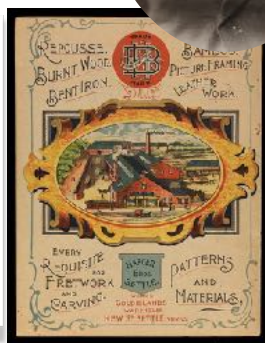


Robert Harger, inspector of nuisances

Robert was born on 7 January 1844, the eldest son of **Joseph Harger** [ph1] of Settle and his wife **Margaret Baldwin** [ph2]. The Hargers were successful joiners and furniture makers and had been in business since just after the turn of the century, allegedly, [SC] and were well known for their quality fretwork. The business



ran from large workshops at Goldielands on New Street, now Station Road, with premises reaching down to the river [ph3].

Mrs Harger, photograph by the Horner Studio.
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The Hargers were active Methodists, regularly preaching in the Settle Circuit and Joseph eventually became a superintendent minister. Unsurprisingly, the family were involved in the building of two Methodist chapels in Settle, the second replacing the first in 1893. The Hargers were also commissioned to undertake the carpentry, and a son-in-law, **Thomas Bateson**, the stonemasonry in the construction of Holy Ascension Church in the late 1830s. The Hargers were no ordinary joiners but pioneers taking out a number of patents to improve joinery machinery.

Robert was a pupil at Giggleswick School, and then was apprenticed into the family business. At the age of 21 he went as a journeyman joiner, first to **Mr C Blades** of Lancaster. While in Lancaster, he worked with patients at the Lancaster County Asylum, west of Lancaster and the fourth lunatic asylum built in the country, in 1816. It was a progressive institution, pioneering the abolition of mechanical restraint and more 'humane treatments'. It was later known as Lancaster Moor Hospital, holding up to 3200 patients at its peak and you can now buy a luxury and unusual residence there. Whilst there Robert worked with patients who were either former joiners or were learning the trade, acting as a foreman to this group.

This experience was to shape the rest of his career. Robert became more involved in the running of the hospital and was promoted to the position of General Superintendent of works at the asylum. Soon after this appointment, on 8 January 1868, Robert married **Mary Isabella Harvey**, [ph1] at Settle's Zion Independent Chapel. Mary was the only daughter of **Thomas Anderson Harvey** who ran the ironmonger's store in Settle market place between the Naked Man and the Royal Oak for decades. Thomas was a deacon at the Zion church for 36 years, following in the steps of his father-in-law **James Thomson**, hence the wedding venue. Robert, Mary Isabella and her mother **Isabella (Thomson) Harvey** [ph2] had their photos taken at the Horner studios [ph4].

Unfortunately, Mary Isabella's gravestone at the Zion Chapel tells a sad story.

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Mrs Harvey, photograph by the Horner Studio.
Horner Collection@NCBPT (CC-BY 4.0)

In memory of Mary Isabella the beloved wife of Robert Harger of Lancaster and daughter of Thomas A and Isabella Harvey of this town who died May 5th 1869 aged 24 years. Also an infant daughter of the above R and MI Harger interred at the cemetery Lancaster. To him that overcometh will I give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God, Rev Chap 2, Verse 71.



18 months later Robert married again, to **Annie Kirkby**, daughter of **William Kirkby**, a master cobbler in Southport. In 1875 Robert obtained a promotion and left his role at the Lancaster. Upon his departure he was awarded with an inkstand and pencil case, inscribed with the words: *'Presented to Mr Harger by Officers and Workpeople of Lancaster Asylum, as a token of their esteem.'*



Robert returned to Craven to take up the post of *'Inspector of Nuisances'* for Skipton Rural Sanitary Authority — a public health inspector responsible for keeping the area clean, sanitary and safe. Robert's appointment generated a huge debate about his salary, which was finally agreed at £200. Robert was up against six other candidates and the board voted on each over a course of four rounds. In the final round the votes were tied, 20 each, between Robert and **Thomas Broughton**. The Chairman, Mr Shaw had the casting vote and chose Robert.

Robert's job involved inspecting for offensive conditions (known as nuisances) that were in breach of the law and enforcing steps to remove them, such as improving rubbish collections, insisting on standards on market days and disinfecting houses of smallpox victims. In 1880 Robert [ph4] conducted a Sanitary Survey on 1,832 houses in Skipton and found that the average occupancy was just under 5 per people per house. 1717 water closets had been installed across the town which was a vast improvement in conditions since 1858, facilitated by the new sewer which had



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been installed in 1861. By December 1894, thanks in part to Robert's work, the mortality rate had been cut by a third, the drainage problems had been resolved and the rivers and water supply were now clean. The state and smell of the town would still be unacceptable to our 21st Century eyes and our noses too – especially with all these animals roaming around the High Street! [ph5]

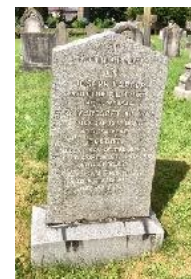
Robert died, unexpectedly, in the early hours of Wednesday morning, November 25 1885, aged 41. *'On the previous Saturday he had read a paper on 'Our duty as electors' to the Skipton Temperance Electoral Association, and on the Sunday morning had preached in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Skipton on 'The unsearchable riches of Christ'. At night he complained of a cold, but at midnight he paid one of his occasional visits to the lodging-houses of Skipton. On his return home he complained of severe internal pain, and he took to his bed from which he never rose again, passing quietly away as stated, the cause of death being internal inflammation. Mr Harger's post as Nuisance Inspector was a very trying one, and naturally enough was the cause of some little friction between himself and those with whom he came into contact' - there had been a few complaints about the way Robert fulfilled his role! It was mentioned that 'the office of inspector of nuisances required very peculiar attributes. It required a man well versed in the peculiar duties that fell to his share to enable him to deal leniently and fairly to those with whom he came into contact, and at the same time enforce the authority of the Sanitary Board. Under these peculiar circumstances Mr Harger had succeeded wonderfully, and as far as his ability went, he might tell them that he was one of the first inspectors of nuisances in the whole Kingdom who was able to pass the examination which entitled him to the surveyor's certificate of the Sanitary Institute of Great Britain.'* Despite this, in 1884 that when Robert asked the authority for a horse to enable him to carry out his duties more effectively, his proposal was enthusiastically rejected!

the cause of death being internal inflammation. Mr Harger's post as Nuisance Inspector was a very trying one, and naturally enough was the cause of some little friction between himself and those with whom he came into contact, but we are sure there will be but one feeling of sincere regret on the part of the public bodies he represented and the ratepayers generally that he should be so suddenly cut off in the midst of a useful and honourable life, and in the prime of manhood. Mr Harger was in his 42nd year.

Robert was buried at Waltonwrays Cemetery [ph4] but his life was also remembered on his parents' stone back in Settle — Robert's father died six months later. This was the earliest dated gravestone in the 'Old' graveyard following the purchase of land to extend the burial ground. Robert's death occurred just as the Old graveyard was opening so there may not have been time to make the appropriate arrangements to bury him his home town. After Robert's significant contribution to the welfare of Skipton, his burial there was quite appropriate.



In loving memory of Joseph Harger who died April 14th 1886 aged 76 years. Also Margaret his wife died Sep 12th 1891 aged 74 years. Robert, eldest son of the above died at Skipton Nov 25th 1885 aged 41 years. Also Annie his wife died Dec 27th 1893 aged 49 years. Old A13



The family lived in Embsay and then moved to Gargrave Road, Skipton. Robert's wife Annie died in Morecambe in 1893, aged just 49 and was brought back for burial in Settle with her in-laws. Robert and Annie had two daughters, **Sara Agnes Harger** (known as Sally) and **Margaret Annie Kirkby Harger** (known as Maggie) who were just 16 and 12 respectively. They were brought up by their spinster aunts. Sally worked as a schoolmistress. She died in 1938, aged 61 and was buried in Settle with her spinster aunts in New J19.

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The photo of Sally [ph4] may have been taken at the marriage of her sister Maggie Harger to **Thomas Henry Gould** in 1911. They married at St John's Methodist church in Settle, built by the Hargers, of course. Thomas had been in the local area between 1905 and 1907 serving as a Police Constable [LSA] and this could be how he met Margaret. At the time of subsequent census returns Thomas Henry worked in Suffolk as a horse hair manufacturer involved in the production of the finest quality, durable fabrics. Descendants of Maggie and Thomas still live in Settle today.



CONSTABULARY.—West Staincliffe Division.		
Rank and No.	Name.	Where Stationed.
Superintendent.	John W. Symonds	Settle
P. Sergt. 20	John A. Wood	Settle
P. C. 885	Thos H. Gould.....	Settle



In loving memory of Sara Agnes daughter of the late Robert & Annie Harger of Skipton Born Nov 3rd 1876 died Sep 28th 1938 also Margaret Catherine Harger aunt of the above died March 4th 1941 in her 86th year and of Mary Ellen sister of the above M C Harger died March 19th 1947 in her 89th year, New J19



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'.

With thanks to descendant Allan Gould for his help and support in writing this article. Find out more about the Hargers at hargersinsettle.co.uk. Thanks also to John Frankland from Skipton Library.

ph1 – photo with the kind permission of the North Craven Building Preservation Trust, ph2 – Mrs Harger Image 2022.1.68.15, Mrs Harvey Image 2022.1.68.33, from the Horner Photographic Studio Collection provided courtesy of the Museum of North Craven Life, ph3 – kindly provided by John Reid, ph4 – with thanks to Allan Gould, ph5 – photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Ellwood and Rowley families, and North Yorkshire Council, with thanks to John Frankland



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