

John Winks

Going into the north porch of St Mary's Church you will pass the grave of John Winks, on the left next to the porch. The name John Winks is only just discernible on the severely eroded gravestone, but fortunately members of



Doncaster & District Family History Society made a record of memorial inscriptions in the churchyard over 10 years ago and were able to note that the inscription says John Winks died in 1835. He was 84 years old, having been baptised in Maltby on 28 July 1751.

He had the dubious reputation of having peculiarly miserable habits according the 'Globe' newspaper of 27 May 1836, one of many newspapers to carry the following story. Under a heading of 'A Miser's Hoard Discovered' there is an account of how a Bawtry solicitor, Mr Cartwright, when going through John Winks' effects, by chance opened an old fishing net, thrown aside as a valueless item. To Mr Cartwright's surprise he found Bank of England and local notes worth £190 carefully wrapped inside the net. Searching further he found 96 gold guineas many of them bearing the date 1772 with 'the appearance of newness upon them'. This money was in addition to £155 discovered in a box with Mr Wink's other valuables. The total amount, £445/16/-, has the approximate equivalent purchasing power of £38,000 in today's money.

Hiding his money in a fishing net is not completely surprising given that John Winks' home in Tickhill was burgled on 23 February 1823. He was held in bed while the burglary took place. William Haigh and John Haslehurst were quickly apprehended and committed to York Castle for stealing a purse with several one pound and guinea notes. Both received the death sentence in April, but a few weeks later, in William Haigh's case, this

was commuted to transportation for life while John Haslehurst's death sentence was commuted to two years' hard labour on the treadmill at Wakefield's House of Correction.

Why did John Winks not place his money in a bank? From the evidence of his will, he could not sign his name, simply using a X mark. However, as the will was signed virtually on his death bed on 18 November 1835 (he was buried on 21 November 1835) was he too weak to sign his name? If he could neither read nor write, possibly he did not trust a banking system which required some degree of literacy to check his accounts, but it cannot be assumed that he was illiterate. Perhaps he preferred to keep the extent of his wealth private.

The 'York Herald' of 15 March 1823 when reporting the burglary referred to John Winks as a yeoman. Baines' Directory of 1822 in its Tickhill entry listed him as a gentleman. According to his will, John Winks was a landowner with land and a farmhouse at Oldcotes occupied by a tenant, George Bell, and where Edward Brown was a labourer. This labourer was to inherit £200 from Winks, perhaps compensation for the loss of his home and livelihood as Winks arranged that all his real estate holdings should be sold after his death. The residue of his estate was to be divided amongst the children of his late sister Elizabeth Ingalls. Winks appointed local man John Craven to be his sole executor. Probate was not granted until 1839 and so the beneficiaries of the will had to wait a while for their inheritance. However parsimonious Winks might have been (what were his peculiarly miserable habits?), he was at least generous in making bequests.

Reference for the copy of John Winks' will held at the National Archives: PROB11/1915/393

CD *Monumental Inscriptions of churches and churchyards*, Vol 2, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough, compiled by Doncaster & District Family History Society, 2005