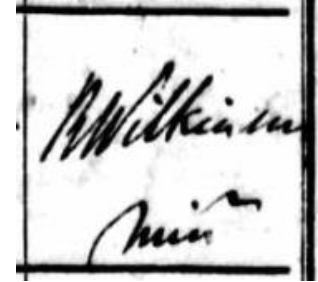


Reverend Robert Wilkinson
(Before 24th November 1752 – 29th December 1839)
and his family

The Reverend Robert Wilkinson succeeded Reverend Richard Sutcliffe as perpetual curate of St. Matthew's Church in Lightcliffe. This was the church that William Walker had built in 1775. Over time the Rev. Wilkinson would conduct a number of baptisms and funerals for the Walker family.

This is how he always signed the Lightcliffe parish registers.

A black and white photograph of a handwritten signature, 'R. Wilkinson', enclosed within a rectangular border. Below the main signature, there is a smaller, less legible signature that appears to be 'min'.

What follows is some of his and his family's story.

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 Wilkinson which is almost certainly him.

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

From this documents it looks as if Robert Wilkinson began teaching at Hipperholme Grammar School in 1771/2 when he was aged just nineteen or twenty.

Some of the same gentlemen also recommend him for Holy Orders.

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 as 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.

The following extract notes his early career in the church.

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 in 1787, Rev. Robert Wilkinson became headmaster of Heath School, Halifax. A history of the school written by a later headmaster, Rev. Thomas Cox, who as it happens, was also buried at Lightcliffe, explains more.

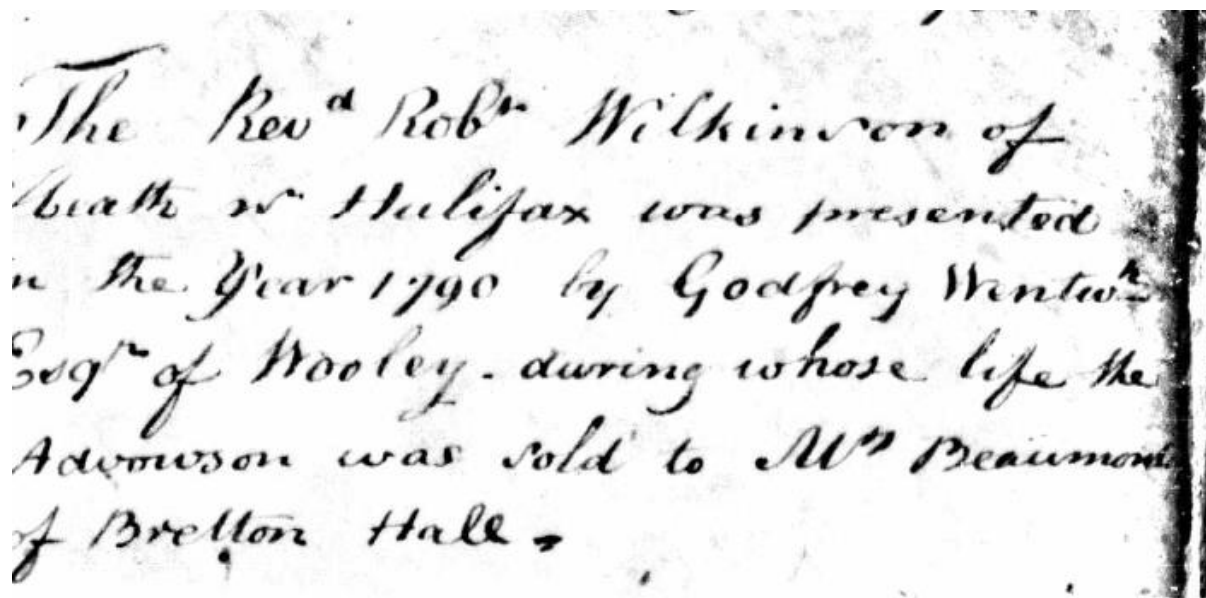
On the death of Mr. Sutcliffe in 1782 the Rev. Robert Wilkinson became Curate of Lightcliffe, entering on his duties on July 7th. I have not ascertained whether he was then a Graduate of a University, or whether he was connected with the neighbourhood. In 1787 he subscribes one guinea to the new set 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".

In 1790, Rev. Robert Wilkinson took on another job as the *Stamford Mercury* announced on 19th and 26th November 1790.

The Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D. curate of Lightcliffe, and master of Halifax Grammar-School is preferred by Godfrey Wentworth, Esq. of Hickleton, to the vicarage of Darton, near Barnsley, vacant by the death of the late Rev. Robert Fisher.

The first page of the Darton parish records for 1790 confirms this.



The Rev^d Rob^t Wilkinson of
Leath wth Halifax was presented
in the Year 1790 by Godfrey Wentworth
Esq^r of Wooley. during whose life the
Advowson was sold to M^r Beaumont
of Bretton Hall.

The **University of Leeds special collection** has this biography of Godfrey Wentworth

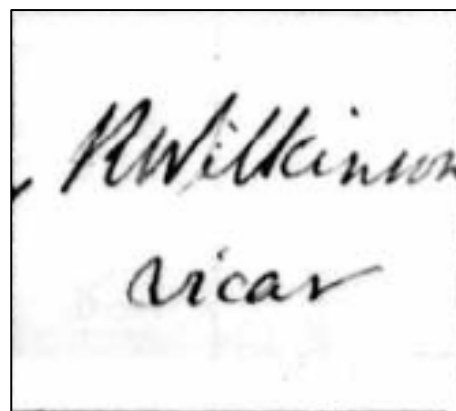
Godfrey Wentworth Wentworth (1773-1834)

Godfrey Wentworth Wentworth was born in 1773 as Godfrey Wentworth Armytage, the son of Sir George Armytage, 3rd baronet, and Anna Maria Wentworth. His father came from a well-established family in the West Riding of Yorkshire with their main seat at Kirklees Hall in the Calder Valley. His mother was the daughter of Godfrey Wentworth, owner of Woolley Hall, south of Wakefield.

Godfrey Armytage was educated at Hipperholme Grammar School and then at Trinity College Cambridge. In 1789 his maternal grandfather died, and Godfrey inherited the bulk of the estate; his eldest brother, George, already held the baronetcy and Kirklees Hall following the death of their father in 1783. Godfrey was now a wealthy landowner in his own right, and in recognition he changed his surname to Wentworth.

Godfrey Wentworth Armytage later Godfrey Wentworth Wentworth and Robert Wilkinson may well have known each other from their time at Hipperholme Grammar School, as pupil and master. Was this how Rev. Robert Wilkinson came to be made vicar of Darton even though he lived miles away in Halifax and had two other jobs? Who knows!

Looking at the parish baptism records for Darton, once the name of the person officiating was noted, it becomes clear that a curate took most of the baptisms and so presumably most of the other services. Rev. Robert Wilkinson did take at least three Darton marriage services in the late 1790s. Perhaps when he went over for these weddings, and possibly some burials, he used the opportunity to 'batch' baptise children. In 1815 there are five different dates, spread throughout the year, on which he baptised more than one child signing the parish register as vicar.



In January 1813 various newspapers including the *Leicester Journal* and the *Cambridge Chronicle* had this announcement.

On Monday the 4th instant, at Halifax, Mr. John Roughton, of Coventry, to Sarah, third daughter of the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D. of Heath, near Halifax.

Anne Lister of Shibden Hall knew, and was in the habit of meeting and calling on the Wilkinsons of Heath. The reference to Isabella Norcliffe's brother of Langton Hall being at the school fits with an event held nearly twenty years later. And thanks to one of her 1823 diary entries, it is known what the Heath School fees were in 1823!

1822-03-15 (journal; WYAS)

- then drove to Heath for IN [Isabella Norcliffe] to call on Mr and Mrs. Wilkinson on account of Norcliffe's having been at school there, — sat 1/4 hour with Mrs and 2 of the Misses Wilkinsons

1823-05-31 (journal; WYAS)

George brought me from Heath this afternoon the terms of Mr. Wilkinson's school — Mr. Wilkinson's 'terms for teaching Latin Greek, Geography (with the use of the globes) English grammar, writing and accounts, are 7 guineas a year and entrance 2 guineas ... Board in his own family 28 guineas a year for young gents. [gentlemen] under 10 years old, but for others above that age 33 guineas per annum and washing £1.12.0 [pounds, shillings, pence] Each young gentleman to bring a pair of sheets, pillow-cases, and 6 towels, or pays 1/2 a guinea annually for the use of them — also a silver spoon or pays 1/2 guinea in lieu of one' ... 'French drawing dancing and music taught on the usual terms' ... a boarding house near where 'a few young gents. [gentlemen] are comfortably accommodated' at '20 and 25 guineas a year according to the ages above mentioned

With grateful thanks to West Yorkshire Archives services (WYAS)

and all the Anne Lister diary transcribers

More diary entries will help tell the story of

Ann Walker and Anne Lister at Lightcliffe

Some other diary entries suggest that the Rev. Robert Wilkinson owned land in Hipperholme near the farm of one of Anne Lister's tenants,

William Hardcastle of Roydlands Farm

1826-02-18 (journal; WYAS)

— he asked Mr. Wilkinson of Heath about that bit (about 650 yards) of land near Hardcastle's — will not sell it (...) to bid 2/6 a yard — but thought it would sell for 5/. and that Mr. Wilkinson really would sell it for money —

1831-08-25 (journal; WYAS)

— wrote note to 'the Reverend Mr. Wilkinson or Mrs. Wilkinson Heath' with compliments to ask what price they would take for the bit of ground adjoining Hardcastle's — Note from Mr. Wilkinson 'as Joshua Riley wishes to occupy the piece of ground at White hall as a garden, he (Mr. Wilkinson has no thoughts of disposing of it at present'

1833-06-13 (journal; WYAS)

(...) moving the Hipperholme toll bar into the far corner of Hardcastle's field no. [number] 10 — will want 40 yards of ground — Samuel Washington thinks it should be 2/6 a yard — I said Mr. Wilkinson wanted 5/. a yard for that bit of ground adjoining Hardcastle's barn — Well! but said Samuel Washington 2/6 a yard has been given in other similar cases —

The youngest Wilkinson daughter, Lydia, married Rev. George Fenton on 30th May 1833. Again, various newspapers including the *York Herald* and the *Leeds Times* both on 1st June 1833 reported the event.

On Thursday, at Halifax parish church, by the Rev. Henry Torre, M.A. rector of Thornhill, the Rev. Geo. Fenton B.A., of Ilkley, to Lydia, youngest daughter of the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D. of Skircoat, near Halifax.

Just a few days after Lydia's wedding her mother Sarah Wilkinson senior died aged 75 on Wednesday 19th June 1833. It is interesting to note which of her husband's three positions the different newspapers included in the death announcements.

22nd June 1833 *Halifax Express*

On Wednesday last, aged 75, Sarah the wife of the Rev. Robert Wilkinson B.D., Master of the Free Grammar School, Halifax

27th June 1833 *Leeds Times*

Same day, aged 72, Sarah, the wife of the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D., master of the Free Grammar School, Halifax, vicar of Darton, perpetual curate of Lightcliffe, and Surrogate to the Spiritual Court York.

29th June 1833 *Yorkshire Gazette*

On Wednesday, the 19th inst., aged 75, Sarah, the wife of the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D., master of the Free Grammar School, Halifax, vicar of Darton

2nd July 1833 *Cumberland Pacquet and Ware's Whitehaven Advertiser*

At Heath, near Halifax, Yorkshire, Mrs Wilkinson, wife of the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, advanced in years.

Her funeral was at Lightcliffe on 24th June 1833 with the officiating minister being the Rev. Thomas Bates, Curate of Coley. She was buried at Lightcliffe but there is no ledger stone with a memorial inscription to her in the churchyard as there are for her daughters. Therefore, it seems more than likely that she was buried within the old St. Matthew's Church where her husband was the perpetual curate. Presumably this was anticipating his eventual committal in a vault there.



By the 1830s, it seems that Rev. Robert Wilkinson, although still vicar of Darton, was visiting that parish less frequently sometimes just twice a year. Judging by the dates on baptism records this was usually in January and in the summer. Some years only had one visit as he moved into his ninth decade. In 1837 he baptised eleven children on New Year's Day perhaps his last visit to Darton. His son-in-law, the Rev. George Fenton of Royston, – nearer to Darton than Halifax – took three baptisms in the summer of 1838.

Rev. Robert Wilkinson was, however, still the headmaster of Heath School but the section in the history of the school about him continues with this comment.

In 1826 notwithstanding the age of the Master there were several boarders and about 35 free scholars. But for some years before his death, which took place at the end of 1839, there were very few scholars; and one of them tells me that all the time was wasted for the three years he was at the school.

Ann Walker's cousin, William Priestley, took a dim view of clergyman who had more than one job and consequently Rev. Robert Wilkinson was in the firing line as this extract from Jill Liddington's *Female Fortunes* describes.

William Priestley had touched on one of the bitter controversies of the 1830s. In Musgrave's sprawling parish, other clergy remained ill-paid. The Reverend Wilkinson had for fifty years combined being curate of Lightcliffe with being headmaster of Heath Grammar School in Halifax. Musgrave might be more concerned to preserve his vicarial privileges than to respond to accusations of neglected clerical duties; but nationally Anglicans were stirring to defend 'the church in danger' from attacks by non-conformists and radicals.

However, throughout the 1830s, despite his advancing years, the Rev. Wilkinson continued to take the Sunday service at Lightcliffe and to be the officiating minister at baptisms and burials. This is known from the parish records as well as Anne Lister's diaries in which she regularly commented that he 'did all the duty' i.e. took the Sunday service. The historian J. Horsfall Turner described him travelling from Heath to Lightcliffe on horseback attired "in the olden style with knee breeches and buckles".

Ann Walker and Anne Lister regularly attended the Sunday service at Lightcliffe, checking in on a Sunday School before hand and then visiting Ann Walker senior of Cliff Hill afterwards.

The following selected diary quotes reveal Anne Lister's thoughts on Reverend Wilkinson's preaching.

With grateful thanks to West Yorkshire Archive Services (WYAS) and all the Anne Lister diary transcribers who have opened up a store of very useful information.

1834-11-09 (journal; WYAS)

(...) 1/4 — A- [Ann] and I off (in the carriage as ever since the 1st Sunday in last month) to Lightcliffe church at 2 — there in 20 minutes — waited 12 minutes — Mr. Wilkinson did all the duty — dined at Newhouse — preached 26 minutes from Ecclesiastes xi. 3. — the most interesting sermon I have heard from Mr. Wilkinson home in 25 minutes at 4 25/.. —

1835-07-05 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — at the school at 2 10/.. for 1/2 hour afraid of being again too late at church not expecting to have Mr. Wilkinson — some minutes too early for he did all the duty — preached 22 minutes from Jeremiah xiii 23 — his voice feebler than usual

1835-11-29 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — Mr. Wilkinson all the duty — could hardly see even by wax light — at least made many mistakes in the prayers and lesson — preached 1/4 hour from John vii. 17 —

1836-08-28 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — at church at 3 — Mr. Wilkinson did all the duty — preached (I did not notice how long — asleep — Mr. Wilkinson hardly audible

1836-12-18 (journal; WYAS)

(...)— service began when we got to church — Mr. Wilkinson did all the duty — could hardly see — hardly read any part of the service right — more mistakes than ever — quite unfit to get into the reading desk — preached 1/4 hour (...)

1837-08-13 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — off to church at 2 3/4 — drove up to Cliff hill — A- [Ann] gone — Mr. Wilkinson did all the duty — had nearly done the 2nd lesson when we arrived — preached 22 minutes from Matthew xxiv. 48 and 3 following verses — 1/2 hour at Cliff hill — (...)

1837-11-26 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — Mr. Wilkinson poorly — (...)

1837-12-01 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — A- [Ann] had written also to Miss Wilkinson — her father better but will not be able to do the duty on Sunday — (...)

By the end of 1837 Reverend Robert Wilkinson would have been 85 years old and was understandably travelling to Lightcliffe by carriage. But he still held three positions, Vicar of Darton, perpetual curate of Lightcliffe and headmaster of Heath School. Not everyone was happy about this situation and change was being suggested.

1838-01-19 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — she had letter from Mr. Fenton to ask if she (A- [Ann]) had learnt if any steps were in contemplation for the public inducing Mr. Wilkinson to give up the school —

1838-01-28 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — A- [Ann] had letter tonight from Mrs. Fenton — very anxious for her father to have an usher who would act as curate —

1838-01-29 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — In spite of the snow A- [Ann] rode off to Heath before 12 and got back at 4 covered with snow — having had no success in persuading Miss Wilkinson of the expediency of her father's having an under graduate of one the universities as usher and curate

1838-02-25 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — Note left at the Lodge last night, came to me just before breakfast this morning for A- [Ann] from Miss Wilkinson to say 'I write a line to say there will be no duty at Lightcliffe tomorrow, (...)

1838-03-04 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — off to church at 1 40/.. — took up A- [Ann] at Cliff hill — Mr. Wilkinson did all the duty — preached 16 minutes from Philippians iv. 11. on the duty of being contented — No organist or singers — the organist has taken the organist's place at one of the H-x [Halifax] Methodist chapels — could not get paid at Lightcliffe —

1838-04-08 (journal; WYAS)

(...) and off to church at 2 5/.. — Mr. Wilkinson did all the duty — reading the last psalm but one when we entered our pew — made sad work of the lessons —

1838-12-02 (journal; WYAS)

(...) Had been off to Lightcliffe church this afternoon (in the carriage with A- [Ann]) about 1 1/2 — A- [Ann] 40 minutes in the school, and I waited in her room upstairs — Mr. Wilkinson's curate did all the duty

1838-12-25 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — at church in 20 minutes at 10 1/2 — the curate read prayers and Mr. Wilkinson preached inaudibly 20 minutes from I Corinthians i 30

1839-03-29 (journal; WYAS)

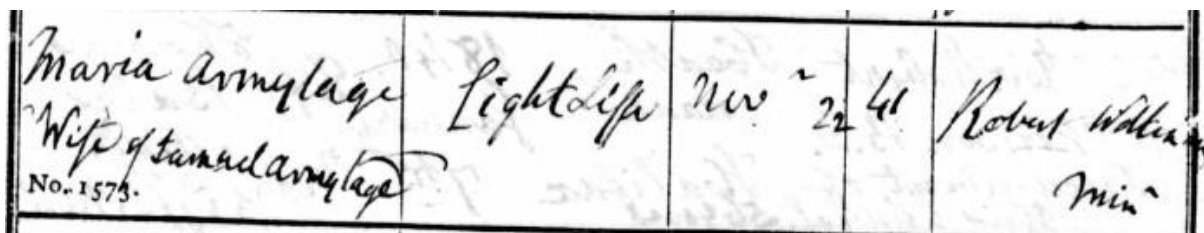
(...) — off to church at 10 10/.. — Mr. Horsfall did all the duty (though Mr. Wilkinson was at church) preached 28 minutes from Luke xxiii. 21

1839-03-31 (journal; WYAS)

(...) — Mr. Wilkinson at church but did no duty except giving the bread at the sacrament — about 30 communicants

Looking at the Lightcliffe parish baptism records Rev. Wilkinson took most of the baptisms in 1837 with Rev. Thomas Bates of Coley, son-in-law Rev. George Fenton and even a curate of Darton taking a few. It was a similar story until October 1838. After that James Horsfall, the curate, took most of the 1838 baptisms and all the 1839 baptisms.

The burial records have the same familiar names taking some of the funerals plus the vicar of Brighouse. Rev. Robert Wilkinson signed as the officiating minister throughout 1838 and for a few burials in 1839, half a dozen in the spring and then a couple in the summer. The last time his signature appears in the burial records was on 22nd November 1839 for Maria Armytage, the wife of Samuel Armytage. More about this Armytage family can be found in the article [George Armytage and family.pdf](#)



A few weeks before, on 2nd November 1839, the advert below had appeared in the *Halifax Guardian*. The purpose was to form a committee to organise a dinner for the Rev. Robert Wilkinson.

HEATH SCHOOL, NEAR HALIFAX.

ON Thursday, the 14th of November, 1839, a Meeting will take place at the Northgate Hotel, in Halifax, at Twelve o'Clock in the Forenoon, for the purpose of forming a Committee of Gentlemen, to undertake the management of a DINNER, proposed to be given to the Reverend R. WILKINSON, B.D. by his Pupils, on Thursday, the 10th of December, at Five o'Clock, at the above Hotel.

Gentlemen educated by Mr. Wilkinson, desirous of attending this Dinner, are requested to transmit their names immediately to the Northgate Hotel, that the Committee of Management may be enabled to make the necessary arrangements, as early as possible.

Halifax, November 1st, 1839.

It provoked the following correspondence published in the same paper on 9th November 1839. The reference in the letter to 'Eighty – four ' would appear to refer to Robert Wilkinson's age which must have been closer to 87.

CORRESPONDENCE.

PROPOSED DINNER TO THE REV. ROBERT WILKINSON, BY GENTLEMEN EDUCATED AT HEATH SCHOOL

To the Editor of the Halifax Guardian

SIR, -- Observing from the advertisement in your last paper, that a meeting is to be held on the 14th instant, at the Northgate Hotel, for the formation of a Committee to superintend this Tribute of Respect to the Venerable Head Master of Heath School, from gentlemen who were educated at that *once efficient* endowment, I would beg, through the medium of your columns, to offer a few observation to those gentlemen who may attend the meeting, and especially to those with whom it was originated. I would render ample justice to those feelings of becoming gratitude and respect towards their Venerable Tutor which have induced them to come forwards on this occasion; but it is quite evident that they are parties residing at a distance, and in complete ignorance of the state of *inefficiency* into which the School has sunk, through the unwillingness of the respected Head Master to resign an office to the duties of which his advanced age has rendered him no longer competent. This is no debatable matter of *opinion*. The fact that there are now only *three or four* pupils at this amply endowed Institution, places both the *state* of things and the cause beyond dispute; and the first impression of the people of Halifax, on hearing of the proposed compliment to Mr. Wilkinson, under such circumstances, was that the whole affair was a *hoax*.

But now that there can be no doubt of the seriousness of the intention, I would gladly prevent the gentlemen who entertained it from wounding their own feelings, as well as those of Mr. Wilkinson's family and friends, by doing that which, instead of a compliment, would virtually be the most cutting censure, and expose to ridicule the self-delusions of Eighty-four as to retaining the unimpaired

power, and vigours of youth. No one can appreciate more highly than I do the advantages possessed by the pupils at Heath, during the long period of Mr. Wilkinson's (I will not say *competent* but) *most able* superintendence, when it was a proud recommendation at College to have been educated there; but can that be an apology for such an endowment being lost to the town and neighbourhood for more than ten years; or will it be argued that the master, whose good management *once* added to the celebrity of the School, has *therefore* a right to sink it into utter inefficiency ?

Instead of the *mock compliment* which, under such circumstances, a public dinner would inevitably be, I would respectfully suggest to the meeting, that its object be converted into a tribute of *real* respect to Mr. Wilkinson – a tribute as appropriate as it would be merited, namely, to form a committee of management for the presentation of a handsome Piece of Plate, *on his retirement* from those duties which he once so efficiently discharged, but which the course of nature no longer permits him to fulfil.

The general voice of the public would applaud an object like this; and the gentleman educated at the Heath would gladly come forward to promote it. Its accomplishment would cast a gleam of merited honour on venerable old age retiring in well-earned affluence from the toils of active life.

Whether I may be successful or not in these well-meant suggestions, I shall have the satisfaction of having acted from motives of sincere regard towards Mr. Wilkinson, and of having endeavoured to prevent gentlemen from doing in ignorance what they would intend as a *compliment*, but which in reality be a *mockery*.

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient Servant

ERICANUS

Halifax, Nov, 4th, 1839.

After the November meeting at Northgate Hotel Halifax the following notice appeared in the *Halifax Guardian* on 16th, 23rd and 30th November 1839.

At a Meeting of Gentlemen educated at
Heath School, held at the Northgate Hotel, in
Halifax, this 14th Day of November, 1839, for making
Arrangements for a PUBLIC DINNER to be given
to the Rev. ROBERT WILKINSON, B.D.

The Rev. SAMUEL SHARP, M.A., Vicar of Wakefield,
in the Chair.

It was Resolved

That the Dinner shall take place at the
Northgate Hotel, in Halifax, on the 19th Day of
December next, at Five o'Clock, P.M.

Colonel NORCLIFFE, of LANGTON Hall, near
Malton in the Chair

Tickets to be had at the Northgate Hotel; 15s each.

SAMUEL SHARP, Chairman

ROBERT PARKER, Hon. Secretary

All Communications are requested to be made to the Secretary.

The *Yorkshire Gazette* on 7th December 1839 and then the *Halifax Guardian* on 14th December 1839 had the above notice with the addition of the following names

Lieut-Colonel NORCLIFFE Langton Hall near
Malton, president

VICE PRESIDENT

The Reverend J.W. WHITAKER, D.D., Vicar of
Blackburn

STEWARDS

The Reverend SAMUEL SHARP, Vicar of Wakefield

The Reverend W.C. FENTON Mattersey, Bawtry

Captain HARDY, Wakefield

JOSHUA HUDSON, Esquire, Haxby, near York

OSWALD MILNE, Esquire, Manchester

This dinner at Northgate House, Halifax, did take place on the 19th December 1839. Two days later the *Halifax Express* paper reported on the in great details on the dinner and then other newspapers including the *Leeds Mercury* and the *Blackburn Standard* repeated the same report later in the week.

DINNER TO THE REV. R. WILKINSON, B.D.

A dinner was given to the Rev. Robt. Wilkinson, Master of Heath school, by his pupils, at the Northgate Hotel, Halifax, on Thursday, 19th inst.; the chair was taken by Col. Norcliffe, of Langton Hall, near Malton. About 50 of the late pupils of Mr. Wilkinson were collected on this interesting occasion, and we never witnessed so much enthusiasm, so much real good feeling and sincere attachment, from such a numerous body of highly respectable individuals. Gentlemen from all parts of the country were assembled, to testify their gratitude to the best of masters, whose whole life had been devoted to the education of the sons of many of the most respectable families in the county of York. The Chairman, after the usual toasts of "the Queen" and "Queen Dowager," proposed "the health of the affianced husband of our illustrious Queen" and spoke of him as a man possessing every quality that could ensure happiness to his amiable consort, but also would promote the prosperity of the country, whose Queen he espouses. "The Army and Navy" were then proposed by the Rev. Dr. Whitaker, Vicar of Blackburn, and was responded to in a handsome manner by the worthy Chairman. After this toast, the Chairman, in an energetic speech, proposed the toast of their excellent guest. He stated his full conviction, that not one of Mr. Wilkinson's late pupils then present, as well as those that were prevented attending on that occasion, but felt with him the many, the extraordinary obligations they owed to their former friend and preceptor; who, bowed down with old age, had done his best from the earliest period of his commencing tutor, a period of above 50 years, in improving the minds, and cultivating the classical tastes of this pupils, and he now received THAT REWARD which so many warm and attached hearts CHEERFULLY and devotedly heaped upon him. The Chairman alluded, in a most appropriate and feeling manner, to the kindness and affection all had received from the late Mrs. Wilkinson, whose solicitude for their welfare, either in sickness or in health, was far beyond what any words could express, or any feelings of his, however acute, could possibly describe; truly could he say of that valuable woman, that she was treasure to her family, and the most

valuable of human beings to those who were more particularly entrusted to her care, After this toast, the venerable gentleman retired, on which occasion every one present rose, and greeted him with the most enthusiastic cheers. The Rev. George Fenton, son-in-law of Mr. Wilkinson, returned thanks for his revered parent, and spoke of him as one of the best of fathers, and as a good Christian, an eminent scholar, and as a gentleman of high and honourable feeling. The health of the worthy Chairman was then proposed by the Reverend W. C. Fenton, the vicar of Mattersey, who described to the meeting the valuable services of Col. Norcliffe as a soldier and country gentleman; -- in the former capacity, on the field of Salamanca, when gloriously leading on his troop viz, the 4th, of Queen's Own Dragoons, to victory, he received a dangerous wound, which had nearly proved fatal; and in the latter capacity he proves himself the most worthy and sympathizing friend to the tenantry and poorer dependents, all of whom look up to him as the father of his people, and the friend to those who are in need. The Chairman was supported on the right by the venerable guest of the party; on the left by Archbishop Musgrave, the Rev. Samuel Sharp, vicar of Wakefield, Henry Hall, Esq., Leeds, John Rawson Esq., Stone Royd, Col. Ramsden, Joshua Ingham, Esq.; and the Vice-Chairman by John Waterhouse, Esq., H. L. Edwards Esq., Pye Nest, Joseph Stocks Esq., Shibden Hall, and the Governors and pupils of Heath School. The greatest credit is due to Mr. and Mrs. Crosland for this splendid entertainment; every delicacy of the season was on the table. The wines were excellent, and their attention to the company was beyond all praise. An efficient company of glee singers, under the able direction of Mr. Sugden, enlivened the company between the excellent speeches delivered during the evening. The party broke up about twelve o'clock, and perhaps there never was a dinner in the town of Halifax where the company were so truly happy. The gentleman-like conduct of the excellent chairman, the talented speeches of the vice-chairman, added much to the conviviality of the meeting; and all went away fully rewarded for the distance they had travelled to be present on this occasion. -- *Halifax Express*

The Heath School governors were obviously present at the dinner and must have had a meeting earlier in the day. The following notice under SITUATIONS VACANT appeared in various newspapers starting with *Halifax Express* on the same day, 21st December, that they reported on the dinner. A week later the position was advertised in newspapers across the country including those in the university cities of Cambridge and Oxford.

Huntingdon, Bedford & Peterborough Gazette 28th December 1839

The place of SECOND MASTER at the Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth at Heath, near Halifax, Yorkshire, under the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D., Head Master is vacant. The Stipend, which is a certain proportion of the net income of the Charity, may be stated generally as about, or not less than 100 *l.* per annum.

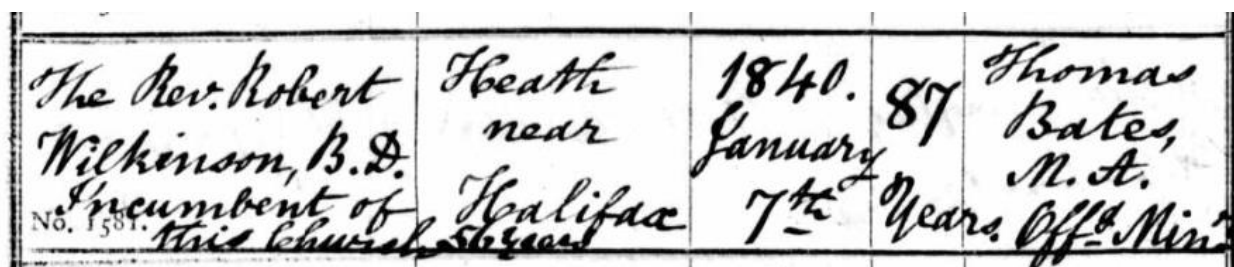
The Second Master will be allowed to reside any where in his own discretion in the neighbourhood of the School, and to receive Boarders into his house.

Heath School has an interest in the Milner Scholarships at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and Lady Betty Hasting's Exhibitions to Queen's College, Oxford.

Candidates, being Graduates of either University, are desired to send their testimonials, (post paid) on or before Saturday, the 25th of January, address to GEORGE POLLARD, Esq., President Governor, Stanary Hall, Halifax

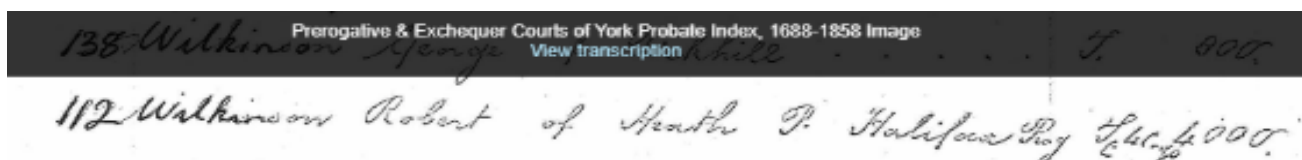
Heath School, Dec, 19th, 1839

The very next day on Sunday 29th December 1839, 87-year-old Reverend Robert Wilkinson died. He was buried in a vault within St. Matthew's Church, his church, on 7th January 1840 almost certainly with his wife Sarah Wilkinson née Robinson.



Within the old church there may well have been a plaque to Rev. & Mrs. Wilkinson near this vault. His predecessor Rev. Richard Sutcliffe and his wife Martha had a plaque which is now in the Lightcliffe tower. But, if there was one, no Wilkinson memorial at Lightcliffe survived the demolition of the old church. A beautiful memorial was erected in St. John's Church now Halifax Minster to both Reverend and Mrs. Wilkinson.

His will was registered at York.



Later the two unmarried Wilkinson daughters as well as Lydia Fenton née Wilkinson and her husband Rev. George Fenton were buried in St. Matthew's churchyard as you will read in

The Wilkinson sisters

The death of Reverend Robert Wilkinson was announced in many newspapers across the country in January 1840.

4th January 1840 *Yorkshire Gazette*

Same day, aged 87, the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D., Vicar of Darton, Perpetual Curate of Lightcliffe, and Head Master of Queen Elizabeth's School, at Heath, near Halifax.

18th January 1840 *Carlisle Journal*

On Sunday, the 29th December, the Rev. Robert Wilkinson B.D., formerly a native of Cockermouth, in this county, and for upwards of 50 years Head Master of the Free Grammar School at Heath, near Halifax, Yorkshire, advanced in life and much and deservedly respected.

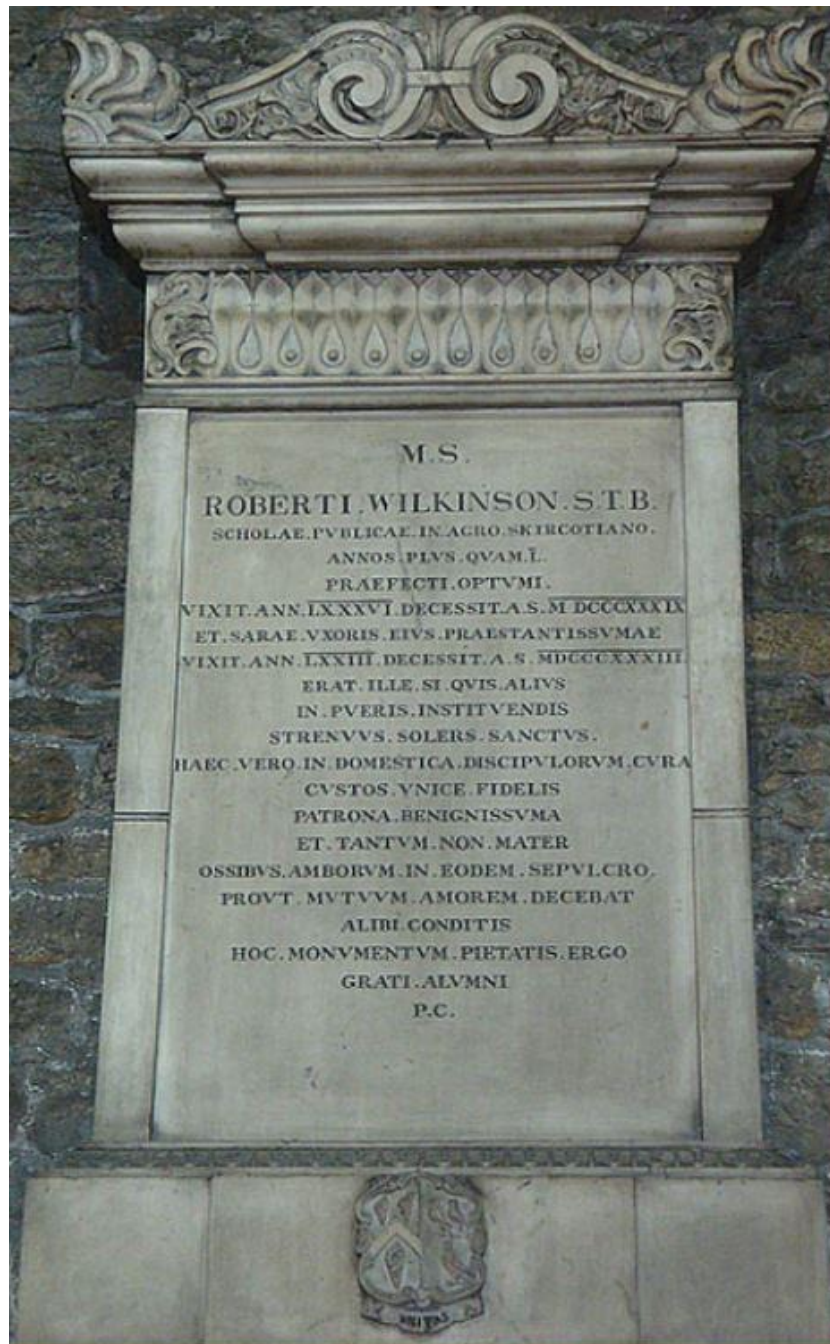
18th January 1840 *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*

Aged 87, the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D. vicar of Darton, perpetual curate of Lightcliffe, and Head Master of Queen Elizabeth's School, at Heath, near Halifax. As a classical master, there were few men who sent forth into the world so many eminent scholars, and the University of Oxford and Cambridge can bear witness to the many well-grounded pupils that came from Heath School.

4th January 1840 *Leeds Times*

On Sunday, aged 87, the Rev. Robert Wilkinson, B.D., vicar of Darton, perpetual curate of Lightcliffe, and headmaster of Queen Elizabeth's school, at Heath, near Halifax. On the 19th of December last, a dinner was given to Mr. Wilkinson by his former pupils, several of whom came from great distance to pay a tribute of affection to their venerable preceptor; and on this occasion the greatest enthusiasm prevailed, proving how highly the pupils of this excellent man valued his unwearied attention to their future welfare and happiness. As a classical master, there were few men who sent forth into the world so many eminent scholars, and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge can bear witness to the many well-grounded pupils that came from Heath School. As a Minister of Christ's holy religion, he was indefatigable in his vocation, and the two parishes of Lightcliffe and

Darton, both of which benefices he held upwards of half a century, will ever remember with gratitude the bounty he distributed among his poorer parishioners and the kind sympathy he showed when distress or sickness visited their dwellings. The poor inhabitants of Heath and the neighbourhood will never forget the unbounded charity of that excellent woman, the late. Mrs. Wilkinson, and the kindness and liberality continued after her decease, by her family. As a parent, his affection to his children formed a prominent feature in his character, and his loss will be severely felt by his four afflicted daughters, and a large circle of friends and acquaintances. The writer of this was his pupil for ten years, and as a small mark of gratitude and respect to his aged and beloved tutor, he pays this last tribute to his memory.



The Wilkinson memorial plaque in Halifax Minster

With grateful thanks to Halifax Minster and David Glover who took the photograph

D.M.Barker
 March 2018
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