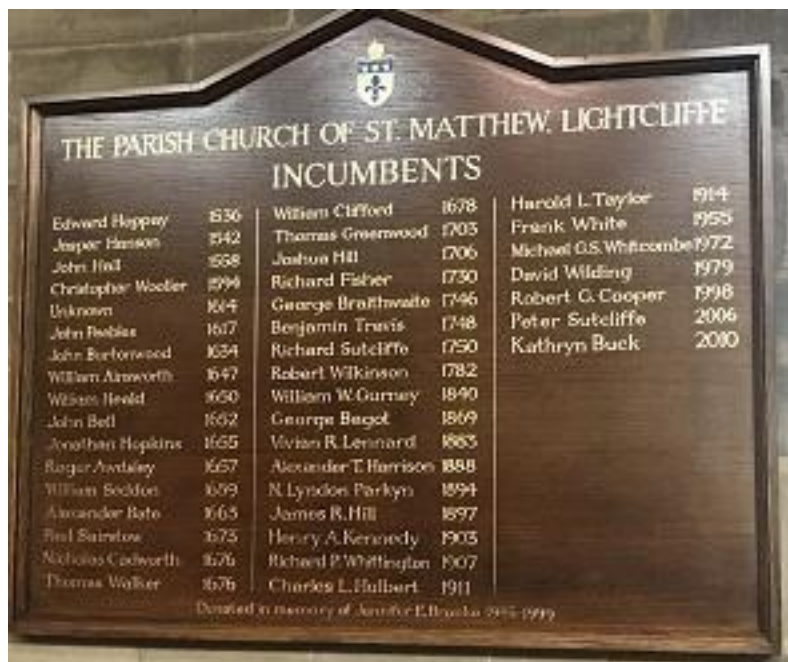


The Incumbents of St. Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe part 1



The incumbents board in the new St. Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe (below) donated by John Brooke in memory of his wife Jennifer

Incumbents is an unusual term today, but it is used by the church to include priests who are in charge of a church. They may be a vicar, a rector or, in our case, for many years a curate. Our curates, certainly by the late 1700s and 1800s, were 'perpetual' curates. Lightcliffe was part of the very large Halifax parish stretching over much of what is now Calderdale. The Vicar of Halifax, together with local landowners or gentry, had the right to make appointments to churches. A perpetual curate had rights of tenure until death whereas an ordinary curate could be dismissed at any stage without any financial security. Lightcliffe perpetual curates could stay in post until either they decided to move or died. An advantage to the priest but not necessarily for the parishioners as the curate became older and less able to function effectively. This finally changed in 1869 when the parish of St Matthew's, Lightcliffe was established and a vicar appointed.



To go to the beginning, we have to travel back in time beyond the building of the present church and its predecessor opposite the Sun Inn; beyond the Civil War and beyond even the original 1552 Book of Common Prayer, to 1529 in the reign of King Henry VIII.

It is hard to imagine what Lightcliffe, in the township of Hipperholme-cum-Brighouse, might have been like at this time - rural certainly, with one or two landowners of rising prosperity on the back of the increasing wool trade. It fell within the parish of Halifax. This was a time of some excitement, with copies of William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament circulating around the country. In 1529 a group of local gentries, including Richard Rookes of Shibden agreed to found a Free Chapel and Rookes gave *'one parcel of ground, lying at the south end of one of his closes, abounding upon the highway that leadeth betwixt Halifax and Wakefield.....to the perpetual use and behoof of a chapel and chapel yard....to be built and ordained.'* Its dedication stone was built into the tower of the later church.

*Deo et Sancto Mattaeo.
Apostolo Evangelistae
Martyri Sacra
A.D. DCXXIX*

"to God & St. Matthew, apostle, evangelist, sacred martyr 1529"

The first priest to be appointed to the new church in 1536 was Sir **Edward Hoppay**, but before we get too excited, it should be pointed out that the title does not imply that he was a knight of the realm. It was merely a medieval, pre-reformation courtesy title for a clergyman without a degree. The practice persisted into the time of Elizabeth I. We know no more about him, where he lived, or how old he was, but he would have been a bachelor performing the Latin mass etc. even though Henry VIII had broken with Rome two years before Hoppay's appointment and made himself the Supreme Head of the English Church. The appointment coincided with Henry's seizure of the monasteries and their great wealth. It was also the year that he approved the use of the Bible in English.

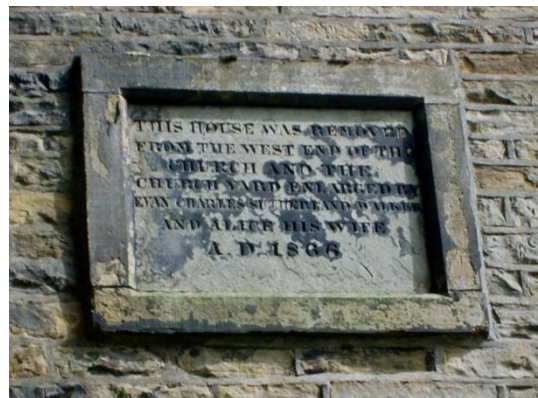
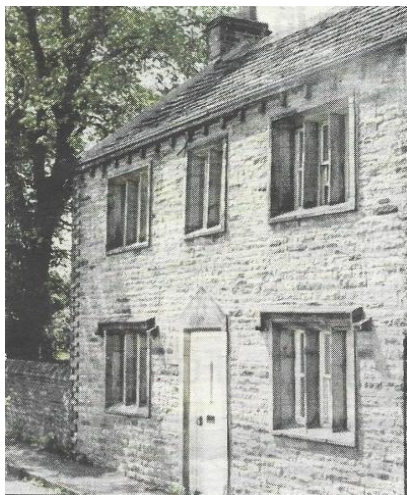
Six years later, in 1542 Hoppay was succeeded by Sir **Jasper Hanson**. King Henry died in 1547 but in 1545 he had passed an act to seize the assets of the Chantry chapels and on his accession the 10-year-old Edward VI continued this and extended it to confiscate the lands, rents and goods of other chapels. When the King's Commissioners arrived in Halifax, the wily sponsors of the Eastfield Chapel anticipated their arrival and so, although the Chapel was closed, the land, and endowments were taken back by those who had given them, only to be returned when the Chapel was reopened in 1558 in the reign of Queen Mary, presumably with the Catholic rite.(They were not so wily up at Coley however, where the endowments were seized and used to found Sedbergh School, or at Rastrick, where the chapel became a barn.

John Hall was appointed as the Minister of Lightcliffe Chapel in 1558, the year Elizabeth I came to the throne, presumably using Cranmer's Protestant-leaning Book of Common Prayer of 1552 and the Anglican liturgy as we would recognize it. He was succeeded after 26 years, in 1594, by **Christopher Wooler**, in whose time it seems that money was raised to repair the 60-year-old chapel. Wooler was followed after about 20 years by a Mr. **Blanks** (or **Banks**), of whom, appropriately, nothing is known!

John Peebles M.A. was appointed 3 years later in 1617. His family came from Scotland and their coat of arms appears on a window of Dewsbury town hall. Two daughters, Grace and Alice, were baptised in 1619 and 1622 and a son John in 1627, followed by another daughter in 1630. All the baptisms took place in Halifax Parish Church, because the Chapel was yet to be licensed. He left Lightcliffe in 1630, but we know that his son became an unscrupulous lawyer known as 'the devil of Dewsbury' and that Peebles himself was ejected from the Church in 1662 for failing to observe the Act of Uniformity following the Restoration in 1660.

The new incumbent who was appointed, after a gap of 4 years, was **John Burtonwood**. His daughter Mary was baptised in 1635 but buried in 1637.

A Minister's house (pictured below left) was built near the west corner of the chapel in 1634. In 1866 it was moved to the northeast corner of the new burial ground on Till Carr Lane. The inscription on the plaque (below right) on the churchyard side of the house says this was done by Evan Charles Sutherland Walker and his wife Alice so that the churchyard could be enlarged. (Sutherland Walker was the last of the Walker family to live in Lightcliffe). The house may have been used by curates in earlier times but curates such as Sutcliffe and Wilkinson lived elsewhere, either in their own property or at a school as in the latter's case.



Speaking of burials, it seems that the parishioners of Lightcliffe were being wily, or guilty of sharp practice again around this time. In 1680 Archbishop Richard Sterne granted a license to '*dwellers in and inhabitants of Hipperholme-cum- Brighouse, within the Chapelry, and near the Chapel of Lightcliffe to baptise their infants in the chapel and bury the bodies of their dead in the said chapel and in the cemetery adjoining.*' When the Minister's house was being moved, they found a grave dated 1592 i.e. 88 years before burials were authorised! Another document of 1594 refers to a cemetery alongside the chapel. But no other evidence to support this has been found.

During the Civil War in 1647, **William Ainsworth** came to be minister from Southowram, but he left Lightcliffe after only three years for Sowerby Bridge. In 1650 he published three sermons (*The Triplex Memorials*) he had preached in Halifax. In these he bemoaned the status of priests whose accommodation was often poor, their wages low and there being no provision for their families after their death. He also published a long poem '*The Marrow of the Bible.*'

It is at this time that the well-known Oliver Heywood of Coley, minister at Coley from 1652 to 1662, enters the story. He kept copious diaries containing sharp comments on other clergy from his high moral Presbyterian standpoint. His opinion of Lightcliffe was not flattering! *'They have scarcely ever had a good minister at Lightcliffe since the Reformation, but one, Mr Banks about 60 years ago (1614);.....The rest have been generally loose tippling preachers, and like priests, like people. The whole chapelry is much addicted to profaneness, so that Lightcliffe and Oakenshaw have been called Sodom and Gomorrah, and I have scarcely known any serious people living there. When I have gone by the place, I have often thought of the sons of the prophets, saying to Elisha, concerning Jericho, "Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren...This I may apply to the waters of the sanctuary, and to the people bad and barren, otherwise the place is very pleasant and fruitful..."* And again *"I could tell sad stories from my own knowledge about ministers and people at Lightcliffe, but my work is not about them, therefore I shall forbear.'* His opinion of poor Mr Ainsworth was *'a scholar, little good besides.'* But then Ainsworth conformed to the new Book of Common Prayer in 1662 whereas Heywood did not and had to leave the Church and became the father of nonconformity in the North of England. Nevertheless, Heywood has a memorial plaque in Halifax Minster.

Ainsworth was replaced after three years, in 1650, by **William Heald**, whose son, Thomas, became the headmaster of Hipperholme Grammar School from 1682 to 1696 and Vicar of Huddersfield. He, himself moved on to become Vicar of Donaghadee in Ireland and was buried in Halifax Parish Church in 1684.

John Bell came next in 1652 when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector. Oliver Heywood described him as *'A wretched Scotsman yet could have spoken well.'* He was succeeded, again after only three years, by **Jonathan Hopkins** and Heywood described him as *'An old friend of mine at Cambridge'* but he gives him a poor character reference.

Roger Awdley was the next minister, but he only stayed a very short time, perhaps understandably, because Heywood says that he fell asleep in the pulpit at Lightcliffe! He was later ejected as Vicar of Batley, for failing to Conform, presumably in 1662, but later did so.

In 1659 **William Seddon** MA arrived. He was born in Outwood near Prestwich and educated at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Again, Heywood comes into his own describing him as: *'A drunkard and hunter, who died at Beeston and desired to be buried at the North side of the chapel (normally reserved for the unbaptised, suicides and heretics) in view of the alehouse he haunted.'* He left after only two years in 1661, a year after the restoration of the monarchy.

Two years later came **Alexander Bate** from Chelford in Cheshire who stayed for ten years. He was a man of means, the second husband of Mary Northend (Mrs Holdsworth) and he lived at and owned various properties, including the 12th century Cromwell Bottom Hall, Crow Nest Mansion, Giles House and Siddal Hall, Southowram, and he also owned land in Cheshire. He had three sons. To the eldest, William, he left Giles House and Siddal Hall and his Cheshire lands. To the second, Alexander, he left 2 messuages at Southowram and to the youngest, Daniel, a messuage and 5 cottages.

This all sounds so respectable until Oliver Heywood attacks again! *'Mr Bate, minister at Lightcliffe, baptised a child in his own house...and, within an hour after, died, was buried at Halifax on Thursday following. Dr.Hook preacht, commended him, yet was told at drinking the same day, that sometimes upon a Sabbath day at noone, he had got so much liquor that he could neither have preacht nor read prayers sensibly. Then, saith the doctor, "I must retract my words."*

Paul Bairstow B.A., a native of Sowerby, followed in 1673. His father, Michael, had been a member of Mr Root's independent congregation there. Heywood (again!) writes: *'He was schoolmaster at Sowerby and made a jeering copy of verses upon old Mr Root and caused a scholar to cast them upon his coffin, when he was a-putting into the grave. They fell down at my feet, wherein there was a horrid abuse of the good old man...This young man preacheth at Lightcliffe and teacheth school for Mr Threadpland...and it is said he is a wild blade. ... Mr Bairstow went and listed a soldier for Flanders, sold his books, went away 1676, what's become of him I cannot learn.'*

Later, Paul Bairstow moved to Rochester. He set up Paul Bairstow's Charity: In 1711, he left a farm and land at Meopham in Kent...*'that they might sell the property and an Estate in or near Halifax.'* The income from this:- *To provide a school at Sowerby; to pay 20/-per year to a minister for preaching a sermon on the feast of St.Michael.'* (This is roughly equal to £1,650 today.)

Nicholas Cudsworth (or **Cadworth**) makes a brief appearance, probably in 1676. He had been ejected in 1662, which may account for Heywood's slant on him: *'He was about a year with them, but they hated him and soon got him out...He was a good scholar and a holy man, as was hoped and a good preacher, but so exceedingly melancholy that it obscured his parts and rendered himself and his labours less acceptable.'* He went on to Coley, and thence to *'Beeston, Ardsley and Ossett and was not long resident anywhere; was very poor, built a house with difficulty upon the common at Ossett, cast himself into debt.....at last died.'* Oliver Heywood succeeded him at Coley. Another fleeting minister was **Thomas Walker** B.A who came in November 1676 and is recorded in 1677 as 'late minister there'.

The next incumbent stayed 25 years, from 1678 to 1703. He was **William Clifford** M.A. Educated at St John's Cambridge, he married Susan Thorpe of Hipperholme at Hartshead. He had a son, Rev. Gropius and two daughters. He was an authority on the Gibbet Law and author of 3 books. In the Archdeacon's Visitation in 1680 he was called to appear for *'not receiving the Lord's Supper on Palm Sunday last.'* He was no friend of the Nonconformists and according to Heywood, he told one that he *'would rather dye [sic] in the Pope's bosom than in the Presbyterian faith - the like I have heard that several clergymen have asserted, it may be that God will put them to it.'* He died at Northowram and is buried at Halifax Minster.

The next minister was **Thomas Greenwood**, who remained only 3 years before moving on to Luddenden and thence to Heptonstall. He, in turn, was succeeded by **Joshua Hill**, educated at Christ College, Cambridge, who was in post for 33 years from 1706 to 1739. This sounds like good news, but the Northowram Register tells us that *'He had been blind and unfit to preach a long time and the chapel oft empty.'* Watson, in his *History and Antiquities of Halifax of 1775*, records that at the *'East end within the chapel was this epitaph: 'Here lies interred the Rev. Mr. Joshua Hill, curate of this chapel near 32 years, who was buried June 11th, In the 79 year of his age, AD 1739, of whom it has often been said that he was neither poor, proud nor covetous.'* He might have had an influence on Laurence Sterne, the author of the strange, rambling novel *Tristram Shandy*, who was a pupil at Hipperholme grammar School in his time.

Richard Fisher then took over in 1739 but was not ordained until 1743 and stayed for seven years, before going to Sowerby Bridge. He was replaced by **George Braithwaite** (locally pronounced 'Braffit'), who, prior to 1740, had been a dissenting minister at Elland Unitarian Chapel, but then conformed and became chaplain to Sir George Saville in Nottinghamshire. He was nominated to the living of Lightcliffe in 1746 and remained for two years, before moving to Rastrick, where he was accused, in an Archdeacon's Visitation of 1766, of neglecting to perform divine service, drunkenness, immorality, gaming, fornication with his housekeeper, Mercy Lacey, and begetting a male bastard child. Mercy Lacey was compelled to do penance, wearing a surplice and her hair flowing down her back, whilst the culprit observed the ceremony. An old inhabitant said he was a man who loved his belly! The life must have suited him, because he died there at the age of 89. To be fair, reports suggest that he became a reformed character and was a driving force behind the building of St Matthew's Rastrick besides which he is buried. St Matthew's, Rastrick, built a few years later than our church, looks very similar on the inside.

Benjamin Travis B.A. came next in 1748. He was born in Shaw, Lancashire, and his mother was a Quaker. He was educated at St. Catherine's College, Cambridge and never married. He was buried at Holy Trinity, Shaw. Of him it was said that *'He had rare opportunity of studying rustic life and out of these surroundings he made some use, most likely by way of pastime, producing a volume of pen and ink sketches of incidents, scenes and people that came under his observation and intercourse with neighbours.'* He sounds a good man, but he only stayed two years before moving to Luddenden in 1750.



A drawing by **Benjamin Travis** taken from the Parish Registers of the Chapelry of Luddenden for 1769

Our next minister, **Richard Sutcliffe** M.A., arrived in 1750. Before then he had been curate at Southowram from 1746. He and his wife Martha lived at Cooper House, an early seventeenth century farmhouse at Luddendenfoot. In 1744 he was an usher at Heath Grammar School.

He established Sutcliffe's Gift and gave 20 shillings a year to William Walker of Crow Nest, the minister and church wardens of Lightcliffe and their successors in trust, to be distributed by them at Lightcliffe chapel yearly, on Christmas Day, to 20 poor persons residing in Hipperholme-cum-Brighouse, not in receipt of Parish Relief. His name appears on the Benefactors' Board. The money was guaranteed from the rent on Sheard Green (farm) which was in Hove Edge. It lay on the east of the crossing between Upper Green Lane and Finkil Street. In the 1867 Sale of the Crow Nest estate, it was lot 95. *'A plot of land, garden and buildings, with vendor's right in the adjoining Waste Land, with half of Pew No.36 in Lightcliffe Church.'* : land of just over four acres. The tenants at the time were Mahala Hall and Widow Pearson.

He was headmaster of Hipperholme Grammar School from 1759 to 1779 and was an able classical scholar. But surely his most significant act was to see through the building of the new church in 1775.

Rev. Richard Sutcliffe died in the spring of 1782 and was buried within the church on 21st March 1782. The Sutcliffe memorial tablet which was in the church is now in the tower to the right on the image below.

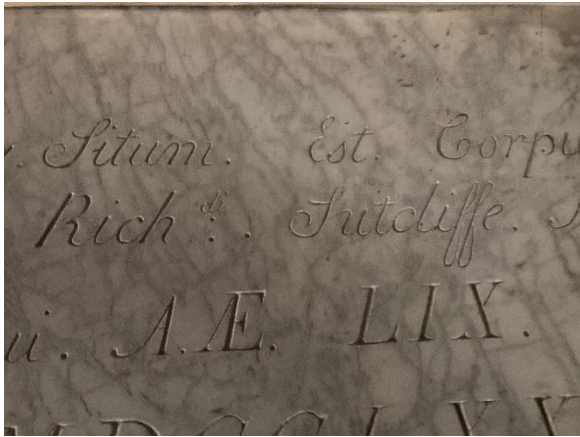


Inside Lightcliffe Tower

Above the door - the dedication to John Walker junior from his widow.

Centre - the brass plaque to Ann Walker, a niece and two nephews.

Right - the Sutcliffe memorial, sections of which are shown in close up below

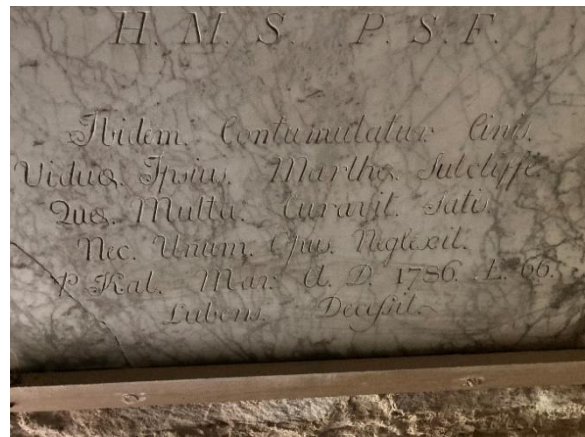


Notice Richard Sutcliffe's name

Juxta situm est corpus Rev Rich.
Sutcliffe A. M. Qui A. Æ. LIX.
A. D. MDCCLXXXII.
A. D. XVI. Kal. Apr. Obit.
Per An. XX De Schola
Hipperholmiensi.
Archididascoli Admodum Diligentis.
Per An. XXX Minister De Lightcliffe.
Haud Infidelis
Vico est Functus.
Quoad Privatam Vitam.
Uxoris Fuit Amantissimus. Amicus
Certus.
Miseris Beneficus.
Denq. Re Vera Christianus.
Vidua Tristis.

H. M. S. P. S. F.
(Hoc Monumentum Sibi Posterisque
Suis Fecit)

Ibidem Contumulatur Cinis. Viduæ
Ipsius Marthæ Sutcliffe.
Quæ Multa Curavit Satis.
Nec Ullum Opus Neglexit P. Kal Mar.
A. D. 1786, Æ 66
Lubens Decessit



The dedication to his wife Martha Sutcliffe

Near this place lies the body
of Rev Richard Sutcliffe A. M. who
died at the age of 59
on 17th March 1782

For 20 years, Headmaster of
Hipperholme School

Always careful.
For 30 years, Minister of Lightcliffe.
never unfaithful.
As assertive in village matters
as in his private life. He was a loving
husband, a true friend.
Kind to the poor.
In short, a true Christian.

His sorrowful widow
She raised this monument for herself
her descendants

In the same place are buried the
ashes of his widow Martha Sutcliffe
who amply took care of many things
and did not neglect any duty
28th February 1786, aged 66.
Happily departed

The translation of this Latin inscription to Rev. Richard Sutcliffe's memory and that of his wife, Martha who died four years later in 1786, was kindly supplied by Matthew Saunders, Friends of Friendless Churches.

Robert Wilkinson M.A, B.D., who was Sutcliffe's curate, succeeded him as Perpetual Curate in 1782. A native of Cumberland, he married Sarah Robinson of Hipperholme. He was vicar for 57 years and Headmaster of Heath Grammar School for 50 years. He lived at Heath Grammar School, coming in his later years to Lightcliffe Chapel on horseback, attired in olden style, with knee breeches and buckles.

Ann Lister of Shibden Hall throws further light on Rev. Wilkinson in her diaries:

Sun. March 17th 1822- 'Went to Lightcliffe Church, Mr. Wilkinson preached 18 minutes. He has a sleepy, idle sort of manner and I could not attend much.

Sun May 5th ,1822- 'To Lightcliffe chapel. Mr. Wilkinson preached 20 minutes ...Pretty good discourse, but, as usual, stupidly delivered.'

However, she does record that he preached the most interesting sermon that she had heard him preach. Further entries are less positive!

Sun. April 8th,1836 'Off to Lightcliffe church at 2. There in 10 minutes. Waited 47 minutes! Enough to tire [sic] a saint. Service at 3.05. Mr. Wilkinson preached 26 minutes. Beyond the text I heard nothing; Asleep; Wearied before service began.

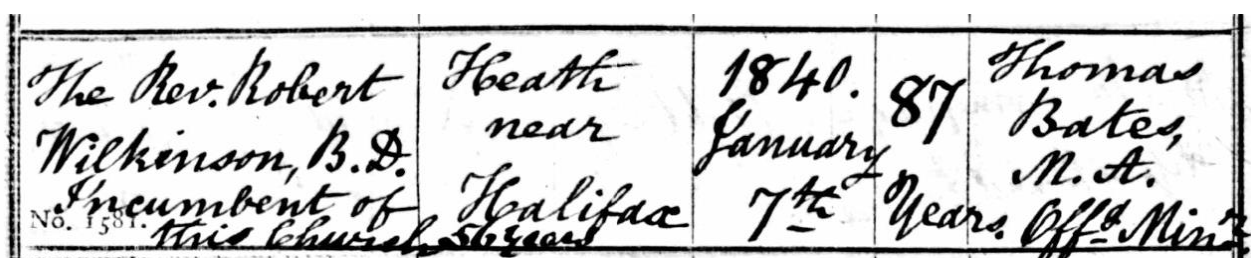
These observed sermons lasted, on average, 21 minutes varying from 15 to 29 minutes. Anne Lister found little to commend in the sermons that she reported on. However, there were two sermons which did meet with some approval though these were preached by a curate. In December, 1838 she named Mr. Holdroyde as Wilkinson's curate whilst earlier in the month she described him as 'a little fat black-haired man who preached a good sermon.'

Perhaps it should also be recorded that she and Ann Walker often arrived after the service had begun according to Anne Lister's diary. On one occasion only just catching the 2nd lesson. There is more information about [3. Ann Walker, Anne Lister and St Matthew's Church.pdf](#) on our website.

Towards the end of his long life there were considerable concerns regarding his ability to sustain both the school and his ministry in Lightcliffe. Services were increasingly taken by Rev. George Fenton, his youngest daughter Lydia's husband. Anne Lister and Ann Walker tried to persuade him, through another daughter Catherine, to resign from running Heath Grammar School.

Looking at the burial records from the mid-1830s, burials were increasingly being taken by other ministers such as Thomas Bates, vicar of Coley, George Fenton, his son-in-law, and Mr. Holdroyde, named by Anne Lister as Wilkinson's assistant.

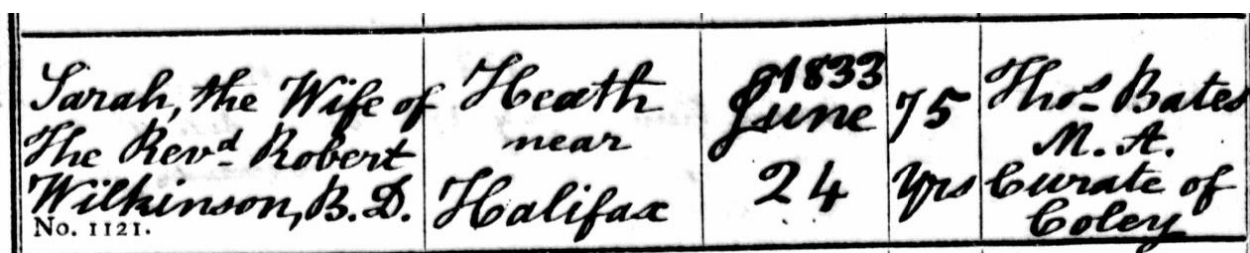
The eighty-seven-year-old died at the end of 1839. He too was buried within St. Matthew's Church on 7th January 1840.



Rev. Robert Wilkinson also has this memorial in Halifax Parish Church with a lengthy inscription in Latin.



The memorial inscription says that the tablet was placed by grateful former students. It records that he had been a public-school principal in the Skircoat area (where Heath Grammar School was) for 50 years. The dates of his and his wife's years of birth and death are recorded. It continues with praise for the education that he was *'an active saint in the training of children'*.



His wife Sarah who predeceased him is thanked for her care of the children *'a most faithful and most kind patroness, almost a mother'* Finally we are told that they lie buried, elsewhere, in the same tomb as befits their mutual love. They were buried under the floor of St Matthew's Church where he had been the minister.

The letters S T B after his Robert Wilkinson's name indicate that he had the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology as a qualification.

For more information about the Wilkinson family including Ann Walker's friend and later housekeeper Lydia, please go to [2. Rev Robert Wilkinson.pdf](#) on our People of Interest page.

In 1840 **William Gurney** M.A. was appointed by the Vicar of Halifax, Venerable Archdeacon Charles Musgrave. He had previously been senior Curate of Halifax Parish Church. He was the son of Rev. Dr. William Gurney of St. Clement Dane's in the Strand and was recorded in the 1841 census as aged 40, 'clerk', with wife Harriet aged 30. He had married Harriet (Betty Rotton), a widow, in Kensington on 12th August, 1825. When they first moved to Lightcliffe, they lodged at Mann's Farm on Wakefield Road, soon after they lodged with Ann Sinclair at German House before moving to the newly built vicarage, recorded as The Parsonage on the electoral roll.

It was Gurney who organised the new Vicarage, now called Abbotsford on the corner of the Stray. In 1852 a one-acre site was bought by the Ripon Diocese from William Priestley who gave £200 to the Queen Anne's Bounty for the maintenance of the Curacy of Lightcliffe. The building is marked 'vicarage' on the plan for the 1867 Crow Nest Estate sale indicating that it had already been built.

During Rev. Gurney's time the status of St Matthew's parish was changed to that of a Chapelry. The preparation for this took a considerable amount of time. The Archives show that Gurney had to come to agreement with the Vicar of Halifax regarding changing fees and the proposed boundary of the new district. He had to complete a detailed set of questions for the church authorities which tell us that the population of our area was 2250 and that of the parish of Halifax as a whole was 130,743. He lists four past endowments for the benefit of the curate which total £800 producing an annual return of £98.

London Gazette, 1846.

'it appears expedient, that a particular district should be assigned to the consecrated church of St Matthew, situate at Lightcliffe..' and goes on to define the district

"The Chapelry District of Lightcliffe" be bounded as follows, that is to say:

"The boundary commences in the new road leading from Halifax where the said road crosses a brook north of Mytholm and proceeds along the middle of that road south easterly till it comes to the road leading to Common-wood; it then proceeds northerly up the middle of that road to the said wood; it then proceeds easterly along a footpath from the aforesaid wood, said to be a right of way, to the village of Hipperholme; then by a

stile through the street of the said village; thence northerly up the middle of the road, which passes through the said village as far as the toll bar; it then turns north easterly and proceeds along the middle of the road to Priestley-green; and from thence along the footpath, said to be a right of way, running by the premises of Mr. James Sunderland, to Coley-mill, leaving Coley-mill on the north, in Coley, and the buildings near it on the east, in Lightcliffe; then by a brook into Bob Den-wood, situate in the townships of Hipperholme and Shelf; thence by the boundary of these townships to another brook which separates the hamlet of Hipperholme from North Bierley; it then proceeds southerly down the said brook as far as the hamlet of Brighouse; and continues along the boundary of the said hamlet of Brighouse, in a south westerly direction till it meets a water course; up which water course it then proceeds north westerly as far as the road at the point where the boundary commenced, as the same is more particularly delineated on the map or plan to hereunto annexed, thereon coloured blue.

That Banns of marriage should be published and that marriages, baptisms, churchings and burials should be solemnised and performed in the said church at Lightcliffe; that half of the fees to arise from marriages should belong and be paid to the Vicar for the time being of the said parish of Halifax; and that the other half of such fees and also all the fees to arise from baptisms, churchings, burials should belong and be paid to the incumbent for the time being of the said Church of St Matthew at Lightcliffe.



821

" to amend and render more effectual an Act, passed in the last session of Parliament, for building, and promoting the building, of additional churches in populous parishes," duly prepared and laid before Her Majesty in Council a representation, bearing date the twenty-second day of January one thousand eight hundred and forty-six, in the words following, viz.

" Your Majesty's Commissioners for building new churches by leave humbly to represent to your Majesty, that, having taken into consideration all the circumstances of the parish of Halifax, in the west riding of the county of York, and within the diocese of Ripon, it appears to them to be expedient, that a particular district should be assigned to the consecrated church of Saint Matthew, situate at Lightcliffe, in the said parish of Halifax, under the provisions of the sixteenth section of an Act, passed in the fifty-sixth year of the reign of His Majesty King George the Third, intitled "An Act to amend and render more effectual an Act, passed in the last session of Parliament, for building, and promoting the building, of additional churches in populous parishes" and that such district should be named, "The Chapelry District of Lightcliffe," and be bounded as follows, that is to say:

" The boundary commencing in the new road leading from Halifax where the said road crosses a brook north of Mythen, and proceeds along the middle of that road south easterly till it comes to the road leading to Cameron-wood; it then proceeds northly up the middle of that road to the said wood; it then proceeds easterly along a footpath from the aforesaid wood, said to be a right of way, to the village of Hipperholme; thence by a stile through the street of the said village; thence northly up the middle of the road, which passes through the said village, as far as the toll-bar; it then turns north easterly and proceeds along the middle of the road to Priestly-green; and from thence along the footpath, said to be a right of way, crossing by the premises of Mr. James Swalesford, to Coley-will, leaving Coley-will on the north, in Coley, and the buildings near it on the east, in Lightcliffe; thence by a brook into Bob Den-wood, situate in the townships of Hipperholme and Shelf; thence by the boundary of these townships to another brook

which separates the hamlet of Hipperholme from North-Riberby; it then proceeds southerly down the said brook as far as the hamlet of Brighouse; and continues along the boundary of the said hamlet of Brighouse, in a south westerly direction, till it meets a watercourse; up which watercourse it then proceeds north westerly as far as the road at the point where the boundary delineated on the map or plan herewith annexed, and thence coloured blue:

" That leases of marriage should be published, and that marriages, baptisms, churchings, and burials should be solemnized and performed in the said church at Lightcliffe; that one half of the fees to arise from marriages should belong and be paid to the Vicar for the time being of the said parish of Halifax; and that the other half of such fees, as also all the fees to arise from baptisms, churchings, and burials should belong and be paid to the Incumbent for the time being of the said church of Saint Matthew, at Lightcliffe:

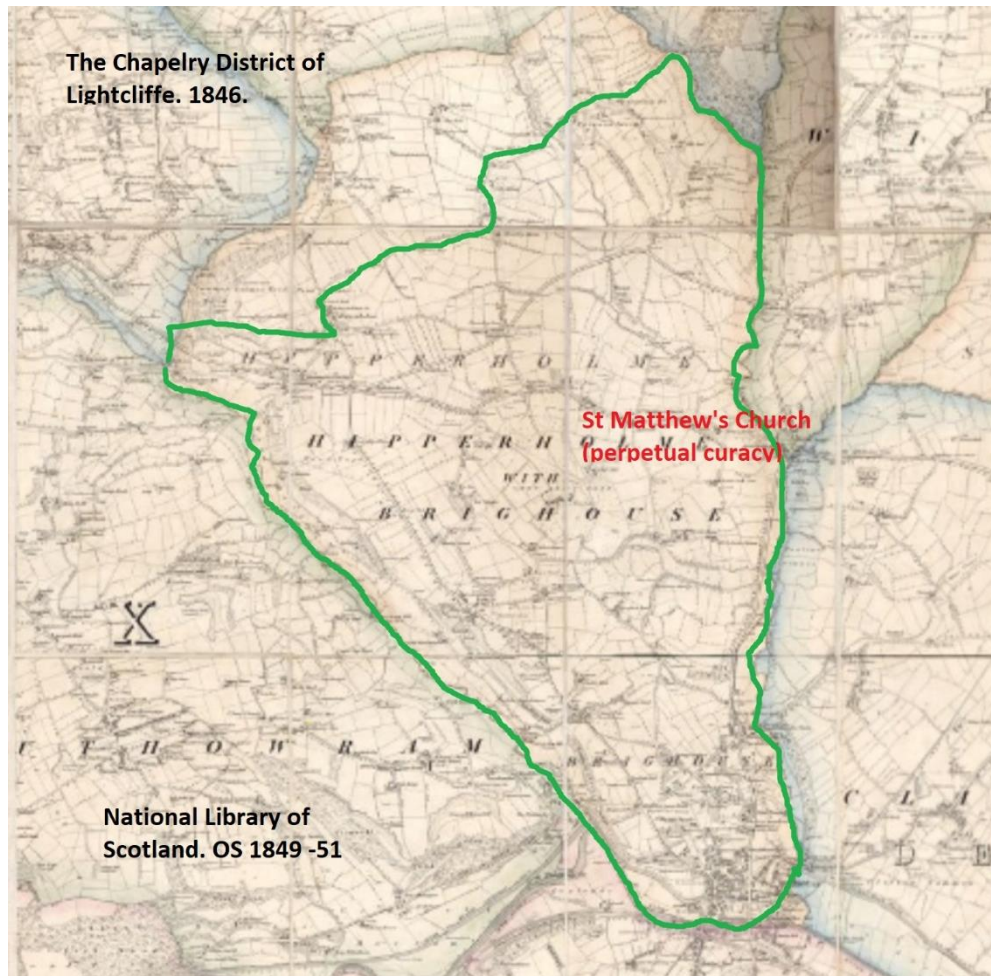
" That the consent of the Right Reverend Charles Thomas Bishop of Ripon has been obtained thereto, as required by the above-mentioned section of the said Act, passed in the fifty-sixth year of the reign of His Majesty King George the Third; in testimony whereof, the said Charles Thomas Bishop of Ripon has signed and sealed this representation:

" Your Majesty's Commissioners, therefore humbly pray, that your Majesty will be graciously pleased to take the premises into your royal consideration, and to make such order in respect thereof as to your Majesty in your royal wisdom shall seem meet."

Her Majesty, having taken the said representation, together with the map or plan herewith annexed, into consideration, was pleased, by and with the advice of Her Privy Council, to approve thereof, and to order, as it is hereby ordered, that the proposed assignment be accordingly made; and the recommendations of the said Commissioners, in respect of the publication of banns and the solemnization of marriages, baptisms, churchings, and burials, and the fees arising therefrom, be carried into effect, agreeably to the provisions of the said Act.

Wm. L. Bathurst.

A 2

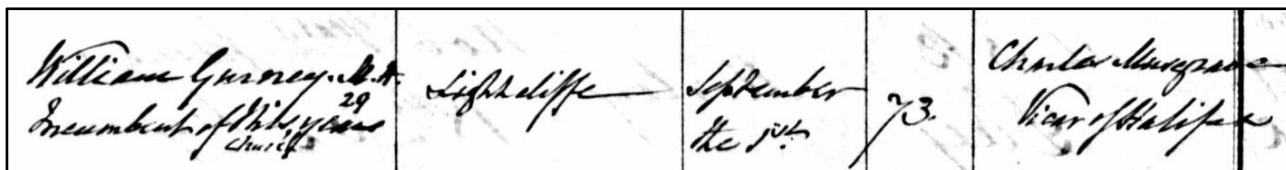


For many years before his death, Rev Gurney was described as being “weakly” with failing eyesight. But he was still performing his duties to the end. There is a page in the Burial Record where he officiates at several 1869 funerals before his own death on 28th August.

The *Halifax Courier* 4th September, 1869, noted that:-

‘the rev. gentleman was very staunch in his advocacy of Evangelical principles; in his official and his private life he was much esteemed, and was of a kindly, genial disposition.’

His funeral, on 1st September 1869, was attended by gentlemen of all denominations, resident in the neighbourhood and by many of the clergy. The Vicar of Halifax, the Venerable Archdeacon Musgrave, officiated and presented a large bible to the church.



IN MEMORY OF
THE REV. WILLIAM GURNEY M.A.

FOR 50 YEARS FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST
AND FOR 29 YEARS, THE DEVOTED PASTOR
OF LIGHTCLIFFE CHAPELRY
IN THE COUNTY OF YORK
WHO DIED
THE 28TH DAY OF AUGUST 1869
AGED 73

THOU “THOU WILT KEEP HIM IN PERFECT PEACE
WHOSE MIND IS STAYED ON THEE
BECAUSE HE TRUSTED IN THEE” ISAIAH XXVI.3

WHOSE “WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW” HEBREWS XIII. 7

AND ALSO OF HARRIET GURNEY HIS WIFE
WHO DIED JANUARY 12TH 1881
AGED 72 YEARS

His widow Harriet Gurney died in Ramsgate, Kent but was brought back to Lightcliffe for burial with her husband on 18th January 1881. Their headstone is near the tower in the closed section of the churchyard.

Up until William Gurney's death, priests could be buried under the church floor as had his two immediate predecessors, however the practice of being buried under a church was made illegal, on health grounds, by the 1860s Burial Acts. We know of about 12 people buried under the old church both clergy and lay. The archaeological survey by Bradford University shows no sign of these so they must have been buried at some depth. Presumably when the church was demolished these graves were covered by turf. The last burial under the church was that of Ann Walker in 1854.

For a short period of time after William Gurney's death, services including burials were conducted by James Wynn who appears to have been his assistant for at least two years. It was Wynn who stood in for him at the January 1869 opening of the National School, endowed by Evan Charles Sutherland Walker.

But a new vicar was appointed very quickly as explained in part 2.



St. Matthew's old Church, Lightcliffe
1775 – 1875
(image taken about 1920)

Dorothy Barker and Ian Philp

December 2024