

Lawrence Mansergh, coachman, clerk and a very bad man

Mansergh is a small settlement alongside the River Lune north of Kirkby Lonsdale. From there numerous families with the surname Mansergh originated.

Lawrence Lambert Mansergh was born in 1836 the youngest of five children of Richard Mansergh and Margaret Lambert in Whittington, just south of Kirkby Lonsdale. Richard, a butcher, died just after Lawrence was born in 1836 and Lawrence may have reflected on this to explain his behaviour in later life.

In 1861 Lawrence married Dorothy Bracewell, a cabinet maker's daughter, but she died in the summer of 1865, perhaps related to childbirth. Just six months later, Lawrence had moved to Settle and married Mary Bowman who had been working in domestic service in Stackhouse. Mary was distantly related to Dorothy. Their daughter Margaret was born in September 1866 but died an infant and is buried somewhere in the Ancient graveyard at Holy Ascension. They were in Bentham when infant Harry was born and died in 1868. They moved to Keighley and had two more children, Frank and Mary. Now Lawrence worked as a coachman.

But in January 1887, Lawrence, now a respectable clerk, was convicted of 'Attempt to Murder by Starvation'. His criminal record says that he was charged with 'feloniously withholding food, nourishment, and clothing from his wife, Mary Mansergh, and keeping her in a damp unwholesome room, with intent to kill and murder her at Halifax in the months of November and December 1886.

Understandably this featured in newspapers across the country [1,2]. Reports claimed that he had recently taken out a life insurance policy against Mary's life, and had started a relationship with another woman. Mary had suffered a stroke and so was disabled. It was not that Lawrence couldn't afford to look after his wife - he was working as a magistrate's clerk. '*The judge regretted that legislation had not contemplated the possibility of a man being so devoid of common decency*' and gave him the maximum sentence of two years in prison with hard labour.

ATTEMPT TO MURDER BY STARVATION.

At Leeds assizes, Lawrence Mansergh, 50, groom, living at Todmorden, has been indicted for attempting to murder his wife by starvation. The evidence, which disclosed a revolting state of things, shewed that the prisoner had been married to his second wife 20 years. Two years ago she had attacks of paralysis and epilepsy which disabled her. From this time the prisoner neglected her altogether, and she depended upon such food as the neighbours were enabled to give her. She was repeatedly heard crying for food, and the prisoner did all he could to prevent the neighbours assisting her. She had been allowed to lie in one position so long that her limbs were permanently crippled. The attention of the authorities was ultimately called to the case and the poor woman was removed to the workhouse apparently in a dying condition. The prisoner was earning good wages, but having become connected with another woman he frequently told his wife to "Get forward with her dying," as he was anxious to marry again. The jury found the prisoner guilty, and the judge regretted that recent legislation had not contemplated the possibility of a man being so devoid of common humanity as the prisoner had been, consequently he could not deal adequately with the case. He should give the utmost sentence the law allowed, namely, two years' imprisonment.

The Todmorden & District News.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21ST, 1887.

YESTERDAY, the Todmorden Bench of Magistrates sat for four hours investigating a sad case of neglect. The prisoner, Lawrence Mansergh, a coachman, stood charged with neglecting to provide proper food, clothing and shelter for his wife, and with intent to kill and murder her. The details given were of a harrowing description, and caused much sensation in the crowded court. The depositions of the woman, who lies at the workhouse in a very low state, were taken last Saturday; and after hearing the evidence presented to them yesterday the magistrates committed Mansergh for trial at the ensuing Leeds Assizes. Prisoner is well known in the town, having been in the service of the magistrates' clerk for about seven years.

Lawrence was sent to Armley Gaol in Leeds, which was a dangerous place to be. In March 1888 a fellow prisoner, William Sissons, had been imprisoned for shooting but had developed violent signs of insanity. He was assessed as a 'dangerous lunatic' and it was decided he should be taken to Broadmoor. It says much about the Victorian system that '*pending the discharge of legal formalities, William should be placed in a cell with two other prisoners who were to act as watchers*'. One of the watchers was Lawrence. In a frenzy, William killed the other watcher, James Edward Taylor. Lawrence managed to hold William down and raise the alarm [3].

GHASTLY MURDER AT ARMLEY GAOL.

Sensational occurrences are unhappily becoming frequent in the erstwhile quiet, industrious borough of Leeds, and now another tragedy, rendered all the more peculiar and horrifying by reason of its locality, has to be added to the list. All Leeds was ringing on Saturday with the intelligence that at a late hour on the previous night a murder had taken place at Armley gaol, the

at Broadmoor. He was certified to be a dangerous lunatic, and pending the discharge of some legal formalities before he could be removed, the gaol officials decided to place Sissons in a cell with two other prisoners, who were to act as watchers. The men selected for this onerous duty were James Edward Taylor (40), of Bradford—said to be the son of a surgeon, and at one time of good position, and who was serving time for the theft of books—and Lawrence Mansergh. It seems that Sissons had a fit about five o'clock on Friday, but soon recovered, and after the evening meal had been partaken of, went to bed, as also did his watchers. Taylor went to sleep, but the other watcher remained awake. Just before ten o'clock Mansergh heard a short cough. Turning round he saw Sissons, who previously had appeared to be asleep, and who was a powerfully-built man, standing over Taylor with a three-legged stool in both hands, raised above his head. Mansergh instantly sprang out of bed to seize Sissons, but before he had time to do this Sissons had brought down the stool with terrific force on the right side of Taylor's head. The skull was fractured and death occurred almost instantaneously. Mansergh at once closed with Sissons, and, having taken the stool from him, managed to get to the bell-pull and raise an alarm. The murderer struggled desperately, the light being knocked out in the course of the tussle, but Mansergh, a stalwart young man, succeeded in overpowering him, and in holding him down until the arrival of several warders,

Despite this, Lawrence completed his sentence - was he a reformed character? In July 1889, Lawrence was again taken to court for deserting his poor wife and failing to pay workhouse (medical) fees [2]. On this occasion he paid a fine. The long suffering Mary died in January 1890, eventually.

ALLEGED NEGLECT OF WIFE AND FAMILY.
Lawrence Mansergh, coachman, who was apprehended at Shipley during the week, was put in the box on a charge of deserting his wife and allowing her to become chargeable to the common fund of the Todmorden Union.—Mr.

Undaunted, Lawrence married a third wife in 1893. Lawrence lied about his age saying he was 52, when actually he was 57. He was ten years older than his new wife **Elizabeth Midgley**, a widow from Nottinghamshire. By the 1901 census, they lived in Keighley and Lawrence worked as a tramway manager. Lawrence was now just '54' - the same age as Elizabeth.

<i>Isabella Jane</i>	<i>as wives</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Manager Tramways</i>
<i>Lawrence Mansergh Head</i>	<i>Ma</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Elizabeth , da wife</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>1</i>	

Lawrence died in 1905 aged 65, and Elizabeth lived until 1930. Lawrence and Mary's son Frank worked as a theatrical groom and died just two months after marrying in 1900. Daughter Mary lived with her aunt, Lawrence's sister, Margaret (Seward).

Every family has a black sheep, which Lawrence certainly was.

However there were good guys too. One such was **James Mansergh** whose family ran the saw mills in Rathmell for generations [LSA]. He was a good, hardworking man who contributed to the development of Methodism in Rathmell. In 1852, James married **Mary Fletcher** on the same day as

JAMES MANSERGH, Joiner and Wheelwright, Saw Mills, Rathmell, nr. Settle.	Estimates given for Buildings and all kinds of Joinery.
Cheap Depot for Posts & Rails for Wood Fences. FUNERALS COMPLETELY FURNISHED.	

Settle Graveyard Project

her sister Margaret married John Dickinson in Settle [4] - see Todd.

James had his workshop on Mill Lane, Rathmell [ph1] and was known to do plenty of work for the Geldard family at Cappleside. He is buried with his wife Mary and several members of his family at Rathmell graveyard.

On Saturday last, by the Rev. T. Haswell, at the Wesleyan Chapel, Settle, Mr John Dickenson, of Stainforth, to Miss Margaret Fletcher, dressmaker, of Settle; and at the same time and place, Mr James Mansergh, of Rathmell, joiner, to Miss Mary Fletcher, of Settle. The brides are sisters, and the two marriages being the first solemnized in the above chapel, each party was presented with a copy of the Scriptures and a Wesleyan Hymn Book.



This account has been compiled as part of the Settle Graveyard Project which has recorded gravestone inscriptions, updated church records and researched the lives of those buried. 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 settleresearch@gmail.com. Latest news and events are on the Facebook page 'Settle Graveyard Project'.

The life stories of people with italicised names have been researched as part of the graveyard project.

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 – Totnes Weekly Times, 2 – Todmorden and District News, 3 – Leeds Times, 4 – Kendal Mercury.

LSA - Lambert's Settle Almanac, with the kind permission of the North Craven Buildings Preservation Trust

ph1 – photo credit to Rathmell village website