

Quaker Meeting House, Minehead

9 Bancks Street, Minehead, Somerset, TA24 5DJ

National Grid Reference: SS 96890 46112



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was built in 1903 by the Plymouth Brethren for their own use, but passed into commercial use after the First World War. It was acquired by the Society of Friends in 1975. The architect has not been identified. The building is a modest but attractive example of Edwardian architecture and is of medium heritage significance.

Evidential value

It seems unlikely that there are any archaeological deposits beneath the meeting house which is of low evidential value.

Historical value

The building has a varied history, beginning with the Plymouth Brethren and including use as a church hall and a photographic studio. The Quaker connection begins only in 1975. The building is of medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is a pleasing and typical example of Edwardian architecture and is of medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house was built in 1903 as a place of public worship. It has been used by Quakers since 1976 and increasingly by other local groups. The building has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *West Somerset*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0024250*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *West Somerset Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Minehead*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Minehead, Wellington Square*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1903*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *10 October 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Faith Cartwright*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *detached burial ground at Alcombe*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
 - Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 2, p. 541
 - Sully, Michael, *Quakers in Minehead from the 1650s to the present day*, Minehead Museum Project Series 4, 2016
 - Victoria County History of Somerset* (forthcoming)
 - Local Meeting survey from Chris Lawson, April 2016
 - Information on deeds provided by Chris Lawson

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

2.1 Historical background

Friends were meeting in Minehead by 1674 and by 1689 had built a new meeting house with a burial ground behind the market place. In 1717 Susan Turner leased land at Alcombe on the outskirts of Minehead for a burial ground, presumably replacing the earlier one. The meeting was discontinued in 1814 and the meeting house was converted to a school and then demolished in 1822 (Sully). The Alcombe burial ground was leased to Wesleyan Methodists in 1846, who built a chapel on the site in 1850. The meeting revived in 1938 and gathered at first in hired rooms. In 1975 Friends purchased a building in Banckes Street which had been erected in 1903 for The Plymouth Brethren but was sold in 1908 to the Parish Church and used as a church hall until 1958, when passed into commercial use as a photographer's

studio and shop. The building was adapted internally and opened for meetings in 1976. A suspended ceiling was added to the main meeting space in 1998 and improvements were made to the toilets and kitchen in 2000.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building is single-storeyed and rectangular on plan, with an outshot on the north side. The walls are faced with red sandstone, with dressings of Ham Hill stone and the pitched roof is covered with slate. All the architectural detail is concentrated on the gabled west-facing street front. The central doorway has a moulded segmental head set in a stone surround. On either side are rectangular window openings with a single transom and moulded heads. Above the entrance is a triple window with small-paned glazing set in a stone surround. The northern outshot has an opening with a moulded segmental head which was originally a doorway but has been converted into a window. The side elevations are much plainer, with red brick dressings to the window openings.

The entrance door leads into a full-height lobby, where the roof trusses are visible up to collar level. A stair leads up to an open loft. The main meeting room has a match boarded dado, plain plastered walls and a modern suspended ceiling with lighting panels which was inserted in 1998.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no loose furnishings of heritage interest.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

N/A

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

As the recent edition of Pevsner's *Buildings of England* notes, Banckes Street is a minor civic centre, with the former Reading Room, the Public Library, the Masonic Hall, the Church Institute, the United Reformed Church and what is now the Friends Meeting House grouped loosely together in a turning off the High Street.

On the outskirts of Minehead in Combeland Road, Alcombe (NGR SS977449), is the site of a former Quaker burial ground dating from 1717. The ground was leased to the Methodists in 1846 and a chapel built. The site was sold out of Friends' ownership in 1935 and is now a private house and garden.

2.6 Listed status

The building is not a candidate for the statutory list or the local list, though it does form part of an interesting group of modest public and semi-public buildings dating from the decades either side of 1900.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The earlier settlement centres of Minehead are elsewhere, and the site has low 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): N/A

3.2 Maintenance

The last Quinquennial Inspection was made in October 2014 by Clive Madge MRICS. The building was found to be generally in good condition and well-maintained with no major structural problems. Most of the recommendations in the report have been attended to. There is no 5-year maintenance and repair plan based; works are done on an *ad hoc* basis.

3.3 Sustainability

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

- Climate change & energy efficiency: the building was re-roofed in 2013 and additional insulation installed; all windows have double or secondary glazing; solar panels have been installed on the roof.
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: water consumption reduced; recycling bins provided.
- Wildlife and nature conservation: This is a town-centre site with no green space.

The meeting house has an Energy Performance Certificate issued in 2012: energy efficiency level D, energy impact level 98. Several improvements have been made to the building since 2012 but the meeting does not plan to obtain a new certificate.

3.4 Amenities

The meeting has all the amenities it needs within the meeting house. These include one large meeting room, storage space for use by user groups and two toilets, one adapted for use by disabled people. There is no resident warden. The meeting is in the town centre with a good daytime bus service. There is parking space for one car on site. Street parking is easy on Sunday and in the evenings and there are public car parks within 5 mins walk.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities, with a ramp to the front door. Inside the building all rooms are accessible apart from the storage loft. There is an accessible toilet and a hearing loop, but no special facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit has not been conducted; the meeting has relied on the QI for guidance on necessary improvements.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 3-4 hours on Sundays and 2-3 hours on 'First Fridays' in each month. The building is available for community lettings for 50-60 per week and is let for about 15-20 hours per week (use varies with the time of year). The meeting has a lettings policy which excludes organisations whose aims and policies are in serious conflict with Quaker beliefs and values. Free use is occasionally allowed at the discretion of the PM. Users value the building for its town centre location, good size and good facilities.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There has been no serious crime or heritage crime (though a smart water system was set up at the insurer's request). No crimes have been reported to the police. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low levels of deprivation (in the immediate area) and high community confidence. Friends would consider making contact with the local policing team if it was felt to be helpful.

3.8 Plans for change

No changes are planned to the meeting house.

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 meeting house has all the facilities it currently needs. There is scope for refurbishment and probably some scope for change, if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: it appears that the meeting house is already suitable for use by the wider community, though there is probably scope for internal alteration.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: the building could doubtless serve a wholly secular use if closed.

Part 5: Category: 3