

Miles Wilson of Halton Gill

“Until 1847 the curate lived in the house and taught the children in one schoolroom, the numbers being about ten or twelve. In this remote and tiny school there was room for the eccentric and unusual master – only serious devotion would keep a curate and schoolmaster in this position for a long period, in one case for seventy years of service.”

“In 1737 the first of the eccentrics was appointed as curate and master, one Miles Wilson, who in August the same year married Dorothy Lambert, a farmer’s daughter of Halton Gill. Wilson served the curacy and school for forty years and brought up two sons who entered the Church. The eldest son, Edward went to Christ’s College, Cambridge, and after a good career as a student, was appointed tutor to the two sons of the Earl of Chatham with whom he remained for eight years. In 1773 he accompanied the younger son, William Pitt, to Cambridge and resided with him there.”

“Miles Wilson’s most curious achievement was his little book *The Man in the Moon*. This described an imaginary journey of a Halton Gill cobbler, Israel Jobson, who went to the summit of neighbouring Penygent. From it a ladder enabled him to climb through space on to the surface of the moon. He was able, after exploring the moon, to use it as a starting point for a long journey through the solar system. Although the story verges on the ridiculous and fantastic, the book includes good descriptions of the solar system as understood at that time and might well have been used in his school. Copies are now almost unknown because Wilson at one time called in and destroyed every copy he could trace. One of his other eccentricities took the form of contriving mechanical toys and models of fine wood carvings. These would both appear strange in a curate of such a remote area. His ‘weather glass’ caused much wonder and his neighbours greatly admired the carving in wood of an ape blowing a trumpet. Other mechanical wonders credited to him owe more to vivid rustic marvel than to actual fact.”

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