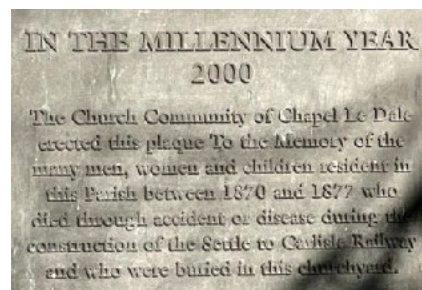


## Ribblehead Tales . . . Navvies dying of respiratory infections

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 millennium plaque at St Leonard's Church reads:

***In the Millennium Year 2000 The Church Community of Chapel Le Dale erected this plaque To the memory of the many men, women and children resident in the Parish who died through accident or disease during the construction of the Settle to Carlisle railway and who were buried in this graveyard.***



The cramped conditions, lack of sick pay and incredibly high turnover of labourers from all over the country provided a hot bed for disease. In a similar study into the deaths of navvies who were buried at Settle graveyard the distribution of causes of death was significantly different. Just under half those navvies died of accidents and just over half died of disease. No navvies died of smallpox and less than 10% died of 'natural causes'. In Settle many navvies boarded with families and those that were in navy huts found their buildings on solid ground. Being based in a small town, life was far more 'normal', probably with less temptations than the insular world of Ribblehead. Overall, the 'living' conditions at Ribblehead were far worse than in Settle and so the chances of death were far greater.



### Typhoid

Aside from smallpox, covered in a separate account, the majority of the other infectious diseases were down to typhoid, phthisis (tuberculosis) or other respiratory diseases. Typhoid/enteric fever is a highly contagious bacterial infection, *Salmonella typhi*, that can spread throughout the body, affecting many organs. An infected person can pass the bacteria out of their body and this can easily spread to others, especially in places like Ribblehead. The typhoid vaccine wasn't invented until 1896, far too late for these nine navvies.

The first fatal case of typhoid was in the middle of the smallpox outbreak, on 2 June 1871, when **William Clark**, a railway labourer from Sebastopol died after four days of suffering, aged 27. He was from Long Sandal, near Wakefield and had been boarding at Hart's Head in Giggleswick, working on more southerly sections of the railway before coming to Ribblehead. He was described as a widower in the census return. **John Firmstone** was present at his death — see *Informants*

On 30 January 1872 **Thomas Walker** died. He was a bread baker living in the Jericho huts and was 27 years old.

It being a leap year, on 29 February 1872 **Henry Loyd**, a labourer at Jericho huts died, aged 46. **John Firmstone** was present at his death too.

## Settle Graveyard Project

On 26 March 1872 **Joseph Drury** the son of another **Joseph Drury**, a shoemaker at Batty Green died, aged 18.

A few days later, on 31 March 1872 **Henry William Tozer** died, aged 18. The Tozers were from Luppit, Devon. Henry was the eldest son of **William Tozer**, a shoemaker and his wife **Elizabeth Griffin**. Henry's uncle, **James Auber Tozer**, a shoemaker and his wife and family lived at 39 Batty Wife Hole at the time of the 1871 census and Henry had come up to join them. Uncle James stayed at Ribblehead for several years, having two children baptised at St Leonard's church.

Months later on 24 Nov 1872 **James Fassam**, a labourer, died after suffering for seven days, aged 52. James' wife and four daughters died of smallpox within a fortnight in May 1871 at the beginning of the outbreak — *see Children*.

**Henry Hodges** was the son of **John Hodges**, a railway labourer at Batty Green. Henry died of typhoid and John died of tuberculosis. Henry died on 9 Jun 1873, aged 13 and John followed on 24 November 1873, aged 38. Shoemaker/letter carrier **Richard Foster** was there at both these deaths — *see Informants*

On 21 Feb 1874 **Charles Henry Studley**, a farmer's son from Flintshire died, aged 23. He was a railway labourer at Bleamoor. At the time of the 1871 census Charles was boarding with **Charles James Hill** and family at Jordan huts. Charles James Hill died less than 3 months later of emphysema and cardiac disease — *see A Colourful Life*

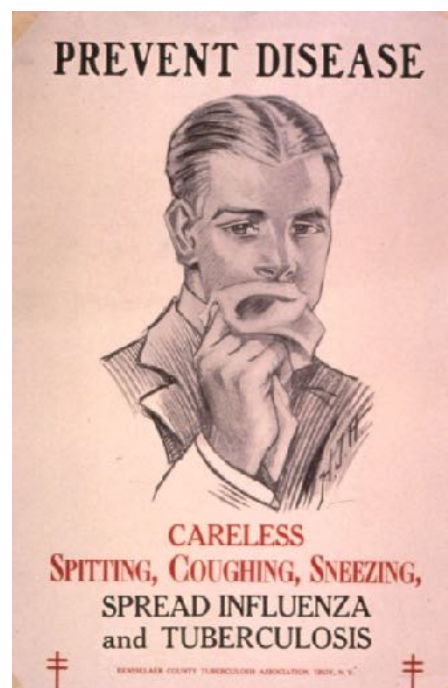
29 Jan 1875 **Robert Holland** the Tommy shop keeper and carrier died, aged 51 after a month's illness with typhoid. He also had ulceration of the bowels for 3 months. Robert has his own account.

## Phthisis/Tuberculosis/Consumption

Tuberculosis phthisis is another contagious bacterial disease affecting the lungs. With airborne transmission it would have thrived in the crowded environments at Ribblehead [ph1]. It can take months or years for symptoms to develop and so was sometimes known as the 'slow death'. Victims would have known they were dying and often lost a lot of weight and coughed up blood. Even these days 90% of infected people have an inactive latent form. Incredibly, in 2018, one quarter of the world's population was thought to have a latent infection of TB. These days it can be treated with antibiotics, subject to antibiotic resistance. Eight navvies died of phthisis, which is slightly easier to say than spell.

The first phthisis death was on 15 November 1871 when **Edward Poole**, a Bleamoor tunnel bricklayer, died aged 28. **James Fassam** was present at his death, just six months after burying his wife and four daughters.

On 5 March 1872 **George Capstick**, the bookkeeper and telegraph clerk at Inkerman died, aged 38 — *see 'The Bookkeeper and the Surgeon.'* Shoemaker and letter carrier **Richard Foster** was present at his death.



Over a year later on 16 May 1873 **William Thomas** died, aged 32. He was a blacksmith's striker at Batty Green and was married with a daughter. At the time of the 1871 census he lived next door to **William Court** who died of smallpox later in 1871.

21 Jan 1874 railway labourer **Robert Plumber/Plummer** of Batty Green died, aged 28. He was from Essex and his brother William Plumber was present at his death. William later worked as a mariner back down in Essex [ph3]. Another brother, **Joseph Plumber**, 'accidentally drowned' when he fell from a sailing boat off the coast of Essex in 1866 — he was just 16 and couldn't swim.



On 15 November 1874 **Robert Hempinstall/Hepinstill** and many other spelling variations, died, aged 37. Robert and his wife **Elizabeth Gaffney** were both from Catholic families in County Wicklow, Ireland and had arrived in Liverpool by July 1871 for the birth of son **William**. They were in Ribblehead by July 1872 when daughter **Mary** was born but she also died, aged just ten days old and was buried on 13 July 1872. Being a Catholic family Mary was not baptised at St Leonard's church. Elizabeth was present at Robert's death giving her address as 196 Bleamoor Tunnel Huts. After Robert died Elizabeth stayed at Ribblehead but son William was buried on 3 January 1875, aged 3 years and 9 months. Elizabeth may have gone back to Ireland after that. Robert's younger brother **Thomas Hepinstill** also came to work on the Settle-Carlisle Railway with his wife who was, incredibly, also called **Elizabeth Gaffney**, ten years younger than Robert's wife. Thomas and Elizabeth's second son **Robert Hepinstill** was born on the Dent side of Bleamoor tunnel in the summer of 1873. Thomas had better luck, having four sons who survived but he died in 1883, aged 38.

On 2 January 1875 **James Northey**, a railway labourer at Bleamoor died after 3 months of symptoms, aged 48. His death was certified by **Francis Green**, the surgeon appointed to the Settle-Carlisle railway after his brother's horrific death. James' son, another **James Northey**, aged 14, was present at his death. James Northey (Snr) was from Cornwall and his wife **Catherine Murphy** was from County Cork, Ireland and they were married in Stirlingshire, Scotland. The family lived in a navy hut in Staveley, Derbyshire before coming to Ribblehead. After James died, Catherine and son James and a daughter went to live in Saddleworth and James worked as an 'excavator navy'.

The last navy to die at Ribblehead was **James Rawlinds**, a railway labourer at Batty Green who died of phthisis on 28 Dec 1877, aged 53 after being ill for three months. His death was certified by **Dr William Altham** of Settle. James had an alias of **James Gutteridge**. His death was registered by **Charles Shaw** — see *Informants*.

### **Pneumonia and diseases of the lungs**

Eight navvies died of other diseases of the lungs. On 27 December 1873 **William Monks**, a tunnel miner living at Tunnel Huts died of pneumonic dropsy, aged 46. Unusually, he wasn't buried until 1 January but the vicar would have been busy. William was from Dublin and had previously worked at Darfield near Barnsley.

On 17 January 1874 **John Bell**, a blacksmith living at Jericho died of bronchitis, aged 45.

On 30 January 1874 **James Dawray/Dowry/Doory** was another Irish tunnel miner from Galway. At the time of the April 1871 census he worked as a labourer with wife **Bridget Slattery** and three children in Swinton, north-west Manchester. James was 36 when he died.

On 24 May 1874 **George Williams**, a railway labourer living in Jericho huts died of gastric disease and pneumonia, aged 24. George was from Gloucestershire and had previously lived in the 'Paradise' navy huts at Garsdale with wife Hannah.

On 2 June 1874 **Hugh Morgan**, another miner at Bleamoor tunnel, died of pneumonic diarrhoea, aged 50.

On 5 July 1874 **William Wire/Wyer**, a carpenter at Bleamoor died of rheumatic fever and meningitis, aged 30. William came from Gillingham in Dorset. He had been living at 24 Batty Wife Hole which was in the 'Inkerman' community, with his wife, **Mary Ann Brock** and two children. His daughter Fanny was baptised at St Leonard's on 29 Jan 1871. After William's death Mary Ann married another navvy, **James Robinson**. Daughter Fanny married a carpenter **James Henry Harvey** — they both lived to the age of 91!

On 8 Jan 1875 **Joseph Wrench** died of bronchitis, aged 59 after living in the Jericho huts. John Jones

**Gaol Record Detail For: Joseph Wrench**

was present at his death. There were several **John Jones**! Two John Jones, aged 27 and 21 boarded together in Bleamoor Huts in the 1871 census return. Poor old Joseph came from Cheshire and had been a life-long navvy, labouring on canals, quarries and railways in Cheshire, Lancashire, Bedfordshire and Derbyshire. He almost kept his head above the breadline. In 1849 he found himself in Bedfordshire Gaol for 21 days with hard labour (in the mill) for being an '*idle and disorderly person*'. He was 5 feet 4½ inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes. He was 'stout' with a crooked little finger on his right hand [ph2].

On 14 January 1877 **William Knowles**, a railway labourer at Salt Lake huts died of congestion of the lungs, aged 56. His son, another William Knowles was present at his death. — *see Marital difficulties*

### Other infectious diseases

On 21 May 1872 **Thomas Mullins**, a miner at Bleamoor died of measles, aged 40. Thomas was from Winchester and, from the age of 15 had at least four convictions for 'petty crime', stealing 6 spoons, counterfeit coins and lead[1].

**Jonas Beck** was present at his death, another man with a criminal record — *see Informants*

**Thomas Mullins**, for stealing a quantity of lead at Carisbrooke, from a dwellinghouse there—eight months' imprisonment.

On 18 July 1874 **Lewis Roberts**, a miner at Bleamoor huts died of 'fever', aged 32. Unsurprisingly, Lewis was Welsh and had worked as a miner in Dalton near Ulverston before coming to Ribbleshead.

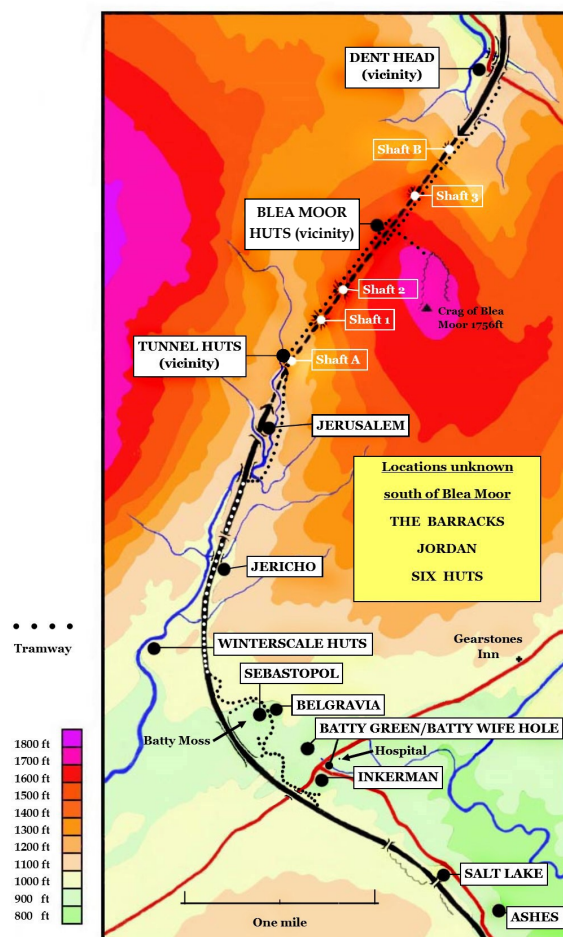
There was also thought to be an outbreak of scarlet fever in 1870/1. Any fatalities were children.



*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*



## Settle Graveyard Project



Supposed locations of navy settlements between Ribbleshead and Dent Head.

Revised to 2022. © Nigel Mussett

*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](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*

*ph1 — credited to Wikipedia by Rensselaer County Tuberculosis Association, ph2 — credited to Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service via [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk), ph3 — credited to family descendants via [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk), username [simontrubshoe](#)*

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

*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](http://ancestry.co.uk), originally from The National Archives.*