

***Friends Meeting House, Monkseaton***

*23 Front Street, Monkseaton, Whitley Bay, NE25 8AQ*

*National Grid Reference: NZ 34487 71983*



***Statement of Significance***

*An interesting late Georgian vernacular survival, originally single storey, which was extended and adapted in the early twentieth century, initially for residential use and then as a Meeting House. The building makes a positive contribution to the townscape in the core in the Monkseaton Conservation Area, and is of high evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.*

***Evidential value***

*The property originated as a single storey cottage for farmworkers, and retains its original thick stone walls, and features such as panelled doors and sash windows with shutters. The*

*early twentieth century alterations illustrate its transformation to a higher status private dwelling and then to a Meeting House.*

### **Historical value**

*The Meeting House is of high historical value as a fairly rare vernacular survival in the modern development of Monkseaton, with over a century of associations with local Quaker history.*

### **Aesthetic value**

*The Meeting House has high aesthetic townscape value for its frontage to the main street, tall sash windows, steep tile roof and surviving internal features. The rear elevation is more informal, with a catslide roof. The secluded garden, bordered by high stone walls, adds to its high aesthetic value.*

### **Communal value**

*In addition to its use by Friends, the Meeting House has a long history of wider community use. This is currently constrained by issues of damp and access, but the building continues to be used by community groups, as well as providing communal value by virtue of its positive contribution to the character and appearance of the local Conservation Area.*

## **Part 1: Core data**

1.1 Area Meeting: *Northumbria*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0032410*

1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *North Tyneside Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *North East*

1.6 Civil parish: *Whitley Bay*

1.7 Listed status: *Local*

1.8 NHLE: *Not applicable*

1.9 Conservation Area: *Monkseaton*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *Eighteenth century; 1902-3 and 1911; 1979-80*

1.13 Architect (s): *Not established; Scaif; Tristram Spence*

1.14 Date of visit: *18 April 2016*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Gillian Grant*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 478  
Grant, G., *A History of Monkseaton Quaker Meeting*, Sept. 2015, updated Jan. 2016  
Local Meeting Survey, by Gillian Grant, Jan. 2016  
North Tyneside Council, *Monkseaton Conservation Area Appraisal*, 2006

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

### **2.1. Historical background**

There was a Quaker meeting at North Shields in the seventeenth century, and Friends were closely involved with the development of local industry, including coal mining. Meetings for worship in Whitley Bay began in 1907, at the Eden Café. This became a full Preparative Meeting in 1910. At this time, the former villages of Whitley Bay and Monkseaton were developing as suburbs and seaside resorts. Monkseaton is older than Whitley, having been given by Henry to the monks of Tynemouth Priory in the twelfth century; after the dissolution the land passed to the Dukes of Northumberland. Until the mid-nineteenth century the main route through the village was Bygate, while Front Street was a farm track. Here stood Gourd Cottage, a modest single-storey stone-built structure of late eighteenth or early nineteenth century date, which belonged to the Dairy Farm Estate (Monkseaton Farm).

Gourd Cottage was sold at auction in 1892 to Joseph Robson, a draper of Newcastle who was married to Charlotte Greenacre, a convinced Quaker. According to Grant, it was they who added the second storey, in 1902-3, along with a new staircase wing at the rear. Joseph died in 1905, leaving most of his estate to his widow, who continued to live at Gourd Cottage. When she died in 1910, she left the property and most of its grounds to the Friends for use as a Meeting House, along with funds for any necessary alterations (Arthur Rogers, her executor, was left land at the bottom of the garden to build a separate cottage, Lynn Cottage). In 1911, a Newcastle architect (by name of Scaif, understood to be architect to Newcastle Monthly Meeting) was appointed to carry out the necessary adaptations, involving the addition of a front porch and raising the sashes of the upper storey to increase light into the large meeting room created on the first floor. The downstairs area continued to be divided by an old lath and plaster partition (now removed), and was used for children's meetings and other functions, with a ladies' lavatory at the end of the kitchen and a gents' under the stairs. The first meeting for worship was held on 20 August 1911.

At the outbreak of the First World War the meeting house was temporarily requisitioned by the War Office, but returned to Quaker use in 1916. After the war, repairs included attending to drainage and damp problems (both recurrent issues).

During the Second World War the Meeting House was a base for welfare work, and temporarily housed the congregation from the Congregationalist church in Chapel Lane after that building was bombed in 1940.

After the war, Whitley Bay enjoyed its heyday as a seaside resort, and the Meeting flourished. Attempts were made to alleviate the continuing problem with damp and rot, and electricity was installed in 1954. In 1957 the front garden was paved over and in 1966 the council acquired a three foot strip at the front of the Meeting House in order to widen the pavement.

In 1979 Tristram Spence, architect to Newcastle Monthly Meeting, was appointed to improve the WCs and kitchen, and to try and tackle the damp problem. A small rear extension housing a WC necessitated the demolition of a bay window overlooking the garden. These improvements cost over £6,000. Fittings, decoration, floor and stair coverings were replaced in the mid-1980s, and there were further works of redecoration and repair in 1995 and again in the early 2000s.

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

The meeting house originated as a cottage; the ground floor is the surviving element of a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century cottage, with thick rubble stone walls. The first floor and rear staircase wing were added and the end stacks raised in 1902-3. The paired plate glass ground floor sash windows on either side of the porch probably also date from this time. Further alterations (the timber and glass porch at the centre, the raising of the first floor sashes) took place in 1911 when the building became a Meeting House. The building is of two storeys and three bays, rendered and lined to resemble ashlar blocks. The first floor sashes are narrow, tall and gabled, each of six panes over six, and each breaking through the eaves, maximising light into the meeting room. At the rear, the roof swoops down in catslide form around a gabled and pebbledashed stair addition of 1902-3, while a rendered bay to the right has an original sash window (six panes over six) to the ground floor and a similar window (but with horns on the meeting rail), probably of 1902-3, to the first floor. The pebbledashed lean-to WC addition in front of the staircase wing is of 1979-80; older plans show a bay window here.

From the entrance porch, a four-panelled door with old knocker leads into the ground floor, now a single main space with a chimney breast at one end. Although opened up, this space retains some historic features, such as window shutters and fielded panel doors with old hinges. The Edwardian stair is of open string form, with three stick balusters per tread, square newels and moulded handrails. The first floor is given over to the large space of the meeting room, with a high ceiling plastered under the collars, and with fireplaces of Arts and Crafts character at either end, with glazed tile surrounds and (at one end only) original elaborate cast iron inserts. Old panelled cupboard doors at either end may be reused from downstairs. Although the meeting house was converted to electricity in 1954, many of the old gas fittings survive.

## **2.3. Loose furnishings**

The non-fixed furnishings in the main meeting room are modern – upholstered seats and a low table. Above the fireplace at one end is a framed needlework sampler with alphabet and pious text, by Sarah Holmes, Ackworth School, 1817. Downstairs, over the fireplace is a carved oak leaflet rack given by Miss Clephan of Tynemouth in 1964, inscribed ‘as much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men’.

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

None.

## **2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting**

The Meeting House is in Front Street, a gently-rising thoroughfare, originally a farm track but now a wide and fairly busy traffic route, in the core of the Monkseaton Conservation Area. It has group value with other nearby historic buildings, but its immediate neighbour on one side is a 1960s block of flats of unsympathetic bulk and design. The Meeting House is set back from the road behind a paved front garden and low boundary wall. At the back is a long and fairly narrow garden with fruit trees and vegetable patches, bordered by high rubble stone walls of some antiquity.

## **2.6. Listed status**

The building is not statutorily listed but is included in North Tyneside Council’s Local Register of Buildings and Parks (see entry [here](#)). As a modest survival of a late Georgian vernacular building, retaining some original features, and with major alterations of 1902-3 and 1911 which in themselves are of some architectural and historical interest, the building

might be considered a candidate for statutory listing. However, given the extent of later (post-1911) alterations, the case for listing is considered marginal.

## **2.7. Archaeological potential of the site**

The site lies close to the core of a medieval village, and has been occupied since the late eighteenth century or earlier. It is considered to be of high archaeological potential.

## **Part 3: Current use and management**

*See completed volunteer survey*

### **3.1. Condition**

- i) Meeting House: Poor
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

### **3.2. Maintenance**

The Meeting attempts to keep on top of maintenance, but there are significant fabric problems. The most recent QIR (2011) identified a number of maintenance and repair needs, including poor detailing at the roof junctions with neighbouring properties, dampness, evidence of rot in nearly all the windows and some evidence of dry rot. Since that time, repairs have been carried out to the roof and gulleys and the kitchen window has been replaced (in uPVC). Fire doors have been installed. The damp issue remains unresolved.

### **3.3. Sustainability**

The Meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures taken to reduce environmental impact have included secondary glazing, draught exclusion, installation of a heating timer/thermostat and cultivation of a vegetable and wildlife garden. The Meeting House is accessible by Metro (station with regular services two minutes' walk away), bicycle and on foot, and there is secure space for cycles in the building. For those who drive, there is free parking outside in the street and in a nearby public car park.

### **3.4. Amenities**

The Meeting considers that it has the amenities it needs. These include an attractive first floor meeting room capable of accommodating sixty people, with library, a similarly-sized lower room for children's meeting and refreshments, a kitchen and two WCs, front and back lobbies and a lower ground floor storage area with water pump. There is an extensive garden at the rear. There is no resident warden.

### **3.5. Access**

A Disability Audit was conducted in 2003 and subsequent measures have included improved lighting, non-slip floor surfaces, additional handrail for the stairs and a removable ramp at the entrance. However the main meeting room is not available for those unable to use the stairs, and the WCs are not to accessible standards.

### **3.6 Community Use**

In addition to Sunday and occasional weekday use by Friends, the Meeting House is theoretically available for six days a week (up to 144 hours for the two spaces). However, the Local Meeting decided in 2005 to restrict lettings, on account of the poor state of the building and its facilities, and lack of key holders to open the building to users. Nevertheless it is used three times a year by Buddhists for Saturday retreats, for meetings of a professional group, for private training, by the Cub Scouts, and is opened to the public on Heritage Open

Days. Part of the garden is leased to the occupiers of Lynn Cottage, which is located at the bottom of the garden.

### **3.7. Vulnerability to crime**

The area is generally well cared for and there are no issues of heritage-related or other crime. The building is located near two pubs and a fish and chip shop, and litter gets dropped in the front area.

### **3.8. Plans for change**

Newcastle Area Meeting has agreed to fund a feasibility study to consider improvements to the Meeting House, including addressing the chronic damp problem and improving access to the first floor meeting room.

## **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 lends itself well to its current use. Although not built as a Meeting House, it is a historic, locally listed building, and the necessary improvements should take account of this character, e.g. when window replacement or repair is considered.

*ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use:* There is a long history of wider community use, currently hampered by the poor condition of the building, out-of-date facilities and access issues. Again, any works to address these shortcomings should respect and complement the character and historic features of the building.

*iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House:* Until 1911 the building was in residential use, and most of the twentieth century alterations were also for this use (i.e. in 1902-3). In the event of being laid down, the building could without great difficulty be returned to residential use, provided the historic features and furnishings were retained and respected.

## **Part 5: Category: 3**