

## Tenants and later owners of Kildwick Hall

A series of articles already posted on the History Group website describes the development of Kildwick Hall by the owners of the Kildwick manor estate.

In this article we look at the occupants of the Hall who were tenants of the estate, and those who came to own the Hall once the estate was broken up.

### Tenants of the Kildwick estate

#### The first tenants

The earliest evidence of the Kildwick Hall being tenanted, rather than occupied by the owner of the estate, comes from 1758 when an advertisement offering the Hall to let was published in the newspaper the Manchester Mercury.

At the time she inherited the estate, Dorothy Currer (1687–1763), was already married to Dr. Richard Richardson of Bierley Hall, near Bradford, and it is reasonable to assume that Kildwick Hall became vacant as a consequence of her living at Bierley.

Frances Mary Richardson Currer (1785–1861) inherited the Kildwick estate at her birth. She was the posthumous daughter of Rev. Henry Richardson Currer and his wife Margaret Clive Wilson, the only surviving child of Mathew Wilson of Eshton Hall. Frances was born at Eshton Hall and, as far as it is possible to determine, she lived there all of her life. There is no evidence that she ever lived at Kildwick Hall.

During her ownership the Hall was occupied by a number of tenants, including a Mr. Cockshott who filled many parts of the premises with hand woolcombers.

## Occupancy by members of the Wilson family

Between 1825 and around 1840, the Hall was occupied by Sir Mathew Wilson, Frances Currer's half-brother and subsequent owner of the Kildwick estate. He appears to have assumed management of the Hall and was responsible for a number of changes to the building.

From 1842 onwards, with Mathew Wilson back living at Eshton, Kildwick Hall was occupied by John Tennant, Mathew Wilson's cousin and also his brother-in-law. In his diaries Tennant reported mixed feelings about the changes that were still being made to the Hall, and generally about the way he was treated by Mathew Wilson.

June 16 <sup>th</sup> 1848	Paid Mr Wilson - rent half year for Kildwick Hall and Carlton Hospital house lands £77 10s 2d.
Mar 15 <sup>th</sup> 1850	New approach to the house - intend opening it to the public in about ten days, it will certainly be a great improvement Turnpikes - for travelling [on] a shocking bad road. <b>Note:</b> This is the carriage drive, now Hall Gardens. J.J. Brigg says that this was built by Mathew Wilson while he was living at the Hall – which is clearly not the case.
May 23 <sup>rd</sup> 1850	Paid to Mattw. Wilson Esqr rent due to Miss Currer for land at Cragg Top & Kildwick Hall the latter, charged I suppose, as accommodation which I am certain never was Miss C[']s] wish, & is not right £79 1s 9d.
Nov 28 <sup>th</sup> 1850	Paid Mr Wilson rent for Kildwick Hall and Crag Top Farm etc, £86 15s 5d.
April 9 <sup>th</sup> 1859	Matthew Wilson has made a sad mess in the House at Kildwick, by his last project - worse I think than ever.
April 16 <sup>th</sup> 1859	Matthew Wilson [is] pulling to pieces the only remaining room that we occupy. It is possible that this refers to the changes made to the dining room at Hall, that bear Frances Mary Richardson Currer's signature stone. <b>Note:</b> Significantly, when Country Life visited the Hall in 1911 the article was very dismissive of the recent changes that had been made.

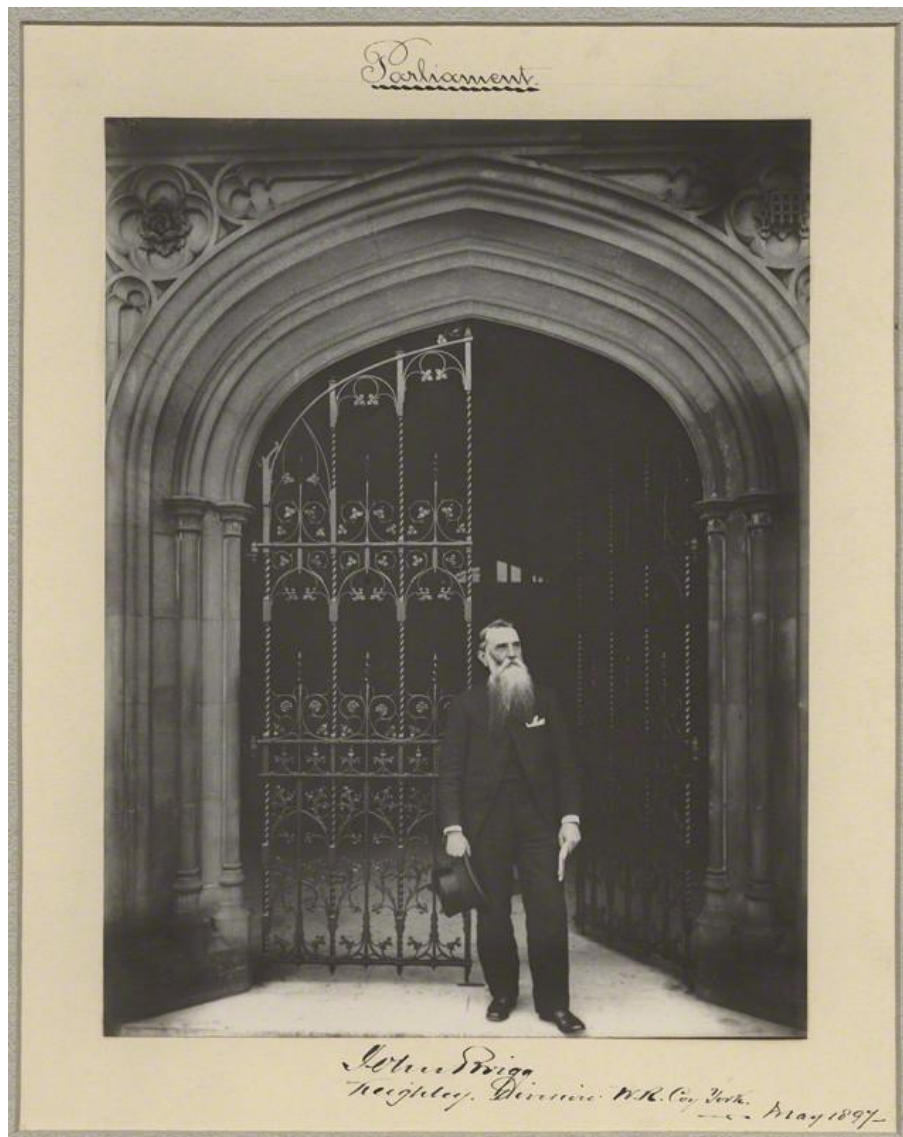
The diaries of J.R. Tennant are held in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; ref YAS DD201.

## The Brigg family

John Robert Tennant retired to the south coast in the early 1880s and the tenancy of Kildwick Hall was taken up by John Brigg. The Brigg family would continue to live at the Hall until 1945.

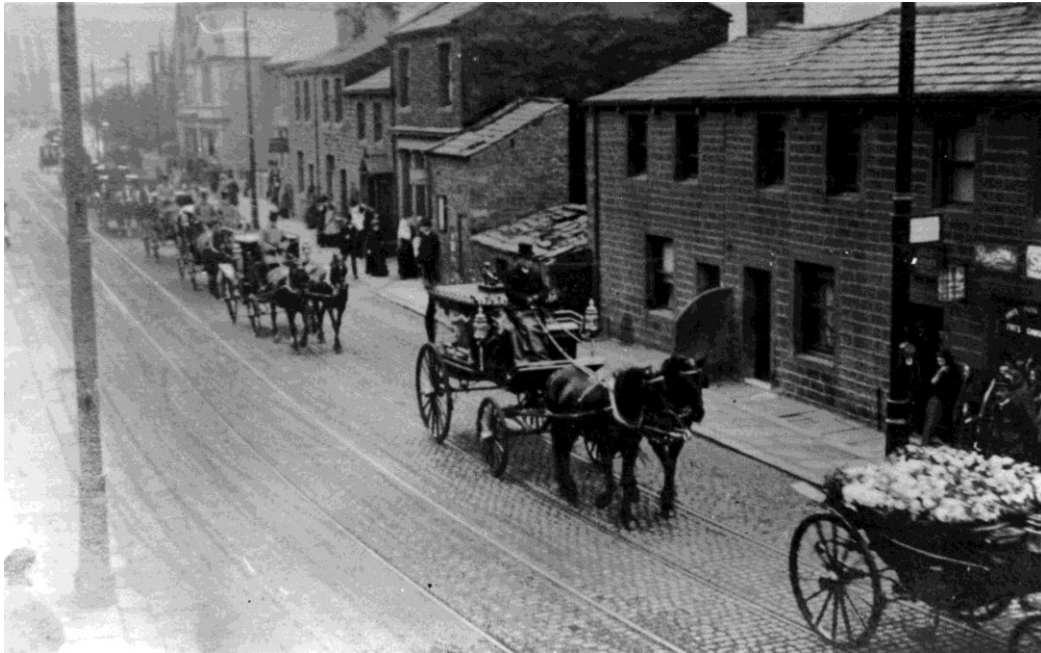
This was something of an interesting reversal of fortunes in the history of the Brigg family as in 1704, a certain Thomas Brigg, an ancestor of the Brigg family, appeared in front of Justice of the Peace Henry Curren, in the Kildwick Hall Justice House, where he was fined goods to the value of £1 for the non-payment of fines.

John Brigg was a business man of some note. Amongst other interests, he was the chairman of John Brigg & Company Ltd., worsted-spinners and manufacturers of Calversyke Mill, Keighley. In 1895 he became the Liberal MP for Keighley, a position he held until his death. He was also appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1902, and was knighted in 1909.



**An official parliamentary photograph of John Brigg; May 1897**

He died in 1911. His funeral, in Keighley, was a major civic event.



**Sir John Brigg's funeral procession through Keighley; 5/10/1911**

On the death of Sir John, the tenancy of Kildwick Hall passes, apparently seamlessly, to his two eldest sons, the twins William Anderton and John Jeremy.



**The twins John Jeremy and William Anderton Brigg at Kildwick Hall**

The Hall was also home to a third son, Leolin, and their sister Mary Sharpe. (A fourth son, Tom, had already married and moved to the Midlands.)

W.A. Brigg became mayor of Keighley for an unprecedented four years between 1912 and 1916 (with his sister acting as lady mayoress), and J.J. Brigg was a County Councillor and local historian.



**Photograph commemorating the re-election of W.A. Brigg as mayor of Keighley in 1914. It shows (amongst others): W.A. Brigg (centre), Mary Sharpe (to his right), the Lady Mayoress of Bradford (to his left), and the Lord Mayor of Bradford (behind, with chain of office)**

W.A. Brigg died in January 1938, officially in his sleep at home, but actually after collapsing at a dance in Keighley; Leolin died later the same year; and after J.J. Brigg died, early in 1945, Mary Sharpe decided to leave the hall to live with her daughter in the south of England.

The Brigg family's furniture that remained at the Hall was disposed of at auction in January 1946.

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS— **"HAMMER, LEEDS."**

TELEPHONE NOS.— **29671-2**

In the Estate of the late J. J. Brigg, Esq., J.P.

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**The Remaining Furnishings of  
Kildwick Hall, Nr. Keighley, Yorks.**

(Keighley  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles    Skipton 4 miles    Kildwick Station  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile)

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CATALOGUE  
of  
Antique Furnishings  
Pewter, Pictures, Books  
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WILL SELL BY AUCTION

On the premises as above, on

**MONDAY & TUESDAY, 28th & 29th January, 1946**

at 11 a.m. precisely each day

Catalogues (1/- each) may be obtained from the Auctioneers' Offices, 3, Park Place, Leeds 1  
or from the House on the View Days

On VIEW Friday and Saturday, 25th and 26th January, from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m.

Arthur Wiles & Sons Ltd, The Wavertree Press Leeds 6

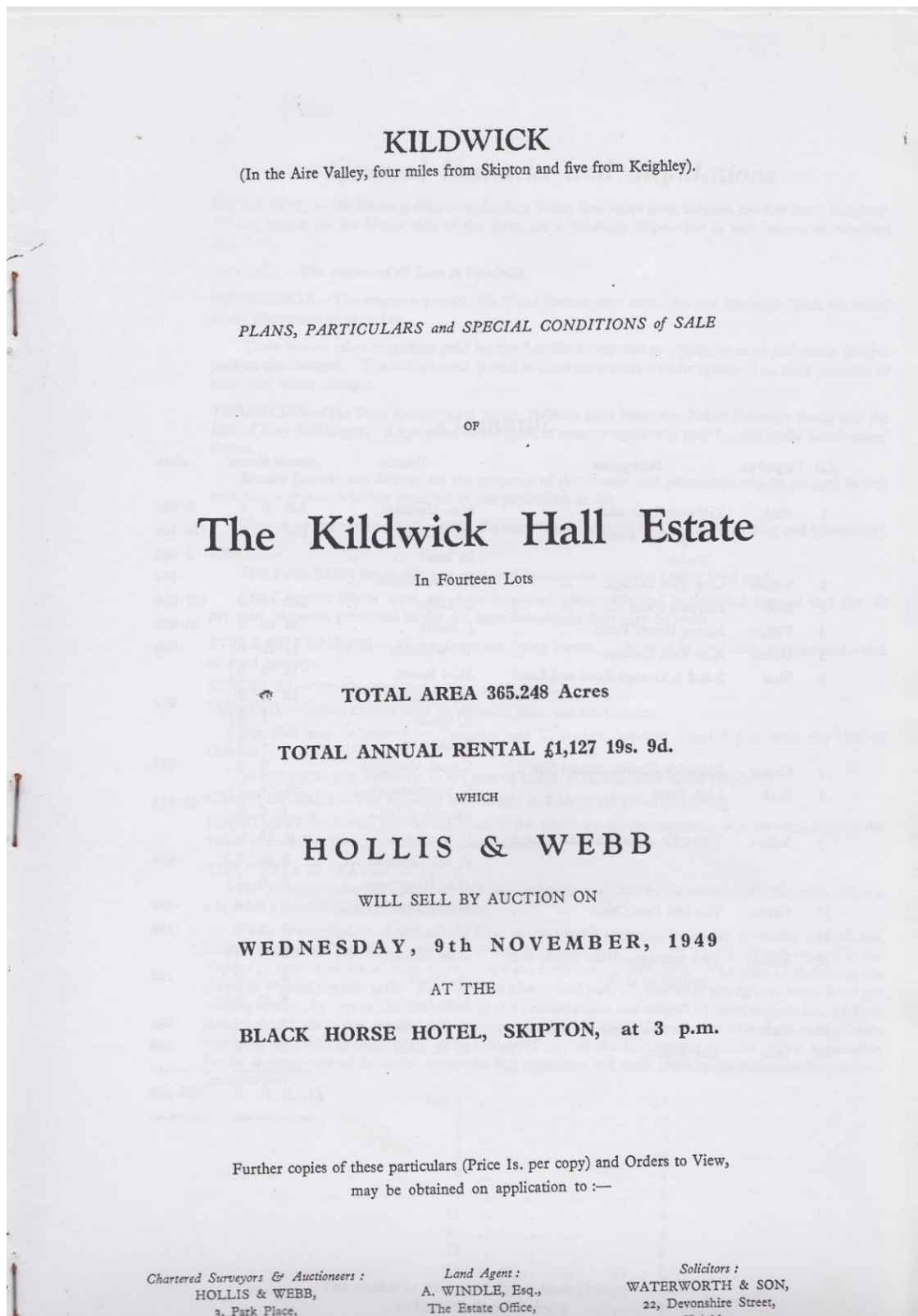
First page of the auction catalogue for the Brigg family furniture, etc.

## Post-war refugee hostel

After the house became empty it was used for some time as a hostel for refugees fleeing from Europe after the war.

## Country house hotel and Restaurant

In 1949 the Kildwick estate was split up into various lots and sold at auction on November 9<sup>th</sup> by Hollis and Webb. The Hall itself failed to sell.



Hollis and Webb auction catalogue for the Kildwick Hall estate





Operating as a Country Club was a common way of circumventing the licensing laws of the time, and the bar at the Hall was open all day, attracting numerous people keen to drink outside the usual hours.

The Hall was sold in 1950, to Frank Walker, an Australian who had been a frequent visitor to the UK. His intention was to live at the Hall, which would continue to be run as a hotel by the Fawcett-Goddards.

Walker was a retired Australian naval officer and a very flamboyant character. He could often be seen in naval uniform and insisted on being called "The Squire". He used to attend Kildwick church, where he always occupied the "Curren Pew" – situated in the north aisle.

His departure from the Hall provoked a mystery. He simply left the hall one morning for a trip to Southampton, and disappeared !

### **1958 to 1962 – Members of the May family ?**

The West Riding electoral roll shows members of the May family – Frederick, Christopher and Ruth – living at Kildwick Hall Hotel. Although the May family could have been exceedingly long-term residents of the hotel, it seems more likely that they were the owners or tenants.

### **1963 to 196? – John Rutherford**

An application for the transfer of a liquor licence, dated April 1964, suggests that John Rutherford had, since late in 1963, carried on the trade of hotelier at Kildwick Hall. In addition to selling liquor, the Hall was also licensed for gambling.

How long Rutherford ran the Hall is not known. However, in 1967 the exterior of the building was used in a 4-part BBC2 TV adaptation of "Wuthering Heights" starring Ian McShane and Angela Scoular. Kildwick Hall took the part of Thrushcross Grange and one of the Rutherfords' infant twin sons, Timothy, appeared as an extra in the production.



**Members of the cast of "Wuthering Heights" at Kildwick Hall  
From the Craven Herald report 28/7/1967**

John Rutherford's parents, John and Alice Rutherford are known to have lived at Grange Hall Cottage.

**Note:** In the mid-1960s the Hall was bought by a well known local property owner and insurance broker, Gerald Harrison who lived in Steeton, as an investment for his daughter, Janet. It is possible that either John Rutherford or one of the other operators of the Hall during this time were actually tenants of Janet Harrison.

Janet took an interest in the wood which stands above Crag Top, part of the property of the Hall, and could often be seen planting trees there.

## 196? to 1972 – Donald Hart

Before coming to Kildwick, Donald Hart had run a very successful hotel, The Bridge, on the A1 at Walshford just north of Wetherby.

Hart did not live at the Hall. In 1957 he had bought Hazlewood Castle at Tadcaster and, although he had subsequently sold the building to Carmelite monks, he continued to live there.



The approach to Kildwick from the Aire bridge; photograph probably from the 1960s or '70s  
The sign on the far left is an advertisement board for Kildwick Hall Restaurant

Donald Hart was developing and improving the Hall when he died suddenly, in 1972, and the hall was sold at auction.

### Kildwick Hall

KILDWICK, KEIGHLEY, YORKSHIRE

OCCUPYING A MAGNIFICENT SITUATION  
OVERLOOKING THE AIRE VALLEY

FULLY EQUIPPED AND FURNISHED AS A LICENSED  
RESTAURANT OF DISTINCTION

together with the

GARDENS AND WOODED GROUNDS EXTENDING IN ALL  
TO APPROXIMATELY 5½ ACRES

part with the benefit of Detailed Residential Planning  
Permission

which

upon instructions received from the Executors of Donald  
Hart (deceased)

**ALVIN & SON**

WILL OFFER FOR SALE BY AUCTION AT THE HALL  
(unless previously sold)


WITH VACANT POSSESSION & INCLUDING A VALUABLE  
INVENTORY OF EQUIPMENT, FURNISHINGS &  
ANTIQUES

on

**THURSDAY 26th OCTOBER, 1972 at 3 p.m. prompt**  
*Subject to Conditions of Sale*

**AUCTIONEERS' OFFICES:**  
PROVINCIAL HOUSE, 26 ALBION STREET, LEEDS 1. Tel. 23848/29243  
THE ESTATE OFFICE, 40 RUTLAND STREET, FILEY. Tel. 3204

AUCTION 26th OCTOBER 1972



Country Manor House of historic interest and great character.

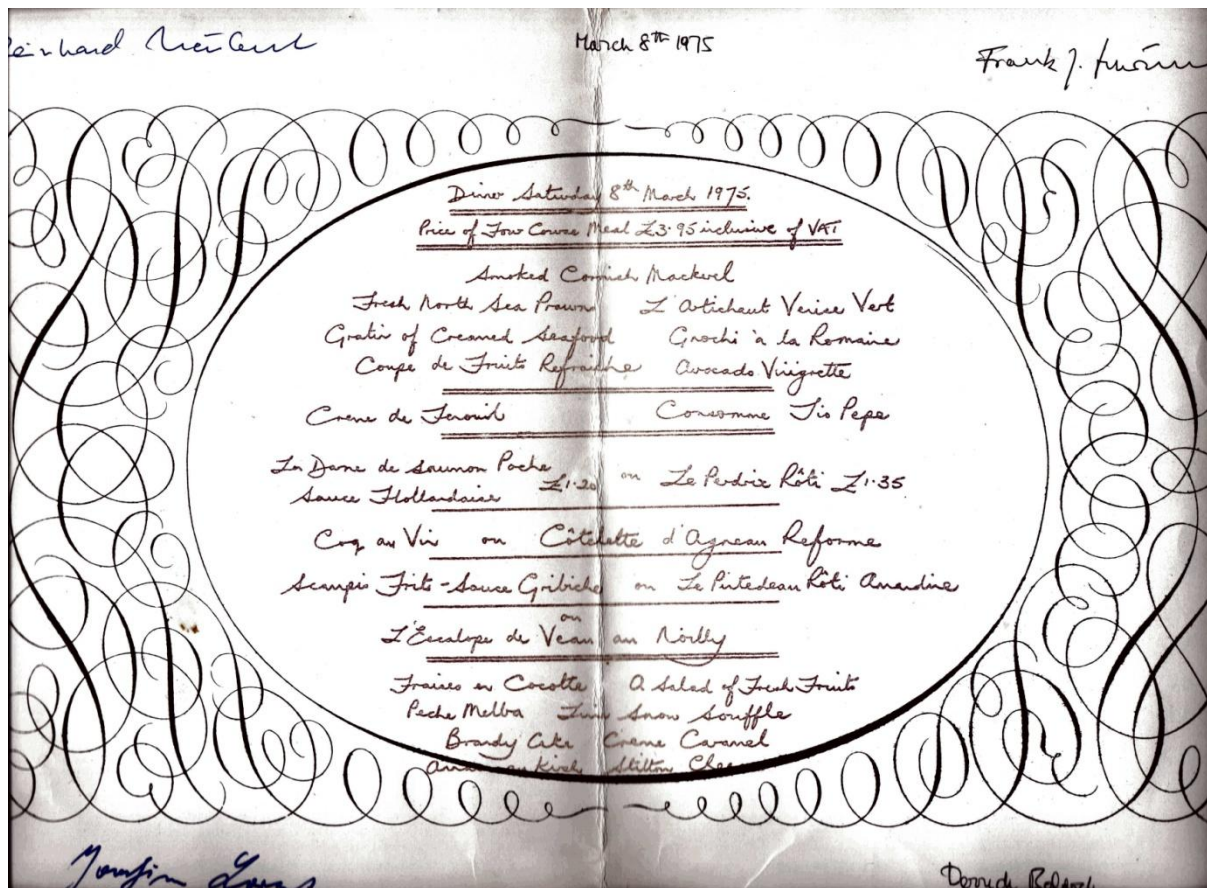
MANY POTENTIAL USES (Subject to Planning Permission).  
CONVENIENT FOR CITIES OF BRADFORD AND LEEDS

**VENDORS' SOLICITORS:**  
**DONALD RACE AND NEWTON**  
YORKSHIRE BANK CHAMBERS, 3 HARGREAVES STREET,  
BURNLEY. Tel. 25221/2/3 and at NELSON.

## 1973 to 1977 – Malcolm Reid and Colin Long

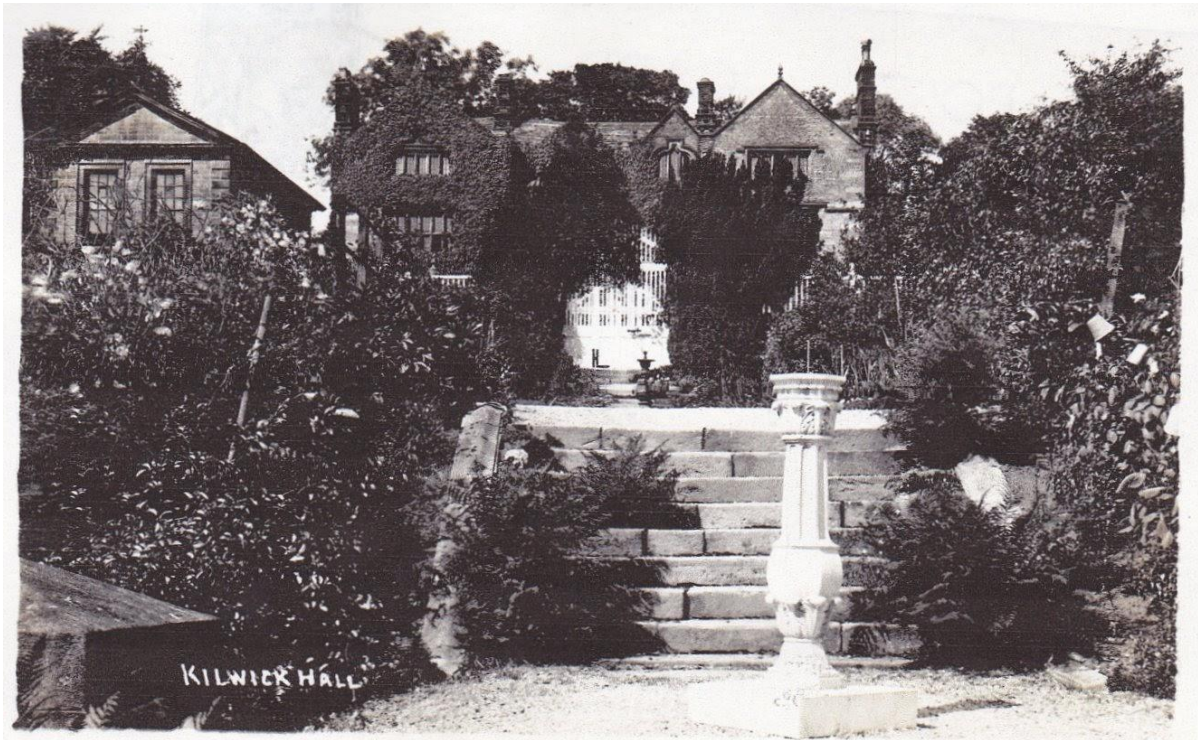
By the time they came to run Kildwick Hall, Malcolm Reid and Colin Long were already well established restaurateurs, and were still running the Box Tree in Ilkley.

In 1973, the Kildwick Hall restaurant won the coveted restaurant of the year award from Egon Ronay. However, by 1976 the same organisation had stripped it of its 2-star rating – something which was said to have had the chef in tears.



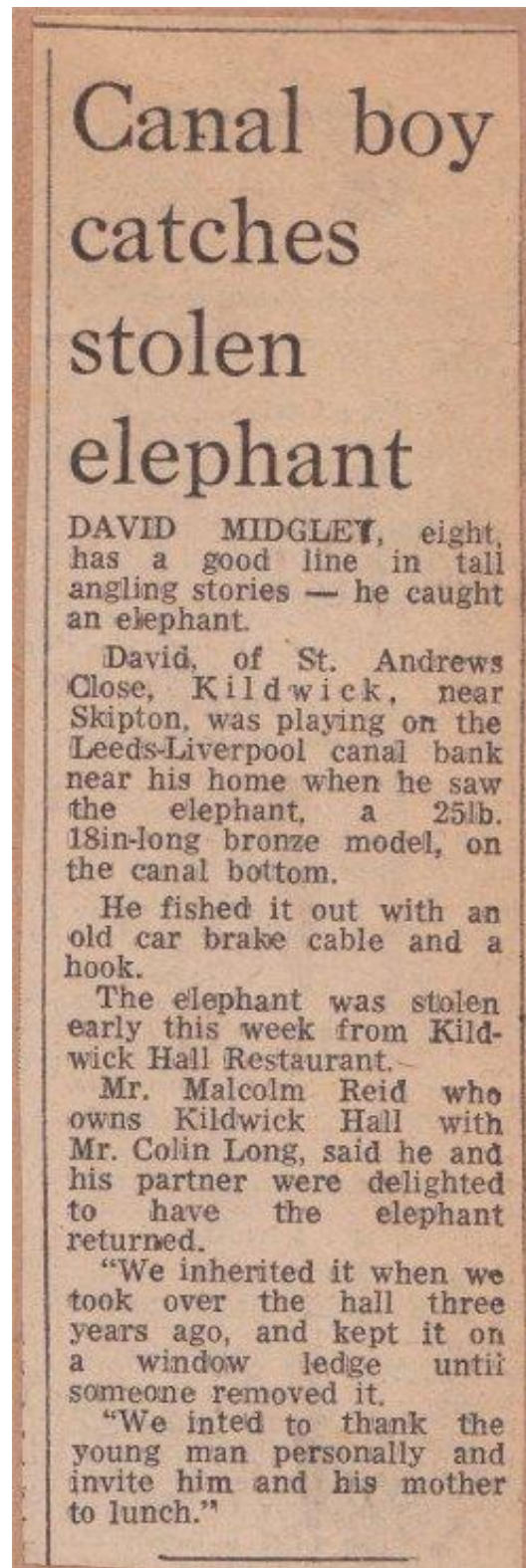
A Kildwick Hall Restaurant menu, dated March 8<sup>th</sup> 1976.

Reid and Long upset many of the local villagers when, without planning permission, they destroyed the walled garden of the Hall, turning it into a car park.



Two photographs of the old walled garden – showing the fountain

There is an amusing anecdote about the Hall during Reid and Long's ownership that has a happy ending. It's best told by the following article that appeared in the Craven Herald in July 1976.



**A boy, a canal, some fishing, and an elephant**

The owners were as good as their word and shortly after the Midgleys received an invitation to lunch at the Hall.

When the business failed and Reid and Long were declared bankrupt, the bank sold the woodland to the west of the Hall to a property developer who originally planned to build several houses on the site. Objections by Kildwick Parish Meeting kept the number down to just four.

### **1978 to 1979 – Patrick and Claude Benrezkellah**

The Benrezkellahs came from Paris with their young daughter Alexi, who attended Kildwick School during their brief stay.



**The Benrezkellahs at home in Kildwick Hall**

Patrick had sold his burglar alarm business and trained to be a chef with Paul Becuse before he came to Yorkshire. They bought the Hall for over £100,000, spent £90,000 on improvements, and set about creating an establishment based around an up-market, French, nouvelle cuisine menu.

This won them an Egon Ronay star, but the high prices and the dishes on offer did not suit local tastes and the business failed within a year.

## 1979 to 1980 – The Davies family

Robin and Billie Davies took over the Hall in February 1979, paying (as they told the local press) nothing approaching the £220,000 asked by Patrick Benrezkellah.

The couple had spent the previous 14 years running a 3-star hotel in Lyme Regis, and were planning to share the running of the business with their son, who was about to qualify as a chartered accountant, and his wife; another son who was studying hotel and catering management, and his fiancée who already had her diplomas.

Just a few weeks after they arrived, Kildwick Hall was once again the location for a TV production, when Michael Palin used it for scenes in his classic Ripping Yarns film 'Golden Gordon'. Some of the cast also stayed there.

Here are some extracts from Michael Palin's published diaries:

- **Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup> 1979**

... Then to the elegant, tasteful portals of Kildwick Hall ...

Sat amid this unretouched history, knocking back scotches in fairly rapid succession, is Bill Frazer, with whom I play the Foggen (scrap merchant) scene tomorrow, and a rather narrow-faced ex-tax inspector, who appears to be the hotel's only other resident.

- **Tuesday, March 20<sup>th</sup> 1979**

In the evening we shoot some 24 carat gold exteriors at Kildwick Hall. The fine Jacobean façade illuminated by one single 250 arc light on a 120 foot hoist. Dickie Betts[lighting engineer] is in his element, strutting squat and small, with his Alaskan trapper's fur hat on and talking into his radio – 'Bring the moon round, Ron.' and other classics.

- **Tuesday, March 27<sup>th</sup> 1979**

... Drove JC [John Cleese] over to Kildwick Hall, where the Davises [the owners] greeted us and Hassan, the Moroccan waiter, hovered, waiting to be introduced – a perfect echo of Manuel ...



Mandy Wass lived in Farnhill and has memories of the Golden Gordon cast members and other people who stayed at Kildwick Hall Hotel around that time:

*I worked at Kildwick Hall: my friend and myself used to be weekend chambermaids there in our teens, for extra pocket money. I went on to work there full time for a while after I left school.*

*At that time it was a very popular hotel and we met quite a few celebrities. One was Fred Perry [the tennis player], I still have his autograph, he was there with Clement Freud [TV celebrity of the '70s] who refused to speak to us.*

*I worked there, in 1979, during the filming of Ripping Yarns and met the cast; Michael Palin, John Cleese and Bill Fraser were staying in the hotel. In fact I had an 18th birthday card signed by John Cleese and had a personal note from Michael Palin. It was interesting serving his breakfast in his room while he was in his dressing gown and shaving, he was very nice and chatted about local history.*

*I was out in Skipton one evening, with my boyfriend, and Michael Palin was on the other side of the street. He shouted across to ask if he could join us, but my boyfriend wouldn't let him – I was a little disgruntled, as it would have been nice.*

Amongst other famous people who stayed at the Hall around this time was the singer Shirley Bassey, who seems to have been quite a regular visitor. On one occasion she made quite an impression on the locals when seen going down Parsons Walk wearing a pair of leopard-skin print leggings.

## **1980 to 1987 – John Sharpe and family**

For seven years Kildwick Hall was run by John and Julia Sharpe, and Julia's son from a previous marriage, James Bacon. They were there for longer than any other owners.

John Sharpe was a former industrialist. During his ownership he developed the former Justices building into a popular bistro. He also applied to Bradford Met for permission to build a motel with 20 bedrooms, to be situated in the former walled garden.

This was met with great resistance from local people who appealed against the application to the planning committee which had the final say in the matter. In spite of all their efforts, consent was granted by 6 votes to 5. However, the building did not start and, five years later, the permission expired.

When Mr. Sharpe applied for an extension the situation had changed somewhat. Kildwick had by then moved out of Bradford Met and into Craven District, who refused permission.

...all the hospitality & charm of a bygone day, right here in Yorkshire.



Kildwick Hall is a superb Jacobean Manor House overlooking Airedale, situated at the heart of the Brontë country and at the Gateway to the Yorkshire Dales.

The Hall is now operated as a luxury country house hotel under the personal supervision of the resident owner.

You will find no complex of impersonal rooms: there are twelve luxury bedrooms all with private bathrooms, bedrooms on which a great deal of loving dedication to detail has been lavished; not only on the furnishings, but also on the small things that go to make a guest's stay special. We offer the amenities of a true English Manor House with many of the charms of a bygone day; a unique throne toilet, the odd creak of a floorboard here and there – after all what is an odd creak when you are four-hundred years old!

Kildwick Hall is surrounded by its own delightful woodlands with lovely views over the Aire Valley. All this is complemented by an excellent restaurant and a superb cellar. For a less formal meal the hotel's gatehouse features the area's finest Bistrot with its extensive menu catering for every taste.

If you appreciate more than a little peace and quiet, you'll delight in the unique charms of Kildwick Hall where the sole purpose is to take care of our guests with the traditional hospitality that only the Yorkshire Dales can provide.

Kildwick Hall is clearly Jacobean, with parts reputed to be Elizabethan, whilst the remaining detached pavilion, gateposts and vases are typical of the garden work of England when William III was King. The architectural detail is intriguing with mullioned windows, embossed leaden fall pipes, charming plaster work with fine oak panelling.

It is fully illustrated and described in 'English Homes', Vol. 1 of Period III (1558-1649), the standard work on English domestic architecture.



A page from the Kildwick Hall Hotel brochure – undated but probably from the 1980s

## 1987 to 1988 – David and Delicia Stothers

David Stothers was a former detective constable in the Bradford police force; his wife was a nurse. They took on Kildwick Hall having previously run a private rest home in the Bradford area.



David and Delicia Stothers - from a 1987 press article

When they opened for business they told the local press that they hoped to add a swimming pool and Jacuzzi to the Hall at a future date but would combine these up to the minute facilities with the old world atmosphere. At the moment it was, they said, a hotel with a high class restaurant at reasonable prices and they said they were aiming at developing on those lines – they stayed for 9 months.

### **1988 to 1991 – Paul Whittle and Sandra Thompson-Sanders**

The couple, who planned to marry later in the spring, took over the hotel in January 1988 after moving north from their Staffordshire home.

The hotel trade was a completely new venture for accountant Paul 39 and 41 year old Sandra who was regional sales manager for a plastics firm, but the ambitious couple said they had no qualms. Their priority would be to return the Hall to its best. The general appearance of the place has been allowed to deteriorate and they intended carrying out improvements.



**Paul Whittle and Sandra Thompson-Sanders**  
Photograph from an article in the Bradford Telegraph and Argus

In February 1991 the business went into receivership with debts of £750,000.

An article in the Yorkshire Post, dated 28<sup>th</sup> June 1991 and headed “The Final Course”, announced that the Hall had been sold to a private purchaser and would close with a champagne farewell on July 6<sup>th</sup>. It was the end of a “difficult” period in which attempts were made to run Kildwick Hall as a commercial venture.

## Private home

### 1991 to 1999 – Chris and Jill Blundell

The contents of the Hall were sold at auction, by Tennants, on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1991 and sold for over £90,000. One of the bidders for a number of the items was Chris Blundell who would, soon after, become the owner of the building.

Chris was the Wines and Spirits director of the Morrisons supermarket chain and the nephew of the Chairman, Ken Morrison. He bought the Hall as a family home for himself, his wife and his four children and paid, according to the local press “substantially more than £500,000”.

Over the previous 40 years that the house had been run as a hotel, very little had been spent on its up-keep. During their time at the Hall the Blundells spent a large amount of money renovating it. In particular they restored the old walled garden, using a grant from the National Lottery to help fund the design created by Andrew Shaw of Garden Makers.



**The restored walled garden at Kildwick Hall  
Photograph 2020; Richard Dobbins**

## 2000 to 2013 – Russell and Nicola Spence

Russell Spence was a property developer whose business was based in the King's Cross area of London and his parents had lived for some years at a barn conversion at Kildwick Grange. Nicola's parents had previously been the landlords of the Red Lion at Burnsall.

The couple spent more money on further alterations/improvements to the house, and Russell and Nicola's mothers both came to live in the two houses, which Russell also owned, adjacent to the courtyard at the Hall.

In 2012 Russell ran into business difficulties, and once again the Hall was sold.

## 2013 to present – Dr. Richard and Marie Dobbins

Dr. Dobbins and his wife bought the Hall as a private house for themselves and their son.

In the early 1990s the Dobbins had lived at Croft House, Kildwick Grange but then moved away for several years.



**Kildwick Hall**  
**Photograph 2020; Richard Dobbins**