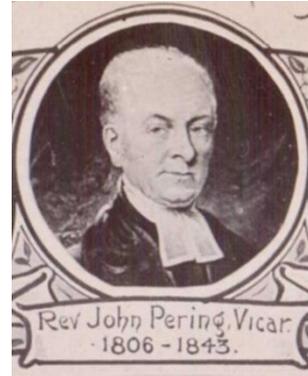


## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON REVEREND JOHN PERING for Harberton & Harbertonford History Society

John Pering was born at Harbertonford, Devon in 1765. He studied for the priesthood at Oxford University and subsequently held posts as Curate in two Devon parishes. In 1806 he was appointed as Vicar of Kildwick and Skipton in Yorkshire, a post he held until his death in 1843. Two years after his move to Yorkshire he went on a two week Tour of the English Lake District which he wrote about in a surviving Journal.



### Family Background

John Pering was born on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1765 at Rockford House, Harbertonford, Devon, three miles south west of Totnes. He was the eldest child of Richard and Catherine Pering and was baptised at St Andrew's Church, Harberton on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1765.

His parents had married at Exeter Cathedral on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1764 where 'Richard Pering, Esquire of Blackawton, Devon' married 'Catherine Gayer of The Close, Exeter'. Richard Pering was an official at the Plymouth Naval Dockyard and later in life became Lieutenant-Colonel of the South Devon Militia. Catherine Gayer's family were merchants in Plymouth.

John Pering had three younger siblings, all born at Harbertonford:

**Richard Pering** born 1767 became 'Clerk of the Cheque' at Sheerness and Plymouth Dockyards, and amongst other naval improvements, invented the modern anchor. He was also a Magistrate for the county of Devon. Like his brother John, he never married.

**Lucy Pering** was born in 1769 and never married. She lived part of her later adult life with her brother at Kildwick Vicarage in Yorkshire and accompanied him on his tour of the Lake District in 1808.

**Susanna Pering** was born in 1770 and married Samuel Noake Esquire, a Draper of Bridgewater, Somerset in 1798. However, Samuel Noake died just 18 months later. Their only child Lucy Noake, who had been born in August 1799, subsequently married Richard Cornish, Esquire of Berry Pomeroy, at St Mary's, Totnes. Their three children were the only descendants of the Pering's of Harbertonford. Susanna never remarried and in later life lived at Bideford. She died in 1844 aged 74 and was buried at Harberton on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1844.

## **Education**

John Pering was most likely initially educated locally. However, his father's prosperity allowed him to be sent to Westminster School, in the precincts of Westminster Abbey. From there, at 19, he entered Christ Church College, Oxford where he studied Theology and the Classics and gained a B.A. in 1788, and M.A. in 1791.

## **Clerical Appointments**

After receiving his B.A. he was ordained Deacon to Edward Smallwell, Bishop of Oxford on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1789. The following year he was ordained priest at the Bishop's Palace, Exeter on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1790 and the day after was officially appointed curate of St Mary's Church, North Huish, within the archdeaconry of Totnes, and just four miles west of Harbertonford. He received a stipend of £40 a year.

During his curacy at North Huish his father died aged 71 on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May 1794 whilst visiting the Dockyards at Sheerness in Kent. He was buried in the Chancel of Minster Abbey on the Isle of Sheppey on 20<sup>th</sup> May with 'such military honours as were due his rank in life'. In his Will he left £1,000 each to his three younger children - a substantial sum in 1794. John Pering, as eldest son inherited the residue of his father's estate. His mother Catherine, who had the right to live at Rockford House until her death, died the following year and was buried at Harberton on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1795.

Also in 1795, his friend Revd Robert Hurrell Froude was appointed curate for Staverton, Devon. Four years later, in 1799, he was appointed Vicar of Dartington, and to a senior post as 'Preacher throughout the Diocese of Exeter'. Possibly on his recommendation, John Pering was appointed as his replacement on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1800 as curate of St Paul de Leon Church, Staverton, within the Diocese of Exeter, and still only four miles from Harbertonford. John Pering's stipend was the same £40 a year 'plus surplice fees'. He continued to hold the post until he became vicar of Skipton and Kildwick in Yorkshire in 1806.

In January 1806 Revd Thomas Marsden, the previous vicar of Skipton and Kildwick died suddenly aged 47. His last Marriage Service was only days before his death. He was buried at Kildwick on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. As the position was in the patronage of Christ Church College the vacancy must have come to the attention of Revd John Pering as he recorded in his 1808 Journal that he decided to make a trip north to look at Skipton and Kildwick. However, from the entry in his Journal he seems to have been doubtful that he would be eligible for the post. He was

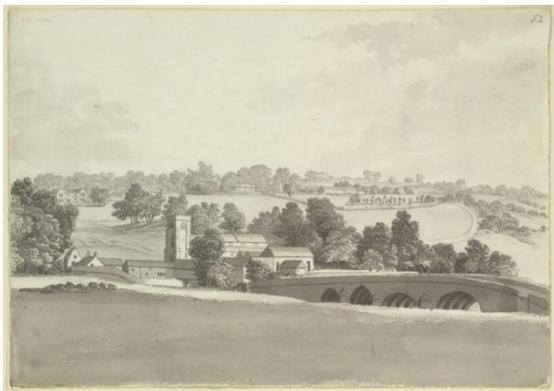
now aged 40 and with 15 years as a Curate, must have felt overdue for an appointment.

On pages 95-96 of his 1808 Journal he wrote:

*“When, in the Spring of the year 1806, on leaving Devonshire, to look at the Livings of Skipton and Kildwick, thinking it probable they finally would not be eligible, I obtained letters to certain persons further North, in order to visit the Lakes, Edinburgh, & other places. For one of these letters I consider myself obliged to the politeness of Mrs Froude, of Dartington, near Totnes. It was addressed to the sister of the Poet, a lady of cultivated understanding, & who lives with her brother.”*

These were Letters of Introduction to people of social standing he hoped to visit. The above letter was from the wife of his friend Revd Robert Hurrell Froude, formerly Margaret Spedding, and addressed to her friend Dorothy Wordsworth. Margaret Spedding’s father, John Spedding, had been a school friend of William Wordsworth at Hawkshead.

However, he did not visit the Wordsworth’s until June 1808, and may not have travelled far on his trip north in ‘Spring 1806’ as he was appointed to Kildwick in April 1806. Perhaps the unexpected confirmation of his appointment came faster than he imagined.



‘View of St Andrew’s Church, Kildwick’ by Heironymous Grimm 1773. British Library. The Vicarage was left of Kildwick Hall (upper left)



The Old Vicarage, Kildwick, where Revd Pering lived

He was instituted Vicar of Kildwick on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1806 and Skipton on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1806. Like Revd Thomas Marsden he chose to live in the rural seclusion of Kildwick Vicarage and continue with a curate at Skipton, Johnson Atkinson Busfield. Skipton Vicarage was on the bustling High Street of a market town going through the early stages of industrialisation.

John Pering continued to own large areas of land around Harberton, including Collaton Farm, near Halwell. However, he initially let Rockford House in 1806 and later sold it to Revd George Martin, Vicar of Harberton as a residence for curates.

### **Life at Kildwick**

Revd Pering brought with him from Devon his 30 year old servant Richard Pearce. John Crossley, the existing Parish Clerk, continued in that post and was also schoolmaster. From 1824 he employed Revd Washington Hallen as Curate at Kildwick and the neighbouring St James Church at Silsden. In Revd Pering's later years John Crossley also conducted both baptisms and burials on his behalf.

In Revd E W Brereton's History of St Andrew's, Kildwick dated 1909, he wrote that Revd Pering 'lived at the Vicarage with his sister Miss Pering and a niece also sometimes stayed with him'. This was his sister Lucy who never married and who accompanied him on his Tour of the Lake District in 1808. He only had one niece, also called Lucy, the daughter of his sister Susanna and Samuel Noake. In 1821 Lucy Noake married Richard Cornish, esquire and it is probable that their children also visited Kildwick as their daughter Laura later married Henry Roundell who had family connections with the Skipton area. Even though she married eight years after the death of Revd Pering, her husband was the son of Revd Henry Dawson Roundell, who was born at Gledstone Hall, East Marton, near Skipton.

### **A Brief Account of his 1808 Journal**

From his Journal of a Tour of Lakes in 1808 it is apparent that John Pering was a keen angler, he wrote of catching trout and perch in Coniston Water, Buttermere and Derwent Water. He was also a poet writing what he described as 'many short compositions'. A few lines of his poetry are contained in his 1808 Journal and in two subsequent letters to William Wordsworth dated 1818 and 1821.

Revd Pering set off from Kildwick Vicarage on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1808 on his two week tour of the Lake District driving his own chaise and two horses. He had four travelling companions: 'Mrs Wise', 'Miss Froude', 'Mr Wise', and his sister Lucy. Like John Pering, all four were born in Devon, and two were sisters of his friend Revd Robert Hurrell Froude.



a two horse chaise

'Mrs Wise' was formerly Elizabeth Froude and married John Wise, a banker of Totnes, in 1783. By 1808 she was a widow, her husband having died in 1807. 'Miss Froude' was her unmarried sister Margaret Froude. 'Mr Wise' was Ayshford

Wise, the eldest of the three sons of Mrs Wise, born at Totnes in 1786. He had been at Brasenose College, Oxford from 1804 to 1808, and was later M.P. for Totnes from 1812-18.

It took them two days to reach the Low-wood Inn on the shores of Windermere, and Revd Pering was clearly impressed with the 'sublime' mountain scenery. From this base they explored Esthwaite and Hawkshead before travelling on to Coniston Water where Revd Pering wrote: 'Having brought a rod, I fished, and caught a few Perch'. They then travelled north to Keswick via Ambleside and Grasmere but did not at this time visit the Wordsworth's. They used Keswick as a base to explore the north and west of the Lake District, visiting Borrowdale, Buttermere, and also the home of Revd Froude's wife's brother John Spedding and his family who lived at Mire House, Bassenthwaite.

At 4am on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June Revd Pering, Lucy Pering, and Margaret Froude were met by a guide and four stout Galloway ponies to make an ascent of the 3,000 foot summit of Skiddaw which overlooks the town of Keswick.

The mountainous scenery had a profound impact on Revd Pering which he described as 'a powerful cause of the Sublime'. He also revealed his classical education by frequently including various extracts from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Virgil's *Aeneid* in the original Latin to compare the beauties of the dramatic landscape.

On Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> the company parted, Mrs Wise, Miss Froude and Mr Wise were heading towards County Durham where they apparently had business, leaving Revd Pering and his sister Lucy to make their way to Grasmere to visit the Wordsworth's. Only a few weeks before the Wordsworth family had left Dove Cottage, Grasmere to live at the much grander Allan Bank which Revd Pering described as follows: *'The house is so situated as to look down upon almost the whole of the Lake, & at no great distance; also, on the church & village. Very nearly all around are steep mountains. The edifice itself is almost new, and handsome, and the rooms far superior to the lot of most Poets.'*

He was initially received by Mrs Wordsworth to whom he presented his letter of introduction, William and his sister Dorothy being out. The following day he and Lucy called again and stayed for the whole morning when they walked and talked with the poet in the extensive grounds of Allan Bank. They were invited again in the evening when they went for further walk with the whole of the family.

The following day, the 1<sup>st</sup> July, Revd Pering and Lucy set off for home arriving back at Kildwick two days later: *"arrived at our journey's end, (after not quite a*

*fortnight's absence) with safety, and pleasure, tho' not unmixed with contrary feelings, at the loss of our agreeable companions."*

The Journal was partially written on the tour and completed in the weeks following his return home.

### **The Parishes of Kildwick and Skipton**

Even though Skipton and Kildwick were separate parishes five miles apart, each, especially Skipton, with sizeable population, the income from each was such that they were only able to attract a 'pluralist' vicar who could combine the income from both parishes. The question of remuneration became an important issue for Revd Pering.

Revd Brereton writing in 1909 tells us that in '1814 Mr. Pering found cause to be dissatisfied with the composition of the tithes, viz., £100 per an'. He went on to write that when offered £150 Revd Pering declined the offer, and on legal advice proposed to the tithe payers of his parish to take £250 for the next seven years, and £300 for the remainder of his life. Lengthy meetings were held at The White Lion, adjacent to the church, between Revd Pering and his parishioners, and it was finally settled in Revd Pering's favour.

In defence of Revd Pering, despite his personal wealth, he had been paid £40 a year for each of his two curacies in Devon, in villages with populations of barely 300. When he came to Skipton and Kildwick the population of the two parishes was nearly 10,000. This had been the reason why Christ Church College found it difficult to attract separate vicars for the geographically large parishes of Skipton and Kildwick.

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 1815 Revd Pering was appointed Curate for Carleton in Craven, a parish adjacent to both Skipton and Kildwick parishes, which gave him an additional income of £75 a year, plus surplice fees and the use of a house, which, like Skipton Vicarage, he would be able to rent out.

### **A Need for New Churches and Schools**

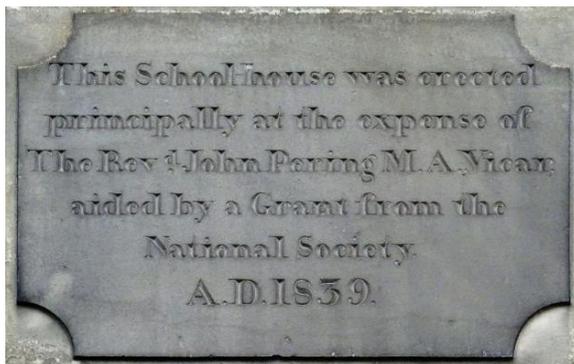
From the 1820's discussions had taken place with Christ Church College about creating a new Parish of Lothersdale out of parts of the Parishes of Carleton and Kildwick, and the building of a separate Church in Lothersdale. An agreement dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1837 was made to build the church and seek donations. The Earl of Burlington gave the land and the Revd Walter Levett, Vicar of Carleton gave £1,000. Although there is no record of any payment made by Revd Pering, he was the chief signatory of the agreement as Vicar of Kildwick, along with J A Busfield,

Curate of Carleton, Henry Alcock (a solicitor of Skipton), and John Benson Sidgwick of Stone Gappe (a wealthy cotton manufacturer). The church was finally consecrated on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1838 as Christ Church, Lothersdale.

Likewise, a new church was built in Skipton to provide for the growing population and the foundation stone of Christ Church, Skipton was laid on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1837. The Leeds Intelligencer dated 24<sup>th</sup> June 1837 reported that the Revd John Pering, Vicar of Skipton read appropriate sentences from Haggai and Exodus, 'he then read the collect for the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers.' The foundation stone bears a lengthy inscription which includes 'The funds for building this Church are raised by a subscription, headed by the Reverend John Pering, M.A., vicar of Skipton. An endowment of £1,000 in land and buildings was given by Christ Church College, Patrons of the Living.' The Church was consecrated two years later, on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1839, by the Bishop of Ripon and his chaplains, plus 'Revd J Pering, vicar of Skipton', and others.

W H Dawson in his 1882 'History of Skipton' also records that Skipton's 'first National School for boys was built in 1812, while the Revd J. Pering was vicar', but to what extent it was his project is not known.

However, in 1839 Revd Pering personally financed the building of a School House at Kildwick, adjacent to the Church, aided with a grant from the National Society. He had also had a paved path laid to cover the quarter of a mile uphill from the church to the Vicarage. This public path is still known as 'Parson's Walk'.



The plaque on the wall of the School House, Kildwick

## Final Years

In June 1838 his brother Richard Pering died aged 71 whilst on naval business in London. He was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery which had opened 5 years earlier. His home was in Exmouth, in what is now known as Beacon Hill House, where there is a blue plaque commemorating his achievements. Like John he was a bachelor. Administration of his estate was given to 'Revd John Pering Clerk natural and



lawful Brother'. The above sketch of Richard Pering dated 10<sup>th</sup> May 1829 is in the National Portrait Gallery.

By the census of 1841 Lucy Pering had left Kildwick and was living at Exmouth in the house that had belonged to her brother Richard.

The 1841 Census for Kildwick shows that Revd Pering had three servants living with him at the Vicarage: Richard Pearce aged 63, Anne Mitchell aged 49, and Hannah Wade, aged 30. According the Revd Brereton, Richard Pearce had come from Devonshire with Revd Pering in 1806. When he married Mary Laycock on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1819 at Leeds Parish Church he was described as a Gardener. He died at Kildwick in 1845 aged 67.

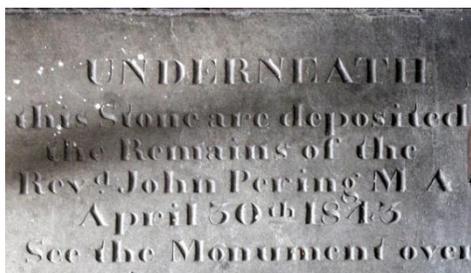
Revd Pering died on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1843 aged almost 78, and his death was reported in various Regional Newspapers, plus the Gentlemen's Magazine:

Death – 'April 30. At Kildwick, Yorkshire, aged 80, the Rev John Pering, M.A. Vicar of Kildwick and Skipton. He was formerly a student of Christ Church, Oxford, when he graduated, M.A. 1791, and was presented to the churches above mentioned in 1806 by that society.'

His last burial service was on 25th April only five days before his own death. He was buried on 9th May on the south side of the altar in a service by Revd William Cartman, headmaster of Skipton Grammar School who also acted as Curate for Skipton. The delay of nine days between his death and burial was perhaps to allow for arrangements for his interment, and perhaps for his sisters and family members to come up from Devon.

A marble tablet above the centre arch on the north side has this inscription: "Sacred to the memory of the Revd. John Pering, M.A., late student of Christ Church, Oxford, Vicar of Kildwick and Skipton, died April 30th, 1843. In his estimable character all those qualities were combined which distinguish a man and elevate a Christian, in whom learning was adorned by humility, benevolence by modesty and piety, by a life of self-devotion to his God. For 37 years he faithfully discharged the arduous duties of this extensive parish, and in the 78th year of his age he calmly resigned his life to Him who gave it. His two sisters, deeply sensible of their irreparable loss, have caused this tablet to be erected to his memory as a memorial of his worth and their affection.

'Well done, thou good and faithful servant'."



Revd Pering's Gravestone and Marble Tablet in Kildwick Church

Both his sisters survived him, and his heir at his death was his great nephew, Revd Richard Pering Cornish of Devon, one of the grandchildren of his sister Susanna Noake. Lucy Pering, the last of the Pering's of Harbertonford, survived her brother John by 10 years, dying in Exeter in January 1853 aged 83.

Perhaps as a result of Revd Pering's dispute about Tithes, he was the last 'pluralist' vicar to hold both Skipton and Kildwick. The two posts were separated, probably helped by The Tithe Commutation Act of 1838 which replaced the system of tithes and formalized a national method for calculating monetary payments. His successor at Kildwick was Revd John Turner Colman Fawcett, and at Skipton, Revd Philip Chabert Kidd.

#### SOURCES:

Picture of Rev John Pering Vicar of Kildwick 1806-1843 – taken from a postcard of vicars of Kildwick 1806 to 1908, produced by Rev E W Brereton 1909

Sketch of Richard Pering, junior - National Portrait Gallery (non-commercial use)

Harberton and other Parish Registers – South West Heritage Trust

Oxford University Alumni

Clergy of the Church of England Database

Obituary of Richard Pering senior in the Kentish Gazette 30<sup>th</sup> May 1794

Will of Richard Pering senior – Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1794

Mike Pering – Pering family database

British Library Newspaper Archive

Manuscript Journal of Revd John Pering's Tour of the Lake District 1808 – held in the Archives of the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere

Administration of Richard Pering junior 1838 – Prerogative Court of Canterbury

The History of Parliament – short biography of Ayshford Wise

History of Skipton – W H Dawson (1882)

History of the Ancient Church of St Andrews, Kildwick – Revd E W Brereton (1909)

The History of Lothersdale – edited by Kenneth Wilson (1972)

Special thanks to two members of Harberton and Harbertonford History Society:

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