

A short history of the short-lived Aked's Mill

Aked's Mill stood on the west side of Farnhill Main Street, on the site of what is now a terrace of private houses opposite the Institute; numbers 31 to 37.

There is no known photograph of the mill building, but the photograph below shows the mill chimney, which was demolished in 1906. The mill chimney was situated on the east side of Main Street – the flue went under the road from the mill's boiler room.



The demolition of Aked's chimney.

The building in the foreground was a mill warehouse and later became Kildwick & Farnhill Institute

This article provides a short history of Aked's Mill using information from legal documents, census returns, electoral rolls and births, marriages and death records.

The Aked family and the ownership of the mill

Keighley origins

In the census return for 1851 James Aked is recorded as living in Change Gate, Keighley, with his wife, Mary (nee Dawson); their son Thomas, born in 1840 but recorded as being aged 6; and their daughter Emma, aged 3. James is listed as being a Linen Draper. The household also includes a Servant, two Milliners, and a Draper's Shopwoman – perhaps suggesting that James was running a drapery business ?

2	Change Gate	James Aked	Head	Mar	52	Linen Draper
		Mary do	Wife	Mar	44	Draper's Wife
		Thomas do	Son	6		Schooler
		Emma do	Daughter		3	
		Elizabeth West	Shopwoman	11	14	Draper's Shopwoman
		Ann Foster	Servant	11	12	House Servant
		Elizabeth Dawson	Wife	11	11	Milliner
		Margt do	do	11	11	do

The Aked family in 1851

Note: The family also included an older son, Edwin (b. 1837), who was at school near Blackpool in 1851.

By 1861 Thomas, who was still living at home with his parents, but by this time in Albert Street (Cottage ?), Keighley, appears to have adopted his father's trade. In fact the whole family, along with two apprentices and an assistant, were involved in the business.

1	Albert Cottage	1	Thomas Aked	Head	Mar	41	Linen Draper
			Mary do	Wife	Mar	34	
			Tom do	Son	21		Linen Draper
			Emma do	Daughter	Mar	13	
			Keighley August	Apprentice	Mar	15	Draper's Apprentice
			Mary Aked	Servant	Mar	22	House Maid
			Ann West	Apprentice	Mar	14	Draper's Apprentice
			Ann Philpotts	Assistant	Mar	24	do Assistant

The Aked family in 1861

Purchase of a mill in Farnhill

In 1869 James Aked bought property in Farnhill, including:

- A worsted mill, with a boiler and other equipment
- Four cottages adjoining the mill, two (at least) of which had been occupied by Jonathan Priestley and Samuel Overend
- A warehouse nearby, along with adjoining yard, garden and some waste ground

This was purchased from Mr. J. Topham of Bradley for a total of £1000, made up of £100 cash and a loan of £900 made by Topham to James Aked. This loan was passed on to Topham's sons when he died later in 1869.

By the time of the 1871 census the Aked household had reduced somewhat. The family were still living in Keighley, but both James and his son Thomas appear to have switched from working with linen to worsted. Perhaps this was because of the nature of the mill ?

James Aked	Head	Married	43	Worsted Spinner
Thomas do	Son	Married	20	Spinner do
Emma do	Daughter	do	23	Housekeeper
Emma Taylor	Servant	do	33	Domestic Servant

The Aked family in 1871

James Aked died in 1872 and was buried in Utley cemetery. Probate was granted jointly to his sons Edwin and Thomas, both of whom were recorded as being Worsted Spinners.

Note: The location of Edwin Aked between 1851 and 1876 is uncertain. However all of his children were born in the Keighley area between 1860 and 1873.

Shared ownership of Aked's mill

It appears that James Aked's will may have split the ownership of the Farnhill Mill between Edwin and Thomas as, in the Farnhill electoral roll of 1876, both are recorded as owning half a share each.

GLUSBURN POLLING DISTRICT.				207
No. 58—FARNHILL.				
No.	Christian Name and Surname of each Voter at full length.	Place of Abode.	Nature of Qualification.	Street, Lane, or other like Place in this Township, and Number of House (if any), where the Property is situate, or Name of the Property, if known by any, or Name of the occupying Tenant; or if the Qualification consist of a Rent-charge, then the Names of the Owners of the Property out of which such Rent is issuing, or some of them, and the situation of the Property.
Voters in respect of Property—including Tenant Occupiers at a Rent of £50 and upwards.				
6399	Aked Edwin	Cononley	Half Share of Freehold Mill	Farnhill
6400	Aked Thomas	Towning place, Crosshills	Owner, Freehold Mill, half share	Farnhill Mill
6401	Baldwin Joseph Benjamin	Farnhill	Freehold House	Farnhill

Part of the Farnhill electoral roll for 1876.

Both Edwin and Thomas Aked are eligible to votes as they are joint-owners of a mill.

The 1881 census returns record Thomas living at an unspecified address in High Farnhill with his wife Martha and three children, including 4 year-old Thomas Oswald; he is listed as being a Worsted Spinner. Edwin is recorded as living at Brooklyn Villa, Cononley and lists his occupation as "Worsted Spinner – employing 50 work people consisting of men, girls and boys".

Worsted Shimmer: emp. 50 workpeople
consisting of men girls & boys

Edwin Aked's occupation, as recorded in the 1881 census.

The half-sharing of the mill between Edwin and Thomas appears to have continued probably until 1886; at which time it seems that Edwin relinquished his half in favour of his three eldest sons (Richard Metcalfe, James Edwin, and Henry Dawson).

In October 1886 James Edwin wrote to the headmaster of Kildwick school:

Memorandum from
James Aked,
Farnhill Mill,
Kildwick, via Leeds.
Oct-11th 1886.
To The Managers of the Kildwick School
Sir
From this date
I shall pay the school fees
of the half-timers working
at my mill as formerly.
Yours truly
James Aked

Letter from James (Edwin) Aked, found inside the Kildwick school log book

The arrangement of split ownership between Thomas and his nephews (Edwin's three sons) did not last long. By 1891 Richard Metcalfe and his brother Henry Dawson had emigrated to the USA; and Edwin had moved to Southport, along with James Edwin and several of his (Edwin's) daughters.

In the 1891 census James Edwin was recorded as being "Artist / Art Decorator – sculptor"; and Edwin appears on the electoral roll as being the owner of a "Dwelling House". Edwin is not recorded in the 1891 census, but in 1901 he appears as a "Retired Worsted Spinner".

The financial affairs of Thomas Aked – 1888 to 1893

Between 1891 and 1900 sole ownership of the mill seems to have resided with Thomas Aked, who appears in the electoral roll as the owner of "Freehold buildings, comprising Mill and Cottages".

But from 1888 to 1893 he was involved in some interesting financial dealings, suggesting that there may have been some degree of trouble at the mill.

In October 1888 Thomas Aked agreed to settle his debt to the sons of J. Topham for the sum of £910. Then, on the same day (or very soon afterwards), he agreed to take out another loan from the Topham brothers for £700 at an interest rate of £4/10/0d per £100, per annum.

Also, before the end of the month, he took out a line of credit with Craven Bank Ltd.

Less than three years later Aked sold off some property on Main Street, Farnhill.

To Holgate Green – two cottages, with:

- To the east – a dwelling house, owned by Thomas Aked but already contracted to be sold to Jackson Wilson (see following).
- To the west – three dwelling, owned by Thomas Aked and occupied by James Walmsley, S. Spencer and Mrs. Drake.

To Jackson Wilson – two cottages, with:

- To the east – Farnhill Primitive Methodist Chapel
- To the west – the properties being sold to Holgate Green.

Jackson Wilson was already living in the basement of these two cottages.

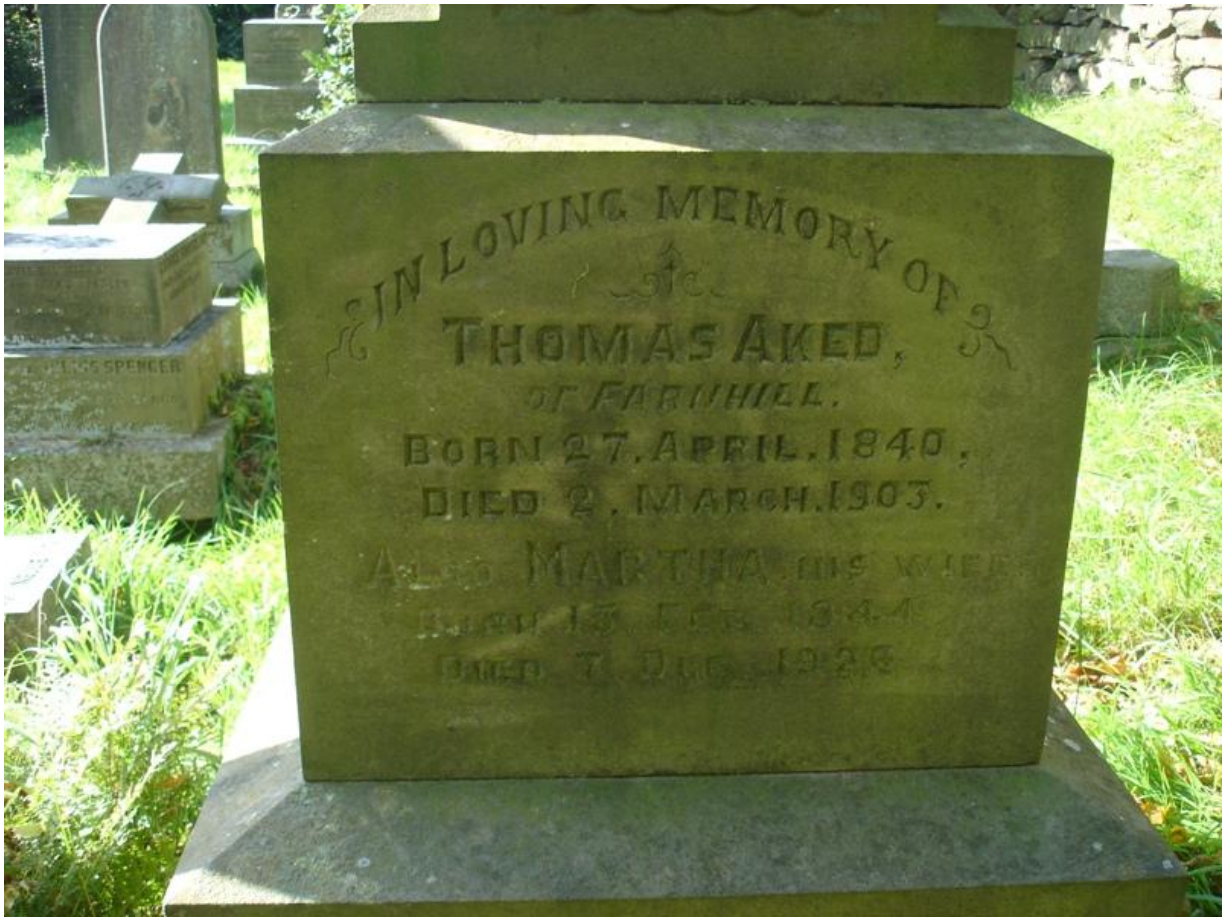
Note 1: These four cottages were, presumably, the ones that James Aked bought, along with the Mill, in 1869.

Note 2: The Chapel referred to cannot be the 1897 chapel that closed in 2015. It must be an earlier building known to have existed, further down the road.

With the money realised from these sales, Thomas Aked was able to pay off the mortgage he had with the Topham brothers. For the first time, the mill and remaining property in Farnhill Main Street belonged to the Aked family outright.

The end of the mill and the death of Thomas Aked

Thomas Aked died in March 1903, aged 62. He was buried in Kildwick churchyard.



Gravestone of Thomas Aked, in Kildwick churchyard

By this time, however, Aked's Mill had ceased to exist.

A legal document shows that at the time of his death Thomas Aked's property amounted to: a warehouse with outbuildings, yard and ground; and four dwelling houses – **formerly a worsted mill** – and now #31 to #37 Main Street. The dwelling houses were occupied by J. Backhouse, T. Green, J.W. Sutcliffe and Martha Aked (Thomas's wife).

Clearly Aked's Mill had already been converted into houses.

The same document goes on to outline the depressing state of Thomas Aked's finances:

- The deeds of all Thomas Aked's property had "some time ago" been handed over to Bradford Commercial Joint Stock Company Bank, as security against a loan.
- At the time of his death the debt on the loan exceeded the value of the properties.
- The full amount owing to the bank was reckoned at £1200.

The Aked's Mill had gone, but the business continued

There is significant evidence to show that by the time the mill building in Main Street was converted to houses, Thomas Aked had already transferred his business elsewhere; to Airedale Mill, on the opposite side of the Leeds-Liverpool canal.



Airedale Mill – part of a photograph taken from the tower of St. Andrew's church, Kildwick

In the account of his funeral the Craven Herald notes that:

The works of Messrs E. Watson and T. Aked were closed at 10.30am in order that employees might attend the funeral.

And amongst the wreaths it lists those from:

- Mrs E. Watson
- the employees of E. Watson
- the employees of the deceased

This report implies that Thomas Aked was still running a business, and that there was some connection between Aked and Mrs Watson.

In fact Airedale Mill was owned by Mrs. Ellen Watson who ran a business on the third floor and in the garret. The company "Aked & Son" used the first two floors.

Thomas Oswald takes on the debts left by his father

Following Thomas's death, probate was granted jointly to his two sons: Ernest Dawson and Thomas Oswald. His assets were reckoned to total less than £360.

AKED Thomas of Farnhill-mill Kildwick Yorkshire worsted-spinner died 2 March 1903 Probate **Wakefield** 20 July to Ernest Dawson
Aked banker's-clerk Effects £359 17s. 4d.

Grant of probate on the death of Thomas Aked in 1903

In September 1903 Ernest Dawson agreed to relinquish all claim on his father's estate and Thomas Oswald agreed to take on the full amount of his father's debt with Bradford Commercial Joint Stock Company Bank.

By May 1904 the total amount of the debt had risen to over £4000. Fortunately for Thomas Oswald, by then the Bradford Commercial Joint Stock Company Bank had gone into liquidation. At a meeting between the bank, the liquidators, and Aked it was agreed that the bank and liquidators would accept £2500 in full settlement of the debt, which was promptly paid off.

The final end of Aked's

Aked's Mill had gone, but Thomas Oswald Aked continued in business, running Aked & Son from Airedale Mill. Up until 1905 he continued to appear on the Farnhill electoral roll; recorded as living in the village (at an unspecified address) and being the joint owner of a mill.

The latter statement is almost certainly an exaggeration. There is no evidence that Aked owned any part of Airedale Mill.

However, in the end it didn't matter. Fate was going to deal Aked and the rest of the village a devastating blow.

In the early hours of Wednesday March 31st 1906 Airedale Mill was totally destroyed by fire. Aked & Son lost material worth around £5000 (equivalent to around £650,000 in 2022 prices).



Airedale Mill. A George Whiteoak (GW) photograph

Thomas Oswald's finances never recovered from the blow of the Airedale Mill fire. He very soon left the village and from 1907 is recorded as living in Harden, his only property in Farnhill being the old mill warehouse on Main Street.

Thomas Oswald Aled was declared bankrupt in 1909 and very soon afterward he emigrated to Canada with his wife and children.

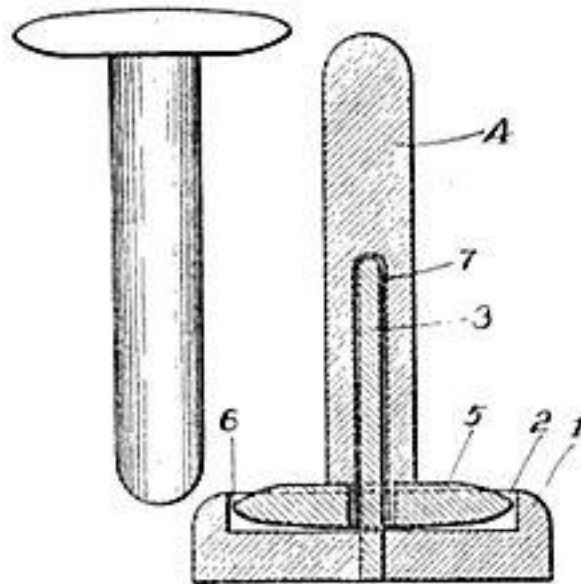
Appendix 1 – Thomas Oswald Aled in Canada

Having sustained losses of around £5000 in the fire at Airedale Mill in 1906, Thomas Oswald Aled emigrated to Canada in 1909; along with his wife, May, and his daughter, Elizabeth Aled.

The family settled in Toronto, where Thomas Oswald continued working in wool trade.

In 1921 he took out a US patent for a "Combined Yarn Holder and Darner".

1,448,175. COMBINED YARN HOLDER AND DARNER.
THOMAS OSWALD AKED, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
Filed Aug. 26, 1921. Serial No. 495,633. 3 Claims.
(Cl. 223—14.)



1. A combined yarn holder and darning consisting of a stand comprising a base having an annular recess in its top surface and an arbor projecting vertically from the center of the recess, combined with a removable reel comprising a spindle rotatably mounted upon the arbor having at one end a disk of ovoidal cross-section seated in the recess of the base.

He died in 1950 and his cremated remains returned to the UK where he was interred in the same plot as his mother and father.



Graves inscription of Thomas Oswald Aked, in Kildwick churchyard

His wife and daughter were subsequently interred in the same plot.

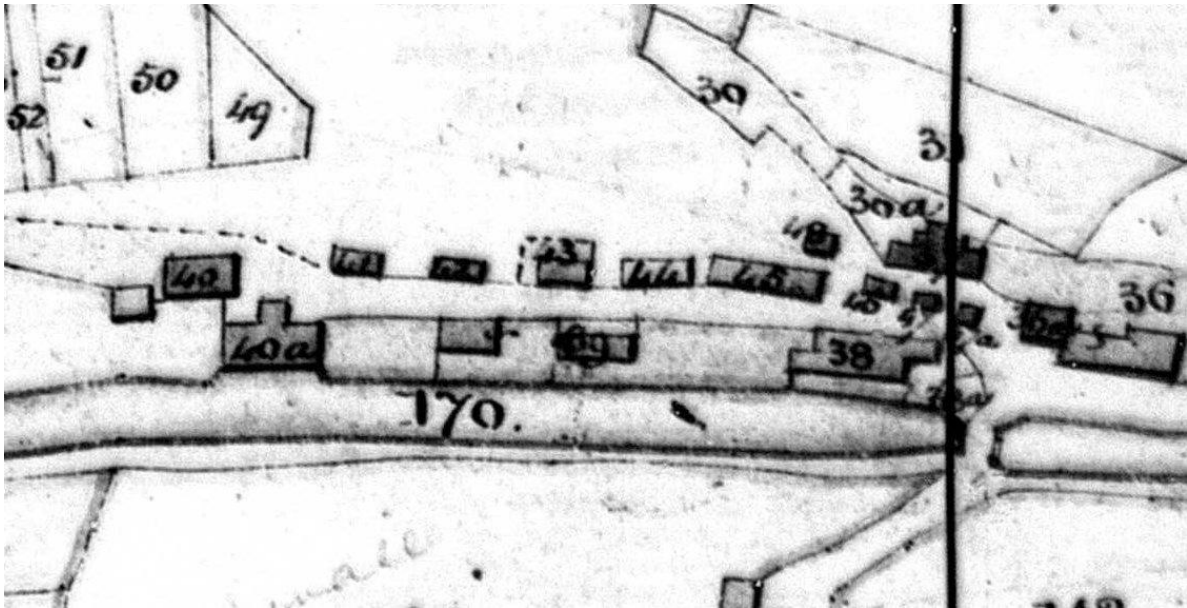
In reporting his death the Ottawa Journal said he was “prominent in Eastern Canadian textile circles”.

Appendix 2 – The origins of Aked’s mill: Benjamin Smith and the arrival of industry in Farnhill

If you compare the 1841 and 1851 census returns for Farnhill one of the things that becomes quickly apparent is the move, in that decade, from home-based employment to industrial manufacturing.

The majority of people in both records are listed as working in the wool or worsted industry, but by 1851 a significant number of people were working in a factory making worsted using power-looms. Almost all of these factory workers were adult, unmarried women, with the men still involved in the more traditional domestic activities, such as wool-combing.

The name Benjamin Smith does not appear in the 1841 Farnhill census but the 1846 tithe commutation document records him as the occupant of four buildings, clearly marked on the map that accompanied the tithe document.



Part of the tithe commutation map of Farnhill, showing the Canal (#170) and the four properties occupied by Benjamin Smith in 1846 (#40, 40a, 41 and 47).

The document describes two of these properties as: being owned by Sir George Lane-Fox, which had Benjamin Smith as tenant:

- A cottage on the north side of Main Street opposite Redman Bridge [#47]
- Another cottage on the south side of Main Street just below the Arbour. [#40]

More interesting are the other two properties of which Benjamin Smith was the owner/occupier:

- A building referred to as "Mill and Cottages" [#40a].
- A second "Mill and Cottages" [#41], close to #40a but on the opposite side of the road.

Significantly #40a is the only building in the village with a direct frontage onto the canal. It is this building that would later become Aked's Mill. #41 was probably used as a warehouse.

The 1851 census records Benjamin Smith as a “Worsted Manufacturer and Farmer of 56 acres”; his eldest son is employed as a “Worsted Warehouseman”, and another as “Overlooker in a Worsted Factory”.

Benjamin Smith	Head	Mar	40	Worsted Manufacturer and Farmer of 56 Acres
Hannah do	Wife	Mar	46	
William do	Son	14	24	Worsted Warehouseman
Joseph do	Son	12	18	Overlooker in a Worsted Factory
Ann do	Daughter	12	15	Scholar
Sarah do	Daughter	11	14	Scholar
Hannah do	Daughter		8	Scholar
Elizabeth do	Daughter		8	Scholar

The 1851 census return for Benjamin Smith and his family

This is the first reference to factory manufacturing in the village.

Appendix 3 – The remains of Aked’s Mill

By the time of the Airedale Mill fire, the only visible remains of Aked’s mill in Farnhill Main Street was the chimney and the warehouse on the opposite side of the road.

The chimney was taken down in May 1906 (see photograph on page 1) on the instructions of the Rural District Council, who considered it unsafe.

It may have been that by this time Aked could not afford to have it demolished and instead made a gift of it. This gave the chimney a second life, as reported in the Craven Herald.



Craven Herald report – 16/5/1906

The mill warehouse was sold to the Brigg family, who lived in Kildwick Hall, and in 1911 it became the Kildwick and Farnhill Village Institute.



Kildwick and Farnhill Village Institute (left) with the houses on the site of Aked's Mill (right)

In 2022 members of the Local History Group were invited to visit 35 Main Street where the current owners had discovered further remains of the old mill.

The vaulted basement of the house formed the mill's boiler room and the flue that led under the road to the chimney is clearly visible.



Brick arch at end of boiler room.



End of flue in boiler room.

Coal was delivered to the mill by barge on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. The arched entrance for the coal from the canal can still be seen.



Entrance to the mill coal store from the canal

Coal was loaded onto wagons and most of the basement was used as a coal store.

A set of the original coal wagon wheels was found buried by the flue entrance. This style of wheel was used by coal wagons in some pits and examples can still be seen at the pit museum in Ashington. The following photographs show them after they had been renovated.



Original coal wagon wheels, found in the basement of 35 Main Street

The basement coal store had elaborate, and clearly second hand, beams set on cast iron pillars. In 2020 when the renovation of the basement commenced these beams were all covered in coal dust that must have been in place since 1903.



Wooden beams mounted on cast-iron pillars – in the coal store

The builders were clearly proud of their work as can be seen by the carpenter's mark on one of the beams.



Carpenter's marks