

The Walkers of Crow Nest, Lightcliffe

There seem to have been Walkers at Crow Nest, Lightcliffe since at least 1714 when that was the address on the York probate index of a William Walker (1665 – 1714). But there may have been Walkers in Lightcliffe before then. His grandfather, another William Walker (1596–1676), is thought to have moved from Waterclough Hall, Southowram, to Lower Crow Nest leaving Waterclough Hall to his second son Abraham Walker (1629 – 1695).

This Abraham Walker married Anne Langley in 1663 and they were the parents of the William Walker born 1665. One of his siblings was Richard Walker (1672 – 1721) who lived at Waterclough Hall, the address on his York probate index record. It is from this Richard Walker's family that there is the well documented link with Emily Bronte and her possible model for Heathcliffe in her novel *Wuthering Heights*

But back to the Walkers in Lightcliffe.

If William Walker (1596 – 1676) moved to Lower Crow Nest what happened after he died? His eldest son, of course another William Walker (1626 – 1711) may have inherited the Lightcliffe property if his younger brother Abraham got Waterclough Hall. But there is a 1692 Overseers assessment which has "Abraham Walker for Crow Nest" paying 11s for "ye Relief of ye poore or Hippolme cu' Brigghouse" and "Ab.Walker for ye other pt" – possibly of Lane Ends - paying 11s 6d and then "Ab. Walker for Richard Flathers" paying 5s. So, who knows who owned or lived in which property!

A "William Walker junr for Crow Nest" is on a list of churchwardens for the year 1710. This could be this eldest son but apart from this no other records have been found for William (1626 – 1711), perhaps he never married. This might explain why Abraham and Anne Walker's eldest son William Walker (1665 – 1714) and his descendants became the prominent family in Lightcliffe.

William Walker (1665 – 1714) married Sarah Mortimer in 1686. They had five children; Abraham who died in infancy in 1687, William born 1689, Richard born 1691, a sister Ann and another Abraham born in 1696. Their eldest surviving son, William, married Elizabeth Haigh of Honley in 1708. Elizabeth born 1690 was the daughter of George Haigh. Her dowry included mills in Honley which were still in the Walker family's possession a hundred and fifty years later and feature in property valuations as lawyers attempted to untangle the complicated subsequent family wills. Their second son Richard married Alice Roebuck of Lightcliffe in 1720.

William and Elizabeth baptised four children at Eastfield Chapel, two girls Elizabeth and Sarah in 1710 and 1711 and then two boys William on 15th April 1713 and Haigh on 26th December 1714. Eastfield Chapel was the church that preceded St. Matthew's old church. In 1714 its churchwarden was "William Walker for Crow Nest", probably these children's father. Richard and Alice also baptised their son Richard there on 7th September 1721.

When the three brothers, sons of William and Sarah, died they all had Lightcliffe addresses on their wills. William (1689 – 1720) was of Crow Nest. Richard who was buried in Lightcliffe churchyard on 17th April 1724 was "of Lidget, Halifax" as was Abraham. Abraham (1696 – 1725) was recorded as being a "gent of Lightcliffe" when he was buried at Halifax on 2nd August 1725. Is this Lidgate House making an appearance for the first time as a Walker home?

William Walker (1713 – 1786) was the wealthy owner of Crow Nest who largely funded the building of St. Matthew's old church on the site of Eastfield chapel. He is reputed to have gone to the Baltic to personally supervise the purchase and transportation of timber to roof this church, and the Crow Nest and newly acquired Cliffe Hill mansions. He was churchwarden and thus involved in the day to day administration of the church and church affairs. Here he is advertising for craftsman in 1774.

LIGHTCLIFFE CHAPEL,
 In the PARISH of HALIFAX.
NOTICE is hereby given, That any
 Mafon, Carpenter, Joiner, Glazier, or Plaiſtärer,
 willing to undertake his reſpective Branch of Work in re-
 building the ſaid Chapel, may apply to William Walker,
 Eſq; of Crow-Neſt, near Lightcliffe, on Friday next, be-
 twixt the Hours of One : : d Four in the Afternoon.

William Walker also organised the pew plaques for the new church as this later document details. His name appears on many of the plaques either for the family's personal pews or for those of his many Lightcliffe tenants.

BRASS NAMEPLATES
 Many of these were engraved by John Butterworth of Leeds, who wrote to William Walker on March 24th. 1779 as follows: "the prices as follows for Brass & Engraving one like the inclosed you have sent 1/6, if 2 names 2 shilling & if more names in proportion, will do them well."



William Walker (1713 – 1786) was married twice, firstly on 5th January 1739 to Mary Wainhouse who died and then on 6th November 1746 he married Elizabeth Caygill. She was the daughter of the Swaledale born John Caygill who moved to Halifax about 1700 and became a merchant. It was his son John, so Elizabeth's brother, who was the very wealthy wool merchant owning much of Halifax who gave the land and a large sum of money to build The Piece Hall. Years later Anne Lister would record in her diary for

Tuesday 31st March 1835

-- then looking over A-'s old papers that she brought from Crow-nest for about an hour – several copies of wills --- Mr Caygill's, great grandfather to A--.

One can imagine that William and Elizabeth Walker were thus very, very wealthy easily able to create magnificent mansions for themselves and their family

Their family comprised Mary born in 1747, William – there had to be another William! - born 1749, Elizabeth born 1750, John born 1753 and finally Ann born 1757. When the church benefactor died in 1786 his eldest son William Walker inherited the Lightcliffe estate and various other properties and businesses in the West Riding. He was also probably responsible for getting a Schnetzler organ installed in his father's church in 1787. Perhaps before he died his father had requested it, sparing no expense when it came to the inside furniture of his church. This William like his sisters, Mary and Ann, never married, but his siblings, Elizabeth and John, did. Elizabeth Walker married John Priestley in 1776 and John Walker married Mary Edwards daughter of John Edwards of Pye Nest in 1795. This brought together three very wealthy and therefore influential families in the Halifax area.

John and Mary Walker lived at Cliffe Hill when their eldest son William – the seventh and last! - was born in 1798 and then died there three weeks later. He was buried in what would become the family plot just outside the church his grandfather had built. Presumably, John's elder brother William with perhaps his spinster sisters resided at Crow Nest. Elizabeth and John Priestley lived near Sowerby Bridge and had a large family many of whom died young.

Their eldest surviving son William Priestley born 1779 spent time at Crow Nest with his grandparents, aunts and uncles; perhaps when he attended Hipperholme Grammar School. His much younger cousins Mary born 1799, Elizabeth born 1801, Ann born 1803 and John born 1804 were all baptised at St. Matthew's old church.

These children and their parents then moved to Crow Nest on the death of John's older, unmarried brother William in 1809. This is when the inheritance issues became even more complicated. William Walker (1749 – 1809) of Crow Nest has two York probate index records one for 1810 and another dated 1824. As John and Mary moved to Crow Nest it seems likely that the spinster sisters Mary and Ann Walker moved to Cliffe Hill. This was certainly the address on Mary Walker's will dated 1823. She died in 1822 and was buried within the church her father had built. The Walker plot just outside the east end of the church would receive three more individuals when teenager Mary Walker died in 1815 and then her parents, John and Mary Walker, in 1823.

Both grandfather William Walker (1713 – 1786) and father John Walker (1753 – 1823) seem to have attempted to make very good provision in their wills for their daughters. But things were complicated even further when son John Walker junior died on his honeymoon in

Naples in January 1830. John Walker, the heir to the Crow Nest estate had married Frances Esther Penfold in the summer of 1829. Fanny, as she was known, was the daughter of Rev. Penfold of Sussex and a niece through marriage of Christopher Rawson. She had come to Lightcliffe to be a companion for either Aunt Ann Walker or young Ann Walker. When her husband died, she returned to her parents in Sussex as she was with child. This child would have been heir to the Crow Nest estate if it had not been still born. A memorial to her late husband was placed in St. Matthew's old church and survives to this day in the Tower.

This left sisters Elizabeth Sutherland, as she was by then, and Ann Walker as extremely wealthy co heiresses to the Lightcliffe and other properties. Sister Elizabeth Walker had met Captain George Mackay Sutherland at a ball at Crow Nest and married him in York in 1828. They would spend much of their married life in Scotland on his Inverness estate where most of their children were born. Although one, George Sackville Sutherland at the time their eldest son, was baptised at St. Matthew's old church in 1831. His baptism record gives his parents' abode as Crow Nest suggesting that they resided there at times.

The two Ann Walkers were the last Walkers to live in Lightcliffe. Aunt Ann at Cliffe Hill and Ann Walker at Lidgate House and then finally at Cliffe Hill. When Ann Walker was at Lidgate her cousin William Priestley and his wife Eliza lived nearby at New House, Lightcliffe later called The Grange and now demolished. See photograph. He was an eminent local musician, antiquarian and literary gentleman who instigated the founding of Halifax Choral Society. He had an extensive collection of mainly German music which they often performed. For a time, he was churchwarden at St. Matthew's old church.



William Priestley was also an executor for the will of his uncle, John Walker senior, along with Henry Lees Edwards (1775 – 1848) who was the brother of John's wife, Mary. Safeguarding his Walker cousins' fortune must have been a concern as his cousin, Ann Walker, moved to live with Anne Lister at Shibden Hall. It took until 1835 to sort out who inherited what, the same year that William and Eliza Priestley moved to Thorpe Arch. Newspaper reports at the time say that this move was to the dismay of his friends and neighbours in Lightcliffe. By 6th June 1841, a 30-year-old 'Worsted Manufacturer' William Holland resided at the Priestleys' former home New House. William and Elizabeth both died at Thorp Arch in the 1860s; they had no children.



William Priestley son of John and Elizabeth Priestley nee Walker

For the 1841 census Samuel Washington and family were recorded as being at 'Crow Nest' and this was Samuel Washington's address on an 1841 "Poll for the Knights of the Shire" list. Read

The family of Samuel Washington

Was this the main house or a cottage nearby? If the Sutherlands used the Crow Nest mansion as their Lightcliffe residence, then perhaps it was another property but only one Crow Nest property is listed on the census returns. Lamplugh Wickham Hird and family were at Lidgate House. Read

Lidgate House

'Next door' to the Washingtons of Crow Nest was Aunt Ann Walker at Cliffe Hill. This was where she lived until she died there in 1847 aged 90. She was buried, probably with her older sister Mary, in a vault within St. Matthew's old church. Each sister has a small commemoration plaque, now in the new church, which would have been positioned near this vault.

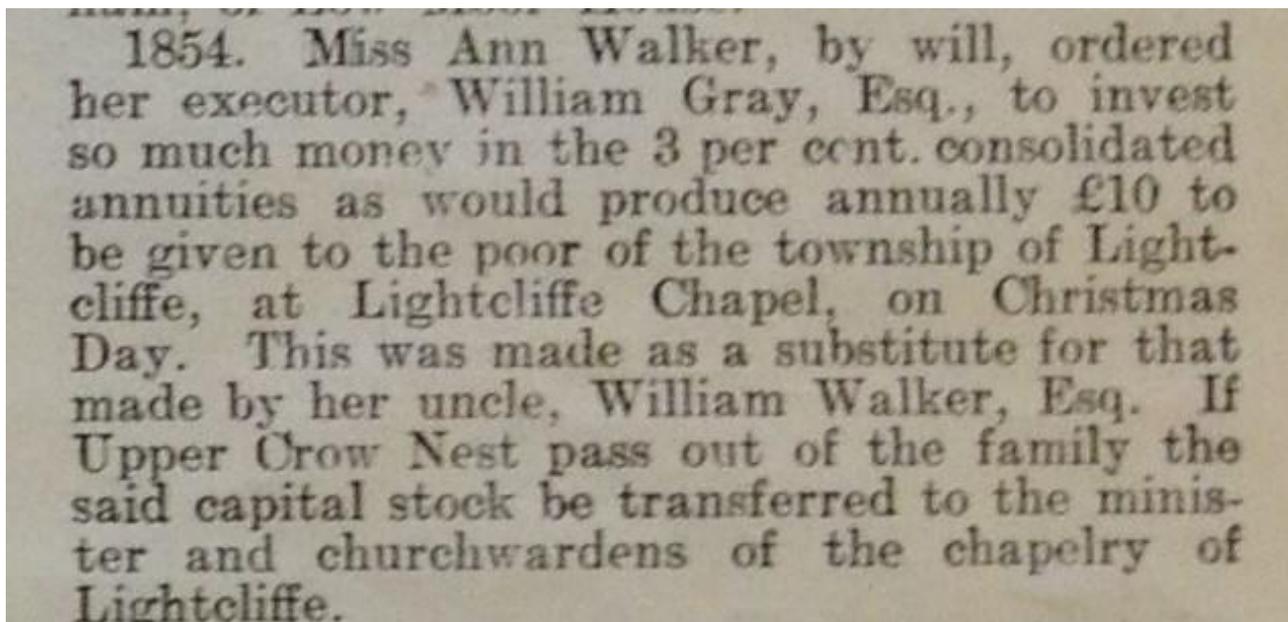
The 1840s saw the deaths of Anne Lister and Ann Walker's sister Elizabeth Sutherland, her niece Mary Sutherland and her brother in law George Mackay Sutherland as well as some young nephews including the heir George Sackville Sutherland. Elizabeth died in 1844 at Abbey Lodge, Surrey and was buried at Merton, Surrey. But her husband and teenage daughter Mary were buried in the churchyard; Mary with her grandparents in 1845. At the time the Sutherlands were living at Shibden Hall which Anne Lister had given Ann Walker a life interest in. This was probably so that George Mackay Sutherland could act as the Committee for Ann Walker who by then had been declared a lunatic. As a lunatic Ann Walker had to have others act for her in the management of her estate, properties, stocks and shares etc. She could not change the will she had made earlier which still named George Sackville Sutherland as her legal heir even though he had died. His younger brother Evan Charles Sutherland, her only living nephew, became her heir. Sometime before the 1851 census, perhaps in 1847, after her aunt and brother in law died Ann Walker moved back to Cliffe Hill where she was born. Her housekeeper, widow Lydia Fenton nee Wilkinson, was an old friend of Ann Walker. Meanwhile Titus Salt had rented the Crow Nest mansion in 1848. Samuel Washington, the Crow Nest land agent, moved his family into Lidgate House.

Ann Walker's death on 25th February 1854 seemed to bring the Walker era in Lightcliffe to an end. She was buried within the church probably with her spinster aunts on 3rd March 1854, there being no room for her in her parents' plot. The Reverend Charles Musgrave took the burial service and later that day wrote this in part of a letter to J Horsfall Turner.

I have been interring today a Lady whom I have known as long as yourself & a distant connexion of yours - the last of her family, poor Miss Walker of Cliffe Hill. She was buried in Lightcliffe Church in the same vault with her aunt, Mrs Mary Walker, who was much esteemed all through life by every branch of your family.

With grateful thanks to Diane Halford and Steve Crabtree who found this letter in West Yorkshire Kirklees Archives

As many of her ancestors had done previously Ann Walker had provided charitable donations to the poor of Lightcliffe during her life. This was continued under the terms of her will as detailed below.



1854. Miss Ann Walker, by will, ordered her executor, William Gray, Esq., to invest so much money in the 3 per cent. consolidated annuities as would produce annually £10 to be given to the poor of the township of Lightcliffe, at Lightcliffe Chapel, on Christmas Day. This was made as a substitute for that made by her uncle, William Walker, Esq. If Upper Crow Nest pass out of the family the said capital stock be transferred to the minister and churchwardens of the chapelry of Lightcliffe.

Also, under the terms of her will her heir was required to add the name Walker. Thus, Evan Charles Sutherland and his family were known as Sutherland Walkers for a time. He married Alice Sophie Tudor in 1859 and they resided at Crow Nest after Titus Salt was asked to vacate the place after Ann Walker died in 1854. Little William Sutherland Walker was born and then died at Crow Nest and was then buried in Lightcliffe churchyard on 7th August 1861 in an unknown grave. His siblings Alic and Alice Sutherland Walker were baptised in 1863 and 1865 respectively in the church their great, great grandfather had built. Whilst residing at Crow Nest at this time Evan Charles Sutherland Walker paid for the church to be refurbished as well as giving the land and money to build Lightcliffe National School. As part of the refurbishment of the church he put up wall memorials to his parents, his aunt Ann Walker, his own deceased infant siblings as well as to his deceased baby son. And then suddenly in 1867 he placed the entire Crow Nest estate on the market. Details of the auction and which properties and parcels of land were sold, some immediately and some over a period of years, will be told elsewhere.

In 1868 the year before he was awarded his baronetcy Titus Sale bought Crow Nest mansion and so moved his family back into a place they already knew. Major Johnson Jonas Foster bought Cliffe Hill mansion from where he would later instigate the building of St. Matthew's new Church up along Wakefield road.

Major Alic Sutherland – in 1883 the family had dropped the name Walker by deed poll – and his only surviving sibling Marion Gee were executors for their parents' wills. Evan Charles had died in much reduced circumstances in 1913 and his wife ten years later in 1923. In 1935 they wrote this letter to the churchwardens responsible for the churchyard concerning the plot of land that their baby brother was buried in. We do not know where this plot is, and no headstone has been found.

10a Cannon Hill Lane,
Wimbledon,
LONDON S.W.20.

2nd April, 1935.

Dear Sirs,

In consideration of the Parochial Church Council of "St Matthews" Church Lightcliffe in the Ancient Parish of Halifax with the approval of the Vicar and Church wardens undertaking to keep the Grave of the Infant Son of the late Evan Charles Sutherland (at one time known as Evan Charles Sutherland-Walker) and the Headstone thereof in good order and to so maintain them in perpetuity WE and each of us consent to the portion of the Graveyard of the said Church containing one hundred and twenty nine and one third square yards (in which portion the said Grave is situate) and reserved by the said Evan Charles Sutherland Walker for the exclusive use as a Burial Ground or Cemetery for him and his Family in a Document entitled "Sentence of Consecration" and dated the 8th day of March 1867 under the hand of Robert Lord Bishop of Ripon and in which Document the plot of land so reserved is shewn upon a plan attached thereto and edged round with a red border line being thrown into and merged with the Graveyard of the said Church to be used as part thereof for the purpose of burial of persons entitled to be so buried therein but reserving nevertheless out of such consent the Grave of the said Infant son of the said Evan Charles Sutherland. It is a condition of the above consent that it involves no personal responsibility on our part

Yours faithfully,

ALIC SUTHERLAND
MARION GEE.

To/ The Parochial Church Council and
The Vicar and Churchwardens of
St Matthews Church,
Lightcliffe.

This was the last known dealing between any of the Walker family and Lightcliffe. The connection had possibly spanned nearly two hundred and fifty years.

D.M.Barker
September 2020