

Quaker Meeting House, Ashburton

Foales Court, off North Street, Ashburton, Devon, TQ13 7QE

National Grid Reference: SX 75574 69951



Statement of Significance

The meeting house is a converted Plymouth Brethren Chapel which originally was two cottages. It has medium significance.

Evidential value

The building was derelict by 2009 and much had to be replaced and repaired during the conversion. The original planform of the cottages or the chapel is no longer readily apparent, although the outer walls still contain original fabric. The meeting house has medium evidential value.

Historical value

The building is part of the later development of a medieval burgage plot behind the main street. It was a Plymouth Brethren Chapel from c.1850 to c.1950. It has medium historical value.

Aesthetic value

The building is a vernacular building of local stone with two large round-arched windows to the rear. The windows and most of the interior date from 2013. The building has medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building was a Plymouth Brethren chapel for about a hundred years and is now a Quaker meeting house which 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: *0316060*
- 1.3 Owner: *Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Dartmoor National Park Authority*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Ashburton*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *Ashburton*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *Not known (restored and converted in 2013)*
- 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: *Mary Yeatman*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Devon and Dartmoor Historic Environment Record, HER no. MDV7908
Architectural drawings by Rud Sawyer Architects, Totnes
'A short history of Quakerism in Totnes and Ashburton', booklet
Local Meeting survey by Michael Baker, March 2016

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

2.1 Historical background

There were early Quakers in Ashburton although historical records are sparse. A licence for a meeting house was granted at some point between 1689 and 1789. During and after the Second World War, meetings were held at Waterleaf Farm and later in private houses. In 2004, a Quaker wedding in St Lawrence Chapel in Ashburton led to regular meetings in the town. In December 2009, a former Plymouth Brethren Chapel in poor condition was acquired by the Devon Area Meeting who converted it to Quaker and community use. The architects for the conversion, which included the insertion of an upper floor, were Rud Sawyer Architects. The meeting house opened in September 2013.

The building had been converted in about 1850 by the Plymouth Brethren from two cottages and had been used as a chapel until about 1950. From then until 2008, it was used as a wood store by a local hardware store.

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The building has an oblong plan and the entrance elevation faces southeast. The materials are rubble stone with a pitched roof with asbestos-cement tiles. The southeast elevation has a new central entrance door. (Prior to 2013, there was a door on the projecting wall of the short southwest elevation, with a window above; both are now blocked up with matching stone.) The southwest gable is hung with asbestos-cement tiles; the northeast gable is boarded with timber. There is a first-floor window (replaced in 2013) on the northeast elevation, above a lean-to porch belonging to the neighbouring property (Basil Cottage). The long northwest elevation (overlooking a private garden) has two round-arched windows with Gothick tracery. (The windows are sympathetic timber replacements of 2013.)

The ground floor has a lift in the south corner and a stair in the east corner. The rear part of this floor is a full-length room with a kitchen and dado panelling; it is lit by the lower part of the northwest windows and by opaque glass slabs in the floor above. There is also a toilet beside the lift and an accessible toilet beside the stair. Upstairs is a large ceiled meeting room with five ceiling beams. It is lit by the upper part of the northwest windows and a window at the east corner. Along the northeast wall is a kitchenette. As in the downstairs room, there is a vertical dado.

2.3 Loose furnishings

Some fragmentary panels with biblical inscription and pieces of stained glass from the former Plymouth Brethren Chapel are currently in storage.

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house is accessed by Foales Court, an alleyway off North Street. The narrow alleyway allows only oblique views of the meeting house. The building makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is currently unlisted and is not considered to be a candidate for listing. It might, however, be considered a curtilage structure to Foale's Cottage (grade II), which abuts at the southwest.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

'As one of the county's most important medieval towns, an early borough, wool centre and stannary town, Ashburton has high archaeological potential' (conservation area appraisal). The meeting house site is near the medieval centre of Ashburton and also 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

The building was converted, repaired and refurbished in 2013. The first quinquennial survey is due in 2018.

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: wall, ceiling and under-floor insulation, double glazing, efficient gas boiler, zoned thermostatic controls and programmed timing controls
- Resource use, recycling & waste management: recycling where possible
- Transport: walking where possible

The meeting does not have an Energy Performance Certificate and considers this to be not necessary as the building is already very energy efficient (estimated efficiency level of at least B).

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 although Sunday services are poor. There is no car parking on site (but a public car park is close by) and no secure parking for bicycles.

3.5 Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is a lift to the upper floor, and an accessible toilet. The installation of a hearing loop is planned. There are no specific facilities for partially-sighted people. A Disability Access Audit was conducted in 2012 as part of the design process.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for 3-4 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 156 hours per week. It is used for an average of 15 hours per week. The meeting has a lettings policy. Groups whose aims are in keeping with Quaker values are acceptable. Free use is granted to groups doing work in line with Quaker aims. Users value the building for its excellent, quiet location with beautiful views of the surrounding hills and countryside, its well-heated interior with good facilities, reasonable rates and the vicinity of town centre parking.

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

There are currently no planned changes.

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 was only recently converted and still meets the needs of the meeting. The interior plan and fittings are modern and could be altered or reordered if required.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house has currently all the amenities required by local community groups.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting: The building could easily find another use, should the meeting be laid down or decide to sell the meeting house.

Part 5: Category: 3