

## Joseph and William Guyer, sextons for over 90 years

**Joseph Guyer** and **Jane Parkinson** married in Kirkby Malham church, near her home, in 1785 and they had a lot of children, almost all daughters. It's not obvious what Joseph's occupation was but he supplemented his income as the sexton (gravedigger) at Giggleswick church. This would have provided a small wage plus a fee for each burial. He did this for 46 years before his death in 1831, aged 69 [1]. A reminiscence, written in 1879 by **Mrs G Linnaeus Banks**, describes 'Joe Guyer, a grey little man with a liking for his "drops"' [2]. In another part of the article she described him as the 'gaumless Joe Guyer.' (gaum is an old word for sense, so 'lacking sense', now spelt gormless).

**Mrs George Linnaeus Banks** was **Isabella Varley** before marriage. Isabella and her husband were both prolific writers.

The diarist **William Lodge Paley** [WLP] mentions Joseph a couple of times during the 1820s, described as a trustworthy man, witnessing payments and acting as a church clerk. Joseph and is buried in an unmarked grave in Giggleswick graveyard with his wife Jane, who died two years later, and an infant son, **Joseph Guyer**, who died in 1806.

It was the only surviving son **William (Billy) Guyer** who took over as church sexton when Joseph passed away. His day job was a shoemaker so it would not be surprising if Joseph had done that too. In 1831, in Manchester Cathedral, William married **Elizabeth (Betty) Bond** and they went on to have three sons and four daughters, living in Tems Street, Giggleswick.

Soon after Billy took over as sexton, in 1832, the Reform Bill was passed allowing men of a certain status to be eligible to vote. William's case was turned down on the grounds he did not have 40 shillings profit arising out of land and had not been appointed as sexton for life [3]. Harsh! It's unlikely he was formerly appointed at all! The case of **William Brennand**, the parish clerk, was similarly dismissed. The fact he was even considered suitable reflects a high status — only 1 in 14 men were eligible to vote.

Billy received quite a bonus in 1837. That was the year that the Giggleswick church Bone House was eventually demolished. St Alkelda's Church in Giggleswick dates back to Saxon times. In the earlier days, the majority of the deceased were buried in the churchyard in unmarked graves. Once the bodies had decayed, the bones were dug up and placed in a charnel (bone) house and so the burial ground could be re-used. Obviously, high-ranking and influential persons might be buried in a tomb or a vault inside the church so as not to be put through this indignity, hence the expression 'the stinking rich'! In 1837, as practice had changed, Giggleswick church decided to demolish the Bone House, probably located at the eastern end of the church, and William was paid £1 5shillings to re-inter the bones in the churchyard.

On Friday last, at Giggleswick, in his 70th year, Joseph Guyer he has been sexton of the parish church of Giggleswick upwards of 46 years.

Commotion hushed to consternation before noon. It had transpired that Joe Guyer a grey little man, with an unoubted liking for his "drops," a sometime assistant of the sexton, had been hastily summoned to take the post, and that Solomon Bracken himself had lost the use of his limbs.

Jan. 22.—We attended Church and Guyer acted as Clerk—poor old R.A. has long been ill flt on a/c of his sight. He has now runnings and they say mortification in his legs. Heard animated

Jan. 26.—Paid Y. Wilkinson in our house for carriage of parcel from London in presence of J. Guyer and Chrstr. Taylor. Am thus particular as he got tipsy after. Cousin W. Lodge came

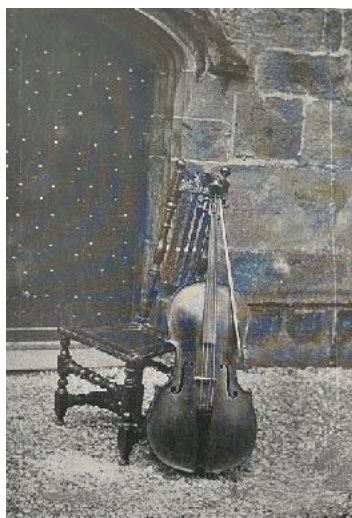
### CASES OF DISPUTED FRANCHISE UNDER THE REFORM BILL.

William Guyer sexton of Giggleswick, was disallowed on the same ground, and also because he did not show any appointment for life.

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As a respected member of society Billy was asked to witness to the signing of **Eli Harger's** will. Eli was the landlord of the Naked Man in Settle. Eli died 12 July 1845, aged 67 predeceased by all five of his children. The diaries of William Lodge Paley report that Eli was addicted to liquor which is not too much of a surprise in those circumstances.

Billy Guyer was a talented musician, playing in brass bands and ringing bells at the church. In the 1850s, before there was an organ in the church, Billy *'accompanied the choir on a bass fiddle, which is still in the church, and after a preliminary note and tuning up they would start'*[ph2]. The bass fiddle remained in the vicar's vestry for decades. After William's demise **Titus Nelson** took over, and he was thought to be the



last to play it [ph2]. Billy topped up his income by reciting/singing at weddings and funerals *'until the guests drove away after lavishing shekels of silver and gold on the orator.'* The band of the North Craven Rifle Volunteers

had been led by **George Stansfeld (Jnr)**. In 1866 George left the area and the Volunteers presented him with a conductor's baton made of ebony and mounted in silver. Whilst lamenting Mr Stansfeld's loss, the newspapers reported that the *'good teaching of Mr Guyer'* would ensure that, with regular practice, the

band would *'attain a proficiency that will render them more than ever a credit to themselves and the town of Settle.'*[4]

Billy was reported to be *'fond of his glass'* and his wife took to drinking with him pint for pint to make him realise how much he was drinking, after which *'he was tee-total for a long time'*[ph2]. Billy's wife Elizabeth died in 1858, aged 52 when their youngest child, **Eliza Guyer**, was ten. Once they had grown up, Billy lived with his daughters and their families for the rest of his life. Billy and Elizabeth's son **William Guyer (Jnr)** died 1870 in Bradford, aged just 29. He had been working as a linen draper in Hanover Square Bradford. This, and the lack of Betty's presence, may have been a contributory factor in Billy's court appearance in 1872. He was fined 10 shillings plus 9 shillings costs for having been drunk in Giggleswick church graveyard [4]— that's really not a good look for a sexton! William died in 1886, aged 79, nearly 30 years after his wife Elizabeth and ten years after another son, **Joseph Guyer**. Billy was buried with Elizabeth and their lives were celebrated with a fine memorial stone which also provided other helpful information. Between them Billy and his father served

Until the 'seventies there was no organ in the Church, and in the 'fifties Billy Guyer accompanied the choir on a bass fiddle, which is still in the Church, and after a preliminary note and tuning up they would start.

There is an interesting survival of those days at Giggleswick in the old bass-fiddle now safely kept in the vicar's vestry. The vicar states that the last to play this instrument was Titus Nelson and before him William Guyer. Previously the

for weeks." After a wedding, as the party came out and scuffled hen silver to the village lads, he would recite his "Omney"—

When Adam was first created,  
The Lord of the Universe crowned  
His happiness was not completed  
Until he a help mate had found.  
Several other verses followed, until the guests drove away after lavishing shekels of silver and gold on the orator.

To Mr. Stansfeld's active suprintendence and cultivated musical taste may fairly be attributed the efficiency which the band has attained. Although it must have been somewhat discouraging to them to lose lately two of their best players and now Mr. Stansfeld, we hope they will not allow their hearts to fail them but will continue to practice regularly, and with the good teaching of Mr. Guyer attain a proficieny that will render them more than ever a credit to themselves and the town of Settle. —On Thursday evening, the 29th ult.,

Now Billy was fond of his glass, and his wife, Betty, could not influence him, so she thought out a new method and followed him into the public house, and when Billy called for a pint she did the same. This was repeated two or three times until at last Billy turned on her before the company and said: "Nay, Betty, if thou's bound to start drinking I mun stop; we can't afford to have two at it"; and Billy was teetotal for a long time. As verger, musician and grave-digger, he was an important official, but during a fine summer Betty was heard to say, "It's hard times, for our Billy hasn't buried a wick soul for weeks." After a wedding, as the party

PETTY SESSIONS, Tuesday last.—Before J. Birbeck, Esq., Rev. H. J. Swale, and C. Ingleby, Esq.—Wm. Guyer [Giggleswick] sexton, was fined 10s. and costs, 9s. for having been drunk in the churchyard of the parish church at [Giggleswick]—Matthias Frankland,

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as sexton at Giggleswick church for over 90 years, a remarkable achievement.

*In memory of Elizabeth wife of William Guyer who died 1858 aged 52 years. Also William son of the above who died at Bradford March 3rd 1870 aged 29 years. Also Joseph son of the above who died at Tredegar, Monmouthshire, February 26th 1876 aged 42 years. Also of the above William Guyer, for 45 years sexton and ringer at this church, died Nov'r 18th 1886 aged 79 years. Also of John Bond (Guyer) son of the above who died at Lancaster Nov'r 30th 1910 aged 74 years.*



CONCERT.— On Saturday the Tredegar Town Brass Band, under Bandmaster Joseph Guyer, assisted by Miss Roberts (Eos y Wain), Miss Jones (Eos y Bryn), Mr. Evan Williams (from St. George's Church, Tredegar), and Mr. G. Golding as accompanist, gave a grand concert of vocal and instrumental music, under the patronage of the vicar, gentry, and tradespeople of the town. The programme was a good one, and well executed. The "Gloria," from Mozart's "Twelfth Mass," was excellently rendered by the band.

Billy and Betty's children? Son **Joseph Guyer** was also musically talented. He started life as 'professor of music and pianoforte' in Manchester. Then he moved to Hull to become a 'bandmaster and licensed victualler', an unusual combination, with his wife **Fanny Cave**, 16 years his junior, although there doesn't appear to be a wedding certificate.

In 1875 Joseph led the Tredegar Town Brass Band in a 'grand concert of vocal and instrumental music'[5] 'The programme was a good one and well executed'. Joseph died a year later and his life was remembered on his parents' stone, although he was not buried in there. His 'wife' Fanny married again, twice, still in Hull.

Son **John Bond Guyer** had a career working on the railways in Lancashire. He married **Margaret Winder**, 15 years his senior. When Margaret was 44 she gave birth to a daughter, **Elizabeth Ellen Guyer** who died an infant and they didn't have any more children. After Margaret died in 1891, aged 69, John came back to Settle to live with his sister, widowed **Elizabeth (Guyer) Ralph** and family.

William and Elizabeth's daughters had mixed fortunes. **Jane Guyer** married **John Hurtle**, a railway porter at Giggleswick station. John's aunt, **Mary Hurtle**, was the first wife of stonemason **Lawrence Hodgson** who sadly died after the birth of her second son. John and Jane had at least seven children and moved to Blackburn where John worked as a railway clerk. William and Elizabeth's daughter, **Mary Guyer**, had three illegitimate children before she married **Henry Greenwood**, a ginger beer manufacturer. Henry had a few problems involving court appearances and excessive intakes of alcohol and so Mary left him in Blackburn and took the children to move in with sister Jane (Guyer) Hurtle and family.

William and Elizabeth had a daughter **Eliza Guyer** and another one called **Elizabeth Guyer**, easily confused. On 5 October 1872 Eliza married quarryman **Lot Bordley Lord**. Lot was one of three illegitimate sons of Settle's **Mary Lord** before she married the immensely successful blue slate flag dealer, **William Ralph**. Lot also found himself in court in May 1870. He had been working as a railway watchman on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway in Todmorden but he could not resist the temptation to steal two quarts of whisky from barrels and four pairs of boots from goods he was meant to be

**THEFTS BY A RAILWAY WATCHMAN.**—At the Todmorden Police Office, on Wednesday, Lot Bordley Lord, a watchman in the employ of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway at Todmorden, was charged with stealing two quarts of whisky from a cask under his care for a night on the siding at Todmorden; and also with stealing four pairs of boots from a case also under his charge. A cask containing 23½ gallons of Scotch whisky was sent from the Wisshaw Distillery, on the 21st April, by the Caledonian Railway; at Carlisle and Preston the weight was about the same, but on arriving at Holmfirth, to which town it was consigned, it was found considerably lighter, and on measuring the contents they were nearly a gallon short of the invoiced quantity. Two spile holes were found in the side of the cask. The train in which the cask was conveyed from Preston was under the prisoner's care for the night on a siding at Todmorden, and on his cupboard being searched a bottle containing about a quart of whisky was found, and there were also found two gimlets, which were of the same size as that by which the cask had been bored.

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guarding [6]. For this he was imprisoned for 15 months with hard labour at Wakefield Gaol. Just months after his release Lot married Eliza and they started on their family of at least six children, living in Nelson with Lot working in the quarries. They were buried back in Giggleswick graveyard close to some of their children.



*In loving memory of Eliza the beloved wife of Lot Lord of Nelson, late of Giggleswick, who died January 18th 1912 aged 64 years. Also of the above Lot Lord who died Oct. 31st 1918 aged 69 years. B8/23*

*In loving memory of Maud daughter of Lot & Eliza Lord of Nelson who died Nov. 17th 1895 in her 7th year. Also of William Frederick their son who died March 5th 1897 in his 17th year. Also of Tom their son who died Nov'r 12th 1899 in his 27th year. Also of James Henry their son who died August 22nd 1912 aged 26 years, B8/29*



Meanwhile Eliza's sister Elizabeth Guyer married **Joseph Ralph**, a grocer and distant relation to William Ralph the flag dealer. Unfortunately Joseph died aged 39 leaving Elizabeth with two daughters — little **May Ralph** had already died, aged six. Upon Joseph's death Elizabeth took the bull by the horns and set up business with her daughters at the end of Chapel Street, just opposite the Folly, as a ladies' draper and milliner. Elizabeth's widowed brother John Bond Guyer came to help for a while. After Elizabeth died the two spinster daughters continued the business [ph1].



Joseph, Elizabeth and their daughters are buried in one large plot in Giggleswick graveyard with two stones, just across from the graves of sister Eliza and family.

*In loving remembrance of Amy second daughter of Joseph and Elizabeth Ralph of Settle born May 26th 1877 died April 25th 1884. Also of the above Joseph born Sep. 9th 1850 died Jan. 12th 1889. Also of Elizabeth wife of the above born Oct. 19th 1842 died Nov. 24th 1919. Agnes Maud Ralph died Oct. 23rd 1934. Ann Elizabeth Ralph died July 3rd 1952. B8 30a/b.*



## *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 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'.*

*Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 – Leeds Intelligencer, 2 – Nottingham Evening Post and Rutherglen Reformer, 3 – Albion and Star, 4 – Lancaster Gazette, 5 – Western Mail, 6 – Leeds Times*

*ph1 – photo credited to the Back in Settle Facebook site, the Ben McKenzie collection, ph2 – thanks to Giggleswick Church Archives*

*LSA - Lambert's Settle Almanac, WLP – the diaries of William Lodge Paley with the kind permission of the Museum of North Craven Life*