

Friends Meeting House, Torbay

Tor Hill Lodge, 48 Tor Hill Road, Torquay, Devon, TQ2 5RT

National Grid Reference: SX 91101 64313



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a nineteenth-century villa which was converted for Quaker use in 1955. It has overall medium significance.

Evidential value

The original plan of the house is still discernible and it retains many historic features. It has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The date and the designer of Tor Hill Lodge are not known. It is a large example of an urban Victorian house. It has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building retains many decorative features on the two main elevations, as well as fine fireplaces inside. It has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building was built as a private house. It has been a Quaker place of worship since 1955 and is also in additional community use. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Devon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0002200*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Ltd*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Torbay Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Torquay NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Tormohun*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *Mid-nineteenth century (acquired in 1955)*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Not established*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *12 May 2016*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Johanna Roethe*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *William Becher*
- 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. 143-144
Stell, C., *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in South-west England*, 1991, p. 100
Information from Hal Bishop of the Torbay Historic Environment Record
Torbay Civic Society, *Quaker Meeting House, 1856-1948*, leaflet
Local meeting survey by William Becher, April 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

From about 1840, meetings attended by seaside visitors were held in rented rooms on the Strand and, by 1851, in St John's Place. A request to be recognised by the Monthly Meeting was turned down in 1847 because of insufficient numbers. That year, an informal group proposed building a meeting house. A site in Warren Road was leased in 1853. Work started that year but was delayed due to difficulties with contractors. It was completed in 1856 (figure 1). The architect was Edward Appleton, designer of several buildings in Torquay, who later also built the meeting house at Exeter (*qv*). In 1921, the freehold was bought for £150 but in 1948, it was sold for £2,600. (It is now owned by the Samaritans.) Until 1955, Friends met in temporary accommodation. In 1955, Tor Hill Lodge was bought and adapted for

meeting house use. This is a tall Victorian house on a corner site, with a small toilet block which had been built at the rear of the building prior to 1955.



Figure 1: The former meeting house in Warren Road, Torquay

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The main elevation faces northeast, the entrance is on the southeast elevation. Tor Hill Lodge is a three-storey house on an oblong plan. The materials are white and red brick in Flemish bond; the T-plan gabled roof is covered with slate. The northeast elevation has two two-storey canted bay windows under a common roof which are visually linked at the top by a decorative timber arch. The aprons of the first-floor windows are of red brick with a red brick plat band which continues on the side elevation. The second floor has two sash windows. The entrance occupies the centre bay of the three-bay southeast side elevation. Above the door is a rubbed red brick arch with a large stone keystone which acts as corbel to the shallow, oblong oriel window with a dentilled cornice above. The windows flanking the door have red brick segmental arches with keystones, and red brick aprons. The first-floor windows are similar, with aprons which slightly project from the plat band. The three second-floor windows are flat-arched and directly below the eaves but also have red brick aprons. The southeast gable to the front has a red brick and stone bulls-eye window. The southwest elevation is rendered and painted; the shallow stack projects above the eaves of the rear gable. Also at the rear are a single-storey toilet extension and an external stair for the second-floor flat.

On the ground floor, two front (northeast) rooms have been combined into one meeting room which retains a marble fire surround and a cast-iron Art Nouveau-style grate. The floor is of oak and pine parquet. The stair in the centre of the building has a turned newel with ball finial. On the other side of the stair are the kitchen (within the original house) and the toilets (in the extension). On the first floor is a large room directly above the meeting room which has a similar fireplace. A small side room houses the library with another fine fireplace. The upper staircase is enclosed, leading to the upstairs flat. The flat was not inspected.

2.3 Loose furnishings

None of particular note.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a corner site near the junction of Tor Hill Road and Tor Church Road which is overlooked by the large brutalist Methodist/United Reformed Central Church of 1970. The meeting house with its decorative and largely unaltered two main elevations makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is not considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

It is not known if there was an earlier building on the site. On present evidence, the archaeological potential would appear to be medium.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1 Condition

i) Meeting House: Poor. While the meeting house in general is in good condition, there are severe problems with damp, water ingress and mould at the junction of the extension and the kitchen. The meeting is currently planning to demolish the old toilet block and build a new one in order to resolve this problem.

ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

3.2 Maintenance

A new quinquennial report is currently in preparation. In general, the local meeting has enough money to repair and maintain the building. There is no five-year maintenance and repair plan.

3.3 Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit. It has not implemented any measures to reduce its environmental impact. The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate but would 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.

3.5 Access

The ground floor of the meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access, an accessible toilet, and a hearing loop but no facilities for partially-sighted people. No Disability Access Audit has been conducted.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 2 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 80 hours per week. It is used for an average of 2 hours per week (plus a monthly session of 2 hours). The meeting has a lettings policy. Gambling, alcohol, illicit drugs, smoking or other fire hazards are not permitted.

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 but the meeting might consider making contact if necessary.

3.8 Plans for change

The meeting is planning the rebuilding of the toilet block.

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: Apart from the damp problems in and near the toilet block, the buildings meets the needs of the local meeting.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting is in additional use by community groups who seem to find all the amenities they need in the meeting house.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: In the unlikely event of closure, the meeting house could be converted to another use. Due to the location in a conservation area, redevelopment is unlikely to find favour.

Part 5: Category: 3