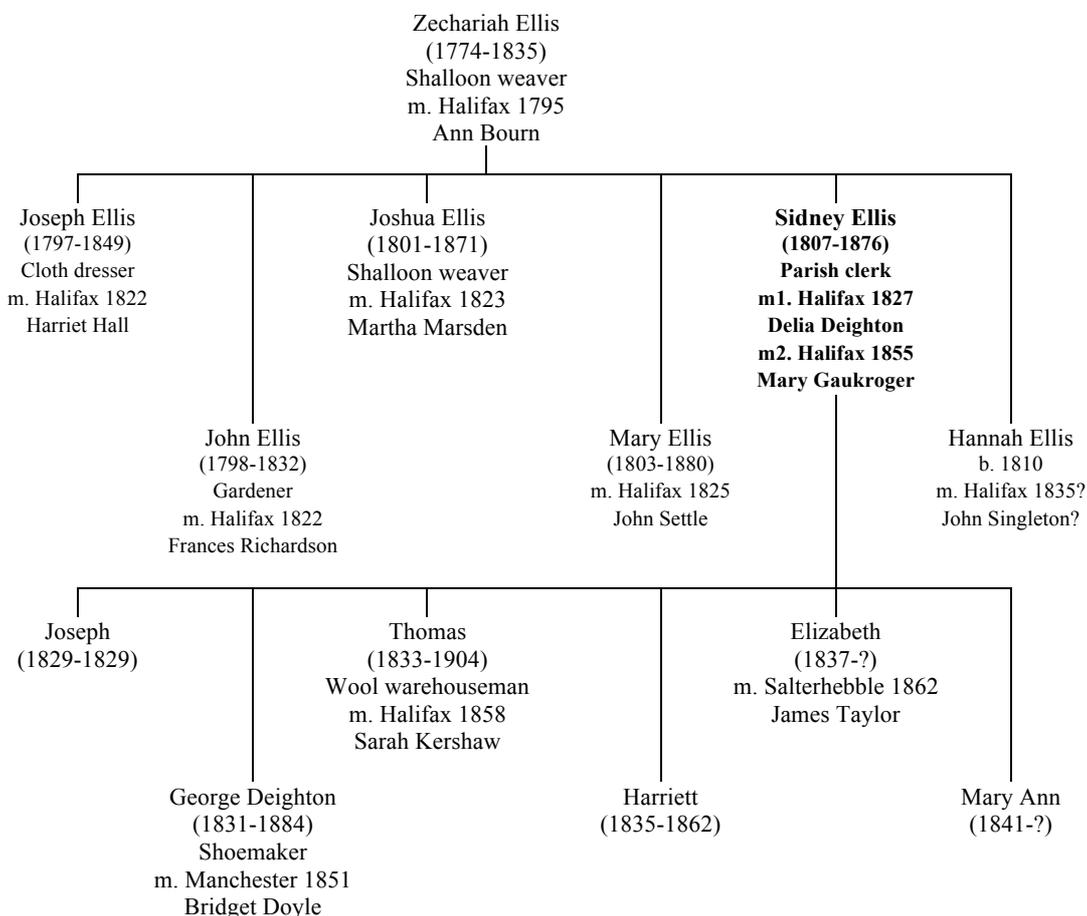


Sidney Ellis of Lightcliffe, 1807 - 1876

Wool comber, parish clerk, sexton and Sunday School teacher

Sidney Ellis was born in Lightcliffe in 1807 and died there in 1876. In his younger days he worked as a wool comber: later he became the parish clerk, sexton and Sunday School teacher at St. Matthews Church. Sidney married twice, had six children and was buried at St. Matthews Church with a substantial headstone.

Sidney was baptised at Old St. Matthew's Church on 26th July 1807, the fifth of six children born to shalloon weaver Zechariah Ellis and his wife Mary. The present author is descended from the third child, Joshua. Sidney's father Zechariah was raised in Wyke as a member of the Moravian Church but moved to Lightcliffe as a young man, leaving the Moravians in the process. Zechariah and Ann died in 1835 and 1838 respectively and were buried at Lightcliffe Old Church.



Sidney married Delia Deighton at Halifax on 31st August 1829. Delia was born in Ripon in 1797, making her ten years older than Sidney. Their first child, Joseph, was born about three months after the wedding. Joseph died at the age of just two weeks and was buried at Lightcliffe on 8th November 1829. Sidney and Deliah went on to have five more children – George Deighton, Thomas, Harriett, Elizabeth and Mary Ann. All were baptised at Lightcliffe.

MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of Church of Halifax
in the County of York in the Year 1829

Sidney Ellis of Hipperholme of this Parish
Comber, Bachelor
and Delia Deighton of Hipperholme of this Parish
Spinster
were married in this Church by Banns with Consent of
this Thirtieth Day of
August in the Year One thousand eight hundred and twenty nine
By me C. Rogers Curate
This Marriage was solemnized between us Sidney Ellis
Delia Deighton's Marriage
In the Presence of { John Little
Wm Weaver
No. 169.

Marriage of Sidney Ellis to Delia Deighton at Halifax, 1829.

The 1841 census shows Sidney (30, wool comber) and Delia (40) living on Stoney Lane in Lightcliffe with George (10), Thomas (8), Harriet (6) and Elizabeth (3). By the time of the 1851 census, Sidney (43, wool comber) and Delia (54) were living with Thomas (18, 'sculpter'; presumably a stone carver), Harriet (16), Elizabeth (13) and Mary (9). Harriet and Elizabeth were both listed as wool combers, presumably assisting their father with his trade.

Sidney's wife Delia died two years later, on 6th May 1853, aged 57. She was buried at Lightcliffe on 11th May in the grave of her father-in-law Zechariah Ellis, who had died four months earlier.

Sidney remarried in Lightcliffe Church on 20th February 1855. He was 47: his second wife, Mary Gaukroger, was 43 and a spinster (i.e. unmarried and not a widow). Mary's father was named as Thomas Gaukroger, 'card-maker'. Her place of birth was given as Bingley but in later censuses she said that she was born in Halifax. The name Gaukroger is derived from the Norse *gauk* meaning cuckoo and *rocher* meaning rocks. It is an unusual name nationally but common in the Halifax area: at least three Mary Gaukrogers were born in and around Halifax at the time of Mary's birth (about 1811).

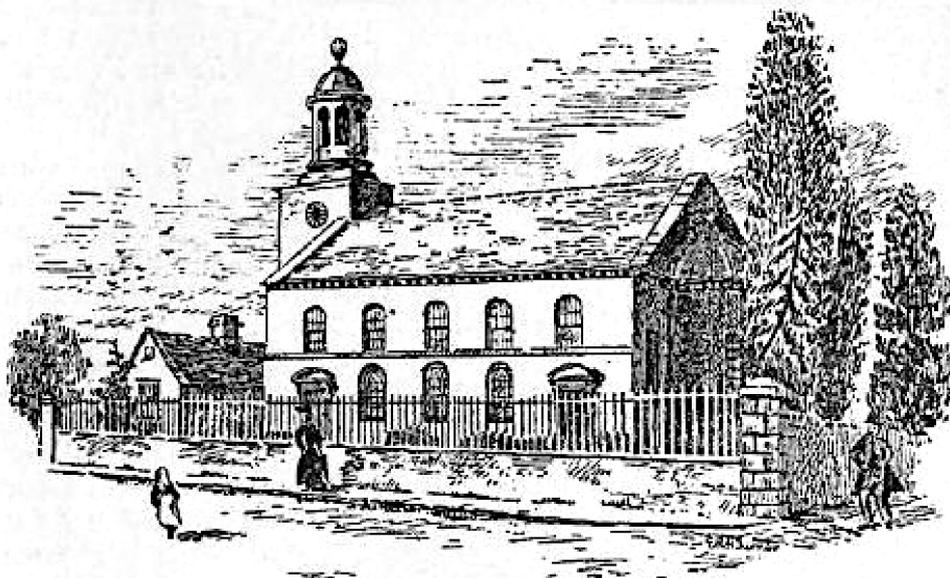
The 1851 census showed a 39-year-old Mary Gaukroger working as housekeeper to Mary Priestley, Gentlewoman, of 1 Houghend (or Hough End) in Sowerby near Halifax. Mary Priestley was 62 years old. She was the widow of Major Henry Priestley who had died in 1837. Twenty-five years earlier, Mary had been a friend of Miss Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, possibly better known today as 'Gentleman Jack'. Anne Lister and Mary Priestley were similar in age and were members of the small set of upper middle-class gentlewomen living in the Halifax area. Miss Lister wrote in her diary of visiting the Priestleys at Haugh End in 1817 and 1818. She and Mary had tea together, conversed, played piano and sang. Anne Lister died in 1840, ten years before Mary Priestley was recorded as employing Mary Gaukroger as her

housekeeper. Mary Priestley died in about 1855, around the time that Mary Gaukroger married Sidney Ellis.

1855. Marriage solemnized in <i>Lightcliffe Church</i> in the <i>Parish of Halifax</i> in the County of <i>York</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
8	<i>1855 Feb 20th</i>	<i>Sidney Ellis</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>Widower</i>	<i>Wool Comber</i>	<i>Lightcliffe</i>	<i>Zechariah Ellis</i>	<i>Wool-dropper</i>
		<i>Mary Gaukroger</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>Spinster</i>		<i>Bringley</i>	<i>Thomas Gaukroger</i>	<i>Card-Maker</i>
Married in the <i>Church of Lightcliffe</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Church of England</i> after Banns by me, <i>G. B. Rogers</i>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>Sidney Ellis</i>		in the Presence of us,		<i>William Hodgson</i>		
		<i>Mary her Gaukroger</i>				<i>Thomas Gaukroger</i>		

Marriage of Sidney Ellis to Mary Gaukroger at Lightcliffe Church. 1855.

The 1861 census shows Sidney Ellis (53) working as a School Master and living at "Lightcliff Saint Mikel Church" [sic] with his wife Mary (49, cook). Sidney's older brother Joshua Ellis was clerk and Sunday School teacher at St. Martin's Church, Brighouse, at around the same time. It is likely that by this time Sidney had abandoned wool combing which had gone from being a home-based 'cottage industry' to something done by machines in mills. Sidney and Mary lived in a house provided for the church clerk that stood next to Old St. Matthew's Church, within the church grounds.



Drawing of Lightcliffe Old Church with a house to the left that may have been the home of Sidney and Mary Ellis in 1861. Taken from J. Horsfall Turner (1893) 'History of Brighouse, Rastrick and Hipperholme'.

An unfortunate event had occurred three years earlier, on 18th June 1858. Fifty-year-old Sidney was walking home from Lightcliffe Railway Station when three men attacked him and threw him to the ground. They rifled his pockets and stole his watch, 5 sovereigns, a half-sovereign, four half-crowns and other money, plus a basket of groceries he had been carrying. Daniel Hanson was charged with the

offence at the December Assizes in Leeds but Sidney was unsure about identifying his assailant. Witnesses gave Hanson an alibi and he was acquitted.^a

The 1871 census has Sidney (63) listed as Church Clark [*sic*] and Sexton, living with Mary (60, daily cook) with four other families at Bottom Hall on Till Carr Lane, Lightcliffe. The new St. Matthews Church was consecrated in 1875. It is possible that Sidney and Mary moved to Bottom Hall when the construction of the new church was taking place. Sidney would have remembered Bottom Hall from the days when it housed the local workhouse (until 1834).

Sidney Ellis died on 28th June 1876. The *Halifax Courier* wrote on 1st July that "A few days ago the deceased gentleman had a fit while in the church. He was at once conveyed home, but continued to sink under the attack, and died at an early hour on Wednesday morning." The *Halifax Guardian* published a more substantial obituary that included the following observations:

Mr Ellis has been clerk at the Lightcliffe Church, and in his position has been most useful, always taking an active part in church matters ... Sidney was a character in his way, and well known throughout the district. The writer remembers visiting Lightcliffe old church some years ago when Sidney, in addition to his other duties, had to look after the Sunday School children. These latter were accommodated with seats in the middle aisle of the church, and 'Old Sidney' used to keep a sharp look out upon them. On the occasion referred to, one juvenile was very refractory, and it became necessary that he should be called to order. The service, however, was proceeding, and it was necessary that the clerk should be at his post to give the responses. One youth, however, was especially an evil doer, and Sidney rushed from his place, boxed his ears, and rushed back just in time to say "Amen" to the prayer which the clergyman was reading.

Some ten years ago, a gentleman was interred in the old graveyard at Lightcliffe, but soon after his remains were removed to the new portion of the cemetery. On that occasion a shell was provided, so that the coffin could be placed in it and removed bodily, without fear of the remains being disturbed. When this had been done, Mr Ellis asked for the shell, and expressed a wish that when he died he should be interred in it. His wish was complied with, and he has kept the shell up to the time of his death, and will be interred in it this day. It will be remembered by most inhabitants of Lightcliffe and district, that the house of the clerk used to be at the west end of the church, and that it was removed a few years ago. The grave of Mr Ellis will be under the sight of the residence which he occupied so long. He was an institution at Lightcliffe, and his sudden death has created quite a sensation amongst his numerous friends."

According to family legend, Sidney kept the coffin shell by his bed, ready for when it was needed.

^a Malcolm Bull's *Calderdale Companion*. The original report is in the *Liverpool Mercury*, Wednesday 4th August 1858, p. 4. The story may have been carried by other regional newspapers.

Sidney Ellis was buried at Lightcliffe Church on 1st July 1876. Three people were subsequently interred with him. The first was his daughter-in-law Sarah, wife of his son Thomas, who died in 1891. The second was the son Thomas who died in 1904. Third was Annie, wife of Sarah and Thomas's son Arthur, who died in 1928, 52 years after Sidney.

The inscription on Sidney's gravestone reads:

In memory
of
SIDNEY ELLIS
Clerk at Lightcliffe Church
for 39 years and 6 months
who died June 28th 1876
aged 69 years.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on thee:
because he trusteth in thee. Isaiah XXVI. III

"Whose faith follow" Hebrews XIII.IV.
also Sarah Ellis
who died Sep. 25 1891 aged 58
also Thomas Ellis
born Dec. 16 1832 died Aug. 17 1904
also Annie, beloved wife of
Arthur Ellis,
who departed this life May 22nd 1928
aged 59 years
At rest

Sidney's second wife Mary died three years after him. She was buried at Lightcliffe Church on 21st August 1879, aged 68. Apparently there was no memorial stone. Unlike Sidney's daughter-in-law Sarah, his son Thomas and his grandson's wife Annie, Mary was not interred with her husband. The children of Sidney's first wife Deliah may have had something to do with that.

Andy Ellis
May 2021

P.S. Sidney Ellis was my 3x great grand-uncle.
Comments and corrections welcomed: andy.ellis@york.ac.uk