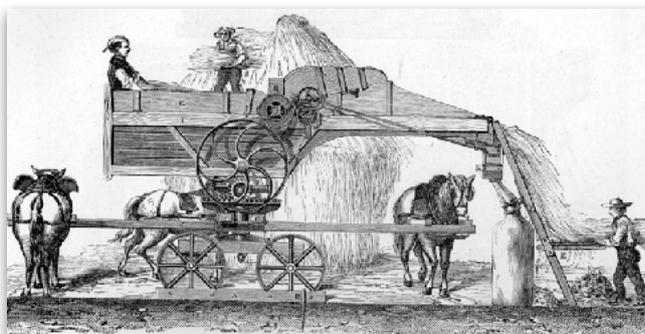


## Alexander Field, steam rollers and threshing machines

**Alexander Field** and his five older siblings came from Kirkcudbrightshire in Scotland, the children of **James Field**, an agricultural labourer and his wife **Annie Bryson** but the family had moved to Penrith by the 1880s. This was an interesting time to be in agriculture because of the impact of the industrial revolution.

Alexander's brothers, **Joseph Field** and **James Field** were 'early adopters' of technology and set up in business with their traction engines and threshing machines as soon as they arrived in the Penrith area[1]. Threshing machines, separating seeds from stalks, were one of the first farming machines to be invented, in the 1780s. They were about the size of an upright piano, driven by horse power [ph1]. The machines significantly reduced the number of men needed to harvest the crops. After the Napoleonic Wars and the resulting high tax and low wages, the labourers finally revolted in 1830 — the Swing Riots. The labourers smashed threshing machines and threatened farmers who had them. The riots were dealt with very harshly — nine of the rioters were hanged and a further 450 were transported to Australia.

**JOSEPH & JAMES FIELD & Co.,**  
TRACTION ENGINE, THRASHING MACHINE,  
AND SAW BENCH OWNERS,  
NEWTON, PENRITH,  
**B**E G respectfully to inform Farmers, Wood  
Growers, and Timber Merchants that they are  
prepared to undertake THRASHING and WOOD  
SAWING at reasonable charges. All orders shall  
have prompt attention.



'Progress' was inevitable. Later machines, including those of the Field brothers, were steam-powered, driven by a traction engine. The Field brothers owned a traction engine and a thresher, connected with belts and toured the area making plenty of money as they went. The traction engines were large and powerful, albeit slow and heavy, and could do the work of 20+ horses and so revolutionised agriculture and road haulage. Roads were little more than tracks in the second half of the nineteenth century and so traction engines could do a lot of damage to them. When roads were muddy traction engine owners put spikes and bolts onto the wheels to help them grip, which made conditions even worse. Joseph and James were just two of ten traction engine owners who were taken to court in 1917, for using spikes on the driving wheels of their traction engines causing damaging to road surfaces in the Penrith area and '*not in accordance with the Highways and Locomotives Amendment Act of 1878*'[1]. PC Glenross challenged Joseph when he saw the marks left by his engine. Joseph said, '*yes, I know but it's very awkward when you are on an engine and the roads are in an awkward state. One cannot travel without studs at the present time.*' The defence argued that prosecutions were '*not in the best interests of the country, that farmers needed the threshers to survive and that the Bench should bear in mind the circumstances of the time and not confine themselves strictly to the law*', which is an interesting perspective in changing times. You can see both sides of this argument. The judge said he understood the necessity of threshing machines and associated traction engines '*but I have to*

**LOCAL FARMERS'  
TROUBLES.**  
—  
**FEEDING STOCK ON SHEAVES.**  
—  
**WASTEFUL PROCESS IN  
WAR TIME.**  
—  
**TEN CONVICTIONS OF THRASHING  
MACHINE OWNERS AT PENRITH.**

## Settle Graveyard Project

*implement the law'* and so, after five minutes' deliberation, all ten owners were fined £1. The newspaper reported that, after the hearing, the farmers concerned met to organise a protest meeting *'to communicate the opinion of the farmers and threshing machine owners to the Board of Agriculture as soon as possible'* [1].

The quality of roads was to be transformed with the invention of steam rollers, with a large cylindrical roller in place of the two front wheels of a traction engine to level out the roads. The steam road roller was patented in 1867 and weighed in excess of 30 tons.

Alexander Field began his working life as a farm servant but will have worked with his older brothers with their threshers. In 1896, aged 27, he married **Frances Elizabeth Routledge** who was, literally, the girl next door. From this moment onwards Alexander described his occupation as a steam roller driver. Unfortunately, Frances died five years later at the birth of a their third child, **William Field**, and their eldest child, **James Field**, died a year later, aged four. A year later Alexander married widow **Elizabeth (Thompson) Peel** and they moved to Salkeld, north-east of Penrith.

After the war the family moved to Goldielands in Settle and Alexander became a steam roller driver for Settle Rural District Council. Daughter **Annie Field** worked in domestic service for the Birkbecks at Anley and son William got a job as a loco fireman for the Midland Railway, based in Hellifield.

In 1922 son William died, aged just 22 and was buried in the *Old graveyard J35* with a beautifully engraved memorial stone. By the time of the 1939 register Alexander, now retired, and Elizabeth had moved to Ingleton. Elizabeth died in 1947 and was brought back to Settle for burial with her stepson. Daughter Annie stayed in Settle and, at the age of 44, married **Fred Harrison**, a farm labourer who worked at Stackhouse. Annie died six years later, just a year after her mother. Her life was commemorated on the stone with her brother but she was buried alone in the unmarked *New FX11*.



*In Loving Memory of William the beloved son of Alexander and Elizabeth Field died Sep 21st 1923 aged 22 years. Also Annie Harrison died May 4th 1948 aged 50 years. Also Elizabeth Field Died July 27th 1947 aged 81 years. Rest in Peace.*

Alexander returned to Newton Reigny, near Penrith, and lived his last year with his spinster niece, **Annie Field**, the daughter of his brother Joseph Field. He was buried in the same graveyard as his parents and brothers. There were no heirs to this family.

Two years after Alexander's death, in 1951, *'a working model of a threshing machine built in 1906 by Alexander Field'* was to be included in an exhibition of farming machinery at Cartwright Memorial Hall in Bradford. *'In his spare time Mr Field made many models of agricultural implements and his niece still keeps most of them in her home at Newton Reigny.'* It also transpired that his brothers 'Jim and Joe' exhibited their threshing machine steering gear at the Royal Show in Carlisle 50 years previously [1]. In 1901 they had taken out a patent on a *'hand steering gear for the rear wheels of threshing machines and other wheeled vehicles.'* What a talented family.

He was a brother of Mr Jim and Mr Joe [Field], well-known traction engine and threshing machine owners, of Newton Reigny, who exhibited their steering gear for threshing machines at the Royal Show at Carlisle half a century ago. In his spare time Mr [Field] made many models of agricultural implements and his niece still keeps most of them in her home at Newton Reigny. The

## Settle Graveyard Project

When thinking about life in 19th century Settle and Giggleswick it's easy to forget that the streets were often pounded by traction engines and steam rollers. In 1895, at the Rural District Council meeting, **Edward Taylor** proposed that the council purchase a steam roller. He was certain that the provision of a steam roller would not only improve the roads but would also lessen the rates. The proposition was seconded by **James Hudson** who would later become a driver of the said engine [2]. The steam roller was acquired which left the thorny problem of where to keep it. In September that year **John William Shepherd**, who lived at The Terrace in Settle, and **John Delaney** who lived at Halsteads nearby protested against the chosen site for the Steam Roller Shed. A month later it transpired that that the shed had been built near The Terrace [2] — not in my back yard! Edward Taylor had tried to rescind that decision — perhaps after a lot of pressure from Messrs Shepherd and Delaney? but it was too late

[2]. The issue continued to rumble on. In 1904 **Thomas Brayshaw** had apparently offered the use of his Goosebutts Field, at the junction of Raines Road and Bankwell Road in Giggleswick, for the steam roller shed in exchange for £100. However, he changed his mind and decided to ask for £150 which was accepted [2]. The council may well have been desperate, and Thomas Brayshaw would have realised! It was known as 'Roller Shed' for generations.

In 1902 a party of 25 non-commissioned officers of the Bradford Artillery Volunteers marched through Settle en route from Bradford to Morecambe in order to prepare the camp at Bare. and a battery of four guns was drawn by a traction engine 'for the purpose of testing the results of the work of engines with the new 4.7in guns in comparison with that of horses' [3]. All these traction engines and steam rollers required quite a bit of maintenance which provided opportunities for local mechanics such as entrepreneurs **William Slinger** and **Robert Haygarth**.

Steam motor wagons were an increasingly common sight in the early 19th century as they were used to transport both limestone from quarries and burnt lime from the kilns to Giggleswick station for use at the steelworks. They could transport over six tons and even managed to ascend Buckhaw Brow and the steep hill out of Settle to Airton! Can you imagine the state of the roads? Bill Mitchell reported that the roads were so bad

**STEAM ROAD ROLLER.**—Mr. Ed. Taylor moved a resolution that the Council purchase a steam roller. He was certain that the provision of a steam roller would not only improve the roads, but would also lessen the rates.—Mr. Taylor's proposition was seconded by Mr. H. J. Hudson and carried.

**Steam Roller Shed**—Letters were read from Mr. J. W. Shepherd, of Settle, and Mr. John Delaney, of Halsteads, Settle, protesting against the site upon which the shed for housing the road roller is being built, but it was decided to proceed with the building.

**STEAM ROLLER SHED.**—Mr. Edward Taylor had given notice of his intention to move that the resolution providing for the erection of the steam roller shed near the Terrace, Settle, should be rescinded, but stated that inasmuch as the shed was already built, he did not intend to proceed with his motion.

### RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL. THE STEAM ROLLER.

A letter was read from Mr. T. Brayshaw withdrawing his offer to accept £100 for the Goosebutts field, Giggleswick, required as a site for the proposed steam roller shed, and asking £150.

Mr. Brayshaw explained that £100 was mentioned in his previous letter by mistake, and on the recommendation of the committee in charge of the matter the amended offer was accepted.

and Quartermaster Edgar. The main body will leave Bradford, Halifax, and Heckmondwike by train for Skipton to-morrow morning, march to Settle the same day, follow the road as far as Bentham on Sunday, and finish the journey by road on Monday.—One battery of four guns will be drawn by traction engines for the purpose of testing the results of the work of engines with the new 4.7in. guns in comparison with that of horses.



## Settle Graveyard Project

that 'cabbies going from Settle to Giggleswick Station made a detour by Watery Lane'[A]. Bill's photo of a steam wagon on Mill Lane, behind Giggleswick School, clearly shows the state of the roads. The driver of this wagon was **Edgar Hudson** [A], the son of James Hudson who seconded the decision to buy a steam roller in the first place. Another well known driver was **Joe Parsons**, pictured with his steam wagon in 1921 when he was 17 [ph2]. Joe started working at the quarries at the age of 13 and worked his way up to drive and maintain the steam wagons. These two men would most likely have known Alexander Field.



The site of the Stocks Reservoir is situated 10 miles from the nearest railway station. All materials which are delivered by rail are unloaded at Long Preston Station (near Settle), hauled by traction engine and motor lorries a distance of five miles and delivered on to the Board's light railway at Tosside, which is five miles from the site of the dam.

Traction engines were essential to the building of the dam, in order to flood Dalehead Valley to form the Stocks Reservoir near Gisburn. 'All materials which are delivered by rail are unloaded at Long Preston Station, hauled by Traction engines and 'motor lorries' a distance of five miles and delivered on to the Board's light railway at Tosside, which is five miles from the site of the dam.'[4]

**GIGANTIC TASK.**  
—  
**Three Thousand Million Gallons.**

Between 1923 and 1931 the Fylde Water Board constructed three reservoirs and associated pipework to provide water for Blackpool and Fylde. Stocks Reservoir cost an enormous £1,328,477 and was built to hold three thousand million gallons.

Inevitably, this relatively new technology caused plenty of road accidents and even fatalities. In 1919, ten year old **Arthur Herrington** died when he climbed off a timber wagon being hauled by a traction engine into the path of a car driven by **Thomas Hall**, a chauffeur who was driving **Lady Henderson**, her daughter and a nurse who were all 'very much upset at the accident' [5]. The Herrington's were probably very much upset too. Lady Henderson was the wife of **Sir Frederick Henderson**, a ship builder from Partick, Glasgow. Poor Arthur was buried in *Old H21* with his family.

**FATAL MOTOR ACCIDENT.**—A sad motor accident occurred on Friday, resulting in the death at Leeds Infirmary (where he had been taken on the Sunday following) of a boy named Arthur Herrington, son of Charles Herrington, mill worker, of Bridge End, Settle, aged 10 years. A traction engine, belonging to Messrs. Green, of Skipton, and drawing two timber wagons was proceeding over the bridge in the direction of Giggleswick, when the deceased and two other boys, who it is supposed had been riding on the timber projecting from the wagons, suddenly ran from behind the wagon in front of a car coming in the opposite direction. Deceased was knocked down and received serious internal injuries and concussion, from which he succumbed.

**Arthur Herrington died 21.7.1919 aged 10 years. Charles Herrington died 24.6.1938 aged 68 years. Jane Herrington died 19.11.1946 aged 78 years. Mabel Herrington died 23.8.1991 aged 91 years**



The internal combustion engine eventually replaced all the steam wagons.



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.

## *Settle Graveyard Project*

*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 – Penrith Observer, 2 – Lancaster Standard, 3 – Bradford Daily Telegraph, 4 – Fleetwood Chronicle, 5 – Lancaster Observer*

*[A] – Gossip from Giggleswick by W R Mitchell*

*ph1 – photo credited to Wikipedia, author unknown, 1881, ph2 – kindly provided by John Reid*