

Ribblehead Tales . . . Marital difficulties

Conditions at Ribblehead during the building of the Settle to Carlisle Railway were challenging, overcrowded and insanitary. It was a male-dominated environment and many of those men were in their testosterone driven twenties and thirties and fuelled by alcohol, despite the best efforts of the Temperance Societies. Husbands worked hard long shifts digging around six tons of material during a 10 hour day, six days a week and miners worked 12 hour shifts. When they weren't at work, many were drinking. Women had to do all the housework for family and lodgers without any mod cons, often while pregnant and/or childrearing [H]. It's not surprising that marriages felt the strain.



At the time of the 1871 census nearly 80% of the adults were men, 90% of those being navvies (of all types) and others providing services for the community. 22% of the men were married, most living with their wives who were typically running the navy hut with varying numbers of children. Around two-thirds of huts had lodgers and nearly 65% of the men at Ribblehead were male boarders. One navy hut wife, **Elizabeth (Holliday) Holland** was described as, 'a robust, powerful, purposeful dame, of immense energy, considerable surface roughness and real genuine kindness of heart.' [2] She would need to be! Unsurprisingly, there were very few single women at Ribblehead. Over a third of the Ribblehead residents were children. Interestingly, of the baptisms at St Leonard's Church during the navy years, just 45% were boys.

Navvies and other men's wives had a reputation for running off with each other and in other stories we have discovered the naughty wives of **William Goddard**, and of **John Firmstone**, one of our *Informants*, who did just that. Several other cases hit the headlines. For example, **William Farrell** was taken to court for running away with **George Garnett's** wife. 'Farrell and the faithless wife' had been residing in Great Harwood near Blackburn after stealing George's purse containing £20 [1].

was inflicted.—George Garrett, a railway labourer at Settle, preferred a charge of larceny against William Farrell, railway labourer, under the following circumstances. Previous and up to March last, Farrell lodged with the prosecutor at Settle, both parties being employed on the new Settle and Carlisle Railway. Sometime in March last Farrell eloped with the prosecutor's wife, and, as was alleged by the prosecutor, the prisoner had taken a purse, containing £20, along with him. Farrell and the faithless wife have, it appeared, been residing together latterly at Great Harwood, where both were apprehended on the 28th ult., and brought before the Accrington Bench of Magistrates, who remanded them to Settle on a charge of stealing the purse. After hearing the evidence adduced in

One of the most sensational cases earned the headline 'Eloping with the Mother of Seventeen Children, Capture of the Runaways at Barrow'[1]. **William Harding** had been working on the Settle to Carlisle Railway but, when it was almost completed in May 1876, William had to find work elsewhere. He went to Melton Mowbray to look for work and accommodation. He left his wife with £40 cash 'in a well furnished house' planning to collect the family once sorted. 'Mrs Rachel Harding is about 48 years of age, being married 25 years and has had no fewer than seventeen children, of whom seven are living, the eldest being about 16 years of age, and the youngest about 12 months.' William returned after a short time away and upon his arrival, 'was greeted by his eldest daughter who, he was shocked to find, had two black eyes, the result of some ill-usage. The poor girl had discovered the shame of her mother who had misconducted herself with a navvy, Samuel Cooper, who is 27 years of age, who had recently lodged at the house. The girl had protested to her mother against her intimacy with this man and the ruffian had not

ELOPING WITH THE MOTHER OF SEVENTEEN CHILDREN.
CAPTURE OF THE RUNAWAYS AT BARROW.
 On Monday afternoon week an escapee took place in John-street, Barrow, when a runaway wife and her paramour were discovered by the wronged husband. It appears that on Monday



then hesitated to strike her. Immediately after this the couple fled, carrying off with them the baby, all the available money, two watches, wearing apparel, trunks and bedding.' Understandably, William immediately involved the police who found the couple in Barrow. **Samuel Cooper** was arrested and taken to Bradford for a court appearance. He was charged on 16 May with 'stealing 2 boxes, a bolster and a pillow' with no mention of a wife.

Stealing 2 boxes, 2 watches, a bolster, and a pillow, the property of William Harding, at Ingleton, on the

However, because Samuel did not receive those goods in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the prosecution 'would not be justified in offering evidence and asking the jury to convict him' [3]. And so Samuel was acquitted. Lucky Samuel! In a classic case of 19th century journalistic incompetence[4], one journalist reported the case of **William Cooper** eloping with the wife of **Samuel Hardy**! They don't make it easy for researchers.

depositions showed the prisoner did not receive the goods into his possession in the West Riding of Yorkshire, but most likely in Lancashire, therefore he (Mr. Gatty) would not be justified in offering evidence, and asking the jury to convict him. The jury, by direction of the Court, acquitted the prisoner.

before E. M. Fenwick, and J. T. Coates, Esqrs., Wm. Cooper, of Batty Green, labourer, was brought up in custody of Sergeant Clapham, charged with eloping with the wife of Samuel Hardy, from Batty Green, and

William Harding was a life long excavator/railway labourer from Helsby in Cheshire. He had married **Rachael Davis** from Carmarthen in 1852. They had lived in Wales for many years with visits to Truro, Cornwall and Clifton, Bristol having children as they went. Rachel would have done incredibly well to have produced 17 children and records are struggling to support that! The baby Rachael took with her was youngest **Arthur Walter Harding (Harden)** who was baptised at St Leonard's on 3 June 1874 'of Batty Green'. In all subsequent census returns Alfred gave his birthplace as 'Jericho'. The sixteen year old daughter who received the black eyes was **Eliza Harding**.

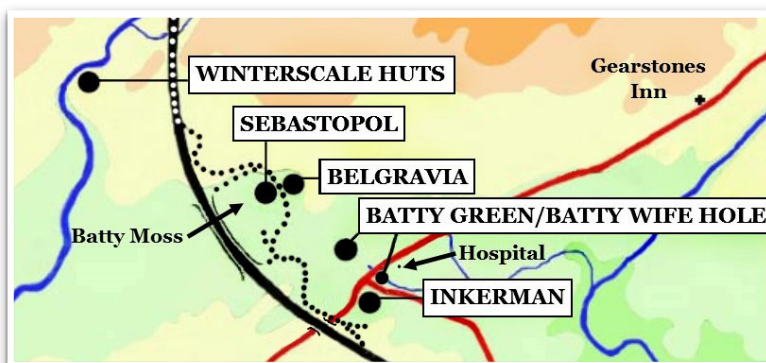
Jan 3rd	Arthur	William	Harden	Batty Green	Lancaster	Samuel Hardy
	Rachael					

Settle Graveyard Project

There are no further records for Rachael (Harding or Cooper) and at the time of the 1881 census William, described as a 'widower' and general labourer, lived at 864 Ripponden Road with four children, including the youngest, Arthur Walter. The cottage was in a row of weavers' residences high upon on the moors above Oldham. William died in 1884, aged 58. After his death, the last four surviving children, including Eliza and Alfred Walter, all remained single and stayed in the same property working in the mills until they died. In most returns Alfred Walter was described as 'outa work'.



Richard Ingham and William Knowles both used work on the railway as an escape from their wives! **Richard Ingham** was a local lad, born in Settle. In 1839, aged 22, he married **Alice Eglin** who was 21 and they both worked in the cotton mills. Two years later they had a daughter **Ellen Ingham** but she died, aged just five weeks. And that was that. Richard and Alice lived apart for the rest of their lives. Richard worked on the railways and Alice worked in domestic service. Richard went to Ribbleshead to work as a railway labourer, living at Inkerman huts. Richard was the fourth navy to die at Ribbleshead, on 9 October 1870. He died of heart disease and asthma aged 50.



William Knowles was from Litton in Derbyshire and was a quarry labourer when he married **Elizabeth Beresford**. They had five children before they separated. At the time of the 1871 census William and his 13 year old son, another **William Knowles** were at hut 98 Sebastopol working as railway labourers, lodging with a blacksmith. Younger lads like William were often used to take messages and make deliveries with a horse and cart. Their neighbours included the **Rixon family** who ran the brickworks which were close by. It's quite likely William worked for them too. Meanwhile wife Elizabeth stayed in Derbyshire with their only unmarried daughter, another **Elizabeth Knowles**. When wife Elizabeth died, daughter Elizabeth came up to Ribbleshead and found a husband, **Joseph Arnett**, a navy from Staffordshire and they married at St Leonard's in 1874. Son **John Knowles** also came to Ribbleshead and was present at the death of **George Hill** who died of smallpox in February 1872. William was the third last navy to die at Ribbleshead, on 14 January 1877, aged 57 of congestion of the lungs. By then he lived at Salt Lake and son William was there at his death. His death notice explained he had worked on the railway for seven years so would have been at Ribbleshead from the very start [1]. He very nearly made it to the end. William and Elizabeth's children spent their lives on the railway too.

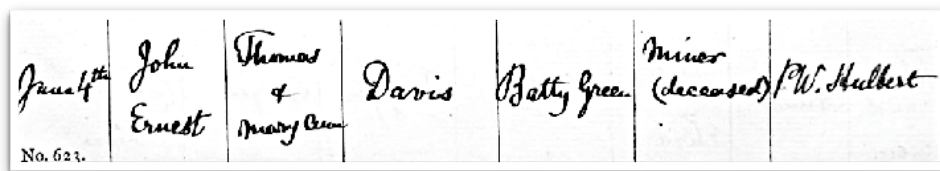
On the 14th inst., at Batty Green, Mr. William Knowles, employed on the works of the Settle and Carlisle line for seven years, aged 57 years.

Settle Graveyard Project

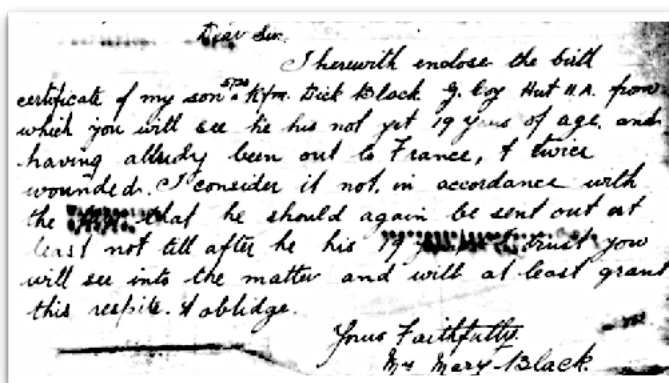
The stories of **Harriet Reeks** and her daughters were typical of many navvies' wives. It's all very well getting married to provide a means of income, but what happens if the husbands die? At the time of the April 1871 census **Harriet (Blackwell) Statham**, a labourer's widow, lived in Duffield with some of her seven children. Her husband had died in 1867. Between then and 1875 she had made her way to Ribblesdale, perhaps with her sons who were labourers and met a navy, **John Reeks** from Somerset who she 'married' — there is no formal certificate. In September 1876 Harriet was present at the death of **Joseph Briton** who died of heart problems, aged 55.

Harriet's daughter **Sarah Ann Statham** married her first husband **Charles Brown** at Ribblesdale on 12 March 1877. They had their family in Horton-in-Ribblesdale where Charles worked as a quarryman. That's also where she married second husband **Walter Marshall**, another quarryman, when Charles died in 1899. After the railway was built the Reeks family moved to Settle and then Gargrave. Harriet worked as a nurse while John laboured. They died in Gargrave.

On 6 March 1876 daughter **Mary Hannah Statham**, aged 17, married **Thomas Davis** in Derbyshire. Incredibly, Thomas was buried just a week later on 13 March 1876. Three months later a son **John Ernest Davis** was baptised at St Leonard's Church in Chapel-le-Dale with Thomas described as '*miner (deceased)*'. Perhaps they knew Thomas hadn't long to live and decided to '*do the right*



thing' for pregnant Mary Hannah? Mary Hannah, six months pregnant, found her way to Ribblesdale to be with her mother. On 28 April 1878, now in Settle, Mary Hannah, aged 21, married **John Henry Darby**, a police constable and they had a daughter **Harriet Darby** (who later married the wonderfully named **Shackleton Williamson**, a weaver) before John Henry died in 1880. Mary Hannah had another son, **Thomas William Davis** before marrying **Richard Black**, 20 years her senior and another railway labourer. The wedding was in Gargrave on Christmas Day, 1886 and they had a few more children. Richard died in 1910. Son **Dick Black** enlisted in the army aged just 16. Despite his age, and so being against regulations, Dick was sent out on foreign service and was wounded, twice. Mary Hannah wrote to the army to complain and sent in his birth certificate as proof of his age. As if she didn't have enough to be worried about?! They agreed not to send him out again until he was old enough.



Poor **Thomas Cook**, a 30 year old platelayer on the railway in Carlisle decided married life was all too much. In 1875 he took his own life leaving a chalk message on a nearby wall, '*I take the pleasure of riting [sic] these few lines, if it will be a warning to all young men never to live with a mother-in-law. Now I end my miserable existence*' [5]. Ouch.

A MATRIMONIAL CALAMITY.—Yesterday morning, a young man, 30 years of age, a platelayer on the Settle and Carlisle Railway, hanged himself on a post in a public drying-ground at Carlisle. Before doing so he wrote with a piece of chalk on a neighbouring wall the following message:—"I take the pleasure of riting these few lines, if it will be a warning to all young men never to live with a mother-in-law. Now I end my miserable existence."

Settle Graveyard Project



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. 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'.

H — Painting by Betty Harrington, with the kind permission of the Museum of North Craven Life and thanks to Nigel Mussett and Peter Thomson who is related.

Navy Settlements diagram with thanks to Nigel Mussett, archivist for FoSCL. Sketch thanks to Teresa Gordon

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 — Lancaster Gazette, 2 — Chambers Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art, 3 — Bradford Daily Telegraph, 4 — Craven Herald, 5 — Rochdale Observer

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, originally from The National Archives.