

## Ribblehead Tales . . . The Rixons, brickmakers

At 400 metres in length Ribblehead Viaduct is the longest structure on the Settle to Carlisle Railway and regarded by many as the most iconic structure in Yorkshire. To have survived over 150 years, with many elements of original engineering, it must have been built by talented engineers and contractors and exceptionally skilled tradesmen. The Ribblehead Viaduct arches and the Bleamoor Tunnel linings were made of bricks which had to be of excellent quality from a reputable company. Meet the Rixon family from Northamptonshire.

**Warden Rixon**, born in 1773 in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire was the head of a brickmaking dynasty. He had several sons with his wife **Hannah Robinson**. Three of those sons, **Samuel**, born in 1802, **John**, born in 1808 and **Robert Rixon**, born in 1813 brought their business to Ribblehead having won the contract to make the bricks. The brothers were relatively elderly, in their sixties. Samuel's wife, **Sophia Clark** had died in 1851 but Samuel brought his sons **James** and **Robert (Jnr)** and they had their own families with them too. Other members of the Rixon family stayed behind to keep things ticking over in Northamptonshire [2].

TO BUILDERS, FARMERS, AND OTHERS,  
**MOULTON.**

A quantity of BUILDING BRICKS, DRAINING PIPES  
PANTILES, RIDGE TILES, COPING BRICKS,  
Narrow-wheel CART, &c.,  
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,  
By T. S. MUDDAMAN,  
On THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD, 1871, on the premises at  
MOULTON, in the county of Northampton, by order of Mr.  
GEO. RIXON;  
COMPRISING 100,000 building bricks, perforated and  
solid; 60,000 2-in. drain pipes, 8,000 3-in. ditto, 3,700  
7-in. ditto, and 650 9-in. ditto; 2,000 12-in. and 18-in. coping  
bricks, 500 garden tiles, 1,400 pantiles, ridgetiles, copper  
bricks, oven squares, narrow-wheel cart, &c., &c.  
Sale to commence at Eleven o'clock.

It's possible that Robert (Jnr) Rixon and his wife, **Elizabeth Whiting** and family were the first to arrive. Their sixth child (out of ten), **Harriet Rixon**, was baptised at St Leonard's on 10 April 1870. The address was given as 'Chapel-le-Dale' rather than 'Ribblehead' but this was the very first baptism from the railway community. At the time of the 1871 census all the Rixon men lived in huts close to each other at Sebastopol right next to the brickworks. The viaduct and the entrance of Bleamoor Tunnel were nearby. Samuel lodged at number 92 Sebastopol with the **Harris** family, next door to his son James (Jnr) and family at 94. Samuel's son Robert and family were at 96 and Samuel's brother John and his wife were next to them. Samuel's brother Robert, a single man lodged at number 90 with **George Denning** and his family.

1870	April	Harriet	Robert	Rixon	Chapel-le-Dale	Brickmaker	A. Lockwood
No. 425			Elizabeth				1177 M. 10. 10. 10.

The Rixons ran a massive operation producing 20,000 bricks a day and employing up to 28 people [ph1]. To land a contract like this the Rixons must have had a good reputation. A contemporary report in the *Lancaster Guardian* described, 'The brick-making establishment [at Batty Green] is



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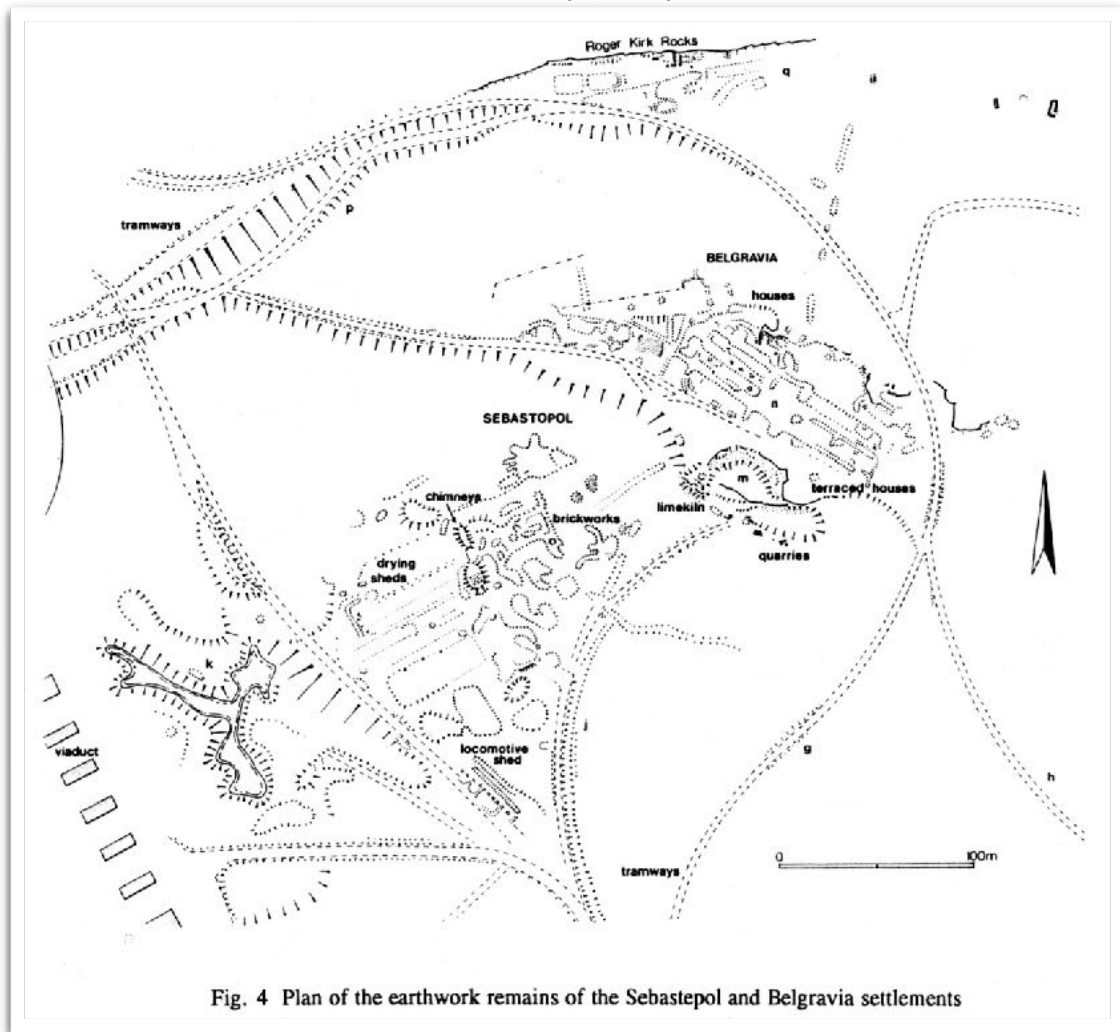


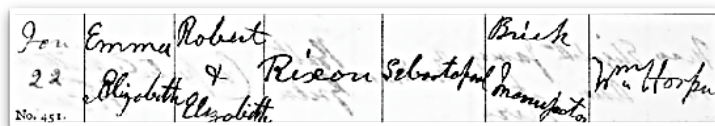
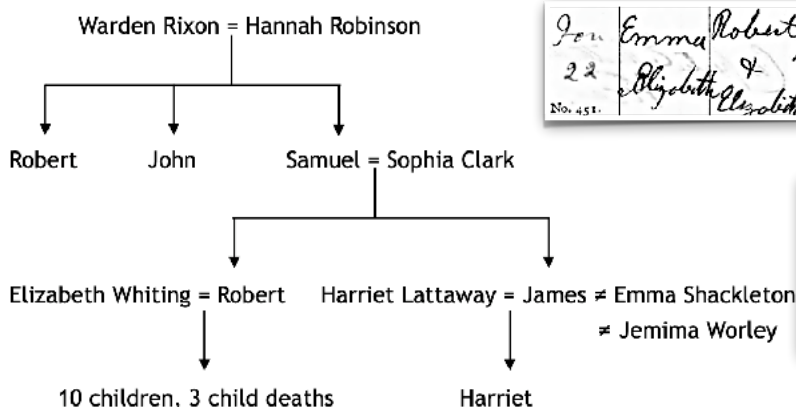
Fig. 4 Plan of the earthwork remains of the Sebastopol and Belgravia settlements

under the management of Mr Rixon. The brick works, which cover a large space of moorland, consist of extensive drying sheds, ovens, a large patent brick-making machine by Porter and Co., of Carlisle, a crushing machine, and a traveller seventy yards long to deliver the bricks in the shed above the ovens where they are dried by the waste heat. Porter's machine when in full work will make about 20,000 bricks a day. At present, as only half of it is at work, it makes from 11,000 to 12,000 a day. There are ten ovens with two fire holes to each oven. An oven holds from fourteen to fifteen thousand bricks, and it takes about a week to burn them. The quantity of fuel consumed at these works is only half the quantity used at an ordinary brick kiln. A crushing machine is employed to grind shale, which, being intermixed with the clay used at the works, yields bricks of such a superior quality that when thrown out of the ovens they ring like pots. From 26 to 28 persons are employed at the works. Two girls were busy carrying bricks from the never-ceasing traveller. The large quantities of bricks made at these works are used for lining and arching the tunnel.'

Local shale and clay was baked in the ovens right next to the railway. The Porter brick making machine had been purchased by Mr Bayliss, a contractor for the job. The tunnel bricklayers worked in teams. On each side of the tunnel there was a bricklayer with his own labourer and two mortar carriers. Between them they laid 70,000 bricks in the tunnel each week. The blasting and lining work in the tunnel was continuous, in 12 hour shifts. Lit by candles they worked through 16 yards a week stopping only on Sundays. Cornish miners were said to be more comfortable in these conditions than back home! By the completion of the railway the Rixons had made at least 1.5 million bricks.. 'No person can walk in the tunnel for an hour or more and listen to the thundering

reverberations of blasting and the miners wielding with terrible force their sledge-hammers when drilling the hard rock, and breathe the thick smoke of the exploded dynamite, without feeling much sympathy for those employed in the mining operations, and seeing what a privilege it is to travel by rail at the rate of a penny per mile.' [3]

### The Rixons



Ingleton Fells.—On the 29th ult., at Sebastopol, James, son of Mr. Robert Rixon, brick-maker, aged 4 years.  
 Ingleton Fells.—On the 29th ult., at Tunnel Huts, Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. Job Corben, stonemason, aged 7 years.  
 Ingleton Fells.—On the 3rd inst., at Sebastopol, Ellen, daughter of Mr. Robert Rixon, brick-maker, aged 6 years.

Robert (Jnr) Rixon and his wife Elizabeth Whiting had an awful year in 1872 when three of their children died. On 11 February 1872 daughter **Emma Elizabeth Rixon** died, aged nine having been baptised a year before on 22 January 1871 - perhaps she had been in danger of death for a while. Two weeks later on 29 February 1872 son **James Rixon** died, aged four and then days later daughter **Ellen Rixon** died on 3 March 1872 aged six [1]. Their son **Samuel George Rixon** was born around this time too but was not baptised here. Perhaps the deaths prompted them to make the decision to move back to Northamptonshire. Their next child, a replacement **James Rixon**, was born back in Wellingborough in 1875.

Samuel's other son, James Rixon had married **Harriet Lattaway** in 1861 and they had a daughter, another **Harriet Rixon**, born in Northamptonshire early in 1870. James and Harriet were definitely at Ribbleshead by the beginning of 1871 — on the 21 February James was taken to court by **Henry White**, charged with threatening language, 'by threatening to shoot him'[2]. 'After a long hearing the case was dismissed.' James probably had good reason. Henry White had allegedly run off with James' wife, Harriet. She had returned to Ribbleshead by the time of the 1871 census on 2 April and Henry had disappeared, probably a sensible move.

**THREATENING LANGUAGE.**—At the Ingleton Court House, on Tuesday, before the Rev. R. Denny, James Rixon, of Sebastopol, Ingleton Fells, brickmaker, was charged with using threatening language towards Henry White of the same place, labourer, by threatening to shoot him. After a long hearing the case was dismissed.

**PETTY SESSIONS.—ASSAULT.**—On the 15th inst., at the Court House, before C. Ingleby, Esq. and the Rev. Richard Denny, James Rixon, of Sebastopol, Batty Wife Hole, brick-maker, who had been in custody since the 13th inst., was charged, on the information of Emma Shackleton, of the same place, married woman, with assaulting her in an aggravated manner, on the 11th inst., at Sebastopol. The defendant, it would appear, has lately had his troubles, having twice lost his better half within about a fortnight, from the effects of which and "John Barleycorn" he has approached somewhat to the position of a madman. After hearing the witnesses on both sides the defendant was fined 1s. and 4s. 4d. costs.

Less than three weeks later James was reprimanded again on the charge of assaulting **Emma Shackleton** 'in an aggravated manner' on 11 March [1]. The report described that an argument began over money and James hit someone in the crowd who had nothing to do with it. Emma told James off for hitting the person, at

On account of the complainant reproving defendant for striking some one in the crowd who had nothing to do with the row, he struck her on the side of her face, the bruise from which was visible on the day of hearing her complaint.—Jane Cooper corroborated the evidence of

which point James 'struck her on the side of the face, the bruise from which was still visible on the day of the hearing' [3]. The report explained that James, 'has lately had his troubles, having twice lost his better half within about a fortnight from the effects of which and "John Barleycorn" [alcohol] he has approached somewhat to the position of a madman.' He was fined £1 14s 4d, described as a 'very lenient fine.' Yet again we are reminded about the influence of alcohol on the shanty town. It may have been a harsher penalty if the judges had known about a previous offence. In 1858, in Wellingborough, James was taken to court for assaulting **Mrs Jemima Worley** while her husband was out. 'James Rixon came to her house and called her everything that was bad; he also shook his fist in her face and said if she was half a man he would smash her.' The magistrates fined him 17s 6d on that occasion[1]. James obviously had a violent temper, inevitably made worse by drink.



July Rixon came to her house, at Moulton, and called her everything that was bad; he also shook his fist in her face, and said if she was half a man he would smash her.

James' Ribblehead victim, Emma (Childs) Shackleton was the wife of **Daniel Shackleton**, a brickmaker who will almost certainly have worked for the Rixons at Ribblehead. They were neighbours, living at 80 Sebastopol. However, at the time of the assault Daniel and another brickmaker, **Samuel Langdon**, were lodging in Dalton (north of Barrow-in-Furness) for some reason. By 1873 the Shackletons had moved to Liverpool.

Once their business at Ribblehead was done, the Rixons returned to Wellingborough, Northamptonshire and normal business was resumed, with heavier purses no doubt. They were sufficiently wealthy to be listed on the electoral register — a real indication of their wealth. James Rixon, recovered from his position as a madman, established some brick works in Finedon Road, Wellingborough and quickly expanded into iron ore quarrying leasing land for the quarry. Using his experience at Ribblehead, James built a metre gauge horse-drawn tramway to move materials about his site and connect to the Midland Railway and this eventually extended to over four miles.

The business didn't keep James out of trouble though. In July 1877 he took a man called **John Stock** to court for assaulting him. According to James' father, Samuel, Mr Stock came over a fence, asked James if he could box and then knocked him down without provocation. Of course, Mr Stock said he was provoked by Samuel.

John Stock was fined 10 shillings plus costs of £1 2s which sounds a bit unlucky![1] In June 1879 James was taken to court again for cruelty to a horse for allowing a lame mare to pull a cart of coal despite having been told she was lame by a veterinary surgeon. The Bench didn't think it was

BRICKS.	<b>RIXON &amp; CO.,</b>	BRICKS.
	<b>PATENT BRICK AND TILE WORKS,</b>	
	<b>FINEDON ROAD, WELLINGBOROUGH.</b>	
GOOD Machine-made Kiln-burnt BRICKS can be had at the above address. Prices as follows:—		
Common Bricks, in the yard .....	24s.	per 1,000
Ditto, loaded into trucks.....	25s.	"
Pressed Bricks, in the yard.....	33s.	"
Ditto, loaded in trucks .....	39s.	"
	Terms—Nett Cash.	
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struck him.—Samuel [Rixon] father of the complainant, gave corroborative evidence as to the defendant coming over a fence, and after asking him if he could box, knocked the complainant down, without any provocation.—The

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intentional cruelty, rather a case of neglect and, as the other horses were so well turned out, they inflicted a nominal fine of 2s 6d which also sounds quite lucky.

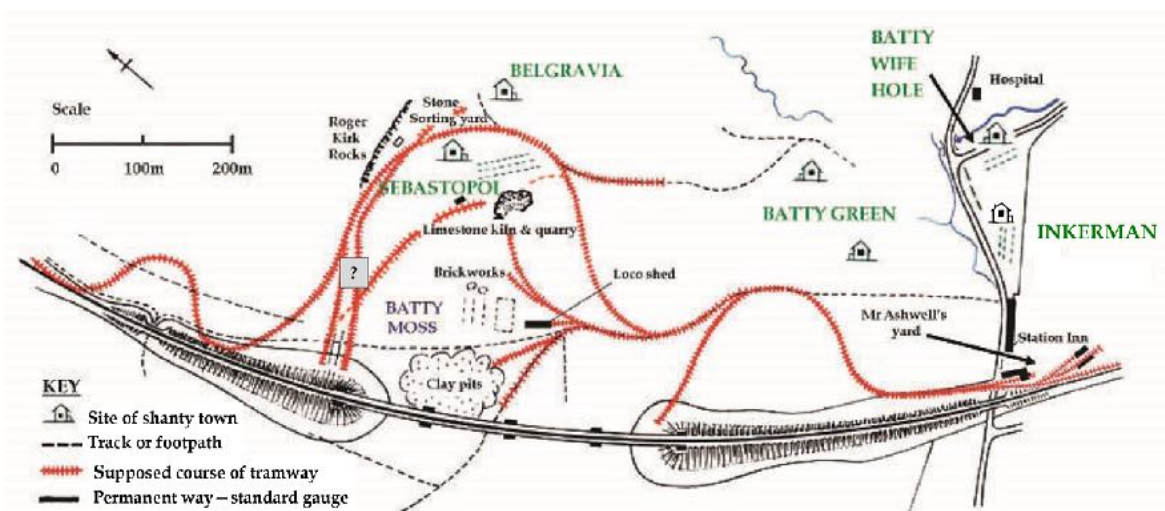
By 1884 the iron ore quarrying was becoming more successful than the brickworks and James bought two steam locos to operate on the tramway. However, there was a 'Shocking Accident' in which 24 year old **William Nash**, a boiler maker was killed at the Brick and Iron Works of Messrs Rixon and Co. William was part of a team erecting a new blast furnace for the Rixons. It was a frosty morning and William lost his footing on some scaffolding and fell 60 feet, landing on his head and so his 'body presented a frightful appearance'[1]. As James Rixon was having blast furnaces erected it's clear the business was expanding rapidly. There had been previous fatality at the works in 1878 when one of the Rixons' employees, **Alfred Geary**, was caught between two trucks when trying to uncouple them.

**SHOCKING ACCIDENT.**—On Monday morning an inquest was held at the Bell Inn, before Mr. J. T. Parker, on the body of William Nash, a boiler maker, who was killed on Sunday, at the Brick and Iron Works of Messrs. Rixon and Co., adjoining the Finedon-road. The body presented a frightful appearance.—William Davis, boiler maker, 16, Midland cottages, deposed that he was foreman of the boiler makers, and in the employ of Mottram and Rowden, Bakersfield Boiler Works, Bilston. The firm were engaged in the erection of iron blast furnaces for Messrs. RIXON.

Despite their booming iron trade Rixons' company was declared bankrupt in 1887 and the 'Wellingborough Iron Company' was formed to take over the business. They expanded and modernised the business and it operated until 1962. Finedon Road still houses brickworks to this day.

The three brothers Samuel, Robert and John died in 1896 aged 94, 83 and 89 respectively. Samuel's son Robert died in 1897, aged 57 having suffered from 'spine decease' at the time of the previous census, working as a beer house keeper. Samuel's son James predeceased him, dying in 1890, aged 55 just three years after the bankruptcy. James' wife Harriet had already died in 1881 aged just 41. James and Harriet's only child, Harriet Rixon remained a spinster and had a career as a governess and music teacher and died in 1944, aged 74.

Some of the navvies who died at Ribbleshead were brickmakers and bricklayers so were probably employed by the Rixons. **Nathaniel Dell**, a brickmaker from Slough died of smallpox on 30 July 1871 at the hospital. **Edward Poole**, a bricklayer at Bleamoor Tunnel died of tuberculosis on 15 Nov 1871, aged 28. **John Waldon** was a bricklayer who died on 12 May 1874 of cardiac arrest aged 43.



Victorian railway workings at Ribbleshead 1870s.

## Settle Graveyard Project

**George Bryer/Enos Prior** who worked on the stone crushing machine was killed by an engine in May 1876. In 1871 brickmakers **George** and **Joseph Laydall**, **Thomas Rogers**, **William Lesson** and **George Davis** were charged with '*wilfully and maliciously doing damage to the Welcome Home Inn*', belonging to **James Mathers**. They were inebriated at the time, of course.



*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](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'.*

*ph1 — Photograph with the kind permission of Bryan Gray and the Settle & Carlisle Railway Trust.*

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

*Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 — Lancaster Gazette, 2 — Northamptonshire Mercury, 3 — Lancaster Guardian*

*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.*

*Baptism records via [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk), originally from The National Archives.*