

Charles Benson, bank manager

Charles Benson was born in 1820 in Acomb, York, the son of a wheelwright/builder, Robert Benson. Charles siblings all stayed in the area and never married. His brother, Thomas Benson, worked as another builder but Charles had a more academic streak and began his working life as a banker's clerk in Drifffield. Then he moved to Leeds where, in 1849, he met married Eliza Birch, the daughter of a William and Sarah (Carter) Birch who were tea dealers and grocers on the Lower Headrow in Leeds. William had started his career as a shopman to 'Messrs Randall and Vickers' when, in 1802, he took over the grocery and tea-dealing business of Simon Hagen[1]. He appeared to do well, regularly advertising for apprentices in subsequent years.[1].

To PARENTS, &c.
WILLIAM BIRCH, Grocer, Tea-Dealer,
 &c. Top of Lowerhead-Row, Leeds, is in
 immediate WANT of an AN APPRENTIC'R.

By 1840 it appears that William had retired and was successful in being elected, out of 11 well recommended candidates, to be the 'Collector of the Lamp-Rate' for the Leeds Improvement Commissioners,[1]. Unfortunately Sarah died in 1846, aged 68 and William followed in 1848, aged 73. Eliza had at least five sisters and one brother. Unfortunately brother William and sisters Jane and Sarah died as infants and sister Sarah Susanah died when she was 20. They were buried with a memorial stone [ph1] in the graveyard of St John the Evangelist Church which is just next to Leeds' Grand Theatre but is now redundant. This is a shame as it's the oldest church in Leeds city centre, consecrated in 1634 and is now a grade I listed building [ph2]. William and Eliza probably joined them in the grave plot later.

In Memory of William, son of William and Sarah Birch of this Town who departed this life October 23rd 1812, aged nine weeks. Also Jane, daughter of the above who died Sept 13th 1813, aged 2 years 1 month. Also Sarah who died June 28th 1814, aged 3 months. Also Sarah Susanah who died Jany 7th 1839, aged 20 years.

Charles and Eliza married in Leeds on 15 October 1849 with Eliza's youngest sister, Mary Clark Birch, as a witness and they went on to have five children. They spent a few years in Bradford before moving to Settle by 1858 for the birth of their fourth child, Charles Frank Benson. Charles had become the bank manager of what was then the Yorkshire Bank in the Market Place, next to the old Saving's Bank behind the Town Hall, now Goad and Butcher's solicitors. He was also the agent for County Fire Office Insurance company [LSA]. Unfortunately, little Charles Frank died, aged 4 months and is buried in an unmarked grave in the Ancient graveyard. Charles and Eliza's last child, Mary Frances Clark Benson was born a year later.

In June 1883, 67 year old Charles narrowly escaped injury when an engine whistle, accompanied by an emission of steam, startled his horse, throwing the driver off and

L E E D S.
WILLIAM BIRCH, Grocer and Tea-Dealer,
 (late Shopman to Messrs. Randall and Vickers)
 begs Leave to inform his Friends and the Public in
 general, that he has taken and entered to the Shop and
 Stock-in-Trade of Mr. SIMON HAGEN, in Lower-
 Head Row, where he intends carrying on the above
 Business Wholesale and Retail, and hopes by strict At-
 tention and a Desire to please, to merit the Approba-
 tion of those who favor him with their Commands.
 Has on Hand, a Stock of TEAS, of excellent
 Quality, which he will sell on reasonable Terms, with
 every other Article in the Grocery Business.

SIMEON HAGEN hereby acknowledges the
 past Favours of his Friends and the Public, and
 informs them, he has declined the above Business in
 Favor of W. BIRCH, to whom a Continuance thereof
 will be duly regarded, not doubting he will merit their
 future Favours and Esteem.



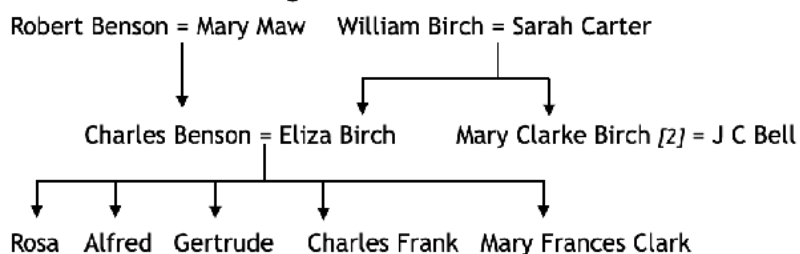
AGENT FOR SETTLE:
C. BENSON, YORKSHIRE BANK.

A DANGEROUS PRACTICE.—Last week Mr. Benson, manager of the Settle branch of the Yorkshire Banking Company, narrowly escaped serious injury whilst being driven in a close carriage past the Settle Junction. It seems that the vehicle was proceeding quietly on its way, but when opposite the junction the sudden whistle of an engine, accompanied by an emission of steam, caused the animal to start violently forward, throwing the driver off the box, and upsetting the conveyance. Fortunately, no further consequences resulted than a severe shock to the nerves and some slight bruises.

causing the carriage to turn over [1]. The paper fails to name the poor driver but reports there were no serious injuries, just severe shock and some slight bruises. This may have contributed to Charles and Eliza's decision to retire and move to London to live with their only surviving son, Alfred Benson. Charles and Eliza had been in Settle for about 30 years.

Like all his siblings (and most aunts and uncles) son Alfred remained unmarried. He became a medical practitioner and found work in Maida Vale, Paddington with his sister Gertrude Benson as his housekeeper. Some medical practitioners have a quiet life but, being in the heart of London, Alfred found himself in the newspapers on several occasions.

Charles Benson's family



In 1887, a poor quality advert explains that Alfred was summoned to attend the body of 38 year old James Jones who he found 'quite dead lying on the pavement with an umbrella partially covering him' after being struck by lightning. Mr Jones' previous history of heart disease will not have helped [6]. In December 1888 Alfred was called to certify the death of Mary Ladd who had drowned in the Regent's Canal following several years of domestic abuse from her husband. The husband alleged that she had written a suicide note but, as it was in handwriting identical to his own, he was suspected of writing it himself [2]. Five years later, in 'an abuse of charity' a hotel clerk called Henry Eaton approached the Rev Canon Forrest Browne to request financial help. He had a letter, purporting to have been written by Alfred Benson giving a good character reference. However, Alfred said he knew nothing about it! Henry pleaded guilty to forgery and was imprisoned for two months with hard labour. [3]

The canal was dragged, and on the following morning the body of the deceased was found, and in the dress were a number of letters, which the witness admitted to be in his own handwriting. It was found on examination that there was a great similarity in the writing of them and in the one he alleged he had received from the deceased. Dr. [Benson] of Clifton Road, proved that the cause of death was suffocation by drowning, and that there were no marks of violence upon the body. The Coroner, referring to the similarity of the writing of the letters which the husband admitted to be his, and that which he said he had received from the deceased, said it was a matter that required clearing up, and the inquiry was adjourned.

Rev. Canon Forrest Browne. On the 30th ult prisoner called at Amen-court, Paternoster-row, with a letter purporting to have been written by Dr Alfred Benson, of Maida Vale, and addressed to the prosecutor, who is the Canon in residence at St. Paul's. The letter represented that the prisoner, a man of good character, had been employed at a confectioner's in the neighbourhood, but was then out of employment. The letter asked if the Canon could assist the prisoner. The prosecutor gave him

A WOMAN'S DETERMINED SUICIDE.

Yesterday (Thursday), Dr. [Benson] (deputy coroner) held an inquest at the Salusbury-road Coroner's Court on the body of Clara Hilton (49), widow of a 'bus conductor, who committed suicide on Monday at 14, Rudolph-road, [Maida Vale], by cutting her throat.—Saving Luckart, brother of deceased, living at Kilburn Park-road, horse dealer, stated that he frequently saw his sister, and he last saw her on Sunday night at Rudolph-road. She was going blind, and that preyed on her mind. She complained of it to him on Sunday. The family lived together till the father died about nine months ago, when she went to the infirmary for her sight and to be treated for varicose veins.

By 1897 Alfred had become the Deputy Coroner for the local area and held an inquest of the body of 49 year old Clara Hilton who took her own life after the death of her father and deteriorating eyesight [4]. There were horrific injuries and Alfred must have had a strong stomach as, in those days, coroners and their jury always had to attend the body. There are no further reports of Alfred working as a coroner so perhaps that line of work wasn't for him. Alfred was called to several other victims of suicide in subsequent years [5]. In 1905 Gertrude Abigail Burne, the wife of Col Newdigate Knightley Burne of the Indian Army died of excessive alcoholism and a drug overdose while her husband was away in Thibet [7]. The Colonel was later awarded an OBE.

SHOCKING SUICIDE IN
MAIDA VALE.
Draper's Assistant Cuts His
Throat.

Alfred's main contribution to national newspaper column inches was in December 1912 when he pleaded guilty and was fined £50 for having 'carelessly signed passport declarations' for two French

speaking brothers, Louis and Lucas Kuschneyder, who worked as interpreters. They were afterwards discovered to be on the Continent engaged in the white slave traffic. This would 'deceive the friendly relations between the subjects of the King of England and the Queen of the Netherlands'[4,8]. One of Alfred's patients recommended the brothers to him and they produced British birth certificates so he thought it was all above board. There was no suggestion that Alfred knew what the brothers were up to but had charged the men 5 shillings each – which did not help his case. They were arrested in Berlin, charged with procuring a girl in London. This event didn't seem to do any long term harm to Alfred's reputation and he continued working until in death in 1932, aged 79.

At the Old Bailey, on Wednesday, Dr. Alfred Benson, of Maida Vale, pleaded guilty to having carelessly signed passport declarations for two men who were afterwards discovered to be on the Continent engaged in the white slave traffic. Mr. Justice Darling said the prisoner had pleaded guilty to an offence which was more serious than perhaps was generally apprehended, and one of the aggravating circumstances of the case was that the men were charged five shillings each for the "consultation." It appeared to him that the time had arrived when the Foreign Office ought to consider whether they should not restrict the list of persons before whom declarations could be made. Defendant must pay a fine of £25 in each case—£50 in all—and be imprisoned until the money was paid.

TO OBLIGE A PATIENT.
DOCTOR CHARGED WITH
SIGNING FALSE DECLARATION.
ALIENS AND WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC

DOCTOR'S PASSPORT DECLARATIONS.
 At Bow-street Alfred Benson, a medical practitioner, of Maida Vale, was charged upon two summonses with knowingly and falsely signing declarations to the effect that from his personal knowledge he could vouch two men, named Louis Kiseneyder and Lucas Kuschneyder, as fit and proper persons to receive passports to travel to Rotterdam, such declarations being calculated

Charles and Eliza's eldest daughter, Rosa Benson, worked as a governess in Surrey before her death in 1896, aged 45. Charles and Eliza's youngest daughter Mary Frances Clark Benson, always known as Mary, was born in Settle in 1860 and remained here after her parents left until 1929. 'Miss Benson' was one of Settle's most talented and yet understated heroines, well regarded by residents and all with a musical interest. She lived at 17 Craven Terrace with a day job as a 'music teacher', and a very successful one at that. Many students achieved success under Mary's tutorage. In 1899 [9] these included Miss Mary Greenwood and Miss Ethel Hunt, the only daughter of James Hunt, the well known hairdresser-cum-jeweller, optician, perfumer and dentist based in the Town Hall [ph2].

MUSICAL SUCCESSES.—Miss Mary Greenwood and Miss Ethel Hunt, of Settle, pupils of Miss Benson, have successfully passed the Trinity College Senior Examination (Blackburn centre) in pianoforte playing and singing respectively.



Mary's widowed maternal aunt, Mary Clark (Birch) Bell, lived with the family and then, after Charles and Eliza moved to London, with Mary for 20+ years – she had been the second wife of artist John Christopher Bell in Scarborough and had brought up his younger children when he died in 1870 before moving to Settle. He specialised in oil paintings of animals and exhibited several works for the Society of British Artists in the 1850s. Even today, his paintings generally sell for over £1500 and you can find many images of his work on the internet. This was an artistic family. Aunt Mary spent her last months with nephew Alfred Benson in London, probably because he was a medical man. She died of 'broncho-pneumonia following epidemic influenza' in 1892 [10].

BELL.—February 15, at 72, [Maida]Vale, London, W., the residence of her nephew, Dr. A. [Benson], of broncho-pneumonia, following epidemic influenza, Mary Clarke Bell, widow of the late John C. Bell, animal painter, of Scarborough.—No cards.

Settle Graveyard Project

Meanwhile, back in Settle, Miss Benson's [ph3] real claim to fame was outside work, playing an integral part in the development of Settle Amateur Operatic Society (SAOS) and other amateur musical and dramatic groups. She was a lead performer and director of SAOS for many years to critical acclaim. In 1896 Miss Benson played the 'rather thankless part' of Katisha in *The Mikado* [9]. She 'sang with artistic perception which is always found in her work'. 'Her excellent acting contributed largely to the success of the undertaking. . . The pains which must have been taken by Miss Benson and the conductor (Dr Buck) to obtain such precision and perfection have been no doubt prodigious but excellent singing repays them for their trouble.'

black and gold. Katisha's rather thankless part fell to Miss Benson, who sang with that artistic perception which is always found in her work. Although on this occasion she was evidently indisposed she never allowed the part to flag for a moment, and her excellent acting contributed largely to the great success of the undertaking. The chorus did yeoman service and proved itself thoroughly efficient. The pains which must have been taken by Miss Benson and the conductor (Dr. Buck) to obtain such precision and perfection have been no doubt prodigious, but excellent singing well repays them for their trouble. Mr. Wood and Mr. Everett, of Bradford, proved excellent accompanists, and Mr. Thompson efficiently led the band.



In 1910 a poor copy article about the production of *The Gondoliers*, reported 'The part of the Duchess was again taken by Miss Benson about whom it is needless to say more than that her singing and acting were marked by that degree of excellence which is always associated with her name. In the numbers allotted to the Duchess Miss Benson was accorded hearty encores. . . . Miss Benson, who has worked so ungrudgingly and at the cost of so much time and trouble, must have felt satisfied at the result of her labours as honorary coach and manageress. The staging of the *Gondoliers* is no small matter and the success of the performances must be largely accredited to Miss Benson, who spared nothing in her efforts to draw the best from all performers.[11]

After a performance of *Pirates of Penzance* in 1911 [12] Mr Charles Alured Swale proposed a 'hearty vote of thanks to Miss Benson for her excellent stage management'. Thomas Brayshaw toasted the success of SAOS and remembered how Settle had always been an enthusiastic place for drama, with early performances in a barn on Duke Street.

Mr. Swale also proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Miss Benson for her excellent stage management. Mr. T. Brayshaw proposed "Success to the Settle Operatic Society," and in the course of his remarks said he had with him a programme of the first performance of "Pirates" in 1892. Settle had always been an enthusiastic place for the drama. In the early days performances were given in a barn in Duke-street. After that Mr.

Aside from the SAOS Miss Benson performed to help raise funds for other groups including the Girls' Friendly Society, the Primrose League (Conservative Club) and for the Church Sunday School annual treat [13]. On this occasion 270 children marched through the town led by the Brass Band. Miss Benson played the organ for a church service and a further parade and tea followed. 270 children at Sunday School? Those were the days! There were games and other amusements in the evening. In 1900, as an indication of the regard in which she was held, Miss Benson played the organ at the funeral of the solicitor Charles Henry Charlesworth.

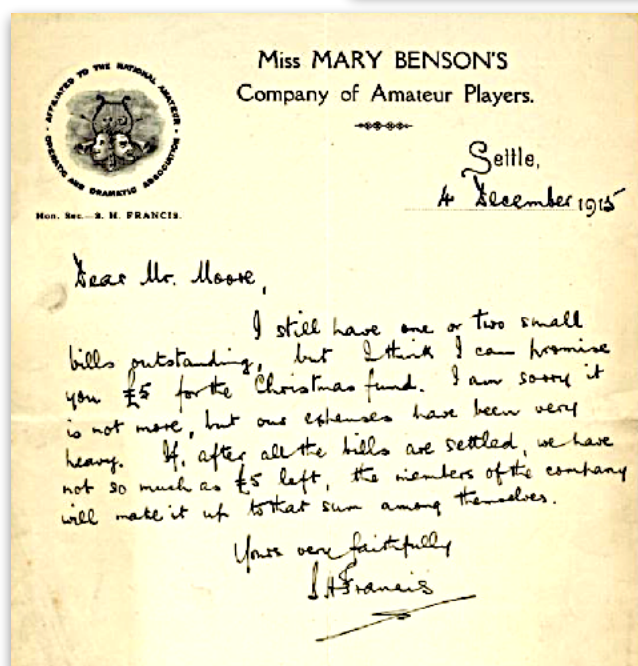
CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL.—On Saturday last the scholars attending the Church Sunday schools had the annual treat. The children, numbering about 270, assembled at the school, and marched, by way of Kirkgate and Craven Terrace to the church, headed by the Settle Brass Band. The scene presented was a pretty one, the children being in holiday attire, and many of them carrying flowers. The service in church was taken by the Rev. R. C. Garnett, M.A., the vicar. During the singing of the hymn "There's a friend for little children," the scholars gave in their offerings, consisting of flowers, fruit, eggs, toys, and books, for the children's ward at the Leeds Infirmary. Miss Benson presided at the organ. After service the procession was again formed, and the principal streets paraded. At four o'clock tea was served in the school, the evening being spent in games and other amusements. The children dispersed about 9 o'clock, a most enjoyable afternoon having been spent.

Settle Graveyard Project

During the war Miss Benson organised the Company of Amateur Players to maintain artistic performances while men were on the front. Their first performance was Ernest Denny's 'All-of-a-sudden Peggy' which was, unsurprisingly an unqualified success [10]. Frederic Sargent of His Majesty's and Criterion Theatres in London starred and made a great impression. In 1915 the Company donated £5 to the Christmas Fund, organised by *John Moore*, to send parcels to the sons of Settle fighting on the front [ph4].

SETTLE AMATEURS IN "ALL-OF-A-SUDDEN PEGGY."

Miss Mary Benson's Company of Amateur Players gave their first performance in the Victoria Hall, Settle, last night, to a good house, the play chosen being Mr. Ernest Denny's "All-of-a-Sudden Peggy." The performance was an unqualified success, and will rank as one of the best that amateurs have given in the district. Mr. Frederic Sargent, of His Majesty's and the Criterion Theatres, London, made a great impression on his first appearance at Settle, and his acting in the part of the Hon. Jimmy Keppel was much appreciated. Most of the other principals have proved their qualities before Settle audiences on many previous occasions. The chief triumph of the evening



In 1929 Mary moved down to Paddington to be with her sister Gertrude and died just a year later, aged 69. Gertrude was the last of the siblings to die 12 years later, aged 87.



This account has been compiled by Sarah Lister as part of the Settle Graveyard Project which has recorded gravestone inscriptions, updated church records and researched the lives of those buried. It has been written in good faith with no offence intended. If I have inadvertently included errors or breached any copyright I apologise and would welcome corrections.

Life stories can be found on dalescommunityarchives.org.uk/settle-graveyard-project. The 'Old Settle' family tree on ancestry.co.uk includes the families buried in the graveyard. The project is ongoing and welcomes queries and information on settlerearch@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 – Leeds Intelligencer, 2 – Lancaster Gazette, 3 – Evening Star, 4 – Kilburn Times, 5 – West London Gazette, 6 – The Globe, 7 – Westminster Gazette, 8 – Guernsey Evening Press, 9 – Lancaster Standard, 10 – Yorkshire Evening Post, 11 – Lancashire Observer, 12 – Lancaster Guardian, 13 – Lancaster Standard

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