

Private Henry Bowles of the 3rd Hussars

Henry was baptised in August 1839, one of several children to **George**, a policeman and **Elizabeth (Saunders) Bowles**. Along with many other tall, working class labourers, George was attracted by the slightly higher wages of the recently formed Metropolitan Police. By the time of the next census, George was working as a dock labourer. Over half of policemen, possibly including George, were dismissed for consuming alcohol – they were employed on the slightly unrealistic expectations of being on duty and sober 24/7.

Aug 25 1839 Henry George Bowles
 Son of George Bowles
 Elizabeth



At the time of the 1841 census Henry was living with an elderly nurse, **Elizabeth Pawley** – perhaps he was not well? Henry worked as a clerk at the docks before joining the army in the 3rd (King's Own) Hussars, a cavalry regiment. This historic regiment, raised in 1685, had served in famous battles, including the Glorious Revolution, Spanish wars, the Jacobite Risings and the Napoleonic wars. It's possible Henry served in India with the regiment before his death.

In the spring of 1864, Henry found himself subject to disciplinary issues within the regiment. He had been given a sanction of walking instead of riding during the first day's march. This seems to have been a final straw and Henry had attempted suicide twice. Despite this, the 'stiff upper lip' of Victorian military service was probably all the support he received and a third attempt was probably inevitable [1]. 'On the previous day he was in a state of delirium caused by excessive drinking'. On Tuesday, 3rd May 1864, in the Royal Oak Inn, Private Henry Bowles left his comrades who were preparing for the day's march and took his own life in an outhouse.

The article describes the scene in Settle as troops from the regiment passed through, 'For the last week or ten days our unusually quiet town has been considerably enlivened and had quite a military appearance through the almost daily arrival and departure of different troops forming the 3rd Regiment of Hussars, now on the march from the garrisoned towns in Scotland to Manchester'. The inns would have been incredibly busy.

SETTLE.

SUICIDE OF A SOLDIER.—For the last week or ten days our usually quiet town has been considerably enlivened and had quite a military appearance through the almost daily arrival and departure of the different troops forming the 3rd Regiment of Hussars, now on the march from the garrisoned towns in Scotland to Manchester and other places in Lancashire. The daily appearance of the troops and their smart appearance has been a source of considerable attraction, and we are sorry to have to record a melancholy event in connection with their visit, viz., the suicide of a private in the regiment, named Henry Bowles, who shot himself, on Tuesday morning last, at the Royal Oak Inn. It appeared from the evidence of several of his comrades, at the inquest held before Mr. T. Brown, that the deceased had been for several days in a desponding state of mind, and had twice attempted to commit suicide, and that on the previous day he was in a state of delirium caused from excessive drinking. The deceased was along with his comrades in the stable, making preparations for the march, when he left them and went into an outhouse in the yard of the Royal Oak Inn and there shot himself with a carbine. When found he was lying dead in a pool of blood, and the discharged weapon at his feet. The jury returned a verdict of temporary insanity. On Wednesday the body was interred, with military honours, at Settle Church, and the ceremony was witnessed by a large assembly. The band of the North Craven Rifles attended on the occasion.

Giggleswick diarist William Lodge Paley [WLP] was a bachelor and so, typically for men of his class, resided in the local inns. He was usually found at the Black Horse Inn, run by John Waller which was on this occasion overrun with soldiers from the North Lincoln Militia. In other entries William complained about

Sep 24.—Had 17 soldiers and 3 women at Mr. Waller's last night, being part of a detachment of the North Lincoln Militia on their march to that city to be discharged, and have about half that number to-day. Cast up mill accounts for pay last night.

having to share a bed because of the number of military visitors.

As was the norm, neither article [2] shows any compassion for poor Henry's plight. Four companions stayed with him 'until the arrival of the next troop, by whom he was buried' so it seems that no-one he knew attended his funeral. At least Henry was buried with military honours, witnessed by a 'large assembly'. Obviously, it's not every day something like this happens in Settle. It's likely a flag would have been draped over Henry's coffin and a volley of shots fired as a salute. The band of the North Craven Rifles also attended and so he would have had a musical tribute. Henry was buried in an unmarked grave.

SUICIDE OF ONE OF THE 3RD HUSSARS.—On Tuesday noon, another troop of this regiment arrived in town from Settle. Early on that morning a private of the regiment named Henry Bowles, aged 22, committed suicide at his billet at the Royal Oak, Settle. He got up at the usual time in the morning, and went into the wash-house, as his companions thought, for the purpose of washing himself. Shortly after, the report of a carbine was heard, examination was made, and Bowles found laid dead upon the floor; he seems to have put the muzzle of his loaded carbine to his forehead and then discharged it, for the shot had entered his forehead and gone through the back part of his head. The regiment had recently come from Scotland, and Bowles, for some disgraceful conduct, was ordered to perform the first day's journey on foot. This is supposed to have preyed upon his mind, and led to the fatal result. Four of his companions stayed with the body till the arrival of the next troop, by whom he was buried.

Henry was one of at least eight victims of suicide in the graveyard and there are a couple of rather strange accidents which could also have been attempts at suicide. There was no welfare state, nor official support for people with mental health problems. Some people became so desperate that they took their own lives, usually recorded as a moment of 'temporary insanity'. Surprisingly, all of these unfortunate people were from professional, religious or trading backgrounds, and all were men.

Through history suicide has been regarded as one of the ultimate sins. Medieval 'coroners', deriving from 'crowner' served the crown. Their role was primarily to decide taxes payable at death. If they and their jury decided the deceased had committed suicide the victim's whole estate was surrendered to the crown. If someone died outside their home town, the community in which they were found had to pay additional taxes (incredibly, to deter locals from killing strangers or Norman invaders). Local justice scenarios were regarded as with scepticism by some as coroners seemed to make so much money from them. They provided rich pickings for satirists and cartoonists. This one read, *Juror — The man's alive Sir, for he has open'd one eye. Coroner — Sir the doctor declared him Dead two hours since & he must remain Dead Sir so I shall proceed with the inquest [ph1]*. Coroners were said to frequent more public houses (for inquests) than any other men alive!

As time has evolved the role of the coroner has evolved to 'conduct an inquest into the manner or cause of death, and to investigate or confirm the identity of an unknown person who has been found dead.' The coroner in Henry's case was Thomas Brown of Skipton, a solicitor who was given the position of Coroner for West Yorkshire for life. His son Thomas Parkinson Brown was his deputy and took over the solicitor's business and role of County Coroner



Settle Graveyard Project

when Thomas (Snr) died.

Suicide was a criminal offence until 1961 and insurance schemes would not pay out for victims of suicide. The Church of England had strict rules about these burials and subject to the vicar's discretion, prevented funeral services inside the church, burials in consecrated ground or during daylight hours. The General Synod eventually decreed that these burials could have full services inside the church in 2015. Fortunately the vicars at Holy Ascension were compassionate and all of the burials of suicidal victims in Settle Graveyard appear to be in consecrated ground and routinely buried amongst other burials. May they all rest in peace.



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 – Leeds Intelligencer, 2 – Burnley advertiser

WLP – the diaries of William Lodge Paley with the kind permission of the North Craven Buildings Preservation Trust.

ph1 – credited to legalhistorymiscellany.com