

Research findings and observations

The information gleaned from the death certificates provided by the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line was the starting point for this research. Other sources have added depth and detail – church and local records, previous project findings, old OS maps and a number of genealogical websites providing births, marriage and burial records, census returns and 19th century newspapers.

Navvies are hard to trace

These burials were harder to trace than most others in Settle graveyard for several reasons. Navvies tended to originate in other parts of the UK and, as such, finding a John Jones, John Owen, Thomas Burton or men with the surname Smith is a bit of a lottery. For whatever reason there seem to be a disproportionately high proportion of common names in this selection. There was often incorrect information on documentation. Regional accents can be hard to interpret and some navvies deliberately tried to avoid being traced. Obviously some navvies had very short lives too so there is not much information to find.

All the deaths certificates were completed by registrar **John Cowburn**. Death certificates often provide valuable information as to a person's identity. The first column is entitled 'When and where died'. Specific dates were given although this registrar John Cowburn just listed 'Settle' or 'Langcliffe' for the location. The death certificate has a column 'signature, description and residence of informant'. Some registrars detail the name and specific address of the informant and their relationship to the deceased person, but again John Cowburn had a more minimalist approach. (As you will see in his life summary, John Cowburn had a lot on his mind.)

Registrar's District <i>Settle</i>									
1875 DEATHS in the District of <i>Settle</i> in the County of <i>York West Riding</i>									
No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.

Eight deaths required a coroner's inquest. In each of these cases the 'informant' column has words to the effect of 'information received from the Coroner for Yorkshire' and so information of relations and their addresses was potentially lost. However, coroners' inquests were legally reported in newspapers which gave details of the location and nature of the death. From these we are able to locate some workplaces on the railway. Where possible I have included probable locations from old maps but am happy to be corrected by those with better knowledge of the railway workings. The coroner for each inquest was **Thomas Brown** or **Thomas P Brown**.

Who were the navvies that died?

The spreadsheet summarises the information known about each worker. The men who have been possible to trace were generally from working class backgrounds. Their families worked hard, kept their heads down and didn't make the headlines. The majority were sons of labourers, agricultural/farm labourers, weavers or framework knitters depending on local industry. There was also a son of a tailor, a butcher, a joiner, a shoemaker and two gardeners. **Thomas Smith** married Eliza Seal whose family were successful quarry owners and major employers in Wakefield.

Occupation	Number
Railway labourer	13
Miner / tunneller	2
Engine stoker	1
Carpenter	1
Stonemason	2
Blacksmith's apprentice	2
Tinner/brazier apprentice	1

Thirteen of the 22 were ‘railway labourers’. Three of these were described by the registrar as just ‘labourers’ but their deaths were caused while working on the railway. The 1871 census return records hundreds of ‘labourers’ or ‘railway labourers’ who had moved to Settle from elsewhere. The number of more skilled tradesmen working on the railway also increased. For example, the number of stonemasons (and stonemason’s labourers) more than tripled from 19 in 1851 to over 65 in 1871 and there were many other ‘quarrymen’ too. The number of blacksmiths more than doubled, from 10 in 1851 to 22 in 1871. It is impossible to tell whether our Settle born apprentices were working on the railway, but it would be surprising if they weren’t for some of their time at least.

Where did the navvies come from?

Three of our workers were from Settle. The building of the railway was a welcome opportunity for local working class men. During the 1850s the town had seen an exodus of working class families as the Settle cotton mills temporarily went into decline. Hundreds of families moved to work in the Lancashire cotton mills with Accrington being particularly popular.

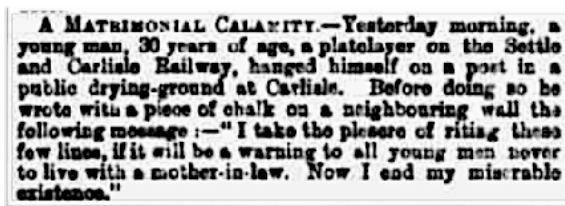
One labourer came from Bentham, another from Coverdale near Kettlewell. Further afield there were two navvies from Preston, two from Nottinghamshire, and one from each of Wakefield, Leeds, Lincolnshire, Worcestershire, St Albans, Devon and Somerset. One navy came from Anglesey and three from Newry, Ireland. Two of our men cannot be traced.

Causes of death – Accidents

Eight navvies died from tragic accidents which prompted coroners’ inquests and one had a bad accident which, for some reason, didn’t. The coroners’ findings revealed a catalogue of awful, preventable injuries which even the most basic health and safety procedures may have prevented. **John Owen’s** death was the only one to merit any concern in this regard, *‘that for the future all the cranes used on the line should undergo an inspection daily by some competent person in the employ of the Midland Railway Company.’* It’s not exactly rigorous

Cause of death	Number
Accidents	9
Infectious disease	10
Liver disease	1
Heart disease	2

advice. Unfortunately, in those days, these accidents and deaths were regarded as an inevitable consequence of empire leading engineering projects. 19th century newspapers didn’t hold back with graphic details of injuries and death. As always, the balance between ‘journalistic interest’ and fact occasionally resulted in quite insensitive reports. For example, whilst researching the navvies, an article was found about poor Thomas Cook, a platelayer on the railway in Carlisle. In 1875 he took his own life, *‘ending my miserable existence’* whilst warning other young men *‘never to live with a mother-in-law!’* [1]



In our sample, causes of death listed by the coroner included:

- Accidentally killed by a crane falling and striking him
- Accidentally killed by a crane falling and knocking him off a bridge into the River Ribble
- Injuries received from a wagon laden with earth accidentally passing over him on the new Settle to Carlisle Line
- Accidentally crushed and mortally wounded between two wagons, survived 3 days

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- Accidentally killed falling from a railway engine
- Mortal injuries from a piece of timber accidentally falling upon his head, survived one hour
- Accidentally killed by explosion of a dynamite cartridge
- Found dead in the River Ribble with no marks of violence upon his person

In the last case ‘found dead in the River Ribble’ **Thomas Smith** died ‘*after being seen the worse for wear on Saturday night*. Alcohol was an integral part of navvies’ life. This was a tough physical job and drinking for rehydration and relaxation was the norm, so many navvies will have died because of its effects, either on the line or afterwards.

Another navy, **John Barrett** died of the longer term effects of excess alcohol, liver disease.

Causes of death – Disease

During the 19th century, infectious disease was just another of life’s challenges. Nationally a third of all deaths were due to the diseases of small pox, typhoid, scarlet fever, measles, cholera, whooping cough or diphtheria. The small pox vaccine was discovered as early as 1796 but effective treatment of other infections had to wait for a better understanding of germ theory and sanitation much later in the 19th century. Antibiotics were not in common use until 1940.

Navy communities were a hotbed for disease. Navvies couldn’t afford to take time out for sickness and so travelled around the country harbouring germs, sharing them with others in their crowded navy huts, workplaces and communities. The concept of social distancing just didn’t exist. In 1872 there was an outbreak of smallpox in the area. 80 people died of smallpox in the Ribblehead settlements although it did not kill any of our selection of Settle navvies. The clerk to the Settle Union, *John Lister*, asked the Midland Railway to contribute to a subscription to the Settle smallpox hospital. As it was quite likely that the outbreak was introduced to the area by incoming navvies, the railway contributed £100.

Ten navvies died of infectious disease, well over the national average. Over half of these infections were identified as some form of lung disease – tuberculosis, pneumonia or lung infection. Two had ‘continued fever’ and one died from scarletina, which we now know as scarlet fever.

Two of our navvies died of heart disease, no doubt exacerbated by the tough physical work conditions and the lifestyle of the navy. **Joseph Smith** was 64, **Joseph Uttley** was 41.

Average age of death in our sample was 30.8. Our youngest navvies to die were 16 year olds **John Jones**, an engine stoker and **Robert Henry Jackson**, an apprentice blacksmith. The oldest navy, by a considerable margin was **Joseph Smith**, aged 64. 18 of our 22 navvies were aged 40 or under.

When did they die?

The spreadsheet summarises information of the death certificates arranged in chronological order. In the 12 months from March 1872 nearly half of the deaths occurred, including six of those involving a coroner’s inquest. These were across the whole length of the line between Settle and Batty Wife at Ribblehead. Better

Year of death	Number of navvies
1869	1
1870	0
1871	3
1872	8
1873	3
1874	5
1875	2

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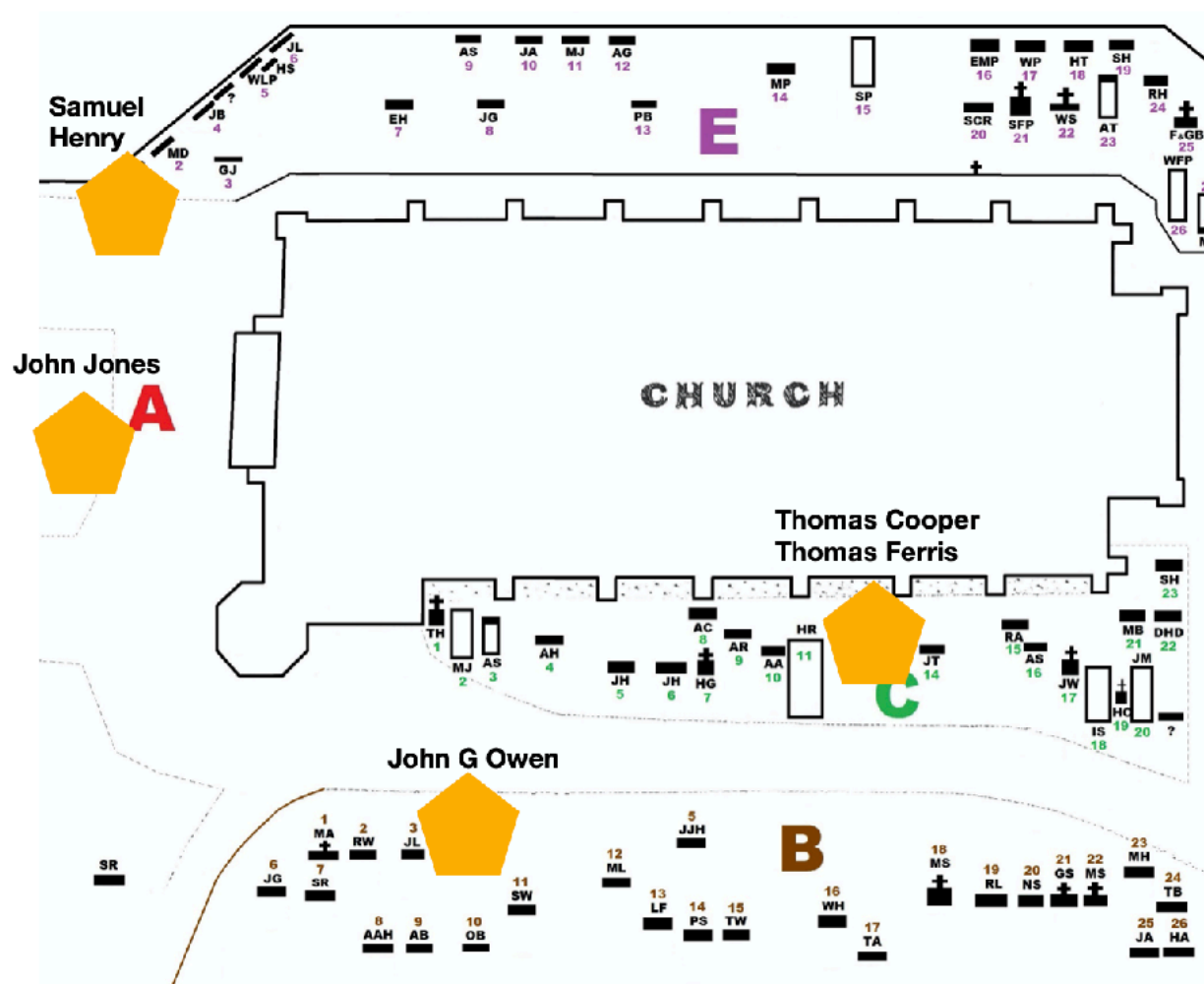
railway historians than I will be able to analyse the link between these deaths and the building of specific sections of the railway.

Where did they die?

The final resting place for all these navvies was the churchyard at Settle. At least six of the navvies died in situ at their place of work along the line but were brought back to Settle for the coroner's inquest. Others were taken to the hospital in Settle, one being transported all the way from Batty Wife which would have been an incredibly uncomfortable journey without pain relief. Those suffering from diseases tended to die in their residences as family, work colleagues or neighbours are reported 'present at death'.

Where were they buried within the graveyard?

The church sexton was responsible for maintaining the map of the graveyard to indicate where burials were located. Unfortunately, the sexton during these years was *William Perkin* who, despite written warnings from the church, didn't keep the map up to date so we will never know where most of the navvies are buried. However, five of them had their lives commemorated with a gravestone, two of them together. The gravestone locations are shown below.



Thomas Cooper, his brother-in-law Thomas Ferris and Samuel Henry were from Catholic families originating in Newry, Ireland. John Griffith Owen was from Anglesey. We do not know where John Jones was from.

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Gravestones: Samuel Henry, John Jones, John G Owen, Thomas Cooper with Thomas Ferris

Research shows there is no specific pattern of burial location within the Ancient graveyard over time. The distribution of these gravestones would suggest that, as with all other burials, the navvies were just buried in the next available plot. There are only two gravestones in area A to the north of the church. It's possible that some of this ground was unconsecrated. Many of the burials in area A were members of working class families who moved away from Settle after the burial so it wouldn't be surprising if some of our navvies were in there too.

The church has no knowledge of any descendants visiting any of the navvies' graves.

Research has found that between 1869 and 1876 there were a further 30 burials who were the infants and children of navy families and a few mothers and wives. At the time of the 1871 census, **William Goddard**, a miner from Derbyshire, was living with his wife **Dora Marsden** in a Jericho navy hut at Ribbleshead. They had married in May 1869. Between then and April 1873 Dora gave birth to and then lost four children, two of them in our graveyard. Daughter Martha lived the longest, for just ten months. Such was navy life.

<i>Jericho</i>	1	<i>William Goddard</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Miner on A Railway</i>
		<i>Dora do</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>26</i>	



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 – Rochdale Observer.