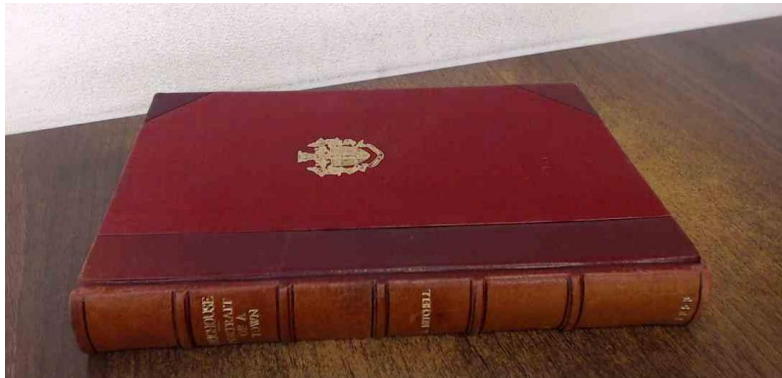


## Some Lightcliffe suicide cases

The extract below comes from page 70 of the book *Brighouse: Portrait of a Town* Hardcover – 1 Jan. 1953 by R. Mitchell (Author), Albert T. Pile (Illustrator).



for the parliamentary franchise movement, began under the impulse of the 1832 Reform Act. Poverty and low wages still continued. In 1833 George Goldthorpe and Thomas Hanson, overseers of the poor in Hipperholme-cum-Brighouse, and Jonathan Schofield and Paul Rushforth, overseers in Rastrick, had many hard cases to deal with, and inadequate resources at their disposal. It was perhaps symptomatic of the times that in March 1833 John Hutchinson of Lightcliffe hanged himself with a handkerchief at the Wellington Inn, Brighouse, and that Joseph Aspinall of Hipperholme hanged himself in February in a fit of insanity. In March

Amongst other things it records the suicide of two local men, who hung themselves. Both were buried in St. Matthew's churchyard.

The back story of one of them, **John Hutchinson ( 1784 - 1833)** is told separately in

### **The Hutchinson family**

Although it is known that John Hutchinson was buried at St. Matthew's, what is not known is whether he was buried in the family plot with his sisters, next to his parents' plot. His name does appear on the long memorial inscription on the plot now given the code N\*15. But were four adults really buried in this plot?

John Hutchinson hung himself on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1833 as recorded in newspaper reports and Anne Lister's helpful diary entry for that day. This was after 1823 when burials of suicide victims were permitted in churchyards under certain conditions. Previously suicide cases were traditionally buried at crossroads, sometimes with a stake through the victim's heart as a deterrent for 'felo de se', a crime against oneself. But the 1822 suicide of foreign secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, who was then buried in Westminster Abbey, led to an 1823 Act of Parliament. This allowed the burial of suicide victims in consecrated ground i.e. churchyards but only at night between the hours of 9 pm and midnight. And quite often the suicide victim was buried in a plot north of the church and not with other family members. Is this what happened to John Hutchinson? Who knows!

**Joseph Aspinall (c1776 – 1833)**

Joseph Aspinall died on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1833, according to the memorial inscription on his ledger stone. He had hung himself. His ledger stone is above the Lightcliffe plot now given the code W\*8. As for John Hutchinson's suicide, just a couple of months later, the 1822 Act of Parliament meant that he could be buried in Lightcliffe churchyard. And this is what happened on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1833 as the parish burial record confirms.

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
Joseph Aspinall No. 1081.	Hough Edge	1833 Feb 1 <sup>st</sup>	56 Year	George Fenton

[Notice who was the officiating officer. Rev. George Fenton, vicar of Royston, was the son in law of the Lightcliffe vicar Rev. Robert Wilkinson. He married the Wilkinsons' youngest daughter Lydia who was a close friend of Ann Walker. In 1851 the widow Lydia Fenton was Ann Walker's housekeeper at Cliffe Hill.]

The *Halifax Express* for 9<sup>th</sup> February 1833 explained what had happened.

INQUESTS BEFORE MR STOCKS

Yesterday week, at the Pond Inn, in the township of Hipperholme-cum-Brighouse, on view of the body of Joseph Aspinall, a stonedelver, who hung himself in his dwelling house, on the Tuesday preceding. Verdict – that the deceased “hung himself whilst labouring under temporary aberration of mind.”

From his death age Joseph Aspinall was born about 1776. He married Hannah Clayton on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1814, when he was described as a ‘Delver’.

Joseph Aspinall of Hipperholme of this Parish  
 and Hannah Clayton of Hipperholme of this Parish  
 were married in this Church by Banns with Consent of  
 this seventh Day of  
 August in the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and fourteen  
 By me Will Wilmott Curate.  
 This Marriage was solemnized between us } Joseph Aspinall  
 } Hannah Clayton's next of kin  
 In the Presence of } George Hley  
 } Wm. Ricabworth  
 No. 755.

The widow Hannah Aspinall née Clayton resided in Brighouse on the next two censuses.

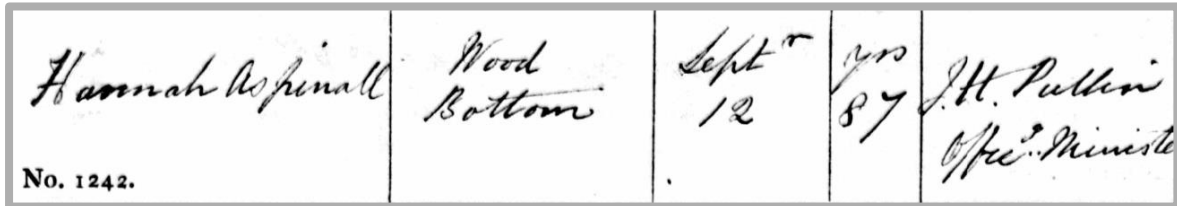
1841 census

Mary Collins 50  
 Hannah Aspinall 60  
 Address Schorah Row, Brighouse

1851 census

Hannah Aspinall Head 77 Widow  
 Annuitant  
 Address Schorah's Row, Hipperholme cum  
 Brighouse

Eighty-seven-year-old widow Hannah Aspinall, a widow for over twenty years, died on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1860. She was buried in plot W\*3 on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1860. There is a probate record for her.



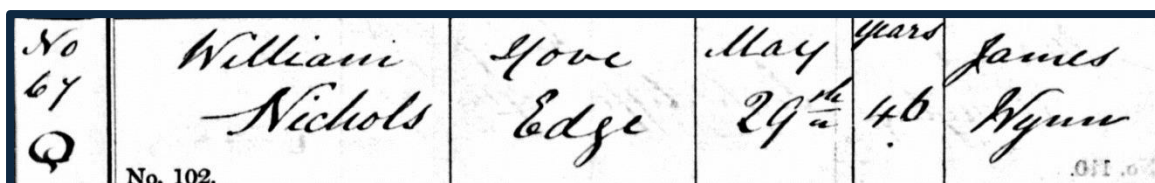
The Will of Hannah Aspinall formerly of Schorah-row in Brighouse but late of Woodbottom in the Township of Hipperholme-cum-Brighouse in the Parish of Halifax in the County of York Widow deceased who died 8 September 1860 at Woodbottom aforesaid was proved at Wakefield by the oath of Kaye Aspinall of the Manor House in Brighouse aforesaid Stone Merchant the surviving Executor. Effects under £200

This may be a clue as to Joseph Aspinall's ancestry, but further research will be needed. Luke Aspinall was for a time chairman of the Brighouse Local Board.



## William Nichols (c1823 – 1869)

William Nichols was buried in a known plot, Q67, in Lightcliffe churchyard as the burial record below confirms on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1869.



On the same day a report in the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* explained what had happened to him.

### HALIFAX – SUSPECTED SUICIDE BY DROWNING

Yesterday morning, at a quarter past seven, a man named William Nicholl [sic], aged 46, employed on the grounds of Mr. Titus Salt, Crow Nest, near Halifax, was found drowned under the following circumstances:-- He had been employed as foreman in the construction of the artificial lake in the park, under Mr Ponsonby, the contractor, of Sheffield. He lodged at the Prince Albert beerhouse, Brighouse, which he left at four that morning,

on his way to Crow Nest Park, and about seven o'clock his cap was seen floating on the lake by a fellow workman named George Hunt, when a search was made for him, and in a quarter of an hour his lifeless body was found with his hands tied together with his own handkerchief, but in such a manner that he might easily have extricated himself had he been so disposed. His watch had stopped at 4.35 a.m. He had been at Halifax on the previous day to pay for some pot pipes. The lake in which he was found is three feet six inches deep in every part, and it was full. His wife and family reside at Warwick.

By 1869 Titus Salt had purchased Crow Nest mansion from Evan Charles Sutherland Walker, Ann Walker's nephew and heir. Later that year in October 1869 he was made a baronet, Sir Titus Salt. But before then he had set about enlarging an existing ornamental pond or ponds into an artificial lake in the grounds of the Crow Nest mansion. For reasons that might be clearer after reading the report on the inquest the construction's foreman, William Nichols, took his own life on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1869.

William Nichols appears to have been a married man from Warwick, possibly born near Tewksbury in Gloucestershire. But nothing more about him or his family has been discovered.

But despite being a suicide victim William Nicholl was buried the next day in a known Lightcliffe plot. Very understandably there is no headstone to this plot, but we do know where it is in the middle section of the churchyard. Nearly twenty years later in 1887 the same plot, Q67, was recorded as the burial place of 43-year-old Annie Cawthra on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1887 and the apparently unrelated 38-year-old James Whittane on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1887.

## LIGHTCLIFFE

### SUICIDE by DROWNING

An inquest was held by Mr. Barstow, deputy coroner, on Saturday last, at the Old Pond Inn, Hove Edge, on the body of Wm. Nichols, aged 46, whose body was found dead on the previous day in the artificial lake in the grounds of Titus Salt, Esq., Crow Nest. George Hunt was called and stated that he lodged with deceased at George Clark's, Waring Green, his house being at Ashchurch, near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. He was foreman of excavators at the new lake making at Crow Nest, and came last Saturday. He last saw deceased alive in his bedroom at Waring Green on the morning of the previous day, about twenty minutes to four, when he got up, that being an hour before his usual time. Deceased said nothing to him but pulled the window curtain aside. He sat on the bed edge three or four minutes as if studying, then dressed himself and went out. He next saw him in the lake between seven and eight the same morning. They had seen his cap at ten minutes to six floating on the water, on which they searched for him, and found him at the bottom of the lake, about twelve feet from the edge, and about four or five feet from the byewash. It would be about three feet six inches deep where he was found. He was fully dressed, except his cap. They got him out on to the bank. His hands were tied together with the handkerchief now produced. His hands were in front of his body, and so tied that he could have tied them. The handkerchief was his own.

There was no blood about him or the place, or anything to show how he got into the water. The night before he was a little in liquor, and had been so more or less for the previous eight or nine days. He had been to Halifax the previous Thursday and was away from his work all day. Witness had known him 20 years, and he had

during all that time drunk heavily at times. He believed deceased had eight or ten sovereigns with him when he went to Halifax on Thursday, belonging to Mr Ponsonby, the contractor. He had no money on him when he was found. Witness did not know that deceased had anything to pay for at Halifax except £2 10s. for some earthen pipes. Mary Ann Clark of Waring Green stated that deceased had lodged with her for about seven weeks. She last saw him alive on the previous Thursday night, when he came home shortly before eleven. He was not quite sober, but could walk straight. He sat and talked about half an hour and pulled his watch out, saying it had gone curiously lately, but he would throw it away tomorrow, and himself and all. He got up to go to bed, and said, "Farewell, missis, you'll never see me no more after to-night." She said, "Oh get off to bed with you – you talk wild." She thought he was joking, because he had said such things before. He generally left in the morning about half past five. The last week he had taken more to drink than usual, and he had told how many glasses of whiskey he had sometimes had. On Wednesday he was singing and was quite cheerful. The handkerchief produced was his. She had no idea why he should do this, except he might have lost some money. On the Sunday previous she believed he had sixteen sovereigns on him, at least he counted them and said so. – Jno Nicol, head gardener at Crown [sic] Nest, said he assisted in searching for the deceased in the new lake. He could easily get to the place where he was found, and it is about six or eight inches deeper than the rest of the lake. He was laid on his face with his hands loosely tied in front. He met deceased on Thursday morning near the lake, and he thought he looked curious, but it might perhaps be from drink. – The jury returned a verdict of "suicide from drowning, whilst of unsound mind"

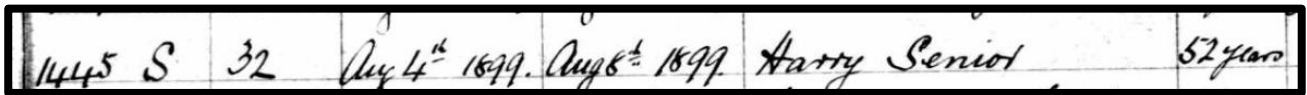
## Henry Senior (1847 – 1899)

Thirty years after William Nichols drowned himself Henry (Harry) Senior was found in a pool of water in the Midgley Quarry, Hipperholme. At the time Henry Senior was the coachman for Joshua Smithson Esq., of Lydgate House, Lightcliffe. This was a position he had probably held for some years. In 1891 the Senior family lived very close to the churchyard in South View, Wakefield Road.

Details of what exactly happened to Harry Senior can be found in the article

### **The Senior family**

He was buried in a known grave plot, S32, in St. Matthew's churchyard as the burial record notes. The plot which was also where his wife was buried a few years later has no headstone. But there is a headstone on another family plot which you can read about in the Senior article.



D.M.Barker

June 2024