

Ribblehead Tales . . . Babies, infants and children

At the time of the 1871 census at Ribblehead 38% of the residents were children aged 16 or under. During the 19th century infants, aged five and under, represented a fifth of burials. With such a high child mortality rate and with no reliable contraception it's easy to see why some families had so many children, despite the perils of childbirth for the mothers. The contractors provided some education for younger children at Ribblehead and most parents encouraged children to attend, around their work, of course. Children were very useful! Navy wives bringing up numerous children whilst also providing for their lodgers needed everyone to chip in with the endless chores. Children could also bring in some money, even at Ribblehead. Girls were very cheap employees at the Rixon's brickworks, carrying bricks and young lads led horses with carts laden with materials to the various worksites — a very dangerous job. However, it was good training to build up the fitness and experience for life as a navy. **Job Hirst**, the subcontractor employed to oversee the construction of Batty Moss (Ribblehead) Viaduct died of a heart attack (after an assault) in December 1872. Thanks to working alongside their dad, his two sons, aged 23 and 21, were regarded sufficiently experienced to take over the contract and, we must admit, did a pretty good job!

Talking of large families other accounts cover the **Holland family** running the Tommy Shop who had ten children — one of their daughters, **Betsy (Holland) Sewell**, had 17 children. **Charles Steel** and his wife **Eden Bibby** were reported to have 20 children including three sets of twins and **William Harding** and his wife **Rachel Davis** also had 17, resulting in her running off with a navy half her age.

However, it's the deaths of children that made the headlines. Stories about the little ones always pull at the heart strings, don't they? Out of the burials at St Leonard's, Chapel-le-Dale during the years of the Settle to Carlisle Railway construction 125 were aged 14 and under, representing 58% of the navy family burials. 115 were aged five and under which was 46% of navy family burials, and more than double than the national average. 102 were aged three or under which was 41% of navy family burials.

Why were there so many child deaths? The navy families were living in horrendous, unhygienic conditions. The wooden huts were often crowded with large navy families and several lodgers. A cooking range provided heat and dirty oil lamps provided light, fuel permitting, [H] but there was no running water. Women had no choice but to use water for washing and cleaning from the stream (which others and animals had used for waste). Alcohol was the only 'safe' drink and, as



It is not much to look at. A number of low, wooden huts, covered with tarred felting, have grouped themselves together without pretence to arrangement on either side of the road, that winds down rather steeply from the archway to the little pool formed by the head waters of the Ribble, as they spring out of the limestone rock. Great square-shouldered, rough-faced men, with slouched billycocks, knotted kerchiefs, dingy slops, very short moleskin trousers, and tremendously stout ankle jacks, come lurching out of the huts, and stride heavily through the oozy moorland to the scene of their work. Pigs walk about Batty-green at their sweet will, rooting in the garbage about the gables of the huts, or rolling themselves lazily in the swiftly flowing gutter.

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navvies needed to quench their thirst after all that hard labour, were regularly inebriated. The whole area was called 'Batty Moss' for good reason — it was a bog, with planks providing the only walkways. The huts were surrounded by the navy wives' livestock and rats ran around the hut roofs [2]. Huts were covered with felt which were tarred three times a year and the hut walls were lime washed to reduce transmission of disease, despite the side effects of these irritants. It would have smelt awful. It's no wonder so many infants died. And imagine giving birth in those conditions?

The story of six year old **Annie Wall** is covered in the *First Burials* and the story of the **Goddard children** is covered in the *Graveyard Extension*. **James Fassam/Fasham** had one of the most heart-breaking stories to tell. James, a labourer and his wife **Hannah Keys** came from Ash, near Sandwich, Kent. They married in 1863 when Hannah was 25 and James 36 and five children followed in quick succession although their only son, **William Fassam**, died an infant, just a couple of months old, before they came to Ribblehead. By the time of the 1871 census they had moved to Batty Green, lodging with **Kate McGeown** of Dublin at 74 Sebastopol. Kate's hut was one in a row of six in Sebastopol run by women who described their role as 'mistress' which remains open to interpretation! These mistresses were generally young, respectably 'married' or 'widowed', but without husbands in sight. Unsurprisingly, it's impossible to trace any of them aside from this census return so they were using false names, unsurprisingly. It seems Kate may have completed the census return and didn't quite get all the daughters' ages right. **Emma's** age was about right, **Ellen** was actually three months old, rather than five years, **Jane** was five years instead of three and **Harriet** was nearly three years instead of three months! Mum Hannah's age was about right but James was 44/5 rather than 40.



74 Sebastopol	1	Kate Mcgeown	Head	Mar	50	Mistress
		James Fassam	Boarder	Mar	44	Railway Labourer
		Hannah do	Serv	Mar	31	
		Emma do	Boarder	Woman	6	
		Ellen do	do	do	5	
		Jane do	do	do	3	
		Harriet do	do	do	3mo	
		William Gardener	Boarder	Mar	48	Railway Labourer
		Ann do	do	Mar	42	

The smallpox (variola) epidemic reached the shanty towns in April 1871 and **William Griffiths** was the first fatality on 28 April. The Fassams were soon infected too. Within a period of two weeks in May wife Hannah and all four daughters had died [1]. They were all given separate burials — smallpox victims were always buried as soon as possible to reduce infection and, even in those days, they knew infection could spread and



wouldn't disturb the grave of a smallpox victim.

Ingleton.—On the 4th inst., at Sebastopol, Harriet Fassam, aged 2 years; on the 11th inst., Mrs. Hannah Fassam, aged 33 years; on the 14th inst., Ellen Fassam, aged 8 months; and on the 18th inst., Jane Fassam, aged 5 years.

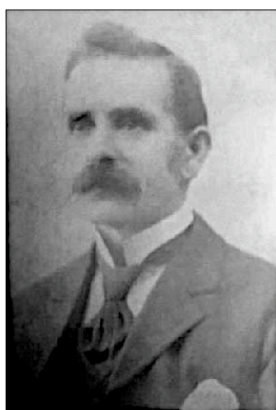
FASSAM.—On the 19th ult., at Sebastopol, Ingleton Fells, aged 6 years. Emma, daughter of Mr. James Fassam, railway labourer, being the fifth death in the same family since the 4th ult.

Just a couple of months later James found himself in court on a charge of unlawfully aiding and abetting **Frederick Hoare** to assault and beat a medical attendant **Henry Heighton** [1]. **Frederick Hoare** was another life-long miner from Somerset and lived a few doors down from James at 79 Sebastopol with his wife **Emma King** and seven children. Frederick's eight year old daughter **Eliza Hoare** had died on the same day as James' daughter Harriet Fassam and so it seems they both had an axe to grind with the medical attendant?

James was fined £1 10 shillings plus 13 shillings costs, which wouldn't have been too much of an imposition on a navvy's wage. The Chairman made it clear that in future cases a fine would not be an option to a House of Correction. No mention is made of James or Frederick's recent bereavement, of course. Frederick Hoare was no angel either — he had a criminal record for the theft of a watch worth £1 and 15 shillings.

Ingleton Fells, was charged by Henry Heighton, medical attendant at the railway works, with unlawfully aiding and abetting one Frederick Hoare, to assault and beat the said Henry Heighton. The defendant was fined £1 10s., and costs, 13s., in default, two months imprisonment in the House of Correction at Wakefield with hard labour. The fine and costs were paid. The Chairman commented strongly on the case, and wished it to be clearly understood by the workmen and others on the new line, if a similar case was brought before them they should feel disposed to send the offender to gaol without the option of a fine.

Just months after the death of his family, in November 1871 James was present at the death of **Edward Poole**, a 28 year old bricklayer, who had been living at Bleamoor Tunnel, who died of phthisis (tuberculosis). It's hard to appreciate how death was such a regular part of life for our navvies and their families. James died 18 months later on 4 November 1872 of typhoid fever. Poor man.



John Little, Engine Driver.

John Little [ph1] was an engine driver from Maryport, Cumberland and had two children with his first wife **Eleanor Perry**. The children were shipped off to live with their Little grandparents when Eleanor died and John married **Mary Charters**. Mary had a daughter and three sons by the time the family moved to Inkerman huts at Batty Green. Tragically within days of each other, on 5 and 9 February 1871, sons **Frederick** and **Tom Atkinson Little** both died aged 4 and 1 year six months respectively. So,

weeks later at the time of the April 1871 census John and Mary were at the Inkerman huts, 10 Batty Wife Hole, with just a son and a daughter. By November 1872 the family were at Appleby where appropriately named youngest son **Frederick Atkinson Little** was baptised in November 1872. After the railway was built the family moved back to Cumberland where John continued to work as a loco driver.



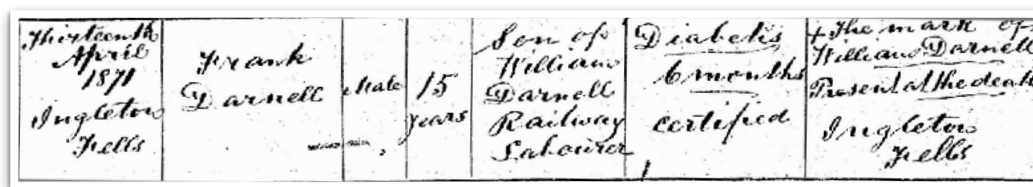
Frederick Little (left), born at Batty Green 1871, and his elder brother John Charles.

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John and Mary both died during the 1880s aged 54 and 46 respectively. Despite their early deaths all the remaining children survived. Daughter **Jane** had a lifelong career as a schoolmistress and headteacher. The sons, as we can see [ph1], including the two from the first marriage, had good careers in railways and in the military.

William Darnell from Market Harborough was a lifelong excavator/tunneller so spent his whole life in navy huts in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Saddleworth as well as Ribbleshead. His poor wife **Elizabeth Loveday** spent her life catering for the needs of the family and lodgers whilst giving birth to at least six children. At the time of the 1871 census William, Elizabeth and their youngest son **Francis (Frank) Darnell** lived at 19 Batty Wife Hole in the Inkerman huts with five lodgers.

Son Frank Darnell was 15 and was already working as a railway labourer. Three sons and a daughter had previously died as infants. Just 11 days after the census return son Francis died of diabetes from which he had been suffering for six months. Of all the causes of death at Ribbleshead, diabetes is less likely but was not understood in those days and so frequently fatal. Dad William was there at his death.



William and Elizabeth just had one son left, **John Henry Darnell**. He had started working as a goods guard on the railways in Nottinghamshire, but he died in Wortley, Leeds in 1875, aged just 26. So, all six children predeceased William and Elizabeth. William and Elizabeth retired to Northamptonshire where they worked as agricultural labourers. Elizabeth died aged 72 and William lived to the age of 86 which is incredible considering their physical life.

We spare a thought for all these little ones, and the hundreds of others like them, and their parents. How lucky we are to have today's midwifery and medical provision. Stories of twins and triplets are in a separate account.



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 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. Sketches kindly provided by Teresa Gordon

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ph1 — with the kind permission of John Locker whose wife descends from the Little family, and Nigel Mussett

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

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.

