

Henry Currer (III) – the Justice House and the Currer Library

Henry Currer (III) was born on 25 January 1651 and at about the time of the Restoration of Charles II young Henry was entered at one of the Inns of Court in London. He qualified as a lawyer, was called to the bar and began a profitable career as a barrister.

In November 1683 he married Margaret, daughter of Abraham Fothergill of Chancery Lane. He was 32, she was 18.

Less than two years later his mother died and his father decided to move to the smaller Currer house at Bank Newton. Henry and his wife moved from London to Kildwick Hall.

In the twelve years from 1684 to 1696 Margaret bore her husband ten children: three boys and seven girls – only three of these children reached adulthood. (Two boys both named Hugh died in infancy – breaking the Hugh-Henry naming sequence of sons which had been a feature of the Currer family.)

It seems to have been normal practice for a JPs to transact local legal business from their own homes and it was for this purpose that Henry had the Justice House built in the front courtyard of Kildwick Hall.



The Kildwick Hall Justice House

One occasion when law may have been handed down in the Justice House was in 1704 when one Thomas Brigg, of Keighley, and some friends were summoned for non-payment of tithes. He was fined and “bacon, wheat, and barley, worth £1” were taken from him. Thomas Brigg was an ancestor of the Brigg family who would live in the Hall for around 70 years in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Henry Curre also built elsewhere in the village. In 1712 a dinner was held in his honour because he had paid for the installation of a clock on the church tower. This was particularly welcomed by the sexton, Joseph Horrocks, because his basic salary was doubled when he undertook to wind it regularly and make it sure that it remained in good condition.

The home that Hugh Curre (III) started and which Henry inherited was a cultured one. Hugh was known to have owned several books – including collections of sermons from preachers on both side of the religious divisions of the time. Starting in 1669, Henry began his own collection which he later added to his father’s.

Perhaps significantly one of the books Henry Curre bought was *John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* – a very popular, and rather gruesome, account of the sufferings of Protestants under Queen Mary.



A page from “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs”

The year in which he bought this book, 1685, was the same year that James II, a Catholic, became king and it’s possible that, as a Protestant, Henry may have thought that he could become a victim of a new Catholic purge. This may have played some part in his decision to leave London and return to Kildwick.

In 1707 Thomas Bray published a book called *Bibliotheca Parochiales* which advocated the setting up of parish libraries. This stimulated Henry to donate his collection of books to St. Andrew's church. All 77 books that formed the Curren Library are now held in the Rare Book Collection of York University.

Sources

Kildwick Leaves, by Michael Baumber; "12 – Henry Curren and Kildwick Hall" and "13 – Curren Library". Published in The Bridge, the magazine of St. Andrew's Church Kildwick. Copies in the possession of the History Group.

[Kildwick Hall Historical Sketch, by J.J. Brigg](#)

[Country Life visit Kildwick Hall \(1911\)](#)

"Kildwick Parish Library - a new home", an article available on the History Group website, provides information about the Curren Library and describes the role of the History Group in finding it a new home.