

Kildwick Hall

Historical Sketch



P R I C E S I X P E N C E

By Post Eightpence.

J L Laycock

Kildwick Hall



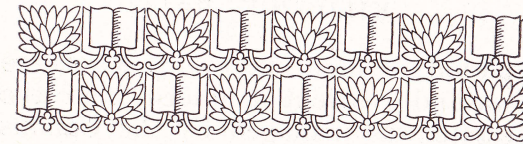
KILDWICK HALL.

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KILDWICK :
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Kildwick Hall.

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“HAPPY is the country that has no history,” said the French Statesman, and Kildwick Hall, in spite of its antique charm that arrests the step of every passer-by, has nothing eventful in its history. It is doubtful even whether it has a ghost. The whole village and manor of Kildwick were granted in 1124 by Cecilia de Romilli, of Skipton Castle, to the religious house at Embsay, which was afterwards removed to Bolton, and known as Bolton Priory. With the Canons of Bolton it remained until the monasteries were dissolved by Henry VIII., in 1539. During this

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period of four hundred years there was no resident landlord, and the estate was managed by the Canons from Bolton Priory, Kildwick Grange being their establishment in the parish. Whitaker, in his *History of Craven*, gives many extracts from the Bolton Priory Account Books, and in these there are frequent payments and receipts in connection with the Grange at Kildwick. Kildwick Bridge, for example "was repaired in 1306," and Sir Robert de Stiveton buried in 1307. At the Dissolution, the Kildwick property, after passing through several hands, became vested in Hugh Currer, of Kildwick, in 1558. He died in 1617, and the estate descended through five generations of his descendants, named successively Henry, Hugh, Henry, Haworth and Henry. Some of them, notably Haworth Currer, (1690-1744), were active magistrates, and their names frequently appear in the records of the West Riding Quarter Sessions. The quaint old monument in Kildwick Church says of Haworth Currer, that "he "was a great proficient in the study

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"of the Law, but allured by the "charm of a private life he retired to "the place of his birth, where he "choose rather to employ the talents "he had acquired therein to the dispensation of justice on the bench "than to the advancement of his own "private fortune in attendance at "the bar"; while of his son, Henry Currer, (1728-1756), it naively relates that, "after maintaining the reputation of his family, in hospitality and "the distribution of justice, he exchanged this life in hopes of a better." The writer has sometimes wondered whether Charlotte Bronte, who once lived as a governess at Stone Gappe, may not have been struck by the name *Haworth Currer*, and adopted thence her *nom de plume* of "*Currer Bell*." Dorothy Currer, (1687-1763), the last of the family, married Dr. Richard Richardson, whose family had for two hundred years owned Bierly Hall, near Bradford. He was a man of science, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and his correspondence with the learned men of his time has been published. He received

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from 1617) 1673, which *may* be the date of the newer building, and 1617 that of the older part. The leaden fallpipes on the front of the house bear the Richardson crest, and the date 1771, while there is a pipe-head on the billiard room which bears the inscription "H.A.C., 1663," and this again may be the date of the main building.

The facade is of three floors, lighted by well-proportioned windows, all of them flat-topped, except two curious ogee-headed ones in the highest storey. The windows in the two lower floors have transoms as well as mullions, and all the mouldings are of half-round sections, quite different from the concave and possibly earlier mouldings at Royd House. But the strong Gothic influence, which lingered so long in the architecture of Yorkshire, is visible in the gables and pinnacles, and especially in the Tudor doorway, although the fine panel in *gesso*-work of the arms of Currer and Haworth is classical in feeling.

The change of architecture to the

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purely "classical" is well seen in the Billiard Room on the west side of the terrace, where no trace of Gothic remains. Although long used as a billiard room (the table is 100 years old), it was probably first built as a justice room. As already related, the Currers were active magistrates, and no doubt heard Petty Sessions cases here. It is recorded of Thomas Brigg, of Keighley, an ancestor of the present tenant, that, in 1704, having been summoned along with other "Friends" before Henry Currer and Robert Ferrand, Justices of Peace, for non-payment of tithes, he was distrained upon, and "bacon, wheat and barley, worth £1" were taken from him.

In an interesting, although imperfectly executed series of sketches, made by Richard Warburton in 1720, now in the British Museum, the Hall, Billiard Room, and all the Terrace, Lions, Vases and Garden Steps, appear as they are seen to-day. From other sketches by Warburton we see that a similar arrangement of fore-

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court and formal garden was found at other Yorkshire mansions in his time, *e.g.*, at Ryshworth Hall and Hawksworth Hall. The taste of a century ago was for landscape gardening, sunk fences, and wide sweeps of lawn and park, giving not only seclusion, but aloofness, from one's neighbours, and so we find in other cases, that the old arrangements have been swept away. At Kildwick, the highway, (from which Cromwell, riding across country to Preston Fight, may have seen the new building going up), was in the way, so that the steps and terraces and open railings remain. The owner of two and a half centuries ago did not shun his neighbour's gaze, and their youthful descendants still come to see the "Kildwick Lions," (fearsome beasts taken from the "lion passant" in the Currer Arms), come down to drink "when they hear the Church clock strike twelve," and to see whether the ball is dancing on the fountain in the "Low Garden." Their elders, too, often make it a Sabbath day's journey to come to

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note the changes of the seasons in the restful old-world garden and the flower-clad terrace.

John Richardson, who took the name of Currer, and died in 1784, seems to have been the last of the name to live at the Hall. For some years it was occupied by tenants, of whom one, a Mr. Cockshott, is remembered by name. In his time many parts of the premises were occupied by hand wool-combers. About 1825, Mr. Mathew Wilson brought here his first wife, and made extensive improvements. Before then the only approach to the house was by the stately, but not very convenient terrace-steps, so he cleared out the carriage yard and made the drive from the top of the "White Gate," as well as the road up to Crag Top, now known as "The Folly." His additions can be seen in many parts of the outbuildings, the one best known to the passer-by being the doorway of the summer house on the lawn. Such summer houses, or garden houses, introduced from Holland,

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have been named "Gazebo's," from a fanciful Latin conjugation of the word "gaze," being placed where the occupants can sit and gaze out upon the country and on passers by.

After a twenty years' tenancy by Mr. Wilson, the Hall was occupied by Mr. John Robert Tennant, his cousin, remembered by many old inhabitants for his kindly eccentric ways. During his tenancy, the owner, Miss Currer, added the Dining Room and the north-east wing, thus adding greatly to the convenience of the house, without detracting from its picturesqueness. Her initials, F.M. R.C., and the date 1858, are over the Dining Room window. Mr. Tennant was succeeded in 1882 by Sir John Brigg, M.P., who died in 1911.

The interior has some interesting features. The Entrance Hall, with its huge open fireplace, oak timbers and panelling, its XVII. Century furniture, and weapons of many ages and countries, is worthy of the house. In some of the rooms, and especially in the large south-east bedroom, there

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is good panelling and plaster work, contemporary with the house. The kitchen has a noteworthy dresser of pewter, with the Richardson crest.

In its outside grouping of old stone work and garden craft, and in its interior, where antique charm is joined to modern comfort, Kildwick Hall is excelled by very few houses of its own size and standing. J.J.B.

