

## John Douthwaite, an agricultural labourer

Illegitimate sons were sometimes named to identify the father of the child. For example John Cowburn Towler could be the son of John Cowburn, born to Miss Towler. The Douthwaite family gave examples of this.

In Victorian England, marriage was regarded as 'God's purpose' in order to ensure heirs, continue the family business and have someone to look after you on old age. Infant mortality was high – one in five infants didn't reach the age of five. It was not uncommon for women to become pregnant before marriage - there was little reliable contraception, and it proved the fertility of the woman. There was a general expectation that couples would then marry. If they didn't, these descriptive names were sometimes used. We could speculate on the reasons for the woman naming her child in this way.

Nationally, the proportion of recorded deaths for illegitimate babies was twice that for legitimate babies (and many went unrecorded). This could be because their mothers tended to be young, poor and inexperienced. Some illegitimate babies were unwanted and so were deliberately uncared for, or worse.

The Douthwaite family were a farming family from Bentham. **William Douthwaite** and his wife **Mary Singleton** had at least seven children including a pair of twins, Betty and Catherine. John Douthwaite was the eldest surviving son. Unfortunately William died in his 40s, so Mary had to bring up the younger ones alone and moved to Rathmell.

**John Douthwaite**, an agricultural labourer was 23 when he met **Margaret Wilkinson**, a 17 year old weaver's daughter from Giggleswick. In February 1847 she gave birth to **John Douthwaite Wilkinson**. Unfortunately he died aged 1 year and is buried in the graveyard. Perhaps Margaret was considered too young to marry? She had another illegitimate child, Esther when she was 22, and then married John Moorby a quarryman with whom she had another five children.

In July 1848, John married **Alice Chamley**, one of nine children of a respectable farmer Robert Chamley living in Selside. Alice was already pregnant with a daughter Mary who died when she was just two. Alice had another daughter Agnes. Unfortunately Alice died soon after Agnes' birth, aged 30 and Agnes would be brought up by her Chamley relations. John went back to live with his mum.

John's sister Agnes gave birth to **William Winder Towler Douthwaite** before marrying and Thomas Winder, with relations called Towler may be the father - he was between marriages. One of John's twin sister, most likely Catherine, gave birth to an illegitimate daughter Mary. Both William and Mary were born in Rathmell.

John's sister Ellen gave birth to an illegitimate daughter Maria, who was baptised on 21 October 1838 in Ingleton. Just 9 days later on 30 October Ellen married Thomas Frankland. Tragically Ellen died just after and was buried on 9 February 1839. Maria was brought up by her grandmother Mary Douthwaite.



*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.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk) 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](#).*