Snowdrops

In winter snowdrops can be seen on a number of the verges around in Farnhill and Kildwick. Kildwick Hall used to be renowned for them – thanks mostly to the efforts of the gardener at the Hall in the early part of the 20th century, William Whitaker.

The snowdrops of Kildwick Hall

In the last few weeks and during January and February of previous years, many people have gathered snowdrops in the grounds of Kildwick Hall, and local residents, together with the owners of the hall are concerned about this. Not only is the land private, and the people are trespassing, but the beautiful display which has for so long been a well-known feature of the district is being destroyed.

Mr. Colin Livingstone, manager of Kildwick Hall Restaurant, said he had been asked on several occasions for permission to pick snowdrops, but he had on principle refused.

Older people remember when large areas of the grounds were carpeted white. "At that time, people came in chara loads to see the snowdrops," said Mrs. L. Spencer, of Starkey Lane, who has worked at the hall for 14 years.

Mr. William Whitaker, who lived at Crest Cottage, Grange Road, was employed by the Brigg family as gardener, and he was responsible for the laying out and upkeep of the Edward VII and George V coronation display of snowdrops. A further job was to patrol the grounds for trespassers. His son, Mr. Wilfred Whitaker, now lives at Aireview Cottage, which faces on to the famous snowdrop dell.

The third Sunday in February, was known locally as Snowdrop Sunday. About that time, Mr. J. J. Brigg, who had connections with a chapel in Keighley, gave permission for members to gather snowdrops for the chapel, and streams of people walked from Cononley, Bradley, Cross Hills and Silsden, to view the spectacle:



Snowdrop bank at Kildwick Hall – date of photo unknown

William Whitaker appears on the Farnhill censuses from 1881 (aged 9). He married in 1895 and set up his own home on Grange Road. From the 1901 census onwards he is recorded as being a gardener.

To commemorate the death of Edward VII and accession to the throne of George V, he planted a decorative display of snowdrops in the grounds of Kildwick Hall by Grange Road.



Snowdrops commemorating Edward VII (king from 1901) and George V (king from 1910)

He died in 1935.

His second son, Wilfred (born in 1899), continued to live close to Kildwick Hall, but moved over the border into Kildwick in the 1930s, and set up home in Aire View Cottage.

In 1953 Wilfred planted a display of snowdrops to commemorate the coronation of Elizabeth II, in the garden of Aire View.



Snowdrops planted by Wilfred Whitaker in the garden of Aire View Cottage

Wilfred Whitaker died in Surrey in 1983 and is buried in St. Andrew's graveyard.

There are no snowdrops on his grave.