

## William Beecroft, the oldest man in the Ancient Graveyard

William was baptised in March 1754 in Ferrybridge, near Pontefract before it was known for its power station and motorway interchange.

By 1784 he had worked his way to Settle, and married Margaret Glover from Whittington outside Kirkby Lonsdale. They had three daughters although little Margaret died aged 4. Wife Margaret died in 1814 at a perfectly respectable age of 64. Daughter Agnes married James Dodgson from Skipton but died in 1837, aged 48.

Daughter Ann/Nancy didn't marry and stayed with William. In the census returns, they were recorded living in High Street, near the Talbot Inn. William worked as a labourer, but, aged 97 was a 'pauper and retired labourer'.

In July 1851, William and Nancy had some trouble with a couple of local lads who knocked down a wall at their property. 'Old Nancy Beecroft', aged just 54, kept the keys to Castleberg Crag. The lads just climbed over the wall and sat 'in an easy chair at the foot of the hill'. [3]

William eventually died on 24 February aged 98 (according to his death certificate) in 1852. One newspaper credited him the age of 99 [1] and another as 'the oldest inhabitant' [2]. He died on the same day as the well known surgeon Thomas Robinson.

Daughter Ann stayed in the same house, working as a seamstress and died in 1862 at the good age of 75.

They are buried in an unmarked grave in plot AX1.

the case was dismissed.—Matthew Hutchinson, a shoemaker's apprentice, and Joseph Harper, a joiner's apprentice, were summoned for having, as it was alleged, thrown down a part of a wall said to be the property of **William Beecroft**. The complainant was old Nancy **Beecroft**, who has the keeping of the keys opening to "Castleberg." These lads were, to Nancy's great astonishment, found comfortably seated in the easy chair which stands at the foot of the great hill, without having applied to her for admittance. It seems they deemed application to her unnecessary, and had got over the wall, and hence arose this complaint before the magistrates. Mr Robinson appeared on behalf of both the defendants: and as the old woman would not swear that the lads had knocked the wall down (although in her information), the magistrates dismissed the case.

On the 24th instant, at **Settle**, Mr. Thomas Robinson, surgeon, aged 59.  
Same day and place, Mr. **William Beecroft**, at the advanced age of 99.

**Settle.**—On Wednesday last, Mr. **William Beecroft**. He was the oldest inhabitant, and died at the advanced age of 98 years.



*This account has been compiled as part of the Settle Graveyard Project. The project has recorded gravestone inscriptions, updated church records and researched the lives of those buried. The 'Old Settle' family tree on [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) includes all the families buried in the graveyard. The project is ongoing, and always welcomes queries, information and family knowledge on [settleresearch@gmail.com](mailto:settleresearch@gmail.com). Latest news and events are on the Facebook page Settle Graveyard Project.*

*Newspaper cuttings by kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 – Westmorland Gazette  
2 – Lancaster Gazette, 3 – Kendal Mercury*

*SC - Settle Chronicle, with kind permission of the North Craven Buildings Preservation Trust*