

Chapter One, Family Heritage: The Suttons and Dent

Will Sutton, his father and his grand-father, were all legends in their own time but for different reasons. The dynasty begins with Will's grandfather, Richard Sutton, whose tale is one of rags to riches. It has been suggested that part of his story was used by both Charlotte and Emily Brontë in their novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Richard being the model for Heathcliff. We will examine this in the next chapter but we should get to know the man himself first.

Dent, Yorkshire

Richard Sutton was born in Westhouses and baptised at nearby St. Oswald's church,ⁱ Thornton in Lonsdale, on 7th June 1782. To orientate ourselves, Westhouses is a hamlet about a mile north-west of Thornton in Lonsdale; Ingleton is one mile to the west and Dent eight miles to the north.ⁱⁱ We are in an upland area within the Pennines, a chain of hills often called the 'backbone' of England. Criss-crossing the area there are many valleys known as dales, hence Thornton in Lonsdale, Deepdale, Dentdale. The dales are surrounded by fells, which is Old Norse for mountain, the highest of which is Whernside at 736m.

As is the case in these dales, the good people of Dentdale form a little world in themselves. Each is mostly the proprietor of his own little section of the hillside, - that is, between rivulet and rivulet, - they forming the natural landmarks of each demesne. Two or three fields, called "pasture-heads," are generally enclosed and cultivated near the house, where oats, wheat, and potatoes are grown for family consumption; and for their horses and cows; but the upper parts, called "the fell-side," are all grazed by large flocks of sheep, geese, and wild ponies. Sheep, however, form the wealth of the valley; and their social sheep-washings and shearings make as blithe holidays as the harvest homes, and the wakes and fairs, of other districts. Hope On! Hope Ever! Or The Boyhood of Felix Law, Mary Botham Howitt, 1845.

In the same year he was born, baby Richard was carried by his parents Richard and Ellin over the hill, crossing the parish boundary, to Gastackbeck, an isolated farmhouse high on Deepdale Lane between Great Coum and Whernside; not far away you can hear the waterfall, Lockin Garth Force. It is here where their second child, Jane, was born. Dent-town, as the locals called it, is two miles down the valley.

We know little about Richard and Ellin Sutton apart from the fact that they were back in Thornton in Lonsdale by 1796 as this is when Richard senior died and was buried at St. Oswald's. Times were hard just after the French Revolution and before the Napoleonic Wars.

I was still living at the Parsonage at the end of last century; and I well remember the two years of terrible suffering, when the necessaries of life were almost at a famine price, and when many of the farmers and land-owners before that time hardly able to hold up their heads had to pay poor-rates that were literally more than ten times the weight of what they had been in former years. It was indeed a time of sorrow and great suffering. Life and Letters of the Reverend Adam Sedgwick, John Willis Clark, Thomas McKenny Hughes, 1890.

Without her husband, Ellin was left destitute with two children, Richard aged thirteen and Jane, ten. What could she do? Her answer was to find an indenture for her daughter. An indenture is one way in which the poor were able to survive: they became, in effect, servants for seven years, legally bound to a particular person. The indentured person was clothed and fed in return for work. At the end of the indenture (or apprenticeship as they were sometimes called) they were free to seek employment elsewhere. So, at the tender age of ten, Jane was indentured to one Thomas Robinson of Westhouses, Thornton in Lonsdale.

Meanwhile, Ellin clearly felt her best option was to move back to Dentdale to access support from their old neighbours.

As might be supposed, the inhabitants of one dale form a little community or clan where everyone is known to the rest, and where a great degree of sociality and familiarity prevails: but the whole dale sub-divides again into neighbourhoods, where a stronger esprit du corps exists. ... Within this boundary they feel it a duty, established by time and immemorial usage, to perform all offices of good neighbourhood, and especially that of association together. The Rural Life of England, William Howitt, 1838.

Richard was able to find work with the wealthy Sill family at their grand new mansion, West House, ***“as a shoe-black or some such thing,”***ⁱⁱⁱ whilst Ellin found work just down the road at a large dwelling house called Syke Fold.



West House, thanks to Sedbergh Historian



Syke Fold, thanks to Sedbergh Historian

It is hard for us in the 21st Century to imagine such destitution. What is even worse is that eight years later, in 1804, not long after completing her indenture, Jane died. She is buried in the same place as her father. Her mother^{iv} is living a mile away in Ingleton: she had clearly moved back to take care of her daughter.

Marriage to Ellen Constantine

We do not know whether Richard attended his sister's funeral but two months later he married Elinor Constantine, who was three years his junior, at St. Andrews church in Dent. Richard could neither read nor write as he signed the register with an 'x,' Elinor did sign but it is a very tentative signature suggesting that she, too, could not read nor write very well.

Elinor, sometimes known as Ellen or Eleanor, was the first daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Constantine. She was born in Hawes, about ten miles north east of Dent, in the North Riding of Yorkshire at the head of Wensleydale, which

is also her father's birthplace. Her mother was born in nearby Hardrow, where you find Hardraw Force, England's highest, unbroken, waterfall. Without doubt Ellen would have bathed in the pool below the waterfall as children still do today.^v

Like Richard Sutton senior, Robert Constantine was a farmer and moved to Dent for work. The Constantine family lived at Cage, a farmhouse not far from West House, which is where they are living in 1806 when, again mirroring the Suttons, they lost their youngest child, Betty; she was 17 years old.

We now know how Richard met Ellen: they were neighbours. After their marriage the newlyweds moved into Rigg End, a farmhouse up on the fells owned by the Sill family who used to live there before West House was built. During the 30-odd years Richard and Ellen lived at Rigg End they had twelve children: eight boys and four girls.



Rigg End © Jan Bridget

...when a birth is about to take place, they have what is called a Shout. The nearest neighbour undertakes the office of herald. She runs from house to house, through the neighbourhood, though it be dead of night, summoning all the wives with this cry – “Run, neighbour, run, for neighbour such-a-one wants thy help – and take thy warming-pan with thee!” The consequence is, that the house is speedily filled with women and warming-pans; a scene ludicrous, and, one would imagine, inconvenient enough too; but which the women of the dale all protest is a great comfort. When the child is born, there is a great ceremony of washing its head with brandy, which is performed by the father and his male friends, who are assembled for the occasion; and who then fall to, and make merry over their glasses. The assembled women regale themselves with a feast of their own kind, being a particular species of bread made for the occasion, and sweet-butter; that is, butter mixed with rum and sugar, and having in truth no despicable flavour. Then comes the Wife-day, generally the second Sunday after the birth, when all the women of the neighbourhood who have attended at the Shout, go dressed in their best, to take tea, and hold a regular gossip, each carrying with her a shilling and the news of the neighbourhood. The highest possible offence that can be given, is to pass over a person within the understood limits of the neighbourhood – it is the dead-cut. The Rural Life of England, William Howitt, 1838.

Having large families was common in those days, as was losing many in infancy or at a young age: of the twelve Sutton children six died young, the first two in infancy; the only girl to survive was called Betty.

The Suttons, the Sill Family and Inheritance

Richard was neither indentured to nor adopted by Edmund Sill of West House but the Sills clearly thought well of him: he had risen from one of the lowliest jobs (shoe black) to becoming Ann Sill’s ‘farmer’^{vi} and was now renting their old farmhouse. When Richard marries Ellen Constantine, James Sill, Edmund’s youngest son, is his witness.

As well as being farmers and property owners, the Sills were originally involved in the hosiery trade (knitted fabrics), the area being well known for ‘the terrible knitters of Dent,’ partly because of the speed which men, women and children could knit but also because of the peculiar way they knitted. This was no solitary job – the locals would meet to do their work in ‘sittings.’

They took to their seats; and then began the work of the evening; and with a speed that cheated the eye they went on with their respective tasks. Beautiful gloves were thrown off complete; and worsted stockings made good progress. There was no dreary deafening noise of machinery; but there was the merry heart-cheering sound of the human tongue. No-one could fortell the current of the evening’s talk. They had their ghost-tales; and their love-tales; and their battles of jest and riddles; and their ancient songs of enormous length, yet heard by ears that were never weary. Each in turn was to play its part, according to the humour of the Sitting. Life and Letters of the Reverend Adam Sedgwick, John Willis Clark, Thomas McKenny Hughes, 1890.

Someone had to sell the finished products for the locals, an activity that fell to Edmund Sill’s younger brother, John. It seems likely as a result of these trading activities, John expanded his business and ended up in Jamaica, owning a sugar plantation and slaves. He co-owned two ships, the *Dent* and the *Pickering* which, in 1758, went to the West Indies returning to Liverpool with sugar and cotton.^{vii}

When John Sill died in 1774 he had no children. Providence, his sugar plantation in Jamaica and 267 slaves were left to his family in Dent who also inherited several farmhouses in the area, all bought with profits from the plantation.

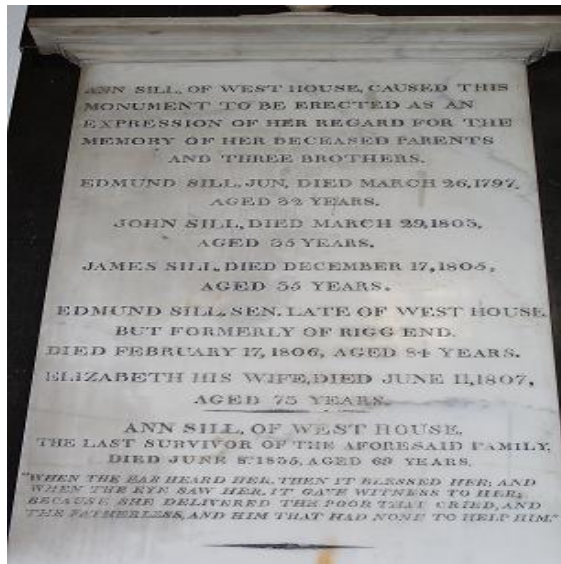


Monument in St Andrews Church, Dent, to John Sill from his nephew and Ann Sill's brother, John Sill. © Jan Bridget

John's brother, Edmund and his wife Elizabeth, had four children, three boys and a girl. The boys, in turn, would have inherited Providence and the farmhouses but all three died in their 30's; James, the youngest son, died in 1805, just a year after he had witnessed Richard and Ellen's marriage. This left their sister, Ann Sill, the sole beneficiary and the richest person in the area. Ann died in June 1835 aged 69 years. At the time of her death she owned the West House Estate, eleven Dentedale farms and the sugar plantation with 180 slaves in Jamaica.

We know little about Ann Sill but what we do know suggests she was a deeply religious and kind person. She never married and had a lifelong companion and family friend, Nelly Middleton, who died five years before Ann. It is interesting that as many women as men inherited the residuary monies in Ann's will and many of those who inherited property had been renting the same from the Sill family for years – including Richard Sutton who inherited Rigg End and Dyke Hall which he had been renting for over 30 years.

The following quote from Job, xxix. 11-13, can be found on the Sill family monument in St. Andrews Church, underneath Ann's inscription: *"When the ear heard her, then it blessed her and when the eye saw her it gave witness to her because she delivered the poor that cried and the fatherless and him that had none to help."* We do not know if this is a specific reference to Richard Sutton (fatherless).



Sill Family Monument, St Andrews Church, Dent, © Jan Bridget

Ann's obituary in the local newspaper read, *"...much respected by all who had the pleasure of her acquaintance. We fear in her the Poor have lost a very great friend."*

Ann made her will in 1805, three decades before she died. Over 30 individuals benefitted: eight inheriting property, 14 a percentage of the residue monies and a further ten from smaller legacies. Richard's inheritance was the largest: he was due to inherit the two farmhouses and one tenth of the residuary monies. The West House Estate, including West House, West House Farm and Smithy Fold, was left to Spencer Flexney, one of Ann Sill's relatives.

Sill Inheritance Scandal

The death of Ann Sill created a scandal which was recorded for posterity by William Howitt in *The Rural Life of England*, first published in 1838 and reprinted several times. Twenty pages are devoted to stories about the Yorkshire Dales and Dentdale in particular. As this scandal was to haunt Richard Sutton and his family for years to come it is important to reproduce the entire section:

There was a story ringing through one of the dales when we were there, which if half of it were true, was bad enough; and that we might arrive at as much truth as possible, we visited and conversed with those who were apparently likeliest to know it.

It was said, and this too by those who had been in daily intercourse with the parties - that a very wealthy widow lady, who seemed to have been of weak intellect, or at least so unaccustomed to the world, and matters of business, as to become an easy prey to any clever and designing fellow, had entrusted the management of her affairs to a lawyer of a neighbouring town.

That this lawyer twenty years ago made her will, in which he had appointed himself one of the executors, and a gentleman of high character, living at a great distance, the other. That he had left in the will ten per cent, on the accumulations of her income to the executors, besides five hundred pounds each for the trouble of their office.

That a man brought up in the house of the lady, was left £5000. That from the original making of the will, it appeared never to have been read over again at any time to the lady; but that she had frequently dictated or written in pencil her instructions for its alteration in many particulars, which instructions or alterations at the final reading of the will after her decease nowhere appeared.

That from the time the will was made till that of her death, twenty years, her lawyer-executor had continually tormented her with the fear of poverty. He had told her that her income did not meet her expenses; and through these representations had induced her to curtail her charities, and to lay down her carriage.

This, however, did not suffice, and his representations made the poor lady miserable with the constant fear of coming poverty. In an agony of feeling on this subject, she one day sent her confidential servant to the lawyer to order him to sell her West Indian property. The lawyer said, "tell your mistress from me, that her West Indian property is not worth a farthing." This the servant, whom we took the trouble of seeing, confirmed to us.

The poor woman, haunted with the fear of poverty, at length took to her bed and a few days before her death, when, indeed, her recovery was hopeless, her lawyer

appeared at her bedside and astounded her with the news, that so far from poverty, her West Indian property was very large, and her income had actually accumulated in the funds to the sum of £80,000! and the hypocritical monster, with a refinement of cruelty perhaps ever paralleled, humbly asked her, "how she would wish it disposed of?"

The previous progress of the poor lady's illness, and this overwhelming intelligence, rendered any present disposal impossible. She was thrown into the most fearful distress of mind, - and continually exclaiming, "O! please God that I might recover, how different things should be!" died on the third day.

When the will was read, the man who had £5000 left him twenty years ago, found it left him still; and yet this man had for years lost the good opinion of the lady, by his misconduct, and had not been permitted to come into her presence for two years. This was a striking proof that her will had not of late years been adapted to her altered mind.

This man, who first came into the lady's house as a shoe-black, or some such thing, and had on one occasion for his misconduct, the alternative offered him either to quit her service, or be carried up to the top of the neighbouring fell, on the back of a man and down again, while he was flogged by another, and was of so base a nature that he had chosen the flagellation, and continuance in a family where he was regarded with contempt - this man had now actually purchased the lady's house of the executors, and lived in it!

We walked past it, and naturally regarding it with a good deal of curiosity, a ludicrous scene occurred. I suppose, being strangers and I having a moreen bag in my hand, it was inferred from our particular observation of the place, that I was a lawyer, come down on the behalf of some dissatisfied expectant, to inquire into the case.

However that might be, we presently saw the man's wife, a very common-looking person, and appearing wonderfully out of place as the mistress of such a house, peeping at us from the windows, first on one side of the house, and then on the other, and at the same time attempting to screen herself from view by partly unclosing the shutters, and placing herself behind them. Soon after, her daughter too came with stealthy steps, out of the back-door, crept cautiously round the house, and posted herself behind a bush to watch us; nor had we advanced far from the place, when the man himself came hurrying along and went past us with very black and inquisitive looks.

We were told that on the will being read, the other executor being now present, was not more amazed at the fact of his becoming, unknown to himself, so greatly benefited by it, than he was at the general details of it.

He inquired of the lawyer if the will had been read to the lady from time to time, in order to see whether it might require some alteration, and being told by him that it had not, he seemed filled with the utmost astonishment and indignation, and abruptly said to him - "Why, there is nothing but damnation for you!" and with that proceeded in such piercing terms to show to the lawyer the cruelty and wickedness of his conduct, that the man trembled through every joint.

It was added that the lawyer "never looked up afterwards," but was in the greatest distress of mind, and daily wasted away. That when the tenants of the property, some time afterwards went to pay their rents, they found him propped up in bed with bolsters and pillows, a most pitiable object; his inkhorn stitched into the bed-quilt by him, and yet his trembling hand scarcely able to direct his pen into it.

That such was the effect of fear, and the visitings of conscience on his superstitious mind, that he drank the water which dropped from the church-roof in rainy weather, in the hope it would do him good!

This is a most extraordinary story, but we found one of these quiet dales ringing with it from end to end, and this was the account given by most trust-worthy people, who knew the parties well, and one of whom was the lady's confidential servant.

Everyone in Dentdale and the surrounding area who could read and had access to the book would have known who Howitt was talking about, even though he did not name them, i.e. Ann Sill (the so-called 'widow' who was, in fact, a spinster), James Davis, a solicitor from Sedbergh, Adam Sedgwick, the '*gentleman of high character*' and Richard Sutton, the '*man brought up in the house.*'

From our perspective in the 21st century, the language used is flowery and hyperbolic (as if Howitt is writing a farce). Points are exaggerated to make the story more dramatic. In fact, this method undermines belief but the basics of the story are probably true. For one thing, the suggestion that Richard Sutton inherited £5,000 has been recently confirmed by various legal documents.^{viii} Howitt

could get away with what he said about the solicitor, James Davis, as he died, at the age of 78, in the summer of 1837, the year before *The Rural Life of England* was published – and you cannot slander the dead. However, given the status of Adam Sedgwick as a respected gentleman and scholar, the status of the Sedgwick family in Dent, and the fact that Mary Howitt's family lived in Dent, it is unlikely Howitt's story was not in essence, although perhaps exaggerated, the truth.^{ix}

Howitt collected his information in 1837 when visiting his wife's relatives in Dent. He probably got some of his information from Ann Mason, who was Ann Sill's house keeper in 1831.^x If Ann Sill did plan to take Richard out of her will and include others instead, then Ann Mason, who might have expected to inherit but did not, would have been pretty angry.

It is worth noting that James Sutton, one of Richard Sutton's children, lived at Gibbs Hall at the same time and in the same tour of the North, the Howitts also stayed with William and Dorothy Wordsworth at Dove Cottage.

As part of his inheritance of Rigg End and Dyke Hall, Richard was charged to pay out six of the smaller legacies, each worth £50. In the process of executing the legacies Richard had to pay for the legal documents to be officially stamped – in this connection it seems likely he may have met the poet William Wordsworth who was the Distributor of Stamps for the area at this time. Certainly, in this capacity, William Wordsworth would have been aware of the broad contents of Ann Sill's will and, no doubt, the ensuing scandal.^{xi} Indeed, Adam Sedgwick was a friend of William Wordsworth.^{xii}

With regard to Ann's property being *“not worth a farthing,”* local historian Diane Elphick has written about the Sill family and their involvement in the West Indies.^{xiii} She tells us sugar plantations were capital intensive and profit seems to have declined over the years. Elphick goes into detail about the costs and problems encountered in running a sugar plantation and suggests the *“panic and destruction that accompanied an uprising in St James in December 1831”* could have been responsible for the belief that Ann Sill had lost her fortune.

As to the flogging of Richard Sutton, if this did happen it would have been when Richard was a boy: how likely is it that a man would carry another man up and down the fell to be flogged?^{xiv} Richard's decision to take the punishment and keep his job might have endeared him to the family. In any event, if the family regarded Richard with contempt at any point when he worked for them, would they not have just sacked him?

The scandal is about the solicitor James Davis not changing Ann Sill's will according to her wishes. Richard Sutton has been brought into the story to 'prove' its authenticity. Howitt is clearly not concerned about repeating what others have said about Richard.

Richard Sutton and his family may have been seen as 'base' by William and Mary Howitt, whose snobbery is revealed with the comment about Richard's wife looking *“wonderfully out of place as the mistress of such a house.”* But who is Richard being compared with? We must remember Ann Sill and her siblings were educated and came from a relatively wealthy family. Richard Sutton, on the other hand, came from a poor, uneducated family, was taken in by the Sills to become a servant when he was 13 years old,

married young, had a large family and was, himself, uneducated.

If Howitt and his wife saw Ellen Sutton and her daughter Betty, as well as Richard Sutton, and they responded as he describes, then it is hardly surprising they would react like this given strangers were looking at them and their home - they would be very sensitive and possibly under siege if the entire area was gossiping about Richard's inheritance and the family moving into West House, especially if Ann Sill had fallen out with Richard.

What could Richard have done to make Ann Sill fall out with him? To repeat William Howitt's words, "*...yet this man had for years lost the good opinion of the lady, by his misconduct, and had not been permitted to come into her presence for two years.*"

Ann Sill was close to Richard and his family when she wrote her will in 1805. It is clear she had expectations that Richard and Ellen's children would be educated as she left some of her books to their eldest son in her will. Yet we know that neither Richard nor Robert, their first two sons, signed their names on the marriage register suggesting they had not been educated. This must have disappointed Ann.

Ann's character is revealed in a letter published in the *Westmorland Gazette* of Saturday, 16th September 1826. Although the letter is signed by Philantropus of West House, Dent, it seems likely this was written by Ann herself. The letter praises the work of the daughters of Reverend Sedgwick and of Miss Davering (who was to marry Adam Sedgwick's brother who later became vicar of St Andrews) for setting up and running a Sunday school in Dent. The writer commends them for devoting their time "*to the moral and religious*

improvement of the wretchedly poor, and formerly, very ignorant children of this populous and poverty-marked district.” The author cannot praise their work enough for “...sowing the seeds of good morals, and cultivating the mental sterility of hundreds of their fellow-beings, and watering the tender shoots of intelligence with the sacred dews of the gospel?” The writer suggests Sunday schools should be replicated in other remote, poor, villages and hamlets: “...what a catalogue of evils and vices would it not exurbate? what comfort, order and contentedness would it not inevitably produce throughout the labouring classes of our countrymen?”

If this is a letter from Ann, is she talking about the Sutton family, amongst others? We know that Betty Sutton, Richard and Ellen’s daughter, had two illegitimate children (Richard^{xv} in 1829 and Robert in 1834). We also know that in 1839 Robert Sutton (Richard and Ellen’s second son) was fined for letting his dog worry sheep.^{xvi} Perhaps Ann felt sorry for Richard’s wife Ellen who, at 46 in 1831, gave birth to their twelfth child, Thomas?

Sutton Inheritance Scandal

According to Professor Christopher Heywood,^{xvii} descendants of Richard Sutton have always believed he was cheated out of his full entitlement when he was persuaded by Ann Sill’s trustees to accept the West House Estate in lieu of his tenth part of the residuary monies. There is certainly evidence to support this.

Had Richard not accepted the West House Estate he would have received one-tenth of the £80,000 accumulated income from the Jamaica estate, about £8,000, plus the compensation paid to slave owners in 1836 for ‘loss’ of their slaves,^{xviii} about £378, plus any profits from the plantation up

to when it was sold (it was still in the ownership of Ann Sill's heirs in 1845), plus one-tenth of what the estate was eventually sold for. Altogether this would have amounted to significantly more than the value of the West House Estate, i.e. £3,500.

In a strange way, this gives credence to the suggestion Ann Sill had fallen out with Richard: it would have been safer for Richard to have the West House Estate as this was legally transacted in a very short space of time in comparison to the elongated process of resolving the Jamaican Estate during which period there could have been legal challenges against Richard receiving anything.^{xix}

When Richard Sutton died his estates were bought by William Thompson of Underley Hall; an examination of the legal documents is revealing. They clearly state that Richard Sutton bought the West House Estate from Spencer Flexney for £3,500; a further £1,000 was paid to Ann Sill's relatives in Kirby Lonsdale and £500 to the executors, Adam Sedgwick and James Davis as per Ann Sill's will.^{xx} This begs the question, where did Richard Sutton get the £5,000 from? The most likely answer is that it came from Ann Sill's Estate (released by the executors). Remember, Howitt cites Richard Sutton as receiving exactly £5,000!

Here is a conundrum however: The day after Richard had bought the West House Estate from Spencer Flexney he then took out a mortgage for £3,500 from James Davis. Why did he do this – unless he simply wanted the cash?^{xxi}

Richard originally planned to rent out West House, as Smithy Fold and Westhouse Farm were already rented out. Advertisements were placed in both the Westmorland and Lancaster Gazettes.^{xxii} We do not know if he was successful

but we do know that Richard and his family had moved into West House by June 1836 as this is where their grandson, John, was born.^{xxiii}

Becoming part of the Establishment

Despite the scandal, Richard became part of the establishment. On April 14 1837 he is appointed a 'sidesman' for St Andrews Church in Dent.^{xxiv} He also attended the first Conservative dinner held in Sedbergh and was toasted by his fellow attendees.^{xxv} In 1840 he is amongst 24 landowners who called a public meeting with the purpose of requesting the Tithe Commissioners for England and Wales to enquire into and settle the boundaries of Dent.^{xxvi} Indeed, Richard was one of the founding committee members of the Sedbergh Agricultural Association.^{xxvii}

Richard dies on 5th August 1851, his obituary in the *Lancaster Gazette* reads: "***Sedbergh - On Tuesday last, aged 70, after a short but severe illness, Mr. Richard Sutton of West House, in Dent near Sedbergh - much and deservedly respected by all who knew him.***"

In his will Richard is called a yeoman; he leaves goods at under £1,500 which is worth just over £187,000 today, as well as stocks and substantial properties which were auctioned at the Bull and Dog in Sedbergh and sold for £7,764.00,^{xxviii} worth just under one million pounds today.^{xxix} They included,

Lot 1: West House, with Gardens, Orchard, Pleasure Ground, Coach House, Harness Room, Stable and Cow House; Dwelling House (Smithy Fold), West House Farm and land
Lot 2: Rigg End and Dyke Hall

- Lot 3: Cow Fold
- Lot 4: Dwelling house in Dent
- Lot 5: Two dwelling houses in Dent.

Richard tried to emulate the Sills by buying and letting property but, unlike the Sills, he did not have a regular income from a sugar plantation to offset any difficult periods. He re-mortgaged the West House properties several times, unsuccessfully put them up for sale in 1849 and ended up having to take out a further mortgage in 1850. He even had to borrow 20 shillings twice: once in 1849 and again in 1851.^{xxx}

On the sale of his properties Richard's trustees paid his outstanding mortgage of £4,500^{xxxi} and invested the remainder to ensure his wife was looked after for the rest of her life. On her death, the stocks, funds and securities were converted to money and divided between his sons, his daughter Betty and her children, and his grand-daughter, Jane. Ellen died in 1863; she shares a grave with Richard in St. Andrews churchyard.

Inheritance Maketh the Man

William Howitt's style of writing was one of exaggeration but on several points he appears to be telling the truth. If Howitt got everything right then Richard Sutton is lucky he received anything. The inheritance meant Richard owned the 'big' house but was constantly short of money, perhaps due to maintaining a certain lifestyle or bailing out a large family? At the same time, by becoming part of the establishment and a local statesman, he appears to have fulfilled the expectations originally placed on him by Ann Sill. Now that is irony.

Richard was elected a guardian of the Sedbergh Poor Law Union^{xxxii} which, given his circumstances 45 years earlier, was some turnaround. By the time of his death

Richard could not only sign his name but he had his own seal. He had come to respect education and made sure at least some of his children, including his son William and grand-daughter Jane, were educated. Jane, however, ended up becoming a servant (as did another grand-daughter, Elizabeth, the great, great, grandmother of the author) whilst William was to take a leap into the unknown by emigrating to Canada.

ⁱ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle married his first wife at St. Oswald's in 1885 and their reception was held at The Marton Arms, which is just opposite and previously known as the Church Stile Inn. This coaching inn was on the main route from Liverpool to Dent and Kendal to London and it is highly likely the Brontë sisters would have stopped here on their way to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge (1824-25) just over five miles away. Source: Christopher Heywood, editor, *Wuthering Heights*, Broadview Editions, 2001.

ⁱⁱ Historically, both Thornton in Lonsdale and Dent were in the West Riding of Yorkshire but now they are in different counties: the former in North Yorkshire whilst Dent is in Cumbria.

ⁱⁱⁱ Howitt, William, *The Rural Life of England*, 1938

^{iv} Ellin died in 1826 and is also buried at St Oswalds with her husband and daughter.

^v In 1806, J.M.W. Turner painted a series of watercolours of Hardrow Force. You can visit the waterfall via the Green Dragon Inn, in the village of Hardrow. There is a small entrance fee but it is well worth it as a pleasant walk by the side of the river leads up to the falls.

^{vi} Ann Sill's will, Kendal Archive, WFQ 009 1808.

^{vii} Elphick, Diane, WESTHOUSES, The Suttons, Sedbergh Historian, Spring 1987.

^{viii} Underley Hall documents at Kendal Archive. One of the documents dated 21st June 1836, clearly states that Spencer Flexney sold the West House estate to Richard Sutton for £5,000, out of which £500 was to be paid to Adam Sedgwick and James Davis as executors of Ann Sill's will, and a further document, of the same date, also shows Richard Sutton bought the West House properties for £5,000, out of which a further £1,000 was paid to Ann Sill's relatives in Kirby Lonsdale.

^{ix} It was Adam Sedgwick who had been left to deal with all the complexities of Ann's estates in Dentdale and Jamaica on the death of James Davis.

Stacey, Francis, WESTHOUSES: The Sills, *Sedbergh Historian*, 2003

^x Heywood, Christopher, Yorkshire Slavery in Wuthering Heights, *Review of English Studies*, volume 37 issue 150.

^{xi} The Legacy Receipts, held at Kendal Archive with the Underley Documents, were paid on 21st June 1836 by Richard Sutton to Barbary Barry late Foxcroft; Margaret Harling (two); Robert Foxcroft; Robert Foxcroft and Barbara; an A(?) Backhouse has signed for W. Wordsworth on the back of each receipt. Other legal documents connected to Ann Sill's will were also stamped. William Wordsworth (1770- 1850) was Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland in 1813-1843, which earned him £400 a year.

^{xii} Speakman, Colin, Adam Sedgwick, Geologist and Dalesman, 2017.

^{xiii} Elphick, Diane, Plantations, Patriotism and Profit: The Involvement of Local Families in the West Indies, *Sedbergh Historian*, Summer 2007.

^{xiv} Elphick, op.cit.

^{xv} It says on Richard's marriage documents that his father was Robert Waller; a Waller family lived in a farmhouse not far away.

^{xvi} *Westmorland Gazette*, 22nd June 1839.

^{xvii} See following chapter. Whilst researching Christopher Heywood met one of the direct descendants of Richard Sutton, Margaret Sutton of Wine Warth farmhouse, Ingleton, who told him about the family legend.

^{xviii} Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833

^{xix} It is worth looking at the time-line: Ann Sill died 5th June 1835; Richard Sutton took out a lease on West House 11th August 1835; legal documents state he bought West House estate on 12th August 1835; he advertised West House for rent on 15th August 1835; Ann Sill's will was proved on 6th October 1835; Richard Sutton and his family had moved into West House by June 1836 as this is when his grandson, John was born at West House. On 21st June 1836 Richard paid the charges of £1,000 to William Gott of Kirby Lonsdale (Ann Sill's descendants) and £500 to Adam Sedgwick and James Davis (Ann Sill's trustees). It is curious that Richard Sutton could buy the West House estate off Spencer Flexney before Ann Sill's will had been proved.

^{xx} Kendal Archive WDU/Box 58/1; 58/2; 58/3; 58/4; 58/5 – The two key documents are dated 21st June 1836: one relates to the payment of £500 to Adam Sedgwick and James Davis; the other of £1,000 to William Gott, Esq., of Kirby Lonsdale (Ann Sills relatives). The former states: ***The Messuages and Tenements Lands Grounds Closes Inclosures hereditaments and premises at or near West House aforesaid so given and devised by the said Ann Sill were in consideration of five thousand pounds duly granted and conveyed by the said Spencer Flexney to the said***

Richard Sutton in fee subject to the payment of the said Legacy or Sum of five hundred pounds to the said Adam Sedgwick and James Davis as in the said recited Will is mentioned.

^{xxi} It is worth noting that when James Davis died he left effects under £35,000 - worth about three-and-a-half million today - compared to the wealth of Adam Sedgwick at death - £4,000.

^{xxii} 15th August 1835.

^{xxiii} Thanks to Diane Elphick who picked this up from the Dent Parish Magazine.

^{xxiv} Richard's son, James, also becomes a sidesman a few years later. It is thought that 'sidesmen' is a corruption of 'synodsmen', co-opted and not elected."

^{xxv} The fascinating report of this event appeared in the *Westmorland Gazette*, 4th November 1837.

^{xxvi} *Westmorland Gazette*, 26th September and 4th October 1840.

^{xxvii} *ibid.*, 9th November 1844.

^{xxviii} Kendal Archive WDU/Box 58/1; 58/2; 58/3; 58/4; 58/5

^{xxix} His properties would have fetched a much higher price had there not been deflation

^{xxx} The *Westmorland Gazette* on 18th June 1853 reports a court case between the administrators of the estate of Myles Baynes and the administrators of the estate of Richard Sutton. It seems Richard borrowed 20s from Myles Baynes in 1842 and another 20s in 1851. The latter loan, which appeared not to have been repaid, was the subject of the court case. Whilst Richard's executors were willing to pay the 20s his family were not. The judge found in favour of the plaintiff. It is worth noting that a common labourer would earn about 3s 9d per week, so 20s would be just over a month's wage.

^{xxxi} In fact it looks like his son-in-law, Thomas Parker had, at some point, taken on the debt of £3,000 from the original mortgage; this amount, plus two further mortgages of £800 and £400, plus a new loan of £300, totalling £4,500, was transferred to Adam Fairrie and Edward de Vitia in 1850.

^{xxxii} *Westmorland Gazette*, 27th March 1841, thanks to Diane Elphick for pointing this out. Richard stood again the following year but was defeated, he did, however, get 114 votes. *Kendal Mercury*, 9th April 1842.