

William Bellwood

(1809-1888)

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William Bellwood was born on 2nd December 1809 and baptised in Adel Church on 17th January 1810. His father was shown on the baptism record as James Bilwood (sic) of Alwoodley¹.

Alwoodley is now a relatively prosperous suburb on the northern edge of Leeds. In the early 1800's it was a large rural area with the main income coming from farming and quarrying. Many of today's Alwoodley street names echo the areas of Alwoodley shown on early maps². Those early maps show some of the roads that are still present today, King Lane, Alwoodley Lane, Wigton Lane, Harrogate Road, and Nursery Lane are all examples of this fact. The area was close to two main churches, Adel Church (sometimes shown as Addle Church) at the foot of Stairfoot Lane, and Harewood Church on the Harewood Estate were the churches used by the residents of the area, depending on which was the closest to their homes². It was in this area that William was to spend most of his life as a child and subsequently he worked in the area as a farm labourer

The Genuki website carries these descriptions garnered mainly from gazetteers in the 1820's³:

"The Ancient Parish of Harewood. Harewood, a parish town in the upper-division of Skyrack, 6 miles from Wetherby". The parish includes the following places "Alwoodley, Alwoodley Gates, Black Hill, Brandon, Dunkeswick, East Keswick, Harewood Bridge Inn, Harewood House, Huby, Lofthouse, Newby, Weardley, Weeton, Wescoe Hill, Wigton, Wike."

"The Ancient Parish of Adel. Adel, a parish town, in the upper division of Skyrack; 4 miles from Harewood, 5 from Leeds, 7 from Otley, 24 from York". The parish includes the following places "Arthington, Arthington Nunnery, Cookridge, East Breary, Eccup, Kershall, Kirkskill, Mosely Wood, West Breary"

"Alwoodley, in the parish of Harewood, upper-division of Skyrack; 3 miles from Harewood, 5 miles N. of Leeds, 6 from Otley. Pop. 142"

"Alwoodley Gates, a hamlet in the township of Wigton, and parish of Harewood, 3 miles from Harewood, 5 miles N. of Leeds".

William's father, James Bellwood (1787-1813) married Elizabeth Foster (1788-1861) on 3rd October 1807.⁴ They married in Leeds Parish Church, St Peter's. James must have travelled into Leeds to get married because he was shown as being resident in the Parish of Harewood. Elizabeth was resident in the Parish of Leeds. She was pregnant with their first child at the time of her wedding⁵ and the couple married by licence, not banns. One of the witnesses was Robert Bellwood, no doubt a relative of James. The bride, groom and witness Robert Bellwood signed with their marks so probably could not read or write⁴.

James and Elizabeth's first child, Sarah Bellwood, was baptised at St Michael's Church in Headingley on 20th December 1807⁵. The record does not show James' occupation but shows his residence as Headingley. Headingley was also a rural village in 1807, so perhaps James was working on a farm there.

James' and Elizabeth's second child was William, the subject of this biography. He was born on 2nd December 1809¹ at Alwoodley Gates²² and baptised at Adel Parish Church about a month later, on 7th January 1810¹. On 31st March 1812, Mary, William's younger sister, was also baptised at Adel

Church⁶. On both occasions their father James was listed as a labourer and the record showed the family lived in Alwoodley.

James, William's father, died in 1813 and was buried in the graveyard of Harewood Parish Church on 19th August 1813, aged just 26 Years⁷. His residence was shown as King Lane. This must have been a devastating blow for Elizabeth, William's mother, being left with three young children; the oldest, Sarah, was only 6 years old. No doubt it will also have affected the three young children greatly, both emotionally and financially. Without a working father, the family would have been impoverished and perhaps homeless too, if they had been living in a tied cottage on a farm.

7 years later, Elizabeth re-married in Harewood Parish Church⁸. Her new husband was John Todd (1870-1822) and she went on to have two further children with him in 1821 and 1823. John Todd died, aged 42, at King Lane before his last child was born¹⁰. He was buried in November 1822 at Harewood Parish Church⁹. William was 13 when his stepfather died. His mother was 35 with four children and another baby on the way. It cannot have been easy for the family. Elizabeth never married again and lived on King Lane for the rest of her life. In the 1841 census she was shown working as a farm labourer¹¹, in the 1851 census she was shown living with her youngest son, James¹², and in 1861 she was living on her own in a cottage on King Lane, adjacent to King lane Farm which was farmed by a Mr George Todd, perhaps a relative of her deceased husband¹³. Later that year, in the last quarter of 1861, she died¹⁴.

What of William?

Sadly, it has not been possible to find any records for William until the 1851 census return when he was shown working at Crag Farm, close to King Lane, in Alwoodley¹⁵. He was 40 years old, unmarried and employed as a servant on the 83-acre farm. Shown on the same census page, working at Alwoodley Hall, a 180-acre farm, was a Thomas Bellwood, aged 22 and unmarried. It is likely that he was a relative, but the relationship is not known. There seem to have been several Bellwood and Todd families in Alwoodley at the time. It is probable that William worked as a farm servant in the Alwoodley area up until 1851. He probably first went out to work aged 14. He had never learnt to read or write and signed his marriage entry in 1852 with a mark, not a signature¹⁶.

William Bellwood, aged 44 and a bachelor, married Hannah Naylor, a widow aged 45, at St Peter's, Leeds Parish Church on 6th June 1852¹⁶. He described himself, rather grandly, as a farmer and also elevated his father, James', occupation to that of a farmer. When he married, he was living on Woodhouse Lane, in Leeds. Hannah's (1806-1872) maiden name was Shackleton and she was the daughter of Matthew Shackleton, a baker from Wakefield¹⁶. Her marriage to William was her third. Her first husband, Joseph Womack (1768-1840) married her in 1825 in Wakefield¹⁷, had died, aged 72, in 1840¹⁸, and the couple had one daughter who was born in 1836. Her second husband George Naylor (1788-1851), who she married in 1846¹⁹, was a career soldier who had retired from the army with a pension and was working as a wool sorter²⁰. George Naylor was buried in Beckett Street Cemetery on 9th July 1851²¹.

In the 1861 census²² William was living with Hannah, his wife, who was not working, at 8 Church Street, off Woodhouse Lane²³, in Leeds, and was listed as a farm labourer. Another two men living close to William were also listed as farm labourers²², so there must have been somewhere local that the three men had found work, despite living in the crowded area of central Leeds. Perhaps there were cow keepers, dairies, or market gardens producing vegetables for sale. William and his wife, Hannah, were shown in 1871 living at 6 St Mary's Street (previously known as Church Street) in Leeds²⁴. Hannah was working as a boot binder to increase the family income, and William was listed

as a farm servant. Hannah's job was poorly paid and it is not certain where, or if, William was working. St Mary's Street was near St Mary's Church in a crowded part of Leeds which was becoming increasingly industrialised, and maps of the area from 1852 do not show any areas of farms or rural land anywhere nearby. There were no other agricultural workers living nearby in the 1871 census.

Hannah Bellwood died in 1872 and was buried in Beckett Street Cemetery on 18th September 1872²⁵. Her address was shown as 4 St Mary's Street and she was aged 73. The grave was a pauper's grave in the Anglican Sector of the graveyard, and there were 24 other people in the grave.

William was an inmate of the Leeds Union Workhouse by 1881²⁶. He was shown as having no employment and as being an agricultural labourer, widowed, and aged 70. He died in the June quarter of 1888²⁷ in the workhouse²⁸. It is likely that he never left the workhouse after 1881. His burial was delayed by a few months because his body was donated to the Leeds Medical School and was probably used for dissection by medical students in the anatomy department²⁸.

The anatomy act of 1832 was introduced to allow medical schools to have legal access to donated bodies for dissection²⁹. The intent was to increase the numbers of bodies available for dissection. Prior to that very few bodies were available and many medical schools resorted to buying bodies illegally from 'body snatchers', who would dig up bodies from new graves and even resorted on occasion, to murdering of live victims whose bodies could then be sold, like the infamous Burke and Hare. When William died, unclaimed bodies from the hospitals, workhouses and asylums could be donated to the medical schools. In return the bodies were buried with a proper burial service, at the expense of the medical school. Bodies were kept in cold rooms and were embalmed, but no refrigeration was available so, after a few months, it was essential to bury them.

William Bellwood was finally laid to rest in a pauper's grave on 12th December 1888. The grave (number 10337) is in the Consecrated Sector of Beckett Street Cemetery and contains the bodies of 15 other people and has no headstone²⁸.

In summary, William Bellwood was born and brought up in Alwoodley, a rural area on the outskirts of Leeds. He was part of an extended group of several Bellwood families who lived and worked in the same area. His father died when he was just four years old, leaving William's mother widowed with three young children. His mother remarried and had two further children before her second husband also died. His early years must have been a very difficult time for William. He worked all his life as a farm labourer, eventually marrying a widow, Hannah Glover, when he was 45. The couple lived in an overcrowded inner-city area of Leeds. They had no children. Hannah died in 1872 and by 1881 William was in the workhouse. He probably stayed there until his death 7 years later. After his death, he apparently had no family to claim his body so it was donated to the medical school for dissection, prior to his burial in a pauper's grave in December 1888.

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