

Reverend Robert Wilkinson
(Before 24th November 1752 – December 1839)
and his family

As the vicar of Lightcliffe it has already been seen that the Reverend Robert Wilkinson conducted a number of funerals for the Walker family. But there were other links and so here follows an outline of his family.

Early texts suggest that Robert Wilkinson was born in Cumberland. Working back from his death date and age his year of birth was probably 1752. There is a 24th November 1752 Cockermouth baptism of a Robert Wilkinson son of Thomas Willkinson which is probably our man.

The following two letters would appear to confirm the Cockermouth connection and give more details of Robert Wilkinson's early life.

To his Grace, the Archbishop of York

This is to certify that Robert Wilkinson was born at Cockermouth in Cumberland, attended a Grammar School there from near his seventh year of his age to above the thirteenth. That he removed immediately from thence to St Bees School, where he continued near four years; that upon leaving St Bees he lived again with his parents one year, when he was taught a little of mathematics.

He afterwards was master of the Grammar School at Dovenby near Cockermouth one year; from whence he came to Hipperholme School, where he has been four years & a quarter as first of three assistants; in which capacity he has been teaching Sallust, Virgil, Terence, Horace & Tully the Greek Testament, Lucien, Homer, Epictetus, Xenophon & Longinus.

In witness whereof, we set our names this 27th of May 1776.

*Richard Sutcliffe Curate of Lightcliffe
Dd Sutcliffe Curate of St Ann's
Robert Wilkinson*

To the most Reverend Father in God, Robert, by divine providence, Lord
Archbishop of York, Primate of England & Metropolitan, greeting.

Whereas our beloved in Christ Robert Wilkinson hath declared unto us his intention of offering himself a candidate for the Holy Order of Deacon and for that he hath requested of us a letter testimonial of his life and behaviour. We therefore, whose names are herewith subscribed, do testify from our personal knowledge of the life and behaviour of the said Robert Wilkinson for the space of four years last past and upward that he hath during that time lived piously, soberly and honestly. Applied himself diligently to his studies and (as far as we know or believe) never wrote or maintained anything contrary to the doctrine or discipline of the Church of England, and moreover we think him a person worthy to be admitted into the Holy Order of Deacons.

*In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands, the
8th day of June in the year of our Lord 1776.*

Richard Sutcliffe A.M. Curate of Lightcliffe

Edwd Nelson Curate of Halifax

Dd Sutcliffe Curate of St. Ann's.

ROBERT WILKINSON was appointed assistant Curate of Coley on the nomination of the Rev. E. Nelson, on July 27th, 1777; to have all the profits. Robert Webster succeeded him there in July 1781, at £40 per year. Robert Wilkinson, deacon, was appointed curate of Lightcliffe July 7th, 1776, on the nomination of the Rev. Richard Sutcliffe at £30 per annum. On July 1st, 1782, Robert Wilkinson, clerk, was appointed perpetual curate of Lightcliffe on the death of the Rev. Richard Sutcliffe, on the nomination of the Vicar of Halifax, Dr. Wood. He entered on July 7th and made an entry of the fact in Lightcliffe Register. He was an M.A., and afterwards B.D., and for some years a surrogate.

On 15th July 1782 “Robert Wilkinson of Hipperholme” married Sarah Robinson, spinster “of the same parish”. They had a large family. The eldest three children were girls namely Mary, Catherine and Sarah who were baptised at St Matthew’s Church on 1st July 1783, 28th June 1785 and 19th April 1787 respectively. Then followed three boys, Robert, George and Thomas, again all three were baptised at St Matthew’s Church on 6th March 1789, 31st December 1790 and 5th November 1792. But none of the sons survived into adulthood. One-year old Thomas was buried in St Matthew’s churchyard on 18th November 1793. Robert Wilkinson born 19th January 1789 died just after his seventh birthday and was buried in St Matthew’s churchyard on 25th January 1796. George did not quite make it to be a teenager being buried on 9th July 1803 again at St Matthew’s churchyard. These burials do not appear in the online Lightcliffe burial records. There were Wilkinson burials at these times but their Christian names and that of their father are interchangeable. But going back to the original, difficult to read, parish records the above information is hopefully correct.

A fourth daughter Lydia Wilkinson was baptised on 25th January 1796 and then a fifth daughter and so eighth child Eliza was baptised on 14th April 1800 both at St Matthew’s Church. Eliza Wilkinson was buried there on 13th November 1801.

Meanwhile from a history of Heath School, Halifax.

On the death of Mr Sutcliffe in 1782 the Rev. Robert Wilkinson became Curate of Lightcliffe, entering on his duties on July 7th. I have not ascertained whether he was then a Graduate of a University, or whether he was connected with the neighbourhood. In 1787 he subscribes one guinea to the new set of Bells at the Parish Church and is put down under Hipperholme. He might have been resident in the Township or even Assistant Master at the School. At any rate he was looked on as a competent man to fill the vacancy at Heath, and on Feb. 4th, 1789, he was elected Master on a salary of £75 a year, which in 1797 was raised to £80. The School gained a celebrity under his tuition, and many “foreigners” resorted to it. At one time the number was so great that several boarded at a house at Moor-bottom, which was pulled down a few years ago. I once heard an old pupil say that there were a hundred scholars at the School, but most of them were boarders. Houses however were wonderfully elastic in those days!

Mr Wilkinson had probably entered his name on the books of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, which enabled him after ten years, on satisfying the authorities that he had devoted himself to the study of Theology, to take the Degree of B.D., without going through

the usual course of residence at the University. Having then obtained a Degree in 1790, he proceeded no higher in Divinity, and devoted himself to the duties of his Mastership. For many years the School had a great notoriety in the West Riding; and there was a rivalry between Heath and Hipperholme, the latter claiming a superiority in "manners" and the former in "brains".

His wife Sarah Wilkinson died aged 75 in 1821 and was buried in St. Matthew's churchyard on 4th April 1821. "All his old pupils speak highly of Mrs Wilkinson who is described in an epitaph [in Halifax Minster] as "tantum non mater" i.e. "all but a mother". The copy of the parish burial records below shows the Rev. Thomas Bates, Curate of Coley taking the committal service understandably not Rev. Robert Wilkinson, the widower.

Elizabeth Sharp Grandey wife of Dan Sharp Lane No. 1116	June 15 R Wilkinson 2 years min
Betty Smith Wife of John Smith No. 1117	June 26 R Wilkinson 2 years min
Mary Anne daughter of Mark Greenwood No. 1118	June 2 R Wilkinson 4 years off min
Benjamin Hepworth No. 1119	June 8 T. Bates 6 years off min
John Homestay son of Little Homestay No. 1120	June 9 R Wilkinson 12 months min
Sarah the wife of the Rev Robert Wilkinson B.D. 1121	June 7 T. Bates 24 years late of Coley

D.M.Barker
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