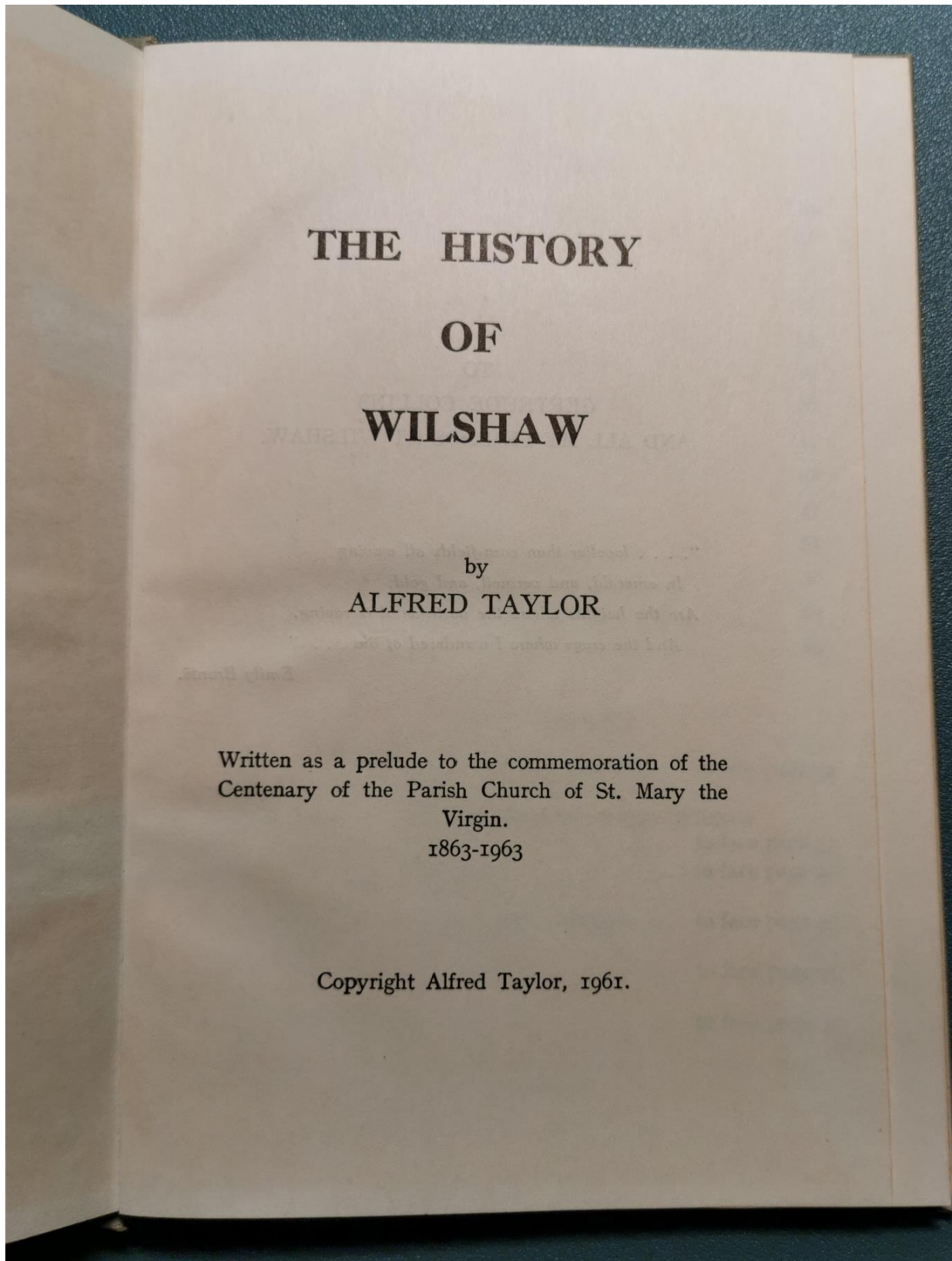


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Chapter Eight

THE TIRED HEART

Throughout his married life Joseph Hirst had been consolidating his Wilshaw estate by buying adjoining land and property as it came on the market. So when, in 1871, the opportunity arose of adding Upper Greave to the Wilshaw farmstead he had bought on the death of his uncle, Jonas Brook, and Lower Greave which he had bought later, he jumped at the chance.

This last purchase was an important addition to his holdings. The map of the land for auction (now in the possession of Mrs. J. R. Kirby, of the Manor House) shows it to have included Cote Farm and part of Wood Nook, in addition to the group of farmhouses and cottages at Upper Greave. It was, in fact, the whole block of land stretching eastward from the field behind the plantation opposite Wilshaw Villa (now the vicarage) to Knowl Cottages; northward to Wood Nook, skirting Bank Wood; westward to Brook's Reservoir; then southward back to Lower Greave again, on this last leg adjoining property already in Joseph's possession.

The sale was on June 7, 1871, and it marked the culmination of Joseph's expansion programme. His early dreams of founding a little empire had now materialised. The map shows Upper Greave to have been a tiny hamlet of ten properties—farms, farm buildings and cottages, surrounded by land sweeping down, then up to Wood Nook in a patchwork quilt of fields; a pattern that seems to have changed little with the years.

One wonders how many of these old field names have survived. Once in common daily use, they are no longer part of the villagers' language. They are all there on the map: Daisy Lee, Tenter Close, Kaye Close End, Boggard Close, Three Day Work, Wheat Ing, Three Nook Close, Little Ing, Nether End and others too numerous to mention.

The names chime on the ear like a peal of bells, descriptive of the usage or ownership of the fields, even how long

Chapter Nine

THE END OF THE ROAD

Joseph Hirst was buried at noon on Wednesday, December 16, 1874. He was 69 years of age and within a few weeks of his 70th birthday. He never knew the exact date of his birthday, but was sure that he was born in the month of January, 1805.

During the week preceding the funeral there had been successive falls of snow on the Pennines and the village presented a wintry appearance. From the dazzling crests of the hills, over the bleak virgin-white wastes of moorland, and across the graveyard a cold wind blew, moaning through the leafless sycamores.

Only relatives, a few intimate friends, and Joseph's workpeople were invited to join the cortege. The funeral was to be as simple as possible. There were neither coaches nor equipages, for, the Villa being so near the church, none were required.

As noon drew near great numbers of country people assembled in the snow outside the Villa. They had come from far and wide, in spite of the weather, to pay a last tribute to one who had never closed his hand to the poor and needy. They stood, a black solemn mass against the white snow as the funeral retinue began to move in this order up the hill:

Sunday School Scholars.

Workpeople (about 200).

Neighbouring Clergymen.

Magistrates.

Members of the Meltham Local Board.

The Officiating Clergymen (the Rev. J. S. E. Spencer, Vicar of Wilshaw; and the Rev. J. W. Aldam, Vicar of Thornton Hough).

Gentlemen from Huddersfield and District.

THE COFFIN.

Mourners.

Henry Arthur Hirst, Joseph's nephew, succeeded to the estate, and in 1882 he re-opened the mill and gave it another span of life, specialising in worsted materials. But Henry Arthur, "Mr. Harry," as he was known in the village, was not another Joseph, and, though we have no exact date, it seems fair to assume that the last piece of cloth was woven at Wilshaw before or about the end of the 19th century, and since then the building has, in the main, remained derelict.

Four years before he succeeded to the estate, Henry Arthur Hirst had married Harriet Jane Owen, second daughter of William Webb, of Larchville, Brimstage, Cheshire. The couple took up residence at the Manor House, Wilshaw, and, when Eleanor died, the Rev. J. S. E. Spencer moved into the Villa. Henry Arthur died on July 6, 1912, aged 69 years, and is buried in the north-east corner of the churchyard, not far from the mausoleum.

The estate now passed to another of Joseph's nephews, Mr. Jonas Brook Hirst, son of Joseph's brother, Charles Brook Hirst. It had grown into a less attractive acquisition with the passing years, for Henry Arthur had lived comfortably on the income and spent little on property repairs. Moreover, by the terms of Eleanor's will, the estate was subject to provide Henry Arthur's widow with an income of about £300 per annum—an annuity which she drew until her death in 1934.

Jonas Brook Hirst, a Meltham man, showed no desire to move into the village, and administered its affairs for the next two years largely through his son, Mr. Henry James Hirst, who moved from Meltham to Ash Cottage at the beginning of the 1914-18 War.

When Jonas Brook Hirst died on October 14, 1914, aged 81 years, he left the estate to his three sons, Arthur, William, and Henry James. Some time later Arthur (after retiring from the headmastership of Haworth School in the famous Bronte village) joined Henry James at Wilshaw, taking up residence at Kirklands.

Later again Mr. Henry James Hirst bought out his two brothers' shares in the estate, and was for some years master

of almost as much of Wilshaw as Joseph Hirst, its founder, had been. The exceptions were the Vicarage, its grounds and fields adjoining; the triangular plantation and the Laurel Bank opposite the Vicarage; the church and grounds; the almshouses, and the wood behind which stretches between Greave Road and Wilshaw Mill.

The aforementioned sections of property are in the care of the Eleanor Hirst Trustees whose function is (a) to keep in trust, and to administer the six almshouses; (b) to keep in trust the five paintings of the Hirst family which were originally part of the furnishings of Wilshaw Villa (the Vicarage) and which now hang in the Sunday school; (c) to keep in trust several small pieces of land in the centre of the village (including the aforementioned Laurel Bank, and the small plantation on which stands the telephone kiosk).

A separate trust set up under the will of Joseph Hirst also continues to function under the style of the "Joseph Hirst Education Foundation." The annual income from this is £23, which is given in grants to Wilshaw children reaching the secondary stage of their education.

The Education Foundation did not function until 1909. The money originally used for the school was no longer needed after 1904-5, and the accumulated income from the capital originally set aside in the will was then used to purchase a library for the benefit of Wilshaw people, and also for general educational purposes. Now that the West Riding County Library service is operating in the village the old library has been superseded, and the whole of the income is used in grants to students.

This then was the pattern of life in Wilshaw when the gentlemanly figures of Arthur and Henry James Hirst appeared on the scene.

Arthur was noted for his impeccable dress, ruddy cheeks, small white imperial beard, and upright schoolmasterly appearance. He was for many years the popular President of the Wilshaw Working Men's Club, and well loved in the village. He died on April 10, 1949, aged 91 years.

Henry James Hirst, J.P., had a different role to fill. On him, when he became sole owner of the estate, fell a

great load of responsibility. He commanded from the people of Wilshaw the warm respect they had once showered on Joseph Hirst, for he had the same concern for the village and the dignity of its people. He was a patient man who faced frustrating circumstances without flinching. He was what Wilshaw people call a "gentleman"—a term they use sparingly and which has no connection with station, rank, or money.

Like Joseph in so many things, Henry James Hirst was different in this—he had no treasure chest of unlimited funds. When Joseph was alive the mill chimney smoked at Wilshaw and there was wealth in abundance—money to buy property, money to demolish it, money to rebuild. Times had changed and now Wilshaw was no more than a dormitory village without industry. Property was in poor repair, and rents, once economic no doubt, now scarcely paid the cost of upkeep. The value of money had dropped, too, and fell with sure acceleration until the last war saw the purchasing power of the pound drop to its lowest point in history.

Estates all over Britain began to break up, big estates and little estates, and in time the finger of fate touched Wilshaw.

On December 31, 1943, Manor Farm was sold. When Wilshaw Farm went the same way at the beginning of 1945, Joseph Hirst's little kingdom had vanished like a dream. For Henry James Hirst it marked the end of long years of struggle against odds that had grown in the end too big to overcome. He died on August 10, 1951, aged 76 years.

To the few of us whose Wilshaw blood can be traced back to the start of the Joseph Hirst era the sales were a shock. We, too, had been involved in the dream, had thought of Wilshaw as a little world apart and immune from outside influence.

Since then the cottages have been sold to the tenants and the estate has entirely disappeared. Mrs. J. R. Kirby (daughter of Henry James Hirst) keeps the Manor House, and James Clifford Hirst (son of Henry James Hirst) also remains in the village. He is the last of the line to bear the name at Wilshaw.