of Judge Thomas Fell and his wife Margaret, influential figures in early Quakerism; George Fox first visited them in 1652 when touring the area. Meetings for worship were held in the hall. In 1669, Friends bought the burial ground at Sunbrick, a few miles to the south. A plot known as Petty's Croft containing a thatched house, barn and about half an acre was bought by George Fox in 1687 for £72; the property had previously been rented by two of Judge Fell's daughters. Fox conveyed the property to local Friends in 1687 as a gift (recorded on the inscription over doorway), gave £20 or £40 for repairs and provided detailed instructions on how to create a meeting house from the existing building by adding a porch, slating the roof, paving a path and enlarging the barn. Early writers differ in their view on whether or not the earlier building was repaired or completely rebuilt, but recent archaeological survey suggests the previous domestic building was retained and adapted. The building was registered as a place of worship in 1689 and in use from 1690. Early on part of the building was used as a school room. The meeting room was probably unheated to begin with, but a stove with metal flue pipe was installed in 1825 (Figures 1 and 2). Tall sash windows with 24 panes were installed in place of 'ancient' windows in 1829. In 1843 the west gable end was slated. The wall enclosing the grounds was rebuilt in c1800. Inside, £175 was spent on unspecified work in 1813 and 1814; the movable screen may date from this time.

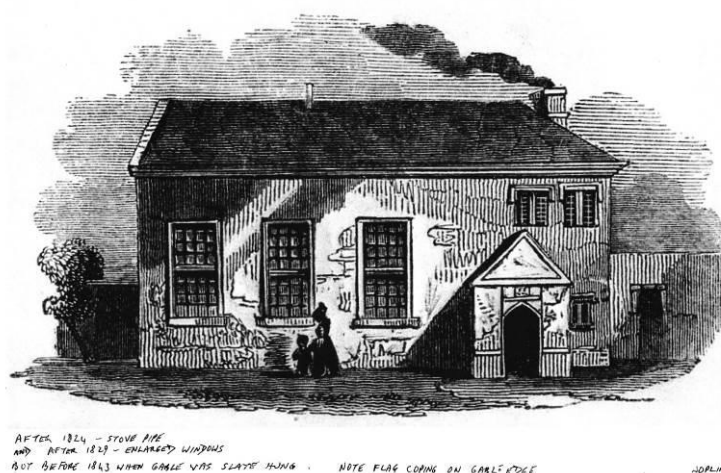


Fig.1: meeting house in c1843 (from Jopling, 1843)

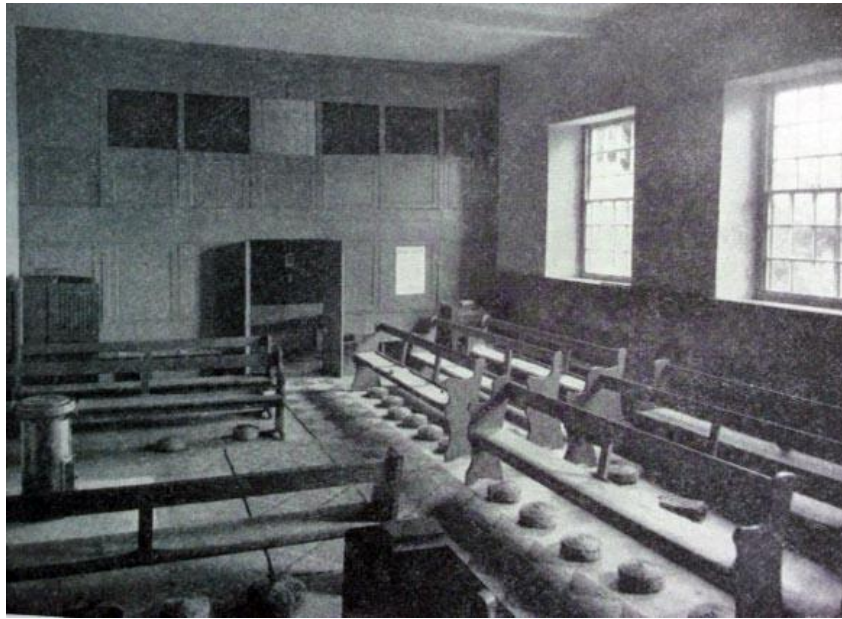


Fig.2: Interior in c1961 (Lidbetter, 1961, plate v)

Twentieth century repairs and improvements included new joinery in c1910: 'a large part' of the ministers' stand, the staircase and some panelling (Greenlane Archaeology p16), and in 1936, further replacement of panelling (Greenlane Archaeology p.46). The stove was moved from the centre of the room onto the back wall in 1935 (Fig.2). More recently, in 1985, a new kitchen and toilet block was added and the former stables and coach house were refurbished for a children's room in c.1987. At an unknown date, the stove was removed from the meeting room and the bench seating re-arranged. The sashes were replaced with the existing different windows in 1995. In 2011, a photovoltaic array was installed in the field north-east of the meeting house, to generate electricity.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was created from an earlier house and barn, of perhaps sixteenth century date, in 1688-90. Built of local stone, the walls have a rough cast or cement rendered finish with slate-hanging to the west gable end. The roof is laid with graduated Cumbria slates, with a rendered external stack to the east gable and cast-iron rain water goods with wrought iron brackets to gutters. The rectangular building is aligned north-west to south-east and faces south-west, with a single-storey range to the east containing a former stable and coach house, now a hall, and a modern ancillary range to the north of this. The gabled porch is to right of centre; the open doorway has a stone drip mould above and a stone moulded surround with a cambered head and the inscription EXDONO:GF/1688 (given by George Fox). To the left, the full-height meeting room has three tall modern timber windows, with stone sills. To the right are 2-light mullioned windows; two to each floor and all with leaded glazing and stone hoodmoulds. The left return is blind and hung with slates above the lower part of the wall with lime-render (original finish). The rear is blind except for one 3-light timber mullioned window to the ground floor, and is finished with a hard cement render. The former stable range to the east has a modern lean-to slated canopy to the entrance door to the left and modern glazing in a former cart doorway

to the right. The rear kitchen and WC block is rendered with small timber casements to the north and a pitched slate roof.

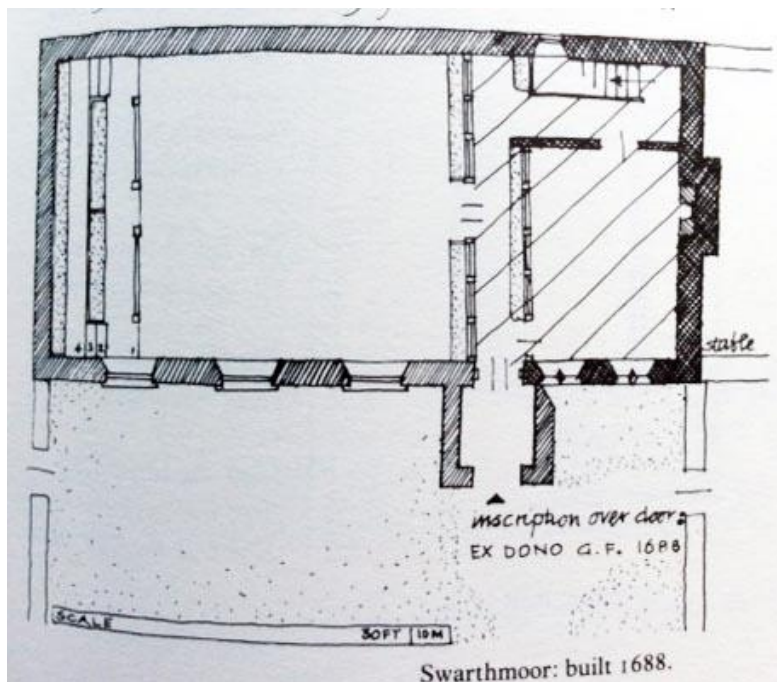


Fig.3: Ground floor plan of the meeting house as reconstructed by Butler (not to scale) (Butler (1978), p.125)

The interior of the porch has a stone floor, exposed roof structure and a hat peg rail. The ground floor of the meeting house is divided by a stone-flagged cross passage in line with the porch; double doors lead into the meeting room to the west and a single inserted doors leads east into the former women's meeting room. The walls of the passage are solid masonry for the lower metre with top-hinged shutters above; wrought iron hooks in the ceiling support the shutters when open and there is a short hat peg rail on one wall. The meeting room is arranged with the stand at the west end and the movable screen at the east end; the shutters to the top part of the screen, to the gallery slide vertically on pulleys. All the panelled shutters and the dado panelling in similar style is painted of timber, with horizontal boards. The stand has steps to either end, fitted benches to both levels and the dado ramps up to the east wall. The rail with turned posts and the panelled pine to the back of the front benches is unpainted (renewed in c1910). The floor is carpeted. The flat ceiling and upper walls are largely plastered with modern gypsum plaster. There are four timber beams to the ceiling, the soffits of tie-beams to the roof. The former women's room on the east side of the passage has an open fireplace on the east wall which re-uses a section of window mullion for one jamb. The west wall is partly hung with hinged shutters. The floor is laid with slate and walls are plain plastered. Two beams carrying the sloping gallery floor above have previously been plastered (propped at the time of the visit). To the rear against the back wall is a passage and staircase (renewed c1910) with an early chamfered timber mullioned window below the stairs. The gallery has a sloping pine board floor and six rows fixed plain benches without backs. Walls are plain plastered except for the west wall which has vertically sliding shutters. The ceiling has a chamfered beam that has been lime-washed in the past

The range to the east, the former stables and coach house retains a 2-bay tie-beam roof and two tiers of purlins, all exposed. Walls and ceiling have modern plaster, and

the rooflights and all joinery to doors and windows is modern, dating from the 1985 conversion.

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains a collection of loose pine benches, now scattered between the meeting room, the passage, the hall and the women's meeting room. There are two patterns of design, a probably nineteenth century bench with solid shaped ends and an earlier bench with shaped arms and separate legs (Fig.5). Two chairs associated with George Fox and Margaret Fell are now at Swarthmoor Hall.



Fig.4: pine bench in meeting room



Fig.5: benches in women's meeting room

2.4. Attached burial ground

The burial ground lies to the north-west of the meeting house, enclosed to the north-west by a drystone wall and a fence to the east. There are rows of plain headstones with semi-circular heads. The burial ground has been in use since 1702 (the date when Sunbrick closed). It is still in use and a plan of the burials is kept by the registrar to the meeting. Most of the area is managed for wildlife with wild flowers and long grass, and mowing limited to paths and an area of more recent burials on the west side.



Fig.6: burial ground from the south-west

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting



Fig.7: Setting in c1895, before housing development on the lane (Swarthmoor meeting archive)

The meeting house is on the south-west edge of Ulverston, a market town close to the south coast of Cumbria. Swarthmoor Hall, the seventeenth century home of Judge Fell is half a mile to the north-west. The meeting house, originally in a rural location, now has a partly suburban setting with early twentieth century houses along the road, but there is still a field to the north and the adjoining burial ground to the rear. There is now a photovoltaic array in the field (Fig.8). The forecourt to the meeting house is enclosed by high stone walls with triangular copings, ramped up along the front wall above a chamfered stone gateway with a boarded door. The forecourt is laid to grass with mature trees. There are gateways leading west to the burial ground and east into the separate walled yard in front of the Barn (former stable) which has lower enclosing walls and a stone mounting block (Fig.10).



Fig.8: photovoltaic array in adjoining field



Fig.9: view from the road with former stable to right Fig.10: mounting block

The detached burial ground at Sunbrick is about two miles to the south, at SD2861973913; it is notable as the burial place of Margaret Fell (died 1702), prominent early Quaker and wife of George Fox. The walled enclosure is Grade II listed.

2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is rightly listed at Grade II*; the listing includes the former stables.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The building was recorded in detail by Greenlane Archaeology Ltd, in 2012, in advance of repair works. The site around the building has some archaeological potential to reveal evidence of activity and buildings here prior to the meeting house being established. The burial ground also has potential to yield information about past Quakers.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Fair. The last QI was 2007 and a new inspection is now overdue. Some major works have been undertaken since 2012; the meeting house has been re-roofed, but there are some outstanding structural concerns about the beams supporting the gallery floor. More generally, modern gypsum plaster is unsuited to the solid masonry walls and is exacerbating damp where it is present along the front wall of the meeting room, particularly around the inserted windows.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Optimal/generally satisfactory. The burial ground is managed for wildlife with a suitable mowing regime. Walls and headstones are in good condition.

3.2. Maintenance

The meeting does not have a 5-year plan but carried out routine maintenance, including in burial ground and gardens. A Friend acts as caretaker for the site, living a hundred yards away in a Quaker-owned house.

3.3. Sustainability

The Sustainability Toolkit has been used; a major project was to install photovoltaic panels in the field in 2011. Insulation in roof space was improved as part of the re-roofing work. The burial ground is managed for wildlife with bramble beds, wild flowers, holly, apple, elderberry and ash trees retained, nesting boxes, dry stone walling, access points to fields for wildlife, logs for insects etc.

3.4. Amenities

The meeting has the facilities it needs including a small but adequate kitchen, gents and ladies toilets and association space in the former stables (the Barn). There is free parking on the public lane, and secure bicycle parking.

3.5. Access

An access audit was carried out about 15 years ago, and recommendations followed up at the time. Toilets are accessible to wheelchair users with limited mobility and have rails but there are no low sinks. The meeting is accessible to wheelchair-users, with a car-parking space in the site. There is a hearing loop, but no measures specifically for people with sight impairments.

The nearest bus stop is 200 metres away with a good week-day service and a Sunday service from Barrow in time for Meeting. Ulverston has a railway station (about a mile north).

3.6 Community Use

The building is used for approximately 15 hours per week by community groups, but could be used more. A local Friend manages lettings and any concerns are brought to the local meeting. There is not a written policy but no alcohol is allowed. The meeting is an attractive place for lettings due to price, location, size and the quiet.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

No incidents or heritage crime have been reported to the police in the last ten years. The only minor issue involved youths climbing over the wall, which was not reported. Friends have not liaised with the local Neighbourhood Police Team. The well-cared for area is considered to have low crime, low deprivation and high community confidence.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no plans for further change at the moment.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House only: changes to this fine old building are constrained by its historic features and character, and make it difficult for the meeting to further improve energy use and make alterations.

ii) For wider community use, additional to local Meeting use: the existing facilities and location could enable further community use in the former stables, without putting pressure on the historic meeting rooms.

iii) As a consequence of being laid down as a Meeting House and passing into secular use: it would be regrettable if this meeting were to close and it would be difficult to adapt it for a new use given the sensitivity of its character, the setting and the interior.

Part 5: Category: 1

Part 6: List Description

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

List entry Number: 1270207

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, MEETING HOUSE LANE, ULVERSTON

County/District	District Type	Parish
Cumbria	South Lakeland District Authority	Ulverston

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 02-Mar-1950

Date of most recent amendment: 19-Apr-1996

Details

SD27NE MEETING HOUSE LANE (North side) 626-1/1/91 02/03/50 Friends' Meeting House (Formerly Listed as: MEETING HOUSE LANE Friends' Meeting House) (Formerly Listed as: MEETING HOUSE LANE Stable Block at Friends' Meeting House)

II*

Quaker meeting house. Dated 1688; interior altered 1814; sash windows added 1829; gable wall slated 1843. Roughcast with some sandstone ashlar dressings and some slatehanging, with slate roof. To the left of the single-storey gabled porch are 3 windows with plain reveals and projecting sills lighting the main meeting room. They were inserted in 1829 but now have C20 casements with glazing bars replacing the original glazing bar sashes. To the right of the porch there are 2 windows at both ground-floor and gallery level lighting the former womens' meeting house. All are mullioned and of 2 lights with leaded glazing. Those on the ground floor are cyma-moulded and those on the 1st floor are chamfered and have hoods. The wall of the porch is cut back where it overlaps the left-hand window. The porch has a sandstone plinth and moulded doorway which has a lintel with false 4-centred arch. The lintel has a re-cut inscription: 'EX DONO G.F. [George Fox] 1688'. The inner doorway has a moulded stone surround and studded plank doors. The left-hand gable wall has slatehanging which returns to cover part of the front wall. Projecting from the right-

hand gable wall is a chimney stack with offsets. Adjoining to the right is the former stable block, now converted into a meeting room. It has a lower roof which projects forwards at the left to form a canopy over a doorway. A wide doorway towards the right has plain reveals and is now filled by a glazed screen. INTERIOR: the main meeting room has a high ceiling with exposed hardwood tie beams. The timber screen at the east end of the meeting room dates from 1814 and has top-hung shutters opening at both ground-floor and gallery level. Between the passageway and the east room there are similar shutters. Both this room and the passageway have stone-flagged floors, and the room has 2 axial main ceiling beams and a fireplace with the remains of moulded jambs. HISTORICAL NOTE: George Fox bought the property at Swarthmoor in 1687 from two of Judge Fell's daughters and passed it on to the Friends with instructions on how to build the meeting house, which was registered as a place of worship in 1689. The former stable block was listed on 20/06/72. (Butler DM: Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties: London: 1978-: 123-5).

Listing NGR: SD2837876875

Selected Sources

Butler, D M, Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties, (1978), 123-125