

John Beffit

(b. 1839 - d. 1908)

15th December 2019

Jacqueline Saville

John was born on 12th December 1839 (1) to parents Charles (born around 1800 in the East Riding of Yorkshire (3)) and Mary (born around 1810 in Leeds (3)), and baptised a few weeks later in the parish church in Leeds (1). The family's surname is variously written as Bevitt (1), Bevett (2), Beffit (3), Beeffit (4) or Beffitt (5) and in John's early life his father Charles was a labourer (1,2).

John appears to have grown up and lived most of his life in the area around Briggate, the main street leading north from Leeds bridge. At his baptism, his parents' abode was given as Briggate, and on each census return from 1841 to 1871 John was at Reinhardt's Yard, which was off Briggate (7) close to where the Queen's Arcade is today. He had a brother, George, around seven to nine years older than him (2,3), and a sister Eliza (3) four years younger than him (8).

While John was still at school, his father and older brother were working with horses (3), with his brother driving an omnibus in 1851 and their father described as a horse-keeper and later a groom (6). John himself followed in this tradition, described in census returns and the marriage register as a horse-keeper (4, 10, 11), groom (9,11) or ostler (a man who looks after the horses at an inn) (6). In the 1881 census he is referred to as 'Labourer Stable Man' (9) which suggests that both his 1871 census return as 'Labourer' (5) and his father's early descriptions as a labourer do not necessarily mean that their occupations changed drastically over time.

On June 13th 1858 in the parish of Burley to the north-west of Leeds, John married Elizabeth Cook (4), a boot-binder who was born in Bradford in about 1840 (6). Both were illiterate at the time, making an X rather than signing the marriage register. On the 1861 census John and Elizabeth are in the neighbouring household to John's parents in Reinhardt's Yard, possibly living with Elizabeth's father and sister (widower John Cook born Bradford around 1813, Caroline Cook born Leeds around 1848), though the Cooks are described as lodgers. There is no evidence of any children from the marriage, and by the 1871 census John is in his mother's house and described as unmarried (5), though on the 1891 and 1901 census returns he is said to be a widower (10, 11).

John's father Charles died between the 1861 and 1871 census returns, probably in 1865 under yet another variant of the surname: Beffith (12). By the time of the 1871 census, as well as retaining one of the lodgers who was in Charles and Mary's household on the 1861 census, Mary was working as a charwoman (cleaner) (5). Around 1876 or 1877 John lost his sight (9) which would have meant losing his income as well. It is not clear at what point between then and the 1881 census he entered the workhouse, but certainly when his mother died in 1879 (13) there was no longer a parental home for him to remain in.

John is listed as an inmate at Leeds workhouse on the 1881, 1891 and 1901 census returns, and died there in 1908 (14). Due to his 'total' blindness (11) he is unlikely to have stopped being an inmate for any portion of time during those 27 years. He was buried in Beckett Street Cemetery on 25th May 1908, where his abode was given as the Union Infirmary and under 'description' in the burial register, where other men are usually denoted by their occupation, John is simply described as 'A blind man' (15).

Reference List:

- (1) Baptism of John Bevitt, 1 January 1840. West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms 1813-1910, Leeds, St Peter, 1840. Available at [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (2) Census return for Reinhardt Yard, Leeds, Leeds West subdistrict, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO HO 107/1346, book 3, Folio 10, p. 13 (1841). Available at: [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 6 October 2019)
- (3) Census return for Reinhardts Yard, Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO HO 107/2321, Folio 248, p. 25 (1851). Available at: [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (4) Marriage of John Beeffit and Elizabeth Cook, 13 June 1858. West Yorkshire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns 1813-1935, Burley, St Matthias, 1858. Available at [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (5) Census return for 6 Reinhardts Yd, Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO RG10/4568, Folio 86, p. 25 (1871). Available at: [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (6) Census return for Reinhardts Yard, Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO RG9/3396, Folio 45, p. 19 (1861). Available at: [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (7) A List Of Streets, Squares, Courts, Lanes, &C. In The Town And Suburbs Of Leeds For 1853. <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS/WRY/Leeds/LeedsStreets1853> (Accessed 13 October 2019)
- (8) *Certified entry recording birth on the Civil Registration Index, Sep 1843*. Available: <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?cite=%2BFOTVn2aL3i3%2BnK9jse8Lw&scan=1> (Accessed 6 October 2019).
- (9) Census return for "Leeds Union Workhouse" Becket Street Leeds, Leeds, North Leeds, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO RG11/4524, folio 99, p.3 (1881). Available at [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 14 September 2019)
- (10) *Census return for District Leeds Union Workhouse, Leeds, North Leeds, Yorkshire*. Public Record Office: PRO RG12/3696, Folio 118, p. 7 (1891). Available at: [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (11) *Census return for District Leeds Union, Leeds, North Leeds, Yorkshire*. Public Record Office: PRO RG13/4227, Folio 102, p. 12 (1901). Available at: [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (Accessed: 20 September 2019)
- (12) *Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index, Dec 1865*. Available: <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?cite=Fugrv6s1vsePjYe8w6O9Gg&scan=1> (Accessed 6 October 2019).
- (13) *Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index, Sep 1879*. Available: <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?cite=22gtyGvfhpSneoHKbaSFTw&scan=1>

(Accessed 6 October 2019).

(14) *Certified entry recording death on the Civil Registration Index, June 1908*. Available:
<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/information.pl?cite=NEFTh4YrU4MGWYQSiXM50A&scan=1> (Accessed 14 September 2019).

(15) *Leeds, England, Beckett Street Cemetery 1845-1987* at ancestry.co.uk (Accessed 20 October 2019)