

Joseph Fishwick, a nonconformist & bit of a rumpus!

Joseph Fishwick was born around 1787 in Rathmell, possibly the illegitimate son of **Alice Fishwick**. He worked as an agricultural labourer, renting the farm Scoutber End, behind Rathmell. It wasn't until he was 45, in 1832, that he married **Elizabeth Towler**, an illegitimate daughter of **Isabella Towler**, also from Rathmell and 15 years his junior. They had three children, **William, John** and **Mary Ann Fishwick**.

It was an uneventful life until Joseph made the headlines upon his death. Elizabeth's mother, Isabella Towler died in 1854, aged an impressive 83 and was one of the earlier burials in Rathmell graveyard — the church had been consecrated in 1843 and Isabella was the 31st burial. **Reverend Edward**

Male conducted the service. Before that burials were at Giggleswick, including Joseph's mother Alice who died in 1832, aged 79. Joseph was deaf for a few years before he died in March 1855, aged 70. Widow Elizabeth went to see the Reverend Edward Male to arrange the burial.

Reverend Edward Male had only recently arrived in Rathmell, in January 1854, after serving at Leeds Parish Church and in Worcestershire. He had excellent credentials. His father, **George Edward Male**, had been a pioneer in forensic medicine and was the Chair of Medical Practitioners in Birmingham, *'The father of English Medical Jurisprudence'* [ph1]. Despite a *'degree of deafness'* George Edward was a good man, known to provide free medical care, vaccination and midwifery for the poor, from his own house.



George Edward died in the line of work, sort of. *'Dr Male's death in 1845 was an unusual one'*. He suffered for some time with severe rheumatism and tried a number of remedies on himself without relief. Following a paper by Dr Alexander Fleming (unrelated to the inventor of penicillin), George Edward decided to try a tincture of aconite which he took three times daily, gradually increasing the dose. Unfortunately he died on the sixth day of treatment. Aconite, otherwise known as monkshood or wolfsbane is a lethal poison inducing an array of awful effects.



George Edward Male MD — The Father of English Medical Jurisprudence

Dr Male's death in 1845 was an unusual one. He suffered for some time with severe rheumatic pains especially of the back and hips, for which he tried a number of remedies without relief. In July 1845 was published Dr Alexander Fleming's *'Inquiry into the Physiological and Medicinal Properties of the Aconitum Napellus'* based upon Fleming's Gold Medal Edinburgh dissertation, which recommended tincture of aconite as a specific for rheumatic pains. Dr Male decided to try aconite, which he took as the tincture in the recommended dosage of five minims three times daily, increasing gradually to ten minims, but he reached only one dose of ten minims before dying on the sixth day of treatment.

So Edward [ph2] had an excellent background and graduated from both Cambridge and Oxford. He was ordained in 1841. Unfortunately, he inherited less compassionate genes than his father! Edward refused to conduct the funeral service for Joseph Fishwick because Joseph was a nonconformist, despite burying his mother-in-law the year before. As reported in several newspapers Rev Edward Male said, *'The late Joseph Fishwick was notoriously a neglecter of public worship and the testaments, and no-one is able to testify of his repentance in these respects.'*[1,SC] As such, Joseph was effectively excommunicated and could not be buried within the established church. There were local no burial grounds for nonconformists so what were the Fishwick's supposed to do? What a caring man!

REFUSAL TO BURY AT RATHMELL.—In last Saturday's *Leeds Mercury* there is a rather long account on the above subject. We understand the Rev. E. Male refused to read the burial service over the body of the late Joseph Fishwick, of Rathmell Moor; the reasons for which are contained in the following letter copied from the *Mercury*.

"Rathmell, March 14, 1855.

"To the Representatives of the late Joseph Fishwick.

"Sir,—Application having been made to me to read the burial service of the church over the body of the late Joseph Fishwick, I write this statement of my reasons for declining to do so:—

"The late J. F. was not in communion with the church, having separated himself from it by his own act, and having attended, if any, the meetings of a society calling themselves Independents.

"Such persons are declared by the canons of the Church of England 'excommunicated *ipso facto*,' that is, by the simple fact of their separation; and in the prayer book we are forbidden to use the burial service for any that die excommunicate. The late J. F. was also notoriously a neglecter of public worship and the sacraments, and no one is able to testify of his repentance in these respects. Under these circumstances I do not consider that I can conscientiously read the burial service over the body, and must, therefore, decline doing so. I will further add that Rathmell Church, being a district church, in the parish of Giggleswick. I believe that burial there cannot be claimed by any one, but at the same time, I make no objection to the friends of J. F. laying the corpse there if they think fit; but it must be without the service of the church.

"I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

"EDWARD MALE,

"Incumbent of Holy Trinity church, Rathmell.'

Edward incurred the wrath of the papers in no uncertain terms with a headline 'Clerical Bigotry'! It said, *'During the last few years the clergymen of the*

CLERICAL BIGOTRY.

Church of England have been divided in their feelings and bearing towards their fellow Christians. While one portion have been gradually growing in liberality towards Nonconformists, another portion have gone in the opposite direction and exhibited an amount of bigotry and intolerance almost unequalled since the days of Laude.' (This refers to William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury to Charles 1 who was know for his extreme views of worshippers) *'Of one of this latter class it is now our task to speak. Joseph Fishwick rented a small farm at Scoutber End, Rathmell. Last week after an illness of some duration, Mr Fishwick died and his friends intended to inter his remains in the graveyard of his Rathmell township. The incumbent of that place of worship, however, Rev Edward Male, is a gentleman who appears to hold notions of his own upon the matter; and because the deceased had not been a communicant at Rathmell Church, this priest peremptorily refused to read the burial service over the body.'*[1] Edward later said he would allow the body to be buried at Rathmell but would not conduct the burial service. **Rev William Coulthurst**, the vicar at Giggleswick offered to bury Joseph there instead, although Edward had insisted that he should

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not be buried within the established church. The paper concluded, '*Conduct such as that of Rev Edward Male furnishes its own comment. The circumstances will be brought under the notice of the Bishop of Ripon.*' Ouch!

Funnily enough Rev Edward Male did not conduct any further burials at Rathmell church and was quickly replaced by **Rev Matthew Forde Smythe** who, after Edward, was welcomed by the community with open arms. At the Easter festival, '*the reciprocal feeling of friendship and gratitude which pervaded the whole, it evidently seems to foreshadow "good times coming".*' A year later, in April 1856, Edward married **Elizabeth Geldard** of the Cappleside landowning family. The service was conducted by Rev Smythe, Edward's replacement. Immediately after the wedding they moved away to Lincolnshire and then Oxfordshire where Edward served as a '*clergyman*



without care of souls' and threw himself into literary work. During the 1890s he translated '*The Ancient Fathers on the Office and Work of the Priesthood*'.



Edward and Elizabeth had one daughter, **Caroline Elizabeth Male** [ph2] who remained a spinster and had a very comfortable life in Worcestershire, looked after by numerous servants. The majority of stained glass windows and memorials in the church are dedicated to members of the Geldard family who were the main benefactors. As such, the oak screen around the font is dedicated to Elizabeth (Geldard) Male [ph2]. Some would argue she deserved some memorial having been married to Edward! A silver altar cross was given to the church by **Miss Openshaw**, a Geldard relation. The design was based on a 15th century Spanish cross procured from Seville by Elizabeth in 1853 as a processional cross for Wychbold Church, Droitwich where she had been living.

Meanwhile, what about the Fishwick family? In contrast to Rev Edward Male, as working class agricultural labourers there is very little information available. As we know, Joseph was buried in Giggleswick graveyard, hopefully with his mum and probably within the area for nonconformists. Widow Elizabeth stayed at Scoutber End farming with the help of her unmarried son John Fishwick until she died in 1880, aged 79. John had a few court appearances for being drunk and disorderly so perhaps didn't cope too well with the events that had happened? Both Elizabeth and John were buried in Rathmell graveyard in unmarked graves.

Son William Fishwick, a farmer and mechanic, married **Eliza Brennand**, the decorator's daughter and they moved to Lancashire with their three children. Daughter Mary Ann married **Benjamin Ayrton** and they farmed in Gisburn Forest with their family.



This account has been compiled by Sarah Lister as part of the Settle Graveyard Project which has recorded gravestone inscriptions, updated church records and researched the lives of those

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buried. It has been written in good faith with no offence intended. If I have inadvertently included errors or breached any copyright I apologise and would welcome corrections.

The life stories of people with italicised names have been researched as part of the graveyard project and can be found on [dalescommunityarchives.org.uk/settle graveyard project](http://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'.

With thanks to Alan Hemsworth for his help with this account. Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 –Leeds Mercury

SC – Settle Chronicle with the kind permission of the North Craven Buildings Preservation Trust

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