

Rev J R Blakiston, demonstrating how the other half live

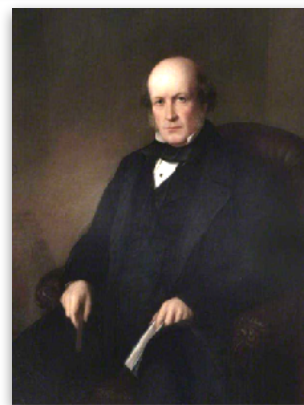
Rev John Richard Blakiston was the headmaster of Giggleswick School from 1858 - 66. The position of Headmaster at Giggleswick School was a lucrative and prestigious appointment so only the very best candidates were appointed. What do we know about him?

John Richard had an impressive ancestry. The Blakiston family were given detailed coverage in Debrett's Illustrated Baronetage, and Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage. The Baronetage was first conferred by James I in 1615 and also by Charles I in 1642. They had quite an attractive family crest [ph1]. The first Baronet was John Richard's great grandfather, **Sir Matthew Blakiston** born in 1702 [ph2]. He was an eminent merchant in Jermyn Street, the centre of tailoring, and became the Lord Mayor of London in 1760. He was knighted in 1759 and created a Baronet in 1763. Sir Matthew was followed by his son, another **Matthew Blakiston**, who was also knighted. The family are remembered on memorial stones and plaques inside St Thomas the Apostle churchyard at Lymington, Hampshire. The second Sir Matthew, John Richard's grandfather, has an impressive plaque [ph3] which includes an intriguing inscription *'To those who knew him, the enumeration of his virtues would be superfluous, to those who knew him not, it would be superfluous.'* This Matthew's wife, **Dame Anne (Rochfort) Blakiston**, lived to the incredible age of 102, being widowed for 56 years. Her death notice mentioned that she was *'grandmother of the Rev J R Blakiston, of Giggleswick School'* which tells us much about his perceived status [1].



At Torquay, Dame Anne, widow of Sir Matthew Blakiston, Bart., in her 102nd year—grandmother of the Rev. J. R. Blakiston, of Giggleswick School.

John Richard's father was **Rev Peyton Blakiston** [ph4]. After studying Holy Orders, a fear of tuberculosis led him to a medical career, training in France. Back in England he took a particular interest in cholera and chest diseases, and wrote several publications which placed him as the leader of this field of study. He also promoted preventative medicine and education in sanitation.



Peyton married **Frances Powell**, the daughter of **John Folliot Powell**. The Powell family have numerous plaques inside St Peter's Church, Tempsford, Bedfordshire. Peyton and Frances had one daughter and four sons. Aside from John Richard, the sons had careers suitable for their status as solicitors and vicars. Their daughter married a physician. Their son, another **Peyton Blakiston**, had a rather short career in the Royal Navy. He was quickly promoted to the role of Commander but, sadly, died in 1866, aged just 32 from yellow fever on board *The Isis* off the coast of Sierra Leone en route to take command of a steam screw vessel *Sparrow* [ph5]. He was buried at sea but has a memorial plaque inside the church back home in Lymington. Before his death, Peyton found time to marry and have three children, the youngest being another **Peyton Blakiston**.

came necessary. Commander Peyton Blakiston, who went out by the last mail boat to take command of the steam screw vessel Sparrow, died of fever on board the Isis four hours after the departure of the homeward-bound mail boat. The crews of the other ships were healthy, but there was a great deficiency of surgeons.

Despite the nature of his father's death, this youngest Peyton Blakiston also decided on a career in the Navy and was a midshipman on board *HMS Iron Duke*, an audacious-class battleship, in the seas around China. Young Peyton died in Hong Kong military hospital, aged just 17. He has a memorial stone in Hong Kong Cemetery, erected by his fellow officers [ph6].



So, this is the unusual ancestry of John Richard Blakiston. How did his life go? It just

wouldn't do for John Richard to marry beneath his station and he certainly didn't disappoint. His first wife was **Elizabeth Nicolls**, the daughter of **General Sir Edward Nicolls, KCB** [ph7], known as '*Fighting Nicolls*' of the Royal Marines and his wife **Dame Eleanor Hester (Bristow) Nicolls** [ph8]. As with several members of this family Sir Edward has his own Wikipedia page. It tells us that he had a '*most distinguished military career, serving in no fewer than*



107 military actions across the world', including the Napoleonic Wars. He enlisted in the Royal Navy at the age of 11 and spent his whole career at sea. He survived numerous injuries including to both legs, a shot through his body and arm, a sabre cut to the head and a bayonet in the chest. He also lost the sight in one eye. He was a committed abolitionist and promoted Temperance. In 1855 he was awarded the KCB, the highest award for chivalry. Amidst all this he fathered seven children, including Elizabeth.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth died two years after her marriage to John Richard Blakiston, perhaps with issues related to childbirth, and so he married again. His new wife was a widow, **Marie Jeanne Charlotte (Simon) Hill**, the daughter of **Dr Pierre Simon** who was French, unsurprisingly [ph9]. Marie gave birth to seven children with just one unnamed son dying soon after birth.



While all this was going on, John Richard had his career to pursue. There are literally hundreds of reports of his work via the internet and newspapers so these are just some points of interest. After a successful education at Trinity College, Cambridge he became the second master at Uppingham School, near Rutland, coinciding with his first marriage. Upon Elizabeth's death he was appointed Headmaster of Preston Grammar School and during this post married his second wife. In 1858 he was the successful candidate out of 40 applicants in securing the lucrative post as Headmaster of the Royal Free Grammar School at Giggleswick, replacing **Dr Butterton**, on a salary of £250 plus an additional £5 for each boy in the school after the first thirty as a captivation fee. He was exceptionally qualified, talented and had enormous potential. At the same time, **Rev Matthew Wood** was appointed Usher (senior deputy). John Richard soon appointed his friend an colleague from Preston Grammar School, **Arthur Brewin**, who ran the Lower/Junior School. John Richard's first inspection report said that the school was '*staffed by very able, young and ambitious young men. Mr Blakiston's intellectual capacity and ability as a teacher were quite exceptional*' [A] and it commended the work of the school, especially of the boys under Mr Blakiston and Mr Brewin. However, the report in the next year, 1860 said that '*progress was by no means satisfactory*' and in

1861, *'there were no boys whose knowledge corresponded with that of an average sixth form in one of the greater Public Schools.'* [A] Oh dear.

John Richard wrote to the papers regarding admission criteria for free places at grammar schools. It included, *'I find such schools too often attended by boys whose abilities are not such as to enable them to rise above their lowly station in life'* and should take an examination to ensure only *'the most worthy'* obtained a place'[2].

In June 1861 John Richard made the headlines after what we now regard as a shocking, unacceptable and career-ending incident. Standards were different in those days, especially for those from aristocratic backgrounds. John Richard was charged with cruelty to a 13 year old Giggleswick schoolboy, **James Edward Wright**, a solicitor's son from Wakefield. The magistrates included **George Stansfeld**, **William Robinson** and **John Birkbeck**. The prosecution was led by **Henry Robinson** who frequently represented people from lower classes (at reduced rates as needed)[3]. The hearing lasted three hours *'and the court was crowded during the whole time'*. As was usual before laws to reduce opportunities for child abuse, James, aged 13, lived with the Usher/senior deputy, Mr Matthew Wood (who later married into the Birkbeck family). James, who was *'rather small for his years'*, was severely whipped and beaten by the Headmaster on the suspicion of cheating in his Greek Delectus examination. **Dr Edward Harrison** described that James' left arm was one mass of bruises and James said he was *'lame from the effects of the beating'*. The court did not consider whether the boy deserved punishment — that was a matter solely for the headmaster, but whether there was *'common assault, severe, savage and cruel flogging without any adequate cause'*. *'After long consideration of the painful case'* the bench decided to dismiss the case, but, unusually, did not charge costs to either side. The reasons given for this decision included the fact that Mr Wood, who provided James' accommodation, did not give evidence. He was in a very difficult position wasn't he?

This incident represented the tip of the iceberg in hostilities between Rev Blakiston, his usher/senior deputy Mr Wood and the governors (several of whom would become Mr Woods in-laws). Mr Wood had sought medical attention and informed the boy's father without the knowledge of Rev Blakiston. The governors had imposed strict rules such that many decisions typically taken by headmasters had to go through them. For example they had to give permission for routine maintenance and building, arranging holidays, admitting pupils and they even queried his pronunciation of Latin. Debates about the case and Rev Blakiston's management style were aired

With regard to the subject of your correspondent's letter, I cannot agree with him that high class schools, free of expense, are always of unmixed advantage, and for this reason: I find such schools too often attended by boys whose abilities are not such as to enable them to rise above their lowly station in life, and who would otherwise have gone to national schools with far more benefit to themselves. Now, I think the wishes of the founders of our Grammar Schools and the interests of the community would be best answered by enforcing competitive examinations before boys are admitted into high class schools, where they will be taught for nothing. I may imagine the case of this school, Mr. Blakiston.

GIGGLESWICK ROYAL FREE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

HEAD MASTER CHARGED WITH FLOGGING A BOY.

On Tuesday last, the Rev. J. H. Blakiston, M.A., head master of the above school, was charged before the Settle Bench of magistrates, with assaulting Master J. E. Wright, son of E. W. Wright Esq., of Bacup, and a scholar at Giggleswick School. The magistrates on the Bench, were George Stansfeld (chairman), William Robinson, John Birkbeck and Walter Morrison, Esqrs. The hearing of the case occupied about three hours, and the court was crowded during the whole time.

The complainant, James Edward Wright, who appeared intelligent, rather small for his years, and was of slight make. He said: I was thirteen years of age last April. Came to Giggleswick School last midsummer. I live at Mr Wood's house. Mr Blakiston whipped me on the 13th May. He flogged me a week before that. I was looking in a Greek Delectus for a sentence. We were being examined. I looked in the end of my book. I had a book there with the sentences written down as we have them for Mr Wood. I had done the Greek sentences with Mr Wood on the Wednesday before. Mr Blakiston said it was a nasty trick and he would not have my nasty tricks there, and said, "Go for the cane." I fetched it; he said "stand out," and then caned me very hard. I had marks on my back and legs; I had one on the arm, and one across the shoulder. The one on the elbow was the worst; it made my arm without feeling. I went to my seat. I was lame from the effects of the beating.

in the correspondence pages of newspapers for two years and only appeared to stop when Mr Wood married **Sarah Mary Birkbeck** and left to become the curate at Settle church. Contributors to this correspondence included staff, governors, ex-pupils and local surgeon **John Holme Burrow** who wrote a poem *'as a token of sympathy with him in his controversy with the governors'*. One asked *'why the school has fallen from such a height to such a depth'* [4].

What happened to poor James Edward Wright? He followed in his father's footsteps to become a solicitor. He didn't marry and died, aged 40, in 1888.

In 1864 John Richard was targeted by burglars *'who were evidently well acquainted with the premises'*. They entered the school through the tower *'and secured as a prize a black cloth college cap, a black staff gown and two canes, the property of the Rev J R Blakiston, the headmaster of the school. They then escaped through the window in the French master's room'*[5]. Surely this was a student prank!

BURGLARY AT GIGGLESWICK FREE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.—A singular burglary was committed at King Edward the Sixth's Free Grammar School, Giggleswick, near Settle, on the night of Sunday last, by some person or persons who have as yet escaped. The burglar or burglars, who were evidently well acquainted with the premises, effected an entrance into the school through the tower, and secured as a prize a black cloth college cap, a black stuff gown, and two canes, the property of the Rev. J. R. Blakiston, the head master of the school. They then escaped through the window in the French master's room. The governors of the school have offered a reward of £5.

Detectives came from Leeds but the culprits were never found. The brutality at Giggleswick school was known to decrease although, even in living memory, headboys, known as 'praeposters' relating to the first statutes of 1592, were given a choice of canes to use when disciplining younger lads. Thank goodness we live in the 21st century with a thriving, safe school in Giggleswick.

The incident didn't do much harm to Rev Blakiston's long-term career and the history books glossed over it, giving it only the slightest mention. As the governors were still unwilling to delegate authority to the Headmaster, John Richard left Giggleswick in 1866 with his wife and the first five of his children to become a school inspector for Leicestershire. **Mr Bramley** and **Arthur Brewin** became the acting leadership team at Giggleswick School. Interestingly, a year later Mr Henry Robinson, who had defended James Edward Wright, gave a vote of thanks to the acting leadership team during which he remarked that *'since Mr Blakiston had left, the number of scholars had increased from 33 to 60'*[6]. After John Richard's departure and a change of some governors, procedures began to change so that the school could once again thrive.

Mr. H. Robinson moved a vote of thanks to the Rev. Mr. Bramley, who has lately acted as the Head Master, and to the Under Master, Mr. Brewin, for the very efficient manner in which they had conducted the school since the retirement of the late Head Master, Mr. Blakiston. We may here mention that in the earlier part of the evening it was remarked by the speaker that since Mr. Blakiston had left (last year) the number of scholars had increased from 33 to 60. This resolution was duly seconded and carried.

John Richard did well in Leicestershire and was rewarded with a promotion to senior inspector of the north-eastern division of England in 1883, there was a presentation and address by his colleagues. *'By the great body of teachers he was truly respected and beloved. He won their respect by ever striving to do justice and their great regard by his geniality and consideration.'* Mr Blakiston replied that he was moved by the comments and was afraid that he didn't deserve them. *'Strive as he might to do right, he was not infallible but, as a teacher himself formerly, he knew something of the difficulties of the teacher and was aware that the study of child nature was almost inexhaustible'* [7]. Indeed.

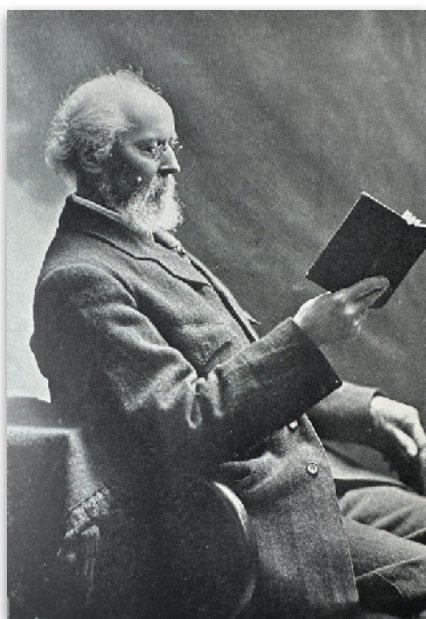
arrangements of the Department. He was afraid that he did not deserve all that had been said of him, for strive as he might to do right he was not infallible, but as a teacher himself formerly he knew something of the difficulties of the teacher, and was aware that the study of child nature was almost inexhaustible.

In 1893 John Richard was promoted from senior inspector to Chief Inspector of Schools for North Eastern England *'including counties of York, Durham and Northumberland with a population of 4.2*

million, served by 46 inspectors' [8]. His headquarters were in Sheffield and he worked closely with the Liberal MP for Sheffield, **Anthony John Mundella**. It may or may not be related to his relationship with Mr Mundella but, soon after his appointment, John Richard was *'paid the high compliment of being invited to take part in the Congress of Education, which is set to be one of the features of the World's Fair at Chicago.'* The invitation from the Bureau of Education at Washington was *'in consideration of your distinguished services in the field of education'*. He was also requested to accept a place in the list of honorary vice-presidents' [9]. Wow!

MR. J. R. BLAKISTON.—Mr. Blakiston, her Majesty's Inspector of schools, has been paid the high compliment of being invited to take part in the Congress of Education, which is to be one of the features of the World's Fair at Chicago. The invitation, which comes from the Bureau of Education at Washington, is "in consideration of your distinguished services in the field of education to attend the Congress of Education at the World's Fair, Chicago, during the week beginning 25th July, and to take part in its deliberations." Mr. Blakiston has also been requested to "accept a place in the list of honorary vice-presidents."

John Richard made considerable efforts to bring about consistency in standards across the regions, particularly with regard to attendance and the education of *'half-timers'* who worked from an early age, and was not afraid to call out bad practice. He petitioned for *'architects to consult with teachers before planning magnificent educational structures'*. Soon after his appointment a report demonstrated surprisingly progressive educational thinking. *'Common sense is beginning to take the place of routine work and the children are being taught to think. But there is still much to be done, for Mr Blakiston tells us that teachers still seem to think too much about getting children to pass a certain standard and too little about the character of the work done'* [10]. One has to wonder what he would feel about education methods today? As Chief Inspector some of his reports were issued as Parliamentary papers, although it's hard to find any evidence of action taken to address the issues raised.



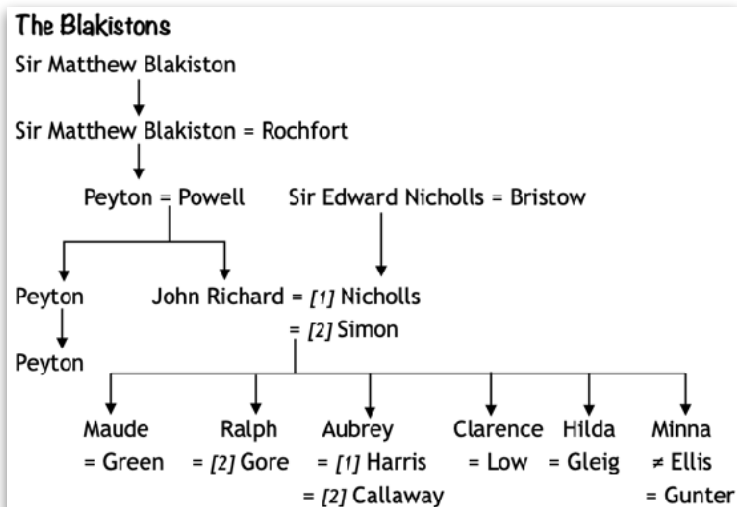
John Richard retired to Torquay just a year later and was applauded by Sheffield School Board for the *'great service to education which he has rendered and of the beneficial influence exercised by him across the region.'* Later John Richard and second wife Marie moved to Brighton which is where she died in 1908, aged 76. A year later John Richard had his photo taken, looking pensive, when he was 79 [ph10]. John Richard moved to Ripon to live with his daughter Maude and family and died in 1917 in Portmadoc, aged 87. Perhaps he had gone there for health reasons? His obituaries [11] described that he wrote several books on education, including *'The Teacher'* and *'Glimpses of the Globe'* which considered the cultural basis of civilisation. *'He was well-known as a great reformer in educational matters'*, promoting education in Latin amongst other things. His daughter presented a portrait in oils to

Giggleswick School as a *'memento of this distinguished headmaster'* [ph11]. They had obviously forgotten his indiscretions of earlier years and the drastic fall in pupils attending.

A portrait in oils has been presented to the School by his daughter. We are grateful to her for this memento of a distinguished Headmaster.

So, what happened to all of John Richard and Marie Jeanne's children? Most had suitably respectable careers and lives. Eldest **Maude Blakiston** married **George Richard Green**, a medical practitioner and they had three children, living in Ripon. John Richard and Marie Jeanne's eldest

son, **Ralph Blakiston**, was a mechanical engineer and managed works in Liverpool. He had three children with his first wife and married his second wife, **Ellen Rosemary Gore**, 25 years his junior, in Bombay, India.



John Richard and Marie Jeanne's second son, **Aubrey Blakiston** [ph12], became a medical practitioner and successful businessman. Inspired by the two model cars sent to Britain by Henry Ford in 1894, Aubrey set up the UK's first Ford dealership in London, initially selling 12 black Model A Fords. Aubrey bred horses and loved horse racing, fox hunting and point to point competitions [ph13]. Aubrey married **Lelia Emily Harris** when he was just 18 and still at school. Lelia was 20. Lelia was working as a lawyer when she married Aubrey — most progressive. They had four daughters while Aubrey was still training but, after they were born, she left him and they lived separate lives. As a Catholic Lelia refused to divorce. Within a month of Lelia dying in France in June 1915, aged 55 Aubrey married again to **Mabel Freda Callaway**, from the Isle of Wight, 30 years his junior.

The children were upholding the family status, so far . . .

The youngest three children, **Clarence**, **Minna** and **Hilda Marie Blakiston** had other ideas which may have caused much consternation in the ranks. In 1880, 16 year old **Clarence Blakiston** joined the Merchant Navy as an apprentice and in 1884 he was awarded a Certificate of Competency to serve as Second Mate. In 1888 he married Glasgow-born **Clementina Lindsay Low** and they had a daughter, **Marie Blakiston**, who sadly died aged just one. They didn't have any other children. This may have prompted Clarence to decide on a change of career — on the stage. This was almost unheard of, and even scandalous, in aristocratic families. He acted on stage and in film, sang and was even a stand-up comedian. His career spanned five decades and included performances world-wide. He was probably best remembered for his title role in the Sherlock Holmes



SHEERLUCK INJECTS COCAINE
Mr. Pickford as Dr. Rotson and Mr. Blakiston as Sheerluck



The Prince Baidar Sahasibhai
MR. CLARENCE BLAKISTON.

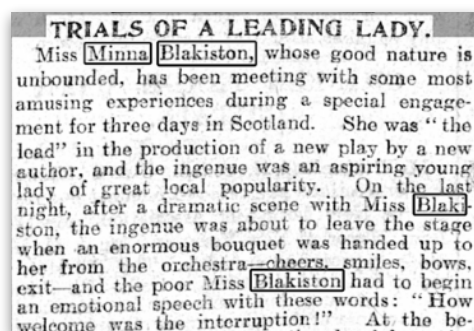
parody *'Sheerluck Jones, or Why D'Gillette Him Off'* which ran for 138 performances in 1901/2 [12]. He also appeared in the original production of *'The Admirable Crichton'* at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1902. He starred as *Prince Badahur* in *The Blue Moon* in 1905 [ph14]. Clarence's last role appeared to be as The Duke of Sussex in the 1937 film *Victoria the Great*, when he was 73!

After Clarence's wife, Clementina, died in 1936, he lived with Ellen Rosemary (Gore) Blakiston, widow of his brother Ralph who had also passed away in 1936. She made a living importing watches. When he died in 1943, aged 78, Clarence left his modest estate to Ellen Rosemary.

John and Marie Jeanne's youngest daughter, **Hilda Marie Blakiston**, perhaps inspired by Clarence, also had aspirations for a life on stage and appeared in at least one production alongside her brother Clarence. In 1895, when she was 25 Hilda married actor and stage and screen-writer **Percy North Gleig**. His stage name was **Philip Egerton-Hubbard**. Sadly, Hilda died in 1900, aged 30 of enteric and typhoid fever. In 1903, Philip married **Gwendoline Logan** (under the name Philip Egerton Hubbard) and it was then that Philip's career really took off as she was also a writer. He was best known for the play *East is East*, 'a new comedy in three acts' and *'A Romance of Cockney Life'* which they co-wrote. They had several children and emigrated to America [13].



Meanwhile, rather than sit around waiting for a suitable husband to come along, John Richard and Marie Jeanne's remaining daughter, **Minnie**, known as **Minna Blakiston** also decided to take the stage as a profession during the early 1890s, just after she turned 21. She spent some time learning the trade, informally, at London's Opera House [14] and then had her first formal appointment with *'Miss Sarah Thorne's Touring Company'* based in Margate. **Sarah Wendy Thorne** ran an acting school in Margate which is widely regarded as Britain's first formal drama school. Incredibly, as revealed in a recent episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Sarah was the 3xgreat grandmother of actor **Toby Jones**. Minna performed for several years, often in comedies, despite a two year break due to *'seriously ill health'*, after which she set up her own Theatrical Company. She was a well known face in London's West End, often taking lead roles. In October 1900 she played the title role in the nationwide tour of *'The Adventures of Lady Ursula'*, which was at the Colchester Theatre Royal on 29 October. In 1902, *'Miss Minna Blakiston, whose good nature is unbounded'* suffered the *'Trials of a Leading Lady'* when she was handed a bouquet of flowers unexpectedly on the last night of the show [15]. It transpires that, although it kept out of the papers for obvious reasons, her two years' *'seriously ill health'* was to give birth to a son, **Adam Gibb Blakiston Ellis**, fathered by **Robert Ellis**, a civil engineer from Edinburgh who appeared to be married and 25 years her senior. Such scandal in high society circles! One has to wonder if Minna's parents or siblings knew about this? Young Adam had a successful military career. In 1902,



Settle Graveyard Project

when Minna was 34, she married **Richard Francis Gunter** from Surrey, a major in the army and that was the end of her career on stage. They lived in Devon with their servants.

Well, well, well!! How the other half live!



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.

A detailed account of Blakiston's work at Giggleswick School is provided by Project Gutenberg on <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30168/old/30168-h/30168-h.htm>

[A] A History of Giggleswick School, by Edward Alan Bell (1912)

Newspaper cuttings with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archives: 1,3,4 – Lancaster Guardian, 2 – Leeds Intelligencer, 5 – Manchester Courier, 6 – Lancaster Gazette, 7,8 – Leicester Chronicle, 9 – Sheffield Independent, 10 – Manchester Evening News, 11 – Evening Mail, 12 – Tatler, 13 – Faversham News, 14 – Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, photograph by Ellis and Walery, 15 – Dundee Evening Telegraph

ph1 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username rachelmark5, ph2 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username Stefan Blakiston Moore, ph3 – credited to findagrave.com, submitted by will ellis, ph4 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username Stefan Blakiston Moore, taken from bbc.co.uk/arts, painted by artist Douglas Yeoman Blakiston, his brother, ph5 – news report via Ancestry.co.uk, username mykmorris98, ph6 – credited to findagrave.com, submitted by Chris Nelson, ph7,8 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username Moss_Nigel, ph9 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, Lynn_Couch, ph10 – credited to the book A History of Giggleswick School, by EA Bell, ph11 – Giggleswick Chronicle via worldwar1schoolarchives.org, ph12 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username RS Mark, ph13 – credited to family descendants via Ancestry.co.uk, username Sally Sroufe Stout, ph14 – credited to Wikipedia, originally from [stage beauty.net](http://stagebeauty.net)