

Ribblehead Tales . . . Archibald Cameron, policeman

Can you imagine a more difficult job than being the police constable at Batty Green, Ribblehead during the building of the Settle to Carlisle Railway? Railway navvies have a well deserved reputation for crime. Petty Sessions in local courts presided over numerous offences including drunk and disorderly behaviour, assault, theft (of property and wives) and even murder — see *Atkinson*. It's not surprising as navvies and their families had a hard life in harsh territory fuelled by copious supplies of alcohol.

Many navvies at Ribblehead acquired a criminal record either before they arrived or during their stay. Serving on the railway was actually an alternative to being locked up with hard labour. Some navvies were given a 'ticket-of-leave' to work on the railway, reporting to the local authorities as part of the deal. In January 1872 **Robert Evans**, alias **Joseph Wallace** was taken to court for failing to report to the chief officer. He got away with it 'with a caution and some good advice' as he had 'conducted himself with great propriety'[1]. Navvying provided a fresh start with a relatively good salary and a new name was sometimes helpful.

He was fined 1s. and 11s. 6d. costs.—Robert Evans, alias Joseph Wallace, a ticket-of-leave man, working at the railway works, Batty Green, Ingleton Fells, was brought up under apprehension for not having reported himself to the chief officer of the district. He pleaded ignorance of the law on the subj. et. It appeared that he was convicted at Liverpool in April, 1865, of larceny, and sentenced to seven years' transportation. He was discharged on the 23rd November, 1870, with a ticket-of-leave. He had worked at the Liverpool docks till four months ago, when he came to Batty Green, where, according to Mr. Supt. Exton's account, he has conducted himself with great propriety—never having been seen in a public-house. The Bench took a merciful view of the case and discharged him with a caution and some good advice.—There were three different cases of assault, but, with the permission of the Bench, they were all compromised.

Archie Cameron obviously liked a challenge and must have been successful as he stayed at Ribblehead for the duration of the building of the railway.

At the time of the 1871 census Archie lived at the Inkerman part of Batty Wife Hole with his new wife, **Jane Walker**, her brother **James Walker**, a grocer and her brother-in-law, **Oliver Bowker**, a saddler and husband of Jane's sister **Margaret Walker**. The Walkers were one of many trading

Oliver Bowker	Head	Mar	47	Saddler	York, Wargolffe
James Walker	Wife	Mar	44	Esq.	Do. Blathane
Archie Cameron	Wife	Mar	26	Police Officer	Scotland
Jane	Wife	Mar	26	Housekeeper	York, Benthorn

families who 'came to the shanty towns like wasps attracted to a jam pot' to exploit the opportunities there[2]. At the same time Jane's other brother, **John Walker** was living in a navvy hut at Cowgill, Dentdale where he worked as a bookkeeper for the railway.

THERE were shops at Batty Wife Hole, and hawkers came to the shanty town like wasps attracted to a jam pot. The navvies ate vast quantities of beef, and cattle were driven in on the hoof to satisfy their appetites.

Archie was born in 1845 in Abernethy, Inverness-shire, the son of a farmer, and signed up to the West Riding Police Force on 23 May 1870 when he was 24. This was his first post after working as a farm servant. Talk about 'in at the deep end'. Archie's police records describe him as 5 foot 11¼ inches tall with blue eyes, brown hair and a fair complexion. Archie was exceptionally tall for the 1870s. Policing was a physical job in those days so strong, tall men were preferred. On 17 June 1870 he began his duties, up at Ribblehead, with three weeks training under his belt!

Sworn on the 23. May 1870.
Archie Cameron

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1871. Marriage solemnized at Chapel-le-Dale in the Parish of Chapel-le-Dale in the County of York

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
53	January 10	Archie Cameron	25	Bachelor	Police Officer	Chapel-le-Dale	William Cameron	Farmer
		Jane Walker	26	Spinster		Chapel-le-Dale	Richard Walker	Saddler

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by me, after banns
William Harper

This Marriage was solemnized between us, { Archie Cameron } in the Presence of us, { James Walker }
James Walker William Harper

Archie

didn't like to hang about. Just 7 months later, on 10 January 1871 he married Jane Walker at St Leonard's Church in Chapel-le-Dale. She was the daughter of saddler **Richard Walker** of Bentham who had passed away in 1862. Despite the hazards of the shanty town, Jane immediately started on the production of four children in the next four years, baptised at St Leonard's church. Like so many others Jane and Archie lost children in infancy — daughter Jane was buried on 15 March 1874, aged 5 months and Sarah Ann followed on 1 September 1874, aged just over 1 one year. A son **William Richard Cameron** and youngest daughter Margaret survived.

Obviously, it would have been wild at Ribbleshead as drunkenness, theft, assault and worse were rife. Archie would have been a very busy man. Newspaper reports show that Archie was roped in to policing in the wider district, using undercover plain clothes policing to catch people gambling on a Sunday, and loitering on Settle Bridge on a Sunday. With everything else going on at Ribbleshead it says a lot that these offences in Settle were deemed a priority[1]. In January 1871 Archie took **John Parker** to court for breaking four squares of glass and window frame at Batty Green, the property of **Sarah Wilcock**, and assaulting her[1]. Obviously, glass was an expensive luxury in those days. If it's the same John Parker, he was a railway labourer from Warwickshire living at 29 Batty Wife Hole with his wife. Either way, John was fined £1 with costs of 11 shillings which wouldn't really make much of a dent in John's pay packet. (One of George and Sarah Wilkins' lodgers was **William Griffiths** from Somerset who died of smallpox in April 1871 and George was present at his death.)

PETTY SESSIONS, TUESDAY LAST.—Before J. Birkbeck, Esq., (Chairman), Rev. H. J. Swale, C. Ingleby, and H. Christie, Esqrs.—*Caution to Loungers on the Bridge:* Numerous complaints having of late been received by the police of persons loitering on the bridge on Sundays, to the great annoyance and inconvenience of persons passing along the road, it was determined, if possible, to put a stop to the practice, and accordingly, 24 summonses were issued against persons found congregated together on the bridge on Sunday evening, the 12th ult., thereby causing an obstruction on the footpath, and on the highway. The

was paid.—John Parker was brought up in custody by P. C. Cameron, charged with breaking 4 squares of glass and window frame at Batty Green, the property of Sarah Wilcock. Fined 10s. to pay 6s. damages and costs 7s. 6d., and also further charged with assaulting in an aggravated manner Sarah Wilcock at Batty Green. Fined £1 and to pay costs 11s.

More seriously, in May 1873 Archie had to try and arrest railway labourer **George Young** who had 'unlawfully and maliciously exploded some dynamite at the Gearstones Inn causing considerable damage. The oven and fire place were blown out, the kettle was smashed to fragments and fifteen squares of glass broken. The hearthstone on the floor above was lifted up.' [3] There were several witnesses including

THROWING DYNAMITE INTO A DWELLING-HOUSE.
George Young, 30, excavator, was charged with unlawfully, maliciously, and feloniously, by the explosion of a certain explosive substance called dynamite, doing damage to a dwelling-house in the occupation of Francis Yates, at Gearstones, on the 12th May. Mr. Fenwick

George Wright 'who was fearfully burnt on his face and hands.' This could be the same George Wright who was living at 23 Batty Wife Hole, Inkerman at the time of the 1871 census. Archie managed to arrest George Young despite his protests, 'Liberate me and I'll smash the house' and found dynamite and caps in his pocket[1]. Later George

George Wright, of Dent's Head, labourer, (who was fearfully burnt on his face and hands) confirmed the statement of the previous witness — Archibald Cameron, policeman, stated that he took the prisoner into custody and charged him with the offence. He denied it, but said "Liberate me and I'll smash all the house." Having searched him, he (the policeman) found in his pocket one package and a half of dynamite and a box of caps, such as are used in firing it.—The prisoner declined to make any statement, and was committed to the Leeds Assizes to stand his trial.

pleaded that he was drunk and did not know what he was doing. He said he would never have done it if he was sober — ah, the life of a navvy![2] George Young was sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour and, if it's any consolation, made headlines across the country.

A series of reminiscences about the navvies in 1955 [2] mentioned that Archie investigated a fatal fight at Dent Head in 1874. Assuming it's the right one, this is the fight on 9 August 1874 between 23 year old **William Williams** from Cardiganshire who was a tunnel

They drank beer in fantastic quantities. In fact the ale can was the cause of nearly all the troubles which beset them.

miner and 30 year old railway labourer **John Adkins/Atkins**, aka *Policeman Jack*. With a nickname like that he's going to be a big man! Depending on which account you read it seems that Atkins challenged Williams to a fight, and despite Williams' hesitation, they went out to fight on the road between Dent and Ingleton. After a few rounds taking a quarter of an hour, Williams fell down and hit the back of his head and, when picked up, was found to be speechless and died about five minutes later

They fought. Archie Cameron, policeman at Batty Wife Hole, investigated a fatal fight at Dent Head in 1874. The dead man's arms and the side of his chest and ribs were "considerably discoloured, the face and scalp bruised and swollen."

[4]. The case eventually went to court in Leeds in March 1875. On the advice of his counsel John Atkins pleaded guilty to manslaughter and said that the other man insisted on the fight which was a fair stand up fight. It was decided that, 'as the prisoner had been in confinement for sometime, [7 months] the judge sentenced him to four weeks' imprisonment.'[5] George

FATAL FIGHT AT DENT-HEAD.—A fight took place on Sunday morning last between William Williams and John Atkins, alias Policeman Jack, which ended fatally. It appears that the two men were not on very good terms, and about nine o'clock on the morning in question Atkins went to Williams and asked him if he was in the humour to fight. Williams hesitated and wished not to do so, but ultimately he accepted the challenge, and the two men, followed by a large crowd,

prisoner had been in confinement for some time, the JUDGE sentenced him to four weeks' imprisonment.

Young, the dynamite thrower may have had something to say about that! The case was reported in Wales, obviously, and the paper there commented 'there are a great number of Welshman from Anglesey and Caernarvonshire working in these parts'[6]. Welsh masons were in particularly great demand because of the quality of their work.

Once the railway was built Archie became the full time police constable at Garsdale. Unfortunately, Jane died there in 1877, aged 33 when youngest daughter Margaret was just two. Obviously Archie couldn't look after the children and do his job so, 18 months later he married the much younger **Nancy Willan**. Incidentally, in 1862 Nancy's mother, **Peggy Willan**, had become the second wife of **Matthew Haygarth**. Several of Matthew's descendants had incredibly successful lives in Settle. His grandson, another **Matthew Haygarth**, also worked as a policeman, perhaps inspired by Archie. When she married Archie, Nancy had just had an illegitimate son, **William Willan**, but no more children followed. Archie obtained several promotions and good conduct awards.

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On 30 September 1891, after 21 years' service, Archie was 'removed from the force' on a pension of 2 shillings and 9 pence a day. His records say that he 'refused the provisions of the Police Act 1890 on 17 January 1891.' The Police Act authorised mandatory Police pensions upon 15 years service, rather than discretionary ones, so it's hard to know what the problem was. It may or may not be related, but, between the time of the 1891 census and the 1901 census, Archie and Nancy separated. Archie found work as a farmer. He died on 26 November 1908 back in Forfar, Scotland aged 63. Nancy lived with her widowed sister, **Margaret Burton**, in Sedbergh and was buried with her when she died, aged 75, in 1930. Archie and Jane's son William Richard Cameron, a farmer had a family in Garsdale. Their only surviving daughter Margaret Cameron married the wonderfully named **Thompson Roo**, a widower and joiner from Leeds.

First wife Jane's sister, Margaret Walker, and brother-in-law Oliver Bowker were interesting characters. At the time of the 1871 census Archie and Jane were living at Batty Green with Oliver Bowker who worked as a saddler. Meanwhile Oliver's wife, Margaret, was running the Post Office in Bentham with her mother-in-law. She also had a one year old son, **Frederick Bowker** — a daughter had previously died as an infant. After the railway was built Oliver returned to work in the Post Office with Margaret. In 1879 both Oliver and Margaret made national headlines, being found guilty on six counts of embezzling money, obtaining money under false pretences, to the value of £160. Oliver had failed in some 'reckless speculations'. The Post Office ran a savings bank and it seems Margaret and Oliver took in savings from six illiterate customers but, knowing they couldn't read, didn't give them any paperwork and pocketed the money. When one of them asked to withdraw money Margaret was found out. The jury, without retiring, found them both guilty and they were sentenced to five years imprisonment with hard labour^[1]. The severity of the punishment reflects the perceived gravity of a crime against one of Her Majesty's Institutions but it's an interesting comparison with the sentence for John Atkins after his manslaughter conviction. What must Archie Cameron have thought?

THE EMBEZZLEMENT AT BENTHAM POST-OFFICE.

At the Leeds Assizes on Thursday before Mr. Justice Lopes, **Oliver Bowker** (39), and **Margaret Bowker** (40), his wife, were indicted for feloniously embezzling and stealing several sums of money, the property of the Postmaster-General, at Bentham, in the months of February, 1876, and September, 1878. The

Court records state that 40 year old Oliver Bowker was a Quaker. He was 5 foot 7 inches tall, with blue eyes, grey hair and a long face. He had a scar on his forehead from an assault in Leeds, and varicose veins on both shins. His records tell us that he was moved from Leeds Prison to Pentonville, Islington where prisoners were kept in total isolation at all times, wearing brown head masks when exercising in silent rows. Unsurprisingly, Pentonville was known for its high proportion of inmates with mental health problems and suicides. From Pentonville Oliver was transferred to Parkhurst top security prison on the Isle of Wight and then to Dartmoor. Oliver was allowed to write to his wife once every three months. He entered Tower Hamlets workhouse in 1899, aged 60 and didn't seem to come out.

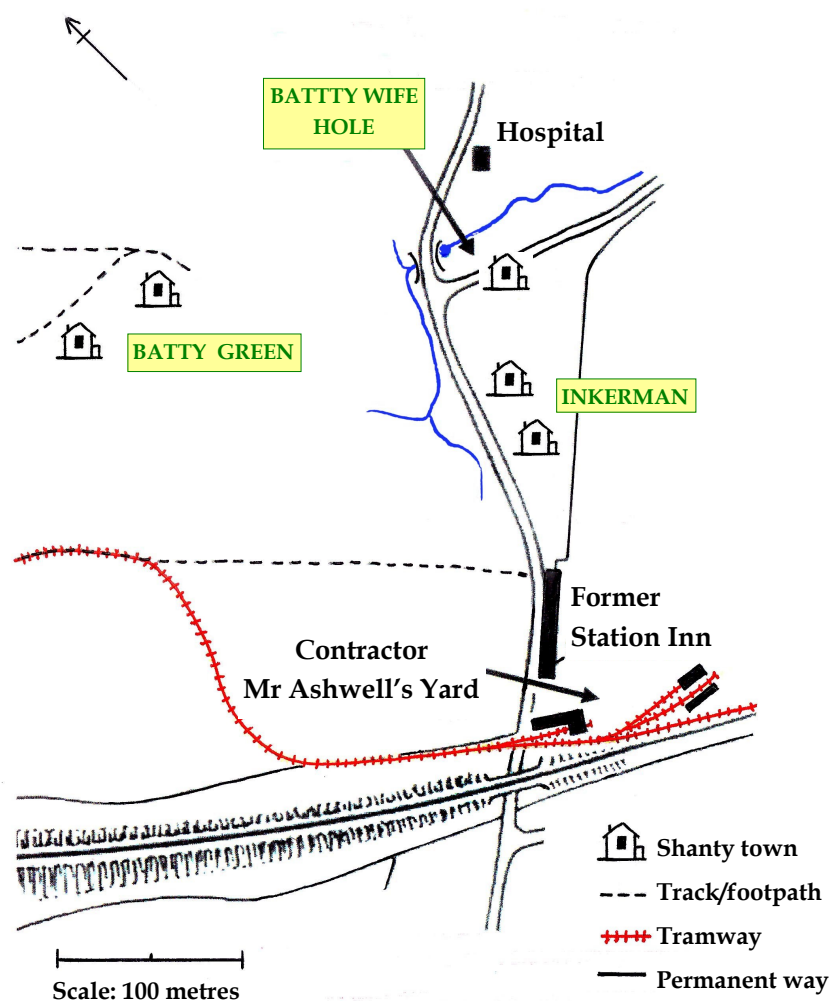


Meanwhile wife Margaret's record tells us that she was 5 foot 3 inches tall, with dark brown hair and eyes, a mole on her left neck and two upper front teeth missing. At

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the time of the 1881 census Margaret was one of 250 women at Fulham Prison and was sent from there to Russell House Refuge in Westminster. This refuge was known to assist Protestant women in organising emigration to the United States and during the 1890s Russell House became a refuge for reformed prostitutes, run by Roman Catholic Sisters. Margaret was released after just three years and escorted to Liverpool, perhaps to live with her brother, James Walker, or perhaps to sail to the States? There are no further records for her in the UK.

What about their children? At the time of the 1881 census, son Frederick Bowker was found in the Isolation Hospital attached to Giggleswick workhouse and records end for him there, which doesn't sound good. Another younger daughter, **Edith Ellen Bowker** was brought up by her uncle James Walker and his wife Alice in Liverpool.



Sketch map of railway settlements at Ribblehead – early 1870s

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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

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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. 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 — Lancaster Gazette, 2 — Lancaster Guardian, 3 — Huddersfield Daily Chronicle, 4 — Kendal Mercury, 5 — Yorkshire Post, 6 — Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald

Navy Settlements diagram with thanks to Nigel Mussett, archivist for FoSCL

*Other sources: *The Railway Years in Chapel-Le-Dale 1870 - 1877* and *The Chapel of the Fells* both by Gerald Tyler, *The New Railway To Scotland* by David Occomore, *Shanty Life on the Settle-Carlisle railway* and *How they built the Settle-Carlisle Railway* both by W R Mitchell, *The Railway Navvies of Settle: the end of the line* by Sarah Lister.*

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