

## Ribblehead Tales . . . Navvies who died of 'natural causes'

Nearly half of the navvies who died at Ribblehead were victims of infectious diseases, with over a third of those being victims of the smallpox outbreak of 1871. A fifth of the navvies died in appalling accidents which could have been prevented with the most basic health and safety measures. Over a third of the navvies died of non-infectious diseases, often referred to as 'natural causes.' The matching plaques at St Leonard's Church in Chapel-le-Dale and Holy Ascension Church in Settle read:

***To the memory of those who through accidents lost their lives in constructing the railway works between Settle and Dent Head. This tablet was erected at the joint expense of their fellow workmen and the Midland Railway Company 1869 to 1876***



As so many of the non-accidental deaths were a product of the appalling conditions at Ribblehead, it's a shame the plaque didn't acknowledge them too. The extreme physical challenge of navy work and the harsh living environment will inevitably have exploited any bodily weakness resulting in men dying at a ridiculously young age.

By far the most common 'natural cause' was heart disease and strokes

**Richard Ingham** had been living in the Inkerman huts. He was from Settle and had been separated from his wife for many years. He died of heart disease and asthma on 9 October 1870, aged 50 — see *Marital Difficulties*.

**John Williams**, a Scottish railway miner had been working at Bleamoor tunnel when he died of '*Extravasation of Blood on the Brain*' (a stroke) on 7 October 1871 aged just 24.

**John William Whisker** was a joiner's son from Manchester. He had been labouring at Batty Wife Hole when he died on 12 January 1872 after suffering 10 days of serious apoplexy (heart attack/stroke), aged 24. His brother **James Whisker** was present at his death.

On 7 December 1872 one of the most popular men at Ribblehead died. **Job Hirst**, the sub-contractor overseeing the building of the viaduct, suffered a heart attack after being assaulted on the way back up to Ribblehead from Ingleton — see *Subcontractors*. He was 57. Neighbour **Robert Holland**, the Tommy Shop keeper, was present at his death

On 23 July 1873 **William Reaves**, a Batty Wife railway labourer died of heart trouble, aged 30.

**Thomas Clark**, a railway labourer based in the Jericho huts died of heart problems, aged 34 on 18 September 1873. **Richard Foster**, the letter carrier/shoemaker was present at his death.

**Charles James Hill** was a labourer at Bleamoor Tunnel. He died of emphysema and cardiac disease on 7 May 1874, aged 43. His stepson **Henry Hill** was present at his death - see '*A colourful life*'

**John Wallden**, a bricklayer at the Tunnel died of heart problems on 12 May 1874, aged 43.

**Joseph Briton** was a railway labourer at Batty Green. He died on 24 September 1875, aged 55, of '*Disease of Aortic Valve and Dropsy*' (oedema, swelling under the skin). **Harriet Reeks** was present at his death — see *Marital Difficulties*.

As we know, alcohol makes everything worse [ph1].

*'For the navy, as a rule, if he be alive, whether in a tunnel, or on an embankment, or going to bed, or getting up, either by day or night, Sunday or week-day, drink is his paradise. More beer and spirits have been drunk at the works at Batty Green than would drown all the inhabitants of the Ingleton township twice over.'*[2] Despite the best efforts of the Temperance Societies and the missionaries, such as **James Tiplady**, the quantity of alcohol consumed by the navvies actually killed some of them, including the surgeon **Frederick MacFarlane Leveson** [2].

**James McVay**, a miner at Bleamoor tunnel, was a miner's son from Frizington, Cumberland. He died on 27 April 1872 of *'hepatitis and abscess of the liver'*, aged just 25. **Samuel Mathers**, the innkeeper's son was present at his death.

They drank beer in fantastic quantities. In fact the alcohol was the cause of nearly all the troubles which beset them.



**William Dyke** was a carpenter at Bleamoor Tunnel. On 30 July 1874, aged 40, he died of *'Delirium Tremens'* which, these days, is the tremors and hallucinations associated from the withdrawal from alcohol.

**Sarah Smith**, the wife of Bleamoor miner **James Smith**, from Shropshire, died of cirrhosis of the liver on 19 September 1871, aged 41. James was with her when she died. She was the first burial in the newly extended graveyard — see *Graveyard Extension*.

An excess of alcohol also caused the death of **Peter Miles** in a most appalling accident and **Henry Bachelor** - below. PC **Archie Cameron** had to deal with an inebriated navvy, **George Young**, when he exploded some dynamite at the Gearstones Inn.

Some navvies had deaths which sounded excruciating

**William Brown**, a stonemason from Skipton had been living at Jericho when he died of *Erysipatous* [Erysipelas, a form of cellulitis] and *inflammation of the brain*, possibly caused by a bang on the head and exacerbated by alcohol. He died on 7 November 1871, aged 37. The newspaper reported that he was an *'innkeeper'*[1] although the death certificate and burial records referred to him as a stonemason. He could easily have been both! William's son **John Brown** was buried on 8 February 1872. William was the third out of four husbands of **Ann Whittaker** of Grassington — that's unlucky.

Ingleton Fells.—On the 7th inst, at Jericho, Mr. William Brown, innkeeper, aged 37 years.

Poor old **Thomas Fitton** was a railway labourer at Batty Green, originally from Seacroft, Leeds. He died, aged 39, on 30 July 1873 of *'the rupture of intestines and haemorrhage'*.

**Robert Holland**, the Tommy Shop keeper died on 12 January 1875 due to a combination of *Ulceration of glands of the bowels*, from which he suffered for three months, finished off with Typhoid — see *Holland's Tommy Shop*.

**John Metcalfe** was a labourer at the Jericho huts who died of 'paralysis' on 7 February 1874, aged 65.

**Thomas Absolom** was a labourer at Batty Green, who spent most of his life as an agricultural labourer in Berkshire. When his wife, **Jane Tubb**, died in 1873 Thomas brought the rest of the family to Ribblehead. Daughter Sophia had a couple of illegitimate children before marrying **Joshua Steel**, son of the 'wonderful workman' **Charles Steel** — see *Graveyard Extension*. Thomas died on 24 April 1876, aged 49, of *Rheumatic Inflammation of Covering to Brain*, which could have been a form of meningitis.

Two of these excruciating deaths were due to peritonitis — the infection of the lining of the abdomen.

**Thomas Develyn/Devlin**, an Irish miner at Bleamoor Tunnel died of convulsions following peritonitis. He died on 22 October 1873, aged 24.

**Arthur James Lambert** was a labourer at Batty Green, originally from Guildford, Surrey. At the time of the 1871 census he was a miner living at the Jordan Huts with his wife **Mary Ann King** and seven of their 11 children. Their neighbours were **James** and **Sarah Smith** - Sarah was the first burial in the graveyard extension. Arthur and Mary had travelled around before arriving in Ribblehead — children's birth places included Dorset, Roxburghshire in Scotland, Herefordshire, Stange in Derbyshire and Dentdale. Their eldest daughter **Mary Lambert** and her husband, **William Baker**, a miner, were living at the Jericho huts. Arthur James Lambert died on 16 July 1875 of peritonitis, aged 48. After Arthur's death several of the children and their families moved to Thelwall, Cheshire in the area that now houses the Thelwall Viaduct.

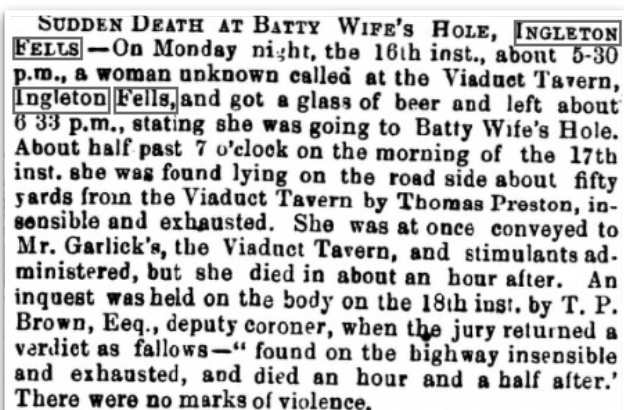
## Two navvies died of untreatable conditions

**Thomas Swanton** from Cork was one of our few Irish railway labourers. He had lived at Batty Wife Hole. He had previously served in the navy in Shanghai. Thomas was the first navy to die at Ribblehead. He died of epilepsy on 15 August 1870, aged 35 — see *First Burials*. **Robert Holland**, the Tommy Shopkeeper, was present at his death.

**Frank Darnell** was the 15 year old son of railway labourer **William Darnell** from Leicestershire. They had been living at Inkerman when Frank died, on 13 April 1871, of diabetes — see *Children*. Frank's father was with him when he died.

## Some navvies were just found dead

Potentially suspicious deaths automatically prompted a Coroner's Inquest and were therefore reported in the papers, in most cases. On 16 January 1871 'a woman unknown' called into the **John Garlick's** Viaduct Tavern and had a beer on her way to Batty Wife Hole. At 7am the following morning she was found lying on the road 50 yards from the tavern 'insensible



SUDDEN DEATH AT BATTY WIFE'S HOLE, [INGLETON FELLS]—On Monday night, the 16th inst., about 5-30 p.m., a woman unknown called at the Viaduct Tavern, [Ingleton] [Fells], and got a glass of beer and left about 6-33 p.m., stating she was going to Batty Wife's Hole. About half past 7 o'clock on the morning of the 17th inst. she was found lying on the road side about fifty yards from the Viaduct Tavern by Thomas Preston, insensible and exhausted. She was at once conveyed to Mr. Garlick's, the Viaduct Tavern, and stimulants administered, but she died in about an hour after. An inquest was held on the body on the 18th inst. by T. P. Brown, Esq., deputy coroner, when the jury returned a verdict as follows—"found on the highway insensible and exhausted, and died an hour and a half after." There were no marks of violence.

Settle Graveyard Project

and exhausted'[1]. She was taken back to the Viaduct Tavern but died about an hour later. 'She is between 35 and 40 years old, 5ft high, complexion dark, dark brown hair and dark eyes, print dress, black bonnet and clogs.'[2]

She is between 35 and 40 years old, 5ft high, complexion dark; dark brown hair, and dark eyes; print dress, black bonnet, and clogs.

On 20 August 1872 'a man unknown' was 'Found dead in a barn without marks of violence', having told a farmer he was spending the night in there [1]. The coroner estimated his age as about 60. He died and was buried on the same dates as **Frederick Pryke** who died when he was 'Accidentally killed by a Railway Wagon running over him'.

INGLETON.  
FOUND DEAD.—An inquest was held at Welcome House Inn, August 22nd, on the body of a man unknown, apparently about 60 years of age. Deceased was found in a barn, near Batty Green, by Richard Bentham, Farmer, and stated that he was going to stay there all night. Bentham looked into the Barn next morning and found the deceased dead, and lying about the same place where he left him the night before.—Verdict.—Found dead.

Twentyneth August 1872 Ingleton Fells	A Man Unknown	Male	about 60 years	Salvager	Found dead in a Barn without marks of violence
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A few weeks later, on 19 September 1872, **George Bond** was 'Found dead in a hole near the huts on Ingleton Fells without any marks of violence upon his person'. He was 35 [1]. The inquest was at **James Mathers'** Welcome Home Inn

CORONER'S INQUEST.—An inquest was held 20th inst., at the Welcome Home Inn, Batty Ingleton Fells, before T. P. Browne, Esq., coroner, on the body of **George Bond**, labourer. Verdict: "Found dead near the huts, Batty Green, without marks of violence."

**William Summers**, a labourer at Batty Green was 'Found dead without any marks of violence' on 20 January 1874, aged 30

CORONER'S INQUEST.—On the 22nd inst. an inquest was held at the Railway Inn, Batty Green, Ingleton Fells, before Thomas Brown, Esq., Coroner, on the body of **William Summers**, labourer, aged about 30 years. Verdict, "Found dead without any marks of violence."

**Henry Bachelor** was a labourer at Sebastopol. Henry got himself drunk on Sunday 14 February 1875 — how romantic. Perhaps he was drowning his sorrows? Henry went to his lodgings to ask his landlord to give him a bird which he kept there. The landlord refused as he was too drunk. Nobody saw Henry again until he was found dead the next day. The verdict was 'Found dead with no marks of violence' except a small bruise thought to be obtained by falling [1]. He was just 22 and was known by an alias, **William Smith**.

FOUND DEAD.—Henry Bachelor, about 22 years of age, was found dead on the Settle and Carlisle Railway near to Sebastopol, Bleamore, on Monday last. It appears that he was never seen alive after about 12 o'clock at noon on Sunday, the day previous, when he went to his lodgings at Mr. Lirke's, and asked for a bird which he had there, but as he was drunk his landlord refused to give it to him, when he went away and was not again seen alive. About seven o'clock on Monday morning he was found lying on his face on the railway quite dead. There were no marks upon him except a small bruise on his forehead, which it was thought was obtained by his falling.—An inquest was held at the Railway Inn, Batty Green, on Tuesday, before Mr. T. P. Brown, deputy coroner, when the jury returned a verdict of "Found dead."

**Thomas Robinson** was one of 12 children of another **Thomas Robinson** and his wife **Jane Atkinson** who were farmers at Aikrigg Green near Kirkby Lonsdale. Most of Thomas (Jnr)'s siblings stayed in farming but Thomas was attracted by opportunities on the railway. Thomas was witness to the wedding of **Jane Oxendale** and **William Archer** in 1872 — see *Informants*. Thomas' eldest sister, **Miriam Robinson** married **John Bentham**, a farm servant. John Bentham

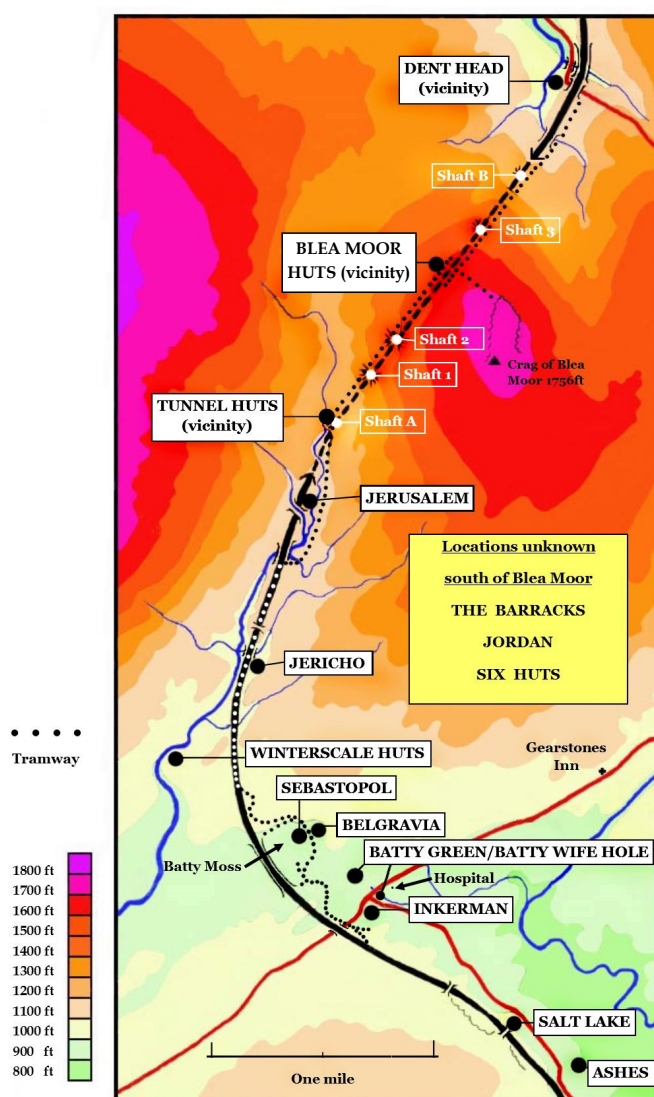


## Settle Graveyard Project

died in July 1870 and was the last burial at St Leonard's before the navy deaths began with the death of little **Annie Wall** — see *First Burials*. John had been working at the Chapel House when he died, perhaps working for the vicar.

For some reason Thomas' death was not registered so we don't know the cause of his death, but as there was no report in the paper it was probably not an accidental death. Instead, Thomas' family had a gravestone erected in a quiet corner of the extended graveyard.

***In memory of Thomas Robinson, son of Thomas and Jane Robinson of Aikrigg Green, Westmorland who died at Bleamoor 17 July 1873, aged 28 years.***



Supposed locations of navy settlements between Ribbleshead and Dent Head.

Revised to 2022. © Nigel Mussett

*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.*

## Settle Graveyard Project

*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'.*

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

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

*ph1 — 'Delirium' credited to Wikipedia, from Wellcome Images from the Wellcome trust*

*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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