

Haworth Currer's plan for a grand driveway for Kildwick Hall

After Henry VIII dissolved the monastery at Bolton, Kildwick manor was granted to Robert Wilkinson and Thomas Drake. In 1549, Thomas Drake sold Kildwick to John Garforth of Farnhill and, in 1558, it was sold again to the Currer family.

The building of Kildwick Hall was started by Hugh Currer around 1650 and successive generations of the Currer family added to the impressive building and the gardens.

The picture shown on the following page is a plan dating from 1738, drawn up at the instruction of Haworth Currer, and illustrates his plans to significantly enhance the grounds of the hall. It shows Kildwick Hall (at the top), with gardens to the front and side; the Parsonage (which was then on Grange Road); the Church; and (at the bottom) the road coming over the river bridge and then dividing left towards Farnhill and right up Priest Bank Road.

Note: 1738 is well before the building of the Leeds to Liverpool canal through Farnhill and Kildwick (in the 1770s) or the construction of the Kildwick to Snaygill section of the Keighley to Kendal Trunk Road (1786).

The text at the bottom reveals why the plan was drawn-up.

Note that all the Closes in this Plan belong to Haworth Currer Esq. except those which are mark't Gleab and the Church Yard and that part shown in Blue [actually green] which contains Two Roods and twenty six perches [2682 square metres] is what Mr. Currer proposes to give in Exchange of that in Red mark't by a pick't line of the Church Yard containing One Rood and twenty eight perches [1720 square metres].

Haworth Currer laid out his full intentions, including an exchange of land, in a letter to the Archbishop of York, Lancelot Blackburne (in post 1724-1743):

... the Church-yard of Kildwick, aforesaid, is very large, and more than is necessary for the Parishioners and Inhabitants of the Parish of Kildwick, aforesaid, to bury their Dead in, and if the East End thereof, marked Red in the Map or Survey hereunto annexed, containing One Rood and Twenty Eight Perches, adjoining on the North to an Avenue leading to your Petitioner's Mansion-House and on the East to Part of your Petitioner's Grounds next unto the High Road, be taken away from the said Church-yard, it will very much Accommodate your said Petitioner, and lengthen the said Avenue: And your Petitioner in Consideration thereof and in Lieu and Recompenses for so much of the Soil of the said Churchyard is willing and desirous that a Part of his freehold Land containing Two Roods and TwentySix perches marked out with Blue in the said Map or Survey and to be wall'd off by the Prick'd line there adjoining to Part of the Glebe Land belonging to the Vicar of the said Parish of Kildwick ...

In short, Haworth Currer wanted to extend the tree-lined drive leading up to Kildwick Hall so that it started on Priest Bank Road. In order to do this he needed some of the land at the east-end of the churchyard to add to the adjacent land he already owned – including the land to the east of the Church, where Kildwick School is today. He made the point that the churchyard was too big anyway and, in order to sweeten the deal, he was willing to give the church a much larger parcel of land (in Farnhill) adjacent to some existing church land.

The vicar, John Dehane, confirmed that the east-end of the churchyard was not being used. He wrote to the Archbishop:

I humbly certify to your Grace that so much of the East End of the churchyard of Kildwick in your Grace's Diocese as Haworth Currer of Kildwick aforesaid Esqr. is desirous to have ... has not been since the Time of my being Vicar of Kildwick afoursaid, or is now, made use off to Bury the Dead.

Perhaps because Dehane had only been vicar since 1734, the same sheet of parchment contains a note from a group of parishioners in support of the vicar:

We, whose names are hereunto Subscribed, churchwardens and Ancient inhabitants of the Parish of Kildwick aforesaid, Do likewise humbly beg Leave to Certify to your Grace, that so much of the East-End of the Church-yard above-mentioned, as Haworth Currer Esqr. aforesaid is desirous to have ... has not ever been within the Time of our Memories, or is now, made use off to Bury the Dead.

The note is signed by eight churchwardens and six “ancient inhabitants” – aged between 63 and 86 years.

The image shows a handwritten document from 1738. On the left side, there is a list of names: John Baxter, Richard Wicks, Robert Parkinson, Jeremy Briggs, Henry Bradley, Hugh Curren, the mark of Michael Smith, and William Parkinson. A bracket to the right of these names is labeled 'Church-Wardens'. On the right side, there is a list of names and ages: Fran: Hix-ly Aged 74 years, Thomas Hix-ly Aged 71 years, Peter Barrell Aged 63 years, Thomas Hix-ly Aged 70 years, William X Aged 86 years, and Henry Hix-ly Aged 81 years. The 'X' mark is noted as 'the mark of'.

Fig 2: Signatures of Kildwick parishioners, 1738
(reproduced by permission of Christ Church, Oxford)

Sadly the archbishop’s replies to these letters have not survived and, as there’s no evidence that Kildwick Hall ever had an entrance on Priest Bank Road, we must assume that the deal didn’t go through and that Haworth Curren, who died in 1744, didn’t get the land he needed in order to create his grand driveway.

However, we do have evidence that there was a double avenue of trees leading down from Kildwick Hall, towards the churchyard.

In 1771 a document was created for John Curren, a successor of Haworth Curren, called “A Survey with Maps of Lands lying within several Townships in the County of York, belonging to John Curren, Esquire”. This includes a map of Kildwick which clearly shows the avenue.



Fig 3: Map of Kildwick taken from John Currer's Survey Book of 1771

Although the quality of this image is not good, various landmarks can be clearly identified. Including the river, Kildwick Church, Priest Bank Road, the Leeds-Liverpool Canal (which must still have been under construction), and Kildwick Hall. A double avenue of trees, exactly as depicted on Haworth Currer's plan, runs down the hill from Kildwick Hall, terminating at the canal.

Evidence of the avenue also appears in an 1826 survey map, which was drawn up to show who owned land that had been purchased to enable the building of the Leeds-Liverpool canal.

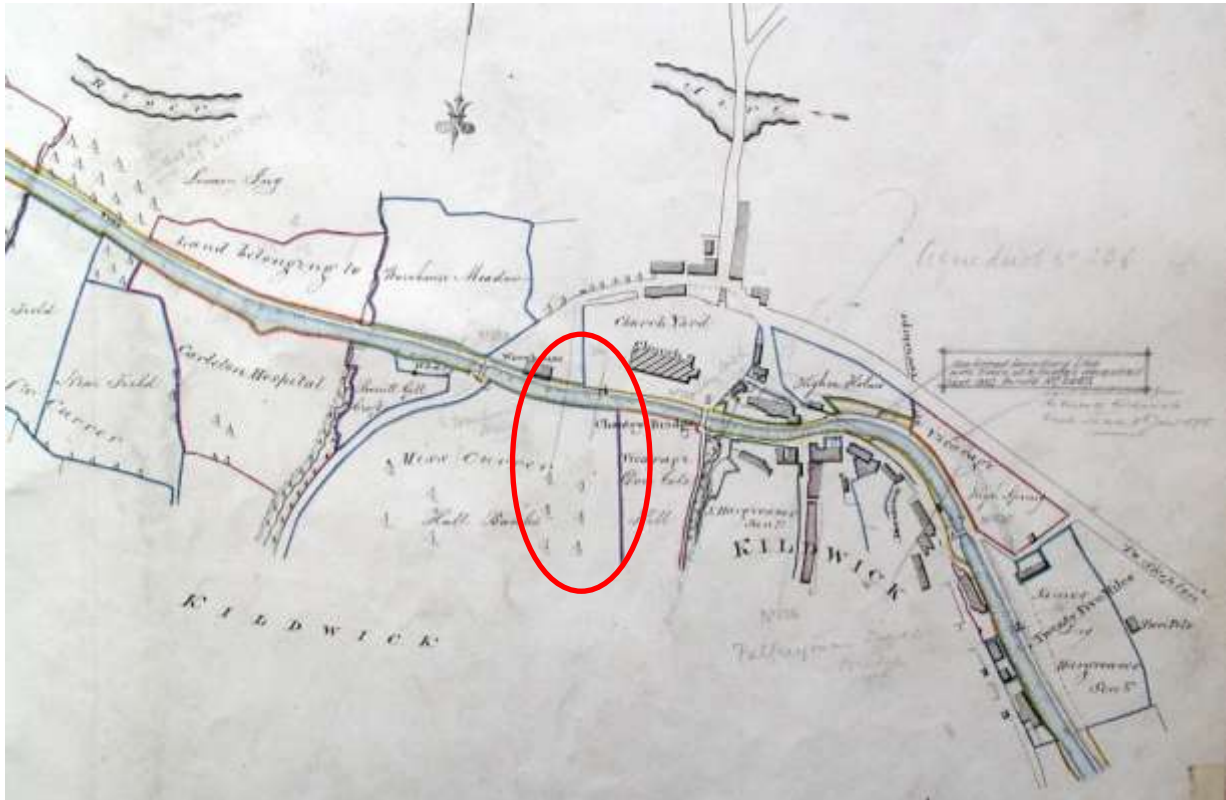


Fig 4: 1826 Canal Survey Map (used by permission of Canal & River Trust)
- a double line of trees drawn in ink with extensions, across the canal, in pencil

This map, which is upside down (North at the bottom and South at the top) shows a double row of trees extending down across Miss Currer's Hall Banks field (Frances Mary Richardson Currer was the owner of the Kildwick estate in 1826) and stopping short of the canal.

But, strangely, the avenue of trees is extended using pencil lines, drawn in lightly but clearly visible, beyond canal and into the churchyard. The significance of these is unclear – but perhaps they were to represent Haworth Currer's intended driveway, cut short by the building of the canal ?

Clearly, even if it was never extended as far as Priest Bank Road, the avenue of trees that would have flanked the driveway was still in existence almost 90 years after the plan was (presumably) rejected by the Archbishop of York.

Is there any evidence of it today ?



Fig 5: The line of the Kildwick Hall avenue super-imposed on a satellite view of modern-day Kildwick (taken from Google Maps)

The answer would seem to be “No”.

So when did the avenue cease to exist ?

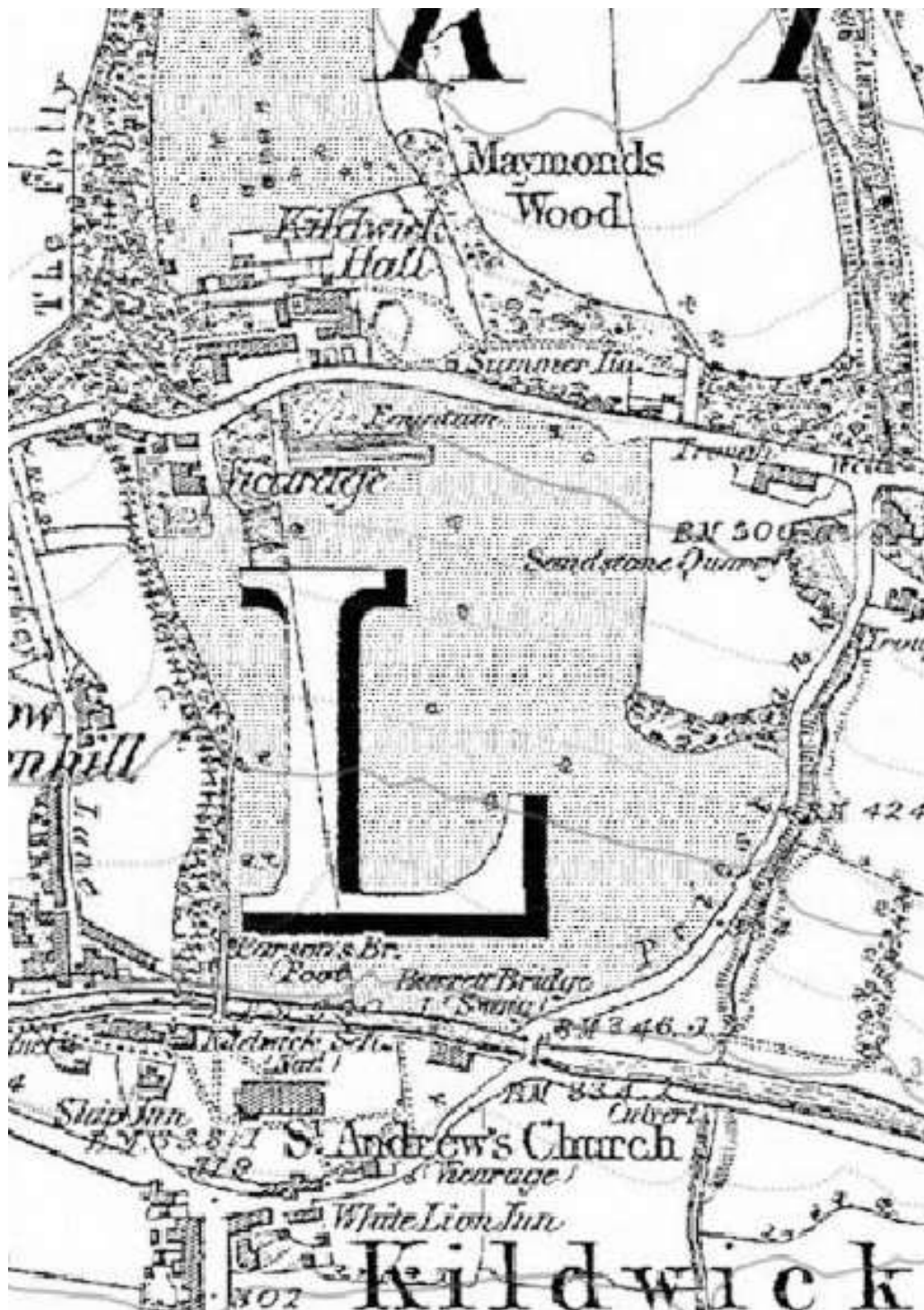


Fig 6: A small section of the 1849 6-inch OS map

The first detailed map of the area is the 1849 6-inch Ordnance Survey map. This shows the field below Kildwick Hall looking very much as it does today: with just a few isolated trees.

It looks as if once the canal had effectively ended any possible way the avenue might be extended on to Priest Bank Road it was simply allowed to deteriorate and, within 80 years of the 1771 Survey and just 23 years after the canal survey map, it had disappeared.

One final question remains. Why didn't Haworth Currer modify his plans and build a driveway with a bend to enable it to meet Priest Bank Road across land he already owned – where Kildwick school is now, or across the field ?

Perhaps it was all about having the longest, straightest driveway possible ? Even so, coming through a set of gates on Priest Bank Road and then riding along a tree-lined driveway that turned to reveal Kildwick Hall at the top of the hill would still have been impressive, and a more direct route to the Hall than going up to the top of Priest Bank Road and along Grange Road.

Acknowledgements

The Farnhill and Kildwick History Group would like to thank Christ Church, Oxford, for permission to reproduce the plan and the letters from Haworth Currer and John Dehane to the Archbishop of York. Also the Canal and River Trust, for permission to use the 1826 survey map.

Thanks are also due to the staff of the Borthwick Institute for Archives (University of York) for their help in trying to find a reply from the Archbishop.

The 1771 Survey Map was found online at
<http://www.olympiabookfair.com/catalogues/download/270>

Thanks to David Gulliver of Cononley, who made us aware of this story.