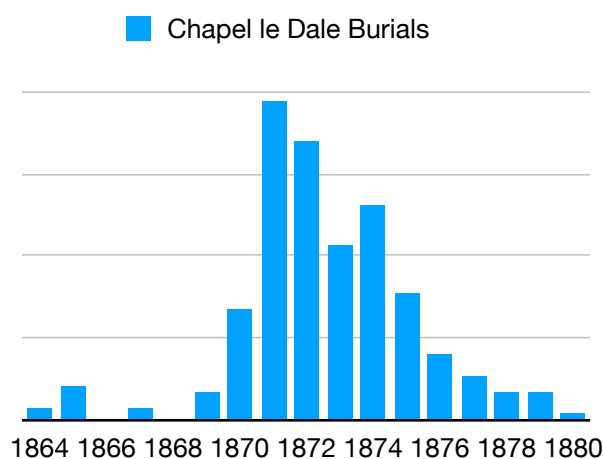


## Ribblehead Tales . . . A few statistics

Imagine living at Ribblehead during the building of the Settle to Carlisle Railway?! Research into the 1871 census, death certificates for the navvies (and others) whose final resting place was Chapel-le-dale graveyard and contemporary sources has produced some startling findings. It gives us a better understanding of the social history this iconic place.



Before the railway was built the vicars of St Leonard's Church at Chapel-Le-Dale buried two or three parishioners in the graveyard each year. Usually burials at St Leonard's represented up to 2% of burials in the whole of Settle Registration District which included all the towns and villages from Ingleton to the West, Littondale and Ribblehead to the North, Malham and Hellifield to the current A65 bordering the Southwest. During the 'navvy years', this increased to around 45 per year and in 1871 the 58 burials at St Leonard's made up 18% of burials in the Registration District. In 1870 there were estimated to be around 250 people living at Ribblehead but at the time of the census in April 1871 there were 913 people and this probably increased again in 1872.



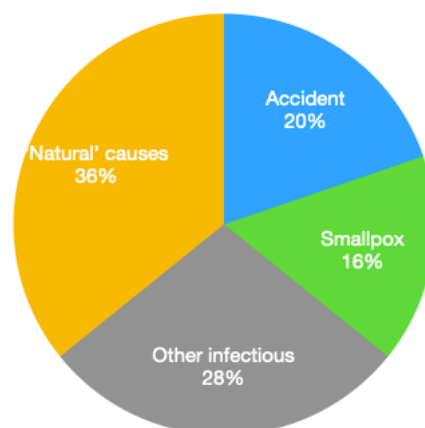
The spike in burials in 1871 was partially due to the 30 or so fatalities due to the smallpox outbreak. Aside from this the number of burials probably reflects the size of the population at Ribblehead. The railway was open to the public in May 1876 but navvies lived at Ribblehead for several years afterwards, making good and repairing roads. Numbers returned to 'normal' during the 1880s as the Shanty Towns were vacated and taken down, with many workers going on to work on railways and other labouring jobs across the country.

Out of the 247 burials at St Leonard's during the 'navvy years' 75 (30%) were men working at Ribblehead including labourers, miners, blacksmiths, stonemasons but also other servicemen such as grocers, shoemakers, bookkeepers and hairdressers. A further 142 (57%) burials were wives and children of the navvies. 125 were aged 14 and under, (58% of the navy family burials). 115 were aged five and under (46% of navy family burials) and 102 were aged three or under (41% of navy family burials). Nationally at this time infants, aged five and under, represented a fifth of

burials. There were just 30 locals buried at St Leonard's during the 'navvy years', which is more than was usual at the church.

## Causes of death

Nearly half of the navvies who died at Ribblehead were victims of infectious diseases with over a third of those dying in the smallpox outbreak of 1871. A fifth of the navvies died in appalling accidents which would have been prevented with the most basic health and safety measures. Over a third of the navvies died of non-infectious diseases, often referred to as 'natural' causes.



In a similar study into the deaths of navvies who were buried at Settle graveyard the distribution of causes of death was significantly different. Just under half those Settle navvies died of accidents and just over half died of disease. No navvies died of smallpox and less than 10% died of 'natural causes'. In Settle many navvies boarded with families and those that lived in navy huts found their buildings on solid ground. Being based in a small town life was far more 'normal', with less hazards and temptations than the insular world of Ribblehead. Overall the 'living' conditions at Ribblehead were far worse than in Settle and the chances of death were greater.

The average age of the 'navvy' men who died was 35 and at Settle it was 31. The average age of all burials at Ribblehead was 17.

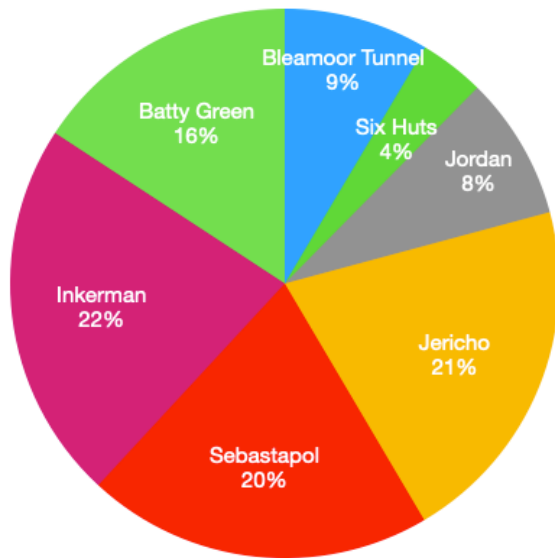
## Ribblehead in the 1871 census

The census return of 2 April 1871 recored 158 dwellings, with 15 of those being uninhabited, housing 913 people. Ribblehead is often perceived as a predominantly male-dominated environment but in fact only 64% of residents were male. Nearly 80% of the adults were men, 90% of those being navvies (of all types) working on the railway. The rest of the men were making a living by servicing the navy community. 22% of the men at Ribblehead were married, most living with their wives who were typically running the navy hut with varying numbers of children and boarders. Almost two-thirds of the 143 inhabited huts had boarders living in them. Where navy huts contained lodgers, the average number was 6.5. Nearly 65% of the men at Ribblehead were boarders. Wives and a few single women of adult age made up 14% of the population and an incredible 38% of residents were children. Interestingly, of the baptisms at St Leonard's church during the navy years, just 45% were boys.

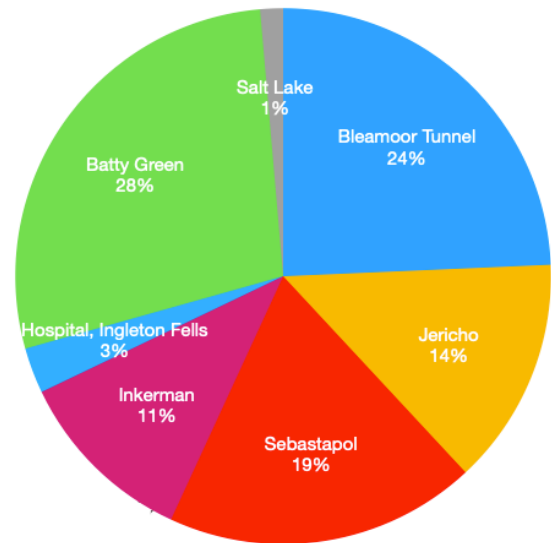
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## Shanty Towns

1871 census



Burials



Any analysis of Shanty Towns is fraught with difficulties:

The 1871 census listed the majority of residents at '*Batty Wife Hole*' otherwise known as Batty Green. However, by correlating these residents with those in baptism and burial records it is clear that some of these residences would have been in the '*Inkerman*' community. The hospital was also in this area.

Newspaper reports and burial records often listed residences by the general term of '*Ribblehead*' or '*Batty Green*' without naming a specific community such as Sebastapol or Jericho.

The number of huts inhabited in each shanty town was in a state of permanent flux. There was a seasonal variation of workers as some work was more viable in summer months. Work inside a dark tunnel didn't rely on good weather as much. There was a significant turnover of workers every day. Hundreds arrived, tempted by the promise of good wages but many left soon after, unable to cope with the conditions. A small core of hardy residents stayed at Ribblehead for the duration, many of these resident at Inkerman which had some brick built buildings and supposedly better conditions. The number of navvies and families living in each shanty town would have depended on the work that needed doing. For example Salt Lake huts, which later became cottages, were constructed in 1874.

Bearing all this in mind,

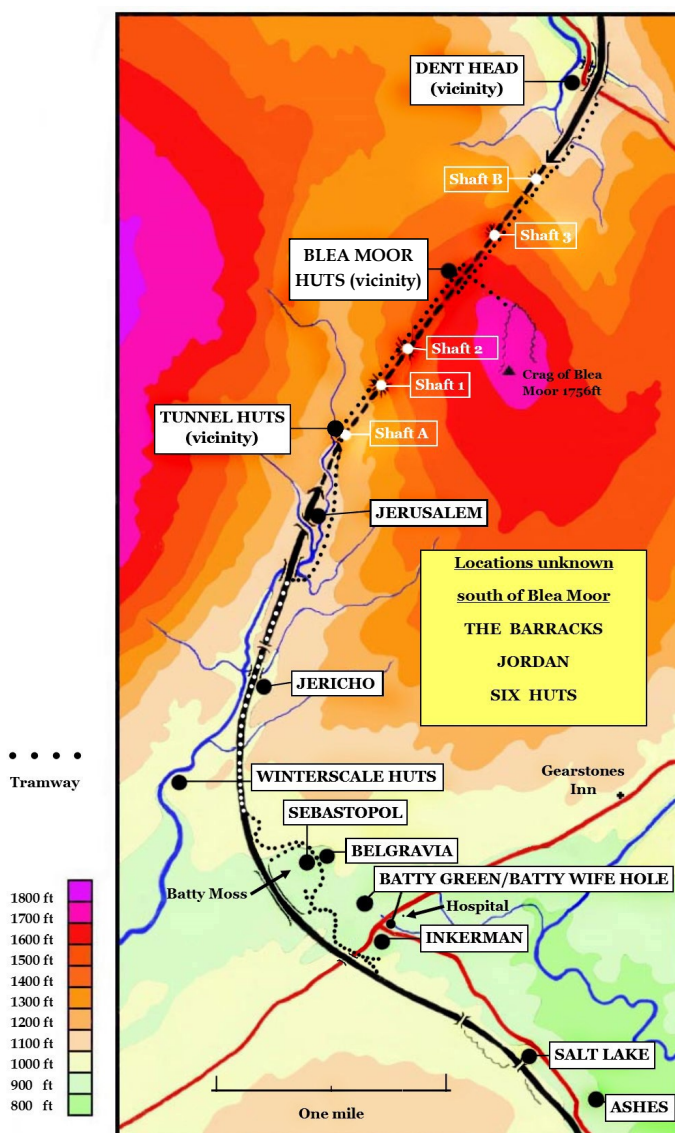
Batty Green, including Inkerman and the hospital, was the largest community in 1871 and also had the greatest proportion of deaths. Within this, Inkerman appeared to be the home of a smaller proportion of the deaths which could be due to the reportedly better conditions.

The deaths due to the smallpox outbreak were clustered in Sebastapol and Jericho, however overall burials for navvies at Sebastapol are in proportion to the number of residents in 1871.

## Settle Graveyard Project

There is a significantly higher proportion of deaths in the areas nearest and including the tunnel. This includes Bleamoor Tunnel, Dent Head and Jericho communities. Conditions in these areas, under the supervision of Frank Moody were described as the 'most severe' and attracted higher wages. It's likely they were also the 'most dangerous'.

These statistics and charts, fascinating as they are, provide just a few headlines. But, behind them is a rich array of human stories giving an insight into the colourful social life of the navy life with some incredible twists of fate, achievements and, of course, scandals. The rest of the Ribblesdale Tales project explores some of these.



Supposed locations of navy settlements between Ribblesdale and Dent Head.

Revised to 2022. © Nigel Mussett

*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.*

## Settle Graveyard Project

*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](http://dalescommunityarchives.org.uk/settle) graveyard project. The 'Old Settle' family tree on [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk) includes the families buried in the graveyard. The project is ongoing and welcomes queries and information on [settleresearch@gmail.com](mailto:settleresearch@gmail.com). Latest news and events are on the Facebook page 'Settle Graveyard Project'.*

*Navy Settlements diagram with thanks to Nigel Mussett, archivist for FoSCL. Pie charts with thanks to Ken Lister.*

*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.*

*Birth, Marriage and Death certificates provided by the General Records Office, covered by Crown Copyright. Census returns and baptism, marriage and burial records via [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk), originally from The National Archives.*