

Friends Meeting House, Tavistock

4 Canal Road, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 8AR

National Grid Reference: SX 48021 74176



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a former pair of cottages built in c.1817 in conjunction with the adjacent Tavistock Canal Wharf. It has been leased from West Devon Borough Council since 1976. The building has high overall significance.

Evidential value

An investigation of the built fabric might reveal further information about the former use and layout of the cottages. The building has high evidential value.

Historical value

The building was built in conjunction with the Tavistock Canal and the wharf. Originally two semi-detached cottages, it was later internally connected. The rear part has been used as public toilets in conjunction with the public car park on most of the wharf site since about the 1970s. The building has high historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house was built from local rubble stone with Gothick windows, matching those on the nearby wharf building (5 Canal Road). It has been altered externally and internally over time but the main elevation in particular retains medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

Parts of the building have been used as a Quaker meeting house since 1976 with additional use by local community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Devon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0025810*
- 1.3 Owner: *West Devon Borough Council*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *West Devon Borough Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Tavistock*
- 1.7 Listed status: *II*
- 1.8 NHLE: *1105839*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Tavistock (and Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape WHS)*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *c.1817 (meeting house from 1976)*
- 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: *Graham Wood and David Williams*
- 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. 142-3
Devon and Dartmoor Historic Environment Record, HER no.: MDV23072
Historic England Archive, red box collection of photographs, photographs of 1950 and 1969
West Devon Borough Council, *Tavistock Conservation Area Character Appraisal*, 2009
Brief history on Tavistock meeting website,
<http://swquakers.org.uk/meetings/devon/tavistock/history>
Local Meeting survey by Pete Squire, May 2016, and by David Williams, June 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

A meeting existed in Tavistock by 1702, using rented accommodation. In 1823, a new meeting was settled which in 1835 built a meeting house on a leasehold site in Dolvin Road for £1,500. The land behind this was used as burial ground from 1836. In 1876, the meeting was laid down and the site was surrendered to the landlord, the Duke of Bedford. The

benches were moved to the Sunday school at the Plymouth Meeting House and the building at Tavistock was demolished in the late 1870s.

In 1951, the meeting was revived and again in 1971. From 1976, the meeting has used 4 Canal Road, on three-year leases from West Devon Borough Council. This is one of a pair of detached buildings (nos. 4 and 5) which may have been the wharf-keeper's cottage and the office for the canal wharf. No. 4 Canal Road used to be a semi-detached pair of cottages which were later internally combined. The Tavistock Canal was built between 1803 and 1817 by the engineer John Taylor, to transport copper, smelted lead, granite, slate, limestone, coal and iron ore between Tavistock and Morwellham Quay on the river Tamar.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The cottage of c.1817 is roughly aligned southwest-northeast, with the main elevation facing northwest. It was formerly two semi-detached cottages and one doorway was later converted into a window. The Tavistock Meeting uses one ground-floor room and one first-floor room with adjoining kitchen. The remainder of the ground floor is public toilets.

The plan is oblong. The cottage was built using rubble stone. (By the 1950s and 1960s this was rendered.) The roof is of slate and the southwest elevation is slate hung. The roof is pitched with an outshut to the rear; the two chimneystacks are on the rear slope of the roof, between the main rooms and the outshut. (Two further stacks to the outshut are visible in photos of 1969.) The front (northwest) elevation is of two storeys and five bays, with the current entrance in the centre. Most of the windows have Gothick Y-tracery casements and arched heads of thin slabs of stone laid on edge. The windows in the east bay have brick arches, while the door and the only window in the west bay (a former door) have segmental heads of stone on edge. (In the 1950s and 1960s, the window in the former door opening still had a lean-to canopy.) Attached at the west corner is a rubble gate post. The southwest elevation has two windows to the first floor and two to the ground floor (as well as a modern ventilation grille). The rear (southeast) elevation has the entrance to the public toilets under two slate-hung dormers; there is a small flat-roofed extension near the east corner. The latter abuts a slate-coped wall to the east which continues the line of the northeast side elevation. The only windows on the northeast elevation are two ground-floor windows and one first-floor window to the outshut, all under modern lintels.

The interior was altered when the two semi-detached cottages were combined internally. Inside, there is a small room (now the library) to the northeast with a fluted fire surround and cupboard on either side. (The ground-floor room at the southwest is used as part of the public toilets.) The staircase appears to be altered and the flight of steps now faces the entrance instead of away from it. The original balustrade has been replaced by panelling, although a few turned balusters survive. The main meeting room is on the first floor at the northeast; it is lit by two windows to the front. It has a plain mantelpiece on corbels with a cast-iron round-arched grate. Beside the fireplace are a cupboard and a door into the roofspace above the outshut. At the southwest end is a small kitchen which is divided from the meeting room and the stairwell at the centre by a partition with a door and two openings with hinged shutters. The kitchen has a blocked fireplace with a smaller but more elaborate mantelpiece.

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are four inverted Y-frame benches in the upstairs meeting room and two in the kitchen. These originally came from the 1835 meeting house in Tavistock, then were given to the Plymouth Meeting and returned on the reopening of the Tavistock Meeting.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The former wharf is located close to the town centre, between the Tavistock Canal and the river Tavy. It retains its industrial heritage character as there are several listed buildings related to the Canal, including a granary, a coal shed, two warehouses and the two cottages. Most of the site is now a public carpark, with some buildings converted to an arts centre and a new leisure centre nearby. The meeting house makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The building is listed at grade II which is considered appropriate.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

The local meeting only leases the building, so this assessment only looks at below-ground archaeology under the building. Finds are most likely related to the construction of the building and of the wharf in general. The wharf site is not far from the site of the medieval Tavistock Abbey and was then probably in use as monastic fishponds, orchards and warrens (see conservation area appraisal). The meeting house site has medium 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

Under the terms of its lease, the local meeting is only responsible for internal maintenance and the painting of the windows.

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: new gas central heating with timer
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: use of council recycling scheme
- Building maintenance & refurbishment: secondary glazing, loft and wall insulation, wall to wall carpeting

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

3.4 Amenities

The meeting house has a kitchen adjacent to the meeting room but no internally-accessible toilets, other than the public toilets in the outshut to the rear (which are locked at night). There is no resident Warden. The meeting is accessible by public transport with the bus station nearby. There is a public car park close by but there is no secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

Only the ground floor is accessible to people with disabilities. There is no level access to the first floor (but plans are in hand for a stairlift). There is an accessible toilet in the adjacent public toilets. Inside the meeting house there is a hearing loop but no specific facilities for partially-sighted people.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 4 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 120 hours per week. It is used for an average of 15 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy which excludes the use by political party groups. Free use is granted based on the perceived worthiness and need of a group. Users value the meeting house for its quaint and inclusive atmosphere.

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

There are currently no signs of general crime or anti-social behaviour at the site. In the past the ground-floor windows have been broken and adjacent buildings have been burgled. There have been incidents which have not been reported to the local police. The locality is generally well-cared for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There is an established liaison with the Local Neighbourhood Policing Team.

3.8 Plans for change

The local meeting is currently in negotiations with the freeholder for a 50-year lease. They are also planning to change the staircase, so a stairlift can be installed.

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 local meeting is currently planning to improve disabled access by altering the stair. As the staircase has previously been altered, this should not affect any historic fabric.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The use by community groups would also be enhanced by improving access to the first floor rooms.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: Should the local meeting close or decide to leave its current building, the front part of the building could be converted to another use, possibly in conjunction with the nearby arts centre or as offices. Most likely, any such new use would require an internal toilet.

Part 5: Category: 2

Part 6: List description(s)

Name: SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

List entry Number: 1105839

Location: SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, 4, CANAL ROAD

County: Devon

District: West Devon

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Tavistock

Grade: II

Date first listed: 07-Sep-1951

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 93416

1. 5185 CANAL ROAD (north east side)

No 4 (Society of SX 4874 4/35 7.9.51 Friends)

II GV

2. Circa 1817. One of a pair of cottages flanking the entrance to Canal Wharf (see also No 5). Two storeys stone rubble. Slate roof. Outshut to rear. Three round-headed casements with Gothic heads. Cambered doorcase. Rubble pier to right-hand side. Right side elevation is slate hung.

Listing NGR: SX4802174176