

Kenneth Bennett Harrison, a survivor

Kenneth Bennett Harrison was born in October 1933, the son of **Fred Harrison** of Austwick and **Margaret Bennett** of Northumberland. Tragically, mum Margaret (Bennett) Harrison died in May 1940, aged 38, when Kenneth Bennett Harrison was just six, just a couple of years after the photo was taken [ph3]. She was buried in Austwick graveyard. No little boy wants to lose his mum! Despite this difficult start Kenneth had a long, successful and lucky life with a career on the railways, thanks to his dad who got him a job as a junior porter at Horton Station at the age of 15. Incredibly, a full account of Kenneth's life with the railways is given in his own entertaining voice in the oral histories of the Long Preston Heritage Group — what a character! From there we discover his first day of work on 9 January 1949, his daily routines and the quirks of the people he worked with as he was promoted from junior porter to signalman. As well as deliveries, ticket selling and organising signals for the trains his first stationmaster, Mr Taylor at Horton had him working on creating the new station gardens. He was so successful that the garden won numerous prizes.



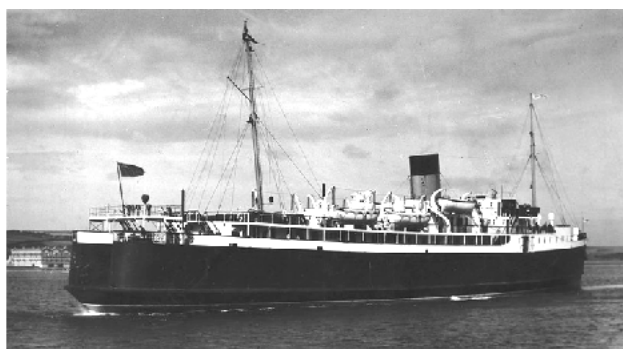
Kenneth was called up for National Service after the war. He had spent three years with the army in Malvern. He joined the Royal Engineers, railway traffic section, usually laying bridges. He worked at the Queen's Dock in Glasgow, Edinburgh and then at the Stranraer ammunition disposal depot where tons of ammunition, transported up the Settle and Carlisle Railway, were disposed of.

Somewhere in the middle of this work, on 31 January 1953 Kenneth found himself on a new type of 'roll-on/roll-off' ferry, the *Princess Victoria*, sailing the short distance between Stranraer and Larne in Northern Ireland. She weighed 2,694 tons and could hold 1,500 passengers plus cargo, cars and lorries and had sleeping accommodation for 54. Despite gale warnings, on that day, Captain James Ferguson, aged 55, with 15 years experience, left Stranraer at 0745 with 44 tons of cargo, 128 passengers and 51 crew. As they reached open water they were confronted with huge 36 foot waves which damaged the stern doors so that the car deck flooded [1]. Unable to turn back because of the conditions the Captain tried to continue but, at 0946 a Morse Code message was transmitted, '*Vessel not under command. Urgent assistance of tugs required*'. The order to '*Abandon Ship*' was issued at 1400 when the ship was a few miles away from the coast of

**DOORS WERE
SMASHED OPEN
BY WAVE**

**Ferry Ship
Story**

RUSH OF WATER



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Northern Ireland, however it was listing so much by then it was impossible to launch some of the lifeboats. That's a long time to be petrified.

The ship [ph1] sank and, despite rescue attempts, an estimated 135 lives were lost — there was no passenger list taken. There were 44 survivors, all men, and none of the ship's officers were among them. Ten crew survived. Among the passengers who perished were three members of the Northern Ireland Parliament [ph2]. This was the deadliest maritime disaster in United Kingdom waters since World War II, and was assigned the headline 'This generation's Titanic'. An enquiry blamed insufficiently robust stern doors and inadequate arrangements for clearing the car deck. The storm also caused 531 fatalities due to flooding on land. Miraculously Kenneth Bennett Harrison survived but, incredibly, he never learned to swim!



How do you carry on after that? Kenneth had married in 1952, just before this so he had a good reason to keep going? After completing his Army service in 1955 Kenneth worked back on the railways as a relief signalman at Settle Junction, Dent, Aisgill, Helwith Bridge and Blea Moor amongst others.

Many signal boxes had minimal facilities, even without water which had to be brought by train. Kenneth recounts the tragic death of **Walter Hayes**, aged 55, at Settle Junction signal box in 1962. Walter was collecting water from the footplate of a southbound train and was returning to the signal box when he was struck by a train coming in the opposite direction. Despite Walter's death water continued to be delivered to signal boxes by trains. In 1977 Kenneth arrived at Blea Moor signal box to find there was no water left. He was assured water would be delivered on the next train, but it wasn't, nor on the next. Kenneth was so annoyed that he decided to put all the signals at red until he had popped down to Horton to collect water from there. In the next 75 minutes chaos ensued on the railway and normal service was only resumed after the next signalman came on duty and sorted it all out. This made headlines across the UK [2]. Kenneth was relieved of his duty immediately and suspended for three days. However, with the support of the National Union of Railworkers, the outcome of the hearing was that a water bowser was provided at Blea Moor signal box and a supply of water also provided for Settle Junction signal box. Good work Kenneth! To this day, the Blea Moor buildings still don't have a water supply and residents over the years have had to rely on local streams, just as the navvies did when the railway was built. Despite this, one of them recently went on the market for £250,000 which seems a lot! [ph4].

Cuppa signals a halt for trains

RAIL passengers were kept waiting at stations and out of trains for more than an hour after a signalman went for a cup of tea.

The thirsty Railtrack employee went home because there was no water at the remote Blea Moor signalbox on the Settle to Carlisle line.

He closed the box, walked a mile to the nearest road and drove home to Settle — leaving 60 passengers at Settle waiting for the train to Carlisle, which they could see waiting at a signal close to the station.

The train was only able to set off when the next signalman turned up for duty.

A spokesman for Railtrack said the signalbox was so remote that there was no running water and supplies were usually delivered in canisters. He said: "For some reason the water didn't turn up on Monday."

"The signalman will be interviewed by his manager, and depending on the outcome we will then decide what action to take."



3 Blea Moor Cottages, Ribbleshead, Chapel-le-Dale @ Seorrap

Offers in Region of
£250,000

[A] which included:

A signalman hears Jazz

The signal-box stands on its timber cradle, Beside the running tracks of steel; Travellers passing see a chrysalis of light, a man hunched motionless within.

Darkness; Signal lights red and green, His hand leaves a lever and points shift, Directing the hurtling tons of iron.

But what they cannot see surrounds him, Unfolding wings of sound: Saxophones, trumpets, drums beating In tumult — a Kansas city chorus. That insentient freight deafens Then fades back into his space in night.

Gripping the lever, he stares as they pass, trains that carried roosting bluesmen From the delta to Chicago, New York, Shake his still reflection.

He drags back his hand, Dreams out the scream of metals, His ear searching this crucible For the frail chords.

A freighter passes, its brake locked on a wheel, Pouring sparks furiously onto the chipping; He leaps up at the molten glow of steel, pressing his cupped hands to the glass Where his eye and imagination fuse.

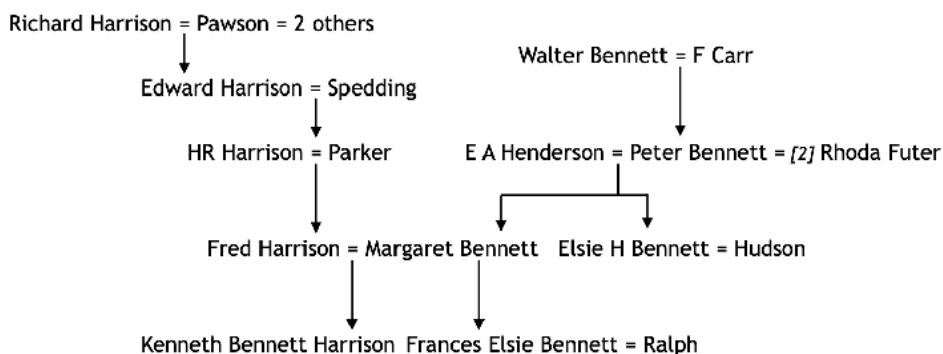
The fire in the night, note after note spilling in him

Kenneth was a busy man but also a family man. He had three children with his wife **Elizabeth (Betty) Margaret Chapman** [ph3] and then many grandchildren and great grandchildren by the time he passed away in 2023, aged 89. Kenneth is buried in the newest section of Settle graveyard, near his father.

The fact that Kenneth's parents met at all involved some interesting twists of fate. Fred Harrison's parents were **Henry Richard Harrison** and **Mary Parker** of Stainforth [ph1]. Fred's paternal grandparents were **Edward Harrison** and **Isabella Spedding**. Edward, born in 1849 and his sister **Alice Harrison** were born in Leeds to **Richard Harrison**, a labourer from Clapham and **Mary Ann Pawson** from Knaresborough.



Harrison Bennett



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However, by the time of the 1861 census Mary Ann was living with her parents, still described as 'married' and the children were boarding in Lawkland with **Robert Whittaker** and his family who don't appear to be related to the Harrisons. Richard Harrison just disappears from the records. Mary Ann went on to have two further husbands: **John Priest**, a brick-maker and, after a spell in Knaresborough workhouse, **Robert Turton**, a farmer.

Meanwhile Edward and Isabella (Spedding) Harrison and their descendants remained in Austwick working in labouring jobs. Their son Henry Richard Harrison, photographed with grandson Kenneth, by the signal box [ph3] married Mary Parker and Fred Harrison was their second child. Fred became a railway signaller which was to help Kenneth get his foot on the ladder when he was old enough to work. Fred lived until 1973 when he was aged 66.



Fred's wife, Margaret Bennett, had her own twists and turns to contribute. She was one of two daughters of **Peter Bennett**, a miner and his first wife **Elizabeth Ann Henderson**, the daughter of a lead miner. Peter's older brother, **Thomas Bennett** was a policeman in County Durham and there are numerous reports of his 'dealing' with drunk and disorderly, theft, assault etc. Peter's father, **Walter Bennett** died on 14 April 1889 when Peter was 24. Miraculously Peter's mother, **Frances (Carr) Bennett**, had another son, **George Bennett**, born on 21 August 1890. George lived with his mum until she died and worked as a labourer.

Margaret Bennett's mother died in 1914 when Margaret was 12 and her younger sister, **Elsie Henderson Bennett** was just three. In 1918 Peter married again. His new wife was widow **Rhoda (Futers) Porter** whose husband, another miner, had died in 1913. She arrived with a son, **Alexander Porter** and they all lived together at the time of the 1921 census. At the same time Fred Harrison was working as a grocer's assistant for 'SA Brown & Son, Clapham', living with his parents and many siblings in Austwick.

By 1930 Margaret Bennett had found her way to the Settle District for employment in domestic service at Lawkland Hall. On 7 June that year she married Fred Harrison with her sister Elsie Henderson Bennett as a witness. In 1932 Elsie married **William Hudson** of Giggleswick who worked servicing the aerial ropeway that transported materials from the quarry to Giggleswick Station. They lived in Tems Street, Giggleswick.

At the time of the 1939 register Peter, Margaret and Kenneth Bennett Harrison lived at Lawkland Hall. Margaret was still in domestic service and Fred was a railway signaller. Fred's youngest sister, **Nancy Harrison** was with them — she ended up marrying **Charles Lord**, the uncle of Settle's famous 'Tot Lord'. They also had Margaret's own daughter, **Frances Elsie Bennett**, living with them, born in 1924. Frances Elsie had been brought up by grandparents in her earlier years. Later, she married **Bryan Ralph** of Horton-in-Ribblesdale.



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.

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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'.

Thanks to relation Donna Ford for her help with this account.

A — poem from A Country on Fire by Graham Mort

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 — Liverpool Echo, 2 — Aberdeen Press and Journal

ph1 — photo credited credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username Sandra Crawford-Alls-Stevenson, ph2 — belfastlive.co.uk, ph3 — photo of newspaper from relation Donna Ford, ph4 — credited to rightmove.co.uk