
A Hellifield railwayman's tragic story

Looking through the old family photo album that I inherited from my great-grandparents, I came across the attached photo of a couple outside their cottage. Luckily this had some names on the back enabling me to do some research into their story and find out what the connection to my family was.



The couple are Francis "Frankie" Farthing and his wife Minnie and are shown outside their cottage at Bridge End, Long Preston. My great-grandparents lived at 33 Midland Terrace, Hellifield and despite being a family of seven, always took in two or three railway workers as boarders. In the 1901 census Francis Farthing was one of their boarders.

Francis Farthing was born in Burnham-on-Sea in Somerset in 1873. In the Midland Railway's staff appointments book for 1893 he is shown as starting his railway career as a carriage washer

at the Midland Railway depot at Kentish town in the London borough of Camden. By 1901 he is shown to be employed as a carriage shunter at Hellifield. While at Hellifield Francis must have met his future wife, Minnie Brinklow. Minnie was born in Redhill, Surrey but at this time she was employed as a live-in housemaid for the Grundy family who lived in the large house by the railway bridge on Gisburn Road now called "The Grange", this house was formerly known as the Vicarage, having been built for the curate in charge of Hellifield in the days when Hellifield church was located in

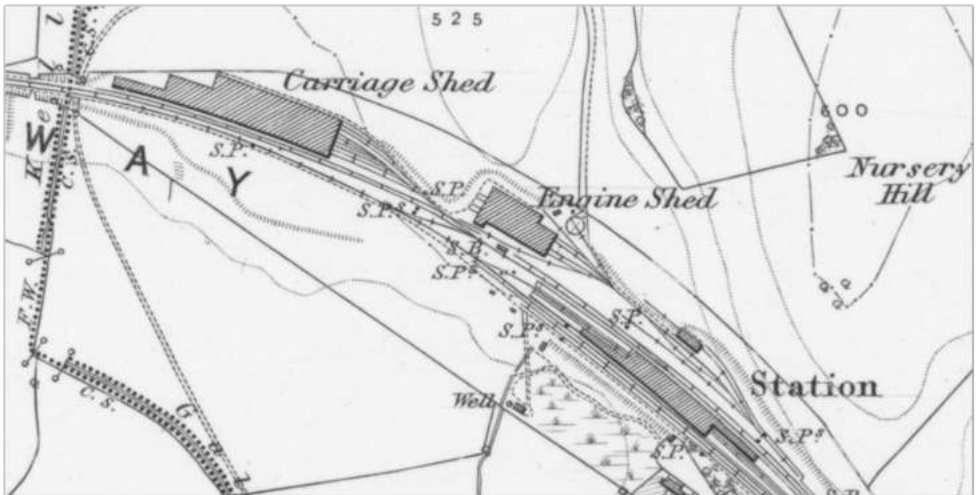


photo of female cleaners from 1917 shows what may be part of the shed above the tender of the locomotive on the left of the photo. To the right of the locomotive is the grounded body of an old American Pullman car which acted as a mess room for the carriage and cleaning staff. The Pullman car can be seen to better effect on the other photo which dates from the late 1940s - it is thought this may have been a sleeping car which the Midland railway imported from the USA around 1874.

the Institute, before the opening of St. Aidan's church in 1906. The couple were married on the 28th April 1901 in Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire and soon after came to live in Bridge End cottages, Long Preston.

To the west of Hellifield Station the Midland Railway built a large carriage shed and extensive sidings which is where Francis, employed as a carriage shunter, would have been involved in the making up of sets of carriages for Hellifield's local train services and the shunting and stabling of carriages for repair or cleaning. The sheds can be seen on the attached section of the ordnance survey map from 1896. Not many photos of the carriage sheds seem to have survived but the attached

After suffering storm damage at several times in its life, the carriage shed roof and sides were eventually removed, leaving the sidings and the workers exposed to the elements of Hellifield's often wet and windy weather! Before the removal of the shed's sides and roof a tragic accident was to befall Francis Farthing. On the 24th July 1937, Francis was riding on the running board of a carriage, giving instructions to the engine driver who was moving some carriages into the shed, when he was struck by one of the metal stanchions that supported the shed roof and was seriously injured. After receiving medical attention on-site he was taken by train to Leeds but sadly





died of his injuries in Leeds General infirmary later that day. Minnie Farthing seems to have left Long Preston sometime in 1939 as the government's wartime 1939 list shows her living alone in Collwell Road, Wellingborough, Northants, and describing her as a widow on unpaid domestic duties. The Collwell Road area of Wellingborough at that time appears to be a railway community with nearly all the residents described as railway or retired railway employees. It

may have been possible that Minnie received some help from the Railway Benevolent Institution. This railway charity was formed in 1858 to provide support to railway staff (active and retired) and their dependents when they needed help through

illness, injury, bereavement or adversity. It also ran two orphanages for children of railway families: the charity is still in existence today and is now known as The Railway Benefit Fund.

Minnie Farthing's death was recorded in Wellingborough in January 1956. The couple had no children.

John Pearcy

