

***Friends Meeting House, Thirsk***

*24 Kirkgate, Thirsk, YO7 1PL*

*National Grid Reference: SE 42812 82174*



***Statement of Significance***

***This purpose-built meeting house and cottage of 1799 is located on a site of a former building purchased in 1647 for use as a meeting house. The building has been subject to a number of alterations over the years, with the latest alterations taking place in 2006 to improve the buildings facilities. The numerous alterations have collectively resulted in the original form of the***

***meeting house being lost; the loft and the Elders' seating have been removed and the interior subdivided. Overall, the building and burial ground together are of high heritage significance, despite the altered state of the meeting house interior.***

**Evidential value**

***The site of the present meeting house and burial ground has been in Quaker use since 1647. The building has been altered on a number of occasions and the fabric has the potential to yield further evidence about its past Quaker use and development. Both the meeting house and the burial ground have high evidential value.***

**Historical value**

***The site of the meeting house has high historical value, the site was purchased for use as a Quaker burial ground, and an existing building was used for worship until the present meeting house was built in 1799. The long history of the meeting provides a local context of the evolution of Quakers in the area.***

**Aesthetic value**

***The meeting house has medium aesthetic value, it is a good example of local vernacular architecture which retains much of its plain exterior detail. The interior of the meeting house has been diminished slightly by the twentieth century alterations. The building makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.***

**Communal value**

***In addition to its use by Friends, the Meeting House is used by the wider community. The building has high community value.***

**Part 1: Core data**

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *York*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0004050*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Hambleton District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *Yorkshire and the Humber*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Thirsk*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1293706*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Thirsk and Sowerby*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1799*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Not established*

1.14 Date of visit: *25 April 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Emma Neil*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Alison Clarke and Stephen Parry*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Detached burial ground at Barbeck*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), vol. II, pp. 764-765.

Helen E. Roberts, *Researching Yorkshire Quaker History: A Guide to Sources*, University of Hull, 2003, pp. 71.

Society of Friends, *Two hundred years of Thirsk Meeting House 1799-1999*, 1999

Alison Clarke, Local Meeting Survey, March 2016.

Hambleton District Council, *Thirsk and Sowerby Conservation Area Appraisal*, 2010

University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Special Collections, Carlton Hill Collection, York Monthly Meeting Estates Book, 1964 (MS/DEP/1981/2/YORK/1/40/1).

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

### 2.1. Historical background

Yorkshire has strong associations with the early Quaker movement; the founder George Fox travelled through the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire in 1651 and 1652, 1663 and 1677. It is believed that Fox visited Thirsk during one of these tours. By 1647 an individual named Thomas Pratt purchased a property from Thomas Osburne for £25.5.0 for use as a meeting house. Roberts (2003) notes that the building was first in use by Seekers until it was registered for use by Friends in 1689. In 1666 Friends acquired a property and associated land from Robert and Richard Deacon for £3 in Barbeck. The land was acquired for use as a burial ground.

During the late eighteenth century Friends decided that there was a need to re-build the meeting house purchased in 1647. A new purpose-built meeting house was constructed on the same site and opened in 1799. Butler (1999) describes the building at the time as plain, high roofed and barn-like. The interior of the building contained a women's gallery separated from the main meeting room by a partition and an Elders' gallery to the other end of the meeting house. By 1833, adjacent land was acquired from John Foster for £100.

By 1876 the meeting house had undergone some alterations, with the minutes of 9 July 1876 stating that the two meeting rooms had by this date been merged into one, wood panelling to the walls had been introduced, the loft which had not been in use since c1850s had been taken out, hot water apparatus and a gas chandelier was installed and a porch and cloak room had been built. The plan of the remodelled building plan would have been similar to Butler's conjectural plan shown in Fig.1.

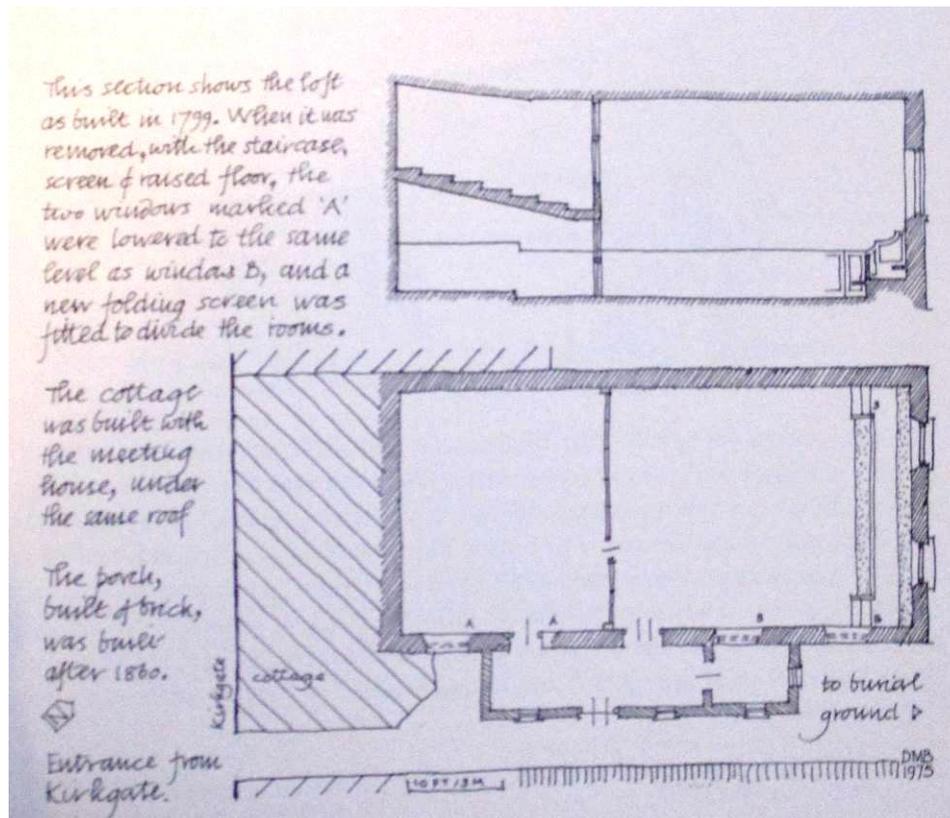


Figure 1: Ground floor plan of the meeting house, as reconstructed by Butler (north is to the top right corner: not to scale) (Butler (1999), vol. II, p.765)

After the war, improvements were made to the cottage at a cost of £700, in 1954. In 1956, the meeting were left a legacy by Mary Baker for the upkeep of the burial ground and repairs to the meeting house. However, from 1957, as a result of declining numbers the Thirsk Preparative Meeting ceased. The meeting was revived from 1973 and regained its Preparative Meeting status in 1981.

Following the re-establishment of the meeting, Friends made some improvements and alterations to the meeting house. This work included a meeting room to the east with lowered windows, a room for children's activities and letting space to the west with a wide hall in between.

In 2006, John Baily was appointed to reconfigure the entrance, with toilet facilities located to each end of the porch, a kitchen provided to the north-west of the wide hall between the two meeting rooms and improvements made for better disabled access.

## 2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built in 1799 and extended in 1850s. The meeting house is of oblong plan, with the south-western side of the building facing the street forming a cottage and the meeting house to the north-eastern side. The building is built in red brick laid in English Garden wall bond, windows have flat brick arched heads and slightly projecting stone sills, and the pitched roof is covered in grey Welsh slate, with a chimney stack to the southeast gable end.

The main entrance is located to the south-eastern side of the meeting house and is accessed from Kirkgate via a side passage. A single storey brick lean-to dating from the 1850s provides an elongated porch area, which has now been rendered and the roof is covered in felt. The

fenestration to the lean-to comprises three 4-paned sliding sash windows and entrance, and one 4-paned sliding sash window to the north-east. The main body of the meeting house has three larger 4-paned sliding sash windows and underneath the north-eastern window is a fire exit door. To the south-western side of this elevation is a two-storey lean-to of twentieth century date which provides access into the cottage. The north-west side elevation consists of a small one-storey lean-to with a projecting chimney breast above, and under the eaves is a 3-light window. The south-west gable fronts onto the pavement facing Kirkgate. The fenestration consists of five 4-paned sliding sash windows, two at ground and first floor level and one in the gable apex. The rear north-east gable comprises a single light window within the gable apex, two 4-paned sliding sash windows at first floor and 8-paned sliding sash windows at ground floor level.

Internally, the porch provides toilet facilities to each end along with a cloak room. The meeting house has a wide hall, now shorter in length due to the insertion of a kitchen to the north west, access to the main meeting room is to the north-east and an additional meeting room is to the south-west. The main meeting room has been refurbished, with plain plastered walls and ceiling, the floor is covered in carpet and modern chairs are aligned in a circle with nineteenth century benches to the walls. The additional meeting room has a panelled partition separating the room from the hall, dating from the early twentieth century. Evidence of the former gallery can be seen above the windows to the south-east where the ceiling slopes. To the north-west wall is a series of panelled fitted cupboards dating from the early twentieth century.

### 2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains a set of benches with open backs and shaped arms, which date from the nineteenth century.



Figure 2: One of the open-backed benches in the meeting house

### 2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

The burial ground is no longer in use for burials, but is still in use for the scattering of ashes. The burial ground forms a rectangular space to the north-east of the meeting house. The headstones have been removed from their original positions to their present location to the far north-east of the burial ground to allow better use of the space as a garden. Further headstones have been laid flat at the base of the north-east gable of the meeting house. The grasses area is enclosed by a red brick wall with a plaque stating the wall was built in 1833 and is the property of the Society of Friends. Burial records are located in Brotherton Library Special Collections at the University of Leeds and cover an approximate date range from 1830 to 1932. A John Gilbert Baker (1834-1920) is buried here; a botanist, he worked at the

Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew as a Keeper of the Herbarium. Baker became a Fellow of the Royal Society and the Linnaean Society.



Figure 3: Burial ground

## 2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

Thirsk is approximately 22 miles north-west of York. The meeting house is within the boundaries of Thirsk and Sowerby Conservation Area and is located within the character area of Kirkgate. Kirkgate is a sweeping street on the north side of the market town, with a number of listed buildings at its northern end including the Grade I listed St Marys church, the Grade II\* listed Thirsk Hall which dates from 1720, and the associated Grade II listed stables. Other properties that line the street include two and three storey Georgian brick properties (some listed Grade II). The gable end of the meeting faces Kirkgate with a side passage providing access into the meeting house. To the rear of the meeting house is the former burial ground now in use as a garden. The area is bounded by a red brick wall which dates from 1833.

There is a detached burial ground at Barbeck but the exact location is not known. The site was purchased in 1666 and sold in 1925 for £10.

## 2.6. Listed status

The meeting house is appropriately listed at Grade II. The list description requires amending and expansion of the description.

## 2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The site for the meeting house and the burial ground were acquired in 1647. Due to the presence of burials, the site 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 took place in 2014. It found the building to be in generally satisfactory condition and adequately maintained. Since then, the heating has been zoned, the roof and gutters have been cleared, secondary glazing has been introduced, new sash windows in the meeting house, toilets redecorated, path in the burial ground reset and the north wall of the burial ground re-pointed. Remaining works to tackle include examination of sewers underneath the passageway, insulating pipes under the floor and renewal of flooring. The meeting has enough money for ordinary maintenance but larger projects could not be financed out of local funds. The meeting has an informal five year maintenance and repair plan for the building.

### 3.3. Sustainability

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

- Climate change and energy efficiency: Secondary glazing to all main windows in the meeting house and cottage. Heating is zoned to minimise heat loss.
- Resource use, recycling and waste management: The meeting house provides recycling boxes in the lobby.
- Building maintenance and refurbishment: The Premises Committee oversee maintenance and refurbishment.
- Wildlife, ecology and nature conservation: the grounds are planted with trees (including fruit trees) and shrubs which provide wildlife habitats. Part of the garden is used for vegetables by the tenant in the cottage.
- Transport: Friends lift share where possible.

### 3.4. Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house and include two meeting rooms, kitchen, two toilets (one fully accessible) and shower. There is no resident warden. The meeting is accessible by public transport on weekdays but not on Sundays. There is no on-site car parking or secure parking for bicycles. Car parking is available on the nearby roads for free on Sundays and on weekdays it is restricted to two hours or a pay and display car park.

### 3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access, an accessible toilet, a hearing loop and facilities for partially-sighted people at the entrance to the small meeting room. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in December 2013. The recommended works were undertaken during the refurbishment works which included providing disabled access throughout, accessible toilet, the path to the garden for level access and a hand rail was provided in 2014.

### 3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for about 5 hours each week. The meeting house is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 90 hours per week and is used for an average of 10 hours each week. The Meeting does not have a formal letting policy. Decisions regarding lettings are made by the Local Business Meeting. Political groups

are not allowed to use the meeting house and alcohol is not permitted in the premises. Groups with links to the Quakers and church groups are able to use the meeting house for free. Users value the building for its location, pleasant atmosphere and price.

### 3.7. Vulnerability to crime

The meeting house has been subject to anti-social behaviour involving littering. There have been no incidents of heritage crime at the site. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. Friends have not developed a liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and would potentially consider making contact in the future.

### 3.8. Plans for change

No plans for future change.

## **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 updated and modernised in 2006 which provided improved ancillary facilities and better disabled access. The building currently meets the needs of the Friends. Future change would be constrained by the listing, although the interior has previously been altered.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* Following the improvements made in 2006 the meeting house has all the required facilities to support wide community use. Future change would be constrained by the listing, although the interior has previously been altered.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* The south western side of the building is in use as residential accommodation and in the regrettable event of closure the meeting house could be converted to residential use, subject to listed building consent and planning constraints.

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

## **Part 6: List description**

Name: **NUMBER 24 AND FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

List entry Number: 1293706

Location

NUMBER 24 AND FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, 24, KIRKGATE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: North Yorkshire

District: Hambleton

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Thirsk

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 15-Jun-1984

List entry Description

SE 4282 THIRSK KIRKGATE 6/62 (east side)

No 24 and Friends' Meeting House

II

House and Friends' Meeting House. 1790, enlarged 1878. Pinkish brown, locally made brick. Pantile roof with gable end to road. 2 storeys. 2 late sashes to each floor and one casement in the gable end. C20 extension to right not included. P Wyon and W Fogitt, Thirsk, Past and Present, 1980, p6.

Listing NGR: SE4281782174