

## Incumbents buried in the churchyard.

A slightly ungainly title for “persons in office esp. clergymen” but in the context of the board in church it means both curates and vicars. Before the parish was created in the 1840s, the person with responsibility for St Matthew's was a Curate under the care of Halifax parish church. We've uncovered a little information about some of the incumbents who were buried either under the church or very nearby. The first is a bit of a mystery, Rev Joshua Hill who died in 1733 and, according to the historian J. Horsfall Turner, was buried under the church (in this case the earlier Eastfield Chapel ). Why a mystery? Because his name is not in the burial records.

We're on firmer ground with Rev Rich Sutcliffe, AM. He had a splendid memorial tablet erected by his widow, Martha, (& now stored in the tower). She also presented a chalice in his memory. He was curate at St Matthew's from around 1750 to his death in 1782. Prior to that he'd been a curate at St Anne's Southowram. He was Headmaster at Hipperholme Grammar School for 20 of those years. Unlike today, being in charge of St Matthew's wasn't a full time occupation. He was a benefactor of the poor and is included on the Benefactors' Board which was displayed in the old church and is now in the tower. His gift amounted to 20 shillings a year based on property in Sheard Green in Hove Edge. (anyone know where this was?) The inscription reads *“To Mr William Walker at Crow Nest, the Ministers & Churchwardens of Lightcliffe & their successors in trust 20 shillings per annum to be by them distributed at Lightcliffe Chapel on Christmas Day to 20 poor persons residing in Hipperholme cum Brighouse having no Parish relief.”*



His memorial says that he was a loving husband, a true friend & kind to the poor. In short, a true Christian.

He was curate when the Eastfield Chapel was replaced by St Matthew's old church. His pews were alongside of those of William Walker of Crow Nest & Cliffe Hill who was a principal donor for the new building.

He was followed by Rev Robert Wilkinson MA, BD who had been assistant curate at Coley and then a similar position at St Matthew's, nominated by Rich Sutcliffe at a salary of £30 per annum. He became the perpetual curate on Sutcliffe's death in 1782. He, too, was a headmaster this time at Heath which is where he lived. He rode to Lightcliffe attired, it is said, in olden style with knee breeches and buckles. Towards the end of his life (he died in 1839), there were complaints that he was too old to preach. Interestingly in an account of his time at Heath, Thomas Cox (Headteacher of Heath & buried in the churchyard) notes that towards the end of his 50 year tenure at the school he was rarely present and the number of boys had declined significantly. Nonetheless he is honoured by a large tablet in the northern wall of Halifax parish church opposite to the south door.

He'd married Sarah Robinson of Hipperholme in 1782 and she was described as “tantum non mater” by the pupils – almost a mother.

They had a large family most of whom died young. But a daughter (3 survived childhood) Lydia married Rev George Fenton, Vicar of Royston who often preached at St Matthew's, both of whom are buried in the churchyard.

Robert was buried under the central aisle of the church.

In 1840 Rev William Gurney became perpetual curate and served for 29 years dying at the age of 73 in 1869. His headstone records that he was a Minister of Christ for 50 years and a devoted Pastor of Lightcliffe Chapelry. *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee: Because he trusted in Thee whose faith follow.” Hebrews.*



He was “weakly” for many years before his death but was still performing his duties to the end. We have a page in the Burial Record where he officiates at several funerals in 1869 before his own death where the Venerable Archdeacon Musgrave officiated is recorded. (the latter presented a large bible to the church). The congregation erected a tablet on the east wall to his memory but this is now lost.

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 remain covered now by turf. One of the last was Ann Walker in 1854.

The Rev John Phillips, not an incumbent, was buried in the church in 1821. He died in Lightcliffe on a visit from his home in Berstead Regus, Sussex.

To be buried under the church itself follows a long tradition going back to the Middle Ages when priests and wealthy landowners would be granted this privilege. There was a belief that being buried within the church or as close as possible to it gave you a better place at the Last Judgement.

But not on the north side within the shadow of the church. As in other churchyards there were very few, if any, burials in this shadow until around 1820. Suicides or 'worthless' people might be buried there and it was used for fairs and other entertainment. Our churchyard was deemed full and closed in 1865 and committed to the care of the Privy Council (now passed on to Calderdale Council). The “new” burial ground began to be used at this time.

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