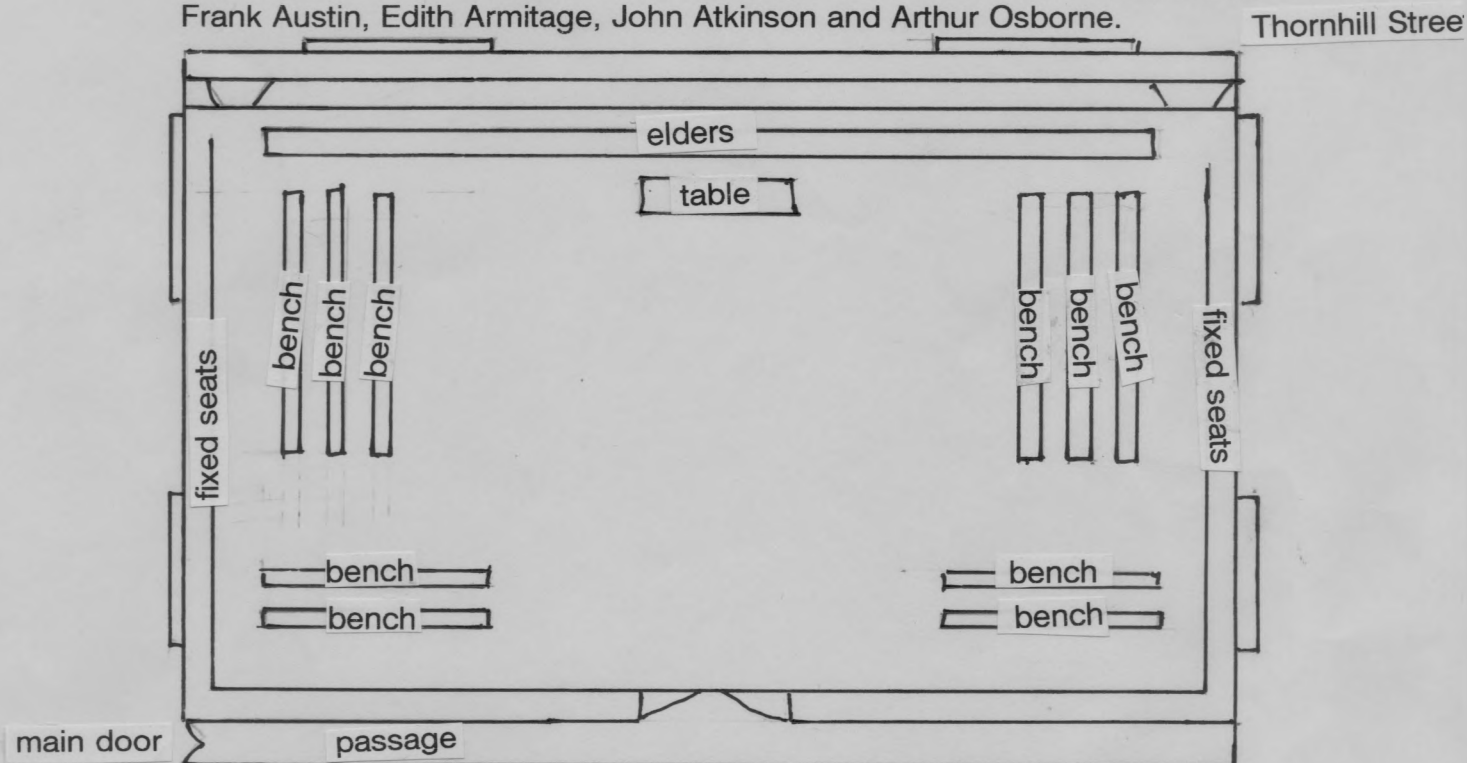


Memories of Wakefield Meeting House

The early history of Wakefield Meeting House is fully outlined in "Quakerism in Wakefield" based upon the writings of John Binks and Walker's History of Wakefield. Reference is made to extensive alterations to the building in 1849 when gas was introduced in place of candles and a chandelier. It may be that the minister's gallery with its three tiers was also dispensed with then. Any alterations after this date are not recorded and it is possible that the layout of the meeting house did not change after this date.

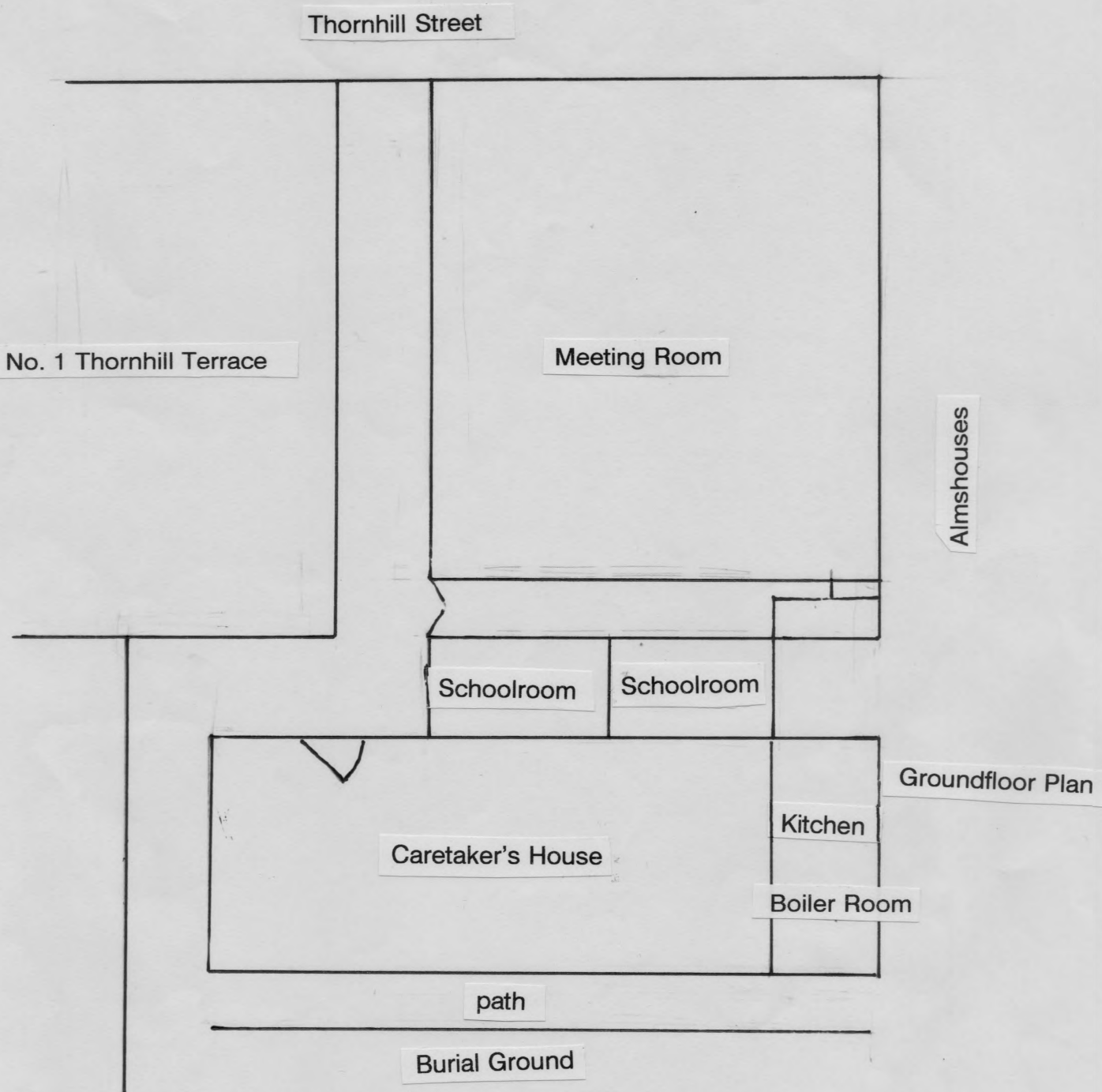
The building comprised the meeting room - a fairly large square lofty room with tall windows. The seating was raised by two tiers at the Thornhill Street end and here sat the elders of the meeting-- in the 1930s : John Bowman, Frank Austin, Edith Armitage, John Atkinson and Arthur Osborne.



In addition to the main room, on the opposite side to the passage, were the school rooms and towards the far end a kitchen and boiler house.

A staircase went up to the right at the end of the passage turning to the left at right angles and then left again up into what was known as the schoolroom - a large room where wedding breakfasts and Christmas parties were held. Off this room at the rear of the building were two small rooms : one a kitchen and the other a meeting room complete with harmonium where the Adult School met.

Attached to the rear of the building was a house occupied by the caretakers. In the 1930s Harry and Lily Ellis with their son Colin lived there - all members of the meeting.



The children in the meeting in the 1930s were :
 Gwen and Bettina Laycock, Colin Ellis, Maurice and Josephine Beaumont,
 Jonathan Fairn, Tim Solloway, Frances and Heather Kilburn.
 Gwen Laycock, who was rather older, took the class.
 Peggy Austin, daughter of Frank, also assisted on occasion.

At the beginning of the war, numbers were increased first by the Fairn family [Duncan Fairn came to be Prison Governor] with son Jonathan, [wife Marion] and somewhat later by the Solloway family --son Tim, another, and a baby who came from London to escape the bombing. They were cousins of the Fairns.

Edith Armitage's garden parties [which originally took place in her summer residence in Crofton - known as the Pavilion and later at Heath [Marsh Close]] were a highlight. Races were run and games played and a fine tea provided by Mrs Armitage and Dorothy.

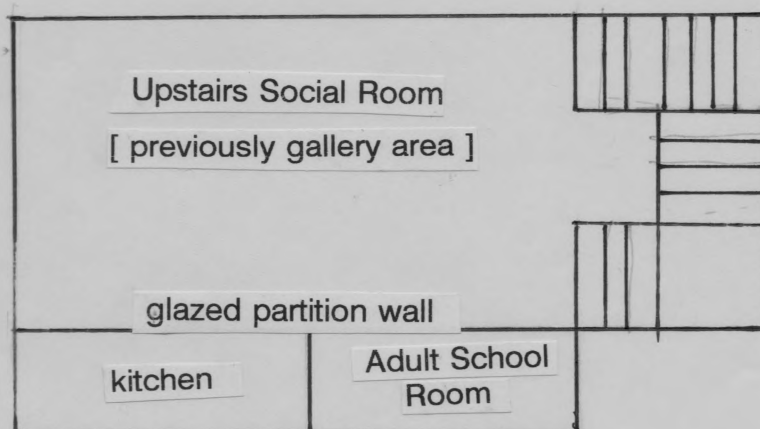
At Christmas the party was held in the upstairs room - for all ages - everyone joined in the games with a will. These included walking down a white line looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars, spinning the trencher and flapping paper fish with folded newspapers.

Mrs Armitage also had a Christmas party for the children at her house at Heath where uproarious games of Pit, a gambling game, was a favourite.

Gwen Laycock got married and went to Australia. Bettina Laycock and Colin went to Ackworth at the beginning of the 40s. Josephine Beaumont went in 1943. The war and growing up and away took its toll on the Sunday School.

Towards the end of the 1940s, Ernest Hebblethwaite began attending meeting with Susan, who was about 8 years old. She was the only child in the meeting until the Rablans came, the Harrises and the Whites returned. Agnes White's parents, the Waltons, had been members at Wakefield for many years. Karl Rehak and family came from Czechoslovakia and lived at Kirkthorpe.

Regular attenders at Meeting in the 1940s were: [elders as previously mentioned]: Annie Millington, John and Annie Rann, Sydney Horsfall, Helen Kilburn, Dorothy Beaumont, Lily Staynes, Ernest Hebblethwaite, Harry and Lily Ellis, Gwen Laycock, Florence Bowman, Bernard Larrand, Sally Staynes, Henry Roberts, Kathleen Perrin- who became Mrs Henry Roberts, Chris Moulton.



Wakefield Meeting House has a spacious garden in the middle of the city. Until the 1960s when an old Chapel served as the Meeting House, the area adjoining was a standard Quaker burial ground with flat stones marking the graves which were arranged in rows. After the demolition of the old Meeting House and building of the new one in the mid sixties, the upkeep of the graveyard presented problems and it was decided to re-position the stones around the edge leaving a grassed area in the middle which would be easier to maintain. The use of the land as a burial ground was officially terminated in

Two or three carefully chosen trees were planted in the grass, one of which, a weeping willow. Is now mature and beautiful. Other plantings have been carried out as memorials.

The garden is enclosed by old walls and flowering shrubs grow immediately inside these. In springtime snowdrops and daffodils flower among them.

The garden is a peaceful secluded green oasis overlooked from the Meeting House windows, and is enjoyed by all users.

We have a gardener who keeps it in good order.

However, there is an even older Quaker garden. Along the Doncaster Road, going out of Wakefield approximately mid way between the cemetery gates and St. Catherine's Church, on the left hand side is the small grassed area that was the original Quaker burial ground. It adjoined Quaker Houses, now long demolished, which was the original Quaker settlement in Wakefield. This small insignificant space with a couple of trees and a low stone wall separating it from the pavement is now maintained by the local authority.

Josephine Beaumont

February 2010