

Mrs Thompson's cute baby!

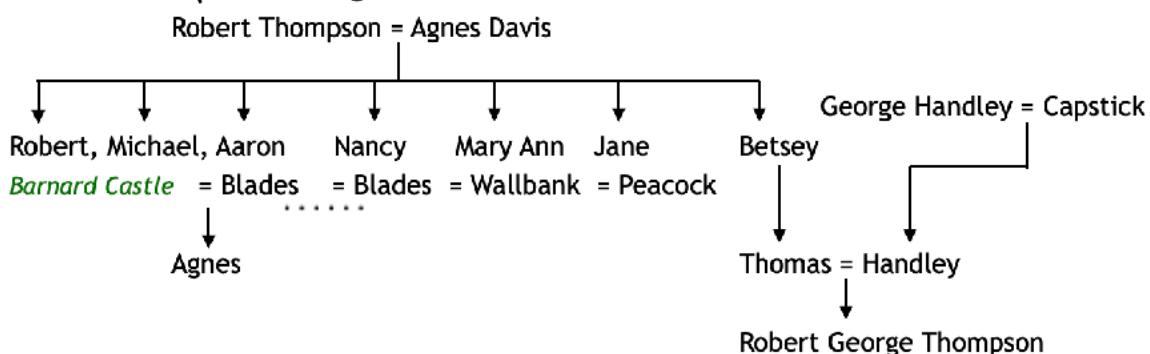
Mrs Thos Thompson's baby, photograph by the Horner Studio. Horner Collection©NCBPT (CC-BY 4.0)



This wonderful photo [ph1] from the Horner collection of photos at the Museum of Craven Life shows a bonny baby in his/her best clothes with, presumably, his/her mum close by, also wearing a 'best' floral hat. She would not have been seen in the final print as the edges of the photo would have been removed. Perhaps this was a photo taken at the baby's christening? The baby sits on a small couch, which would have been provided by the Horners, with a plain backdrop — nothing very fancy in this photo. The photo reflects the changing market of the photography business. It was taken in 1900, some 35 years after the start of the Horners' business. Photographic technology had advanced considerably over those years and had also become cheaper making photos accessible to working class families, which this certainly was. The full title inscribed on the glass plate is 'Mrs Thos Thompson's baby, 1900 Ribbleshead'.

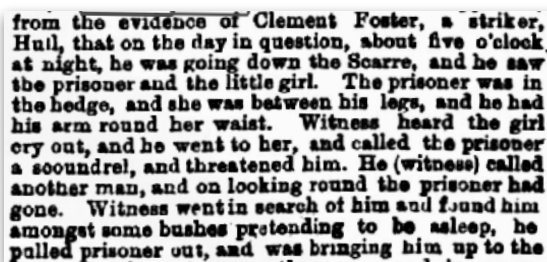
What's the story behind this photo? **Robert George Thompson** was the son of **Thomas Thompson**, a railway labourer and his wife **Jane Handley**, both of Sedbergh/Garsdale. Thomas was the illegitimate son of **Betsey Thompson** who was the eldest daughter in a family of 7 sons and five

Thomas Thompson's family




daughters, including a pair of twins, of **Robert Thompson**, a farmer and his wife **Agnes Davis**. Betsey brought Thomas up with the help of her siblings.

Three of the Thompson sons moved to live in Barnard Castle for work. **Robert Fawcett Thompson**, the eldest worked for the railway and was posted to Barnard Castle as the stationmaster. He married a local girl, **Maria Binns** and they had three children before Robert died, aged just 49 — several of the men in this family died at a similar age, unfortunately. Another son, **Aaron Thompson** worked as a coal merchant/miner and farmer at Barnard Castle. Before he left Garsdale he married **Catherine Blades** who was from a farming family. 'Blades Farm', a typical solid stone farmhouse, still exists, now with a caravan park just outside the village of Garsdale. Aaron and Catherine started their family of ten children but, sadly, three died at a young age. Their eldest daughter, **Agnes Thompson**, aged nine, suffered a traumatic event in 1874 when **George Cooke**, 'a tramp with no fixed residence' assaulted her. A local man, **Clement Foster**, saw Agnes 'between Cooke's legs with his arm around her waist'. Clement heard Agnes cry out and threatened Cooke who got away [1]. Clement went after him and soon found Cooke in a ditch pretending to be asleep! Cooke was sentenced to (just) three months in prison with hard labour, a standard punishment for this type of crime, and was probably glad to have a roof over his head. At the same court session, the evidence of George assaulting another young girl did not satisfy the court and was dismissed. Poor Agnes never married and lived with her parents until she died, aged just 28.



from the evidence of Clement Foster, a striker, Hull, that on the day in question, about five o'clock at night, he was going down the Scarre, and he saw the prisoner and the little girl. The prisoner was in the hedge, and she was between his legs, and he had his arm round her waist. Witness heard the girl cry out, and he went to her, and called the prisoner a scoundrel, and threatened him. He (witness) called another man, and on looking round the prisoner had gone. Witness went in search of him and found him amongst some bushes pretending to be asleep, he pulled prisoner out, and was bringing him up to the

Robert and Agnes' youngest son, **Michael Thompson** also worked on the railway at Barnard Castle, as a railway porter and initially lived with brother Aaron and his family. Just a year after marrying **Dorothy Patterson** in Barnard Castle, Michael was accused of assaulting **William Barnes**, perhaps in his role as railway porter [2]. The case was dismissed but, in the end Michael and his family moved to live at Tebay. Michael was only 43 when he died.



BARNARD CASTLE.
PETTY SESSIONS.—On Wednesday before Messrs. Hustler, Gerard, and Horne, **Michael Thompson**, of **Barnard Castle**, railway porter, was charged with assaulting **Wm. Barnes**, at **Barnard Castle**, on the 4th Nov. last. Case dismissed.—**Joseph Graham**, of

Betsey's sisters didn't have much luck with husbands either. Second daughter, **Nancy Thompson**, (one of the twins) married **Anthony Blades** who, in the small world of Garsdale was the brother of Catherine Blades who had married Nancy's brother Aaron Thompson and lived at Barnard Castle. Nancy and Anthony stayed in Garsdale but, tragically, both died a couple of years after marrying leaving two young daughters who were brought up by their Thompson grandparents. Nancy's twin brother, **Joshua Thompson**, stayed at home, a bachelor, until he died, aged 53. Third daughter, **Mary Ann Thompson**, married **Thomas Wallbank** who disappeared off the scene soon after a daughter, **Margaret Wallbank**, was born. Mary Ann and Margaret lived with her parents but Margaret died, aged just nine. Oh dear. Fortunately, youngest daughter, **Jane Thompson**, was the exception to this gloom. She worked as a servant/housekeeper to a recently widowed farmer, **Thomas Peacock**, and helped to bring up his children. It didn't take long before Jane and Thomas were married, and they had two children of their own to add to the family. Jane was 92 when she died!

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So, young **Thomas Thompson** was brought up by his mum and uncles. When he was 21, in 1878, he set off for a military career, serving with the King's Royal Rifle Corps, 60th rifles, based in Winchester. Unfortunately, a year later he was taken to court for desertion. There aren't many other details about his service but it's likely he served in the Egyptian Wars, the Anglo-Zulu Wars and the Boer War in South Africa. His is next found back in Sedbergh in November 1890 when he was 35. This is when he married **Jane Handley**, 17 years his junior who was the eldest of five children of a **George Handley** and his wife **Isabella (Capstick) Handley** who ran a small cattle farm at Lock Bank, about six miles west of Sedbergh. George was particularly good at breeding 'excellent beasts' often mentioned in reports of agricultural shows.

judges was right. In the classes confined to small farmers there were some very excellent beasts shown, Mr. [George] [Handley] having a well-selected herd. The special prize offered by Mr. Metcalfe-

With such a successful father, it's not surprising that Jane's brother and two sisters remained in the cattle farming business. However, there are only a limited number of farms in the locality for children of farming families to take on. **George (Jnr) Handley** stayed in the area, but the sisters, **Agnes** and **Margaret** and their husbands **Thomas Swidenbank** and **John James Farrer** moved to the heart of the metropolis of Liverpool to join the fleet of Yorkshire cow keepers providing its expanding population with milk. They ran their businesses from normal residential buildings, with cows in the back yard feeding them in local parks and, famously, what was Everton football pitch! Cow keeping was a lucrative trade and these two families had two servants living with them and their children at the time of each census returns. The cow keeping business eventually declined with the introduction of mechanised milk delivery vans.

Meanwhile, while her four younger siblings were being raised, young Jane Handley was sent to Sedbergh to attend school. She was found boarding with none other than our Betsey Thompson. The Handleys already knew the Thompsons as they had been next door neighbours in Garsdale at the time of the 1861 census. Betsey's son Thomas Thompson had already left home for his career in the army. Upon his return in 1890, when Jane was 21, she married Thomas and they lived in Garsdale with Thomas working as a 'general labourer'.

Young **Robert George Thompson** was born in the early summer of 1900, nearly ten years after their wedding. No wonder they wanted a photo of him and travelled down to Settle to have it taken! and Jane was captured in the photo too. By 1901 they had moved to live at Salt Lake Cottages on an bleak bit of moorland just south of Ribbleshead station. They probably didn't have running water and an outside privy/midden of course! Thomas had found work as a relatively well paid 'platelayer working for the railway engineering department'!



sewerage, and then I paid a visit to "Salt Lake," where there are eight very good detached huts.

Salt Lake Cottages still exist and you can rent some of them for a holiday stay, ideal for watching steam trains pass by. Before the brick-built cottages there had been a small shanty town comprising 'eight very good detached huts'[4] which had been built to accommodate navvies building the Settle to Carlisle Railway 1869-1876. The other Ribbleshead shanty town were named after battles in the Crimean war — Jericho, Sebastopol, Inkerman, Belgravia but it's not know where Salt Lake huts got their name from. The huts were built by the Midland Railway in 1874, towards the end of

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the construction and, as a number of men would always be needed to maintain the railway, the brick-built cottages were built at a later date.

For a short while the Thompsons' next-door neighbours were **John** and **Betsy Symons** from Aberdeen. John was a mason's labourer who had spent his working life on the railway, moving the family to wherever there was work, and finding himself at Ribblehead from 1873. Whilst at Salt Lake Betsy had twin daughters, **Catherine (Kitty) Ann** and **Mary Jane Symons** who sadly died within days of each other, aged 2 years and four months and were buried at St Leonard's churchyard. They were one of the few navvy families to erect a memorial stone, now badly laminated. Betsy and John remained at Salt Lake until they died in 1901 and 1902, aged 54 and 72 respectively.



In memory of Mary Jane who died 15th April 1876 and Catherine Ann who died 20th April 1876, aged 2 years and 4 months, twin children of John and Betsy Symons of Ribblehead.

Thomas and Jane Thompson stayed at 6 Salt Lake Cottages at Ribblehead for at least 30 years before retiring to Middlesborough. Thomas was 87 and Jane 86 when they died. What happened to young Robert George Thompson? He was just old enough to serve in the West Yorkshire Regiment for the last year of WW1. By the time of the 1921 census, he was found in Liverpool working as an assistant master in Parkfield School, a small private school run by **Reuben Hand Bailey Hawthorn** to prepare boys for service in the Navy. At the time of the census return they had three students boarding with them, from India, Dublin and Spain, and four assistant masters, including Robert. Reuben died in 1926 and so, presumably did Robert's employment. Unfortunately, and frustratingly, with a name as common as Robert Thompson, it's impossible to find him after that but, as his parents spent their last years in Middlesborough, perhaps he went there?



This account has been compiled 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.

Life stories 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'. The life stories of people with italicised names have been researched as part of the graveyard project.

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 & 2 – Richmond and Ripon Chronicle, 3 – Westmorland Gazette, 4 – Daily News

ph1 – Image 2022.1.68.11 from the Horner Photographic Studio Collection provided courtesy of the Museum of North Craven Life, ph2 – credited to the Dales Community Archives website, submitted by Horton History Group



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