

A CASE OF FURIOUS DRIVING

Sadly we often read in newspapers of a death in a road traffic accident where the surviving relatives feel that the sentence is inadequate to reflect the loss of a loved one's life. However this isn't just a modern phenomenon as I discovered when researching my gg-grandfather, Andrew Morton.

Andrew Morton married my gg-grandmother Ann Stewart at St Michael's, Alnwick, on 13th November 1814. The parish records show while she was a spinster he was a widower. Later census records revealed that their first son George had been born at Heckley Fence Farm, near Alnwick (just east of the current A1). This then led to the discovery of a daughter, Isabella, born at Heckley Fence to Andrew and his first wife Dorothy and baptised at Pottergate Presbyterian Church, Alnwick in 1812. The burial records at St Michael's, showed that Dorothy died at Heckley Fence a year later, aged 31. Despite this information I have been unable to find further details about Dorothy.

After Andrew and Ann married, his first daughter Isabella died at Heckley Fence, aged 3. The family then moved to Chillingham Newtown, a group of farm cottages close to Chillingham Village, where Andrew worked as an agricultural labourer. In the next twenty years a further ten children were born there and all baptised at West Street Presbyterian Church, Wooler. In January 1857 Ann, who had been in poor health, died.

The cause of death was given as "dropsy", presumably congestive heart disease. She was buried in Chillingham churchyard.

At that point Andrew disappears from the records, I cannot find him in the 1861 census. His death is recorded on Ann's gravestone at Chillingham but he is not found in the parish burial records. However a possible death of Andrew, aged 77, appears in the GRO index of deaths for Newcastle in 1866. I obtained the death certificate and that led to further research in the Newcastle newspapers in which the sad tale was revealed.

On the morning of the 27th February 1866 Andrew visited his son Stephen at his flour dealership at 100 Newgate Street, Newcastle. He only stayed briefly then left. He was crossing the road at the junction between Gallowgate and Blackett Street when he was hit by a horse and cart and driven by a Mark Burton. He was knocked unconscious and suffered head injuries. He was carried back to Stephen's shop and Mr. Carr, a surgeon was summoned from Eldon Square. After receiving attention and recovering consciousness he was taken to his daughter's residence in Argyle Terrace where he was confined to his bed. The incident had been witnessed by Mr. William Blanshard who happened to be a County Court judge. He immediately went to Prudoe Street police station and requested Inspector Hall to charge Burton

with "furious driving". Inspector Hall visited Andrew who said that the incident was an accident and he did not want to press charges and that Burton had been very attentive after the accident and had agreed to pay the doctor's expenses.

However Judge Blanshard was not satisfied and decided, in the public interest, to press charges himself. The case came before Newcastle Magistrates Court on 13th March 1866. He gave evidence that that Burton had been driving at around six miles an hour in a reckless manner. His son Henry Blanshard gave similar evidence. The magistrates fined Burton 10 shillings and ordered him to pay the costs. They thanked Mr. Blanshard for bringing the case forward. Alderman Wilson said that he hoped the police would endeavour to stop furious driving, which had now become very common.

Sadly this wasn't the end of the story as Andrew died five days later. An inquest was held at the Adelaide Inn, New Bridge Street, in front of the coroner Mr. J.T. Hoyle. Judge Blanshard again gave evidence that Burton had been driving at a reckless pace of around six miles per hour and had almost collided with another cart. This had distracted Burton's attention but he proceeded on at the same pace and collided with Mr. Morton. Mr. Green, a mining engineer stated that the driver of the second cart had shouted at Burton and he had

turned round and had then hit Mr. Morton who could not have got out of the way. Dr. William Carr, of Eldon Square, gave evidence that he had attended Mr. Morton who had a superficial wound to the back of the head and a severe wound to the upper lip, and two or three teeth were knocked out. In his opinion the head wound had been caused by the fall and that the wound to the lip must have been caused by the shaft of the cart. He had continued to attend the deceased who recovered consciousness and the wounds healed. However he subsequently became incoherent for three days before dying of exhaustion due to the injuries he had received. Andrew was buried in Jesmond Cemetery on 20th March 1866, his life apparently valued at 10s (perhaps £25-£50 today).

One mystery about Andrew Morton remains; the 1851 census gives him born Ellingham, aged 59 corresponding to a birth date of 1791-2, while his death certificate suggests 1788-9. No baptismal record exists in Ellingham between these dates so I don't yet know the identity of his parents.

Sources
1841, 1851 census records
Death Certificate
Newcastle Journal & Newcastle
Courant March 1866

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