

Three Questions about the Kildwick “Organ Grave”

There are a number of interesting graves in the graveyard of St. Andrew’s Church but perhaps the most impressive, although by no means the largest, is the so-called “Organ Grave”.

Situated close to the road, on the edge of the car park, the grave is a family plot for members of the Laycock family.

The headstone itself is fairly unremarkable, recording the names and dates of the family members buried there: from Ann in 1863 to John in 1889. What makes this grave so special is the model of a church organ, carved in stone, positioned in the centre of the plot.



Figure 1: The Kildwick “organ grave”

In this article we provide answers to three questions about this grave:

- Why does the grave have an organ on it ?
- Who carved it ?
- Does the organ still exist and, if so, where is it ?

Why does the grave have an organ on it ?

The final burial in the Laycock family plot was that of John Laycock, who died in 1889.

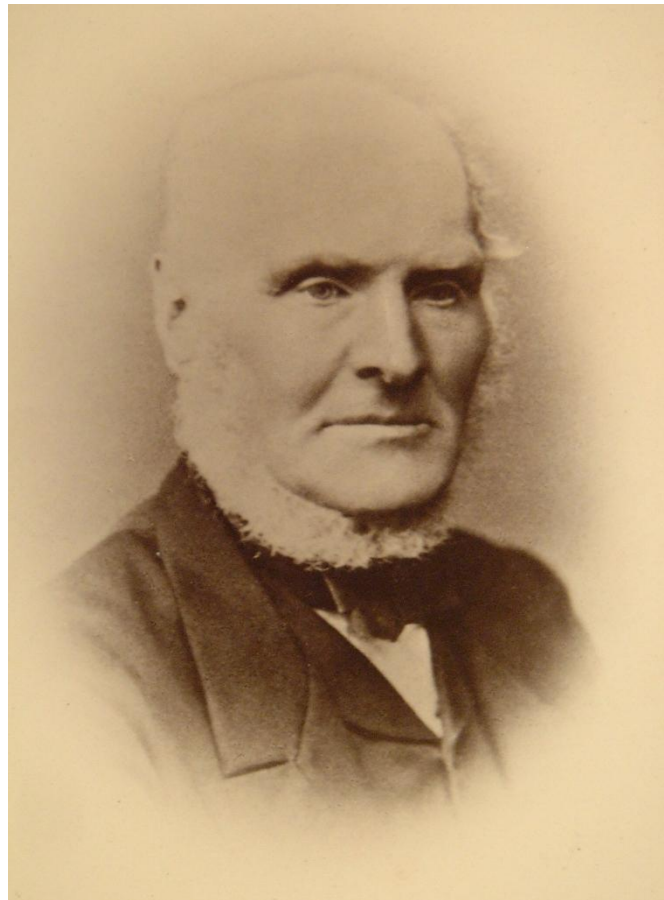


Figure 2: John Laycock, the organ-builder

John Laycock was the founder and owner of an organ building company. Originally based in Glusburn, the company later moved to Crosshills; where, as "Laycock and Bannister", it continued in business up until the 1970s.^{1,2}

The pedestal of the organ carving describes how:

"The above is from the design of the first organ built by the said John Laycock"

Who carved the organ ?

The exceptionally well carved organ, although now sadly, slowly decaying, is clearly the work of a master craftsman.

At the time that John Laycock died, the Kildwick stonemason was John Barritt. His wife was Margaret Ann, the daughter of John Laycock. Could it be that the organ was carved by John Barritt ? In fact, the answer to this is an emphatic “No”.

The organ was actually carved by Joseph Heaton, a stonemason from Haworth. Heaton was also responsible for the well-known “sleeping child” grave in Haworth churchyard.



Figure 3: The Haworth “sleeping child” grave, carved by Joseph Heaton

This beautifully carved grave, the Heaton family plot, contains no fewer than six infant children. The child shown is said to bear a fine resemblance to Joseph Heaton’s son, James Whitham Heaton, who died aged just two.³

An aside: The Barritt family lost three of their children in the Kildwick typhoid epidemic of 1899. This loss is commemorated in a magnificent piece of grave-carving at the back of St. Andrew’s church. But who carved the Barritt memorial ? Was it John Barritt himself or, just perhaps, he called on Joseph Heaton again ? (If you can provide further information about this, please email history@farnhill.co.uk)

Does the organ still exist / where is it ?

Most of the Laycock and Bannister organs were built for local churches; there's one in Farnhill Methodist Church and another in Bolton Abbey church, for example. However, some were built for more remote places and others have since been moved from their original locations; one now resides in Wick, in the very north of Scotland and another was moved, about 10 years ago, from a chapel in Carleton to a school in Appeldorn, Holland.⁴

The memoir-obituary of John Laycock², written in 1903, is clear that:

His first large organ was placed in the Wesleyan Chapel, Crosshills, and afterwards removed to the meeting-house of another denomination in Bingley ...

It appears that this was the "Ebenezer Brethren" building, built in 1868, and now the home of the Bingley Independent Methodist Church.



Figure 4: Bingley Independent Methodist Church, built in 1868

A recent visit made to the church found the Laycock organ still in place: although rarely used and in need of some repair.



Figure 5: Laycock's first major organ in the gallery of Bingley Independent Methodist Church



Figure 6: Casing detail

The design of the casing and the arrangement of the pipes provide for no doubt that this is the organ represented on the Kildwick "Organ Grave" (see Figure 1). Both are a tribute to John Laycock, organ builder.

Obituary – Craven Herald, 21/9/1889

In its issue of September 21st 1889, the Craven Herald made tribute to the recently deceased John Laycock.

Death of Mr. John Laycock – *On Tuesday afternoon were laid to rest in Kildwick Churchyard, where already repose many of his ancestors, the remains of John Laycock, of West Closes, Glusburn, in the parish of Kildwick. The family of Laycock is perhaps the oldest residential family in this parish, the name occurring frequently as “Laicocke” in the early registers of Kildwick Church, and the ancestors of the subject of this sketch have lived at West Closes for many generations.*

It is but seldom that the opportunity to chronicle the details of a life so full of interest and example, presents itself; and we make no excuse for presenting our readers with the following brief memoir of one of the most remarkable men that this shire has given birth to. As an instance of the cultivation of great natural powers by assiduous study and indomitable perseverance amid adverse surroundings, it is almost unique, and well deserves a place among the catalogue of those worthies whose memory future generations will delight to honour.

Born on November 24th, 1809, at Cook House, Glusburn, John Laycock had passed the allotted span, and now full of years and honour, with “eye undimmed” and natural force almost unabated, preserving his faculties to the last, he has passed away.

His period of school life was brief. A few short years under the tuition of the late Mr. Wilcock, of Crosshills, where he learned the rudiments of the three R’s as they are now called, and then he commenced life’s work as a handloom weaver. Whether he ever attained to excellence in this calling is doubtful. Certainly the bent of his genius was otherwise, as most of his play hours and a great portion of what ought to have been his work hours were employed in making water wheels and other mechanical contrivances.

He was soon after this apprenticed to his uncle, a cartwright; but his early training at the loom was not entirely fruitless, for in after years, when his powers were more developed, he supplied the looms throughout the district with “dobbies” – contrivances used in pattern weaving. As a cartwright he continued to work until his thirtieth year, devoting his hours of recreation to the study of mechanics and physics. Then came the turning point of his life. An old organ used in Icornshaw Wesleyan Chapel came into his possession, and after a minute examination of its mechanism he determined to construct one similar. He succeeded, and this his first essay at organ building was purchased by Mr. James Hartley, of Glusburn, now of Ilkley.

Finally, in 1840, he discontinued the business of cartwright, and devoted himself to that of organ builder, with which his name is now so closely connected. Though he never received an hour’s training in the workshop of a professional organ builder, yet he was able to successfully compete with the best builders of the north of England. In the parish churches of Dukinfield, Colne, Altham, Langho, Addingham, Cullingworth, Eccleshill, Silsden, Sutton, Cowling and Sabden specimens of his work still lead the devotions of the congregations. He has also built organs for the Congregational Chapels of Satley-road, Birmingham, and Park-road, Blackburn; for the Wesleyan Chapels of Oswaldwistle, Oakworth, Wilsden, Laycock, Nelson, and Crosshills; for the Baptist Chapels in Burnley, Skipton, and Sutton; for the religious bodies of Liverpool, Denton and many other places.

His first large organ was placed in the Wesleyan Chapel, Crosshills, and afterwards removed to a meeting house of another denomination in Bingley, where, after thirty years' service, it is still in use. But the great wish of his life was that he might have the opportunity of placing in the Parish Church of Kildwick (the Lang Kirk) and in the more famous sanctuary of Bolton Abbey, organs not only creditable to his musical skill, but worthy of their sacred and historic surroundings. The latter was granted, but the first portion of his wish was denied him, much to his disappointment. The organ in Bolton Priory Church has been much admired by all who have heard its tones, the members of the Cavendish family, who were the chief contributors, especially being loud in their admiration of its qualities.

In the construction of his organs he never sacrificed purity of tone and sweetness to loudness, while his keen sense of the artistic was a guarantee that the external appearance was in harmony with the architectural surroundings. He has received numerous unsolicited testimonials from, Dr. Spark, of Leeds, and other well-known musicians; the first mentioned of whom states that a more conscientious builder he has never met with.

It is a question whether his musical or mechanical powers were the more powerfully developed. Almost all inventors have at some portion of their lives devoted some time to clock-making. In the workshop at West Closes, an old clock hangs, which for 30 years has told the hours. It contains three wheels, only two having the power of motion. He constructed another clock which was made entirely of wood, and indicating not only the time of the day, but also the days of the month. Fifteen years ago, in order to get additional power for his machinery he erected a set of windsails with moveable shutters, which by a simple movement of levers can be opened or shut, and the whole thrown into action instantaneously. His greatest delight, however, was a turning lathe provided with an eccentric check, entirely of his own invention, by means of which he could turn out geometrical carvings of the most beautiful and delicate workmanship. Specimens of his turned work in the form of snuff and tobacco boxes, egg cups, etc., were frequent gifts to friends, to bazaars, and in fact for the benefit of any deserving object. He never cared to make a monetary profit by his lathe work. It is needless to mention that he was a lover of art, and he was possessed of no little skill in the use of the brush, though he would never allow that his work in this direction possessed any artistic merit.

In face and figure he was a typical Northman; his character equally sturdy and honest. His one object was to do good work – not to amass a fortune, and “whatsoever his hand found to do he did with all his might”. The possessor of a splendid physique, he used to think lightly in his younger days of walking thirty miles and upwards, and he has, prior to the construction of the railway, frequently walked to Leeds to attend morning service at the Parish Church in the days when Dr. Wesley was the organist.

He played a flute in Kildwick church in his early days, and was wont to say that it was the only place in which it could be heard to advantage. Until an accident in his workshop deprived him of the use of the fingers of his left hand he was the principal piano tuner in the district. He was also unfortunate in having his leg broken on two different occasions, but he nevertheless enjoyed good health until recently, when he nominally retired from the business which he had founded, and which is now carried on by his son and late foreman under the name of Laycock and Bannister. The last occasion he was present at an organ opening was at Clitheroe and the last organ in the construction of which he took an active part was built for Foulridge.

The end was hastened by a slight paralytic stroke, and on Friday, the 13th inst., he passed away, leaving to his family the inheritance of an untarnished name, and to the youth of the parish an example of difficulties overcome and ends achieved by untiring study and perseverance.

The Rev. A.D.C. Thompson, vicar of Kildwick, as a mark of respect, arranged that his choristers should attend the funeral, and the service was accordingly musically rendered. As the coffin was borne into the church, Mr. C. Green, organist of Sutton, played the "Dead March" in Saul, and as the funeral procession slowly followed the vicar and choir to the grave the organ gave forth the strains of "O rest in the Lord" from Elijah. Amongst those present as mourners were the following musicians: Messrs R. Watson, Holy Trinity Church, Burnley; J. Turner Smith, Skipton Parish Church; J. Horsfield, Colne Parish Church; and R.J. Hurtley, Burnley. Others present were Dr. Empey; Messrs T. Watson (Cowling), W.C. Laycock, — Harrison (Skipton), C. Petty, T. Booth (Howden), S. Berry (Silsden), H. Jackson (Burnley), T. Green (Sutton), H. Spencer, — Eastwood. The vicar of Sutton was unavoidably prevented from being present. The bearers were Messrs C. Bannister, R. Thompson, W. Whitaker, S. Stow, W. Dawson, and T. Bottomley. The coffin was of polished oak with brass mountings.

We append a monograph by an old friend, perhaps the oldest living friend of the late Mr. Laycock —

I have enjoyed an unbroken and intimate friendship with Mr. Laycock for more than fifty-two years, perhaps the oldest living friend, and like many others have derived more benefit therefrom than we may have fully realised. The fine enthusiasm, the unbounded search for knowledge, even to the end of his days, the marvellous memory, and the happy style of imparting knowledge was unique and made him equally welcome among young and old. Mr. Laycock's influence and his keen studies among most of the physical sciences, his extraordinary musical gifts, and his insight and fine tastes in the fine arts were surprising, and had a stimulating influence among his youthful friends which produced many and various effects. The late Mr. T.O. Dixon, of Steeton, formerly of Glusburn, had his fine inventive genius impelled and cultured by our old friend in that profound and solid way that has produced such wonderful results at Steeton.

Mr. Laycock's welcome appreciation of the fine arts and his intuitive taste gave him a free range among all the best artists round about. Richard Waller, of Skipton; John Bradley, his son Alan, Thos. Plummer, of Keighley; — Rhodes, of Leeds, and many others too numerous to call up just now, were pleased to give him the free range of their studios. All the artistic notables of the district were his friends and admirers and could meet him without a tinge of jealousy.

Fifty years ago or more Mr. Laycock was one of a band of eager and profound students in the sciences, among whom may be reckoned Richard Petty, Thos Hopkinson, Jno. Turner, Samuel Bottomley, Mr. Shuttleworth, the Rev. Mr. Marsh. Among the associates and helpers in the work also were Mr. Brigg and William Brigg, Mr. John Wilson, and Mr. James Wilson, sen. Around this company gathered a strong body of youngsters, whose powers received a stimulus which still remains with the few who are left. This party founded a mechanics' institution, which worked well, but ultimately collapsed as old members fell off. The institute was reorganised after a time; this also fell off. Where are the eager students and workers and the educated youths now ?

John Laycock was the head of an old Cowling family, two heiresses of which were married to the Wainman's, of Carhead, thereby helping to found that fine estate. The late W.B. Wainman always retained a great personal friendship for John Laycock, and held him as head of that family, which has now ramified in various directions. "Old John's" tall dignified figure, and his noble cheerful countenance was as common as the daylight, and will be missed sorely. The influences of such men are in the future as well as for the present.

In 1903 the text of this article was reworked into a booklet, [available here](#).

Appendix

Recently Dr John Laycock, the great, great grandson of John Laycock the organ builder, visited the grave in Kildwick churchyard.



Figure 7: Dr. John Laycock by his great, great grandfather's grave in Kildwick churchyard

Dr John's father, Cedric, was the last of the Laycock family line to work in the organ building business, which by then had become Laycock and Bannister. Cedric and his wife Dorothy were well known in the area having spent all their married life in Cross Hills where they were involved with the Methodist chapels as senior steward and organist, respectively.

Dr John left the area in 1967, but makes regular return visits.

After researching the history of the Laycock family over many generations, he expanded his interests to encompass the history of the local villages and related farms where the family have resided. With the help of many local enthusiasts, including the Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group, he has created a digital archive of over a million images of old photographs, maps, documents etc. covering Keighley and surrounding villages.

Miscellany

You can see the hand-blown 1851 Laycock organ in Cowling Baptist church being played on this [video](#). Played by Rev. Tony Newnham; with pumping by Margaret Binns.

References

- 1 John Laycock: Weaver and Organ Builder, by Bryan Hughes; publ. Musical Opinion Ltd., 2002
- 2 A Short Memoir Of The Late Mr John Laycock Organ Builder, by T. H. Haswell, based on the Craven Herald obituary, September 21st 1889. [Available here](#).
- 3 The Brontes at Haworth, by Ann Dinsdale; publ. Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2006
- 4 Keighley News, May 2nd 2003.

Acknowledgements

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We were alerted to the video of the Cowling organ by Rolf-Ingo Behnke. His blogpost describes a wealth of [English Curisosities](#).