

Quaker Meeting House, Kingsbridge

Leigham Terrace, 81b Fore Street, Kingsbridge, Devon, TQ7 1AB

National Grid Reference: SX 73475 44387



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a vernacular building (possibly of the nineteenth century) formerly in industrial use which has been sympathetically converted. It has overall medium significance.

Evidential value

Very little is known about the date, purpose and development of the building. The built fabric has the potential to provide more information about its past. It has high evidential value.

Historical value

The meeting house has served a variety of previous uses, including as a bakery, printing works and architect's studio. It has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is a plain vernacular building of local rubble stone and brick. It is picturesquely sited in a narrow alley off the main street in Kingsbridge. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house has been in Quaker use since 1991 and is also used by local community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Devon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0014990*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Limited for Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *South Hams District Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Kingsbridge*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Kingsbridge*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *Possibly nineteenth century*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *11 May 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Hugh Morton*
- 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, pp. 137-8
Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991, p. 86
Kingsbridge Quaker Trail, leaflet, no date
The Architectural History Practice, 'Sacred Heart, Kingsbridge', Taking Stock RC Diocese of Plymouth, 2009
Local Meeting Survey by Roger Grimley, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

There was a Quaker meeting at Kingsbridge by 1668. In 1697, a plot in Fore Street was acquired for £9 for a meeting house and a burial ground. A meeting house was built in 1703; it was re-roofed in 1802. In 1871, the meeting was discontinued and the building was let to Freemasons and the Salvation Army. In 1879, another burial ground nearby (at the corner of Dunscombe Street and Fore Street) was sold to the trustees of the town lands and in 1881 the burials were exhumed and moved to the small burial ground behind the meeting house. In 1917, the former meeting house was sold to the Roman Catholic congregation. (The building is still in use as a Catholic chapel; it is grade II listed.)

The present meeting house building was acquired in 1991 and refurbished. It had previously served as a bakery, as part of the adjacent printings works and as an artist's studio, among other uses. The refurbishment included the insertion of a new stair and the blocking of a former door.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The entrance elevation faces west. The meeting house is a two-storey building on an oblong plan. The walls are of rubble stone and some brick with one reused block of dressed stone with a mortice hole at the southwest corner. The gabled slate roof has clay ridge tiles. The three-bay west elevation has the entrance door at the centre under a segmental brick arch, flanked by a window to the north (which replaced a door in 1991) and another window to the south with a brick segmental arch. The south elevation has a capped external stack whose upper part is of brick, as well as one ground floor window and two first floor windows. The rear (east) elevation has another ground-floor window under a segmental brick arch. Most of the rear elevation is taken up by lean-to sheds belonging to the terrace to the east. All the windows are modern.

The ground floor has a small library and meeting room to the south. This has painted rubble walls, with a brick and stone projection on the south and east walls. The kitchen and the toilet are to the north, with the stair of 1991 along the north wall. A former connecting door into the former printing works to the north has been blocked with breeze blocks. The first floor is the main meeting room, lit by two gable windows and three rooflights. The east and west walls are painted rubble stone and the roof trusses with collar beams are exposed.

2.3 Loose furnishings

The ground floor room has three benches; two more are in the meeting rooms. All have inverted Y-shaped bench ends. They are said to come from the former meeting house at Plymouth (now Swarthmore).

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is located in a small alley called Leigham Terrace, opposite the Shambles on Fore Street. The building projects at right angles to the alleyway which continues around it to a short terrace (nos. 5-9 Leigham Terrace) to the east. The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. The building attached to the north (the former printing works) was recently converted to residential use.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed. Very little is known about its history and date. On present evidence it appears to be too altered to be eligible for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

Kingsbridge was established before the Norman Conquest and the current town centre plan still reflects the medieval burgrave plots. It is not known if there was a previous building on the site but it seems likely. The site has high archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

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

3.2 Maintenance

A new quinquennial inspection report has been commissioned and is due soon. The local meeting has enough money to maintain and repair the building.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include:

- Climate change & energy efficiency: review of the heating system
- Transport: car share and use of public transport where possible

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate and would not consider obtaining one.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs. These are all in the meeting house. There is no resident Warden. The meeting is accessible by public transport. There is no parking on site and no secure parking for bicycles (which can, however, be left in the entrance hall).

3.5 Access

Only the ground floor has level access and when necessary meetings are held in the lower meeting room. There is no accessible toilet, no hearing loop and no facilities for partially-sighted people. No Disability Access Audit has been conducted as the meeting considers that (physical) access to the ground floor is manageable for most disabilities.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 3-4 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings all day and every day except Sundays. It is used for an average of 2-3 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy which welcomes groups whose aims are broadly in sympathy with Friends beliefs. Free use is granted to those in need of financial support or encouragement. Users value the building because of its quiet, peaceful and prayerful atmosphere and the reasonable letting charges.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. There has been no heritage crime, general crime or other incidents. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is currently no liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team and there is no need to do so at present.

3.8 Plans for change

There are no plans for change.

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 was converted to Quaker use in 1991 and still meets the needs of the meeting. The stair and room divisions are modern and could be altered if necessary.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house has all the facilities required at present by its users.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the meeting be laid down or decide to sell the building, it could easily be converted to a new use, possibly even residential like the adjoining building.

Part 5: Category: 3