

John Rycroft – a Kildwick gentleman who served two Tudor kings

This article is about a man who is not exactly famous, in fact very few people will have heard of him, but he was certainly one of the most influential Kildwickians. He was born before the Tudors came to the throne, worked for the first two Tudor kings, and provided a charitable legacy which lasted right up until 1999 – over 450 years after his death.

Nevertheless, in 1887 the Craven Herald was able to write⁴⁶:

The shield with armorial bearings, and the name Master John Rycroft, yet remain in several of the church windows, but this is all that survives to keep him in remembrance ...

This article hopes to go some way towards remedying that.

Early life

John Rycroft was born somewhere in the parish of Kildwick in around 1474 or earlier¹. At this time Kildwick parish covered a large area and it's not clear exactly where the Rycroft family lived. His birth was before the time parish records were kept; but the first volume of these, covering Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals in the period 1575 to 1622, suggests that there were Rycroft families in both Glusburn and Brunthwaite (now part of Silsden)². In 1888 C.W. Hamilton suggested, in a letter to the Craven Herald⁴⁷, that the family may have originally come from Riddlesden, based on a field name in that area.

Note: An earlier John Rycroft appears in the Memorandum Book of Thomas Swynton for the years 1446 to 1458, where he is listed as one of servants in the monastery at Fountains Abbey³⁹. He is described as being "late of Morcar" (a grange farm close to Fountains Abbey). There is some evidence that the John Rycroft who is the subject of this article had a close connection to Fountains Abbey (see the section "The beautification of the church" and the Appendix, both later in this article).

Somehow, and we don't know how, young John Rycroft went from Kildwick to a place in the court of the king. It's unlikely for him to have made his own way there and he probably needed the support or patronage of a local noble. A possible scenario presents itself; involving the need of the newly crowned king Henry VII, after the battle of Bosworth in 1485 and the defeat of the Yorkist king Richard III, to rally the support of old Lancastrian families – families such as the Cliffords of Skipton.

Thomas Clifford, 8th Lord of Skipton, died early in the Wars of the Roses, fighting on the Lancastrian side at the first battle of St Albans, on 22 May 1455³. His successor to the title, John Clifford, 9th Lord of Skipton, subsequently became one of the strongest supporters of King Henry VI and his queen, Margaret of Anjou⁴.

At the battle of Wakefield in December 1460⁵, the battle in which Richard of York most assuredly "gave battle in vain", John Clifford acquired the nickname "Butcher" for his part in the murder of the youngest son of the Duke of York, Edmund Earl of Rutland⁶.



Figure 1: “The Murder of Rutland by Lord Clifford” by Charles Robert Leslie, 1815

This brutal act, depicted in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part 3*, gained John Clifford the enmity of the House of York and he himself was killed on 28th March 1461, the day before the battle of Towton. Towton⁷ was the last in a series of Yorkist victories, and the slaughter of Lancastrians during and after the battle saw Edward, the eldest son of Richard of York, succeed in deposing king Henry VI and secure his place on the throne as Edward IV.

On 4th November 1461 the Clifford family were attainted, meaning that all titles and estates were forfeited. Legend then has it that the widowed Lady Clifford, fearing that her two sons would be executed in retaliation for the death of Edmund of Rutland, sent them into hiding. The younger is supposed to have been sent to the Low Countries, where he subsequently died. The elder son, Henry aged about 7, was sent to live with a shepherd and his wife, where he was brought up as a member of the family, illiterate and untutored, so as to preserve his identity⁸.

Whether or not this story is true things certainly changed for Henry Clifford after the battle of Bosworth, on 22nd August 1485⁹, when the victorious Henry Tudor ascended the throne as Henry VII. Clifford was present at Henry VII's first parliament which started in Westminster on 7th November 1485¹⁰. On 9th November, the attainder against the Clifford family was reversed, Henry Clifford was knighted and became the 10th Lord of Skipton¹¹.

So is it possible that Henry Clifford was accompanied on his journey to London to take his place in parliament and be knighted by one John Rycroft of Kildwick? We will never know, but it is surely reasonable to suggest that an illiterate shepherd may need the assistance of a clever local boy if he is to take his place amongst the principal gentlemen of the realm. In fact, as we will show, it is probable that Rycroft may have been in the party as a result of his association with Sir John Rocliffe, who was related to the Clifford family by marriage.

“Sarjeant of the Larder” to Henry VII and Henry VIII

However it was that he got to court, it seems that John Rycroft established himself in a position of some importance and came to be “Sarjeant of the Larder”: that is to say the person responsible for arranging provisions for the king's household and also his armies when the king was at war.

The first reference to John Rycroft is in 1502¹², in connection with his purchase of land in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire from the estate of one Richard Drake deceased, for which he pays £100 and agrees to provide a priest to say masses for the soul of Drake, his wife, parents, and friends, for a total of 17 years. In a subsequent entry in the Close Rolls for 1504, relating to the same transaction, John Rycroft is referred to as being a “member of the royal household”.

In 1509, Rycroft took part in the funeral procession for Henry VII – as a representative of the king's larder – and on June 24th of the same year he was present at the coronation of Henry VIII.

From 1509 until his death in 1532, there are a number of references to John Rycroft in his role as sarjeant of the larder, and two periods are particularly significant.

War in France and the Battle of Flodden (1513)

In 1513 Henry, together with Maximilian the Holy Roman Emperor and other members of the Catholic League, went to war against France in an action that saw a decisive English victory at the Battle of the Spurs and the taking of the town of Tournai¹³.

In preparation for this, in April 1513, John Rycroft was ordered to provide the army with supplies for a six-month campaign; including:

- 20,000 qr malt (1 qr = 28 lbs or 12.7 kg)
- 3,000 qr beans
- 3,000 qr oats
- 300 oxen
- 1,000 lambs

This to be gathered from all parts of the Midlands and South of England.

The sums involved were substantial. An initial down payment of £500 was made for the above material, and throughout 1513 and 14 orders were made for additional materials, with total payments amounting to £2,695.

On 28th June 1513, while Henry was in France, James IV of Scotland broke the so called “Treaty of Perpetual Peace”, signed just 11 years earlier, by declaring war on England in support of France¹⁴. The King’s Book of Payments for July 1513 notes payment of £500 to John Rycroft for “victuals for the army against the Scots”.

In September 1513, the Scots invaded England and were defeated at the Battle of Flodden¹⁵. King James IV was killed in battle.

Field of the Cloth of Gold (1520) and its aftermath

In 1520 Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France held a three-week long meeting near Calais, intended to cement the friendship between the two kings ¹⁶ ¹⁷.

In a spectacular display of late medieval one-upmanship, both parties arrived with massive entourages – Henry was accompanied by more than 5,000 people – and erected pavilions resembling full-size castles and houses, in the open fields.



Figure 2: “The Field of Cloth of Gold” by James Basire, 1774

Henry’s pavilion was covered with cloth made by sewing gold thread into silk; this gave the meeting its name: Field of Cloth of Gold. The lesser members of the party were accommodated in 2,800 tents.

The event was a political disaster. No treaties or agreements were signed and the expense incurred put tremendous strains on the finances of both England and France. The cost to Henry was in excess of £13,000. Whether John Rycroft supplied any of the 2200 sheep or the other animals that were consumed is not known. However, he was present. He is named amongst those who accompanied the king, along with ten other servants of the larder, and the king’s expenses include daily payments made to them.

Within a few months of the Field of Cloth of Gold, Henry allied himself with Francis's enemy, the new Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and in May 1522 England was again at war with France¹⁸. This episode, like all of Henry's wars was expensive and achieved nothing¹⁹. On 1st January 1523 John Rycroft and others received payment of £2,000 for "vicualing the king's ships"; a sum which represents about 20% of the king's usual annual income in this period²⁰.

John Rycroft's will and other gifts

John Rycroft died in 1532 and was buried in London, in the church of St. Dunstan's in the East, close to the Tower. (The church was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.)

In his will, dated 17th October of that year, he left bequests to his servant, his colleagues, their wives and families, and his apprentice. He also left £4 to both "Wyllyam Rycroft my brother" and "Annes Leyrod my suster besids Hallifax". There is no mention of a wife or any children.

More significant was a gift he made before he died to aid the poor of his home village.

In return for a mass to be said every year on the anniversary of his death, Rycroft made a gift of £80 to the vicar and churchwardens of St. Andrew's Kildwick. The express purpose of this was to buy 120 "milch-kyne" (milk-cows). The cows were to be rented out to the poor of the parish, who would get the benefit of the milk, for 8d a year. From the profits made, 30s was to be used to buy bread, drink and cheese to be distributed to the poor on the day of his anniversary mass; and the remaining profit to be "disposed to some godly use for the relief of the poor at the discretion of the vicar"²¹.

Elsewhere²², it has been suggested that the £4 annual profit was to be divided as follows:

- Provision of bread, drink and cheese for the poor – 30s
- For the churchwardens – 10s
- For the beautification of the church – 20s
- Maintenance of cattle stock – 20s

The £80 was given to Nicholas Gibson, a London grocer, who then passed on £70 to John Blakey and John Garforth, the churchwardens of St. Andrew's, when Rycroft died. This money bought 170 cows.

Note 1: What happened to the other £10 is not known. Possibly £70 was used for the purchase of animals and £10 retained by the church for the anniversary mass? Certainly there is no evidence that the vicar or churchwardens were in any way anxious about a "missing" £10.

Note 2: Another possible reading of the original document, dating from 1552, is that Rycroft made two donations of £80 each. As has been acknowledged, the language of this document is "not always lucid"²¹ and any interpretation involves a degree of "untangling"²². In any event, we can be certain that his donation did not provide for as many as 18 score (360) milch-kyne, a figure that seems to have originated with Roger Dodsworth who made a survey of Kildwick church in 1621⁴⁷.

The nature of Rycroft’s gift to his home parish may sound strange to us today, and Whitaker had some fun with it suggesting that Rycroft “was probably ignorant that money would breed as well as kye”²³; but in a time before established banking procedures, the purchase and use of cows would seem to have been an innovative way of achieving both immediate and long-term benefits for the community.

“The beautification of the church”

Before continuing to examine the history of the Rycroft Charity, it is worthwhile considering how the 20s annual profit from the charity intended for “the beautification of the church” may have been used.

In his history, Whitaker reports that Dugdale’s Visitation of 1666 lists among the windows of St. Andrew’s Church the shield of Master John Rycroft “whose name and shield yet remain in several windows”²⁴. Some of these still exist, of which the most impressive is on the north side of the church just beyond the organ.

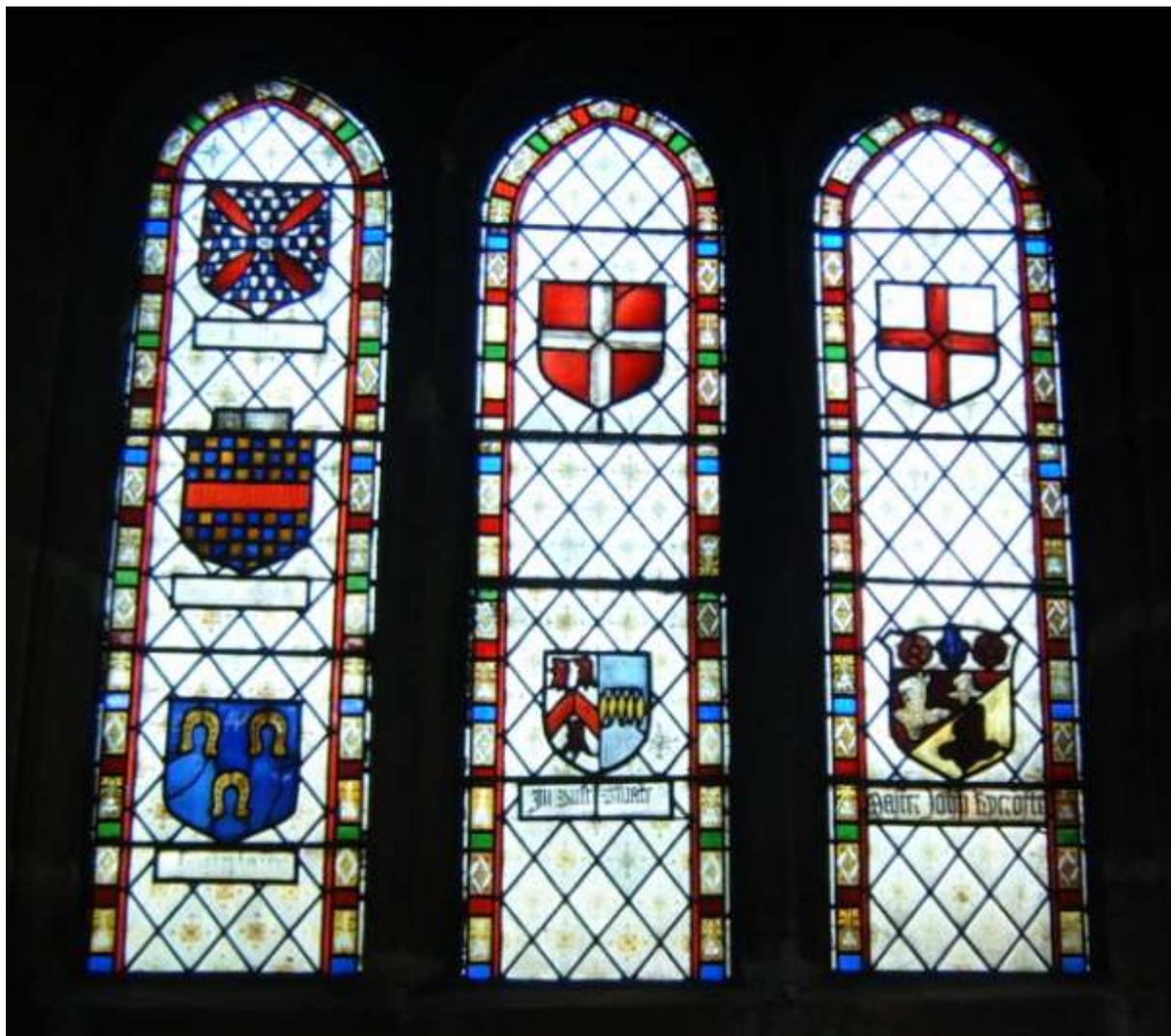


Figure 3: Rycroft window in St. Andrew’s church

The lower section of the right-hand pane bears the name of Master John Rycrofte.



Figure 4: Rycroft window – detail. Note the two Tudor roses (one for Henry VII and one for Henry VIII ?) and the French fleur de lys symbol

The shield, or something very similar, also appears in two windows in the south clerestory.



Figure 5: One of the Rycroft “shield” window in St. Andrew’s church

It is not known whether John Rycroft was responsible for the whole of the window on the north side of the church or just the right-hand pane. But if we assume the former, then the whole window can be construed in a biographical context.

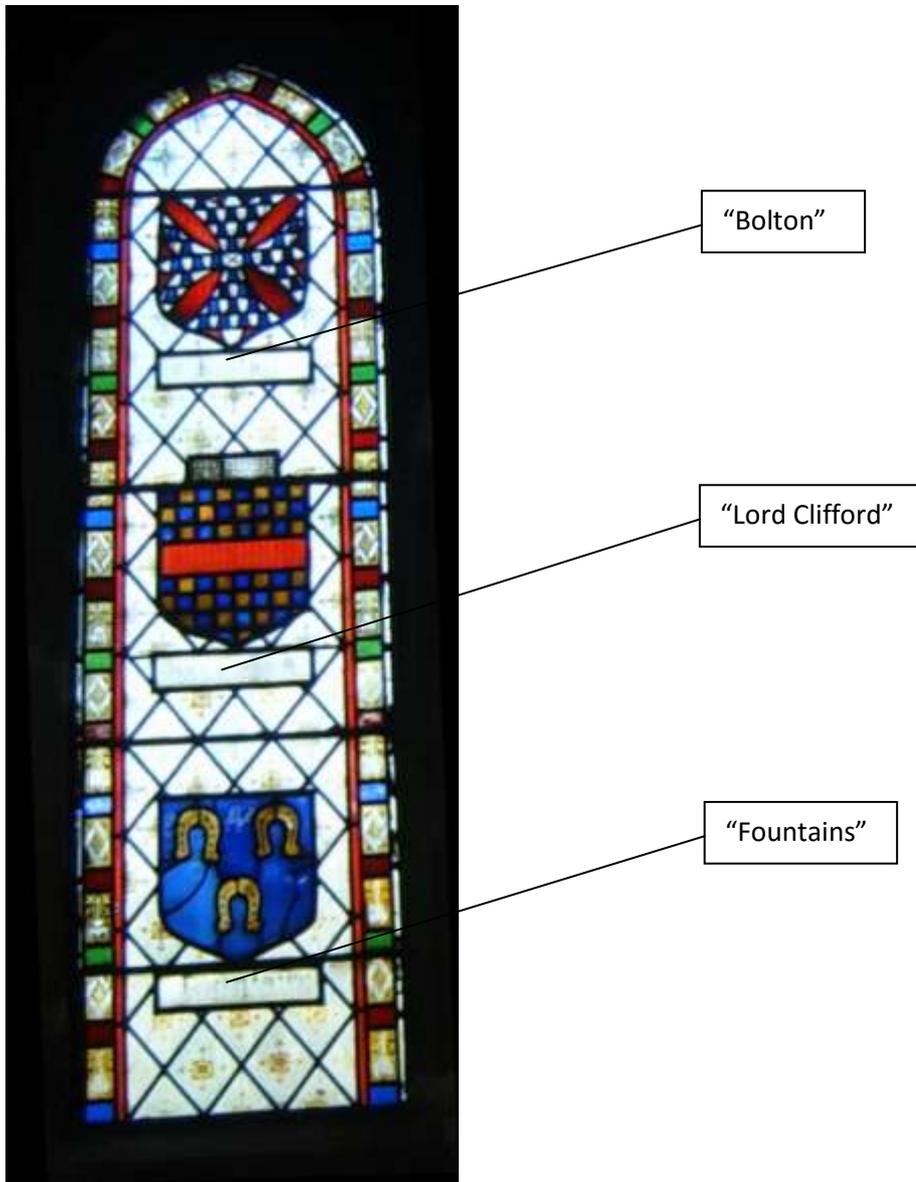


Figure 6: Rycroft window – left-pane

The shields shown in this pane are all labelled and although they are difficult to read today, the labels were recorded by Brereton, as shown above²⁸. Is it too much of a stretch to interpret these as:

- Bolton – Bolton Abbey, the mother church of St. Andrew's
- Lord Clifford – Perhaps Rycroft's early patron ?
- Fountains – a possible reference to his namesake and forbear (perhaps even his father) ?

The lower section of the central pane again fits in nicely with the idea of the window as a “biography” of John Rycroft.



Figure 7: Rycroft window – central pane, lower section

Brereton identified the lower shield in the central pane as that of Sir John Rocliffe. Research carried out for the Farnhill and Kildwick History group by the College of Arms⁴² has shown that the shield is an impalement (a combination of the coats of arms of two families). The left-hand side shows the arms of the Rocliffe family; the right-hand side shows the arms of William Plumpton (John Rocliffe’s father-in-law).

William Plumpton was married to the daughter of Thomas Clifford (8th Lord of Skipton) and was killed at Towton.

There is a clear connection between the Rycroft family and Sir John Rocliffe as, at some time prior to 1480, William Plumpton’s father was the landlord of the Rycroft family. This connection is discussed further in an Appendix to this article, but precisely what part Rocliffe played in John Rycroft’s life it is impossible to say.

Finally, the shields that form the upper part of the central and right-hand panes are representative of the two fighting religious orders: the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller⁴².



Figure 8: Rycroft window – upper centre (Knights Hospitaller) and upper right-hand (Knights Templar) panes

Quite why these symbols should have been included in the Rycroft window is not clear, although St. Andrew's Church and indeed the entire area does have Hospitaller connections.

Rycroft's cows are deemed "superstitious"

Problems with John Rycroft's charitable donation started soon after the death of Henry VIII and the accession of Edward VI, in 1547.

Whereas the church under Henry was essential Catholic, with the King replacing the Pope at its head, Edward's short reign saw moves in a more obvious Protestant direction². In 1547, chantries – endowments to provide for priests to say masses on behalf of the dead – were abolished²⁶. Commissioners were sent out to take land and valuables associated with chantries on the grounds that they were "superstitious objects"²⁷. This raised significant sums for the crown.

The Commissioners visited Kildwick and, presumably after close interrogation, found that the Rycroft cows were indeed "superstitious". The churchwardens and parishioners were:

...commanded to stay the same kyne in their hands to the King's use by the King's surveyor of the lands of the West Riding

In 1552 an appeal was lodged against this decision in the Court of Augmentation, by the churchwardens Roger Garforth, Robert Collyng and 180 other parishioners, on the grounds that:

... the same [kyne] was not within the compass of the statute whereby all colleges, chantries, etc., and all goods and chattels to the same were given to the King

The result of the appeal was mixed. It was determined that the cows belonged to the village:

... the vicar, churchwardens, and parishioners of Kildwick and hereafter for the time being shall peaceably have and enjoy all the said kyne and the profits thereof yearly to the commodity, profit and relief of all the said parishioners, accordingly to the godly uses to them prescribed and appointed by the last will of the said John Rycroft, without any interruption or impediment of the said King, his heirs, or successors, or of his or their officers

But the same sum of money that had been used to buy them had to be paid over to the king:

... the vicar, churchwardens, and parishioners aforesaid shall therefore pay into the hands of the receiver of revenues of the said Court in the County of York to the King's use the sum of £70

An arrangement was made for the money to be paid in seven lots of £10: the first payment to be made on the date of the decree, the rest at twice-yearly intervals (on Lady Day and All Saints Day).

Did the Rycroft Charity fund a school in Kildwick ?

None of the 1552 fine was paid by the Kildwick parishioners.

In 1578, Queen Elizabeth I granted the right to recover the unpaid debt to John Collyng who then demanded it from the villagers. The villagers responded, in 1580, by claiming that they had been told that the debt would be cancelled and that consequently they had invested the £70 and income from the charity's cows in the creation of a free Grammar School. They also added that "*several persons were willing to dispose charitably of their goods to the said school*" if the debt were to be cancelled.

There is evidence²¹ that Rev. Alexander Horrocks, vicar of Kildwick between 1571 and 1589²⁸ did make efforts to found a free Grammar School in the parish. What became of this school is not known.

Even if money from the Rycroft charity was not used directly to fund a school, the 1552 appeal against the confiscation of the cattle suggests that the charity was nevertheless indirectly involved in education within the parish:

... and there hath also been a priest been sometime maintained with part of the profit [of the charity] at the will and pleasure of the vicar and churchwardens for to teach young children of the parish to the great relief of all the inhabitants of the said parish.

Note: That a school of some sort did exist in Kildwick around this time is suggested by the fact that John Collyng, who brought the case against the village for payment of the debt, was described in the village's counter-claim as being a native of the village and as having been brought up in the village school. It is also the case that, in 1587, William Garforth left £10 in his will to "*the maister, govenors or feoffees of Queene Elizabethes free schole in Kildwick in Craven*"²⁹. The terms of this bequest make it quite clear that a school was at least being contemplated as it states that the money should be "*paid within fower yeares if the schoole shall be then fully erected.*"

The Rycroft Charity expands and moves from cows into land

Once the Rycroft charity was established money from other bequests was added to it³⁰. Including:

- 1620 – £66 13s 4d
- 1653 – £60
- 1656 – £33

Giving a total, including the original £70, of £229 13s 4d.

Sometime between 1580 and 1620 the vicar and churchwardens must have decided that cows weren't the best investment, or perhaps the maintenance of a herd was becoming a problem. In any event, we see the Rycroft Charity money being used to buy parcels of land that are then let out on long-term leases – in some cases back to the original owners.

In 1620, two parcels of land were bought for £40 each: one in Windhill, Cowling; the other at West Field, Cowling. Both of these were leased out at a rent of £2 7s per annum each, payable at Martinmas and Whitsuntide.

In 1653 a parcel of land at Addingham Moorside including a mansion, barn, stable and garden, was purchased by the charity for £60. It was then leased back on a 5000 year term to the original owner, William Bolton, for £3 12s per annum.

In the same year, a further £66 13s 4d was used to purchase land from Thomas Shackleton, of Addingham Moorside. This included:

- A messuage (parcel of land) in Addingham
- A cottage and two barns
- Six closes of land called: The Ing, Calf Garth, The Green, West Intack, Whinney Intack, and Little Intack – all in Addingham Moorside.

This yielded £4 per year in rent. Some or all of this land has since been identified as Fell Edge and Ghyll House farms³¹.

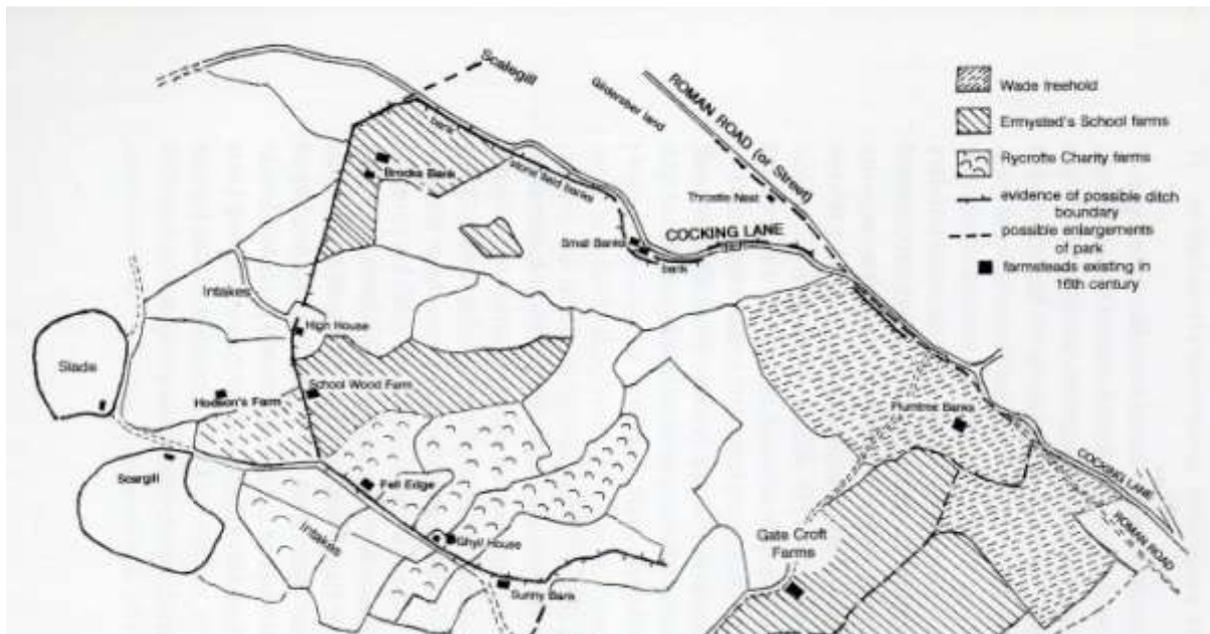


Figure 9: Rycroft charity land in Addingham Moorside – note the large amount of “intake” or “intack” land, taken in from the moor and brought under cultivation. This picture taken from “Addingham: a View from the Moorside”, ed. Arnold Pacey

In 1656-7, £33 6s 8d purchased a messuage and other property in Addingham from John Smallhorne, shoemaker. Once again, the property was then leased back on a 5000 year term to the original owner, for a rent of £2 per annum.

In all, the five parcels of land would generate a total annual income of £14 6s for the relief of the poor. The move from cows to land rents clearly made the charity easier to manage and provided a stable income. However the fixing of the rents for extended terms, in some cases up to 5000 years will, as we’ll see, result in the value of the income becoming eroded by inflation.

Administration of the charity in the 17th and 18th centuries

The way in which the Rycroft charity was administered in the 17th and 18th centuries is rather interesting.

Perhaps in response to problems encountered during the religious upheavals of the 16th century, we find that by the time the charity was moving out of cattle and into land its administration was fully secular.

So that when the land in Cowling was purchased, in 1620, the legal documents show that the properties were held in the name of Edward Malham of Over Bradley and 16 others, although:

... it was intended and agreed by all the parishioners and inhabitants of Kildwick that those yearly rents should be disposed and distributed amongst all the poor people of and within the parish.

To that end an agreement was made between 17 original purchasers on the one hand and Thomas Malham, Edward's son, and three others on the other hand:

that they and the surviving of them will from time to time at Martinmas and Whitsuntide every year, or within 10 days after they have received each half-year's rents, pay over the same to the churchwarden and overseers of the poor of that parish to the intent that they shall, with 10 more of the most able, discreet, and sufficient men of the said parish, pay and dispose of the same amongst the poor people of and within the said parish and to and for no other use

So, an initial committee of 17 would oversee the distribution of the charity's income. But what was going to happen when these 17 died? Well, the committee was going to be self-regenerating:

they also covenant that when they are reduced to four they will within three months next following convey the premises to 17 others of the most able, etc., of the said parish and their heirs upon the same trust

A neat arrangement which, it appears, actually worked in practice until the 1850s.

So it was that in November 1668, ownership of the two parcels of land in Cowling was transferred from William Garforth, William Sawley, and Christopher Emmott, to Hugh Curren and 16 others.

In 1702 the same parcels of land were transferred to Henry Curren and 16 others and, on the same day, a similar transfer of the lands in Addingham and Addingham Moorside also occurred – with the minor change that the distribution of the charity was to take place annually, at Christmas, in the church. Perhaps this is when the charity acquired its alternative name: Kildwick Winter Silver?

The last transfer for which evidence has been found took place on 27th May 1729, when Francis Stirk, Hugh Curren, Thomas Watson and Hugh Watson handed over control of all the charity's lands to Haworth Curren and 16 others. However the process continued well beyond this time and, in 1813, administration of the charity is known to have been in the hands of the then vicar of Kildwick, Rev. Perring, and 15 others – referred to as the "surviving trustees", suggesting that at least one had died since the last transfer of authority.

Payments made by the charity

Although account books for Kildwick parish from 1652 onwards are available³², it is often difficult to extract details of payments made to the poor specifically from the Rycroft charity from the overwhelming bulk of payments made by the "Overseer of the Poor".

In each of the years 1715 to 1718, however, the account book records "Winter Division" payments of between 1 and 3 shillings made to 10 or 12 parishioners.

We might ask why, if the annual income was £14 6s, so little money was being distributed from the Kildwick accounts? The answer is that the income was divided amongst the various townships of the parish, according to an interesting formula.

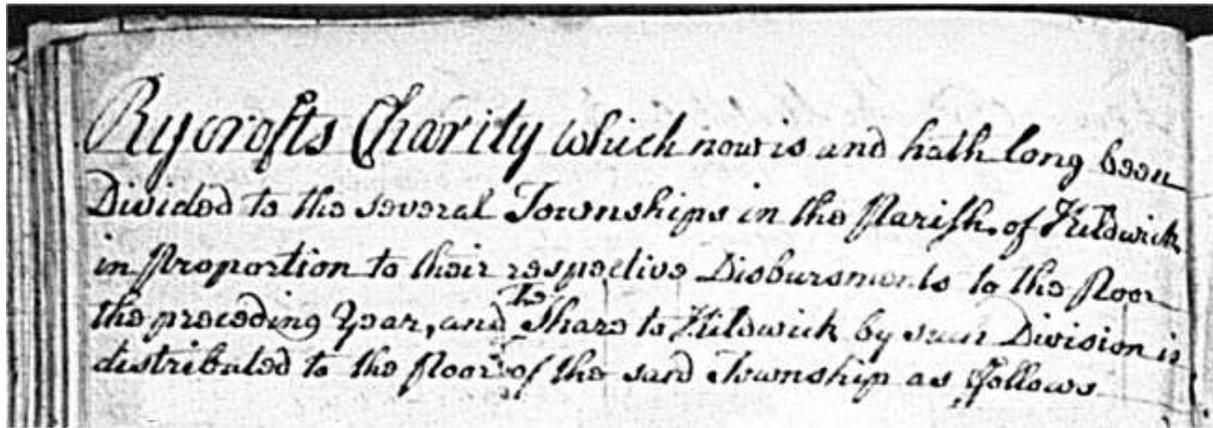


Figure 10: Page header from Kildwick parish account book, covering payments made by the Rycroft charity 1768 – 1773. Taken from NYCC record PR/KLD/28/1/1 (microfilm #3127, frame 794)

Rycrofts Charity which now is and hath long been Divided to the several Townships in the Parish of Kildwick in proportion to their respective Disbursements to the Poor the preceding year, and the Shares to Kildwick by same Division is distributed to the poor of the said Township as follows

Basically the more charitable the township, the more of the Rycroft money it gets to distribute. It has a certain natural justice to it.

Clear records for the years 1768 to 1803 show the distributions made at Kildwick varied between 12s 1½d (1797) and £1 13s 8½d (1768).

For the years in which records are shown, the account book is quite precise, showing the individual amounts paid and the recipients, most of whom appear for a number of years. An exception is the entry for January 1783, which begins with the clear text “To Mary Wilcock 2s 6d” but then breaks off to be replaced with a largely illegible scrawl, from which only the words “Kildwick £1-0s-6d ... was divided by Mr. Topham of which I have no account”, can be deciphered.

The Rycroft Charity in the 19th and 20th centuries

In July 1893 members of the Charity Commission met in the vestry of St. Andrew’s Church to discuss the charities of the parish. The results of this inquiry later found its way into a report presented to parliament in 1897³³.

The inquiry found that changes in the administration of the charity had taken place in 1850s, and again in 1890s.

In 1854 the vicar, Rev. Fawcett, had reported to the Charity Commission that – contrary to its rules – the charity had only three surviving trustees. He made a second approach to the Commission when one of these three died in 1856. Following this, in 1859, the charity was reconstituted with the vicar and a number of the churchwardens as trustees.

In 1887 the parish of Kildwick was broken up into a number of separate parishes and, initially at least, the amount of money distributed to each of the six new parishes was based on their rateable value of the corresponding township⁴⁶.

In late 1891 a series of rather acrimonious meetings took place that resulted in a revised scheme for the administration of the charity, with one trustee from each of the six new parishes⁴⁸. The original trustees under this arrangement were:

- Kildwick, St. Andrew – John Pollard Smith of Kildwick, farmer
- Cononley, St. John the Evangelist – Matthew Laycock of Lower Bradley, farmer
- Cowling, Holy Trinity – Thomas Fisher of Carr Head, land agent
- Silsden, St. James – James Isaac Stocks of Silsden, manufacturer
- Steeton, St. Stephen – John Clough of Hob Hill, manufacturer
- Sutton, St. James – James Bairstow of Sutton, manufacturer

The trustees were authorised to make payments⁴⁹:

... for the benefit either of the poor of the ancient parish of Kildwick generally or of such necessitous persons resident therein as the trustees shall select for this purpose, and in such way as they shall consider most advantageous to the recipients and most conducive to the formation of provident habits:- (1) The supply of clothes, linen, bedding, fuel, tools, medical or other aids in sickness, food, or other articles in kind; (2) the supply of temporary relief in money by way of loan or otherwise in case of unexpected loss or sudden destitution.

The charity's account book for Cowling covering the years 1895 to 1978 still exists.

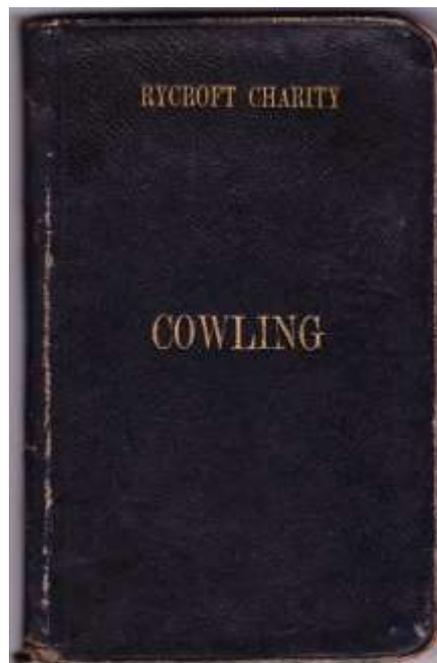


Figure 11: Rycroft Charity account book for Cowling (1895-1978) – kindly loaned by Cowling Moonrakers

The entry for 1895 describes another feature of the new scheme; each of the six townships would receive annual amounts from the charity allocated on the basis of their populations.

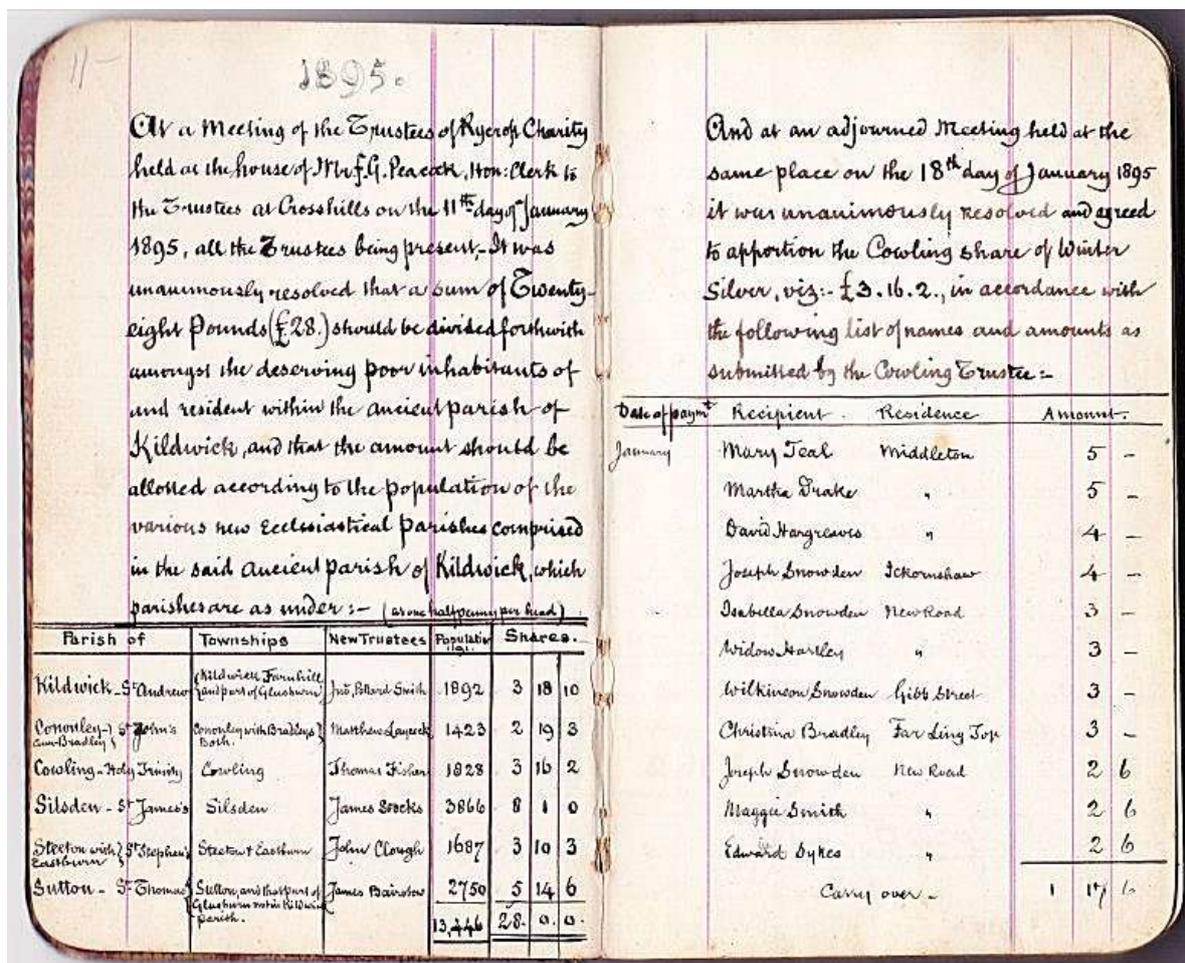


Figure 12: Cowling accounts for 1895

At this time, judging by the 1906 formal statement of account made by the charity's trustees, the annual income to the charity was still almost the same as it had been in the middle of the seventeenth-century³⁴.

Description	Gross income
Rent charge issuing out of a messuage and divers closes in the parish of Addingham called the Ing, the Calf Garth, the Green, the West Intack, the Whinney Intack and the Little Intack	£4 0s 0d
Rent charge issuing out of a messuage, barn and stable with garden to the messuage belonging and six closes of land called Lay Lamb Close, Rushy Ing, Rushy Intack, Intack Before-the-Door and Middle Intack situate at Addingham or Addingham Moorside	£3 12s 0d
Rent charge issuing out of a messuage called Wer Field in Cowling Head and Cowling in the Parish of Kildwick with divers parcels of land called the Nether Ing, Short Bank, Long Bank, and Nether Thorns and Closes in Cowling Head and Cowling called Nether Crofts and Croft Hall	£2 7s 0d

Description	Gross income
Rent charge issuing out of a close called Oxenfield otherwise Birk Cap Field and a laith in the same called Nether Laith and a close adjoining the former one called Over Ing, which said Closes and laith are situate in Cowling aforesaid	£2 7s 0d
New Consols £78 18s 3d	£2 0s 4d

Only four of the five original seventeenth-century land-rents were still in effect. In 1886, one of the parcels of land held by the charity in Addingham was sold to the Midland Railway for £80. This was used to buy £78 18s 3d worth of New Consols, which yielded just over £2 dividend in 1906.

Note: Consols are a form of British Government perpetual bond³⁵.

The payments made from the charity to people in Kildwick and Farnhill in 1906 were³⁶:

Kildwick	Mrs. Charles Hargreaves	3s
	Tom Tillotson's children	2s
Farnhill	Mrs. Pollard	2s
	Miss Lena Pollard	2s
	John Stirk	2s
	Thomas Brown	2s
	Miss Sunderland	2s
	Mrs. Gill	1s 6d
	Mrs. Smith	1s 6d
	Mrs. Taylor	1s 6d

The total amounts distributed by the charity are unchanged from those recorded in the eighteenth-century account book. Their value, of course, much diminished.

Note: Research by the Farnhill and Kildwick History Group on the Kildwick typhoid epidemic of 1899 enables us to put some detail to the two Kildwick payments:

- Mrs. Charles Hargreaves was the widow of a late victim of the epidemic, not included in the official death count. Charles Hargreaves fell ill in early 1899 and never fully recovered. He died in June 1900, aged 44.
- "Tom Tillotson's children" are Leonard and the exquisitely named Norah Brenda Bronte. Thomas Tillotson died in 1893 and the children were orphaned when their mother, Mary Ann, died in the typhoid epidemic. Their older sister, Marjorie, also died.

The Cowling account book shows that regular annual meetings of the trustees took place up until at least 1912 but beyond that date, when the Cowling trustee changed, all that is recorded is the receipt of money from the charity and its distribution.

The amounts distributed annually by the Cowling trustees in the 20th century were as follows:

- 1900 – 1903 £1 12s 8d
- 1904 & 1905 £1 18s 1d
- 1906 – 1912 £1 12s 8d
- 1913 – 1920 £1 11s 0d
- 1921 – 1929 £1 11s 6d
- 1930 – 1978 £1 11s (£1 55p from 1971)

As time passed and the value of the distribution was eroded by inflation, an attempt was made to make the amounts meaningful by reducing the number of Cowling recipients: from 20 in 1900 to just two in 1978.

Entries in the Cowling account book end with the one for 1978, although there are plenty of pages still available in the book. The implication must be that by then the amounts being distributed simply weren't worth the effort.

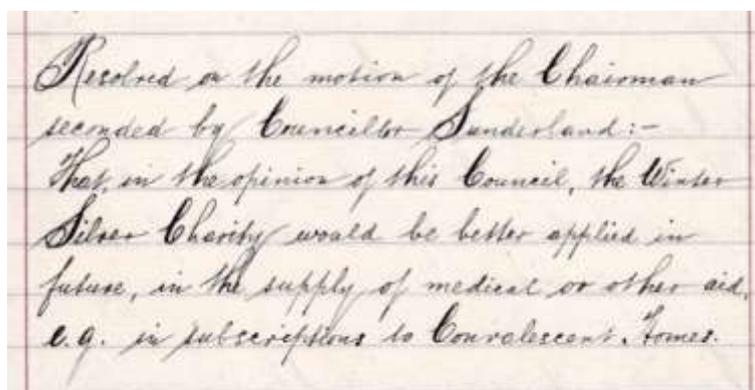
A short piece in the Craven Herald⁴³, in 1920 shows that in Farnhill, as in Cowling, the value of the money available to be distributed was being eroded.

KILDWICK & FARNHILL.
Ryecroft Charity Gifts.—A meeting of the Farnhill Parish Council was held yesterday evening week, Mr. W. A. Brigg presiding. Mr. Brigg, who is the local representative on the Ryecroft Charity, reported that he had received 12s. 6d. (winter silver) and had distributed it in the village at Christmas. He was authorised to act similarly next Christmas.

Figure 13: Just 12s 6d of Winter Silver was distributed in Farnhill in 1919 (down from 14s 6d in 1906)

1999 – the charity is wound up with a final disbursement

From as early as 1910 members of Farnhill Parish Council, who by this time appointed one of the charity's trustees, were trying to suggest a better way of using the inflation-eroded income.



Resolved on the motion of the Chairman
seconded by Councillor Sunderland:-
That in the opinion of this Council, the Winter
Silver Charity would be better applied in
future, in the supply of medical or other aid,
e.g. in subscriptions to Convalescent Homes.

Figure 14: From the Farnhill Parish Council minute book for the meeting held April 15th 1910

They even tried to force a reorganisation of the charity's committee.

The Chairman having produced the copy of the annual accounts of the Winter Silver Charity and pointed out that the income was still being distributed in securing debts

Resolved on the motion of the Chairman seconded by Councillor Sunderland:- That application be made to the Charity Commissioners for the appointment of representative trustees, either by way of scheme or under the Local Government Act of 1894.

Resolved on the motion of the Chairman seconded by Councillor Weatherall:-

That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman sign the form of application for the constitution of a new governing body for the Pyroost or Winter Silver Charity including representatives of the authorities interested.

Figure 15: From the Farnhill Parish Council minute book for the meetings held April 3rd 1911 (upper) and January 10th 1912 (lower)

The idea of giving the charity's money to a Convalescent Home was still being discussed at the end of that year.

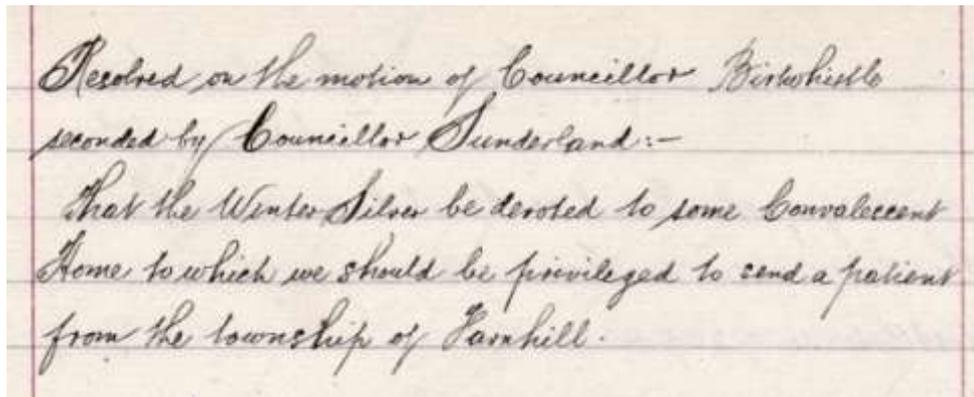


Figure 16: From the Farnhill Parish Council minute book for the meeting held December 17th 1912

But the plan does not appear to have proceeded any further.

At some point subsequently, with the income from the land rents being steadily eroded, a decision must have been taken to sell all the charity's land and invest the money in a deposit account. Perhaps this was in the 1960s when Kate Mason, the Addingham-based local historian, reported that the Addingham rents were no longer being collected³⁷?

However this was sufficient to make the charity a viable operation; and so it was that on 6th January 1999 Rev. Paul Moore, the vicar of Kildwick, sent an email to the other trustees of the Rycroft Charity inviting them to a meeting to discuss winding it up³⁸. In a handwritten note also sent, the vicar reports that the current balance in the charity's account is £953. He also notes:

No grants have been made since I was appointed as trustee other than £400 to the [named family] for the installation of toilets many years ago. I want to know how the deed can be amended to dispose of the full balance ideally to a local charity? Playing fields?

The trustees met on 23rd February 1999 and, after some discussion, it was decided to give all the money to the "Friends of Airedale Hospital" and then write to the Charity Commission in order to close the charity.

It was the final charitable flourish of a remarkable charity.

Appendix – Letter to Sir William Plumpton

In trying to find a possible connection between John Rycroft and Sir John Rocliffe the letter below, taken from the Plumpton Correspondence⁴⁰, is interesting. It is undated but is sent from five tenants living in Idle to their lord, Sir William Plumpton (who died 1480).

The tenants, who include four members of a Rycroft family (William the elder, William the younger, and John) appear to be complaining about some other tenants who are slandering them, stealing from them, and generally making their lives a misery.

LETTER XXIX.

Complaynts of your servants of Hidell,^a John Rycroft and Wil. Rycroft.

To our maister and lord, Sir William Plumpton, knight.

Beseketh your good maistershipp all your tenants and servants of your lordshipp of Idell, Wil. Rycroft yelder, Wil. Rycroft yonger, John Rycroft, Henry Bycroft, and John Chalner except. And at it please your good mastershipp to heare and consider the great rumor, slaunder, and full noyse of your tenants of your said lordshipp, att they shold be untrew peopell of their hands, taking goods by mean of untrewth; and for as much as the said Wil. Rycroft yelder, Wil. Rycroft yonger, John Rycroft, Henry Bycroft, and John Chalner are dwelling within your said lordship, they all not having any kow or kalves, or any other guds whearby they might live, nor any other occupise, and fair they are beseen, and wel they fair, and att all sports and gamies they are in our country for the most part, and silver to spend and to gameing, which they have more readie then any other within your said lordship; and to the welfare of our soveraigne lord the King and you, nothing they will pay, without your said tenants will fray with them, whearfore they are in regage to divers of your graves; and by what meanes they in this wise, with 5 persons being in household, are found, God or some evill angel hase notice hereof. And as for geese, grise, hennys, and copons, your said tenants may none keepe, but they are bribed and stolen away by night to great hurt to your tenants. And for as much as these persons afore rehersed are not laboring in due time, as all other of your tenants are, but as vagabonds live, your said tenants suppose more strangely by them. Whearfore att reverence of God and in way of charitie, your said tenants beseketh you to call all them before you, and to sett such remedy in these premisses as may be to your worshipp, and great proffitt to your tenants, and in shewing of mikle unthriftiness, which without you is likely to grow hear-after, and your said tenants shall pray to Almighty God for your welfare and estate.

Figure 17: Letter from Rycroft tenants to Sir William Plumpton. Is the reference to members of this Rycroft family being without “kow or kalves” significant bearing in mind the form of John Rycroft’s charity to his native village ?

The Plumpton family are known to have land holdings in the following locations in the fifteenth century^{44,45}:

- Near to Fountains Abbey, across which sheep belonging to the Abbey were permitted to be herded.
- The manor of Idle.
- The manor of Steeton.

These, rather neatly, provide a “route” by which the Rycroft family may have travelled from Fountains Abbey, via Idle, to the Brunthwaite area.

There is a clear connection between Sir John Rocliffe and Sir William Plumpton, as follows⁴¹:

- Sir William Plumpton’s son, also William, married Elizabeth the daughter of Thomas Clifford (8th Lord of Skipton) in 1453 and by the time he was killed at Towton they had had two daughters.
- The elder of these, Margaret, married John Rocliffe of Cowthorpe near Wetherby; later Sir John.

So, Sir John Rocliffe was related, by marriage, to both William Plumpton, the Rycroft’s landlord, and the Clifford family: his wife’s nephew was Henry Clifford, the 10th Lord of Skipton. Could it be that John Rocliffe accompanied Henry Clifford to London and that he took John Rycroft with him ? It’s impossible to say for definite but it is a scenario both consistent and compelling.

Acknowledgements

Particular thanks are due to Mrs. Nancy Rycroft who has allowed us to use her late husband’s notes on John Rycroft, gathered during his researches into the family history. Also to Lancaster Herald and members of the College of Arms who provided valuable assistance in decyphering the Rycroft window in St. Andrew’s Church.

Thanks are also due to the staff of Skipton Library and the NYCC Records Office in Northallerton.

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The Farnhill Parish Council minute book was loaned to us by Susan Harding Hill, Clerk to the Council.

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