

SOME NOTES ON THE **HILDRETH FAMILY HISTORY**

-especially the Norton, near Malton, Yorkshire, England branch - but which originated in North Yorkshire near the Co. Durham border.

2011 version

1. Origin of Name

The few textbooks on surnames which include the comparatively rare name *Hildreth* vary in their views on its origin -but one thing that becomes clear is that it is either Anglo-Saxon or Danish/Norse, and in no way French for example. I think a likely derivation is from the Anglo-Saxon words “*hild*” indicating war or battle and “*roeð*” meaning counsel or advice¹ (the letters “d” and “th” were more close in the Anglo-Saxon and were often interchanged. Icelandic still has the letter **Ð** and note the similarity with the German word *rat* meaning advice).

There is another view that the name means “son of Hild”². Hild or Hilda of Whitby (614-680) was a great-niece of the powerful king Edwin of Northumbria. With him she was baptized on Easter Day 627 in or near York by Paulinus – the Roman monk and follower of Augustine who was chaplain to Edwin’s wife Princess Ethelburga of Kent. Her Christian influence obviously had a deep effect. Paulinus became the first Bishop of York; the first Minster church was built to mark the baptisms and it became a centre to rival Canterbury.

Twenty years later, Hild became a nun. She was said to have been strongly influenced by St. Aidan - great missionary founder-Bishop of Lindisfarne who had been invited from flourishing Iona by Oswald (the then king of Northumbria who had spent time in exile there). Aidan and his followers ushered in a brief golden period of the Celtic tradition in the north of England.

In 649 Aidan made Hild Abbess of a Convent at Hartlepool which had been founded in 640 by Hieu, the first woman in Northumbria to take the veil (the monastery fades from history after the 800s –it was probably sacked by the Danes: Lindisfarne was first plundered in 793 and abandoned in 875).

In 658 Hild made a foundation at a place the Danes later called Whitby, on the Yorkshire coast, which she governed as Abbess for the rest of her life, partly overlapping the time that Cuthbert was Bishop of Lindisfarne. Whitby monastery also was totally sacked by the Danes (in 876). Whitby was a double monastery with women and men in adjoining quarters. Among Hild’s subjects were St. John of Beverley, the herdsman Cædmon (the first English religious poet), and five future bishops. In 664 she presided over the famous conference at Whitby to arbitrate between Celtic and Roman church customs including the time of Easter. St. Hild supported the Celtic party but the Romans with the controversial Wilfrid as their spokesman ‘won’. That meant—simplistically—that the church was more autocratic and centralized under Rome, and was less charismatic, and less linked to the earth and to the arts. It is fascinating to speculate how different the church in England might have been if this conference had gone differently!

Bede (a lifelong monk at Jarrow in what is now Co.Durham) is enthusiastic about Hild in his monumental [*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*](#) finished in 731 not long after her death³ –

¹ *Surnames of the UK*-by H Harrison (1912 London: Eaton Press); www.family-ancestry.co.uk suggests it is an old German woman’s first name with the same meaning!

² The *Dictionary of English & Welsh Surnames (1875)* by C W E Bardsley-and now available online.

³ And available online

she was “the adviser of rulers and ordinary folk; she insisted on the study of holy scripture *and upon proper preparation for the priesthood*”.

And in case it should be wondered how Hild could have sons, Bede stated “all who knew her called her Mother”, such was her wonderful godliness and grace”. In the booklet *St Hilda and her Times (1985)*⁴ Abbey Press, p18 Sylvia Mundahl-Harris thinks this might have been the origin of the expression ‘Mother Superior.’ Hild was held in very high regard in the Yorkshire and Co. Durham area for hundreds of years afterwards. Indeed, it was almost certainly because of her memory that the Normans re-founded Whitby Abbey in 1078⁵.

2. The Hildithryth Stone

In Hartlepool there is an incised grave headstone slab about one foot square and 4½ inches deep of local magnesian limestone from the Anglo-Saxon times—most agree from the 600s, but some say the 700s. It was one of several unearthed from an old burial ground in 1833 when workmen were building terraced houses near St. Hilda’s for the influx of workers to the extended docks. Similar stones have been found at Lindisfarne. Apparently, the stone was given by the builder who found it to a local timber merchant whose daughter donated it to a museum in Ipswich. For decades it had been assumed lost. But it was recognised years later by a Hartlepool clergyman and returned. It is now preserved in an oak glass-fronted case in St. Hilda’s church, Hartlepool on the south wall by the chancel steps. The large and impressive Early English church from the late 1100s now stands rather forlornly high on the headland of old Hartlepool.

The stone bears an incised cross with crude alpha and omega marks, (and runic letters running irregularly across the lower halves, which transliterate as “HILDITHRYTH”) and probably commemorates an Anglo-Saxon nun from the times of the monastery.

Some have argued that the stone commemorates the Abbess Hild herself—see Sir Henry H Howorth (1917)—*The Golden Days of the Early English Church* London: J Murray—*Vol 3* pp190-191; but this theory is in my view convincingly debunked in the detailed and authoritative monograph *The Hildithryth Stone and the other Hartlepool Name-Stones* by F S Scott (in *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4th series Vol. 34—1956 pp196-212). However, the names ‘Hild’ and ‘Hildithryth’ may come from the same root, or the latter may in some way be named in honour of the former.

3. Origin of People

So, the ancestors of the Hildreths would probably have been simple farming people who came across the North Sea in longboats from what is now Holland, North Germany or Denmark to Britain between 500 and 800 AD. There were waves of such immigration after (and some people think before) the Romans had to leave these islands to defend Rome in the early 400s. These immigrants became the English-and they pushed the original British Celtic tribes westwards into Wales and Cornwall. The Hildreth ancestors were almost certainly Angles or Danes from the northern part of Germany or Denmark. These were the tribes who settled in the North-East of England and in East Anglia⁶. It is only in that area that the Hildreths are found; until the general

⁴ Which is the source of most of this information on Hild

⁵ The majestic ruins of the Norman Abbey re-founded in 1078 are still standing high on the cliff. The Irish writer Bram Stoker is said to have got the inspiration for his famous Dracula stories in the graveyard at night!

⁶ For many years in the 800s and 900s this area was known as the Danelaw-and before that the area from Humber to Tweed (originally Forth) was the Anglian Kingdom of Northumbria, a name which has survived in popular usage.

movement of population at the beginning of the 19th century one would have found virtually none in the west or south of England and none whatever in Wales Scotland or Ireland⁷.

4. Earliest Hildreths in the records

The earliest Hildreth I have found in the records is appropriately enough in Yorkshire in the late 1400s⁸ -an asylum-seeker in Durham Cathedral! -so I think we can be fairly sure that the Hildreth family is very firmly rooted in Yorkshire and the North East of England. In the days of the system of manors in this country, the owners were assessed for dues and the assessments were recorded on subsidy rolls (called rolls because they were parchment rolls⁹). In 1524 a John Hildreth is shown as owning an estate in Hallikeld¹⁰ (not the manor) in the Parish of *Kirkby Sigston near Northallerton* the county town of North Yorkshire (it might have been the asylum seeker or maybe it was his son) and in 1587 Thomas Hildreth is recorded as selling a part of that estate¹¹. It is interesting that Kirkby Sigston (often spelt Kirby Sigston) although in Yorkshire was a special jurisdiction (or ‘peculiar’) of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral. It will be very difficult to go back any further because parish registration started only in the early 1500s and most parishes have records that start only in the late 1500s/early 1600s. Before that, a person would usually leave a trace only if he owned land or made a will -confining it to the top 15% or so of the male population in terms of wealth.

⁷ This is borne out by browsing the index volumes in the General Register Office in London for births from July 1837 (when records started) and noting where the registrations were.

⁸The following is a translation from the Records of the Surtees Society of Yorkshire, England (an educational charity for publishing documents on the history of the old Northumbria area). Vol. 1837, page 82. It is quoted in SECOND PUBLICATION:HILDRETH FAMILY ASSOCIATION-published in the USA by the HFA in 1922 and available online:

"In the month of November at the Feast of St. Martin, AD 1482, a certain Johannes Hyldryth [John Hildreth] of Hallycelyt [Hallikeld] in the county of Ebor [Yorkshire] came in his own person to the Cathedral at Durham and at that time he pled asylum for this and on this account:

"On the last day of October just preceding in a certain wood called Clarkdale in the aforesaid county of Ebor, his companions having been smitten in the same place, he had struck on the head with a stick commonly called a club, a certain William Hebuman inflicting on him a mortal wound of which wound he died. Thence instantly in the shortest time possible he pled asylum in the presence of faithful witnesses, viz:

Thomas Maybame of Donclue, Goldsmith,

Thomas Boz, Shoemaker,

John Stevynson of Gayesforth. [Might this be Gainford?]

July 14 M. D. XVII Beverlacuse"

⁹ Parchment is made of animal skin.

¹⁰ a very small village of that name still exists between Northallerton and Osmotherley in North Yorkshire

¹¹ Victoria County History of York - North Riding volume 1(1914). The original Subsidy Rolls will still be in existence-kept by the Public Record Office in London.

5. The geographical spread of the name--north

That part of North Yorkshire around Northallerton and Thirsk had a concentration of Hildreths because in the 1600s and 1700s there are odd entries to be found in the parish registers at *Osmotherley, Over Silton, Easingwold, Gilling, Oswaldkirk, Husthwaite, Kilburn, Raskelf* (where a Richard Hildreth was churchwarden in the early 1700s) and also *York St. Olave and York St. Crux*.¹² (Incidentally I have included as being virtually the same name entries for “Hildred” and “Hildrith”. It must be remembered in those days well over half the people were illiterate and they would just say their name to the church minister who would write it down as he heard it and the person would not be able to check of course).

The Mormon Church microfiches containing summary birth marriage and death entries for selected parishes from when records began (usually sometime in the late 1500s) until 1837 confirm a real concentration in central North Yorkshire and South Durham¹³ - especially *Gainford* on the River Tees seven miles west of Darlington. This was a very large parish stretching from Piercebridge to Middleton-in-Teesdale¹⁴. The Mormon fiches also show a line (interestingly) in Whitby, some in Northumberland¹⁵ and a smattering in the Midlands. But central North Yorkshire and south Co. Durham was clearly the epicentre of the family. It is a pleasant rural area through which the main London-Edinburgh railway line and main road run-avoiding higher land of the Yorkshire Dales in the west and the North York Moors in the east.

6. The geographical spread of the name-south

It is interesting, however, that a good line of Hildreths is also to be found in *London* from at least the 1600s¹⁶. This proves that if ever there was only one trunk of the family (which is very unlikely) it must have split at a very early stage: there is also a very large number of Hildreths at Prestwood near *Great Missenden* in Buckinghamshire in the south of England¹⁷.

¹² Indexes to Yorkshire Parish Record Society volumes.

¹³ They are organised by pre-1974 English counties-see the Yorkshire fiche-112 entries, and Co. Durham fiche-97 entries, and the London fiche -28 entries. No other county approaches this number of Hildreths and as mentioned whole swathes of England (and all of Ireland, Wales and Scotland) have none at all. It is also fascinating to check out later data at the time of the 1881 census at www.britishsurnames.co.uk –a time when there had been some, but not wholesale, population movement. There were 320 occurrences of the Hildreth surname in Britain—104 in Co. Durham (22 in Darlington and 4 in Piercebridge); 97 in Yorkshire (12 in Norton-by-Malton and 5 in neighbouring Rillington with 3 in Hutton Buscel a few miles away); but with 23 in Surrey and 21 in Buckinghamshire both in the south of England.

¹⁴ Where there is a delightful gravestone outside in the graveyard south-west of St. Mary’s church recording the burial of the 3 (successive!) wives of Christopher Hildreth-Jane Ann aged 34 in 1857; Elizabeth aged 16; in 1859; Elizabeth aged 34 in 1871. There is also a Hildreth grave slab by the gate into the churchyard but it is badly decayed and covered over—ask locally.

¹⁵ with a good line in Tweedmouth from the early 1700s

¹⁶ and a Thomas Hildred bapt 4 Dec 1614 in Lavenham, Suffolk; and see footnote 13 above.

¹⁷ With a road of that name and (2011) a popular Hildreth garden centre owned by a Richard Hildreth. Their website says that the business is the descendant of Hildreths blacksmiths in the 1600s: <http://groupedmedia.com/Hildreths/index.html> .

What I think is more than likely is that when surnames came to be regularly used in the 1300s it was applied to several families but that the one which produced most children was in North Yorkshire or South Durham!

The southern Hildreths seem to have produced some prestigious names however including Major-General Sir (“Harold”) John (Crossley) Hildreth-1908-1992, (actually born in Burma) who held the American Legion of Merit and whose father was a distinguished surgeon in the Royal Army Medical corps¹⁸. His son Jan Hildreth was a leading light in the Institute of Directors in London in the 1970s and 1980s.

There was also a Peter Hildreth who was an Olympic hurdler and 200m runner representing Britain at the Games in 1952, 1956 and 1960 and who later went into sports broadcasting and writing (born 1928; died 2011)¹⁹ Peter’s father Wilfred competed in the 1924 ‘Chariots of Fire’ Paris Olympics alongside Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell. And a James Hildreth played cricket for Somerset in the 2000s²⁰.

7. **The Thirlby Hildreths** (written jointly with Franklin P Mason II, USA)

7.1 To come now to the Thirlby/Norton branch of the Hildreths : I have been looking forward-but when actually researching you have to work back carefully step by step and taking nothing for granted. Unfortunately, there are a couple of “weak links” in the chain, but I am virtually certain that it is our family which I have traced back to the lovely hamlet of Thirlby, in the parish of Felixkirk near Thirsk in Yorkshire²¹. For over 200 years it was the home of a Hildreth family—apparently just one Hildreth family—all of whom were descended from Leonarde Hildreth (generation 1) and his wife Emmate.²² It is impossible to say when Leonarde and Emmate moved to Thirlby; record keeping in that parish began only in 1598 and their first child was born in 1601.

From the dates when their children were born, it is likely that Leonarde and Emmate were born in around 1575-1580. (To put that date in context, it is about half way through the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and before the defeat of the Spanish Armada!)

Even today, Thirlby has a population of only 120 people.²³ [It is interesting to note, however, that about the time when the last of the Hildreths were leaving Thirlby, in about 1800, the population was actually larger than it is today (167 people in 1823). So, it appears that other

¹⁸ Obituary-*Daily Telegraph*, Saturday 17 October 1992, p.21.

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Hildreth

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Hildreth

²¹ On the Vale of York (the narrower part here is also called the Vale of Mowbray) within a mile or two of a dramatic 750 foot escarpment of the Hambleton hills on the edge of the North York Moors part of which is called Whitestone Cliff. There is a lovely ford at the end of the village and it has delightful old stone cottages with red pantiled roofs so typical of the area.. Virtually no houses are newer than 1900.

²² *Transcripts of Parish Records for Felixkirk 1598 to 1837*, Northallerton Records Office

²³ <http://www.thirsk.org.uk/thirlby/>

families were also leaving at that time.]

Even though there was only one Hildreth family in Thirlby, there were many other Hildreth lines within 30 miles of that hamlet from at least the late 1400s—as has been said.

7.2 Leonarde and Emmate had three children: Fraunces, b.1601; John, b. 1603; and Elizabethe, b. 1605. There are no further records for Fraunces, but Elizabethe married a Georg Whitfield. Elizabethe and Georg had a son who died in 1637, when Elizabeth was 32 years old. (More about John later).

7.3 Leonarde and Emmate both died in 1615 and were buried within three days of each other. One can only speculate as to the cause of their nearly simultaneous and untimely deaths (their youngest child was only 10 years old at the time.) However, in England in 1615 there was an epidemic called “a burning fever,” which killed many people. [Little is known of this disease except that it coincided with an outbreak of “Hot Ague” (fever) elsewhere in Europe.]²⁴

7.4 John Hildreth, b. 1603, (generation 2) the only son of Leonarde and Emmate, had five children: two girls (Ann and Elizabeth) and three boys (William, Christopher, and Richard). There is no further record of Ann except possibly a burial in either 1700 or 1704. Elizabeth married Anthony Hazell from Sutton [Sutton-under-Whitstonecliff], a small hamlet next to Thirlby, in 1671. There is no further record for William. Christopher married and had a son Solomon, who died at age three years. Christopher died in Thirlby in 1722.

7.5 The authors believe that Richard Hildreth, b. 1644, (generation 3) and who married Ann Gilerton in Thirsk in 1669²⁵ had a son, John (generation 4). We say “believe” because there is no record of John’s christening (or birth)—there always seem to be a weak link in every family tree. As was mentioned, there was only one Hildreth family in Thirlby. So the John who was married in Thirlby in 1713 and who died in Thirlby in 1741—must surely have been related to the other Hildreths of that town. If John was married at age 32 years he would have been born in 1681. That would make him plausibly a child of Richard, who would have been age 37 years in 1681. And Richard’s father was named John; so it is logical that Richard would have a son also named John.

Of course, by this reasoning, John could equally well have been the son of either William or Christopher. But John had a son by the name of Richard, and (as far as we know) he did not have a son by the name of William or Christopher. Therefore, we believe that John is the son of Richard.

7.6 It is interesting to note that John’s wife was Judith Whitfield. Recall that John’s great aunt, Elizabethe, b 1605, married Georg Whitfield. Therefore, Judith Whitfield was possibly John’s second cousin.

John and Judith Hildreth had five children. Two of children—Francis and Richard—lived to be adults. The other three—Ann, John, and John—died in early childhood.

7.7 Francis, b 1714, (generation 5) was a farmer. Francis had three children, Richard, Mary, and Sarah. There are no further records for Richard or Mary—and more about Sarah later. Francis

²⁴ http://hawkshome.net/misc_items/events/epidemic_timeline.htm

²⁵ The records for Thirsk and Thirlby have been published by the Yorkshire Parish Register Society

died in 1758 at age 44. At the time of Francis' death, his oldest child, Richard, was only 9 years old and his youngest child, Sarah, was only 1 year old. Nothing is known about what happened to Francis' wife and children after his death. One can only assume that they were taken in by relatives, most likely by Francis' brother Richard.

7.8 Sarah Hildreth, b. 1757, (generation 6) constitutes the second weak link—but I believe this was the Sarah who left Thirlby and ultimately settled in Norton in the East Riding of Yorkshire (just across the River Derwent from Malton)³. Norton is about 20 miles southeast of Thirlby. Sarah's departure from Thirlby might not have been a very happy one, because sometime soon after she left Thirlby, she had a son and there is no record of any father; so her son was perhaps born "out of wedlock". This son, Richard Hildreth, was christened 11 October 1783 in Hovingham, Yorkshire²⁶. (By co-incidence Hovingham is about half way between Thirlby and Norton. At that time, there were Hildreths living in the village of Oswaldkirk, four miles northwest of Hovingham²⁷. Were they relatives of Sarah? It is fascinating to speculate that she might have gone to them to avoid scandal in Thirlby).

7.9 It is, no doubt, appropriate that Sarah named her son "Richard," after her older brother and/or her uncle, one or both of whom probably acted as her father figure in the absence of the father who she never knew (because of his early death). Most, if not all, of the many Hildreths who have lived or are now living in Norton and the surrounding area are descended from Sarah and her son Richard. (Later, Sarah married Robert Gale in Norton.) More about Richard Hildreth later.

6.10 John and Judith Hildreth's other son, Richard, b. 1716, was a weaver. Richard had six children, Elizabeth, John, Thomas, Ann, Ellen, and Francis. At the time when his children were being born, Richard lived in Cleaves House in Thirlby. Cleaves is a small sub-hamlet of Thirlby, with High Cleaves, Low Cleaves, Cleaves Cottage, and Cleaves House. Cleaves House is a lovely old building still there and thriving up a narrow lane, and even the well still works! It is in a marvellous location on a shelf under Whitestone cliff with a view of the Pennines 30 miles away.

7.11 Richard's first child, Elizabeth, married John Anderson in 1795. There are no further records in Thirlby for the other children, except Ann Hildreth, who married Jonah Curry in 1800. (This marriage, by the way, is the last recorded event for someone named "Hildreth" in Thirlby.)

7.12 John Hildreth, b. 1757, son of Richard Hildreth, married Ann Barwick in 1785 in Sowerby, a suburb of Thirsk, about 6 miles southwest of Thirlby. John and Ann had four children Richard, James (Ann's father's name was James.), Mary, and Elizabeth. All four children were born in Northallerton, about 8 miles north of Thirsk.

7.13 The children of Francis Hildreth, b. 1714, and Richard Hildreth, b. 1716, were the last of the Hildreths to be born in Thirlby. *All* of the children of Francis and Richard were born in Thirlby. *None* of their grandchildren were born in that town (at least, no grandchildren with the last name of Hildreth). Thus, after more than 200 years of the Hildreth family in Thirlby, it abruptly came to an end in 1800.

²⁶ Revealed by a search of www.FamilySearch.org

²⁷ Oswaldkirk volume of the Yorkshire Parish Register Society

8. The Norton Hildreths-origins

Correspondingly when I had started at the other end and traced the Hildreths back through the town of *Norton in the East Riding of Yorkshire* (present population about 6000 and just across the River Derwent from Malton in the North Riding of Yorkshire) the earliest entry I found was in 1791. There were absolutely none before that. That entry was the marriage of Sarah Hildreth of the parish of Felixkirk (in which Thirlby is situated) to Robert Gale of the parish of Norton²⁸. The Norton branch all descends from a **Richard Hildreth** who suddenly appears in the Norton records in 1808 when the first of a long line of his children is baptised. The unsatisfactory thing is that I have painstakingly searched the records for the whole area and I cannot be absolutely certain that the Richard born in Hovingham is this one. Richard Hildreth was buried in 1835 and his age is given as 54 which was probably an estimate by his wife. That would mean a birth in or about 1781 so I am fairly sure that it must be our man.

9. Why the move from Thirlby to Norton? It seems that only Sarah (and Richard) Hildreth moved and the rest of the family in Thirlby may have just petered out or dispersed to other places.

One factor may have been the family circumstances outlined.

A second factor might have been that this was the time of the enclosures. From the days of feudal times, back in the 1100 and 1200s, there were very large fields attached to the manors in each village and the farm labourers had rights of cultivation to some extent, but they were more-or-less tied to the land. Various experimental farmers found that much greater yields were possible by having large, enclosed fields, and at the time of these enclosures (between about 1760 and 1810 depending on the area) many farm labourers were dispossessed and wandered from place to place, and this could be the reason.

A third factor might have been that there was a decline in the weaving industry which was carried out in and around Cleaves near Thirlby.

Or it may just be that Sarah Hildreth met her future husband at an annual fair!

In those days- and in fact right down until the 1920s in some towns like Driffield and Malton in Yorkshire-there were hirings for farm labourers at Martinmas in November each year and the labourer was hired for the year by a handshake. Men used to travel many miles to these hirings sometimes wearing something special like a feather in their cap to mark them out. The annual wage was about £5 for which they lived in the farm usually with several other lads and perhaps some girls as domestic servants but were expected to work from 6am to 6pm-4pm on Saturdays with Sunday off to go to church twice and perhaps meet lads from other local lads and lasses in a barn on Sunday afternoon. The only annual holiday was the week of the hirings. Not much above slave labour really!

10. Richard Hildreth-1783-1835 (generation 7); and sons Francis, John and Mark

Reverting to Richard Hildreth he married a girl called **Susannah** when she was very young because the first baptism of a child of theirs was in 1808. Susannah died in 1819 aged 30 so she can have been no more than 19. There were many children born to them in Norton between those dates but, as was the case in those days, few of them survived one year. However, several

²⁸ The original register books for Norton are at the Borthwick Institute (part of the University of York), Peaseholme Green, York

did and in fact Richard Hildreth is the ancestor of the very large Norton branch of the family which includes practically every Hildreth in the 2009 York telephone directory!

Two children who did survive were **Francis** born in 1814 who married Ellen and had three children-Richard, Mary Ann and Henry; and **John**, born in 1817-see below.

After Susannah's death, in 1819, Richard lost no time in remarrying - in 1820. In fact he had to. The girl was only 16 and she had a baby 4 months later. The girl's name was Elizabeth Wilson and I have a copy of the certificate with Richard Hildreth's signature in spidery hand-looking as though he might have been coached to write it²⁹. Again, several children followed and a few survived notably **Mark** born in 1823. The address for the births is given as Brickyards, Norton-which is off the Scarborough Road.

11. Richard Hildreth eventually died in Norton, and he was buried on Christmas Eve 1835, which must have been a bit sad for the family. Most of the children were only teenagers. There is little more we can find out about him because as I said official certificates do not start until 1837, so there is no proper death certificate - only the burial record in the Church books which are preserved at York. And census records with names and places of birth only start in 1841. It was way before photography had caught on. Elizabeth-Richard's second wife-remarried in 1839 at St. Margaret's York-she was 38 and the groom 22 - they both continued to live in Norton

12. The census records are very interesting. In the 1841 census Francis Hildreth was already married but living with his in-laws, and brother John Hildreth was in digs with another family of labourers along the Scarborough Road in Norton near Malton. John's stepmother Elizabeth had remarried as mentioned-and she kept the younger children who retained the name Hildreth. John Hildreth married for the first time in the Norton Parish Church (which was then called St. Nicholas's-near where the level crossing is now³⁰) in 1841 - a girl called Elizabeth Hall who was a dressmaker and the daughter of a farm labourer. Both of them were illiterate and could only make an X on the register.

They had several children and so did brother Francis and half-brother Mark (who had married Mary Ann Magson from Appleton-le-Street in 1844³¹) and so by the 1851 census, there were a large number of Hildreths in Norton - perhaps as many as 1 in 70 of the population (and see footnote 13 above).

One of the children of John Hildreth's first marriage (David) farmed at Garton-on-the Wolds and came to have 11 children, one of whom became Alderman Francis Hildreth who was a farmer

²⁹ According to a search of www.familysearch.org Elizabeth was born in Bridlington in about 1798

³⁰ The new and much larger St. Peter's church on Langton Road was built in the early 1900s

³¹ The oldest of their 14 children born 1845 had the unusual name of **Manfred** and he was an engine cleaner. He married at St. Mary, Castlegate York in 1867. It is the church just by the Yorvik Viking Centre which is now a very popular visitor centre. One of Mark's last children was (George) **Ramsden Hildreth** born 1870 who in turn had 13 children. His wife was Jane Anne Summersgill who interestingly was a daughter of a sister of the Sarah Anne Summersgill referred to in paragraph 14. They in turn had a child George who married the daughter of Harriet Hildreth mentioned in para 13, a son Mark who was killed in the First World War and, as mentioned, 11 others! Ramsden was a sawyer who lived most of his life at 90 Parliament Street, Norton .He died in 1953. Where he lived was still a woodyard in the late 1990s.

with a famous dairy herd at Hessay near York and he had two sons and grandsons many of whom still live in the Hessay and Rufforth area³².

13. John Hildreth 1817-1888 (generation 8)

John's first wife Elizabeth Hildreth (nee Hall) died in 1860 aged 37 but I do not know what of. By that time, they were living at the Brickyards back on the Scarborough Road again. John Hildreth was a farm labourer. (Bob Hildreth³³ remembers a very old man telling him that his grandfather John was an expert maker of hayricks).

At the time of the 1861 census there was a 19 year old girl living in with widower John Hildreth in Norton and interestingly the enumerator originally put that she was a daughter but then crossed it out and put servant. In fact, she cannot have been a daughter because John Hildreth married her in the Norton Parish Church in 1863! Her name was **Mary Ann Frank**. She is a very interesting person and I cannot work out how they got together. Again John Hildreth could not sign his name but she has a very literate hand and was a daughter of a schoolmaster from beautiful and remote *Fryup* near Danby in Eskdale, Yorkshire-in the North York Moors National Park. But she gives her father as already being dead on the certificate so perhaps she was an orphan and came to Malton looking for work.

14 Harry Hildreth 1864-1939 (generation 9)

Their first child born in 1864 was *Henry* (but always called **Harry**). He was Bob Hildreth's father and Bob can remember his father saying that Mary Hildreth was extremely learned for her day and used to do translating for the foreign gentry who stayed at the Talbot Hotel in Malton for the horseracing³⁴. The second child was *Harriet Ann* born in 1867 (married Henderson and they had one child-a daughter Rosalind who married George Hildreth a son of George Ramsden Hildreth-see footnote 27) and the third and last was *Francis Albert* - called Albert - born in 1869³⁵. There was another boy Arthur who died in infancy in 1871 and then came tragedy when

³² Alderman Francis died in 1977. There was a tragedy on 16 November 1944 in the war when a military aircraft coming in to land at Rufforth Airfield struck the roof of Grasslands farm spilling out aviation fuel. A Mr. and Mrs. Hildreth and their eldest son were killed as well as six of the aircraft's crew. ([Dalesman magazine](#) November 2002)

³³ born 1903-see later

³⁴ The Talbot Hotel is still there in 2011. Malton\Norton were famous for horseracing. There are no longer races but Norton is still a major training centre.

³⁵ He moved to Gateshead Co. Durham and there married Cecilia (born 1868) the daughter of an Italian stucco picture painter who had come, with three friends, from Lucca in Italy to Darlington. This Carlo Iacopi later found work in a Teeside Iron foundry and had married Isabella Petty McKenzie on 15 March 1863. (Isabella already had several children and her son William remained with her throughout her life working alongside his step-father in the Iron foundry).—footnote continues..

Albert and Cecilia had 6 children:

Cecilia (b. 1894) m Anastasios Antonopoulos in Gateshead. He was a marine engineer and they moved to London.

They had 3 children: Regina (1915), Cecilia (1917) and Soterios (1919)

Felicia (1896) m. Victor Gallon and they had 1 daughter Peggy

Lavinia (1899) m Ben Gribbin and they had 1 son. Launcelot

Francis Albert (1902)

Maria (1904) m Ridley Miller

in 1872 Mary Hildreth died giving birth to a daughter Zillah who also died. She was only 30 and we know very little about her and it was still in the days before photographs. John Hildreth soldiered on and eventually died in Malton in 1888 aged 71. His death certificate says of “natural decay”!

15. Meanwhile Harry (who would have been 8 when his mother died) left school at the age of 13 as people did in those days. Bob can remember his father Harry saying that schoolchildren had to bring fuel for the fires in school. Harry became a farm labourer and would have lived in at the farm all year. In 1881 at the time of the census he was working as a 17-year old farm servant in the Scarborough Road, Norton-living in with that family even though he was only a stone’s throw from his father’s house. Harry’s by now elderly father John had one of the daughters of his first marriage acting as housekeeper to him.

In 1886, when he was 22, Harry was at Mill Farm, *Sledmere*, Yorkshire- a fairly large farm which would have had several farm hands and servants. It is a typical farm for the Yorkshire Wolds with a shelterbelt of trees and big agricultural fields rolling across the open 500-ft. high chalk hills.

At the farm he met and married a 20-year-old servant girl called **Sarah Ann Summersgill** who also lived in and who came from a large family in the straggling village of *Weaverthorpe* on the Wolds about 6 miles away. Her mother’s maiden name was Ann Skelton (and she came from the next village of *Helperthorpe*) and Sarah’s father also a farm labourer called William Summersgill and he hailed originally from near Nantwich in Cheshire. Sarah had started work early in life-the 1881 census records her as living in at a big farm at Flixton Yorks as a 14 year old servant girl.

16. Harry and Sarah were married on May Day 1886 in the lovely little parish church of Sledmere. Father John was still alive and saw the event-he witnessed the register³⁶.

17. Harry and Sarah continued living at the farm and had the **first two of their 13 children** there, namely *John William* (Jack) who married and had a son Raymond, and *Edith* who married George Horner and had a daughter Connie.

18. When father John died in 1888 Harry and Sarah moved back to the Brickyards, Norton thus continuing the very long link. All the remainder of the children were born there. The house was a very small, terraced house³⁷-what is called a “two up two down”-i.e. just two rooms on each floor. The children were put out to work as soon as possible! When they came back-e.g., for the Martinmas hirings-they had to share a bed “top to toe” with their younger siblings.

William John (1907) m Mary Gofton: they had 2 children: Ann and Anthony John (“Tony” b about 1945-and who personally supplied the information in this footnote. He is a Professor of Medical Statistics at the University of Northumbria in Newcastle)

Tony has married twice- the children from his first wife are Michael and Andrew. His second wife is an Uzbek doctor Gulia : they have a daughter Aziza born in 2006.

³⁶ I have a photograph of this original entry taken by the minister-the book was not yet full in the 1980s!

³⁷ Still standing in 2011 but now bearing the address **13 Poplar View** -off Scarborough Road, Norton. The adjacent Brickyard has long closed.

Harry gave up farm labouring and became a signal fitter on the old North Eastern Railway. In those days the railways employed thousands. He worked a lot up the Newcastle direction and would very often be away for a week at a time taking the food for the week away with him and the men would probably sleep in the trackside huts. Some of them took big pies with meat on one side and apple on the other³⁸!

19. The remainder of the children were *Albert* - he was the man who emigrated to Alberta, Canada in 1930 and his children were Lillian, Nora, Eileen and Clem (all born in England) and Jean (born in Canada). Then *Emily* born in 1890 who married late in life and had no family, *Jane Ann* (Jeannie) born 1892 who married George Wood and had two sons George and Ronald then *Lily* who married William Brewster and had 8 children Dorothy, Mary, Thomas, Edwin, Emily, Kenneth, Gladys, and Ivy. Then *Harry* (junior) born 1895, who had Allan and Jean. Then **Herbert** born 1896 (died Malton 1969) a sergeant and musketry instructor in the Great War who became an accounts clerk and who had **Donald** (born Scarborough 1922-the father of **Steven** the writer of this paper) and Tony. Then *Richard* born 1898 who went to France as a private in the Middlesex Regiment in 1916 aged 18 and who was killed in that war³⁹. Then *Gertrude Annie* born in 1901 who married Bert Reed and had one son Donald then *Robert Percy* (Bob) born in 1903 –and the last survivor who died in June 2000. He was full of fascinating memories. Bob had two daughters Violet and Jean- then came *Iris* born in 1905 who married a Mr. Bean and had one daughter Marjorie and lastly *Ann* born in 1906 who married Alf Dowkes and they had 3 children Randolph, Joan (who married a Canadian) and Sheila. There were also three younger half-siblings William, Mary and David.

20. Like his forbears Harry Hildreth was not very good at reading and writing and his younger brother Francis Albert gained more advancement because Harry found it very difficult to read and understand the signalling diagrams. His wife Sarah was better at reading and writing and Bob remembers her reading from the paper to him. It was an advertisement placed by the Nunnington estate⁴⁰ to run a smallholding which drew them there from Norton (13 miles away) in 1912. Apparently everything was loaded up on to a big horsedrawn wagon and the younger end of the family who had not left home by that stage came along. Bob remembers⁴¹ it was a very windy day and they had to tug on ropes to keep everything aboard. They moved to a small cottage now called ‘Elleron’.

The smallholding did not proving a living on its own and some of the children did carting for the estate (e.g. taking lime to and from the railway station). For about 3 or 4 years before he went

³⁸ Ex. Inf. Robert P. (“Bob”) Hildreth (born 1903 died June 2000 –buried at Nunnington, Yorkshire)

³⁹ His name is on the war memorial (but mis-spelt “Hildrith”) at the south-west end of Nunnington village and Steven has the bronze plaque (“the death penny”) which the Government gave to families to commemorate war dead.

⁴⁰ A small and beautiful old fashioned village in North Yorkshire-co-incidentally half way between Norton and Thirlby. The estate is associated with Nunnington Hall-a fine Elizabethan house now owned by the National Trust and open to the public.

⁴¹ Much of the information in these paragraphs comes from Bob Hildreth’s recollections

away in the war, one of Harry's children Richard did the horse-drawn carrier service to and from Malton via Ness. It involved setting off at 6.00 a.m. and taking on all the goods for the market, etc. and then coming back in the evening and delivering the newspapers and spirits for the pubs, etc.

During this time Harry continued with his signalling work but gave it up soon after the beginning of the First World War (1914-1918).

In 1916 Sarah died aged 50 of double pneumonia and is buried in an unmarked grave at Nunnington church.

21 In 1921 Harry took the tenancy from Nunnington Estate of Diamond Farm, Nunnington which at that stage was 22 acres⁴². It got its name from the shape of the small window panels. It was not easy to make a living from the farm and Bob Hildreth, Harry's son helped him out in running the farm. Bob had got a job at the railway station at Nunnington (a line long since closed and lifted) and was reluctant to leave. Bob succeeded to the tenancy on his father's death but did all sorts of other fascinating things-running a fish and chip shop and a taxi service, doing steam threshing in the 1930s and doing the school bus run with a van. The interesting but old-fashioned farm building just opposite the National Trust's beautiful Nunnington Hall was demolished as unsafe in the 1970s-it was said to have no foundations but apparently firm foundations were revealed!

22. Harry Hildreth died in September 1939 in Nunnington aged 75-but his many descendants and the descendants of his brothers, sisters and cousins live on as teachers, civil servants, lawyers, engineers, computer experts, cricketers...with quite a few still in Norton over 200 years on, and many others nearby in Yorkshire and all over Britain, Canada and elsewhere. The writer of this is generation 12 (see below).

23 American Hildreths

And we must not forget the very large group of Americans- many of them the 11th and 12th generation descendants of 2 (brothers?) Richard and Thomas who emigrated from Gainford to Chelmsford Mass. and Long Island, New York respectively in 1635, just 15 years after the epic voyage of the Pilgrim fathers⁴³. They are a foundational American family.

The American Hildreths are now found in virtually all states having spread out from New England and they now number far more than the British both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population of their country. An internet search reveals professors, estate agents, gospel singers...private detectives!

One famous Hildreth in the States was Richard (1807-1865) who wrote a book called *The Slave (or White Slave)* first published in Boston in 1836 – originally anonymously. It was an account

⁴² It later increased to about 75 acres.

⁴³ **There is a very active Hildreth Family Association in the USA founded in the early 1900s which publishes a quarterly newsletter "Hildreth Highlights", has regular reunions and they have a computer database with 17,000 Hildreths on it and 6 volumes of genealogy painstakingly tracing everything from the original settlers - see their very good Internet site at www.hildreth.net and see also Hildreth, D.M., "Origin and Genealogy of the American Hildreths," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 11, 1857.**

Richard was one of the first freemen of Massachusetts Bay colony and died in 1693 aged 88:
<http://dale-rogersfamily.com/getperson.php?personID=I3980&tree=dale>.

of slave life in the first person which many took to have been written by a slave. It was penned before Uncle Tom's Cabin and many think that Stowe must have been heavily influenced by it. Richard Hildreth also wrote a major and now highly sought-after history of the United States in six volumes⁴⁴ covering in huge detail the period from Columbus to the mid-1800s. There was a Horace Hildreth who was Governor of the State of Maine 1944-1948.

24 Hildreth Associations

There are at least two roads and a house in Britain sharing a name with the family⁴⁵ but no town or village. There is also a fictional heroine Lady Jane Hildreth, Government special agent, in a series of novels written in the 1990s by Michael Spicer, an MP and minister in John Major's Conservative government of 1991-1997.

In America however there is a Hildreth department store in Southampton, Long Island, New York State established in the mid-1800s⁴⁶, and a small town called Hildreth in south central Nebraska near Franklin. It has a population of only a few thousand but is big enough to have a Hildreth State Bank⁴⁷ and a school with pages on the Internet. It was named after its founder the pioneer Carson Hildreth born in Michigan in 1857 who first arrived in the middle of a snowstorm⁴⁸.

There are also three small hamlets in the States not big enough to show on the Rand-McNally atlas⁴⁹ and in South Africa a Hildreth ridge⁵⁰ on a range of hills.

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⁴⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Hildreth

⁴⁵ A short road called Hildreth Road with a lively market just north of Balham railway station in the south London suburbs (I have been unable to discover how it got its name), a street in Prestwood, Bucks (a village where many Hildreths live—see above) and a big building formerly called Hildreth House on the north side and near the east end of the road called Heworth or Heworth Village in the suburbs of York and which now houses a dentists' surgery.

⁴⁶ Internet homepage at www.hildreths.com

⁴⁷ Internet homepage at www.bankofhildreth.com

⁴⁸ According to *Hildreth Highlights (journal of the Hildreth Family Association) Vol XXIX No 4 July 2007 there is a very small settlement called Hildreth in Suwanee County of Florida*

⁴⁹ -but revealed on a computer search of the Encarta World Atlas 1998-in California between Auberry and O'Neals near Fresno (and which gives its name to a Hildreth series of soils); on the state border of south-west Montana 20 miles west of Dell; and a Hildreths Mill between Wilton and Phillips in central Maine

⁵⁰ In the northern Transvaal about 25 miles northeast of Duiwelskloof.