

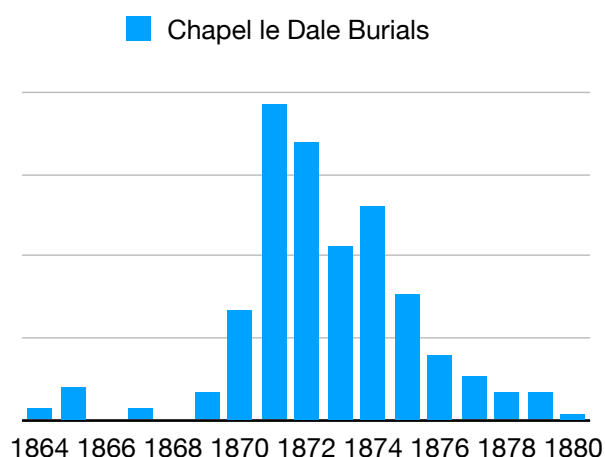
Ribblehead Tales . . . First navy burials at St Leonard's

When 25 year old **Rev Ebenezer Smith** [ph1] from Dorset took over as the vicar of St Leonard's Church, Chapel-le-Dale in 1857 he probably looked forward to working in a quiet little backwater as an ideal start to his career. Ebenezer would have been regarded as an excellent appointment, being the first vicar with a university degree to serve at this church. This delightful tiny church [ph2] was built as part of the Parish of Bentham to serve the local farmers who couldn't always make the journey to Bentham or Ingleton. Ebenezer instigated significant repairs to the fabric of the church — vestry, windows, roof etc and worked to build the vicarage and a new school nearby. He



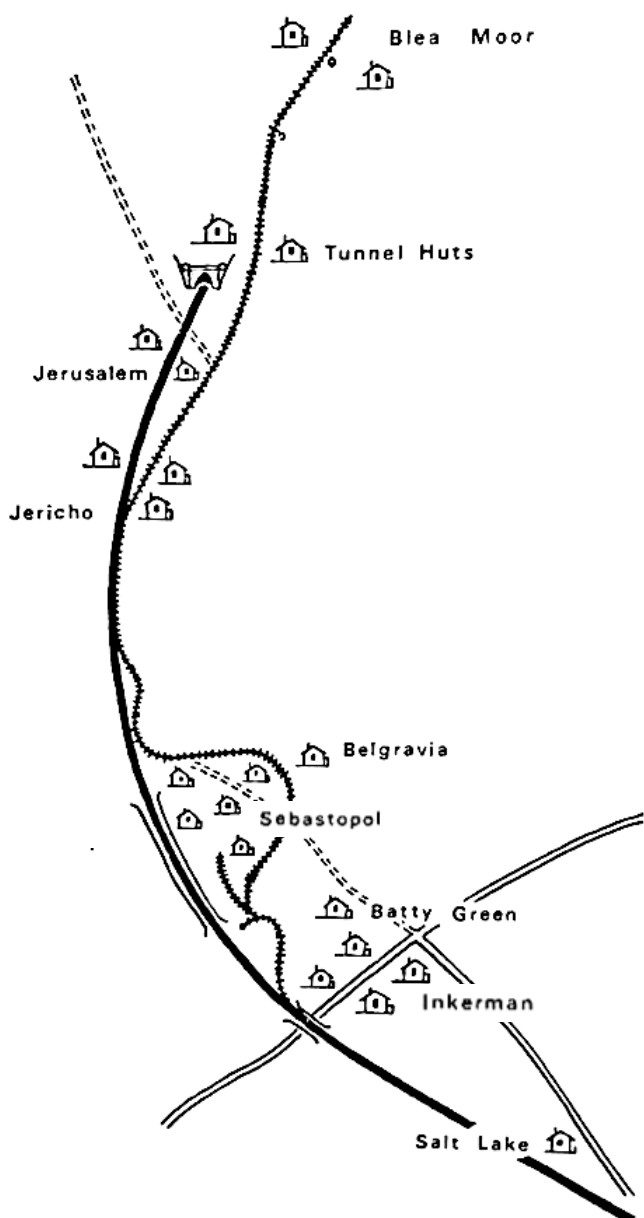
married **Sarah Metcalfe**, the churchwarden's daughter, which probably helped him to settle into the community. So far, so good. Unfortunately, Sarah died in 1863 of diphtheria and, in 1867, Ebenezer married a wealthy heiress, **Sarah Straphen**, from Shrewsbury. Many of the windows and plaques inside the church are dedicated to members of the Straphen family.

The building of the Settle to Carlisle Railway from 1869-1876 changed everything. Typically, Ebenezer had had to bury two or three parishioners in the graveyard each year but this increased to around 45 per year during the 'navvy years'. Usually, burials at St Leonard's represented up to 2% of burials in the whole of Settle registration district. In 1871 the 58 burials at St Leonard's made up 18% of burials in the whole 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. With navvies working without many health and safety measures and living with their families in such basic and crowded conditions and it's not surprising there were so many deaths. Over the 'navvy years' 75 men and a further 142 wives and children from Ribblehead were buried at St Leonard's, as well as the local burials. It would have been tough all round. Ebenezer's rallying cry was said to be '*Nil desperandum*' — 'never despair', which must have been fully tested over the years. Ebenezer had the help of Irishman **Rev William Harpur** and other curates through these years but retired to Cheshire in 1875, probably with a great sense of relief!



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The first burial from the Shanty Towns was that of six year old **Annie Wall** who died on 5 August 1870. The night her death before she lodged at Sebastopol huts with her aunt, **Mrs Ann Powell** on their way to meet Uncle **George Powell** who worked at Blea Moor. The circumstances of Annie's death were horrendous. Just before noon Mr Powell came to Sebastopol from their hut at Blea Moor on a tramway to collect them — below the viaduct there was a service tramway connecting the navy communities and their workplaces. The engines and wagons on the tramway transported materials for building and waste debris as well as passengers. The tramway had been hastily built and was known to be an uncomfortable ride with tight curves, steep inclines and numerous bumps. To get back to Blea Moor Mrs Powell and Annie were put in the first of three wagons behind the engine with Mr Powell in the third. Unfortunately, the engine derailed on a curve and Annie fell out. She was covered with debris from the wagons behind her. 'When the debris was removed the child was found dead, being very much scalded and its body having been broken'. The inquest was held at **Mr John Clark Garlick's** 'house', the *Viaduct Inn* and the verdict was 'Accidentally killed'[1]. 'The engine driver and Mrs Powell were much scalded' too. The papers said, 'The history of Annie Wall is rather a touching one, for according to report Mr and Mrs Powell,



FATAL ACCIDENT.—On Tuesday last, about noon, as Mrs. Powell and her niece, Anne Wall, a little girl about six years of age, was riding on an engine at the Underhill cutting, on the Settle and Carlisle Railway, in the neighbourhood of Batty Wife Hole, Ingleton Fells, the engine ran off the line at a curve on the tramway, and pitched on one end. The waggons that were attached to the engine came rushing on and threw their load of dirt over the engine and buried the child. When the debris had been removed the child was found dead, being very much scalded and its body having been broken. The stoker jumped off the engine and escaped unhurt, but the driver and Mrs. Powell were much scalded. An inquest was held before T. P. Brown, Esq., deputy-coroner, at the house Mr. John Garlick, Batty Wife's Hole, when a verdict of "Accidentally killed" was returned.

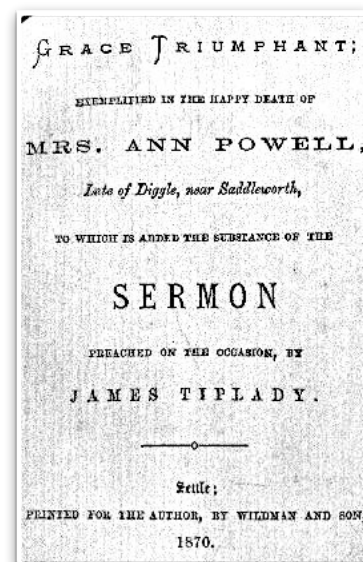
No. 210.	John Birshaw	Chapel Hill	July 11 th	46	E. Smith. Vicar
No. 211.	Annie Wall	Batty Wife Hole Seaton Stones	August 5 th	5	E. Smith. Vicar
No. 212.	Isaac Allen (or)	Batty Wife Hole	August 14 th	8	S. J. See R. Vicar Batty Wife Hole
No. 213.	Thomas Swanton	Batty Wife Hole	August 17 th	30	E. Smith. Vicar
No. 214.	Job Willard	Batty Green	August 23 rd	23	E. Smith. Vicar
No. 215.	Lucy Ann Whitman	Seaton Foss	August 26 th	28	E. Smith. Vicar
No. 216.	Ann Powell	Seaton Foss	August 28 th	28	E. Smith. Vicar

being influenced by love for children had adopted their niece as their own child, and that she was on her way to her new home when her merry childhood was so suddenly and painfully terminated. Her foster parents would have been feeling all the joy that would spring from having a prattling child to brighten their solitary home.' [2]



What was Annie doing here? Annie was the fourth out of six children of **William Wall**, a labourer and his wife **Catherine Powell** who lived in Colwall, Herefordshire. Tragically Catherine died on 15 April 1870 after the birth of son **George Wall**, (who survived) when Annie was just six. Catherine's brother **George Powell**, also a labourer, came to Ribblehead to work with his wife **Ann** during 1870 and obviously decided to bring niece Annie with them. Just four months after mum Caroline died, Annie had this accident.

A scan down the burial records shows us that Aunt Ann Powell also died just three weeks later, aged 28, from burns to her back — that must have been a painful three weeks. Missionary **James Tiplady** reportedly gave the oration at her funeral service in the family hut before her body was taken in a small cart to the graveyard for burying at St Leonard's. Mr Tiplady was so proud of his sermon that he had copies printed by Wildman's printers in Settle! [ph3] In it he said, *'Mrs Powell's pain was intense in the extreme, indeed such was the severity of his suffering that it may please the Infinite One to speedily take her; it would prove to her a happy release. She was thankful that her little niece was taken so quickly and thus spared the pain she had to endure... The remains were followed by the husband, father, sister and other fiends, also some 15 or 16 couples of the neighbours.*



Understandably George Powell left Ribblehead soon after and spent the rest of his life working as a coal miner in Cornwall but died in 1884, aged 52. William Wall remained in Colwall with his children. All the children who had children named their eldest daughter Annie.

Just before Annie's burial, 46 year old **John Bentham** was buried. He was a servant who worked at the Chapel House, perhaps for Rev Ebenezer Smith? It just so happens that John Bentham was the brother-in-law of **Thomas Robinson**, a navy who died in 1873 and is also buried in this graveyard with a gravestone — see *natural deaths*.

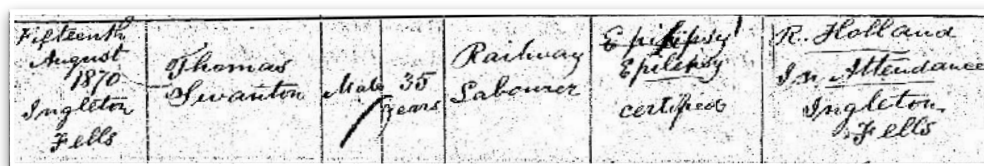
A week after Annie's death, on 14 August, the first infant from the shanty towns, **Sarah Ann Cox**, was buried, aged 8 months. She was the daughter of **William Cox**, a lifelong railway tunneller from Staffordshire and his wife **Elizabeth Bower**. William met Elizabeth when he lodged at her mother's house while working on a railway in South Normanton in Derbyshire. They never got round to marrying. A few weeks after Sarah Ann's death, on 25 September 1870, another daughter, **Caroline Cox**, was one of the first baptisms of the 'navvy years' at St Leonard's. Caroline also died an infant but at least three other children survived to adulthood.

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The first navy to be buried was 35 year old **Thomas Swanton**, a railway labourer working at Batty Wife Hole. Thomas, was from Cork, Southern Ireland. Contrary to popular belief only a small proportion of Ribblehead navvies were Irish — only four of our 75 burials were from Ireland. Thomas was the son of **John Swanton**, a labourer and his wife **Patience Aldworth**. The family came over to live in the Westminster area and, at the time of the 1861 census, Thomas was a Private on board the 21 gun ship 'Scout' which was moored off the coast of Shanghai. What was he doing there? It's likely that everyone on board was preparing for the Battle of Shanghai which ran from June 1861-July 1862 and was part of the Taiping Rebellion which had been running since 1854. Shanghai had been occupied by the Taiping Army of 20,000 men. Despite initially promising to remain neutral the French and British army helped the Qing government to recapture Shanghai. It was a significant victory but at a great price. It helped to bring to an end the bloodiest civil war in world history, with over 20 million dead. Unfortunately, there were several other 'Battles of Shanghai' during the 20th century.

Back in Ribblehead Thomas was one of two ex-military navvies who died. The other was **Frederick Pryke** was a thatcher's son from Stowmarket, Suffolk who had served as a horse-driver for the Royal Artillery in Aldershot. He died, whilst leading his horse on the railway on 20 August 1872 when a loaded railway accidentally ran over his legs — see *Death by Accidents*.

Thomas Swanton died of epilepsy which was poorly understood in those days. Over one-third of deaths of the navvies at Ribblehead were due to 'natural' (non-infectious) causes such as epilepsy, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and liver failure although Thomas was the only victim of epilepsy.



The Tommy Shop keeper **Robert Holland** was in attendance at Thomas' death. Just days later, on 20 August, Robert's son **Job Holland** died [1], aged just 6 weeks. Robert himself died in 1875 and we find out more about him in his own account.

Ingleton.—On the 20th inst., at Batty Wife Hole, Job, son of Mr. Robert Holland, railway laborer, aged 6 weeks.



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'.

Navy Settlements diagram with thanks to Nigel Mussett, archivist for FoSCL. Chart with thanks to Ken Lister. Sketch kindly provided by Teresa Gordon

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 — Lancaster Gazette, 2 — Lancaster Guardian

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ph1 — photo credited to The Chapel of the Fells, by Gerald Tyler, ph2 — credited to Visitcumbria.com, ph3 — with thanks to Nigel Mussett

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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