

William Knott Stephenson, eccentric accountant

C16 In memory of Annie the wife of WK Stephenson of Settle who died 24th October 1850. Also of Arthur their son who died on the 7th day of November 1850 aged 19 days.

Annie Howe, born in 1815, was the daughter of a Kendal saddler. In 1849 she married the (much younger) William Knott Stephenson from Lancaster, born in 1826. Annie died in Settle, aged 35, giving birth to their first child, Arthur, who soon followed.



William's dad Abraham was a Lancaster horse-keeper and innkeeper – in the days of coaching inns these roles were often linked. Abraham died when William was just ten. After Annie's death William went back to Lancaster and lived with his mum Elizabeth Knott. A few years later he married local girl Ann Birkett and they had at least seven children, the youngest also named Arthur. William worked as an accountant and was employed by the railways for most of his life but later worked with his wife in the china and earthenware trade.

1866 was a bad year for William. He had a couple of appearances in court during which judges described his conduct as 'highly improper'. Allegedly, William threatened an employer, Mr Lawrence Holden, a solicitor and coroner with '*a heavy oak stick, one of the heaviest I ever saw*' to obtain wages he felt he was due, whilst drunk [1,2]. The first case was dismissed on a technicality, but William was fined 40 shillings for second case a week later.

time, when he was sober. He said he would not leave the house until Mr Holden paid him £75 he owed him. He used a deal of excited and violent language, and after we had been in the lobby about five minutes, he cried out, "You owe me £75 for keeping the Phoenix Foundry books, and I'll have it." Mr Holden said, "I don't owe you anything of the kind," or words to that effect. Mr Stephenson called out in very loud tones, "You are a liar," at the same time raising a stick, and in my belief was about to strike Mr Holden. Immediately my son took hold of Mr Stephenson's arms, and Mr Holden also took hold of him. He made resistance, but was forced into the road. In the struggle several of us were on the ground. I can't say how many,

ASSAULT UPON A CORONER.—At the Judges' Lodgings, on Saturday, William Knott Stephenson, accountant was charged with assaulting Mr. Lawrence Holden, coroner. Defendant had been summoned the week previously for an assault and battery on Mr. Holden, on which occasion the information was dismissed, on the ground that no battery had been proved. A summons for assault only was then taken out.—The magistrates on Saturday considered that a most unjustifiable assault had been committed, and fined the defendant 40s. and costs. The assault took place in Mr. Holden's house, to which defendant had gained admittance whilst under the influence of liquor.

In the same year he was again summoned to court for an investigation into electoral fraud, and questioned about bribing voters as a Liberal supporter. In 1891, William was brought to court for using insulting language. This case was amicably sorted, with William apologising profusely and paying costs [3].

USING INSULTING LANGUAGE.
William Knott Stephenson, accountant, New-street, was summoned for using provoking and insulting language to Richard Bond, stock and share broker, Lancaster, on the 6th inst.—Mr. Clark appeared for

Obituaries, quite rightly, celebrate success and achievement. In 1896, William's obituary painted quite a different side to this drunken, foul-mouthed accountant and explained why he was in Settle in 1850, and later in the early 1870s. He was described as a '*railway pioneer*' and a '*man of some eccentricity, but of great ability*' William had surveyed several railway lines with Sir Thomas Storey. William was a promoter of both Settle railways [4].

A RAILWAY PIONEER.—The *Lancaster Times* notices the death last week, of a railway pioneer in the person of Mr. William Knott Stephenson, well known in the six northern counties. He was an uncle of Mr. R. W. Bellis, the present master of the Clewer Green Schools. Mr. Stephenson, who is described as a man of some eccentricity of character, but of great ability, was engaged in the survey of several lines in the early railway days, with Sir Thomas Storey and others. He was one of the promoters of the Settle and Carlisle Railways, and the Little North Western, now known as the Morecombe and Lancaster Branch of the Midland Railway. Singularly enough, only a week previous occurred the death of Mrs. Bellis's uncle, Surgeon General Hendley, C.B.

Settle Graveyard Project

Sir Thomas was appointed as railway surveyor for the Midland Railway Skipton to Morecambe Line when he was just 20 and later became Chairman of several Lancashire Coal and iron companies, trading internationally. Sir Thomas was the Mayor of Lancaster four times so William was in good company [ph1].



After William's death Ann continued working as an earthenware dealer with some of her children, most of whom remained unmarried.

These days William would probably be diagnosed with a form of Asperger Syndrome. His immense ability, social gaffs, 'eccentricity' and great sense of justice are typical. William was probably a brilliant man who may not have been appreciated by his peers because of his behaviour.



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'.

Newspaper cutting with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 – Lancaster Gazette, 2 – Preston Chronicle, 3 – Lancaster Guardian, 4 – Windsor and Eton Express

ph1 – credited to gracesguide.co.uk