

## William Irving, a desperate quarryman

The Victorian justice and welfare systems tended to issue far more sticks than carrots. **William Irving** was one of the best examples of the failings of this system.

William was born in 1852/3 the seventh child of labourer **William Irving (Snr)** and his wife **Ann Veitch** who were both from Cumbria. In 1850 the family moved to Rylstone, north of Skipton which is where William (Jnr) was born. Unfortunately, Ann died at the birth of son **Henry Irving** when William was just four and little Henry died an infant too. In 1860 William (Snr) married again. His new wife was **Isabella Middlesborough**. By 1871 William, Isabella and the younger children had moved to live in Terms Street, Giggleswick. William (Snr) worked as a railway labourer on the new Settle to Carlisle Railway, Isabella and daughters worked in the mill and William (Jnr) was a farm labourer. The family lived just on the breadline and alcohol was an easy escape if you had the money, or could be creative in finding the money, to buy it.

Whilst these circumstances were by no means unusual in those days, young William seems to have had problems coping and he demonstrated this in unfortunate ways throughout his life. It is an incredible but sad catalogue of petty crime, much related to alcohol consumption and some of which was brought about because of his relationship with his father.

It all started in 1871. **James Howson** was the nephew of **Rev John Howson** at Giggleswick School which sounds very impressive, but he was actually an illegitimate son and his mum, **Elizabeth Howson**, was a pauper. James took William (father or son) to court for assaulting him on the road between Settle and Giggleswick. However, as James *'was somewhat the worse for liquor'* and the fall could have been caused by liquor rather than William and so the case was dismissed [1].

ASSAULT.—James Howson, of Giggleswick, charged William Irving, of the same place, with having assaulted him on the 26th ult., on the road between Settle and Giggleswick. The evidence tendered was contradictory, and it appeared somewhat doubtful whether the complainant, who it was alleged was the worse for liquor, had fallen from the effects of a blow, or the beer he had imbibed. The Bench therefore decided to dismiss the case. Mr. G. M. Robinson also appeared for the defendant in this case.

In 1873 William (father or son) was found lying drunk in the beck at Giggleswick and fined 5 shillings. 1877 was a bad year. In June William (father or son) was fined £20 when he was found guilty of poaching with **James Monk**. A month later one William was found guilty of assaulting **PC Blossom** while he was in the execution of his duty and for damaging his coat. He was only fined 3 shillings and sixpence & costs for this, an interesting comparison of fines! [2]

ASSAULTING THE POLICE.—William Irvine, of Giggleswick, was charged by P.C. Blossom, with assaulting him in the execution of his duty on the 23rd inst. The offence was proved, and the defendant was fined £1 and costs.—Irvine was also charged with damaging P.C. Blossom's coat, for which he was fined 3s. 6d. and costs.

William's sister, **Mary Irving**, married **Andrew Percy**, a labourer from Annan, Scotland, in 1871. In 1881 William (Snr) and Andrew Percy were taken to court for assaulting **Sergeant Twiggey** and **Constable Norton**. In return William and Andrew took the policemen to court for manhandling them. Apparently, the disturbance was because one of the police officers arrested William (Jnr) *'a returned convict'* because he failed to report to the police and so was imprisoned for a month. The charges against the police were dropped. Andrew Percy was sentenced to a month's hard labour plus 16 shillings costs and William (Snr) was fined £2 11 shillings.

In 1886 William (Jnr) aged 32, *'formerly a member of the Salvation Army and had been 15 times convicted, was charged with stealing seven ducks from his father.'* He killed the ducks and tried to

sell them to grocer Thomas Clark. William (Jnr) said the ducks were his but *'the father denied his unworthy son's story and the latter was sent to prison for 2 months with hard labour.'*[3]

A year later, in 1887, William (Jnr), *'an old offender'* was imprisoned for another 2 months for assaulting his father. He was handed down the same sentence again in 1889 after another assault on his father. *'The magistrates said that it was of no use remonstrating with the prisoner, and they therefore passed the full sentence, Irving having been convicted 21 times previously'* [CH].

In 1888 William's stepmother died and was buried in an unmarked grave in Giggleswick graveyard. Perhaps this would improve William (Jnr)'s behaviour? No, not really. In 1892 there was a different tack taken when William (Jnr) was found drunk and disorderly. *'The case had been stood over to give the defendant the opportunity of reforming, and the information of the police on this point being deemed satisfactory, they dismissed the charge'* [1]. The headline was *'A Reformed Character'*.

What were the chances of this reformed character remaining on the right side of the law? . . . In 1894 William was sent to gaol for 21 days with hard labour for being drunk and disorderly in Church Street. Later the same year William Irving *'a very old offender'* managed to avoid another sentence for being drunk and disorderly by demonstrating that he was reforming to the satisfaction of the police. He must have been quite a persuasive character!

By 1897 William had, inevitably, found his way to the workhouse. *'William Irving a well known character was charged with being drunk in the workhouse premises'*, was brought to court by the workhouse master, **Edward Whiffen**. *'This is Irving's 48th appearance. The magistrate said that as this was a time of national rejoicing (the Queen's diamond jubilee), if he would go back to the workhouse and behave himself, he would be discharged. He was accordingly liberated'*[4]

William's father died in 1900, aged an impressive 84. He had lodged with the Bowskill family at The Folly after Isabella died. Perhaps this helped William (Jnr) to behave? Unfortunately, in 1902, William, aged 51 pleaded guilty to stealing a silver watch from **William Edward Cook** while he was helping him to move furniture. *'I took the watch up twice and put it down again, but the third time the temptation was too strong for me'*. At least he was honest! The chairman said that William had been imprisoned 53 times previously and gave him a sentence of five months this time[5]. His prison record for this offence summarised some of his

**APPROPRIATING HIS FATHER'S DUCKS.**—At Settle, on Tuesday, Wm. [Irving] (32), labourer, [Giggleswick, formerly a member of the Salvation Army, and who had been 15 times convicted, was charged with stealing seven ducks belonging to his father, [William] [Irving, labourer, [Giggleswick]. On Monday evening prisoner killed the ducks and tried to dispose of them to Mr. T. Clark, game dealer, Settle, but the latter declined to purchase. [Irving], in reply to the charge, said the ducks were his. The father denied his unworthy son's story, and the latter was sent to prison for two months, with hard labour.

**THE TWENTY SECOND APPEARANCE.**  
said that it was of no use remonstrating with prisoner, and they therefore passed the full sentence, [Irving] having been convicted 21 times previously.

### **A Reformed Character.**

Giggleswick, on the 17th October.—The case had stood over to give defendant an opportunity of reforming, and the information of the police on this point being deemed satisfactory by the magistrates, they dismissed the charge. —*The Muzzlina Order.*—

This is [Irving's] 48th appearance.—The Magistrate, addressing [Irving], said that as this was a time of national rejoicing, if he would go back to the workhouse and behave himself, he would be discharged. He was accordingly liberated.

### **HE YIELDED TO TEMPTATION.**

William Irving (51), of Settle, described as a quarryman, pleaded guilty to stealing a silver watch, the property of a man named [Cook], at [Horton-in-Ribblesdale]. The watch was stolen while prisoner was helping the prosecutor to remove his furniture. In extenuation of his offence, the prisoner said, "I took the watch up twice, and put it down again, but the third time the temptation was too strong for me." The Chairman: Unfortunately, temptation seems to have proved too strong for you on many previous occasions, as you have been in prison on 53 occasions.  
A sentence of five months' imprisonment was passed.

## Settle Graveyard Project

other misdemeanours.

William spent the rest of his life in and out of the workhouse. At the time of the 1921 census he was found at the Common Lodging House (one step up from the workhouse) run by James Henry Ball in Upper Settle, described as having 'no fixed place of work'. Inevitably, William eventually died in the workhouse, aged 80 in 1932. He was buried in Giggleswick graveyard in an unmarked grave, perhaps with his father and stepmother. William could not be found at the time of two census returns but we probably have a good idea where he was at the time.

**William Irving** ... ..  
2 months, Settle Petty Sessions, 14th December, 1886, stealing 7 ducks.  
3 months hard labour, Skipton Petty Sessions, 6th September, 1890, stealing a jacket.  
7 days hard labour, Settle Petty Sessions, 23rd March, 1897, stealing an overcoat.  
1 month hard labour, Settle Petty Sessions, 27th August, 1901, stealing lead piping.  
Twice wilful damage, 30 times drunk, 6 times game trespass, 9 times assault, once trespass on railway, once debt, once sleeping out.

What a sad portrayal of the glorious Victorian era.



*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](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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