Airton Quaker Meeting House; a vernacular building survey

Report author: Alison C Armstrong (independent vernacular buildings recorder)

1. BUILDING NAME; Airton Quaker Meeting House, North Yorkshire

Building Type/Purpose

Friends (Quaker) Meeting House, with attached dwelling (Nook Cottage), with a former three-bay barn.

NGR: SD 904 592

Surveyed by: ACA, DSJ

Survey dates: January and May 2016

2. SITE and SETTING

The building is in the township of Airton and in the parish of Kirby Malham, North Yorkshire. It lies on the edge of the green and near the road that descends the steep river bank to reach the river bridge. The crossing is near the 19thC textile mill which was the site of the medieval corn mill of Bolton Priory. Much of the area was part of monastic estates of Bolton and of Fountains abbeys. The river bridge is largely early 19thC with one large arch and a smaller flood arch. It is likely the bridge has been replaced many times. The hollow-ways on each river bank, and the routes radiating from Airton, indicate the antiquity of the roads which would have been busy and connected the many monastic and other holdings in this once prosperous farming area of Craven.

Opposite the Meeting House (MH) is a rather large 17thC yeoman farmhouse with prominent datestone "WAE" (William and Alice Ellis 1696) and with a very large columbarium in the end of a gabled barn (now a dwelling). Dovecotes continued to be a sign of status in the post medieval times so William probably held some status in the area as a yeoman farmer. The influence of the Ellis family is reflected in the Meeting House where the door head is inscribed "WAE 1700". It is remarkable that William made trips to America where a number of Quakers had settled in the 17thC.

The Meeting House here appears in a prominent position in the village centre but, as in many barns, its doorway faced into the long croft which it served on the north. Other meeting houses took place in old barns and that at Rylstone stood at the edge of the former arable fields which is marked by a great bank or "fosse" The building was called Fosse or Fox barn. The MH in Addingham stands in the grounds of Farfield Hall where the Myers family were patrons. The Meeting Houses in Settle and Skipton however are in roads just off busy market squares. Barns however have often featured as meeting places for early groups of local Quakers. In Rylstone meetings were held in a barn at Scale House until a barn in the common fields was acquired for a permanent meeting house (R Harland).

Earthwork banks in the burial ground at Airton may suggest there were once other structures here. Perhaps there were helms for hay storage. The field close behind the meeting house retains the stone gateposts of a former entry. The field retained an irregular curved wall in 1850 (OS map) but by 1898 the field walls have been straightened to a rectangular shape.

The entry door into the meeting house is on the south side of the building, via a stone gateway on the gable end. The building, like most barns, faced into its croft. The Ellis house opposite with its large columbarium suggests the site of a medieval farmhouse or "grange". The shape of the MH building complex on the OS map 1850 appears to include the linear meeting house, with Nook Cottage and its porch and then the barn at right angles. There was also a building attached on the south side of the barn which is no longer there.

3. DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

This survey provides an interpretation of the building only from reading the fabric. Documentary records have not been greatly used or were not available. Whitaker's History of Craven has a note (p. 252) that in 1709 the widowed Alice Ellis gave land (29 acres and moor) to a trust for the Quakers to farm. The meeting house is inscribed WAE 1700 (William and Alice Ellis) but the building structure retains a large plinth and low eaves line and re-used cruck blades which indicate it was an agricultural cruck building dating from before 1600 and possibly from about 1500 as local dendrochronology is proving. The 3-bay barn now attached to Nook cottage may have been a 19thC replacement during the 19thC boom years.

.....

4. DETAILED DESCRIPTION

4.1 Materials:

The Meeting House (MH) walling is nearly all of limestone cobbles with a plinth of large field-clearance boulders. By contrast, boulders and cobbles of sandstone are more prominent in Nook Cottage walling and in the barn, indicating different building phases. Dark limestone quoins, roughly dressed, pre-date the peck-dressed sandstone quoins of Nook Cottage porch and barn. Dark limestone blocks feature in the 19thC raised roof of the barn. Dressed window surrounds are of 17thC and 18thC dates and of

local gritstone and sandstone. Sandstone flags are used for roofing. Interior timber includes a screen of oak panels with bevelled edges which are probably of imported timber from the Baltic area. Wide timber planks of softwood for the screen and the elders' seats were also imported. The interior fittings at Hemplands House in Conistone, Wharfedale, (built in the 1680s) included imported "fir deals and Norway oak" although roof for the timber was from Barden Forest. The MH roof trusses are oak and include re-used waney oak from an earlier cruck structure of pre-1600 date.

19thC stone surrounds for some windows are cut by frame-saw and then tooled. 20thC surrounds retain traces of cutting with a frame-saw without hand tooling.

4.2 Exterior detail:

The buildings now form an L-shape enclosing the western corner of the rectangular burial ground. The building complex consists of the Meeting House (MH), Nook Cottage and a three-bay barn (now converted). The MH is created from an earlier building, almost certainly a cruck-framed barn.

4.2.1 South elevation; the Meeting House frontage and the upper gable of the barn. See fig 1.

The S facade includes the frontage of the Meeting House which has a "basket-arch" shape of door lintel dated WAE 1700 (William and Ann Ellis). The datestone is partly hidden by an added 18thC door canopy or hood which is supported on two projecting flaggy sandstones with broad-tooling and classical ogee mouldings. Nook Cottage porch also has ogee kneeler stones but of coarser sandstone. The boulder plinth around the meeting house is from an older structure and is here cut by the 1700 doorway. The doorway is of good dressed sandstone with "long and short" quoins. The quoins are not symmetrical and that on the left bottom forms a facing to the rough plinth, whilst the top jamb is very narrow to fit the space below the lintel.

The ground floor windows of 1700 are shallow and have typical tall, slim, mullions with lights that are wider and typically less deep than in 17thC windows. They have been enlarged later by extending the mullions and side jambs to make taller windows. The windows overlook the garden burial ground. The gallery, on the first floor has an un-altered two light window set in a heightened roof. The two chimney stacks on the roof are c1700 and again with ogee mouldings. The right hand chimney has two pots with flues for the two meeting house fireplaces. The left chimney is bigger but also houses two pots and flues for Nook cottage. This chimney sits on top of the joint wall between the MH and Nook Cottage. The line of the slates on the roof between the two buildings is well-defined and it appears midway on the chimney stack. The space inside the roof is very soot-blackened on this joint wall.

There is evidence that the MH building once had lower walls and limestone quoins and has been heightened in several phases. It was almost certainly a cruck-framed barn. The stone walling has typical "slobbered rubble" disguising the rubble stonework which is mostly of limestone cobbles and some sandstone. The walling to the left, near the barn, has a wavy vertical rebuild line. It is fairly common for quoins to be removed at wall corners and reused for a wall extension whilst the old wall corner is patched up. It is likely that this has happened here as there is a line of rather large sandstones running up to the wavy joint line with Nook Cottage. The quoins may have been removed and re-used which accounts for the mixed quoins on the Cottage. Evidence of the earlier roof line for a thatched barn is also seen at this joint.

The walling of Nook Cottage is notably of sandstone cobbles and contrasts with the Meeting House that is largely of limestone. The plinth around the MH disappears into the barn but probably wrapped around the entire MH area as a three or four bay cruck barn. Above the heightened walling, at the gutter level, the foot of one of the 1700 roof truss timbers (which are re-used crucks) can be seen projecting through the wall where the trusses have been reset on a heightened roof.

Nook Cottage appears to have been attached to the MH building by using cobbles mostly of sandstone and re-using the older quoin stones pulled out of the old gable.

The upper gable of the barn (fig 1) shows raised eaves on the gable sides with heightened walling using dark grey limestone for walling and as small limestone quoins. These raised lines are seen also on the barn frontage and rear. There is a low opening in the centre of the wall which is now partly buried in the hillside but may have been a mucking-out hole or a shippon door. The upper windows are modern but the central one has a chamfered stone used for a lintel.

4.2.2 North elevation of the Meeting House and Nook Cottage (see road side elevation fig 2)

The meeting house has a large plinth of clearance boulders (about 55cm high) with some large limestone quoins. The plinth terminates by a waving vertical walling joint that separates the MH on the left from Nook cottage on the right. The joint is wavy as the former quoin stones, which marked the end of the earlier building, were removed when Nook cottage was added and the stones were reused for the new end which has mixed quoins. There are differences between the two phases left and right of the vertical joint. Above the boulder plinth are what appear to be several phases of lower walling, reaching upward as high as the 19thC window and is of well-coursed rubble and with limestone quoins. Above this, much of the wall is of rubble and includes the large 19thC window and the small c1700 "reading window". The quoins include a prominent sandstone. Above this level, and up to the top of the 19thC window is walling from further heightening that is seen on the south side. The eaves of the MH building seem to have been heightened several times and lastly as Nook Cottage was added.

The walling of Nook Cottage, which is predominantly of orange-coloured sandstone rather than grey limestone, seems to be of mixed builds with the lower mullioned window (18thC) being inserted into the wall. The large central mullion may be a re-used king mullion. The porch has been added covering an earlier doorway with 18thC narrow chamfers and plinth blocks. The porch appears rather 17thC/18thC with moulded coping stones, classical ogee-moulded kneelers and arched light. The doorway however has a lintel that looks 19thC but in a 17thC style. Later, probably 19thC, the coal shed was added with access from the porch. The chimney

for the cottage sits on the former gable wall of the MH and is of ashlar and looks c 1700 in date. The large 19thC projecting chimney breast in Nook Cottage however belongs to the cottage. Both chimneys have flues for two fireplaces.

4.2.3 East elevation; Meeting House gable and barn (see fig 3)

The MH plinth of clearance boulders (from an older phase) is well seen on the right, suggesting a building of nearer 1600 or late medieval. The quoins of the roadside elevation are clearly seen with a suggestion of a change of walling material going diagonally up the wall. The chimney flues have been cut into the wall.

The barn once had the same eaves height as the MH and Nook. In the mid 19thC it was heightened above Nook Cottage and reroofed. Most of the doors and windows are part of the modern conversion and only part of the low end doorway has chamfered jambs. Old photos show this was formerly a narrow doorway and probably in situ. This barn now butts against Nook Cottage wall showing it was built after Nook cottage was established. The corner is very disturbed by heightening of the MH, Nook Cottage and the barn as seen in fig 1 and fig 3.

4.2.4 West elevation; Nook Cottage gable and barn frontage (see fig 4)

Two of the windows in Nook Cottage are 19thC. Walling is mostly sandstone as already noted. The lower window (the under-stair pantry) has jambs made from mullioned windows. The porch and coal place projects at the front.

There is a prominent quoined straight joint of dark limestone separating Nook Cottage from the barn. The barn gable has been heightened above the cottage but was once the same height. One barn forking hole with quoined sides crosses the raised walling. The windows in the barn are mostly modern. The central door opening looks original and suggests a bank-barn plan with a hay mew on the first floor and shippons or stables below. This is a Cumbrian style. There is evidence of a former cart track across the green to the low end of the barn, but this access now disappears under a modern driveway. The track seems to have served the low end bay of the barn which has a cart entry with a large stone lintel. The lintel is lengthened by the use of an internal ogee

4.3 Interior detail;

4.3.1 Meeting house (see plan fig 5)

The interior space is divided into two parts by an oak screen with gallery above. The meeting room is thus single storey whilst the gallery is of two storeys providing heated rooms with fireplaces above and below. The screen has opening shutters so that it can connect with the main room. The screen is supported on posts which incorporate the gallery ceiling beams and floor joists and the stair up to the balcony. The meeting room has a plain white plastered ceiling but this has been coloured lime-wash in the past. The ceiling underdraws the three roof trusses of 1700 hidden above. The west end has a raised gallery (for the elders) of softwood, whilst the stairs at each side have Georgian ramped panelling of 18thC.

The screen appears to date from around 1700 but may contain timber of different ages possibly salvaged or recycled from elsewhere. The four-panel door into the storied bay appears fragile in the way it is held together. The "butterfly hinges" of the shutters are an old style although still used in 1700. Some of the oak panels have bevelled edges suggesting they were once part of vertical plank and muntin panelling of 17thC. The lack of timber knots and evidence of rather straight saw marks suggest these are not local timber but 17thC imports from Norway or the Baltic ports.

The first floor beams of the gallery are heavily varnished but have 17thC style lambs tongue chamfer stops which are barely visible as the screen and posts hides them. The posts of the balcony appear to be fitted into stone in the floor and possibly the wide pre-1850 floorboards are a later addition. The floor boards are mostly wide (pre 1850) and look re-used but the dark staining makes tree species difficult to tell. The narrow boards are post 1850 date. The timber generally suggests making do or recycling of older materials.

Ironwork too seems a mixture of dates but all could cover a 1700 date. The six-panel door to the stair has a blacksmith-made latch. "Butterfly" hinges are usually 16th and 17thC but continue into the 18thC. There are 18thC "L-H" form hinges on the front door. The two stone fireplaces have a pediment over a very deep lintel. The rather narrow jambs have wide-chamfers and cavetto (hollow moulded) chamfer stops. The date is probably early 18thC and likely to be near the 1700 date seen on the doorhead.

The roof seems rather steeper than normal for the area. Three **roof trusses** (see drawing fig 6) can be seen in the loft space. The general form of the trusses display a morticed apex with a square-set ridge piece. There are struts between the tie beam and principal rafters. The original straight struts seem to have been reinforced by the addition of very curved higher struts. These have been seen in other 18thC buildings in Craven. Many of the rafters have been replaced but the purlins and tie beams and principal rafters are made from massive oak beams with clear signs of re-use. The half-lap joinery seen is typical of the carpentry techniques used on local cruck structures from medieval times to early 17thC. Most date from before 1610. Those of monastic date are usually of quality oak supplied by the monastery. After the Dissolution, ashwood crucks were used in new barns built in the hay meadows, such as in Kilnsey. One truss (see fig 6) shows well the inward curving former cruck blades re-used as principal rafters. Trenches can be seen that supported cruck purlins on the outer curve of the cruck blade whilst diagonal cuts and pegs held the horizontal tie beams and collars. Truss 3 (just inside the access hatch) exhibits a clear half-lap joint with a peghole probably for a wind brace. Carpenters red chalk marking out lines also remain. This tie beam also holds the screen. The massive purlins and tie beams have evidence of being cut down in size from larger cruck timbers to fit this roof. Pegging seems minimal and in Wharfedale this is common c1700. Many rafters are full of nails as if they originally held lathe and plaster. Perhaps this was from the shippon of the old cruck barn. A feature of the roof is the soot blackening especially near the wall with Nook Cottage

The gallery, being in the last roof bay, is able to have a higher ceiling than the meeting room. This allows good access to see the roof timbers.

4.3.2 The added Nook Cottage

The cottage is wide at 9m x7m and its plan type belongs to the "end stack with direct entry" group. This is quite a common plan but also one of the simplest. The house is only of two bays with the main entry into the larger housebody room. This was the main living and cooking room and the fireplace is on the gable. The second, smaller room, usually a parlour, is now a kitchen and has no fire place but retains a ceiling with a good beam and close-set joists. The timber may be re-used as it includes incomplete circle markings, possibly apotropaic. Beyond the parlour is the dairy which is partly under the stair but lit by a small splayed window. During the Window Tax dairies were exempt.

The **porch** is dated stylistically to early 18thC by the kneelers and coping stones and round-headed gable light. One porch kneeler has an ogee moulding and one a cavetto moulding which suggests re-used stone. The porch doorway is quite roughly finished inside with no internal chamfer and the doorhead is in a 17thC style but with 19thC tooling and differs from the jamb stones. There was an earlier 18thC **entry doorway** before the porch was added and this has a narrow chamfer to good stonework and would give a direct entry into the housebody. Also in the porch is the narrow door to the added 19thC coal house. The **housebody** or living room is rectangular and contains the stair up. The stair has been boarded-in with tongue and groove planks and also 26cm softwood planks. The fireplace is of gritstone with a large lintel and plain stone jambs and of likely early 19thC date. The back of the fireplace however has been hollowed out of the wall making a stone-lined hood. In the wall above can be seen a large timber beam. It is possible this is a bressumer beam which once held a timber and plaster firehood but more likely contrived to fit a flue against an existing stone wall. This was never a longhouse plan. There is no doorway near the stack and no passage cutting through the boulder plinth and the house is only two cells long.

There are two spine beams across the room both of which finish with decorative lambs tongue chamfer stops typically of 17thC date. The gallery also has these suggesting they are both c1700. A narrow recess in the window corner may have been a cupboard near the fireplace.

A doorway leads into the adjacent narrow room, usually a parlour but there is no fireplace although it is now lit by modern windows looking across the green. There is a good ceiling with a beam across the room and closely set joists with chamfer stops like those in housebody. The timbers have had some repairs where they were split and woodworm damaged. The older timbers retain some inscribed markings made with a carpenters compass into a circles and incomplete "petals". The six-petal flower within compass circles is an ancient and often seen symbol in barns and houses. It is seen carved into stone doorhead designs (eg Church House in Grassington Main Street) and into 17^{th} C plaster walls of a carpenters workshop in Langcliffe and into timbers such as on the Great Barn at Bolton Priory (dendro date 1517) or onto shippon posts in barns. Now generally labelled as apotropaic there is considerable recent interest in such carvings. These timbers may be re-used (from an old Lambert property?). The stepped doorway from the dairy into the barn is probably modern. The upstairs was not examined but a photo of part of the roof showed what appeared to be a row of thick paired rafters onto a ridge timber. Paired rafters are usually of medieval date. Where did these come from, if that's what they are?

4.3.3 The added barn

This is a three bay barn built down a slope. It has a heightened roofline. Its plan seems unusual and is not a typical barn with shippon, hay storage and threshing floor. The low end bay is separated from the other two bays by a stone wall (19thC?) replacing the usual roof truss. It looks as if there was a basement cart shed at the low end and a doorway into the burial ground. Perhaps there was a granary above. The jambs of an original doorway, now widened, remains accessing the burial ground. Over the remaining floor area there is one bolted roof truss, of about 1840 date. These bays do show possible ventilator slits on an old photo, which indicate hay storage. A possibly forking hole remains in the front wall and crosses the raised roof line. One would expect a forking hole in the gable but this was not visible to inspect. Inside, the three bay barn has now been converted from agricultural use. The central window on the stair may be an earlier doorway. Modern stairs lead up into a community space created from two bays and this retains one roof truss on a heightened roofline (seen outside). This is a kingpost structure with struts to kingpost and principal rafters and is of imported and machine sawn timber. The kingpost and principal rafters are bolted to the tie beam. There are traces of carpenters pencil marking-out lines for the bolts. The purlins are all machine sawn and cut to lap over the back of the principal rafters. The truss is likely to be of late 19th or early 20thC date and possibly dates from the heightened roof. The timber has been stained but looks like continental (or American) hardwood.

5. PLAN FORM (See plan fig 5)

The three buildings of the group are all rectangular and separated by straight joints which indicate the phases.

The meeting house is a four bay building, formerly a cruck structure. In plan the MH is very similar to that at Rylstone, except that the gallery there is now a cottage. The fireplaces are very similar in style.

The Nook cottage belongs to the "end stack/ direct entry" plan group.

The barn is of three bays.

6. DATING and INTERPRETATION

The large plinth of limestone boulders, and low walling with limestone quoins around the meeting house, and the reused cruck trusses are likely to be from the earliest building, probably a barn on the edge of the green, and pre 1610 or so in date. It is unclear if the plinth is also present on the west side, now covered by Nook Cottage. This building was heightened for the MH and the old cruck timbers re-used for the new roof.

Nook Cottage appears added to the new MH building with wavy straight joints visible (see fig 1 and 2). This may be where quoins were pulled out to re-use. The interior beams have the same chamfer stops as in the MH.

The Meeting House has many features that match the 1700 datestone. One of the most significant alterations in 1700 was the removal of the old internal timber cruck frame, likely to be of pre-1610 date. This seems to be of oak rather than ashwood and possibly late medieval in date. Its location on the green suggests however that a date of 1600 is more likely. Only dendrochronology dating can give an exact date of felling the tree. Timber was used green so would have been fabricated into trusses very soon after felling. If the building was never in monastic ownership, then the cruck building is likely to have been part of the great rebuilding by new landowners and freeholders around 1600 rather than medieval (see Fig 6 reconstructing the cruck timber frame). Monastic timber is nearly always oak whereas a mix of oak or ash was used locally.

In 1700 the oak crucks were saved and made into new trusses on heightened walls. Three trusses are seen in the roof space including carpenters red chalk setting out lines. One re-used cruck clearly shows half lap joints for a collar, a tie beam and two sets of purlins (see fig 6 reconstruction). Some of the old cruck purlins are re-used as purlins in the present roof.

The building may have originated as a barn or "field house" encroachment on the communal green. It does not seem to be part of a planned village layout. It is unclear if it was once a longer building with a house attached but this seems unlikely. Houses in Cracoe, for example, are still very long buildings with a house and attached barn and evidence of cross passage entries survives. They have documentary evidence as 16thC long houses amongst the Clifford estate surveys. The buildings there were part of a planned layout with long crofts behind each farm. The MH looks more like an encroachment on the green near the road and river crossing. There is no evidence of a cross passage or associated long crofts of regular shape.

Along with the Meeting House plinth there are limestone walling quoins. Some are in situ and relate to an earlier, lower roof line from a cruck phase. Some are re-used and mixed with sandstone quoins during alterations and additions. In the later 17thC sandstone was usual for dressed work.

In 1700 the timber was saved for re-use, in the usual manner, and the walls heightened to the present roof line. A carpenter made up three new roof trusses with a typical morticed apex, tie beam, and principal rafters to hold the purlins. The raking struts seem to have been reinforced with very curved ones possibly added later. There was new timber too. The two floor beams of the MH gallery have lambs-tongue stops, although rather hidden by the screen panels, but the stops are also seen in the two beams in the housebody of Nook.

The plain mullioned windows which are not very deeply splayed are also typical and one lights the gallery. The ground floor windows have since been enlarged to longer windows.

The ironwork latches, butterfly hinges, "L-H" hinges also cover the 17th and early 18thC period. Panelling boards of imported timber from Norway and the Baltic are known from other late 17thC houses being built in Wharfedale. With the 17thC "great rebuilding" sandstone rather than lumps of local limestone was used for the dressed masonry as seen here.

The 1700 dated "basket arch" doorway is typical of the date and significantly has been cut through the earlier boulder plinth. The chimney stack is made of ashlar blocks with mouldings. The gallery fireplaces look 18thC and have typical deep lintel with a moulded sill above, and chamfered jambs with cavetto chamfer stops.

The barn seems to have been added to Nook Cottage in the 18thC. Its plan is not of usual type and there seem to be no shippons. The cart entry is small but may have had a granary over it. In the mid-19thC c 1840 the barn was heightened and given a new bolted kingpost. Wall vents indicate the upper floor was perhaps for hay storage

7. OTHER INFORMATION

7.1.Initials/Datestones;

WAE 1700 (William and Alice Ellis)
The large yeoman farmhouse opposite is dated WAE 1696.

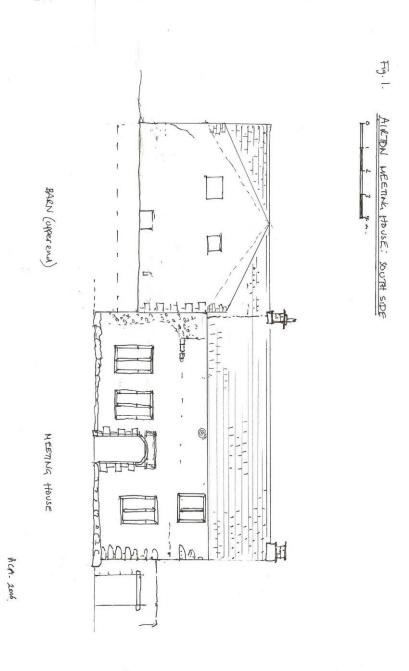
7.2.Oral information from owner/occupier;

Dr Laurel Phillipson is researching documentary history.

8. DRAWINGS ATTACHED

Elevations: south (fig 1); north (fig 2); east (fig 3); west (fig 4). Plan (fig 5)
Roof trusses (fig 6)

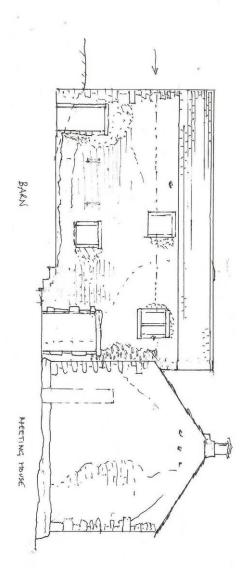
END



ACR 2016

MEETING HOUSE

NOOK COTTAGE



ACA 2016

TY S. MIKTON HERTING POUS: EAST SIDE

