

# The Writings of the Rev Joseph Ismay Vicar of Mirfield 1740 to 1778

Transcribed by Deb Walker  
January 1998

## Introduction

Joseph Ismay was born on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 1708 the son of a Yeoman, and attended Kirbylonsdale Grammar School before going to Christ's College Cambridge in 1729 and taking a BA degree in 1733. Ismay was ordained Deacon and Priest at Chester Cathedral in 1736 and 1737 and appointed Curate of Hartshead in 1738. On the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1739/40 he was instituted at York to the Vicarage of Mirfield. He married Mary France at Bradford on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1747 and had four children; Mary who died in 1749 aged 12 weeks, Thomas 1750-1772, Martha 1753 and Maria 1755. Ismay's wife Mary died aged 48 in 1765. Ismay himself died in 1778 and was buried at Mirfield on the 24<sup>th</sup> June. He had been our Vicar for over 38 years.

Although much of his original writings are still in the hands of his descendants, some extracts have been printed (for example in Pobjoy's History of Mirfield etc). The following is a transcription of those parts of his diaries which have been photocopied by the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Some brief explanatory notes are included at the end of the text. Some of the entries are out of chronological order, but have been transcribed as written.

## *Observations on ye Merits of Mankind - 1755*

People increase in proportion to the number of marriages and that is greater in proportion to the ease and convenience of supporting a family. When families can be easily supported, more persons marry and earlier in life. In London there generally dies annually one person in thirty, but in the country there die not more than one in fifty. By an accurate calculation it appears yt since ye year 1749, there has been a decrease of above 100,000 and that the present number is not more than 740,000. Cities do not by natural generation supply themselves with inhabitants; the deaths are more than the births.

As the cities take supplies of people from the country and thereby make a little more room in the country, marriage is a little more encouraged there and the births exceed the deaths. Europe is generally full settled with husbandmen and manufacturers and therefore cannot now much increase in people.

Marriages in America are more general and more generally early than in Europe. And if it be reckoned here, that there is but one marriage per ann. among 100 persons, perhaps we may there reckon two; and if in Europe we have but four births to a marriage we may there reckon eight. Of which one half grow up and if their marriages are made reckoning one with another at 20 years of age, the people of America must at least be doubled every 20 years.

*A Chronological Account of Some Memorable Events in and About Mirfield Etc.*

- 1722 May 18<sup>th</sup>. Ripponden flood.
- 1729 Nov 19<sup>th</sup>. Bowman's Flood.
- 1736 An apple tree near ye vicarage blossomed and set forth fruit nine times and produced ripe fruit at five different times this year. And what is very remarkable it was in blossom on X'mas Day and a red rose full blown in the hedge by it.
- 1738 Dec 30<sup>th</sup>. An earthquake felt at Mirfield. I perceived my bed to rock and ye chamber to shake at Kirklees where I then lived.
- 1739 Methodism first propagated at Mirfield by Ben Ingham. A great frost which began on Christmas Day and lasted 9 weeks.
- 1740 Apr 26<sup>th</sup>. A riot began at Dewsbury where 1500 and upwards were assembled and proceeded to Mirfield etc. They mustered ye crew and beat up their drum by the vicarage in Mirfield.
- 1740 Aug 25<sup>th</sup>. Buried Ann Holdsworth of Little London aged 102. She could see to thread a needle, sew and knit without spectacles.
- 1741 In January died Mr John Philips of Thorner near Leeds in the 117<sup>th</sup> year of his age. 4<sup>th</sup> Feb a new market began at Dewsbury.
- 1742 Jun 29<sup>th</sup> £2:17:3 collected in the parish of Mirfield for the propagation of ye gospel in foreign parts. The Vicarage of Mirfield augmented a second time.
- 1743 Jun 22<sup>nd</sup>. 102 persons confirmed at Wakefield from the parish of Mirfield by Dr Thos Herring a Bishop of York, now of Canterbury.
- 1743 A very splendid comet was seen Dec 23<sup>rd</sup> in ye signs Aries and Pisces; it continued visible to Feb 20<sup>th</sup>.
- 1744 An estate purchased at Rilston in Craven for ye perpetual augmentation of the vicarage of Mirfield.
- 1744 The harvest flood Sep 13<sup>th</sup>. A late frost which continued till near Lady Day. Fruits of all sorts this year in abundance.
- 1745 Subscribed and paid by the inhabitants of Mirfield towards maintenance of ye Yorkshire Buffs £38:14:6. A dividend of 6s and 2d in ye pound was returned.

- 1745 Nine persons drowned in Calder near Mirfield from Nov 1739 to Dec 1745.
- 1745 Saturday Nov 30<sup>th</sup>. Dies fuit memorabilis and tremebundus commonly called Run-Away Saturday, because a rumour was spread through most towns in ye neighbourhood yt the Rebels were approaching them. Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> Dec The people at Huddersfield, Mirfield etc were put into a prodigious panic by ye Lancashire Militia officers suspecting them to be rebels. A woman at Huddersfield was frightened to death with he report of he rebels approach to yt place. The coal pits on Mirfield Moor and other obscure places were stocked with cloaths and provisions and this day (1<sup>st</sup> Dec) few women attended Divine Service at church for want of apparel, when ye congregation were entertained with ye finest notes of a Robin Red Breast I ever heard. The bird was both more musical and familiar than at other times.
- 1743 Dec 11<sup>th</sup> (shortest day) 14 persons were published in Mirfield church and 29 couples in ye year.
- 1745 Dec 10<sup>th</sup>. A detachment of Marshal Wade's army proceed to Mirfield but are suddenly recalled to ye camp at Wakefield in order to march back to Leeds.
- 1746 Sept. 15 young persons died of the smallpox in Mirfield this month and in ye whole 39. A new tax upon windows.
- 1747 Orders for cattle read in church. Jun 1<sup>st</sup> 36 persons from Mirfield confirmed at Wakefield.
- 1747 Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> Jun Trinity Flood. This was preceded by a violent storm of thunder and lightning. 21<sup>st</sup> Aug. Died at Kirklees Sir Saml Armytage Bart. Aged 52. Fine harvest weather and a plentiful crop. Scarcity of apples and nuts.
- 1748 A new stone wall erected on ye north side of Mirfield Moor.
- 1748 Jul 14<sup>th</sup>. A great solar eclipse. Locusts in Mirfield etc.
- 1749 7<sup>th</sup> Apr. An extraordinary Aurora Borealis at Mirfield. Jul 9<sup>th</sup> a remarkable whirlwind near the vicarage.
- 1750 A violent storm of thunder and lightning in Mirfield. ??? 22<sup>nd</sup> a fiery meteor. A hot dry summer at Mirfield. This year has been remarkable for Earthquakes etc and ye aurora borealis. Feb 26<sup>th</sup> (1751) a violent storm of wind and rain.
- 1751 A wet summer and late harvest.
- 1752 Jan 1751/2 a great snow this month for eleven days together.
- 1753 March – a great wind for eight days together. June – riots about turnpikes in Yorkshire.

- 1754 Feb 26<sup>th</sup>. A meteor seen at Mirfield. Apr 19<sup>th</sup>. The shock of an earthquake felt at Mirfield, Leeds, York, etc. A hard frosty winter, a cold sharp spring, a wet summer and a fine autumn.
- 1754 Eatables of all sorts extravagantly dear in ye spring.
- 1755 Multitudes of earwigs about the houses in Mirfield and other places. A very wet and cold summer, harvest and autumn.
- 1755 Oct 15<sup>th</sup>. Gave tickets to 132 persons to be confirmed at Halifax by Dr Edmund Keen Bishop of Chester who confirmed 2,600. November – several acres of land in and about Mirfield rendered too wet and incapable of being sown with wheat at this season. Nov 1<sup>st</sup>. A most dreadful and extensive earthquake in Portugal and various parts of Europe.
- 1753 21 Children died of smallpox and only two of ye chin cough.
- 1754 Of ye smallpox and chincough 11.
- 1755 Nov 1<sup>st</sup>. Several ponds and lakes violently agitated in many parts of England.
- 1756 Tempests, storms, hurricanes, thunder, lightning and other terrifying phenomena have never been known so frequent throughout great Britain as in Winter 1755/6. Feb 6<sup>th</sup>. Fast Day for the earthquake at Lisbon. Feb 14<sup>th</sup>. Died Mrs Elliot of Ledstone Yorkshire aged 114. She retained her senses till within a few hours of her death. 28<sup>th</sup> died G Wilcocks, Bishop of Rochester etc. May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Fairs open in Yorkshire for ye sale of horned cattle, being prohibited for upwards of nine years. (May) 18<sup>th</sup> War declared against ye French in London.
- 1756 May 25<sup>th</sup>. War proclaimed against ye French at Leeds. Jun 4<sup>th</sup>. A most violent storm of hail etc. (Jun) 16<sup>th</sup> war declared against ye English by ye French. (Jun) 24<sup>th</sup>. Much lightning in ye evening. (Jun) 27<sup>th</sup> Much lightning after 10 o clock of ye evening. It continued for some time in a continual blaze at Mirfield. (Jun) 28<sup>th</sup>. The port of St Philips in the Island of Minorca surrendered to the French. Jul 5<sup>th</sup> apple and plumb trees in blossom a second time this year in my garden. Jul 22<sup>nd</sup>. The marine society instituted in London. The price of wheat begins to advance which occasioned mobs to rise in different parts of the Kingdom. Oct 7<sup>th</sup>. A very extraordinary and extensive hurricane about one in ye morn. Nov 25<sup>th</sup> Died Mr Thos Clarke, Rector of Kirkheaton and Swillington, aged 81.
- 1757 March 14<sup>th</sup>. Admiral Bing shot on board ye Monarque. 15<sup>th</sup> March a great hurricane of wind at Liverpool, Chester, etc by which much damage was done by sea and land. 19<sup>th</sup> March. Died in ye parish of Tadcaster Jno Shepherd, aged 109. He had lived in a cave upon Bramham Moor many years. September. Riots in several places about the Militia Act. 26<sup>th</sup> September A comet appears about this time. 30<sup>th</sup> September. Died at

Bath David Hartley MD and FRS at 53. Sept 15<sup>th</sup>. A great riot at Manchester. October 19<sup>th</sup>. Died at Constantinople Sultan Osman, Grand Signor and Emperor of ye Turks. Seven battles fought by the King of Prussia this year besides ye siege of Prague and great numbers of skirmishes. A very drougthy hot summer – all sorts of grain and provisions at an excessive and extravagant price.

- 1758 January 29<sup>th</sup>. Died at Moor Town near Leeds James Goodrick aged 104. A new workhouse erected and opened in Mirfield in May. An Act of Parliament obtained for extending ye navigation of ye River through Mirfield to Sowerby Bridge etc. August 9<sup>th</sup>. A confirmation at Wakefield by ye Bishop of St Asaph. (August) 22<sup>nd</sup>. The new market house for coloured cloth was opened at Leeds. July 27<sup>th</sup>. A great flood about Wigton in Cumberland. November 26<sup>th</sup>. A remarkable Meteor seen at Newcastle etc. December 29<sup>th</sup>. A ball of fire seen at Colchester moving northeast. December 20<sup>th</sup>. Died at Ealand Mr Rd. Pelly aged 53. In this memorable and glorious year we had a plentiful crop and have seen ye British Flag restored to it's ancient dignity, by being victorious in almost every part of the world.
- 1759 A dry summer and autumn. A malignant fever in Mirfield, which continued six years. January 27<sup>th</sup>. An ox was lately killed at Lowther Hall which weighed 34 stone a quarter and had 19 stone of tallow taken out of him. July 5<sup>th</sup>. A parhelion<sup>1</sup> seen about the setting of the sun at Mirfield. September 2<sup>nd</sup>. Died at Thornhill Mr Saml Sandford Rector of ye Church. November 4<sup>th</sup>. Died of a singular malady Mr Wm. Turner of Blakehall in Mirfield, aged 46. November 10<sup>th</sup>. An hurricane of wind at Mirfield. A dry summer. December 31<sup>st</sup>. A lunar iris<sup>2</sup> observed from my door at ye vicarage. Great and glorious conquests made by the British troops this year in America etc.
- 1760 January 15<sup>th</sup>. A child shot by an accident in Mirfield. A hot drougthy summer. There was the greatest mortality this year in Mirfield yt has happened since that of 1631 when the plague raged in the Parish. Many persons were cut off in their full strength and some in ye vigour and bloom of their age by an eruptive epidemical fever which seized upon me on ye 5<sup>th</sup> of September and confined me to my bed for ye space of 14 days; my life being in great danger by ye violence of ye distemper. May 9<sup>th</sup>. Died at Hernhuth in Silesia, Count (Nicholas Lewis) Linzendorff founder and head of the Moravian Sect. His son (Johannes) consecrated the conventicle at wellhouse in Mirfield on ye 16<sup>th</sup> day of March 1755. October 25<sup>th</sup>. Died K George 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 77<sup>th</sup> year of his age and 34<sup>th</sup> of his reign. October 26<sup>th</sup> K George 3<sup>rd</sup> proclaimed. September 19<sup>th</sup>. Effect of a most surprising flow of water at Bracken thwaite in Cumberland. (Gent. Mag.)
- 1761 January 1<sup>st</sup>. A dreadful hurricane of wind at the NorthWest in the night. January 12<sup>th</sup>. Died of a lingering illness the Rev Mr Jos Wheeler, Vicar of Dewsbury. (January) 9<sup>th</sup>. The Quarter Sessions appointed to be held at Wakefield were postponed on account of the epidemical distempers raging in that town. (January) 29<sup>th</sup>. Died at Mirfield Mr Ed. Darby, Attorney at Law, aged 34. April 30<sup>th</sup>. (Ascension Day) I read ye Divine Service and christened 19 children at ye font in Mirfield Church before dinner.<sup>3</sup>

- 1762 February 21<sup>st</sup>. Shrove Sunday. A dreadful tempest of wind and snow, PM by ye severity of which many persons perished. July 14<sup>th</sup>. A violent storm of thunder, hail etc at Kirklees and its environs. The hailstones were as large as Pigeons eggs, measuring three and four inches, by which great damage was done to corn, fruit and windows. An excessive drougthy summer. This month and last ye drought and heat of the season was so great yt several moors and peat mosses took fire, and burnt under ground for many miles together.
- 1763 An intense frost began December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1762 and continued to January 29<sup>th</sup> 1763. February 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. A great fall of snow with a severe frost. March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Peace proclaimed in London. May 13<sup>th</sup>. Peace proclaimed at Mirfield. (March) 14<sup>th</sup>. AB of York confirms at Wakefield and treats the clergy. 78 persons confirmed from this parish. Three floods at Mirfield in X'mas week. An excessive wet summer.
- 1764 February 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. A great fall of snow etc. March 4<sup>th</sup>. An illumination from East to South (?). April 1<sup>st</sup>. A great solar eclipse. May 11<sup>th</sup>. A Bishop of Yorcks primary visitation at Wakefield. He treats ye clergy. October 18<sup>th</sup>. The Archdeacons Visitation held at Wakefield.<sup>4</sup>

<p><i>Some Account of the Parish of Mirfield to a friend in Cumberland</i> 1755</p>
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Mirfield, ager ad ericelum a Manor lying near a heath or moor as ager eboracensis, Yorkshire.<sup>5</sup>

The parish is situated on the sides of two hills, between which a fine river runs through it. Over this river which is called Calder, are two bridges, one of them stands upon eight wooden piers and measures above 282 feet in length. There are three corn mills and the same number for fulling of broad cloth, which is manufactured here and in the neighbouring town. This is a large populous village and in general is well built. It is bounded to the north by the Parish of Birstal, to the South by the Parishes of Thornhill and Kirkheaton, to the East by Dewsbury and to the west by the parochial chaplery for Hartshead.

It is about two miles in breadth from west to east, two and a half in length from north to south and in circumference near eight miles. It is divided into six hamlets and contains about 3,000 acres of land, viz 2,000 acres of arable, 400 (491 acres, 3 rods and 25 perches - survey of 1766) of waste or common and 600 of woodland. Sir George Savile of Rufford Nottinghamshire Bart is Lord of the Manor. Here is a Fair or Feast on Ascension Day held near the vicarage. The price of provisions is variable. Wheat is sold at present for 13s 6d per load ie 24 gallons which is your Cumberland Bushel. It is sold at 4s 6d statute measure, three? of which make a Wakefield Load. Barley is at 20s per quarter, Oatmeal is £1 3s 6d per load ie 5s per bushel or 15s the Cumberland Bushel. The load consists of nine strikes containing 36 gallons which is one bushel and a half of your measure. Beef is from 2d to 3d per pound, mutton and veal about ye same price at different seasons of ye year. Butter from 4d to 6d and cheese from 3d to 4d per pound. The number of houses are about 435 and

allowing five persons to each house the number of inhabitants will be about 2,175. Land is let in general for about 30s per acre. Taxes included. A roasting pig is sold for 2s, a turkey and goose at Christmas 2s 6d each, a green goose 12d and 1s 6d or 1s 8d at ye latter end of harvest. Chickens 4d generally, a hen 7d and ducks eight pence. Agistment or pasture for cows and fat cattle is 35s or £2. Hay is 2d or 3d per stone and sometimes at six pence. Much clover is grown in ye parish and made into hay. There is no copyhold land but upwards of 40 freeholders in the parish. Day labouring mens wages is 12d, carpenters and masons 1s 3d, taylors 6d and their victuals. Men servants for husbandry £7, clothiers £5. Maids about 50s per annum. There are about 100 pair of looms for weaving of broad cloth, 200 persons employed in making of cloth, 400 in carding, spinning and preparing wool for ye looms. Consequently no less than 600 persons are employed in the woollen manufacture carried on in this place.

The church is not large, but it has two isles and two galleries which in the summer season can but just contain ye number of persons yt attend divine worship. It was enlarge and the north side new built in ye year 1666. It is now 74 feet in length and 39 in breadth. There is a tower steeple 47 feet high, which contains eight musical bells, which were cast and hung about 30 years ago. They were increased from three to eight by Daniel Heddersley in 1725 and are now as fine a ring of bells as any in the County of their weight.

The steeple is 47 feet to the battlements and 51 feet to the top of the pinnacles. The mottoes on ye bells are Peace and Good Neighbourhood – When you hear me sound let Peace and Unity be found. 1725 etc etc.

There is an inscription in the western wall near ye font which shews that the plague raged with great violence in 1631. There are no remarkable monuments of any illustrious persons in the church. One of the Nuns of Kirklees Monastery was interred here February 5<sup>th</sup> 1561<sup>6</sup>, as appears in the parish register. Dr John Hopton, who was made Bishop of Norwich in 1554 was born at Mirfield as we learn from ye History of that Prelate's life. On a table erected in 1745 is a list of ye pious and charitable benefactions to the church, school and poor of the parish of Mirfield.

The Arms of the Hoptons, Saviles, Mirfields etc are curiously painted in ye east window. There is a brass candlestick, consisting of 12 branches and three more on the reading desks, with a curious font made in 1662. There are upwards of 70 tombs and gravestones in ye church and churchyard; with sepulchral inscriptions too long to insert. The church is in the Honour of Pontefract, Diocese of York, hundred of Agbrigg and the Deanery of Pontefract; dedicated to St Mary, built 494 years ago, and consecrated to be a chapel of ease under Dewsbury in 1261. It continued in subjection to it's mother church All Saints in Dewsbury (where it is said Paulinus, the first Archbishop of York, preached and celebrated divine service) until 1302, being the space of 41 years. Pope Urban the 4<sup>th</sup> at the request of Sir John Heton Kt made it parochial and vested the right of nomination in Sir John, who presented his younger son to the living. He was the first Rector, built the parsonage house or manse and died in 1302. William Cressacre was the second Rector who died in 1318. The next we have upon record is William Willinge who died in 1402. After the death of this incumbent the predial tithes<sup>7</sup> were alienated from the church and given to the Monks of Kirklees to pray for

the soul of John Burgh. This church continued a Rectory for the space of 141 years, and then was reduced to a small vicarage to aggrandize monkery and support a nest of drones. It remained in this poor distressed condition for the space of three centuries till it was relieved by a parochial subscription which obtained the Queens Bounty<sup>8</sup> about 35 years ago and invested in land for a perpetual augmentation. It was augmented a second time by a Lady's benefaction and the Bounty in 1742, since which time it received £100 the donation of Sir George Armytage late of Kirklees Bart and about £7 11s per annum in houses and land given by ye late Mrs Ann Horsfall, by a deed bearing date October 30<sup>th</sup> 1739, duly enrolled in chancery. It devolved to the church in 1749.

The names of the vicars, as appears by the register are as follows viz Sir John Chrysmor buried February 18<sup>th</sup> 1563, Sir Richard Wordsworth buried November 29<sup>th</sup> 1577, Anthony Crowther inducted March 1578 and buried August 31<sup>st</sup> 1628. He had five sons and one daughter and was vicar of Mirfield 50 years. Richard Senior inducted September 1<sup>st</sup> 1628 and buried 25<sup>th</sup> October 1639. Robert Allenson inducted December 21<sup>st</sup> 1639 and buried December 8<sup>th</sup> 1676. He enlarged the north side of the church and was buried at Cumberworth where he had been Minister. He was 37 years vicar of Mirfield and had five children. John Gibson inducted December 12<sup>th</sup> 1676. He resigned ye vicarage for the Rectory of Kirkby. Thomas Gleadhill succeeded Mr Gibson and was buried December 20<sup>th</sup> 1687. He left a widow and two daughters.

Richard Margerison (AM?) was inducted June 14<sup>th</sup> 1688. He was baptised at Birstal Church and buried at Mirfield where he had been vicar 27 years on ye 10<sup>th</sup> day of January 1715. He left three children who all arrived to maturity. He died in the 53<sup>rd</sup> year of his age.

Thomas Hardy was inducted May 15<sup>th</sup> 1716 and was buried ye 19<sup>th</sup> of December 1739; vicar 23 years. He left a widow and three sons, ye eldest then a student at Cambridge, who had a good living given by the Earl of Whichelsea (he was presented to Burleigh Ruf. In 174?), but he did not live to enjoy it. The second son is a bookseller in London and is in good circumstances, the 3<sup>rd</sup> has been twice in the East Indies and is now with Admiral West in ye English Navy. The widow is still living at Mirfield and receives ye Bounty.

The present vicar J Ismay BA, was inducted January 28<sup>th</sup> 1739 OS in the presence of his worthy patron Sir Samuel Armytage late of Kirklees Bart, then High Sheriff of ye County. The living is now worth about £75 per annum to the vicar. The present Patron is Sir John Armytage Bart Member of Parliament for ye City of York, who is now upon his travels in Italy. He is impropiator or Lay Rector of Mirfield and receives 200 Guineas annually for tithe of corn and ye modus<sup>9</sup> paid for hay, besides a considerable sum for tithe of wood cut down in the parish.

The Parish Register began in 1559 when there were no disasters in the parish and is continued in one single parchment book to this present year 1755. It escaped the confusion of the civil wars and is as perfect and complete perhaps as any one Register in England. There are 100 marriages, 339 christenings and 220 burials in the first 20 years. 296 marriages, 1165 christenings and 612 burials in the last 20 years as appears by the Register.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1738 a sudden and violent earthquake was felt a Mirfield and in the neighbourhood. I perceived my bed at Kirklees rock and the chamber shake so much that I expected the whole house would have fallen. Being surprised with the shock I awaked my brother, who lay with me that night, but he felt nothing of it. From the high ground in Hopton, especially the Great Pinnacle, on a clear day I have seen into twelve parishes at least with three parochial chapelries. From hence ye enclosed fields in Mirfield make one grand parterre<sup>10</sup>; the thick planted hedge rows seem like a wilderness or a labyrinth; the houses interspersed look like so many several noble seats of Gentlemen at a distance.

The nature of the soil in ye parish being of such different kinds produces perhaps as great a variety of plants as are to be found in any part of great Britain of the same extent. I have met with 250 sorts of wild plants growing spontaneously in ye woods, fields, pastures and waste grounds; besides a curious collection transplanted into my garden at the vicarage from other parts. The poisonous plants found here are the Cicuta<sup>11</sup> or Kex, the lesser Hemlock, the common Nightshade, Black Henbane, Cynocrambe, the Yew Tree, etc. The berries of the last are frequently eaten here without any ill consequence, but the fatal effects of the leaves to cattle was fully confirmed on Easter Monday 1754 when two young heifers near ye vicarage were poisoned by eating them.

The front of Castle Hall, an old building near the church, is adorned with a great number of hieroglyphics curiously carved in wood with the letters TB and ye numerical figures 1022<sup>12</sup> about ye middle of the large window. There is a Danish Mount behind the houses with a plain piece of ground at ye top 63 feet in diameter. I can meet with nothing in the whole parish yt wears the face of antiquity besides three or four old studded buildings, much talked of by the vulgar for their great age, though without any authentic marks of authority besides ancient tradition and ye curious fragments of painted glass in ye windows of one of these old mansions. Here is a free charity school founded by Mr Richard Thorpe, late of Hopton Hall in 1667 at Knowl Lane, with a Dwelling House for the Master and a salary of about £12 per annum.

Near the school are the vestiges of a large round entrenchment resembling that near Penrith called King Arthur's Round Table. Here is a workhouse for the poor, though it is only rented by the parish. Blakehall is supposed to be the ancient seat of the Hoptons and Castle Hall ye seat of Sir John Heton Kt, the first patron of the church now the property of Richard Beaumont of Whitley Hall Esq.

Castle Hall stands very near the church, whence that proverbial saying 'he is John Armytage's Neighbour' ie he is dead. Sir John Heton Kt married ye eldest daughter of Sir Alexander Nevile de Mirfield Kt. Robert Hopton of Hopton Esq. Married Jennet daughter of Henry Savile Esq. Robin Hood's grave stone and the ruins of a Benedictine nunnery founded AD 1236 and dedicated to St Mary are to be seen on ye North West skirts of the parish near Nun Brook

The latitude of Mirfield is 53° 42½' north, the longitude about 1.31 west of London. It stands about 30 miles south west of York.

The soil is of various sorts. We have sand, clay, stone and gravel. Our lands produce all sorts of grain to great perfection. The manure is dung, lime and ashes. Rapes, wolds and turnips are frequently sown in ye parish. They with potatoes are tithable to the vicar. There are many good quarries of hard, durable stone for building, very good earth for bricks and great plenty of coal, which is usually sold for 2d the horse load at ye pit mouth; and it's common in ye meanest cot to see a good fire. The springs are generally found at various depths in ye parish, and the water is very sweet and soft in most places, except near ye coal and there it is a little hard and brackish. We have, I believe, as fine an air as any in England. It is generally healthy and the inhabitants in general live to a great age; especially the poorer sort who use proper exercise and enjoy ye benefit of it.

The present vicar has buried no less than 32 persons each of them aged 80 years and upwards, whereof eight arrived to 90 and upwards and one to 102. There are two dissenting meeting houses in ye parish; one for the Presbyterians and the other for the Moravian Brethren: They are both small and inconsiderable. Mirfield is situate about the middle of ye road between the towns of Wakefield and Halifax, but there is as yet no turnpike<sup>13</sup>. The gentlemen's seats bordering on ye parish are Kirklees, Whitley Hall and Crow Mount. The Aurora Borealis is very common and particularly one on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1749.

The dams across the river are in the nature of cataracts<sup>14</sup> and are a sort of caladupes by which the inhabitants form a prognostication of ye weather. The river produces Salmon, Trout, Smelts, Grailings, Daice, Perch, Eels, Chubs, Barbles, Gudgeons etc. Wild ducks, widgeon, teal, coots and several sorts of water hens are seen about ye river in winter, especially in a great frost. The great speckled loon or diver was shot here September 29<sup>th</sup> 1749 and was the only one perhaps ever seen in this country. When mists appear to rise or fall on Whitley Wood (or Swindon Hill) which stands upon high ground, the people in Mirfield thereby prognosticate of the change of the weather, singing this rhyme,

"If Whitley Wood wears a cap, Balance Beck will smart for that"      or  
""If Swindon Hill wears a cap, Balance Beck must pay for that""

When the sun appears over ye temple on Swindon Hill, it is twelve o'clock at ye vicarage.

The following inscription was formerly over ye door of ye Mansion House of the Hirsts in Mirfield. "Know Whom You Trust, Robert Hirst 1656" Over the door at Wellhouse "GBH 1552" ie "God be here or about this house".

Hunting, shooting, fishing and setting are diversions mostly used. We have Hares, Woodcock, Snipes, Wood Pidgeons, Plovers, Quails, Daker Hens on ye land, Rail, Water Rails, Red Wings, Fieldfares, Woodpeckers, Jays, Nightingales and most of the small birds known in England. We have some Pheasants in ye woods, but the breed is in a great measure destroyed. We have a variety of plants in ye woods, one of which is called the Garden of Eden. We had a fiery meteor passed over this place July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1750, an earthquake in 1754 and often much damage done by floods.

There generally dies in ye parish of Mirfield one person in seventy annually as appears by an accurate calculation. About one marriage per annum among 100 persons. The number of christenings generally is double to the burials in a year.

The congregation at church (which is made up mostly of the male kind, there being generally about nine men to a woman) is much smaller in winter than the summer season, and especially in ye forenoons.

Hay seed were sold in 1756 for 1s 6d and 2s a sack. Rape dust at 7s 6d a quarter in 1757.

### *Hamlets etc in the Parish of Mirfield in 1755(9?)*

Number of houses in ye parish of Mirfield in 1759

In Towngate Hamlet	053
Lee Green Hamlet	108
Northorpe Hamlet	044
Earthorp Hamlet	077
Farside Moor Hamlet	088
Hopton Hamlet	082
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u>452</u>

Increase of houses in 18 years 135. Inhabitants increased at 5 per house 635. Inhabitants increased at 6 per house 750, as appears by my calculation January 27<sup>th</sup> 1759. J Ismay.

Sir Richard Weston of Sutton Place first brought ye planting of clover grass out of Flanders into England about ye year 1650.

### *Agriculture in Mirfield 1755*

Tillage is ye most ancient and honourable employment in ye world. The soil being of very different natures produces all sorts of grain. Wheat and rye called hard corn, are sown in great plenty; Barley, Oats of various sorts, Peas, Beans, Vetches, Rapes and Turnips with wolds for ye dyers are frequently sown in Mirfield. Clover (it came first into England in 1650) was introduced into this parish about 60 years ago and turnips for ye feeding of cattle began to be sown in fields much later, and are great improvers of land. Another good piece of husbandry here is ye draining of wet lands and turning the water over ye dry ground, designed for hay or pasture, in ye winter and spring time. Some sour marshy grounds are made arable by spading ye turf from ye surface and then burning it in heaps. This is called pairing and burning and generally yields a plentiful crop of wheat or rapes ye first year without any other manure than ye turf ashes. For stiff lands, there is no better manure than lime and coal ashes. This is looked on to be an excellent compost, better mixed than laid on separately. We have very little common field land. The advantages arising from enclosures have been long experienced in this parish.

The fence is white thorn and thrives greatly with us, being often cut and kept in repair. The other manure that we improve land with, besides cow and horse dung, lime and coal ashes is soot, soap ashes and rape dust, but these last mentioned are used only by a few persons in this place and that but seldom.

The room next to the garden at Castle Hall is ceiled over ye top with ancient plaister work representing variety of figures viz fir cones, acorns, flower de luces, roses etc with the Beaumonts paternal coat of arms (about ye centre) quartered with another charged with rabbits or conys; but to what family these belong I know not.

I have since found by a manuscript in ye possession of my good friend Richard Frank of Campsall Esq FSA, that ye Turtons of Smallhagh and Millhouse in ye parish of Penistone had for their arms a 3 conies sejants.

Northorp Hall was rebuilt by Josiah Sheard tenant there in 1701 as appears by the figures carved over ye door. Here are in ye windows some curious remains of painted glass viz Christ's Presentation in ye Temple, with a venerable old man representing Moses etc.<sup>15</sup>

The house adjoining this ancient building was rebuilt by Edward Thomas, as appears by these letters and figures over ye chimney piece in the kitchen viz ET 1704.

Mirfield is divided into six hamlets each of which has a viacurus<sup>16</sup> or surveyor of the high ways annually chosen by the parish AD 1755.

### *Towngate Hamlet*

The church parsonage and vicarage stand in this hamlet. An old studded building near the church called Castle Hall built in 1022 with a Danish mount behind the house. Upper Hall the property of Mr Richard Shepley, who rebuilt it.

The streets, lanes and highways are Towngate, Kim Lane, Dunbottle, High lane, Church Lane, Pinfold Lane, Parsonage Lane, Cross Green Lane, etc. Here are four publick houses viz The Pack Horse, Globe, Eight Bells and the Horns. Two Blacksmiths and two shops for groceries.

### *Lee Green Hamlet*

This hamlet contains Lee Green, Little London, Moorside to Fox Roid, Gibhole, Well House, Match Croft, Nickhouse and Greenside. Ways to be maintained are ye great high road over Mirfield Moor, to Roberttown N? Dew Yard Lane, Wood Lane and ye lane between that and Match Croft, Water Roid Lane etc. Here are three publick houses viz The Three Mugs, The Swan and the Red Lyon. Three Butchers shops, two grocers and a Moravian Meeting House with a Workhouse for the poor.

The following inscription was formerly over the door of the Mansion House of the Hirst at the upper end "Know Whom You Trust, Robert Hirst 1656". Over the door at Wellhouse "GBH 1552" ie God be here or about this house<sup>17</sup>.

### *Northorp Hamlet*

Northorp an old house which has been rebuilt contains some curious remains of painted glass in the windows and is still called Northorp Hall. Shillbank – here are some good modern buildings near which is the late Dr Bolderston's house etc. North Bar – Crossley, Field Head, Pale Lane etc. The roads are yt leading to Brickhouse, Shillbank Lane, yt from Crossley, Pale Lane, Gill Lane etc. Akeroid Lane is only a bridleway and not repaired by ye publick. Ravensbridge Lane is maintained by ye parish.

Here are two Ale Houses, a Bowling Green, a Blacksmiths shop and one for Coffee and Tea. There is a Sadler's shop in Shillbank Lane and an Attorneys office. The ale houses are ye Hare and Hounds and the Cock.

### *Earthorp Hamlet*

The Low Mill, Blake Hall a handsome new building, the property of William Turner Esq, Earthorpe Lane, consisting of Water Hall an ancient studded building, Flosch House, another old fabrick and several modern ones; Foldhead, Ledgard Mill, Little Moor, Snake Hill and Earcliffe Bank. Knowl Lane, Knowl School and Knowl. The ways are ye great low road, Knowl Lane etc. Here are three ale houses viz The Black Bull, ye Horse and Jockey and ye Cock. Two corn and fulling mills, two grocers and drapers, an apothecary, the free school and a round entrenchment vulgarly called Kirk Stead by it.

Earthorp villa arabilis.

### *Farside Moor Hamlet*

Nab, Stocks Bank, West Mill, Cinder Hill built by Thomas Sharp in 1638, Bracken Hall, Nun Brook, near which is Robin Hood's sepulchral monument and ye ruins of a Benedictine nunnery. Yew Tree, an old studded building, Mock Beggar and Row Head, two good farm houses. This long range of houses is called Ratton row. The Warren House stands upon a high spot of ground, near which appears ye Butts, which were much resorted to when ye long bow was in use in England. Here is one road to Leeds, two to Wakefield besides a cross causeway to ye mill. Here are three ale houses viz The Three Nuns, A Wooden Head and the Virgin's Inn. One Blacksmith, One Butcher and a Grocer's shop with linen and woollen drapery.

## *Hopton Hamlet*

Liley, Windy Bank, this house stands upon ye highest ground in Hopton except ye great pinnacle (Jackroid Hill), Cuckow Hill, New Hall, Roid, Houses, Brier Knowles, Hagg, Hunger Hill; terrasterilis; Threap Roid ie terra Lilis; Boathouse, Sheep Ing, Tithe Laith, Hanbank, Hollin Hall, Hopton Hall, Calverts Clough etc. This hamlet consists of a great number of odd houses interspersed amongst ye woods, hills and valleys, some of which still retain their old names as above mentioned. The roads consist mostly of lanes through different parts of ye hamlet. Here is a Presbyterian meeting house, commonly called a Chapel, two Blacksmiths, three grocers, one butcher and one ale house. There are 40 pair of looms for weaving of white broad cloth in this hamlet only.

There are a great number of spring woods viz Oliver-car, Jordan roid, Liley wood, Gregory spring, Whitley wood, Hagg wood, Balance wood, Briery bank, Chadwick wood, Crow wood, Little Hagg, Liley Range, Hepworth Wood etc.

These woods produce such a number of medicinal plants that one of them as got the denomination of the Garden of Eden. Here is employment for the Botanist in Summer and game for ye sportsman in ye winter season.

The nature of the soil is various. Here is sand, clay, stone, gravel etc. The land consists of woods, arable, pasture, meadow etc, some of which are firm and some fenny or moorish. As to ye appearance of this hamlet, it is mostly hilly, rocky or mountainous, except the land near the river.

Here are some excellent springs, plenty of coal, stone and oak wood. The clay in Mirfield is generally of a yellowish colour but there is some at the bottom of Mr Turner's quarry in Hopton of a bluish colour and exceeding fine grain.

It is remarkable that the vicar, church wardens, master and scholars of the free school etc in Mirfield walk through the middle of a garden yard and barn belonging to a farmhouse in Kirkheaton parish in their perambulation<sup>18</sup> in Rogation week, when it is customary to go round the bounds and limits of the parish to beg a blessing on ye fruits of the earth and preserve the rights and properties of their parish.

The men and boys in Hopton employ themselves in ye Christmas holidays in hunting ye squirrels which gives them violent exercise in the woods and often affords them excellent diversion.

The dwellings at and about Hopton hall are increased in less than 40 years from 3 to 11. Inhabitants from 17 to 80, as appears by an exact calculation of a person who formerly lived there and is now (1755) in the 82<sup>nd</sup> year of his age.

Some boggy wet ground in Hopton consisting of black earth upwards of 12 foot deep.

The following inscription is painted in red characters over ye north door at Hopton Hall. "Jehovah Nissi" ie The Lord my Banner 1695.

Ruddle or red chalk found in a quarry near New Hall in Hopton.

About 40 years ago only three families lived on ye north wide of Lee Green (between Gibhole and Little London) but now ye number of families amount of 23 and more new buildings are about to be erected.

Craw Fish in a small brook by Briery Bank in Hopton. Jackroid Hill affords an extensive prospect as well as ye great Pinnacle and Windy Bank before mentioned.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A *parhelion* – a mock sun appearing in the form of a bright light on the solar halo.

<sup>2</sup> A *lunar Iris* – rainbow caused by refraction of the rays of the moon.

<sup>3</sup> According to the parish register entry for 30<sup>th</sup> April 1761 there were only 5 children baptised.

<sup>4</sup> Archdeacons were supposed to 'visit' their Archdeaconries, once a year and bishops their dioceses every three years. These occasions were used to enquire into many aspects of parish life ie the church, living, clergy, hospitals, the parish, parishioners and ecclesiastical officers.

<sup>5</sup> Roughly speaking – Mirfield, a Yorkshire manor lying near a heath or moor.

<sup>6</sup> Dame Joan or John Keppax, the last Prioress of Kirklees Abbey, appointed in 1532. The convent was dissolved in November 1539 and at the time contained eight nuns, several of which went to live at Paper Hall in Mirfield.

<sup>7</sup> A *predial tithe* was a tithe of produce from the ground; those from profits of labour were personal tithes; those that were partly one and partly the other (ie chickens, dairy produce etc) were called mixed tithes.

<sup>8</sup> Queen Anne's Bounty – a fund set up in 1704 to aid impoverished clergy, derived from the ecclesiastical revenues that had been taken over by Henry VIII and which Queen Anne diverted to this purpose.

<sup>9</sup> *Modus* – compensation in lieu of tithes.

<sup>10</sup> *Parterre* – an ornamental arrangement of flower beds and paths in a garden.

<sup>11</sup> *Cicuta* – genus of plants containing the water hemlock

<sup>12</sup> It is now believed that these figures were misinterpreted and should have been read as 1522 which would concur with the theory that Castle Hall was built by Thomas Beaumont in the reign of Henry VIII.

<sup>13</sup> The Dewsbury/Elland Turnpike Road via Stocksbank was opened in 1763.

<sup>14</sup> *Cataracts* – ie waterfall structures.

<sup>15</sup> It is said that this painted glass originated from the Kirklees Priory but this is unsubstantiated.

<sup>16</sup> Ie a delegate or representative.

<sup>17</sup> According to Pobjoy this inscription is wrong and should be "GBH 1576 GH RL" meaning "God be Here 1576 Gilbert Holdsworth owner, Richard Lee builder".

<sup>18</sup> The *Perambulation* – this was a customary procession around the parish bounds generally carried out on the Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday before Ascension Day, children were often involved, traditionally to ensure that the location of such boundaries would be passed on to subsequent generations..