

# The Porters of Derbyshire and The Ralphs of Settle

The two Porter families in this graveyard are related but may not have even known of the other's existence. Both men came from broken homes in Horsley, a small village north of Derby. They were good, honest and hardworking folk who made a living from railways.

**Bert Porter**, known as either **Albert** or **Herbert** in documentation, born in 1850 in Horsley, was the son of **William Porter**, a framework knitter, (the predominant employment in that area) and his first wife **Elizabeth Weston**. Elizabeth died soon after Bert was born so he was brought up by his dad and step-mum **Grace Walker**. Bert came up to Settle during the building of the Settle and Carlisle Railway and worked as a guard. In 1876 Bert married **Alice Ralph**, born 1844 in Settle, the sixth out of ten children of **Robert Ralph**, a joiner and his wife **Mary Higson**.

Alice's siblings had more than their fair share of misfortune, some of it due to working on the railway. Her elder brother **Robert Ralph**, born in 1834, started working life as a stonemason and had two daughters and then a son, **Robert**, with his wife **Mary Dale** from Skipton. Toddler Robert died aged four in 1872. The construction of the Settle and Carlisle Railway required a significant number of stonemasons, most recruited from elsewhere, but Robert was in the right place at the right time. The family lived in Bowskills Yard. We know hundreds of navvies died during the construction of the railway and 21 of them found their final resting place in Settle graveyard. More than half of these died of infectious diseases.

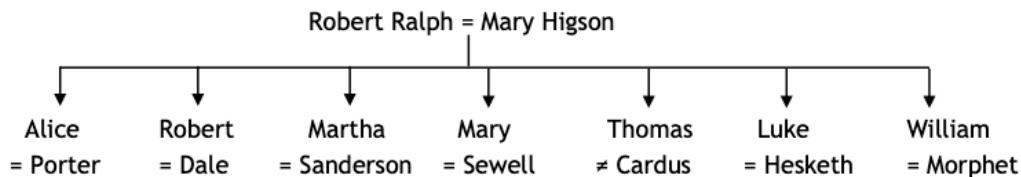
In a heartbreaking illustration of the impact of contagious disease on 11th May 1874 wife Mary died. Just 13 days later, on 24th May, Robert also died. They were aged 42 and 41 respectively [1]. Such was the way of things in the 19th century.

Settle.—On the 11th inst., Mary, wife of Mr. Robert Ralph, stonemason, aged 42 years.	Twenty fourth May 1874 Settle	Robert Ralph, male	41 years	Stonemason	Phtisis Disease from General Drgsy entitled	Mary Sewell Present at the death Sister
Settle.—On the 24th inst., Mr. Robert Ralph, stone- mason, aged 41 years.						

Robert died on 24th May 1874, another casualty of phthisis (tuberculosis), disease of the liver and dropsy (oedema, swelling) and it's very likely that Mary died of something similar. They were buried in unmarked graves. They left two traumatised orphaned daughters, aged nine and eleven. Daughter **Ann Dale Ralph** was brought up by her aunt and Alice's sister, **Martha (Ralph) Sanderson** whose husband **John Sanderson** ran the Talbot Inn in Settle. Ann died a spinster, aged 46, but spent her last 20 years in an asylum. Robert and Mary's daughter **Mary Jane Ralph** was brought up by another aunt **Mary (Ralph) Sewell** who had registered Robert's death. Mary had married **Aaron Sewell**, another stonemason, who had moved to Settle from Cockermouth, Cumbria to work on the railways. The Sewells' eldest two infant children, **Thomas** and **Emily Alice**, died within five days of each other in January 1876 and are buried in the graveyard, hopefully with Robert and Mary. This prompted a move to Lancashire, with niece Mary Jane Ralph. Mary Jane had an illegitimate son, named **Robert**, but he died aged six. A year later she married **Sutcliffe Stott** who worked in the cotton mills and they had several children.

Alice's brother **Thomas Ralph** was an indecisive cabinet maker. He spent nearly 20 years cohabiting with **Mary Cardus** who bore six of his children during that time. For some reason they never married and the children were given 'Ralph' as a middle name with Cardus as the surname. After

## Porter and Ralph families



the birth of the last child, Thomas seemed to have had enough and emigrated to America. This was not good for Mary — as they were not married she would have not been eligible for any support from the authorities. Rather than being treated as a victim, Mary would have been regarded as one of the 'undeserving poor', in some way responsible for the situation in which she found herself. She tried to make ends meet as a dressmaker but died in 1888, aged 48.

Fortunately, Thomas did the right thing and came back to bring up the younger children. Mary may have been interested to know that Thomas had a sudden death in 1902 after an accident at **John Delaney's** quarry and lime works at Horton-in-Ribblesdale. Mary may also have been glad to know that she and Thomas Ralph were together in the end, buried together in an unmarked grave *Old AX34*. Their full story is available as part of this project.

In contrast Alice's brother, **Luke Ralph** was the golden boy of the family. Initially he secured a job as a schoolmaster in Giggleswick workhouse and was praised for teaching the children to sing at a Christmas Party [3]. From there Luke became a regular schoolmaster in Grassington but, within a year, found another post as a workhouse schoolmaster in Dewsbury workhouse. He worked with the matron's assistant **Elizabeth Hesketh**. They decided to marry and were then eligible to become the master and matron of Wrexham Workhouse, beating 34 other couples who had applied. They earned a salary of £100 a year plus rations. They faced quite a challenge as the workhouse could house 400 inmates and had a poor reputation for standards when they took it over.

Luke took the treatment of the less fortunate very seriously, although known to be a thorough disciplinarian. He pioneered a scheme to prevent inmates from drinking liquors and using them for medication which, unsurprisingly, was most successful in reducing costs and leading to better health and less deaths. He also introduced a purposeful system of hard labour with inmates chopping wood that was sold on to increase income. Inmates preferred this over spending pointless hours on a treadmill, for example. In another cost cutting trial, Luke experimented with fish in the diet for inmates but had problems providing sufficient calories for those on hard labour and also with fish bones [2]. Luke introduced new 'tramp wards' for those vagrants who just turned up for the night and a separate cell system. Inspectors praised his work and sent others to see his systems in operation. Upon his death after a short illness, aged 46, Luke received a glowing obituary and the Wrexham Board of Guardians set up a subscription

[20. Accident, at the Horton Lime Works, to Mr. Thomas Ralph, joiner, of Settle, which resulted in his death, at Leeds Infirmary, two days later.

greatest interest in the proceedings. After the tea and currant buns were dispatched, a variety of Christmas carols, songs, and rounds were sung by the children; many of these were in two and three parts, and were given in a manner highly creditable to their teacher, Mr. Luke Ralph. "Hark the whistle," and other games were play-

A large number of the adult inmates, who partook of fish, complained that they felt hungry a short time after dinner; others said that fish might do to be followed by something more substantial, but of itself it was poor food to work upon. Nearly the whole of the inmates who have the hardest work to do voted for beef. In conclusion I may point out that if fish is introduced as part of the established dietary it will entail a large amount of care and anxiety on the officials to watch over the meals of the aged and young children on account of the bones. It will also be necessary to provide proper utensils to cook the fish in.—I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

**LUKE RALPH, Master.**

scheme to erect a memorial to Luke in the cemetery. Perhaps a reader in Wrexham could confirm if this was the case? Elizabeth was left with seven children, the youngest just five. Luke and Elizabeth had run the workhouse for over 20 years. Luke left a generous estate worth over £150,000 at today's value.

Luke and Elizabeth had two daughters and six sons, although **Robert Hesketh Ralph** died in infancy. In a cruel twist of fate, four of Luke and Elizabeth's surviving sons were deaf and dumb from birth even though there didn't appear to be any other deaf people in either family. In those days most deafness was caused by infection, such as scarlet fever. The four sons attended Manchester '*Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb*' to teach them an early version of sign language and a trade. This was a reputable institution established in 1823 to provide for 14 pupils but, by the time the Ralphs attended, it had 165 pupils [ph7]. Ironically, son **Charles Bentley Ralph**, a bookbinder spent quite a bit of time as an inmate in workhouses. He died aged 43. Youngest son **Alfred Ernest Luke Ralph** was just 18 when his mother died and soon afterwards was admitted to a lunatic asylum described as '*deaf, dumb and a lunatic*'. Son **Robert James Ralph** was another bookbinder and lived with his brother John. Robert lived into his 70s but was blind as well as deaf and dumb by then. Son **John William Davies Ralph**, a cabinet maker married **Mary Kellett** who was also deaf and they had two children without hearing difficulties. John was 57 when he died. Luke and Elizabeth's only son without hearing difficulty was **Richard Oswell Ralph**, a saw mill manager, who emigrated to New Zealand soon after marrying **Rose Campbell**. He ran the 'Northern Timber Company' in Auckland but was killed in a freak accident after being kicked by a horse, aged just 38 [T]. Some families just don't have any luck.



#### DEATH OF THE MASTER OF THE WORKHOUSE.

Our readers generally will learn with feelings of unfeigned regret of the death of Mr **Luke Ralph**, for upwards of twenty years the universally respected master of the Wrexham Union Workhouse, who expired, after a tedious and painful illness, at ten minutes to nine on Wednesday evening, in the 47th year of his age. Mr Ralph was born at Settle, in Yorkshire, and was

Luke and Elizabeth's daughter **Bertha Elizabeth Alice Ralph** married an auctioneer's clerk but, upon his death a few years later, emigrated to Sydney, Australia where she married Glaswegian **Joseph Coutts** and had a family. Luke and Elizabeth's daughter **Mary Henrietta Ralph** remained a spinster and worked as a headmistress in Dorset.

Alice's brother **William Ralph**, a grocer, is buried in the unmarked *Old BX34* with his wife **Isabella Morphet** and infant daughter **Jessie**. Alice's eldest brother, **John Ralph Higson**, born 18 months before Robert and Mary married, worked as a tailor in Settle. He was buried with his wife **Hannah Moss** and a granddaughter in the unmarked *Old BX70*. One further case of misfortune in this family was that of Alice's cousin, **John Higson**, a son of her maternal aunt **Jane Higson** born a year before she married a labourer, **James Peacock**. John had a tragic death at the age of just 16 whilst playing a game of 'nine pins' [3].

**SUDDEN DEATH.**—On Saturday last, a young man called **John Higson**, came to his death very suddenly whilst playing a game at "nine pins." He suddenly dropped down, without exhibiting any previous signs of illness, and expired immediately. An inquest was held on view of the body of the deceased on Monday last, when the jury returned a verdict of "died in a fit of apoplexy."—Deceased was aged 16 years.

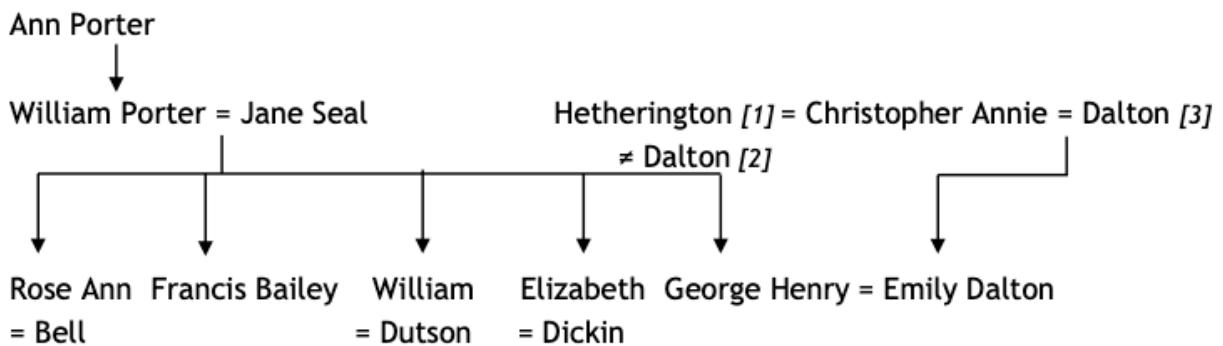
Well that was a bit of a diversion to the Ralph family. Back to the Porters . . .

*Settle Graveyard Project*

Bert and Alice moved straight to Hunslet in Leeds after their wedding. Appropriately, Bert Porter worked as a railway porter and then as a guard. Alice died in 1910 and, despite never living in Settle since their marriage, was buried back in Settle in the unmarked *Old FX13*. Bert died in 1921, still in Hunslet and was buried with Alice. They were buried with 72 year old **Henry Harrison** who had died in 1906. Henry is impossible to trace and may have come from the workhouse. Bert and Alice's three sons stayed in Leeds working on the railways and daughter **Minnie Mary Porter** married a stationmaster **William Clements** who worked at Rawdon near Leeds and was then posted to Blackpool.



**William Porter**, born in 1858 was a third cousin to Bert. His grandparents came from Horsley in Derbyshire but moved to Little Eaton, closer to Derby, to have their family including daughter **Ann**. Ann had two illegitimate sons, our William and brother **George Porter**. William was ten when Ann married **Joseph Walker**, a labourer. William and George both found jobs as '*telegraph constructors*' which led to a lifelong employment on the railways.



In 1886, aged 28, William married **Jane Seal**, a labourer's daughter and they went on to have five daughters and four sons. William's employment took the family to Cheshire and then Settle, still working as a telegraph linesman and living in Bowskills yard. As the children grew up several took on employment at Hector Christie's mills in Langcliffe. The family had a quiet life. William died in 1925, aged 67 and Jane followed in 1932, aged 67. They were buried together with daughter **Sarah Kathleen (Kathie) Porter** who died in 1913 aged 14 in *Old G38*.

*In loving memory of William Porter late of Little Eaton died April 29th 1925 aged 67 years. Also Sarah Kathleen (Kathie) died June 15th 1914 aged 14 years. Also of Jane his beloved wife died Nov 25th 1932 aged 67 years, Old G38*



Only one of William and Jane's children stayed in Settle. **George Henry Porter** [ph8] followed his father to become a railway telegraph man in Settle. He married **Emily Betsy Dalton** [ph8] who had found her way to Settle from Middlesborough. Emily was one of many children of **Christopher Annie White Dalton** — yes, a strange name for a woman. She had a couple of children with her first husband, **John Thomas Hetherington**, a blacksmith. At great expense, John Thomas took Christopher Annie to the divorce court claiming she had taken to drink, built up debts and had two children with a widowed brickmaker called **Walter Jordan** [4]. The divorce



was granted and John Thomas was awarded custody of his children, obviously, although they were brought up by his parents. After the divorce Christopher Annie abandoned Walter Jordan and married **John William Dalton**, a boiler smith and had many other children including Emily Betsy.

In a far more settled life, George Henry and Emily Betsy had a family of four children living at Jessamine Cottage at the foot of Constitution Hill. George Henry died in 1957, aged 56 and Emily outlived him by 49 years, dying in Carnforth in 2006, aged 94!

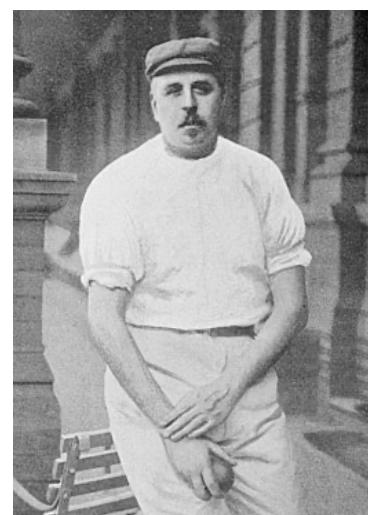
Of the other children, William and Jane's son, **Francis Bailey Porter**, a blacksmith, emigrated to Australia. Youngest son **William Porter** married **Mary Jane Dutson** with the reception in her father's hostelry, the Green Dragon at Bishop's Frome in Herefordshire [ph5].

William and Jane's daughter **Rose Ann Porter** married **Stephen Henry Bell**, one of two children of **Thomas Bell** and his first wife **Mary Martha Briggs**. Stephen and Rose Ann had three children although two sons, **Thomas** and **Francis**, died when they were a few days old and are buried in the unmarked *Old GX35*. Stephen died in 1928, aged 41 and Rose Ann then married **Herbert Robinson** and they moved to Barnoldswick.

William and Jane's daughter **Elizabeth Porter** married a joiner, **Frank Dickin**, from Staffordshire [ph4]. Their eldest daughter **May Dickin** died an infant and was buried with her cousins in *Old GX35* before Frank and Elizabeth moved to Halifax.

There is another well known Porter from Horsley in Derbyshire. **George Porter**, exactly the same age as William Porter's brother, George Porter, started life as a chimney sweep. However, he also played first class cricket for Derbyshire between 1881 and 1896 and then umpired in first-class matches until 1903. He was a right armed fast-medium bowler, 6 foot 2 inches tall, 'of heavy build and with a slouching carriage'. Settle's William Porter descended from a **George Porter** born in Horsley in 1791. Bert Porter descended from a **John Porter** born in Horsley in 1792. The cricketer George Porter descended from a **William Porter** born in Horsley in 1796. A common parentage cannot be proved (at the moment) but, coming from a village as small as that they are inevitably related.

It was stated that the parties were married at Stockton-on-Tees in 1895, and they afterwards lived at Cleveland. Soon after the marriage the wife took to drink, and ran the husband into debt to such an extent that he had to advertise in the papers that he would not be responsible for her debts. In 1898, in consequence of her conduct, he had to leave her, with the result that she took out a summons, and he was obliged to pay her £5. a week under the order made. He then removed to Gateshead, while his wife remained in Middlesbrough. Rumours came to his ears of his wife's conduct, and he would then have taken proceedings if he had the means. However, he was able recently to take action, and found that his wife was living in Jackson Street, Middlesbrough, with Jordan, by whom she had had two children.



### *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](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'.*

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