

THE EARLY HISTORY OF ILKLEY QUAKER MEETING

A talk given at Ilkley Meeting, 26 June 2016

Quakerism in this part of Wharfedale in the early days centred on Askwith and Farfield. There was a Quaker burial ground at Askwith from c. 1660 and a meeting house there from 1665 – first wooden, then rebuilt in stone in 1705. But Askwith Meeting closed in 1778, because of falling membership and financial difficulties, and it merged with Otley, which had had its own meeting house at Cross Green from 1776. This merged meeting then merged in turn with Rawdon in 1792, and Otley meeting house closed, it seems, in 1822.

Further up the dale there was a meeting at Farfield because the owner of Farfield Hall, Anthony Myers, who had become a convinced Quaker in the early 1650s, gave part of his land for a burial ground in 1666 – and in 1689 he gave the land on which Farfield meeting house was built.

Farfield meeting house ceased to be used by Friends in 1816, because of declining numbers in that area. The meeting transferred to Addingham, where Quakers rented a room. One anecdotal piece of evidence for this comes from the journals of the Quaker Joseph Wood, from near High Flatts, who recorded in 1817 when he visited Addingham:

‘Farfield Meeting hath been for some time past held in this village for the greater convenience of Friends in a room which they have taken and fitted up for the purpose.’

(He had earlier recorded attending a Quaker burial at Askwith in February 1780, where he was able to warm himself at a fire in the meeting house, which must have been reopened for the occasion.)

Moving forward now to the mid-nineteenth century, Ilkley was developing rapidly following the building of various hydropathic establishments from the 1840s onwards. It was becoming a desirable place to live or visit, particularly for the middle classes of Leeds and Bradford. And in September 1860 Brighouse Monthly Meeting receives a report about the present 'low state' of Addingham Meeting, and appoints a committee not only to look into this but to investigate the possibility of providing meeting house accommodation for Friends visiting Ilkley. (Brighouse Monthly Meeting had recently taken over in the area from the defunct Knaresborough Monthly Meeting.) This committee reports back in October that Addingham Friends recommend their meeting be closed as soon as suitable accommodation in Ilkley is found, and it appears that preliminary enquiries about either renting rooms or purchasing land for building in Ilkley have already been made.

Some time passes, but in August 1861 the committee is able to report an offer from a Marshall Hainsworth of Wells Terrace to alter a room in his house so that it could

accommodate 50-60 people at a rent of £8 a year. Wells Terrace is the large Victorian block on the top, south side of Crossbeck Road where it joins Wells Road, not far from the present meeting house (it served for part of the twentieth century as the Ilkley maternity hospital, and more recently it was occupied for a while by Ilkley College). Wells Terrace had been built only four years earlier, in 1857 by Marshall Hainsworth and his brothers, who were stonemasons, and one of the three houses it contained was briefly occupied by Charles Darwin and family in 1859. The room offered to Brighouse Monthly Meeting by Mr Hainsworth in 1861, it was reported, would be at the service of Friends whenever required, and it would be possible for a library of books to be kept there. What is more, there could be a notice board outside.

This was all agreed, and a formal memorandum of agreement for a tenancy of ten years was drawn up in March 1862. The agreed alterations included the insertion of an independent outside door, and the Quaker archives in Leeds contain letters from the builders concerning problems with this work and also detailed accounts showing the cost of various items bought for the room, including a Venetian blind, an umbrella stand, hassocks, and a door mat; the cost of advertisements placed in *The Friend* and the *Leeds Mercury*; and the cost of removing forms, i.e. benches, from Addingham to Ilkley. Brighouse Monthly Meeting had asked the committee specially to see to the transport of these forms, and also to 'give notice of the termination of our occupancy of the premises at Addingham'. It was reported later that the forms were very old but usable at present (and so they had probably come from Farfield). Twenty-four volumes of books were also brought from Addingham and others were donated later, making a total of sixty at Ilkley.

Much of this work went on in the autumn of 1862, and official registration of the room as a place of worship was completed in December of that year. It was proposed to hold meetings twice a week, at 11 am on 1st and 4th days, i.e. Sunday and Wednesday.

Brighouse Monthly Meeting minutes, which are our main source of information for all this, then go silent until June 1866, when 'inconvenience' in relation to Ilkley Meeting is reported owing to the fact that no Friends are permanently resident in the town. And so a committee from within Brighouse Monthly Meeting is established to take charge of holding meetings in Ilkley. Things had presumably not been going so well. One surviving document, separate from the minutes, is a list of visitors to Ilkley Meeting in 1867, twenty to thirty of them, some of whom were clearly Quakers from Bradford and elsewhere, so it looks as if an effort was being made to support the Meeting.

But more significant was the arrival in Ilkley in 1867 of a man called Joseph Dymond, who had been born into a well-established Quaker family in Exeter in 1825, and was a banker and actuary. He had moved to Bradford in 1857 to become Secretary of the Friends Provident Institution, and in 1867 he and his family moved to Ilkley. (Some people present may remember Ruth Dymond, one off his descendants, who was an elderly member here when I first came to Meeting in Ilkley thirty-odd years ago.) The arrival of Joseph Dymond

had a galvanising effect. In June 1868 there is a report to Brighthouse Monthly Meeting that the hired room in Ilkley is often too small, now that there are two or more Quaker families resident in the 'village', and that a more permanent meeting house seems desirable. It is reported further that land in Ilkley has recently been bought by a Friend (who turns out later to be Joseph Dymond), that this is now offered to Brighthouse Monthly Meeting at cost price, and that there is information that subscriptions totalling several hundred pounds have already been promised towards the building of a meeting house.

Once again a committee is appointed, which reports back enthusiastically the following month. But interestingly it is decided that both the raising of funds and the erection of the meeting house should be undertaken privately – by, it would seem, a small number of prosperous Ilkley Quakers – with the meeting house only being transferred to Brighthouse Monthly Meeting trustees when the work was all finished; which is indeed what happened.

The piece of land in question, which is where we are now, was part of the Middleton estate, large parts of which on the south side of the river were being sold in 1868. The deed of conveyance, dated 19 August, shows that one of the Tuke family was involved alongside Joseph Dymond, namely Daniel Tuke, who was a Bradford grocer recorded elsewhere as having moved to Ilkley between 1868 and 1875. Work proceeded quickly. The foundation stone was laid in September 1868, and the meeting house was officially opened on 16 May 1869.

The previous week, however, there was a traditional 'Rearing feast' in the meeting house, hosted by Joseph Dymond, for the contractors and workmen and their wives. This was reported at length in the *Ilkley Gazette*, which described how the 'humble guests' enjoyed 'the well-stocked tables' and 'the subsequent intellectual treat'. This took, first, the form of a speech by Mr Dymond explaining the reasons for the new building, saying that the whole cost of between £1100 and £1200 had already been subscribed, stressing that the building would be available 'free of charge for any proper public purpose', and inviting those present to attend meetings for worship and for instruction once the building was open. He then introduced a Mr Tennant from Bradford, who entertained the audience very effectually by reading one of Edwin Waugh's comic stories in the Lancashire dialect. 'This tale', the *Gazette* reported, 'forcibly illustrated the seductions and follies of intemperance, and called forth from Mr Thorp of Leeds some concise and clearly expressed observations on the more destructive forms of the evils of excessive drinking. This address was listened to with marked attention and the speaker was most heartily applauded when he sat down.' Finally Joseph Dymond 'presented each of the workmen with a beautiful copy of the New Testament, and accompanied the gift with an earnest address on the duties, blessings and the all-important necessity of pure, life-manifested religion'.

The *Ilkley Gazette* also printed a description of the meeting house, once it was open, praising the standard of work by the contractor, Mr John Hall of Leeds. 'The exterior elevation', it reports, 'is of local stone and is simple in the extreme, as befits the unassuming

nature of the Society's profession. Two gables in front connected with a low roof surmounted by a centre gable containing a wheel window complete the exterior grouping. The windows and doors in front have columns with carved stone caps. The front fence-wall is to be finished with a plain iron rail which with wood gates hung to the massive gate posts, will carry out the idea of simplicity aimed at throughout. The sides of the building are perfectly plain as it is expected that ere long they will be hid by adjoining buildings. The building is finished throughout in the most solid manner and is perhaps one of the most substantial of any modern edifice in Ilkley. The architects are Messrs Maxwell and Tuke of Bury and Bradford.'

Inside, the *Gazette* reports, there is a gallery as well as the meeting room itself, together providing seating for about 200 persons. (What we see above us now is a false ceiling inserted in 1957.) The meeting room at that time included what is now the library area, which was separated out at the time of major changes in 1968. There was a vestibule running along the front, which is our present entrance space, with the gentlemen's and ladies' cloakrooms placed in a wing on the right-hand side as you go in, part of the area now rented by the playgroup. The other side was occupied by accommodation for the resident caretaker, comprising two rooms downstairs and two rooms up – and these upstairs rooms still exist in essentially their original form, though downstairs is of course greatly changed. Much of the above account of the opening of the meeting house comes, I should say, not directly from the *Gazette*, but from a typescript 'Notes on the Story of Quakers in Ilkley', written in 1969 by a prominent member of the meeting called Dorothea Bohlmann, to mark the centenary of the opening. We have this in the library here.

Formal registration of the meeting house as a place of worship followed before the end of the year, and meetings for worship were advertised for 10.30 am on both Sundays and Wednesdays. But it is important to note that Ilkley was still not a Preparative Meeting in its own right, despite the new meeting house. The question of its status was raised in August 1869, soon after the opening, but it was concluded that no change should be made for the present. This was perhaps just as well, because the number of members and attenders remained relatively small and the meetings on Wednesdays had been abandoned certainly by 1880. The Brighthouse Monthly Meeting printed list of members does not even list Ilkley as a separate meeting in 1872, with the Dymonds being listed under Bradford. By 1875 it *is* listed, but only four families are involved (the well-known names of Ford, Rowntree, and Tuke, alongside the Dymonds), along with one person from Addingham and the meeting house caretakers. The situation is much the same in 1878. The next list, in 1881, is then unexpectedly odd, as all those families have disappeared, with even the Dymonds having moved back to Bradford, and the only people listed are seven attenders (four from one family named Greetham) and a couple who are members of York Monthly Meeting ... So, there was a lot of space at that time for, it seems, very few people.

But then things improve again. By 1884 the Dymonds have returned and other families have arrived, and in 1889 it is finally agreed that Ilkley can have the status of a Preparative Meeting: twenty years after the meeting house opened, and seventeen after the incorrect date given in Helen Roberts's *Researching Yorkshire Quaker history: A Guide to Sources*. By 1893, which is the last date I have checked, there is a dramatic rise to forty-five adults (thirty-five members and ten attenders) plus numerous children. This is partly because of the arrival in Ilkley of the large Harvey family from Leeds, who lived here from 1891 to 1896. And there are detailed childhood memories of an Ilkley meeting for worship in this period (though with names changed) in the book *We Were Seven* by William Fryer Harvey, published in 1936, which we also have in the library here. The author must have been seven or eight at the time, and he describes how his grandmother sat facing them on the left side of the ministers' gallery. On this occasion, at least, meeting for worship lasted an hour and twenty minutes, and there is one particularly good sentence where he remembers, while waiting for the time to pass: 'I become aware that the cracks in the plaster of the wall are extraordinarily like the map of Norway and Sweden'!

So, I've brought the story up to the 1890s, and I'll leave it there. No conclusion, I'm afraid, other than to note the importance of individual people or families in the story, which is really only to be expected. Thank you.

Oliver Pickering

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