

Some Mitchell, Birtwhistle and Heelis family ancestors in the Raikes Road Burial Ground.

by Geoff Sharwood-Smith



(Left) Just after entering the burial ground from Raikes Road, are the graves of my Mitchell great, great grandparents. Beneath a layer of undergrowth and moss the inscriptions are perfectly preserved. Thomas Mitchell 1803-81 once ran a wine and spirit business in the High Street. in partnership with his brother in law, Robert Birtwhistle.



(Right) By Thomas' side lies Ann, his wife. Born Ann Burton Birtwhistle she was the daughter of Robert Birtwhistle, one of the legendary family of Anglo-Scottish Merchants.



Adjoining the Mitchell grave are those of Ann Mitchell's brother William Birtwhistle 1812-73 (Left) a surgeon, of 'Rockwood' (Right) in Skipton and the grave of his wife Margaret.



(Left) The Heelis graves and memorial hold a more central position in the burial ground. Sarah Heelis (line four of the inscription) was Thomas Mitchell's sister. Sarah and her husband Thomas Heelis, a solicitor, were neighbours of the Mitchells. Thomas Mitchell's mother was also a Heelis from this family. Members of the Heelis family held two official positions, both granted by the Earl of Thanet - Keeper of Skipton Castle and Land Agent at Appleby Castle. So the Heelis family became divided between Appleby and Skipton. One Appleby descendant married Beatrix Potter.

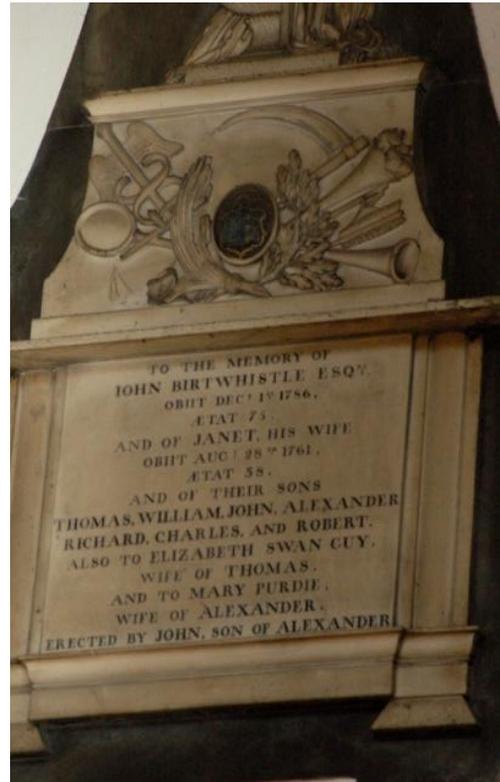


(Above) Thomas and Ann Mitchell are also commemorated in Holy Trinity Church Skipton. On the right above is the fine brass lectern given in 1881 by my great grandfather John Mitchell and his brother William in memory of their parents



(Above) The base of the brass lectern with the inscriptions to the memory of Thomas Mitchell 1803-81 and Ann (Birtwhistle) Mitchell 1809-70

(Right) One of several elaborate memorials to Ann Mitchell's Birtwhistle family in Holy Trinity Church Skipton. The extravagance of these memorials is linked to the bitter Anglo Scottish inheritance dispute that followed the deaths of Ann Mitchell's father Robert Birtwhistle and his brothers Alexander and William.



Ann Mitchell's Birtwhistle cousin and guardian, the talented writer Anna Jane Vardill, was a party to the dispute. She is remembered together with her daughter, on a similarly elaborate memorial, but in St Mary the Virgin at nearby Carleton in Craven (Left). Much of the disputed estate proceeds were given away to charitable causes by the Vardills, notably to the Alms Houses at Carleton.



The story is told by Tony Stephens in his book, 'The Birtwhistles of Craven and Galloway' and further family details are on line at Bob Birtwhistle's site: <http://birtwhistle.info/>