

John Barritt (1809 - 1897)

The following obituary was printed in the Craven Herald and Wensleydale Standard on 9th April 1897. It gives an interesting insight into Farnhill and Kildwick in the 19th century.

Note: The original article, and the typed transcript created from it, was written as a single paragraph. I've split it up to make it more readable.

KILDWICK.

A Village Worthy.- On Tuesday, in St. Andrew's Churchyard, Kildwick, under the shadow of the old kirk, in which for upwards of eighty years he had loved to worship, were laid to rest the mortal remains of John Barritt at the ripe age of eighty-seven. Born on the 4th of August 1809, his age had already passed the allotted span of human existence, which with the exception of a short period, was spent in Kildwick.

Losing his father when only two years of age, he went at the age of seven to work for Mr. James Hargreaves, the tenant of Farnhill Hall, and for the next thirty years, with the exception of a short period of two years spent with Mr. Tennant at Kildwick Hall, he served the Hargreaves family at Farnhill. At the expiration of the Hargreaves occupancy, Mr. James Slingsby became tenant at Farnhill Hall, and for the next 35 years we find the constant old retainer still in the same employment until the death of the master put an end to the servitude, which was continued under Mr. Frank Slingsby, the present occupier, in all a period of close upon 70 years.

Mr. Barritt was never weary of dwelling upon the many acts of kindness which he had received from all under whom he had served, and it was evident that he looked upon his old masters as true friends. That he rendered no grudging service is shown by the fact that his late master (Mr. Slingsby) left him at his death a handsome sum of money as a recognition of his long and faithful service.

Nothing pleased the old man so much as to pour forth his reminiscences to a willing ear, and now, after his well spent life of honest work, they are sealed up in that great closed volume in which lies hidden the history of a vast countryside. He has ploughed up lands on which houses stand for a longer period than most can remember.

He could call to mind three packs of hounds in the district - at Kildwick Hall, Carrhead, and Steeton Hall ; he saw the planting of the trees round Farnhill Hall, could remember when the Court Leet and Court Baron were held there for the Manor of Farnhill ; the building of turrets on the Hall ; the Petty Sessions held at the White Lion; the offenders place in the stocks outside the Churchyard ; the plugdrawing rioters from Lancashire passing through on their way to Addingham ; the arrest of an innocent man at Crosshills on a charge of highway robbery, and an attempt at burglary at Farnhill Hall , which was defeated by his presence of mind in rolling large cheeses down stairs from the cheese room and so startling the robbers. All these and many others the old man loved to relate.

In fact his mind was a complete storehouse of ancient local history, which lost nothing from the quaint manners of the narrator. At the old " stoop " in the churchyard the parish clerk used to notify the parishioners when anything was lost or found, and the schoolboys had high jinks when they rode the parish boundaries.

Dwellers in Kildwick and neighbourhood would be astonished to see seven marriages taking place in the " Old Kirk " as one time, each pair accompanied by about twenty couples, gay with ribbons, who religiously kept up a three days festival in honour of the event. There were rough times in those days too, as the many encounters between Kildwick men and those of Cowling and Silsden would testify.

But mail coaches and London waggons have passed away and the railway has changed everything, except the old church tower in the Airedale almost unconsciously before his eyes, and at last after a quiet eventide in the same parish in which his long life was spent, this, the last link of by-gone generations has been gathered to his rest.

In this age of speed and high pressure and change there was something restful in a quiet conversation with this old yeoman, and his friendship was something to be proud of. He has been gathered to his fathers as many another good and faithful servant with the consciousness of having done his duty in that state of life to which it pleased God to call him, and leaving behind him the kindly remembrance of all who knew him.

He leaves five daughters and one son, whom, it was his pride to see, he had brought up honestly and in the fear of God. He passed away in the house and under the loving care of a widowed daughter, Mrs. Foster. His wife had pre deceased him by 47 years. His coffin was borne to the church by six of his grandsons, and from the Church to the grave by the present and past employees at Farnhill Hall.
