

When Kildwick took on Bradford – and won

Introduction

The 1972 Local Government Act, which came into force on 1st April 1974, brought about many changes to the way local authorities were organised.

In Yorkshire, at the top level, the three Ridings which made up the county were abolished and North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, and Humberside were created in their place.

In a second tier, West Yorkshire was divided into five Metropolitan Districts: Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. North Yorkshire was similarly divided into a number of local governing districts, of which Craven was one.

In the process of this reorganisation, the boundaries of a number of areas were redrawn, with some of the boundary decisions incomprehensible to local people. One of these resulted in a 9-year long separation of Kildwick from Farnhill – with Kildwick becoming part of Bradford, but Farnhill being in North Yorkshire. This article documents the long, and often tortuous, struggle to reunite them.

Early objections

Even before the publication of the 1972 plans for local government reorganisation were published Kildwick consistently expressed the view that they wanted to be included in North Yorkshire.

This is from the minutes of the 1971 Parish Meeting:

The reorganisation of the council was discussed and it was proposed that Kildwick would prefer to stay a member of Skipton Rural District and keep Skipton as headquarters of administration.

By 1972 it was becoming clear that Farnhill and Kildwick might be forcefully separated; and Kildwick Parish Meeting were not happy about it:

It was resolved that: "This annual parish meeting of Kildwick should lodge a strong objection to our rural parish of Kildwick being included in the Bradford Metropolitan District and that we request that the whole parish of Kildwick be transferred to the North Yorkshire area and we condemn any other plan to have both Kildwick and Farnhill placed in the Bradford Metropolitan District."

Even in 1973, there was still some hope that separation might be avoided:

... pointed out the advantages of "joining up" with Steeton and Eastburn [in their objections]. However it was decided to see if there was a possibility of joining up with Farnhill and thus staying with Skipton.

But it was all to no avail.

Local response to the boundary decision

The news that Kildwick, along with Addingham, Steeton and Eastburn, would be included in Bradford Metropolitan District, whereas places such as Farnhill and Crosshills would be in North Yorkshire was met with considerable opposition.

In a newspaper article published shortly after the announcement was made, Parish Councillors made their objections clear. William Brear, from Addingham, said “We are not going into Bradford if we can help it. It [Addingham] is a country place, not a town. We don’t want the overspill from Bradford”. Frank Baxendall, of Steeton, saw a political motivation in the way the boundary had been decided: “It has dawned on me what is happening. They want these country fringes in with the metropolitan area to keep the Tory balance”.

Of all the boundary decisions, the one that split Farnhill from Kildwick was the most difficult to understand. It seemed ridiculous for the two villages to be separated when they were so intertwined. Many local people had no idea where the actual boundary between the two villages lay – as the stream that separated them took a meandering course under the canal and the road.

Kildwick had the school, the Church and the pub that both villages shared; Farnhill had the Institute, the chapel, the shops and the Post Office. The village school came under West Yorkshire, but many of the children were from North Yorkshire which would have to sort out the cost of educating them. Pensioners with bus passes would not be able to use them to travel the few miles to Skipton because they were issued by Bradford. Not to mention the fact that the rates in Bradford were substantially higher than those in Craven.

The MP for Skipton, Mr Burnaby Drayson, tabled an amendment to the proposed boundary, in an attempt to get Addingham and Kildwick transferred to the proposed new North Yorkshire county. In support of this Kildwick Parish Meeting was asked to canvass the parishioners to test their views on the matter. The result showed that 95% of the parishioners wanted to be included in North Yorkshire as it was felt that Craven/North Yorkshire would best reflect Kildwick’s rural way of life.

Surely, with this resounding demonstration of local democratic will, the matter would be quickly and easily resolved ?

The next thing that Kildwick knew was that it, along with Addingham, Steeton and Eastburn, had been put into the newly formed Bradford Metropolitan District, and Farnhill had been put into Craven District. The reason given for this was that Kildwick’s land extended to Silsden and it was not easy for Whitehall to draw a straight line that included both Kildwick’s village and its land – even though Kildwick and Farnhill had previously both been part of the West Riding. (No, me neither.)

An appeal to the Boundary Commission

The next step in reuniting Kildwick with its neighbour was an appeal to the Boundary Commission.

Kildwick Parish Meeting chairman, Keith Midgley took another survey to check that the view of local people was unchanged – this time it found a unanimous desire amongst ratepayers to be moved into North Yorkshire. A letter was then sent to the Boundary Commission, along with letters to the Keighley News, Craven Herald, and Yorkshire Post.

Bradford Council said that they would not oppose any such move and Craven District Council said they would welcome Kildwick if the change was agreed; its Chief Executive Officer, E.G. Sharp going so far as to say that this made sense as the original boundary had been “so badly drawn”.

Early in 1975 North Yorkshire County Council agreed to support Craven District Council in any application to the Boundary Commission for the inclusion of Kildwick in North Yorkshire, and Craven District Council then formally asked the Boundary Commission to undertake an ad hoc review to bring the parish into Craven District.

The reply from the Boundary Commission, when it arrived in March 1975, was not positive. It could be up to two years before they made their decision and in the meantime, Kildwick would remain part of Bradford Metropolitan District. However, the parish would be notified of the time the inspectors would be coming to investigate Kildwick’s case and a public meeting would be called.

No date having been set for the Boundary Commission inspectors’ visit, Keith Midgley wrote – twice – to the commission, and eventually rang to enquire as to progress. He was told that a reply had been drafted to his first letter, but not sent.

In the meantime, Kildwick Parish Meeting had begun a campaign of passive resistance. In the minutes of the meeting held in September 1974 it was recorded:

As we are now, for the moment, part of Bradford it was decided that they should do something about cleaning the streets. The yellow lines wanted renewing. The footpath outside the school was in a poor state. The road by the swing-bridge wanted improving, and the road by Mr. Shuttleworth’s garage was sinking.

Kildwick was going to be a bitter pill for Bradford to swallow.

The vicar joins the fight

In January 1976, in a sermon delivered to a congregation that included the Lord Mayor of Bradford, Mrs. Joan Hobson; the Chief Executive, Mr Gordon Moore, and the Skipton constituency MP, Mr Burnaby Drayson, the vicar of St. Andrew’s, Ian Busby, voiced his support for the re-assignment of Kildwick to Craven when he described local government as “a vast remote and impersonal machine” – a comment that was greeted with a murmur of approval from the locals gathered in the church. He went on to say that the vast majority of the population wanted to go into North Yorkshire – and that since that was the wish of such a large majority it ought to be given the utmost consideration.



Rev. Busby of St. Andrew's stood on the boundary between the two districts – the Kildwick vicarage (to the left) was in Bradford; Kirkgate, Farnhill, (right) was in Craven. Many similar photographs were included in newspaper reports during the boundary dispute.

Shortly after this sermon a spokesman for Bradford Metropolitan Council said that if Kildwick were to make a formal approach to Bradford and ask for a transfer into North Yorkshire they would consider whether it would be better to let them go.

Bradford's veiled threats of further "territorial demands"

In April 1976, three members of Bradford Council asked to attend Kildwick Parish Meeting, where they said that they would support Kildwick's request for transfer into North Yorkshire.

They agreed that the boundary with Farnhill was nonsense but said that it would be a difficult task to change it, and that although Kildwick was becoming increasingly impatient for an answer to its application for withdrawal they doubted that the answer Kildwick was seeking would be forthcoming in the near future.

However they then went on to say that their support would continue only as long as the issue involved Kildwick alone – and that if Bradford decided to extend its boundaries to include Farnhill, Cross Hills, Glusburn and Sutton they could not then support Kildwick moving into Craven, as that would leave it as a North Yorkshire "enclave" within Bradford Metropolitan District.

The suggestion that Bradford, rather than letting Kildwick move into North Yorkshire might seek to resolve the issue by taking control of all the surrounding villages of South Craven, resulted in both Glusburn and Sutton parish councils supporting Kildwick's case.

The Boundary Commission decides to review Kildwick's position

Kildwick heard the result of its appeal to the Boundary Commission in May 1979.

The Boundary Commission accepted that there was a prima facie case for a review; that Kildwick's objections had been based largely on the fact that the boundary split a single community; and that the residents of Kildwick thought of themselves as country people, and looked towards Skipton where the Craven district was based.

The Commission said that the main issue to be considered was whether the requested change would be in the interest of effective and convenient local government. The review would take the form of consultations with the councils involved, other public bodies, and individuals. There would also be chance for public comment.

At the same time as announcing the review, the Commission also invited Kildwick to submit a detailed scheme for the boundary changes it wanted.

So it looked as if the battle was entering its final phase. But it would take another four years.

Bradford's last stand

The Boundary Commission's review took its time.

In July 1979 Bradford Council proposed a swap in which Cross Hills would be transferred to Bradford in exchange for Kildwick moving to Craven. Craven District council met and agreed to resist any attempts by any neighbouring authority to take over areas in the Craven district.

In February 1981, members of the management committee of Bradford Council received preliminary notice that the Boundaries Commission intended to switch the village of Kildwick out of Bradford and into Craven.

At the next full meeting of the Council, Bradford decided it would be best to say goodbye to Kildwick. To smiles and chuckles all round, leader of the majority Labour group on the council, Derek Smith, said "I propose we let them go; Kildwick after all is hardly regarded as a Labour stronghold".

The Boundary Commission confirms the change

In March 1983, after a further two years of consolation, the Boundaries Commissioners granted the changeover – Kildwick would become part of Craven.

The Commission said their decision was made in the interest of effective and convenient local government, and that the change would not interfere with the overall pattern of local government in the area.

The loss of income to Bradford Council would be minimal. Births, deaths and marriages would have to be registered in Skipton, not Keighley. Craven District Council would supply the district services and North Yorkshire County Council would supply education, social services and highways.

A special party to say goodbye to Kildwick was held at City Hall, Bradford, on March 31st. The Lord Mayor, Joan Lightband, and Chief Executive, Gordon Moore, were there; Keith Midgley, Chairman of Kildwick Parish Meeting, and his wife were also invited.

On 1st April 1983, after a fight that had lasted 9 years, Kildwick finally became part of North Yorkshire.

Note: Despite Kildwick's long fight and success in escaping from Bradford Met., Addingham, Eastburn and Steeton never got out and to this day remain part of Bradford.

Appendix – Some of the boundary dispute stupidities

Whoever it was who drew the line between North and West Yorkshire and separated Farnhill from its "twin" cannot have known the issues this would cause. From minor inconveniences to serious planning decisions, these are some of the problems raised by the boundary that nobody wanted:

- Early in 1975 Kildwick Parish Meeting asked Bradford Council to repaint some of the double-yellow, no parking, lines in the village. They were told that this could not be done until the man who did that job had used up all the white in his bucket.
- It was found that Travel Cards issued by Bradford Council to people in Kildwick were not valid for journeys to Eastburn or parts of journeys that included the stretch from Kildwick Bridge to Eastburn. This area was in North Yorkshire and an additional fare would have to be paid.
The matter was only resolved by the intervention of the Council's solicitor. One Kildwick pensioner kept a copy of a letter from him in her purse, which she would display when being asked for the supplement.
- Despite Kildwick being in a conservation area, plans for four properties to be built with synthetic slate roofs rather than Yorkshire stone, within the grounds of Kildwick Hall, were approved by Bradford Council, without notifying Kildwick Parish Meeting. This followed a massive disagreement with Bradford Council representatives at a Parish Meeting about the roofing materials suggested by the builder.
- Similarly, the 300-year old walled garden at Kildwick Hall was destroyed and turned into a car park for the restaurant that was being operated there.
- Permission was granted by Bradford to build a 19 bedroom stainless steel and glass motel at the front of the walled garden at Kildwick Hall. This was later turned down by Craven District as the planning application had run out of time.
- Although the boundary did not run through anyone's home, Keith Midgley, chairman of Kildwick Parish Meeting owned seven garages that backed onto the canal: two ended up in North Yorkshire and five in Bradford. Rates on the North Yorkshire pair were £12 per annum; those in Bradford, 50% more.

- Crimes reported by residents of Farnhill were dealt with by Cross Hills police station, with officers travelling through Kildwick to get to the scene. However, because Cross Hills was part of North Yorkshire, crimes reported by residents of Kildwick had to be dealt with by police in Keighley.

Even after the local boundary had been resolved there was still one outstanding problem. In the time it had taken to resolve the matter, electoral commissioners had decided that Kildwick should be moved from the Skipton parliamentary constituency into Keighley.