

Friends Meeting House, Airton

Airton, Skipton, BD23 4AE

National Grid Reference: SD 90307 59215



Statement of Significance

Airton meeting house has high significance as a good example of a vernacular Yorkshire Quaker meeting house, with fittings dating from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. It has an attractive village setting with a contemporary burial ground and attached cottage, and a refurbished Barn available for lettings.

Evidential value

The buildings and burial ground have high evidential value, and there may have been earlier buildings on this site.

Historical value

The meeting house has high historical value as a rural meeting house associated with local weavers William and Alice Ellis who gave the building to the meeting and are buried here.

Aesthetic value

The building has high significance for its aesthetic value as a good example of stone meeting house built in the local vernacular style, and retaining some original fittings in a little-altered interior. The burial ground and the stone wall with bench enhance the setting of the building.

Communal value

The meeting house is used for worship by a small group of local Quakers and is also the only community space available in the village and local area, so it has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Craven & Keighley*

1.2 Property Registration Number: 0098880

1.3 Owner: *Brighouse Leeds and Settle Monthly Meetings Buildings Charity*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority*

1.5 Historic England locality: *Yorkshire and the Humber*

1.6 Civil parish: *Airton*

1.7 Listed status: *II*

1.8 NHLE: *1132105*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1690s; 2004-2011*

1.13 Architect: *None; James Innerdale*

1.14 Date of visit: *13 June 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Marion Barter*

1.16 Name of contact made on site: *Laurel Phillipson*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Cottage and Bunk barn*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *Yes*

1.19 Information sources:

David Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, Vol.2*, 1999, p775

University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Special Collections, Carlton Hill Collection, Airton
FMH (1802-2000) (MS/DEP/1979/1/PLA/11)

R.Harland and L.Philipson, *The Quaker Meeting House at Airton*, 2007 booklet

Volunteer survey by Laurel Philipson

Meeting house website: www.airtonbarn.org.uk

Kirkby Malham history website:

<http://www.kirkbymalham.info/KMI/airton/quakerhist.html>

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

2.1. Historical background

There are varying accounts of the history of the building; Butler states that William Ellis built the meeting house in 1697-1700, at his own cost, and gave it to the monthly meeting in 1706. Phillipson and the List Entry (Part 6) state that the current building originated as a medieval barn that was in use for meetings from 1658, an unusually early date. In the late seventeenth century, the building was owned by Major General Lambert and his family who provided protection from persecution to local Quakers. In 1700 handloom weavers William and Alice Ellis bought the building for £31 from Lambert's son (also called John); the date 1700 over the entrance probably records this purchase. William was also an itinerant preacher from 1686 and in 1697-99 he visited Friends in America. The mullioned windows and overall character of the building is consistent with a date around the 1690s. The Ellis family also owned a house to the north which has a datestone inscribed 1696, given to Friends. In c.1710 Alice Ellis is said to have replaced the old stable at the south-west end of the meeting house with a cottage, and an adjoining range to the south, to provide a stable with loft.

In the early twentieth century, summer gatherings for Adult School members took place at Airton, and in the 1930s the old stable was used as a hostel by Yorkshire Young Friends. By 1935, the adjoining paddock and the Ellis' house across the road had been sold by Quaker trustees. Repairs and some alterations were made to the meeting house to enable evacuees to stay there during the war, with an upper floor inserted in the stable range in the 1940s. Partitions installed on the first floor of the stables in 1983.

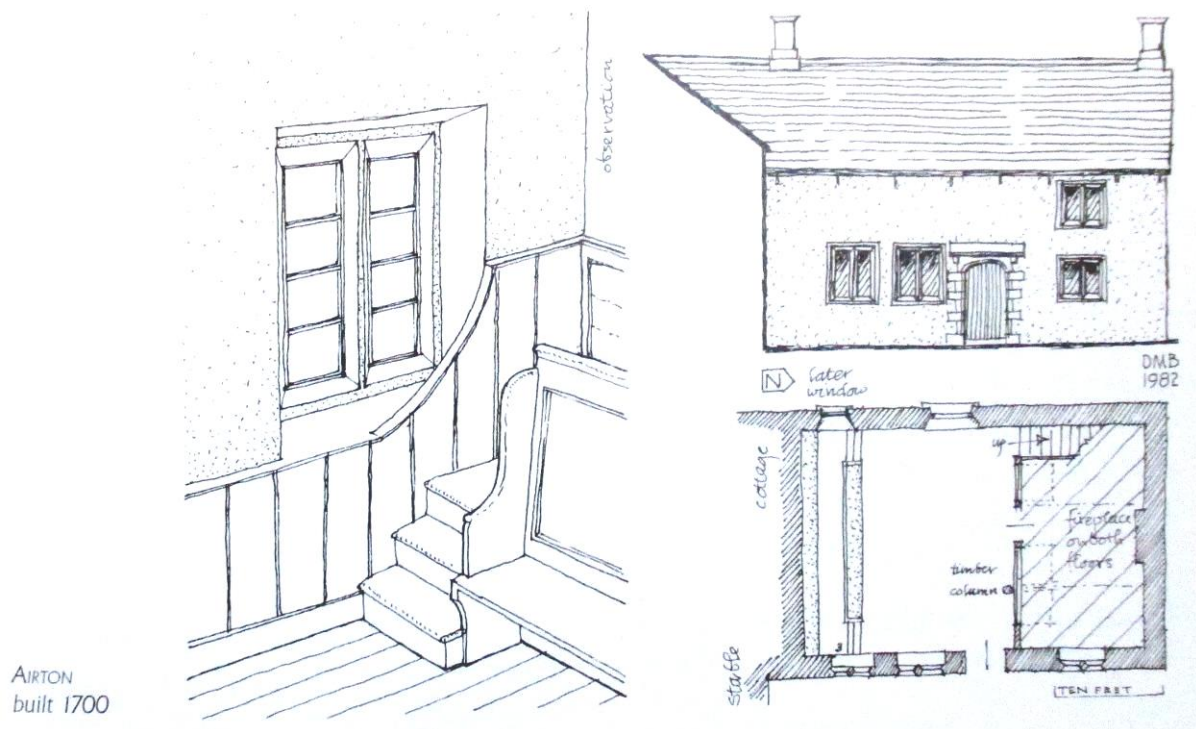


Fig.1: Plan and sketches by Butler, 1999 (p775). North is to the top right.

In 2004-2011 the meeting raised and spent £300,000 on rescuing the buildings from prolonged neglect, including repairs to the roof of the meeting house, adapting the attached barn to the south-east for bunk house accommodation and improving access. The architect was James Innerdale.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house was built or rebuilt in the 1690s, by William Ellis. It is built of roughly coursed rubblestone with quoins, with a large boulder to the plinth of the north-west corner. The roof is laid with stone slates and stone ridges, with a plain verge and a gable end stack to the north-east. Rainwater goods are cast-iron. The meeting house is aligned roughly north-east to south-west with the principal entrance on the south-east elevation facing the burial ground. This has a doorway with chamfered jambs and arched lintel inscribed WEA 1700 (for William and Alice Ellis). Above the doorway is a flat stone canopy on stone brackets with a small wall niche to the left. Left of the door are two 2-light mullioned windows lighting the meeting room, and to the right a single 2-light window to the room beneath the gallery, with one smaller 2-light mullioned window above. The mullions are recessed and plainly chamfered, and the taller ground floor windows appear to have lowered sills. The north-east gable end is blind, and the north-west elevation facing the road has one 9-pane 19th century window with top hopper light to the meeting room and a tiny chamfered window lighting the stand, to the right. Continuing to the south-west under the same roof is a 2-bay cottage known as the Nook; this has a gabled porch with coped verges on kneelers to the north-west, and mullioned windows.

The meeting house interior is divided into two unequal spaces with the main meeting room to the south-west. The stand is against the south-west wall; this has oak panelling to the rear dado, end steps, a fixed pine bench to the front, and pine tongue and grooved dado to side walls, ramped to the stand; the pine joinery appears to be early nineteenth century in date, but the oak panelling is earlier. The smaller meeting room to the north-east is separated by a simple horizontally boarded oak screen with top-hung hinged shutters. Narrow stairs in the north-west corner lead to the gallery; the gallery floor is supported on a pair of chamfered posts and two chamfered beams with exposed joists and the gallery front is plainly panelled. The matching stone fireplaces on both floors, each have chamfered arrises and deep chamfered cornices. These fireplaces and the oak joinery are typical of the late seventeenth century. The ground floor fireplace has a nineteenth century cast-iron grate. Walls and the flat ceilings are plainly plastered with lime-wash finish. Floors are boarded in pine. The 3-bay roof has two tie-beam trusses with struts; one has curved principals.



Fig.2: stand with fixed benches of varying dates



Fig.3: one of two stone fireplaces in the smaller rooms to the east end

2.3. Loose furnishings

The meeting house contains a collection of pine benches of varying design, including several with reversible backs. One of the benches with solid ends on the gallery has the date 1826 on the back of the rail, perhaps re-used from another bench.



Fig.4: pine bench on gallery with back rail inscribed JB 1826

2.4. Attached burial ground



Fig.5: burial ground and stone bench set in wall, from the west

The sloping burial ground adjoins the meeting house on its south and east sides, enclosed by drystone walls. The roughly L-plan area is laid to grass with rows of head stones towards the east end; the stones have arched tops in the usual Quaker style, dating from the second half of the nineteenth century. A low ashlar wall separates the paved yard on the south-east front of the meeting house from the burial ground; the wall has an integrated stone bench to the side facing the meeting house and the top of the wall is chamfered. This unusual feature is hard to date; it is said to be seventeenth century in date, but may be later. A gateway with flat

lintel leads through the wall from the road, with a paved passage against the north-east gable end of the meeting house. The burial records range from 1663 to 2003; records are held by the Area Meeting, and a list of burials, photographs and a plan are also accessible on the website of Malhamdale Local History Group.

William and Alice Ellis are buried here.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies on the east side of the attractive Dales village of Airton, 12 miles north-west of Skipton. The village green to the west of the meeting house is surrounded by stone-built vernacular cottages and house of various dates, from the late seventeenth century onwards. The river Aire runs in the valley just east of the meeting house. The village now has no community buildings such as a pub, village hall, shop or school, and the meeting house is the only building available for the community to use. Less than half of the houses are permanent dwellings; the rest are second homes or holiday cottages, which is affecting the sustainability and vitality of the community.

2.6. Listed status

The building is listed Grade II, an appropriate grade for the building. The List Entry has recently been revised with input from Laurel Philipson.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

The Yorkshire Dales HER was consulted; the meeting house is entry reference number MYD34181. The site is likely to have some archaeological potential due to the burial ground and earlier phases of buildings on the site. The buildings also contain fabric of more than one phase and therefore have archaeological potential, so careful recording is recommended prior to any future works or repair or alteration.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

i) Meeting House: Fair. The last QI was in 2012, carried out by Brian Foxley RIBA. This identified an urgent need for attention to roofs and gutters and the north-east gable end suffers from damp. The meeting reports problems after heavy rain including water running down internal walls and in fuse boxes in December 2015. Roof repairs commenced in August 2016, part-funded by a grant from the Places of Worship Roof Repair scheme.

ii) Attached burial ground: optimal/generally satisfactory. Burial ground walls were partly rebuilt and the shed repaired and re-roofed in 2008.

3.2. Maintenance

Airton Local Meeting struggles to maintain the property and does not have adequate funding. The meeting does not have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan for the building, but they carry out twice yearly inspections and report on the need for minor repairs and upkeep.

There is no burial ground maintenance plan but Friends share the task of maintaining the area. A small area is left as an overgrown "wilderness".

3.3. Sustainability

The Meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit, and has been unable to afford to make improvements to loft insulation or to reduce energy efficiency. Heating the meeting house is reported to be a major problem.

Part of the burial ground is maintained to encourage wildlife.

Friends car-share to attend meetings.

3.4. Amenities

In the barn there is a bunk room (sleeps up to six), with multi-function rooms in addition to the meeting house, two kitchens, three WCs (one is accessible), two showers and a small library. The Barn is reached via the garden/burial ground as there is no internal connection between the meeting house and the Barn.

The adjacent cottage has been occupied by a resident Friend; a new Voluntary Resident Friend has recently been found.

There is parking on the road in the village, and secure bicycle storage on site.

3.5. Access

The Meeting has not conducted a Disability Access Audit but there is access into the meeting house via a ramped stone path installed around five years ago. The ground floor of the Barn is accessible via the garden. There is a hearing loop in the meeting house, but no facilities for partially-sighted people.

There is almost no public transport in the area; there is no Sunday bus service and an infrequent bus service on weekdays. The meeting car-shares whenever possible.

3.6 Community Use

The meeting uses the building for about four hours twice a month, plus occasional half-day and evening events, and for Area Meetings. The Barn and Meeting House are available almost all hours, every day, every month including for overnight stays for up to six people in bunk beds. Actual hours of use are highly variable, from nil to about 150 hours a week. There is no lettings policy and the meeting relies on discretion of the VRF. They ask users to avoid damaging the property, annoying neighbours, using banned substances, selling or indulging in alcohol or engaging in games of chance.

Airton is close to the Pennine Way and at the midpoint of the Way of Roses cycle path in a popular tourist area and visited by organised walking parties for its historic interest. The meeting house is generally kept unlocked, and is the only community space for the southern end of Malhamdale, and liked by visitors and by local residents for its calm atmosphere. The meeting house receives about 11,000 visitors a year and could be an important centre for Quaker outreach, if funds were available to sustain this.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reports of heritage crime or anti-social behaviour. The Meeting House door is not locked. The area is generally well cared for, has low crime and low deprivation but rural isolation is a problem, especially for some retired farmers and there is insufficient funding for rural services.

3.8. Plans for change

Aside from repairs, there are no changes planned to the buildings. The trust that owns Airton meeting house is considering transferring all the meeting houses within the trust to relevant area meetings, as part of the charity being 'laid down' to simplify the complex structure of Quaker charitable trusts. The transfer would not take place until the repair issues are resolved.

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 historic character, fabric and interior of the meeting house make it sensitive to change, but facilities to support the meeting are available in the Barn.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use. The Barn has been refurbished to providing community facilities, and could be further adapted in the future if required, subject to planning.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House. The future of this meeting house seems uncertain; it would be most unfortunate if it were to close. The distinctive and sensitive interior will make it challenging to identify a viable new use for this listed building; a use that retains the spatial character and historic fittings such as a community/cultural use would be preferable to residential.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description

Name: **FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AND THE NOOK**

List entry Number: 1132105

Location

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE AND THE NOOK

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

County: North Yorkshire

District: Craven

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Airton

National Park: YORKSHIRE DALES

Grade: II

Date first listed: 20-Feb-1958

List entry Description

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 20/07/2012

SD 95 NW 3/4 20.2.58

AIRTON Friends Meeting House and The Nook II

A Friend's Meeting House of one storey with a gallery at its east end and an attached two-storey cottage known as The Nook. The meeting house was built by William and Alice Ellis in the late C17th/early C18th. A modern single storey, flat-roofed extension to the corner of the porch is not of special interest.

MATERIALS: Slobbered stone rubble with quoins and stone dressings beneath a stone slate roof.

PLAN: The building is linear in plan with its long axis running north east - south west.

EXTERIOR: Meeting house entrance is on the south east face and consists of a doorway with chamfered jambs and arched lintel inscribed 'WEA 1700' beneath a stone slab hood supported on heavy shaped brackets. Three lower windows and one lighting the gallery are of two lights with straight-chamfered mullions. The east gable is plain and is topped by an ashlar chimney stack with water tabling. The north west face is pierced by an early C19th window and a small single-light window. The gable end has a square-headed arch attached from which a simple stone bench, pierced by an entrance to the burial ground, runs parallel to the meeting house's gable end and south east face. The Nook has a two-light ground floor window with a three-light window above on its north west face together with a gabled entrance porch with coping, kneelers, small round-headed window and doorway with chamfered jambs. A modern single storey, flat-roofed extension to the corner of the porch is not of special interest. The Nook's west gable end contains four casement windows of differing sizes, two to each storey. The chimney stack is of ashlar with cyma corncicing topped with a modern pot.

INTERIOR: The meeting house has simple wooden panelling to the dado, a raised panelled wooden bench or Elder's stand at its western end, and a simple gallery with stair at the eastern end with hinged shutters below, each with its original fastenings which, when closed, enabled the building to be sub-divided into two separate meeting rooms. There is a plank door to the under stair. Beneath the gallery there is a stone fireplace with a plain chamfered shelf into which a C20th fire grate has been inserted. On the gallery above there is a simple blocked fireplace. Some windows have C20th attachments. The interior of The Nook appears to have been altered.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: The burial ground walls and the former stable attached to 'The Nook' contribute to the integrity, coherence and the special interest of the complex as a whole.

HISTORY: Originally a barn, this building was regularly used as a Friends Meeting House from 1658, and is therefore one of the earliest. It was converted/refurbished by William and Alice Ellis in the last few years of the C17, and the datestone of 1700 above the door relates to the purchase of the building from the Lambert Estate in this year. The refurbishment included the introduction of oak wall panelling and an oak divider screen with drop shutters, which is a characteristic feature of many late C17 and C18 Quaker Meetings Houses. William Ellis moved to Airton about 1679 and founded his own linen hand-loom weaving business. He later commenced his second career as a travelling preacher and visited east Yorkshire in 1686, the south of England in about 1690, Ireland in 1694, and North America in 1697, returning home in 1699. In 1710 a small stable was replaced by the attached building known as The Nook, although some features of the stable may be incorporated within this building. At this time the roof of the Meeting House was also raised to align it with that of The Nook, and a new chimney stack was built. A large early C19 window has also been inserted into the meeting house's north west wall overlooking the road. Between 1911-33 a new tiled grate was inserted into the meeting house fireplace and the chimney stack was rebuilt. At an

unspecified date the fireplace on the gallery was blocked. Two families of evacuees from Liverpool were accommodated in the meeting house for a period during World War II and about this time new glazing was inserted into some of the meeting house windows. Shortly after the end of the war the meeting house woodwork was repainted, although this was removed in 2005. In 2005 the meeting house's stone roof was reset. The meeting house's timber floor is an addition, the wooden seating is not original and a bench was brought in from the meeting house at Newton-in-Bowland. Other benches, and pendent lights, have been brought in from the Methodist chapel and schoolroom in Airton, which were closed in 2004. At unspecified dates what was formerly a four-light ground floor window on the north west face of The Nook has been altered into a two light window, and a single-storey flat-roofed extension was added to the building's western corner in the C19.

SOURCES: Royal Commission On The Historical Monuments Of England, Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses In The North Of England (1994) p. 230. R. Harland & L. Phillipson, The Quaker Meeting House at Airton and some of the Friends who worshipped there. 2007 (locally produced pamphlet). Individual Case Details, Airton Friends Meeting House The Nook, Case ID 163711, List Entry UID 324881, 20-02-1958. L. Phillipson, Quaker Meeting House, Airton, Malhamdale. Letter of 10 June 2007. L. Phillipson, Friends Meeting House, Airton. Letter of 25 June 2007.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION: Airton Friend's Meeting House and the associated cottage known as The Nook is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * They are late C17th/early C18th buildings erected by William and Alice Ellis, prominent figures in the development of Quakerism * The meeting house retains some original features including its early largely unaltered raised gallery and shuttered internal partition wall * The building is a good example of the rudimentary vernacular architectural style and decoration associated with the Quaker movement.

Listing NGR: SD9030359208

Selected Sources

Stell, C, An Inventory of Nonconformist chapels and meeting houses in the North of England, (1994), 230