

Flooding has been a constant problem in Earby down the years and the following accounts, taken from the Craven Pioneer and Craven Herald respectively, graphically relate the effects of a cloudburst in Earby and Lothersdale in the summer of 1910. In Lothersdale two young children were tragically drowned in the Spencer lime kilns at Raygill Quarry. I came across these articles when researching Health Care in Earby. The two children were being taken by their parents to breathe in the lime fumes, which was then a noted cure for whooping cough.

Stephanie Carter

From Craven Pioneer 17 June 1910

**Extraordinary Floods at Earby
Streets Blocked & Houses Washed Out
Furniture in the Streets**

Earby witnessed strange things on Sunday afternoon. Probably not within the memory of man has there been such a volume of water in the town at one time, and it is hoped it will be a long time before the experience is repeated. It was in the afternoon when Earby folk were preparing for tea that a thunderstorm broke over the district. It was of no particular violence, and the rain which accompanied it was not of any great weight. But the dark leaded sky over the hills to the east betokened trouble. There is a continuous slope from the dark moorland at the top of the town which nestles apparently comfortable at the bottom. But soon after the flash of lightening and the crack of thunder, the water in the beck which runs by Island Square began to rise with startling rapidity. In five minutes it overflowed its banks, and in ten minutes the road in Water Street was impassable. It was here a foot deep in water and people who had been attending the service of song in the Baptist Chapel had their usual means of egress cut off, and had to get out at the back and go where they could. Meanwhile the yellow flood continued its course, bringing a quantity of mud and sand along with it, and pieces of timber and a varied sort of flotsam and jetsam were borne along its bosom. Over the parapet into island Square it went, and many of the inhabitants were taken by surprise and were compelled to take refuge upstairs. This part of the town suffered worst of all, the water being almost up to the window sills. In one house it was three feet deep, and in many others it was from eighteen inches to two feet deep. It was no uncommon thing to see such articles as dolly tubs, tea pots, washing bowls and articles of furniture sailing about, while in some of the houses the entire food supply seemed to have been destroyed. Down by Mr Firth's shop the road formed part of a great lake and the water invaded the houses at the bottom of Shuttleworth and Grove Streets. By five o'clock the volume of water had lessened and furniture stood in front of the houses in Island Square, while the accumulations of mud were being swept away.

The only word that can effectively describe the cause of this invasion is "cloudburst", for that is really what happened. As we have said the rain in the town was but an average downfall. It was on the hills going down one side to Lothersdale and down the other side to Earby. A cyclist who was riding round by Marton cast his careful eye at the warning blackness over the summit of the hills to his left and after a flash of lightening, to use his own words, he "saw the clouds open", while others in Earby witnessed a stream of water, some say four feet wide but possibly wider, come down the hills above the Dodgsons, tumbling and splashing and carrying nearly everything before it, and ultimately finding its way in the deep gorges and stream courses, though these were unable to carry off the phenomenal volume altogether and roads were washed up, in some places three feet deep, and fences carried away. At Brigstones below Fiddling Clough the water was unable to pass under the bridge over the stream, but dashed violently against the parapet of the bridge, finally carrying it away, stones being found a field's length away. It bore down walls and carried stones three feet long and a foot in thickness a distance of a hundred yards. Trees were fetched up by the roots, but one is grateful to record that loss of life does not seem to have been one of the results of this phenomenal visitation on the Earby side of the hills. The rush of the water down the hill stream beds are described as a grand sight, and the water at Earby falls thundered like a little Niagara.

After the flooding of the Water Street district, the beck which runs from Sough Bridge into Earby also began to swell very rapidly and caused a flood which stopped traffic on the road, a motor car being stranded and water-logged. The herculean efforts of many men failed to remove it, and finally it had to be dragged by a horse into a better position.

The sheds do not appear to have suffered much from the flood as have been the case on previous occasions with a lesser volume of water, this being due no doubt to the precaution taken by Mr Birley's shed to raise the clow. There was an invasion of the warehouse at the Earby Manufacturing Company's Shed, but no work would appear to have been lost by the workpeople employed there.

Some feeling of sympathy goes out to the poor people on Island Square, for every time flooding occurs the houses suffer more or less and even sickness has been caused through it. The matter is one which deserves the consideration of the Council, for something ought to be done, either by means of the erection of a barrier, or in some other way to prevent the flooding of the houses.

From the Craven Herald 17 June 1910

**Cloudburst at Lothersdale
Two Children Drowned
Father's Agonising Experience**

One of the most distressing tragedies that has occurred in the Skipton district within recent years was that which took place at Raygill Lime Quarries near Lothersdale, on Sunday. The direct cause of the terrible calamity was a cloud burst on the moors in the immediate neighbourhood, and the result was unprecedented flooding. At the particular spot where the fatalities occurred there was such a rush of water that two children were washed away and drowned. The storm swept all along the valley with great violence, carrying with it hencotes and all manner of moveable articles, and doing considerable damage to property.

Houses and warehouses were flooded in the low-lying parts owing to the beck overflowing, and when the village was visited by the Craven Herald representative on Monday people were to be seen turning out their furniture into the roadway in order that they might properly cleanse their houses. A considerable quantity of water also forced its way into the warehouse and shed at the works of Mr F G Wilson, manufacturer, and a quantity of tops were damaged.

Workmen at Mr Spencer's lime kilns, which was the scene of the distressing fatalities, were also busily engaged in clearing mud and other debris washed down by the flood, while others were engaged in repairing the wall at either side of the road which had been swept away in several places. Marks were also visible on the walls of the kilns, which span the road at this point, showing the height to which the water had attained. When the storm was at its height the water at this point must have been fully eleven feet in depth.

The Fatalities

But to deal more particularly with the fatalities themselves. During the afternoon of Sunday Mr and Mrs George Ireson Lister, of 58 Emmott Lane, Laneshawbridge, Colne, set out to walk over the moor to Raygill lime quarry at Lothersdale, accompanied by their two children, Clarice, aged two years and five months, and William, aged one year and five months, the latter of whom was in a mail cart. The children were suffering from whooping cough, and the parents had taken them to the district in order that they might breathe the fumes from the lime kilns in the hope of curing them. They had just arrived in the neighbourhood of the kilns when the thunder storm broke over them, and they were obliged to seek shelter in one of the archways at the side of the road and connected with the kilns. The rain was almost torrential in its fury for some time and streams of water were running down the road towards the kilns, the stream which flows past becoming swollen to an alarming extent. Still Mr and Mrs Lister did not anticipate any danger and thought

the storm had about spent its fury, when, quite suddenly and without any warning, the water attained a depth of several feet. There was a cart in the recess belonging to Mr Spencer, and in his extremity Mr Lister lifted his wife and children into it and climbed in himself. But the water was still rising rapidly, making the cart move to and fro, and he saw that unless something was done quickly they would all be drowned. He then got out, and, carrying the youngest child, he attempted to swim across to some higher ground, but the current was too strong for him and he was forced to return. He then placed the baby on the roof of a small shed adjoining. His wife, who had been holding the other child, lost her grasp, and as she screamed out Mr Lister went back to her assistance. He had of course to leave the baby on the roof of the shed, but it must have lost its balance, and rolled back into the flood, for when he again turned in that direction it was nowhere to be seen.

Mrs Lister somehow regained possession of the elder child and was again placed in the cart by her husband, but it is difficult to understand how she retained her foothold. In the words of her husband the cart was rocking like a swing boat, while the water had risen to the woman's shoulders and she had perforce to hold the child up level with her head to keep it clear of the water. Mr Lister then swam down the road for assistance. He cried for help, and his cries were heard by a man named J Watson of 4 Garden Street Earby, who, with a young lady, had been sheltering further up the road, but being unaware of the other people's presence, were unable to warn them of the approaching flood. Together they returned by the top of the lime kilns, and Mr Lister was lowered down on a rope from a hole in the side, a distance of between thirty and forty feet. He eventually succeeded in getting his wife on to the roof of the shed. The water then began to subside and the unfortunate woman, who was in an exhausted condition, together with her heroic husband, were landed on safe ground. The dead bodies of the two children were discovered afterwards.

The Place Described

The stream runs close to the lime kilns and passes through a sort of culvert underneath the road about a hundred yards further up. The water appears to have come in two directions, and meeting at this point, it swept away the wall and also did considerable damage to the wall on the opposite side. From this place down to the arches the road dips from all points, forming the shape of a basin, and the water quickly attained a depth of over ten feet. When the water was at its full height it was only two feet below the centre of the roof of the arch.

Mr Spencer was amongst those who assisted in the rescue, wading up to the shoulders in the flood to be of service. He rendered very valuable help, and he himself had to receive medical attention from Dr Empey. Dr Ward devoted his attention to the mother, who was in a very serious condition. She was unconscious and did not come round until seven o'clock in the evening. Later, both Mrs Lister and her husband were driven to their home in Laneshawbridge in Mr Spencer's motor car. The dead bodies of the two children were removed to Raygill, Mr Spencer's house, to await the inquest.

The Inquest

The Father's Story

Mr Edgar Wood, coroner for the district, and a jury inquired into the circumstances attending the death of the two children, in the hall at Raygill, Mr W Spencer's residence, on Monday afternoon.

The father of the deceased children was the first witness to be called. He said he was a grocer's assistant living at 53 Emmott Lane Laneshawbridge. He left home about eleven o'clock on Sunday morning with his wife and two children – Clarice aged 2½ years and William aged 1½, to walk to Lothersdale. The youngest child was in a mail cart. The children had had whooping cough, and he was taking them to the lime kilns so they could breathe the fumes, he having heard that lime fumes were a good remedy. Witness added that they got to the lime kilns about half past two.

The Coroner: Did you get there before it started to rain? – It was just starting as we got there; there was a thunderstorm.

What did you do? – I wheeled the mail cart underneath one of those arches at the kiln, and we all went under to shelter.

How long had you been there before the water began to come? – We had sheltered about a quarter of an hour, and then the water came. The water, he added, came in one rushing volume.

Did it get very deep at once? – Yes.

What did you do next? – I put my wife and children into a cart there was there and got in myself.

And the water still began to get deeper? – It did. The cart got full of water. I thought we were all going to be drowned underneath the kiln and I therefore determined to make some effort and came out of the cart with the intention of swimming to the other side where I could see some higher ground. When I got outside the kiln the current was too strong and, having the baby with me, I had to return. (Here witness sobbed bitterly and several of the jurymen were observed to be visibly affected by the witness's pathetic story.)

The Coroner: What did you do with the little boy? – There is an outhouse just outside the kiln and I put him on the slates but he rolled off. My wife screamed when she saw him roll off and I turned back to her and the little girl.

Were they still in the cart? – She must have made some movement because she was thrown out of the cart into the water with the little girl. The cart, added the witness, was only a two-wheeled one and it was swinging. His wife managed to clutch hold of the cart, but she lost her hold on the little girl. Witness put her back in the cart and swam away for assistance. When he returned his wife had regained possession of the child but he did not know how much time had elapsed before she recovered the child.

Did you find anybody when you swam underneath the bridge? – I met a young woman and a young man and I called to them for help. Some more people came from somewhere and we got some ropes and they let me down from one of those holes in the bridge.

Proceeding, witness said he fastened the rope round him and swam back again to the cart. His wife was still there and she had the little girl clasped to her. Witness dare not touch the cart for fear of upsetting it, and he went back to the slates. Witness felt that he was not strong enough to bring his wife back. A rope was then lowered at the front of the archway where his wife was. He got this rope and gave it to her. She clung to the rope but witness was afraid she would not be able to hold on as she was about exhausted. At last he succeeded in getting her on to the outhouse and she lost the little girl altogether then. He afterwards saw a man find the little girl near the cart in the kiln close to where they were. Witness did not see the little boy found.

The Coroner: Was there a tremendous current all this time? – The water had begun to settle then. I mean when you got to your wife? – Yes. The current carried me underneath the bridge.

At the time you were let down were there many people about? – I don't think there were many about then, but quite a crowd gathered when the water began to settle.

Unless they could swim they could do nothing? – There didn't seem to be an earthly soul about that could swim only myself.

How high up the kiln did the water get : you could not walk at all? – My wife was stood in the cart and she just had her head and shoulders above the water.

And she was holding the child as high up as she possibly could? – Yes. The cart was tipping up and down like a swing boat.

As far as you know everything was done to help you to get the children out? – Oh yes.

You were practically caught in a trap? – Yes we were caught like rats in a trap.

How deep was the water before the beck rushed on to you? – About a couple of inches, and then it came just like a reservoir bursting.

An Eye Witness Story

Joseph Watson, 4 Garden Street Earby spoke of being in the neighbourhood with a young lady on Sunday. They sheltered about thirty yards further up from where the deceased children and their parents were sheltering. They were under a cart shed. Witness saw the water was coming very rapidly towards them and he said to his companion "We had better be going; it is coming in here". They accordingly stepped out and got on to higher ground. He had just got outside when he heard a cry for help. The young lady with him said "There is a man in the water". Witness immediately divested himself of his coat and waded up to his thighs to see if he could be of any assistance. He saw the man was swimming with the current, which was carrying him towards the

witness, and when the man got to within ten yards of him he waded out. The man (Lister) asked witness to go back with him as he had his wife and children under the arch.. The water was still coming down with torrential force, and witness told the man that it would be madness to go back that way as the current was getting stronger. Just then a man shouted from above that the woman would be all right if she stopped where she was as the water could not get any higher. Of course all this time the woman was calling for help, and her husband was shouting back to her that he was coming. Eventually two ropes were suspended from different holes, one over the arch where the woman was, and one from the bridge that crosses the road. They let Lister down with the rope from the bridge, and he swam across to where his wife was, and took the other rope which had been let down over the arch. Lister kept up a conversation with his wife in order to keep up her spirits, and then the water began to subside somewhat. He then swung the rope across to his wife, and he was able to get her out of the cart and on to the roof of the outhouse. Witness saw a man bring one child out of the archway. The shed was covered with water when witness saw it, and it would be impossible for a child to stay in it, as the water was too deep. The man who got the child out went up to the waist.

The Coroner: Was everything possible done for them? – Yes.

You didn't know they were there? – Not until he came swimming down the road. He added that they kept up a conversation with Lister's wife all the time. She kept saying she was going. Lister asked if the children were there and his wife replied "Yes, but they are dead".

Worst Storm for 26 Years

Stephen Gill, Lothersdale, said he visited the lime kilns in order to prevent the water putting out the kilns. He never heard anything about that distressing affair until he was there.

The Coroner; What was happening when you got there? – There was a man rushing about here and there and all seemed to be in a muddle. Just then I heard a woman scream and from the sound I gathered she was underneath the kiln.

Did you get them a rope? – they had got a rope when I arrived. He added that the woman was the n on the outbuilding and the water was going down.

I think you found one of the children? – Yes, the eldest.

When did you pick the child up? – It was just by what we call the kiln mouth.

Not in the cart? – No.

How long after would that be? – About ten minutes.

Have you ever had a storm like this before at these kilns? – I have been here something like 26 years and there had never been one in my experience like it. I have been told there was one about 30 years ago,.

An Hour's Artificial Respiration

PC Brunskill, Cononley, said he saw the little boy picked up about 6 o'clock.

The Coroner: How far away from the kilns? – I should say about 150 to 200 yards.

He was quite dead of course? – Yes. Artificial respiration was tried about an hour on the little girl until the arrival of the doctor, but without avail. Dr Ward pronounced life extinct.

The Verdict

The Coroner said it was quite apparent those unfortunate people had been caught in that place. The last witness said he had lived there 26 years and he remembered nothing like it. It was indeed the last thing any of them would expect to happen. He did not know whether it would be advisable to ask Mr Spencer to put up a warning asking people not to shelter underneath for fear of these storms. It had been a terrible experience for those unfortunate people.

A verdict of Accidental Death was returned by the jury, and sympathy was also expressed with the parents of the deceased children. Mr Spencer, at the call of the foreman, was also thanked for taking the children into his house and for his assistance generally.

The Coroner: Mr Spencer has been most kind I am sure.