

COANWOOD
NEAR HALTWHISTLE
NORTHUMBERLAND
NE49 0PU



TRADITION: SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
(‘QUAKER’)

BUILT: 1760

MEETING ACTIVE UNTIL: 1960

LISTING: GRADE II*

OS GRID REFERENCE:
NY709590

DELIBERATELY SIMPLE QUAKER
BUILDING OF 1760 IN BEAUTIFUL
UPLAND COUNTRYSIDE

COANWOOD FRIENDS’ MEETING HOUSE



TRANSPORT

Haltwhistle Station is 6 miles away,
there is no bus service.

Coanwood is about 6 miles south of
Haltwhistle and 2 miles east of Coanwood.
We recommend Ordnance Survey map
86 or Google maps to locate the building.
There is a noticeboard on the public road
adjacent. Off-road parking for two cars on
drive, but please do not block access for
farm vehicles which use the lane at all times.

VISIT US

The meeting house is usually left unlocked
during daylight hours. You are welcome
to picnic in the burial ground but please
take away any litter and close the meeting
house door securely behind you to keep
out birds. No toilet facilities onsite.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Coanwood Friends' Meeting House was established in 1760 under the auspices of Cuthbert Wigham, a local landowner who had joined the Society of Friends, or 'Quakers', in 1734. The Wigham family were first established in the area with the purchase of Burn House by a previous Cuthbert Wigham for £100 in 1640. He purchased the manor of Coanwood in 1659 for £300.

The Wigham family lived in Burn House until 1759, when they sold the manor of East Coanwood for the considerable sum of £2,000 and moved to Hargill House (where they live to this day).

The Society of Friends was slower to gain members in Northumberland than in some other areas of Britain – in 1766 the Quaker Joseph Oxley recorded that 'We passed on through the county of Northumberland: here are but few Friends in these parts and meeting houses very few.' Nevertheless, Cuthbert Wigham, was said to 'have known little of the influence of true religion, but took delight in loose and unprofitable company' until his conversion. He joined the society over twenty years before Oxley's visit, and meetings took place in his house from 1737.

From 1753 Wigham set about preaching, travelling as far as Scotland, and in 1760 he granted land for the construction of a meeting house and cemetery, costing a total of £104. Cuthbert died twenty years later on 9th February 1780, and is buried in the grounds of the meeting house.



Left: images courtesy of Marj Baillie,
Haltwhistle Walkers.

ENQUIRE & HIRE

COANWOOD FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE HAS BEEN USED FOR DISPLAYS AND MEETINGS

To find out more visit www.hct.org.uk or contact chapels@hct.org.uk

THE HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST | ST. GEORGE'S GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH,
55 ALIE STREET, ALDGATE, LONDON E1 8EB, UK | REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1017321



THE EXTERIOR

Coanwood is significant in the fact that it has been spared major alteration since construction in 1760.

A simple, slate-roofed stone building, the date of its construction, 1760, is carved on the lintel above the entrance. There is a sloping walled graveyard to the front of the building with typical Quaker gravestones dating from the 19th century.

The graveyard is thought to be full, but owing to Quaker tradition the majority of burials are unmarked. Gravestones were first prohibited in Quaker burial grounds by a Minute of London Yearly Meeting (the Quakers' governing body) in 1717 which also urged the removal of those existing. It was not until 1850 that it was decided that plain headstones of uniform design were not inconsistent with Quaker principles. All of the gravestones to the left of the entrance gate belong to members of the Wigham family, highlighting their enduring association with the Meeting House. The sparse inscriptions comprise only the initials of the deceased and the date in the Julian calendar format.

THE INTERIOR

The interior has a stone flagged floor and is divided into two by a panelled wooden screen.

The larger room is the main meeting room with a central aisle dividing seven rows of open-backed wooden benches facing west. At the west end, two additional rows face the other seven and are raised – sometimes called the Stand or Elders' bench.

The simple wooden benches inside are a rare survival of the historic Quaker layout. The smaller room has a fireplace centre of the east wall and iron hob grate.

At one time, the smaller room was used by the Coanwood Reading Society, and there was a small library in the meeting house with loan records going back to 1824.

FURTHER READING

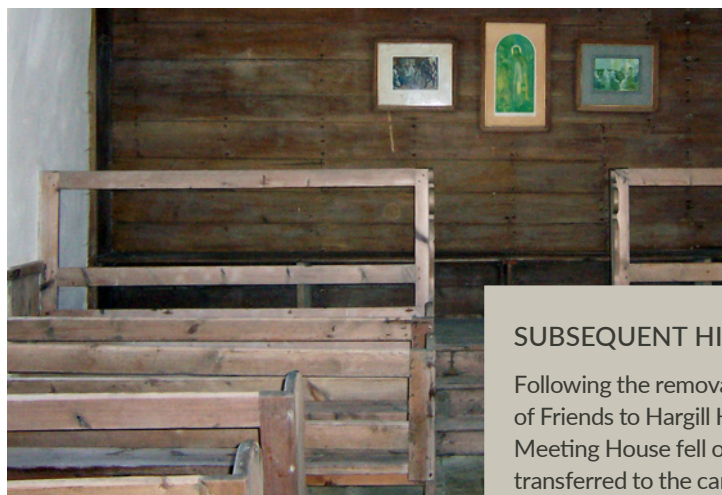
David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain, Volume 1: Bedfordshire - Northumberland* (London, 1998)

English Heritage List Entry, 'Friends Meeting House, East Coanwood', No. 1042914

George Richardson, *Some Account of the Rise of the Society of Friends in Cornwood, Northumberland, Especially in Connexion with the Family of Cuthbert Wigham, the First Individual who Joined it there* (London, 1848)

Hexham Quakers,
Coanwood Friends Meeting House
www.hexhamquakers.org.uk

www.coanwood.com provides a good overview of chronological developments



The raise bench for elders of the meeting is sometimes called the Stand.

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Following the removal of the Society of Friends to Hargill House in 1960, the Meeting House fell out of use, and was transferred to the care of the Historic Chapels Trust in 1998.