

Quaker House, Plymouth

74 Mutley Plain, Plymouth, Devon, PL4 6LF

National Grid Reference: SX 48339 55888



Statement of Significance

The meeting house was built in 2003 on a site acquired in 1896 and beside the previous meeting house, Swarthmore. It has low overall heritage significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house is a modern building; its evidential value is low.

Historical value

While the present building is a relatively recent building, it is associated with the former meeting house known as Swarthmore. The meeting house has low historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a plain building but designed to fit in with the grander Swarthmore next door. It has low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is primarily a Quaker place of worship but is also well used by local community groups. It has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *Devon*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0013780*
- 1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts Limited for Area Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Plymouth City Council*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *South West*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Plymouth NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*
- 1.8 NHLE: *N/a*
- 1.9 Conservation Area: *No*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *2003*
- 1.13 Architect(s): *Geoffrey Gunning & Associates*
- 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: *Esther White*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *Swarthmore (76-78 Mutley Plain)*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:
Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 139-141
Plymouth Meeting website, <http://www.quakerhouseplymouth.org.uk/>
Plymouth Council, planning database
Architectural drawings, 2011, Robert Woffenden, in Local Meeting Archive
Information from Martin Wyatt

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

2.1 Historical background

In about 1660, the meeting rented a cottage on the north edge of the Hoe and a nearby garden as a burial ground. (The latter was surrendered to the landlord in 1721 and burials were removed in 1860 to the burial ground in Treville Street.) In 1675, two cottages in Treville Street were converted into a meeting house and living accommodation for £470. The garden behind was used as a burial ground. In 1703, the freehold of the Treville Street site was acquired for £95. In 1722, the former cottages were re-roofed and a new porch was proposed in 1736. By 1800, the building was in poor condition and in 1802 it was decided to build anew. A purpose-built meeting house was constructed in 1804 on the same site at a cost of £1,270. In 1883, this was rebuilt largely within the 1804 walls with an extension towards the road, for £1,000. It was sold in 1916 for use as a Labour Exchange, while the

burial ground was initially retained. (The latter was last used in 1928 and sold in 1956; the remains were re-interred in the public cemetery at Efford.)

In 1896, a new site at Mutley Plain was acquired. So far, it has been assumed that this was the building known variously as Swarthmore [sic] Hall or Institute. However, recent research by Martin Wyatt suggests that this was in fact the current site, which is directly adjacent to Swarthmore. When the meeting house in Treville Street was sold in 1916, the building now known as Swarthmore was acquired as a meeting house. (It had previously been the private property of a group of friends and had been used mainly for mission work and the Adult School.) Originally two converted semi-detached houses, this was altered and extended in 1916, 1921, 1939 and again after the Second World War. (The pair of semi-detached houses is shown on OS maps until 1933 by which time it had been extended.) In 2003, the site acquired in 1896 was taken back into possession and a former shop replaced by the current meeting house (architect: Geoffrey Gunning & Associates, Ivybridge). It was opened on 11 October 2003 by Dr Sheila Cassidy. It was refurbished and altered in 2012 (architect: Robert Woffenden). Wheelchair access was improved, a new basement stair was installed and two counselling rooms created in the basement, as well as a ground floor office. The previous meeting house (now known as Swarthmore) is let out to a language school (photo top right on page 1).

2.2 The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The street elevation of the meeting house faces east. It has a roughly oblong plan with a gabled slate roof to the front, a single-storey lean-to to the north, and a single-storey hipped wing to the rear. There is a basement under the whole building, and the front block has two storeys and an attic. The walls are rendered and painted. The front elevation is three bays wide with the southern (staircase) bay projecting forward. There is a canopy on corbels over the glazed entrance door in the centre bay. Above the first-floor windows there are non-continuous sections of cornice.

The staircase is in the southeast corner of the building. The main meeting room (meeting room 1) is on the ground floor (photo bottom left on page 1), which is used for meetings for worship. On the same floor is an accessible toilet, the reception, a small kitchen and an office. The basement has two small counselling rooms and one larger meeting room. On the first floor is another meeting room (meeting room 2), as well as toilets. Meeting room 3 on the top floor has a kitchenette and is lit by a gable window and three rooflights (photo bottom right on page 1).

2.3 Loose furnishings

None of note

2.4 Attached burial ground (if any)

Not applicable

2.5 The meeting house in its wider setting

Mutley Plain is a busy four-lane road. The meeting house is slightly set back from the pavement and Swarthmore just to the north has a larger forecourt. To the north of Swarthmore is an off-licence in a former petrol station, while the meeting house abuts a terrace of houses with ground-floor shops (of which several are empty).

The municipal cemetery at Efford Road has a plot set aside for Quaker use. In 1963, Friends Trusts Limited acquired the freehold of several plots with the right to scatter ashes there.

2.6 Listed status

The meeting house is not listed and is too recent in date to be considered for listing. Swarthmore might be suitable for a local list, should Plymouth Council decide to establish one.

2.7 Archaeological potential of the site

This part of Mutley Plain has changed drastically over time. The 1893 Ordnance Survey map still shows villas with large front gardens on this stretch of the west side of the street. At that time, the site of no. 74 was still a garden and it remained so until c.1948-51 when a small shop was built there against the end of a terrace. The site has low archaeological potential.

Part 3: Current use and management

Volunteer survey not received

3.1 Condition

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

3.2 Maintenance

The meeting house was altered and refurbished in 2012.

3.3 Sustainability

Information not received

3.4 Amenities

Information not received

3.5 Access

The meeting house does not have a lift and only the ground floor spaces have level access.

3.6 Community Use

Information not received

3.7 Vulnerability to crime

Information not received

3.8 Plans for change

Information not received

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 is a modern flexible building which could be altered or extended if necessary, for example to install a lift.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is well used by community groups which have all the facilities they need, except possibly a lift.

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

Part 5: Category: 4