



at a glance...

AIRTON FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE – A SHORT HISTORY

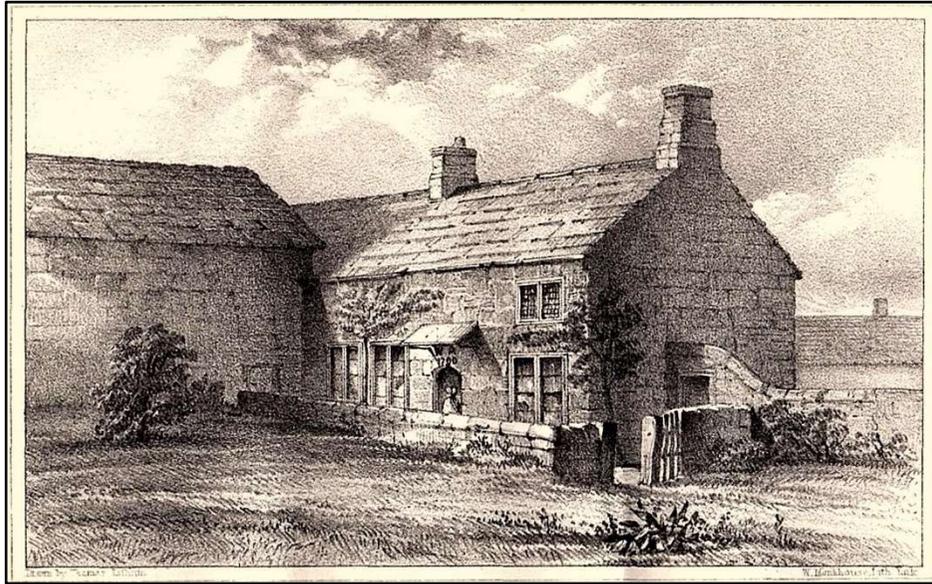
Recent historical research and vernacular buildings survey demonstrate that the Airton Meeting House was purpose-built at the end of the 16th or very early in the 17th century, on land owned by ancestors of the Civil War Major General, John Lambert. It continued to be owned by the Major General and his family until it was sold to Quakers William and Alice Ellis in 1700.

Quaker meetings were held here from 1652 or 1653. George Fox probably met John Lambert here in May or June 1652. A leading Quaker, Gervase Benson, who preached here in the 1650s, described the Meeting House as *a barn in a field in Airton*.

When William and Alice Ellis refurbished the Meeting House in about 1694, it had been used by Quakers for 40 years and as a dissenters' meeting place for half a century before that. Probably it was originally a principal meeting place of the Seekers, a significant but little-known religious movement of the 16th and 17th centuries, many of whose adherents became early Quakers.

Evidence for these statements and further information is set out in the book: *Hidden in Plain Sight, History and Architecture of the Airton Meeting House* by Laurel Phillipson and Alison Armstrong, 2017, Quacks Books, York (for sale at the Meeting House). Some of the most significant points are given on the opposite page.

- Built c.1610, Airton Meeting House may be the oldest purpose-built dissenters meeting place in the UK.
- It incorporates remnants of an older stone barn.
- Perhaps originally associated with the Seeker movement, it has been used by Quakers since the mid-1650s.
- It is closely associated with Major General Lambert, whose family home was in the adjacent village of Calton.
- It was probably visited by George Fox in 1652, and by other leading Quakers in the earliest years of the Quaker movement. Up to 1660, the Skipton-Rylstone-Airton area was a major centre of Quaker activity and administration.
- The Airton Meeting House interior and exterior and the entire complex of buildings are substantially unaltered from their 17th and early 18th century appearance.
- A 17th century oak, drop-shuttered partition wall in the Meeting House was a prototype for similar features in several later Quaker meeting houses.
- The 1700 datestone over the Meeting House doorway commemorates its purchase by William and Alice Ellis, who endowed it to Quakers, from the Lambert estate. This is sometimes mistaken for the date of its construction.



19th century engraving by Thomas Latham, appearing in 'The Life and Correspondence of William and Alice Ellis', James Backhouse (published Charles Gilpin: London 1849)

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Brief Historical Notes on the **Airton Meeting House**

