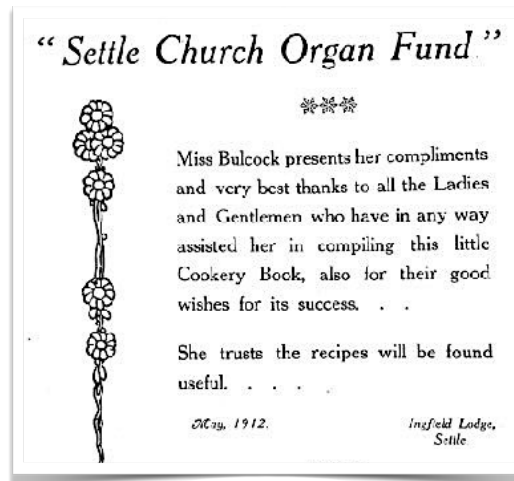
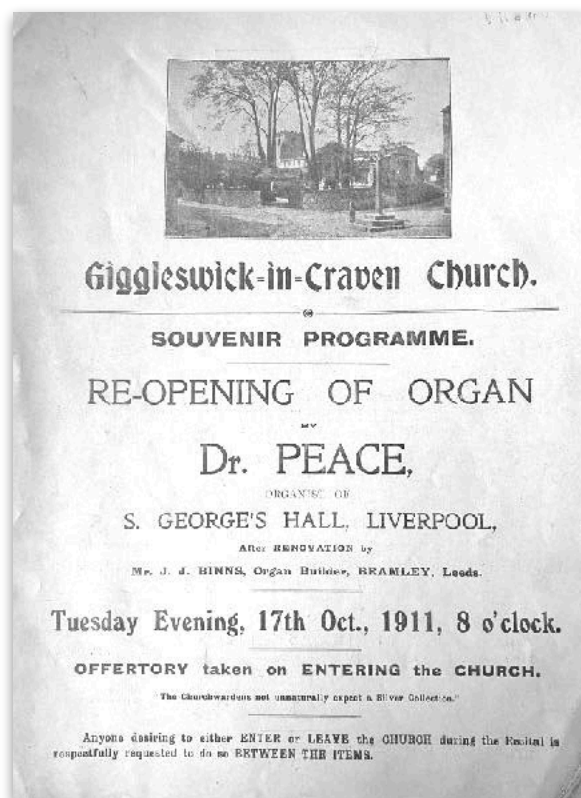


## James Jepson Binns, organ maker extraordinaire

In September 1911 Settle church hosted a talk about purchasing a new organ. The previous organ had been in use since 29 January 1841 and, 70 years later, it was felt that it had had its day. It was decided that it would be better to purchase a new organ than try and repair it, even though it would cost a considerable sum, estimated to be up to £600. It was decided to set up a subscription fund to see if the money could be raised. Coincidentally, in October 1911, Giggleswick Church held a concert to celebrate the re-opening of their organ following renovation by a well respected organ builder, **J J Binns**, from Bramley, Leeds. He was invited to have a look at the Settle organ and reported back, *'I beg to advise you that the organ is absolutely past repairs of any kind. The action, bellows, pallets and everything else in the organ are absolutely worn out. The best advice I could give you would be to go in for a new instrument and do away entirely with the present organ as nobody who professes to call himself an organ builder would attempt anything with the old one.'* That sounded quite fatal!

Over the next 18 months serious fundraising took place, with money from the Parish Fund, jumble sales, a play organised by **Edmund Handby** and the Settle Amateur Dramatic Society performed a farcical play called *'The New Boy'*. **Mary Jane Bulcock** compiled a cookery book to raise funds [ph1]. By February 1912 £360 had been raised. The vicar, **Reverend Linney**, summarised the fundraising as *'Efficiency and Enthusiasm'*. The old organ was sold for £40 with the funds earmarked for conveying water to new organ engine and for the foundations of the organ.

In August 1912 J J Binns visited again to *'make a careful study of the church to determine the character to organ that would be required to suit the building.'* He was awarded the contract with a view to it being ready to have an official opening immediately before Lent in 1913. Unfortunately, in January 1913, J J Binns wrote to the vicar, *'I write to ask you if you will kindly oblige me by postponing your organ opening until Easter, as, during the past few weeks we have had so many of our best men away with sickness. I am sorry to have to ask you for this favour but I am face to face with a problem I cannot solve.'*



## Settle Graveyard Project

The church had no choice but to agree to this, postponing it until 24 April, Easter Monday, to be dedicated by the **Bishop of Richmond** and 'opened' by **Mr Henry Ley**, organist of Christ Church, Oxford, *'one of the most brilliant of the younger generation of organists and the youngest Cathedral organist in England.'* The church planned that, on the same day, the new stained glass window dedicated to the **Jarry sisters**, designed by **William Morris**, would be unveiled by **Mrs Birkbeck** of Anley. Unfortunately the Bishop of Richmond died before the dedication so **Archdeacon Kilner of Craven** stepped in at the last minute. Mr Ley's recital was *'a triumph of organ work. It was a great treat to all lovers of organ music and most of all those who know what to expect from an excellent up-to-date organ in the hands of a first-rate performer.'*

Holy Ascension's regular organist, **John Goddard Barker**, [LSA] resigned on 29 March that year after ten years of service, following a recital on the new organ with soloists **Mrs Morton Buck** and **Miss Monica Buck** (Dr Buck's daughter and daughter-in-law). Could this have been, in some way, linked to the arrangements for the opening of the new organ? In November 1913 it was announced that the final bill for the organ and its installation was £762 16s 11d. At the same time, the vicar had to report that the new organ could not be used, temporarily, due to a lack of rain causing low water pressure! Incredibly, the organ is still used to this day, albeit in need of some serious repairs!



11. Mr. J. Goddard Barker, A.R.C.O., organist and choir-master, gave an Organ Recital on the new instrument at Settle Parish Church. The soloists were Mrs. Morton Buck and Miss Monica Buck, of Giggleswick.

29. Mr. J. Goddard Barker who had been organist and choir-master at Settle Parish Church for ten years, was presented with a silver cigarette case and match box, by the members of the choir, along with the officials of the Church, as a slight appreciation of regard and esteem for past services.

So who was the talented J J Binns, the organ builder? **James Jepson Binns** [ph2] was one of the most successful and prolific of the numerous Yorkshire organ builders working at the turn of the 20th century. His organs were *'a triumph of English craftsmanship'*. His Wikipedia page lists around 50 of his finest organs but, for some reason, omitting the one at Holy Ascension! Musician Herbert Snow said, *'In the list of long-established and eminent firms of organ builders stand the name of James Jepson Binns of Leeds. I have never met a more clear thinker or a more conscientious man and these qualities in a workman are bound to reveal themselves in his finished creations. Those of us who know the work of Binns can testify to his capabilities as an artist.'*



James was one the youngest of four children of **Joseph Binns**, a tailor in Leeds and **Mary Jepson**. James left school at the age of 11 to become an apprentice at **Radcliffe & Sagar** organ builders in Leeds. James surpassed his employers — a Google search of Radcliffe & Sagar throws up only references to James Jepson Binns! From 1873 James worked for **Abbot & Smith** organ builders as a voicer, making adjustments to the pipes to create the proper speech and tone. Abbot and Smith had been operating since 1869. Musically, James was inspired by the German organ builder, **Edmund Schulze**.

The vicar of Giggleswick **Revd Theodore Percy Brocklehurst** was often regarded as controversial and provocative but had a very favourable impression of James' skills and talents, following the renovation of the Giggleswick organ in 1911. Writing his reminiscences of James in 'The Organ' quarterly, July 1929, he reported that: *'There was at that period a very fine musician in Leeds,*

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namely J. W. Broughton, who had a Schulze chamber organ in his music room, which was tuned by Mr Binns on behalf of Messrs Abbott & Co. Mr Broughton became so interested in young Binns, that learning of his great ambition to start organ building on his own account, said to him: "If you can make a pipe and put it into one of the diapason stops so that I cannot detect the difference between your pipe and the rest, I think I might be able to put you in the way of starting." The upshot of this was that Mr Broughton encouraged several wealthy benefactors to advance James the money to establish his own business, which he did in 1880 in Bramley Organ Works, Leeds [1,2, ph4].



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James was an accomplished singer and organist. In his youth he was offered a position with the **Carl Rosa Company** due to his fine baritone voice — perhaps he knew Settle's *Frank Halpin* who also performed with them. James' musicianship was at the heart of his excellent reputation as an organ builder. James' organs were known for their staggering appearance with such a solid build that his instruments had the nickname '*Battleship Binns*'. James took out a number of patents to improve organ design including, in 1884 '*improvements in a hydraulic organ blower*' and, in 1890 '*an improved electric and tubular pneumatic action on organs, and in means for working the combination pistons of the same.*'

The instruments James built between 1890 and the First World War are regarded as his greatest work. His greatest organ was thought to be the one at St Nicholas, Great Yarmouth but this was destroyed during World War 2. His largest surviving work is the organ in the Albert Hall, Nottingham, almost identical to the one in Rochdale Town Hall.

What of James' personal life?

When he was 28, in 1883, James married **Frances Mary Neville Collins**, the daughter of a successful shoe manufacturer who had come to Leeds from Northamptonshire. In 1897 James' father Joseph Binns died, aged 79, a good age. However, he could have lived longer — his death was a tragic accident as he was run over by one of the '*new electric cars*' (trams) in Kirkstall Road. He was dead

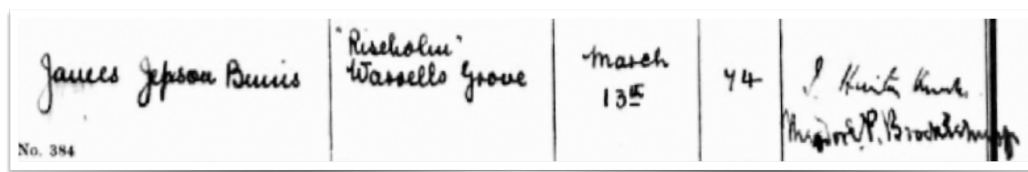
**THE TRAMCAR FATALITIES IN LEEDS.**

The Leeds city coroner, Mr. J. C. Malcolm, conducted inquiries in the Town Hall yesterday into the two tramcar fatalities which occurred in Leeds last week. In the case of **Joseph Binns**, 79, retired **tailor**, of 6, Burley Village, Leeds, who was run over by one of the new electric cars in Kirkstall Road, on Friday afternoon, Mr. Seaton—one of the medical officers of the Leeds Infirmary—said that **Binns** was dead on admission to that institution. His legs were nearly severed from his body, and death was due to shock, arising from the injuries. Police-constable Westwood said he saw the

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upon arrival at the hospital and PC Westwood witnessed the accident. *'His legs were nearly severed from his body and death was due to shock arising from the injuries.'* [3] Joseph had stepped out in front of the electric car too late for the driver to stop. James' mother Mary died in 1901, aged 83.

James and Frances didn't have children and had a comfortable existence, looked after by a servant at the time of each census return. Frances died in October 1913, aged 60, soon after the installation of the organ in Settle. In 1919 James married again. His second with was **Marian Eva Cuff**, a chemist's daughter from Bristol. James died in 1929, aged 74, still in Leeds, leaving £27,000 to his widow. The vicar of Giggleswick, Revd Theodore Percy Brocklehurst had kept in contact with James and contributed to his funeral service.



The Binns company was taken over by Rushworth & Dreaper of Liverpool in 1953. Nearly 150 years later James' organs are still regarded as some of the best in the country and are proudly reconditioned and transferred to preserve their lives. In 1992 an article commented that James *'never achieved a cathedral organ'*. However, the Binns organ installed in 1904 in Heckmondwike Upper Independent Chapel, *'a cathedral of non-conformity, if there ever was one'* faced the end of its life when the chapel was closed. However, it was saved when the organist of Southwell Minster rescued it. *'It gives us a great sense of satisfaction and pride. J J Binns didn't manage to build a cathedral organ — but we've achieved it for him. This project has saved a magnificent organ.'*[4]

Saved from vandal threat  
**Home is a  
cathedral**

James' sister **Eliza Ann Binns** died an infant. His sister **Ruth Ann Binns** lived with her parents until they died and remained a spinster *'living on own means'*. His brother **Charles Binns** began working life as a mechanic but then, after marrying **Anne Atkinson** made a living as a musician in York. They were unlucky parents. They had seven children but four sons died in infancy or childhood, including two named after Charles' brother, **James Jepson Binns**. A third son named **James Jepson Binns** was killed on the Western Front on 8 April 1917, aged just 27.



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

*Settle Graveyard Project*

*Vestry records with thanks to the church. LSA - Lambert's Settle Almanac with the kind permission of the Museum of North Craven Life*

*Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 — Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion, 2 — Eastern Morning News, 3 — Manchester Evening News, 4 — Huddersfield Daily Examiner*

*ph1 — photo credited to John Reid, ph2 — credited to binns.info, ph3 — credited to Proquest.com, ph4 — credited to picklock.co.uk*

*Burial documentation from ancestry.co.uk, originally from The National Archives.*