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# A Walk of faith



Hellifield St Aidans Church final construction in 1906

The road was rough and dry in that summer of 1862. The dust rose amongst the broken stones that marked the edges of the trackway. Boots which were scuffed and worn, disturbed the gravelly surface and the uneven texture of what passed as a walkway alongside the thoroughfare. Mopping his brow and disturbing a cloud of midges which were a continuing annoyance in the heat of the day, the man paused and hastened his wife who was also trudging along some yards behind him. It was an important day. A day to mark one's respects.

They had already passed the Gallaber Farm and its adjoining barn and now as he looked back along the road to Hellifield and waited for his wife to catch up, the man gazed at the flooded pasture on his left where Lapwings wheeled and circled above the damp

marshy ground. He recalled previous walks along this road. In winter, when the surface was either a muddy mire, or a frozen and brittle collection of icy puddles bordered by banks of drifting snow.

John Tomlinson was a labourer on the Hamerton Estate at Hellifield Peel. He was 44 years of age and looked at least ten years older. A good age indeed, and one of a family of six. His journey today was to attend the funeral of his brother Harold. Harold had not seen the random kick of the horse he had been stabling in the buildings adjoining the Peel House. He had turned his back and bent down to pick up a discarded halter. Death had been instantaneous. He had also been 44 years old. A twin brother. John and his wife had no children. She was barren. Not blessed. Emily was 41 and already

weary due to the consumption which had taken hold of her a year previous. John steadied his wife and cursed his younger brother who had promised a bumpy ride to Long Preston, on the trap he had sworn would be available for the journey. The faithful promise had been worthless. Brother Isaac was prone to the drink and even now lay in his bed in a stupor – the result of a night's soaking of Gin and Ale at the abode of one Matthew Deeling, a weaver and another ne'er do well.

Harold was to be buried at Long Preston Church. There had been no other option. Such was his popularity and long service to the Hamerton family; they had contributed to a gravestone. They would also attend the funeral. An honour indeed. As the couple now plodded onward towards the bridge traversing the railway line, the sound of hooves clattering along the unmetalled road behind them caused them to pause and await the passage of whoever may be travelling along the same route.

A lift perhaps? Emily coughed into a dirt stained handkerchief as a fine carriage drawn by two dappled mares rumbled by. Recognising the coach, John bowed his head and removed his hat. The Hamerton conveyance rumbled by without stopping. John sighed and taking his wife by the arm, the couple trudged onwards.

Another weary walk to attend a service in a neighbouring Village Church. Hellifield had no Church for its devout Church of England parishioners. Devout or not – it would be expected by the gentry that attendance wherever possible was a rule of thumb. Many long walks to attend divine service were a part of life in Hellifield in the early to mid-19th Century. John

Tomlinson was one of many, for whom it was an accepted part of life. Until things improved somewhat.

When the building we now know as the Institute (Hellifield's Village Hall) was constructed in 1864 it was a godsend for some of the foot weary churchgoers of the village. The main instigators for providing such a building were the Hamerton family. Miss Frances Hamerton (who was to become Mrs Frances Stansfield – the wife of the Vicar of Coniston Cold) provided the funds for the stipend or salary of the curate-in-charge who would visit Hellifield from Long Preston. The Institute was to serve a dual purpose. Firstly, as an Elementary School from Monday to Friday. Secondly, as a Church and Sunday School. A succession of curate's attended to Hellifield's needs. In 1876 the Reverend F.H. Terry was appointed as resident curate. A grand house was to be constructed in Hellifield to serve as a home for Hellifield's curate-in-charge. It would later be decreed that this house was far too expensive to maintain on the salary of a curate. The house would be sold. It stands today. We know it as 'The Grange' and it is located just outside the village along Gisburn Road.

On a chilly December day at the end of the year 1876 John Tomlinson now 56 and a widower, leant against the iron railings of the Institute and pulled his collars up against the brisk wind that chilled his bones. He had lived a long and hard life and continued to work from six in the morning till eight at night for the Hamertons. He also assisted in the maintenance of the Institute. On this cold December morning the Revd Terry welcomed John to the evening service. John promised the Revd that



*The Reverend F.H. Terry and family outside the Institute in 1876*

he would assist the following Monday evening with installing some new pews for the regular congregation. As he sat with the congregation, John mused on the many long walks to Long Preston he had made in the past. He was alone now. Emily, like his brother Harold, now lay in the ground behind the church. There was no stone.

On the Monday morning, following the service, John helped with the tethering of a newly delivered stallion at the Hamerton's stables. When John had successfully tethered the animal into its stall, he moved to its hindquarters to retrieve the spare halter he had inadvertently dropped at the rear of the stall.

He never saw the kick coming.  
If he'd lived that long – which would have been doubtful - John would never

see the day when Hellifield would have its own grand Church: St Aidan's. A new Church for a new Century. But not John's.

In September 1906, the Bishop of Ripon, Dr W. Boyd Carpenter, officiated at the Service of Dedication, at which the Church was dedicated to St Aidan. Over the next few years St Aidan's would become an important and thriving place in the community.

Ken Leak.