

Mr Spencer, a well-to-do farmer

This photo plate from the Horner collection at the Museum of North Craven Life is damaged with the bottom corner of the plate missing [ph1]. It portrays a man of mature years in a smart double breasted long jacket and a below-the-chin beard. He is sitting beside a table, provided by the Horner studios, upon which are books, intended to imply an educated man. The Horner collection records tell us this is Mr Spencer of Long Preston, taken in February 1866. Who is he?

Thomas and William Spencer were the only sons of **Thomas Spencer** of Long Preston and his wife **Margaret Buck** who farmed at High Ground Farm, east of Hellifield Peel. Margaret's ancestors lived in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Long Preston and, going back further, in Dent and she could be distantly related to Settle's well known **Dr Charles William Buck**.



Mr Spencer, photograph by the Horner Studio. Horner Collection©NCBPT (CC-BY 4.0)

It seems that Thomas Spencer (Snr) was a rather interesting character! In the first decades of the 19th century, the Squire of the Manor, Hellifield Peel, was **James Hamerton/Hammerton**. His son, **Henry Hamerton**, died in 1835, aged just 21. With thanks to a descendant of a graveyard resident [A] letters between James Hamerton and the vicar of Long Preston, Rev Postlethwaite suggest Thomas Spencer and 'my own irrational neighbour', **William Wilkinson** of Hellifield Green had something to do with it. They mention that Thomas Spencer, encouraged by William Wilkinson, was brawling with Henry shortly before his death. Thomas Spencer suggested Henry was a victim of suicide which would have caused a very real problem for burial. However, the coroner decided that there was no reason for an inquest into his death and so he was buried in Long Preston churchyard in the family vault. Talking of which, James Hamerton accused Thomas Spencer of vandalism of the Squire's vault and of taking £50 of public money for his own use and said that Thomas 'ought to have hounded this animal Spencer from his house as a tormentor of trouble in our village'. A letter including these details was read out at **Mary Kaley's** The Black Horse in Hellifield and, following this, Thomas took Squire Hamerton to court for libel. Unsurprisingly, the jury agreed with Mr Hammerton, 'a gentleman of large fortune, a magistrate, a member of the bar and surveyor of the highways'[5].

SPENCER V. HAMMERTON.
Mr. ALEXANDER appeared for the plaintiff, and Mr. BLACKBURN for the defendant. The plaintiff, Mr. Spencer, is a farmer and cattle-dealer, at Hellifield, and the defendant, Mr. [Hammerton] a gentleman of large fortune, a magistrate, a member of the bar, and surveyor of the highways for that township. The libel complained of was a letter from the

In 1843 Thomas (Snr) also fell out with William Wilkinson when he built a drain 'depriving Wilkinson's meadow, occupied by Thomas Lawson, over the summer months'. William Wilkinson went to court to insist that Thomas should 'abate the drain nuisance. Thomas Spencer (Jnr) agreed

Settle Graveyard Project

to remove the drain without the need for legal action. His first removal was not satisfactory but the second met with Wilkinson's approval'. Thomas (Snr) died two years later, aged 70.

Meanwhile sons Thomas (Jnr) and William Spencer both remained bachelors. Their two sisters who both married and moved away. Thomas, the elder brother, inevitably took over the family farm in Hellifield when his parents died during the 1840s. He was obviously successful, farming over 260 acres and employing two men as well as four servants at the time of census returns. In 1853 he was appointed as the Hellifield Parish Constable, within 'Staincliffe West', to help maintain law and order before the introduction of the West Riding Police Constabulary in 1857. To be given this post Thomas had to be a well respected rate payer, strong, as all farmers are, and may well have been tall — it was more of a physical job in those days. For this he was rewarded with a salary of £3 2s 6d on top of his farming income [1].

APPOINTMENT AND SWEARING IN OF CONSTABLES.—
The undermentioned persons have been appointed constables for the ensuing year, for the several townships placed before their respective names, situate in the division of Staincliffe West, in the West Riding. Nearly all of them were sworn at a special Petty Sessions, held at Settle on Saturday last. Those who did not then attend

Looking at the relative ages of the brothers, it's most likely that it was Thomas who posed for the Horner photo in 1866 when he was 57. There doesn't appear to be an obvious reason for the timing of this photo. Once in his seventies Thomas and his younger brother William teamed up to run a smaller undertaking of 52 acres at Barton House, just outside Long Preston on the Gargrave Road. They still had several servants to help in the house and on the farm. William had spent the earlier part of his working life running his own farm of 260 acres in the grounds of the old 12th century Bracewell Hall, outside Barnoldswick. It was already dilapidated in the 1850s [ph2]. 'King Henry's Parlour' is a building remaining on the site because of the legend that he stayed there at one time.



After William died in 1884, Thomas continued to work the farm at Barton House with the help of servants until he died in August 1891, aged 82. Having inherited from brother William, Thomas died a very wealthy man, leaving an estate of nearly £3500, worth millions in today's value. Both brothers were buried in Long Preston churchyard in, surprisingly, unmarked plots.

For his last 20 years, Thomas had the help of a domestic help/housekeeper called **Jane Gornall**, a farmer's daughter from Horton-in-Ribblesdale. Before her employment with the Spencers, Jane had worked for 19 year old **Charles Abbotson** and his uncle, **William Beecroft Abbotson**, who were farmers at Gildersleets, now just inside the A65, Settle direction. At the time of the 1891 census, just before Thomas died, he also had Jane's 19 year old daughter, **Isabella Gornall**, working in service for him. Jane was still a single woman. Over the years we have witnessed many stories of employers taking advantage of their servants, resulting in pregnancy and so this raises a question

1871	Mr. & Mrs. Isabella	Charles Abbotson	see No. 60	Gildersleets Land near Settle	Wm. Beecroft
No. 58					
1872	Mr. & Mrs. John	Thomas & Agnes	Heston	Golden Lion Inn	housekeeper
No. 59					
1872	Miss Isabella	Jane	Gornall	Stainfield Lane	Wm. Beecroft
No. 60					

Settle Graveyard Project

here. The answer to Isabella's fatherhood is provided in the inadvertently mistaken entry in her baptism records by the vicar in Horton-in-Ribblesdale.

So, Isabella's father was her previous employer, Charles Abbotson at Gildersleets. Rather than 'do the honourable thing' Charles turned his back on Jane, a lowly servant, and married a landowner's daughter a couple of years later, fathering five daughters within the next six years! Jane might have been interested to know that Charles died at a young age of 31 of a ruptured blood vessel

housekeeper absolutely (if in my service at my death) all my household — furniture plate linen china and other effects in and about my dwellinghouse

after a head injury sustained by falling between carriages at Bentham Station. Charles' widow remarried, this time to his cousin, ten years her junior. Meanwhile, little Isabella was brought up by her Gornall grandparents until she was old enough to work in service at Barton House with her mum and the Spencers.

Interestingly, after Thomas' death in 1891, when he was 82, Jane and daughter were found living in Barton House on 'independent means'. There are no surprises in guessing where that income came from. In Thomas' will, written in March 1889, Jane Gornall was listed as one of his executors, *if still in his service*, which she was. It transpires that Thomas was a generous man with funds for several women as well as fellow farmers and relations. The will was prepared by **Charles Henry Charlesworth** and his clerk, **James Twisleton**. After funeral expenses had been taken out of his estate, Thomas' first request was that he wanted to give Jane, his housekeeper, *'absolutely all of my household — furniture, plate, linen, china and other effects in and about my dwelling house.'* Thomas requested that all his farming stock, dead and alive should be sold and the substantial proceeds used to give funds to a variety of friends and cousins, including his Godchild, **Dorothy Varley** who remained a spinster and ran Gargrave Post Office, following in her mother's footsteps. Thomas also owned several properties including Wharf House, the New Inn estate at Horton-in-Ribblesdale, an estate in Coverdale as well as the Barton House estate. Towards the end of the will he said *'And I give my Barton House Estate at Long Preston with the appertuances (legally associated features, such as outbuildings, fences etc) to my said housekeeper Jane Gornall and her daughter Isabella Gornall in equal shares.* In a codicil to his will, written in December 1889 Thomas directed that *'my housekeeper Jane Gornall shall, after my death, have the use and enjoyment of my dwelling house at Barton House which I now occupy for as long as she shall desire to reside there, rent free'.*

This is a Codicil to the Will of me Thomas Spencer of Barton House Long Preston in the County of York Yeoman (which Will bears date the 19th day of March 1889) whereby I direct that my housekeeper Jane Gornall shall after my death have the use and enjoyment of my dwellinghouse at Barton House which I now occupy so long as she shall desire to reside there rent free I give to my cousin

No wonder Jane and her daughter remained there for the rest of their lives. They both remained both remained single and were buried in Long Preston churchyard with an impressive memorial stone.

In Loving Memory of Jane Gornall born May 1847 died December 1927 "At rest". Also Isabella Gornall daughter of the above died August 7th 1937 aged 65 years.



Incidentally the very last statement in the codicil stated that he wanted to give 'my servant Atkinson Harker fifty pounds of in service at my death'. We don't know if Atkinson was still in

my farm servant Atkinson Harker, fifty pounds if in my service at my death

Thomas' service but what happened to him? Sadly Atkinson had financial difficulties. In February 1909, Atkinson, aged 43 was found, decapitated, on a railway line at Apperley bridge near Bradford. There was no money or identification on his person except for a pawn ticket with 'Atkinson Harker, Grassington' written on it. He appeared to be 'about 50' and was partially bald with a birth mark on his right arm, which helped with identification by relations [4]. Oh dear.

THE APPERLEY BRIDGE TRAGEDY.

BOY IDENTIFIED.

The body of the man who was found dead on the Midland Railway near Apperley Bridge station on Sunday morning has now been identified as that of Atkinson Harker, of Grassington. It will be remembered that at the inquest on Monday afternoon, when an open verdict was returned, it was stated that a pawn ticket was found on the deceased which bore that name. The police then stated that there was no such man as that named who had been living at Grassington.

The body has since been identified by the man's relatives.

What do we know about Thomas' brother William Spencer? In 1882, after he had moved to Barton House with Thomas, William was one of a number of gentlemen selected to be a judge at Long Preston Christmas Fat Stock Show, choosing the winners from 73 entries of 'first-class quality' cattle and sheep in four classes [2]. *'The arrangements were carried out as smoothly as could be expected, seeing that the show was organised but a fortnight ago, and that it was the first of its kind at Long Preston. One good feature of this first venture was the payment of the prize money immediately after the judging was concluded. At two o'clock the officers, judges and others sat down to luncheon at the Maypole Hotel'*, of course!

CHRISTMAS FAT STOCK SHOWS.

LONG PRESTON.—This show, promoted by a number of gentlemen, was held yesterday. There were 73 entries of cattle and sheep, and the sum of £51 was offered as prize money. The entries were all free. There were four classes of cattle in the local competitors' list, eight in the open, and five classes of sheep, which were also open. The animals entered were of first-class quality. The judging was witnessed by a large number of spectators. The judges were Messrs. Wm. Lister, Bowling, Bradford; Thos. Townson, Wray; William Spencer, Long Preston; and James Howard, Newton-in-Bollard. The arrangements were carried out as smoothly as could be expected, seeing that the show was organised but a fortnight ago, and that it was the first of its kind ever held at Long Preston. One good feature of this first venture was the payment of the prize money immediately after the judging was concluded. At two o'clock the officers, judges, and others sat down to luncheon at the Maypole Hotel. The Vicar (the Rev. J. E. Coulson) presided. List of awards:—

Just over a year later, on 7 February 1884, William, aged 72, tragically took his own life and his body was found in the river by his brother Thomas. Thomas saw him crossing a field in the morning, presuming he was looking after sheep, but became worried when William didn't return. *'Deceased was not quite sober in the morning but talked as usual. He had been rather 'leetsome' in his mind of late through drinking and had been knocked down by an engine on the railway a fortnight ago'*[3]. How sad. Typically, the jury's verdict was that William 'committed suicide whilst in an unsound state of mind.' Mental health issues were a no-no in Victorian society. There were so many railway accidents in those days that non-fatal ones rarely made the newspapers however, it's not surprising William had had a few more drinks than usual. The shame of suicide may also explain why Thomas didn't arrange a memorial stone for him.

SUICIDE OF A FARMER AT LONG PRESTON.—Mr. F. P. Brown, District Coroner, held an inquiry at the Boar's Head Inn, Long Preston, relative to the death of a well-to-do farmer, Mr. William Spencer, aged 72 years, whose body was found by his brother in the river on the preceding day.—Mr. Thomas Spencer, farmer, deposed that the deceased was his brother, and that on Thursday morning he saw him cross a field called "Callinbers," and concluded deceased was looking after the sheep. He did not return to dinner, however, and on going to look over some pastures in the afternoon, witness found the body of his brother in the river, which was about two feet in depth at that spot, the body being only partially covered with water. Deceased was not quite sober in the morning, but talked as usual. He had been rather "leetsome" in his mind of late through drinking, and had been knocked down by an engine on the railway a fortnight ago.—The jury returned a verdict to the effect that deceased committed suicide whilst in an unsound state of mind.

Going back in time we find a couple of interesting relations. The brothers' maternal aunt, **Alice Buck**, married the Winskill farmer **Richard Hodgson Holden** who spent his last years as the innkeeper of the New Inn at Horton-in-Ribblesdale — we remember that Thomas Spencer owned

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that estate. Richard and Alice's son, **William Holden**, married **Fanny Moorby**, the sister of **William Moorby** who was an outstanding musician, teacher and church choirmaster. William and Fanny Holden both worked as assistant schoolteachers in Horton-in-Ribblesdale. They didn't have children of their own but helped to raise a couple of Moorby nephews and nieces. They are buried with a memorial stone in Horton-in-Ribblesdale churchyard. After William died, Fanny moved to Newland, Hull. Why? Her nieces and nephews, most of them school teachers, had moved to Hull and presumably looked after her during the end of her life but she was brought back to Horton for burial with her husband.



In loving memory of William Holden, died April 21st 1873, aged 73 years. Also of Fanny, wife of the above, who died at Newland, Hull, January 16th 1889, aged 81 years.

The brothers' cousin, **Alice Buck**, daughter of Uncle **Thomas Buck**, married **John Metcalf** who appeared to be quite a character according to some reminiscences! [ph3] He *'lived at the foot of Belle Hill and sought for inspiration from the heavenly bodies, when he would stand at the gate and announce "I've fon' it out and its fair beyond sun and moon"'* and sang *'pathetically'* at the Hart's Head with *'some choice companions'* and crawled around the kitchen with chairs on their backs! *'Such were the innocent amusements of our forebears before the days of kinemas.'* Indeed!

Another village worthy was John Metcalf who lived at the foot of Belle Hill and sought for inspiration from the heavenly bodies, when he would stand at the gate and announce "I've fon' it out and its fair beyond sun and moon." Afterwards he would take some choice companions to the Hart's Head where Jim Kidd would sing pathetically "Woodman spare that tree" or "The Ivy Green," and when they came to

the chorus, "Creeping where no life is seen, a dainty plant is the ivy green," each had to put a chair on his back and get down on his knees—and at the word of command "Now creep lads, creep," a solemn procession would trip round the kitchen on their knees and hands whilst trolling forth the chorus.

Such were the innocent amusements of our forebears beofre the day of kinemas.



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 settlerearch@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.

A – with thanks to Paul Wiltshire, descendant of the Wilkinson family for the account of the letters

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1 – Kendal Mercury, 2 – Leeds Mercury, 3 – Lancaster Gazette, 4 – Bradford Daily Telegraph, 5 – York Herald

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