

The Lightcliffe - Shropshire connection.

Two of Lightcliffe's textile families, the Ripleys and the Johnston Fosters, moved to southern Shropshire (near Ludlow) in the later years of the 1800s. From being neighbours at Holme House and Cliffe Hill, they were only a few miles apart in their new homes. There will be more about both families in the forthcoming book *In the Shadow of the Tower*.

Jonas Foster, one of the sons of John Foster of Black Dyke Mills, Queensbury married Hannah Jane Stansfeld of Field House, Sowerby and took her mother's name, Johnston, as his known name. He was a tenant at Cliffe Hill in the 1860s and bought the house in Evan Charles Sutherland Walker's Crow Nest estate sale in 1867.

He subsequently funded the building of the new church of St Matthew's in Lightcliffe.

In 1874 Johnston Foster bought Moor Park near Richard's Castle from the Salwey family (the Salweys have been the predominant family in this area for many generations and still live locally). Moor Park is a magnificent house in the Queen Anne style. The earlier house, dating from 1715, was much modified and enlarged by the Fosters but in a sympathetic style. The weather vane above a bell tower has the initials JJF inscribed just as on the pillars on the Coach Road at Lightcliffe.



The inside of the house, now an independent school, retains the grandeur that the Fosters would have lived in. A superb staircase with windows displaying the family arms, a ballroom, lounge and library. If you were visiting a National Trust property you wouldn't be disappointed. In fact, the then Prince of Wales visited it in 1861 when looking for a country estate. He bought Sandringham instead.

The lodge at the entrance to the park has a Foster heraldic device carved into the chimney stack. It matches the one above the south doorway of St Matthew's.

Johnston Foster died in Cannes in 1880 and his body was returned to be buried in the vault at the side of the church associated with him in Lightcliffe. He had had little time to enjoy his new Shropshire life.

The funeral was attended by his widow, Hannah Jane, the three daughters supported by Abraham Briggs Foster, other members of the Foster family and many local families were represented including Mark Dawson (see People of Interest). Coming from Shropshire was Mr Salwey, quite possibly Alfred Salwey, the person from whom Moor Park was bought (he was looked after by Sir Henry Edwards of Pyenest) however the Archdeacon of Ludlow who had intended to attend was unable to do so. Mr Henry William Ripley M.P. was there as were two of his sons, Frederick and Henry.

His will is of interest in the context of this article. He left an estate valued at £700,000 with his widow well provided for. After this provision, the three daughters inherited the rest of the estate. He made specific donations to Bradford Infirmary, Bradford Eye and Ear hospital, the Bradford Fever Hospital and Halifax Infirmary. The first three were recipients of Henry Ripley's support during his time in Lightcliffe and Bradford.

All Saints Church was built in 1892 and given to the parish by Hannah Jane Foster in memory of her husband, Johnston Jonas Foster and daughter Katharine Laetitia. It was a replacement for the mediaeval church of St Bartholemew's. The architect was Richard Norman Shaw, well known for designing Cragside in Northumberland and the 1909 extension to Bradford's town hall amongst many other buildings in London and across the country.



The church is very simple, featuring the Decorated style of the 14th century. It has a massive south tower which was designed as the main entrance to the church and holds the single two ton bell.

Our local interest is to be found in the several brass plaques to members of the Foster family and in the dedication carving behind the lectern.



In the brass plaque you can see the reference to both Cliffe Hill and the Foster chapel in St Matthew's. There are other Foster plaques including one to Katharine Laetitia who died in October 1883 aged 18, and another commemorating her mother who died in September 1918 aged 76 and placed there by her other two daughters, Ethel Jane, Baroness Inchiquin and Gertrude Stansfeld, Marchioness of Normanby.

The foundation stone had been laid by Hannah Jane Foster in August 1890 in the presence of the Bishop of Hereford, who had previously been in the Diocese of Ripon. The same bishop was there to consecrate the church in November 1892. After the service a luncheon was held in a large marquee in the grounds of Moor Park. In the chair and proposing the loyal toast was Mr John Foster - it is likely that this was Johnston Foster's brother who had lived for a time at Holroyd House, Priestley Green. The toast to the bishop and clergy was proposed by Mr Alfred Salwey. The bishop thanked Mrs Foster and her daughters for their generosity. John Foster responded on their behalf and also gave credit to Mr Salwey for providing some of the stone from his land. The health of the architect was proposed by Sir Edward Ripley and Captain Stansfeld responded in the absence of Mr Shaw. This demonstrates continuing links between the Foster family and the Ripleys. Additionally it seems likely that Captain Stansfeld was Mrs Foster's older brother, John. From today's perspective, it does seem a shame that although the Foster ladies had funded this church, the formalities were conducted by a close male representative.

All Saints is now designated a 'Festival Church' with services only held at Easter, Christmas and Harvest.

The old church of St Bartholomew's dates from the 12th century and was also a Knights Templar chapel. It is sited near to the ruins of a Welsh Marches castle from which the village gets its name.

This church stopped being used for regular worship when All Saints was consecrated and is little changed from Georgian times. The furnishings include box pews and a canopied pew for the Lords of the Manor, the Salwey family. The church is now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

The surrounding churchyard serves the whole of the parish and is the burial place for Katharine Laetitia. When her mother died in 1918, she was buried alongside her husband back in the Foster vault at St Matthew's. The service was conducted by the vicar, Rev J Taylor, and her son-in-law, Rev the Marquess of Normanby.

You'll see the additional link with Lightcliffe, an older church being replaced by a new one. The Foster family were prolific church builders, we know of at least six new churches and a major refurbishment funded by them.

Henry William Ripley, (1813-1882) was created Sir Henry William Ripley of Rawdon in the West Riding of the County of Yorkshire and of Bedstone in the County of Shropshire in May 1880. He was the son of Edward Ripley who had formed a dyeworks in Bowling, Bradford. The company originally specialised in re-dyeing black clothing so that, after it faded, it could be reused. Henry developed new techniques to deal with a demand for more colour and to cope with different textile materials. The company flourished, the factory expanded and Henry built a model village surrounding the works. When he married Susan (the adopted daughter of Robert Milligan - her uncle), they inherited Acacia near Apperley Bridge, Rawdon. A grand house which was eventually demolished in the 1920s. So they owned Holme House, Acacia and the original family home at Bowling Lodge. This probably explains why his title was 'of Rawdon' rather than 'of Lightcliffe' and also, many years later why the short road next to Holme House is called Acacia Drive.

There were 11 children from the marriage. Edward inherited the title and Frederick was created a baronet in his own right. Members of the family died in the World Wars.

Henry served as an MP in Bradford, he was involved in the Yorkshire Penny Bank, the Yorkshire College (for science, a forerunner of Leeds University), and other local institutions. He founded the Rawdon Convalescent Home which as late as the 1950s was an orthopaedic hospital after serving in both World Wars for recovering service patients.

Locally the Ripley family supported both St Matthew's and the Methodist Church. Henry Ripley laid the foundation stone at the church at the cross roads in 1870 and provided the clock on the tower of the 'new' St Matthew's. The sons donated one of the bells.



The Bedstone estate was bought in early 1879 and further land was added totalling 2,000 acres. (later this was increased by members of family)

Bedstone Court was built as a calendar house with a chimney for every month, a window for every day, seven entrances and fifty two rooms. It was



designed by Thomas Harris with considerable direction from the owner. Harris had previously designed Milner Field, near Bingley for Titus Salt, the younger. It is in the Elizabethan style, much in vogue at the time. Internal details, particularly the panelling, are very well done. The hall and main stairs are stunning with stained glass windows reflecting the seasons and rural life.

The main hall and stairs has stained glass representing the seasons and rural views representing the months a far cry from

industrial Bradford.

Sir Henry never had the chance to really enjoy his new house and estate as he died in 1882. Even in the short time that Henry was involved in the local community, he ensured that cottages were improved and additional ones built, new roads created and the church enhanced. He appeared to have been held in high esteem and respect even after such a short time. His funeral is described in detail in several local Bradford and Leeds papers. He was buried at St Mary's Church as are several generations of the family. Within the church are several memorials to members of the family including that of Midshipman Alfred Ripley which had originally been placed on the wall within the old St Matthew's. For his tragic death at sea please see <https://www.lightcliffechurtyard.org.uk/about-churtyard/people-of-interest> Midshipman Alfred Ripley RN.

His funeral was attended by both local people and those from Bradford. A notice of a special train was published in the local Bradford papers with 1st & 3rd class, leaving Exchange Station, Bradford at 8.30 and returning the same evening. There were 18 London & NW R carriages, including saloon cars.

Over 200 personal friends and workers from Bradford came on the train. The coffin was carried by workers from Bowling dyeworks on one side & Bedstone tenants on the other. The final climb to the church from the house was noted as being difficult. It really is a steep climb.

Chief mourners were the family, Sir Edward, Frederick, George, Henry and Hugh. However the ladies remained in the house. These are not named in the reports but it seems likely that the Foster ladies were amongst these mourners.

There were representatives of organisations that he supported - Bradford Infirmary, Fever hospital, Eye & Ear hospital.

Bradford Corporation was represented by former Mayor Ald John Hill, the Town Clerk, Church Institute, and many well known Bradford people, William Mawson, J R Cordingley, Edward Salt, Captain Foster to name a few. Foremen and managers of various departments at the dyeworks and Woodlands Convalescent Home, Rawdon that he had founded also attended.

After refreshments the train returned to Bradford. It was a little late and some missed their connecting train to Rawdon.

On the previous day, a muffled peal was rung at Bradford Parish Church and minute bell at Town Hall was rung.

St Mary's is a small, simple and well-cared for church dating from the 12th century restored in 1878/9. The churchyard contains several graves of the Ripley family including a substantial Celtic cross dedicated to Sir Henry.

The family continued to live in the house or, later, other houses close by and a direct descendent, Sir William Ripley, still lives in the village.

Bedstone Court was sold by the family to the Rees family (Sir Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal was their son) and they created Bedstone College which continues today as an independent school.

The history of the Ripley family is told in great detail in J R Hodges's *Bedstone Court*.

What, I guess, we will never know is how close the two families were on a personal level and why they chose southern Shropshire for their new homes. However, it looks as though they retained close links when they were in Shropshire.

Ian Philp, November 2021

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David Lloyd, historian, Moor Park.

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