

EARBY - OUR VILLAGE - VI

OLD EARBY FAMILIES

THE WILKINSONS (2)

At the centenary meeting of the Mount Zion Baptist Church, Earby, in 1921, Mr. Elihu Wilkinson, of Eastby, was one of the principal speakers. He enumerated the various groups bearing the name of Wilkinson, and convulsed the assembly by remarking, "and I belong to t' Quart John lot."

This family comes of a Kelbrook stock, and John Wilkinson, the grandfather of Elihu Wilkinson, having removed to Earby for the sake of employment, a new name had to be coined to distinguish him from the numerous company of "John Wilkinsons," and the by-name which won favour and was confirmed by general adoption was one that corresponded with his quiet demeanour. His children were commonly called by the father's by-name, and "Dick o' Quart John's" will still be remembered by Earby people living in the village forty years ago. He occupied a house in "T' Backside," now named Garden Street, and he went round Earby and the neighbouring villages with a greengrocer's cart. He retained his father's characteristics to the end of his life.

His brother, Thomas Wilkinson, was a weaver at Bracewell's Old Shed, and his early initiation into the cotton industry proved to be very valuable to him. As a young man he was very

stopped in the kitchen until the evening's courtship was ended and they returned home together. For some years Thomas Wilkinson was of a roving disposition, although he was married. He left Earby for Skipton, and for a time he was a cloth looker at Dewhurst's Mill. Then he returned to Earby, and later obtained a situation at Coventry as a cloth looker. His wife kept a general dealer's shop in Earby, and as the husband could not see his way to settle at Coventry he returned. Being of an enterprising disposition, he started a coal business, but he abandoned that in favour of oatcake baking, being taught by William Bailey, of Barnoldswick. He and his wife having saved a bit of money, he entered into the cotton trade at Skipton, and built Park Shed, which is now run by his grandson. The firm has had a very successful career.

His son, John Wilkinson, also started manufacturing on his own account, first at Griddleton, then at Nelson.

In addition to the mills at Nelson and Skipton, finishing works were established near Manchester, offices in Portland Street, and a warehouse in London.

John Wilkinson was one of the leading townsmen in Nelson and after the charter of incorporation had been received he was the first elected Mayor, succeeding Alderman Gott, who had been provisional Mayor. He was a Liberal in politics, and a prominent member of the Baptist denomination.

Elihu Wilkinson, another son of Thomas Wilkinson, has had a successful business and public career. He continued the oatcake business in Skipton for several years, and he was well known in the town and the neighbouring villages as he attended to the wants of his

customers. Later he joined his brother in the cotton trade, and eventually started on his own account in Skipton, and then removed to Pendle Street Shed, Nelson, where he had 480 looms for the manufacture of coloured goods. At Nelson he was an active worker at the Carr Road Baptist Church, as a deacon and Sunday school teacher. He also occupied a seat on the Nelson School Board, and was the chairman when the board was dissolved. He then sought council honours and was elected for the Bradley Ward, and was appointed as the chairman of the Education Committee. Twelve years ago he entered into partial retirement, and removed from Nelson to Eastby. During these later years he has been prominently identified with the Skipton Baptist Church and Sunday School. and his services have been in much request as a lay preacher for the Baptist and Wesleyan Churches in the Skipton district. He is one of the directors of the Skipton Building Society, and has been connected with the Society since he was twelve years of age, ever since "he began to save a bit o' money." He has now retired from the manufacturing business, which is carried on by two of his sons, one of whom lives at Nelson and the other at Manchester. He has also a son at Harrogate, and a married daughter at Eastby. He and his wife are a veritable "Darby and Joan," and everyone who knows them wishes they may be long spared to exercise their genial influence in and around Skipton.

I am indebted to Mr. Elihu Wilkinson for the following interesting recollections :-

"My father built the block of buildings in Water Street, Earby, which face the bottom of Aspen Lane, and our shop was at the corner facing the Victoria Mill.

The Varley family lived next door to us, and theirs was the only house in Earby which had curtains, excepting Green End House.

"William Varley was the outstanding character of the village. The Varleys had three children; one son, Alfred, became the Town Clerk of Colne; William was engaged in the clerical department of the Midland Railway at Keighley, and their daughter, Elizabeth, who married Henry Brown, engineer, was a very fine young woman.

"I went to Bentley School (the Earby Grammar School) for a bit, but our folk heard of a school at Elslack 'where they used the stick and get 'em on better.'

At Elslack School, Enoch Hall, an old soldier, was master. He was a beautiful penman, and he certainly grounded us well in the "three R's". He could only take us as far as proportion in arithmetic, then he would bring us back to compound addition. It was a

Robert Shaw, Wilson Green and Johnnie Green.

"I remember 'Kitty' and 'Little Harry' Bracewell. Sometimes I used to go to the Wesleyan Chapel on a Sunday night, and the youngsters sat in the gallery. If there was any noise 'Little Harry' would pop up, and there was quietness at once. What an eye he had!

"At the mill sometimes 'Harry' was in charge and sometimes 'Kitty' but they had better work and a better going on when 'Kitty' was in charge.

"I remember an old lady, Mrs. Austerbury, kept an old Dame School across the road from our house, and as they gave us a long holiday at Elslack I had to go to Mrs. Austerbury's School. The old lady delighted to give me puzzling sums. She herself could not do them, but she had the answers in the book!

"Nathan Wilson lived next door to the Varleys. He was a very good thoughtful man. When he

died Mr. Bennett, the Baptist minister from Barlick, preached his funeral sermon from the words: 'Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.' That just describes Nathan Wilson as I knew him.

"My grandfather, 'Quart John,' was uncle to Mrs. James Dodgson (referred to in a previous article) and uncle to John Wilkinson ('John Banks'), who was the carrier from Earby to Colne forty years ago."

J.H.

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