

The Birtwells, patient parents

Edward Birtwell was one of 12 children of **Abraham Birtwell** and his wife **Elizabeth Tomlinson** who ran a grocer's shop in Clayton-le-Moors near Accrington. Out of the 12 siblings only Edward and there other siblings married; **Richard**, sister **Elizabeth (Birtwell) Hodgson** and **Daniel**. The other siblings lived together all their lives and even sister Elizabeth and her family lived with her parents while they were alive.

Brother Richard Birtwell, a pawnbroker, got into a bit of trouble, 10 shillings worth, in 1878. A constable found Richard drunk in the street and told him to go home but then followed him into the Royal Oak public house in Oswaldtwistle, only to find him downing another drink. The landlord was fined 20 shillings for breaching his licence by serving a man who was drunk [1]. Harsh! The press interpreted this as a warning to publicans.

IMPORTANT TO PUBLICANS.—At the Police Court, on Thursday, John Entwistle, landlord of the Royal Oak public house, Oswaldtwistle, was summoned for a breach of the Licensing Act, and [Richard] [Birtwell] for aiding and abetting.—Mr. Radcliffe appeared for

There were brains in this family as three of Edward's brothers became medical practitioners. **Thomas Tomlinson Birtwell** and **Henry Hargeave Birtwell** stayed in Clayton-le-Moors although Thomas gave up and became a joiner and at the time of each census return Henry described himself as a 'surgeon, not practising' for some reason. By the age of 21 brother **Daniel Birtwell** had emigrated to Natal (Durban) South Africa where he married **Annie Botha**. Annie just happened to be the sister of **Louis Botha** who later became prime minister of South Africa. Daniel built a home for the family in 1879 which is now celebrated as a historic building and national monument [ph1]. After he died in 1922 the building was sold to the government who used it to house one of their magistrates. Since 1973 it has been used as the Greytown museum, considered to be one of the best small museums in South Africa.



Edward worked as a joiner. By 1867 he had met **Ellen Harrison**, a Langcliffe draper's daughter. They married at Giggleswick Church by licence rather than by banns. This would have been expensive and was sometimes used by those who needed to marry 'in a hurry' although that doesn't seem to be the case with Edward and Ellen. One of their witnesses was **Joseph Wright Greenwood**. They moved straight back to Clayton-le-Moors [2] to have their family of three sons and then moved to Oswaldtwistle. Edward and Ellen were still in Oswaldtwistle at the time of the 1911 census and died there aged 71 in 1917, and aged 72 in 1918 respectively. They were buried back in Settle in a quiet corner of graveyard *Old FX65*.

EDWARD BIRTWELL,
233, WHALLEY ROAD, Clayton-le-Moors
and
27, EAGLE STREET, BLACKBURN ROAD,
Oswaldtwistle,
JOINER AND CABINET MAKER.
Repairs Neatly Executed.
Funerals Completely Furnished.
177 Wreaths Always in Stock

Edward and Ellen's eldest son **Robert Harrison Birtwell** followed his uncles to become a medical practitioner. He worked in Gloucestershire and had a wife and two daughters. Second son **Henry Birtwell** became a textiles exporter and was based in Urmston, Manchester. Youngest son **Daniel**

Birtwell, born 11 years after Henry, started working at the Post Office in Accrington but later described himself as an apprentice watchmaker.

April 1910 was a very bad year for the family. On 15 April 1910 one creative journalist reported that 'a conscience stricken hen-roost robber' took three fowls worth 10 shillings 6d from Edward's hen coop. He tried to sell them but had a fit of conscience and then shooed them back to Edward's house [3]. Despite his goodwill the robber was fined 30 shillings in lieu of 14 days in prison. The newspaper obviously felt sorry for him as they left him unnamed! The theft had taken place on the 4th April.

CONSCIENCE STRICKEN'
HEN STEALING AT OSWALDTWISTLE
 A story of a conscience-stricken hen-roost robber was told before the Church magistrates to-day, the prisoner being John Holmes (24), of Tower-street, Spread Eagle, Oswaldtwistle. The evidence was to the effect that the prisoner took three fowls, worth 10s 6d, from a hencote belonging to Edward Birtwell, of Spread Eagle-street, Oswaldtwistle, on the night of the 4th inst. After unsuccessfully

On the day of the news report a far more serious crime took place generating some awful headlines [2,3]. Daniel was accused of unlawfully wounding his parents. He attacked Edward with a poker, thinking he was a stranger and then, when Ellen intervened, attacked her as well. There were reports of a lot of blood! During the hearing it transpired that, five years previously, Daniel had fractured his skull in two places, damaging his brain and

SON AND THE POKER.
OSWALDTWISTLE MAN IN CUSTODY.
 Daniel Birtwell (27), a watchmaker, of Spread Eagle-street, Oswaldtwistle, was yesterday accused before the Church magistrates with unlawfully wounding his father and mother, Edward and Helen Birtwell, by striking them on the head with a poker yesterday.
 The mother stated that prisoner had had his skull fractured in two places in the past, and had not been working for about twelve months, but he had been able to go errands. He was peculiar at times. About three o'clock yesterday afternoon her husband said something to her son about his work, and the son struck his father on the head several times with a poker. When she interfered her son struck her twice on the head with the same weapon.
 Prisoner asked no questions, but said he was very sorry for what had happened. At Superintendent Palmer's request the prisoner was remanded for a week.

OSWALDTWISTLE MAN'S VIOLENCE
TERRIBLE AFFAIR AT SPREAD EAGLE.
YOUNG MAN ATTACKS HIS PARENTS WITH POKER.
STATED TO BE MENTALLY DEFECTIVE.
COMMITTED TO THE SESSIONS.

leading to a stay in an asylum. Since he came out Daniel had been unemployed. 'He had been able to go on errands but was peculiar at times.' Daniel's lawyer tried to stop the trial on the basis of diminished responsibility, 'The prisoner is not guilty in law of any offence because he

What conclusion did that lead you to?—There is a possibility that trepanning might do the prisoner a lot of good.
 Any other conclusion?—When I saw prisoner on the day in question I came to the conclusion he was insane.

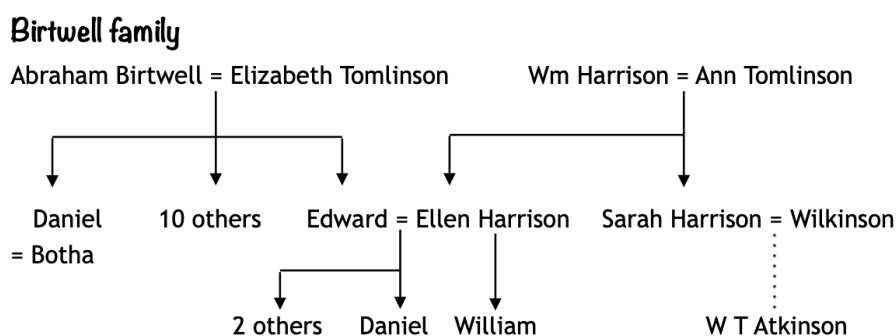


has no control over himself.' A mental health 'expert' examined Daniel and concluded that he was insane and may benefit from trepanning, a horrific procedure, used since pre-historic times, in which a hole is drilled into the skull to reduce pressure on the brain [ph2]. With these findings in mind the charge was reduced to assault and Daniel's brother, Dr Richard Harrison Birtwell, arranged for his entry into an asylum where he could have the operation. Sure enough he was admitted to Whittingham Asylum

on 23 May [ph3]. At that time Whittingham Asylum provided for nearly 2000 patients with mental illness. We have no evidence of the success of the procedure however Daniel stayed in the asylum until he died of phthisis (tuberculosis) eight years later [4].

ASYLUM PATIENT'S DEATH.—At Whittingham Asylum, this afternoon, Mr. John Parker, coroner, held an inquest upon the body of **Daniel Birtwell** (35), an inmate, who died in the hospital at 6 50 pp.m. on Monday.—The evidence showed that the deceased, formerly a labourer, had been admitted to the asylum while serving a term of imprisonment. On June 8th, having exhibited signs of phthisis, he was admitted to hospital. He continued to grow weaker, and died as stated.—The jury returned a verdict of "Death from natural causes."

It's possible that Daniel's accident may not have been the only cause of his mental illness — perhaps there were genetic reasons too. Daniel's uncle Daniel Birtwell, who had emigrated to South Africa, had a son **Hubert Hugh Birtwell** who died under the age of 30 having spent several years in an asylum in South Africa.



At the time of the 1871 census Edward and Ellen were found in Kirkgate Settle visiting Ellen's sister **Sarah (Harrison) Wilkinson** and family and her father **William Harrison** (who eventually died in 1905 aged 90!) and a 5 year old **William Harrison**. Young William was Ellen's illegitimate son, born 18 months before her marriage to Edward. Sarah (Harrison) Wilkinson and her husband **Joseph Wilkinson**, a tailor, didn't have children of their own so they brought up William. He transpired to be an intelligent lad and became the Headmaster of Farnborough Grammar School. His skills were called upon to help run a new technical school in Wigan [5]. William married **Dinah Syers** whose family had come to Langcliffe from Snetterton in Norfolk. William and Dinah had two sons and a daughter before William died, aged just 29. One son became a doctor, another a chemist and the daughter married a doctor as well.

TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE.
 This Committee reported that the sub-Committee appointed to make arrangements for establishing extra classes, reported that classes had been formed for teaching the French language, mathematics, and shorthand; and that they had engaged Mr. **William Harrison**, B.A., head master of the Farnworth Grammar School, and Mr. **B. Maunier**, of Liverpool, as teachers. Circular letter

After young William fled the nest Joseph and Sarah Wilkinson's house may have felt empty and they adopted **William Theodore Atkinson**, born in 1894. William Theodore was the illegitimate son of **Cecilia Beatrice Atkinson** and a railway porter, **Frederick Henry Butt**. For some reason they

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didn't marry each other but both married later — Frederick married **Mary Alice Kilburn** and they lived in Long Preston. Cecilia married a miner from Bolton, **Andrew Ball**, and they took their family off to New Zealand. That's certainly a fresh start. Cecilia Beatrice Atkinson had been the illegitimate daughter of **Agnes Atkinson** who died aged 25, when Cecilia was just two. In her teens, Agnes had witnessed her step-grandfather, 75 year old **Christopher Wright**, being beaten to death by a navy. William Theodore Atkinson stayed in Settle with a successful career as an upholsterer for Hargers furniture business. He married **Emily Louise Ross** and had a family.

Sarah (Harrison) Wilkinson died in 1917, aged 78 and husband Joseph followed a year later aged 74. They are buried in the unmarked grave *Old GX65*. The grave immediately in front of them, the unmarked *Old FX65* contains Ellen (Harrison) Birtwell, Edward, poor son Daniel and also dad William Harrison. Sarah and Ellen's mother, **Ann Tomlinson**, died when she was just 35, in 1852 and was buried in the Ancient graveyard.



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 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'.

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 — Burnley Express, 2 — Haslingden Gazette, 3 — Northern Daily Telegraph, 4 — Lancashire Evening Post, 5 — Widnes Examiner

ph1 — photo credited to kznpr.co.zx, ph2 — credited to Wikipedia, the painting of The Extraction of the Stone of Madness, by Hieronymus Bosch depicting trepanation (c. 1488-1516), ph3 — credited to worldabanded.com