

The Washerwomen of Golgotha

By Andrew White

It was while searching the 1881 census for something else that I came upon the curious phenomenon of Golgotha. Various enquiries over the years about the name of the little hamlet near the gates of Williamson Park had led to my usual response that the place was probably named after the Quaker Burial Ground established nearby in 1660. Golgotha or 'place of the skull', as it is translated from the Hebrew, would be quite an appropriate name in the biblically-aware 17th century. The cottages seemed likely to have been built for quarry-workers at the neighbouring stone quarries, now Williamson Park. After all, the earliest of them appeared to be of late 17th or early 18th century date - one with a datestone of 1728 over the door [E. Garnett, *The Dated Buildings of South Lonsdale*, [1994,101], a time when the Moor quarries must have really got going with the demand for stone for the local 'great rebuilding'. This likelihood had to be tempered by two considerations, one that there might also be agricultural needs for housing here and the other that nothing in history is ever as simple or straightforward as it appears!

So what is the curious phenomenon? I was immediately struck by the number of women who lived there who called themselves 'laundress'. It seemed as if every house had at least one or two, and quickly the total was in double figures. Something odd was going on, as the occupation was neither common nor concentrated in such a way in other areas, judging by the Census Returns. The 1881 Returns revealed that there were four 'stone quarriers' and a 'stone mason' living in the cottages, so there was some connection between the cottages and quarrying, but this was actually unexpected at this date. Williamson Park was created out of the former quarries, which had been bought out by James Williamson in the 1870s before work could commence. There may have been some residual quarrying on what was later to become Moor Hospital land, but it seems more likely that these quarrymen were employed at the Scotch Quarry, lower down the slope of the Moor, which was producing a pale reddish coloured sandstone much used in Victorian buildings in the town. The single stone mason could of course have worked anywhere.

The concentration of laundresses, totalling twenty from only twenty-two cottages, is quite abnormal. The explanation seems quite simple and may even be correct. This location, high on the edge of the Moor with plentiful exposure to the prevailing south-westerly winds, made a superb drying ground. There was also space to peg out the washing, or fix it to thorn hedges, and it was quite remote, avoiding the common risk of theft to which drying grounds were prey. According to the Ordnance Survey map of 1892 all the cottages had outhouses behind, which probably contained both privies and wash-houses. We must now see these as operating on a commercial scale, and involving the collection and return of laundry from town-centre premises. It may well by now have been a cottage industry on the edge of decline, since the first steam laundry (the Princess Steam Laundry) was introduced into the town in 1888 and became the Lancaster and District Steam Laundry Company in 1890. [Cross Fleury, *Time-Honoured Lancaster*, 1891, 581]. It may have driven out the home laundresses by means of superior collecting (by wagon) and speedier turnaround.

Looking backwards, how long had the concentration of laundresses existed at Golgotha? The 1841 Census is of little use, as it does not regularly give occupations of others than the head of household. The 1851 Census however, indicates possibly twelve laundresses (one is 'formerly' and another is 'laundry maid') but also misses out three houses (nos 3,8 and 9). The indications are that the occupation may go back a lot further.

In transcribing the Census Enumerator's Returns I have tried to indicate the occupation of the head of household (if it was a man), the relationship of any laundresses to the head of household, and the total number living in the house (in brackets).

1881 Census

1 Golgotha Richard Swarbrick 66 Joiner, b. Catforth?

Jane 61(w) Laundress, b. Heaton

Mary Heaton 29(d) b. Lancaster

(9) et al.
 2 Golgotha Esther Wallbank 76 Laundress, b. Scotforth
 Eliz 50(d) "
 (4) et al.
 3 Golgotha Agnes Waterworth 26 Laundress, b. Lancaster
 (5) et al.
 4 Golgotha James Whiteside 31 Currier, b. Skerton
 (6) et al.
 Jane Chorley 55 (m-in-1) Laundress, b. Lancaster
 5 Golgotha Thos Rogerson 56 general Labourer, b. Goosnargh
 (4) et al.
 Jane Chorley 16(niece) Laundress, b. Lancaster
 6 Golgotha Nancy Garth 68 Laundress, b. Skerton
 Wm Hodgson 27(single) Stone quarrier, b. Gressingham
 Margaret " 27(d) Laundress, b. Lancaster
 (5) et al.
 7 Golgotha Jane Winder 67 Laundress, b. Lancaster
 Martha " 44? (d) " "
 (3) et al.
 8 Golgotha George Simpson 67 Joiner, b. Kendal
 (6) et al.
 9 Golgotha John Dawson 65 Stonemason, b. Lancaster
 (2) Ann 59(w)Laundress, "
 10 Golgotha John Blackburn 38 Stone quarrier, b. Over Kellet
 (6) et al.
 11 Golgotha Thos Thirwall 77 formerly Agric. Lab. b. Walton, Cumbria
 (3) Jane " 48(d) Laundress, b. Irthington
 Agnes Simpson 35 (visitor) Laundress, b. Lancaster
 12 Golgotha Grace Varey 45 Laundress, b. Hornby
 (4) et al.
 Mary Grime 26(niece) Laundress, b. Lancaster
 13 Golgotha John Salisbury 38 Stone quarrier, b. Lancaster
 (7) et al.
 14 Golgotha Alice Salisbury 43 Laundress, b. Lancaster
 (2) Ester " 1 7(d) " "
 15 Golgotha John Martindale 67 Shoemaker, b. Kirkby Lonsdale
 Dorothy " 62(w) Laundress, b. Scotforth
 (3) et al.
 16 Golgotha Thos Simpson 52 gen. lab. b. Lancaster
 (3) et al.
 17 Golgotha John Willan 33 Stone quarrier, b. Halton
 (6) et al.
 18 Golgotha (occupiers slept at No. 1 Golgotha)
 19 Golgotha Jas Ratcliffe 57 General Lab. b. Milnthorpe
 (4) et al.
 20 Golgotha Robt Masheter 52 General Joiner, b. Carnforth
 (4) et al.
 21 Golgotha. Mary Metcalfe 42 Laundress, b. Lancaster
 (4) et al.
 22 Golgotha Wm Gardner 52 Farmer of 82 acr. b. Lancaster
 (6) et al.
 (7)

1851 Census

1 Golgotha Christopher Jackson 48 Farm Lab. b. Burton in Kendal
 (2) et al.
 2 Golgotha Rich Swarbrick 36 Joiner, b. Woodplumpton
 (8) Jane 31(w) Laundress, b. Heaton et al.
 3 Golgotha [missing]
 4 Golgotha John Layfield 44 Farm Lab. b. Melling Mary " 36 (w) Laundress, b. Cartmel (6) et al.
 5 Golgotha John Edmondson 43 Wood turner, b. Ulverston

Mary 37(w) Laundress, b. Morland
 (4) et al.
 6 Golgotha John Cragg 34 Lab. in iron Warehouse, b. Scotforth
 (7) et al.
 7 Golgotha Wm Smith 33 Keeper in Asylum, b. Conder Green et al.
 8/ 9 Golgotha [missing]
 10 Golgotha John Armistead 35 Ag. Lab. b. Gressingham
 (7) et al.
 11 Golgotha Rich Clague 35 Baker at Asylum, b. IOM (4) et al. Esther Lace 55(visitor)formerly Laundress, b. IOM
 12 Golgotha Joseph Monks 61 Master tailor at Asylum, b. Warrington
 (4) et al.
 13 Golgotha Henry Ellershaw 37 Keeper at Asylum, b. Bent ham
 (4) et al.
 14 Golgotha Thos Thirlwa11 44 Lab. in iron foundry, b. Scotland
 (6) et al.
 Ann 23(d) Laundry maid, b. High Hesketh
 15 Golgotha Thos Casson 54 White smith, b. Milnthorpe
 (7) et al.
 16 Golgotha John Wilkinson 49 Stone mason, b. Skerton
 (4) et al.
 17 Golgotha Jas Salisbury 67 Lab. in woodyard, b. St Michael's
 (3) et al.
 18 Golgotha Thos Garth 44 Lab. (in quarry), b. Kellet
 Nancy " 33(w)Laundress, b. Skerton
 (8) et al.
 19 Golgotha John Wilson 66 Ag. Lab., b. Heaton
 (7) et al.
 Ellen " 26(d) Laundress, b. Kellet
 20 Golgotha Rich Wallbank 50 Ag. Lab., b. Longridge
 Esther " 47 (w) Laundress, b. Scotforth
 (6) et al.
 Eliz 19(d) Laundress, b. Scotforth
 21 Golgotha Wm Chorley 62 Farm lab. b. Longridge
 Eliz 55(w) Laundress, b. Chipping?
 (3) et al.
 22 Golgotha Robt Bleasdale 49 Lab. in quarry, b. Bleasdale
 Jane 44(w) Riddle Bread Maker, b. Caton
 (3) et al.
 Golgotha Edw Gardner 50 Farm lab. b. Heaton
 (6) et al.
 Golgotha George Airey 47 Farmer of 192 acr. b. Lancaster. (7) et al. Empl. 7 labourers
 Golgotha Rich Monks 33 Tailor, b. Lancaster
 (6) et al.
 Golgotha John Strickland 35 Ag. Lab. b. Yealand R.
 (2) et al.
 Moorside Cott. Jas Gardner 55 Farm steward, b. Heaton
 (2) Ann " 51(w) Laundress, b. Caton
 Moorside Cott. John Corless 43 Ag. Lab., b. Nateby
 (3) Eliz " 50(w) Laundress, b. Claughton et al.