

Humshaugh Churchyard Story

Names – William Rutherford, Ann Rutherford and James Rutherford

Grave – To the south of the church

Text on Grave – The memory of William Rutherford who died at Haughton Jan 22nd 1862 aged 101 years.

Also Ann his wife who died at Humshaugh October 5th 1865 aged 96 years.

Also James their son who died at Whittington on Jan 25th 1837 aged 25 years.

The facts we are given puts William's birth date at about 1760. As online 18th century records are scant, it has been difficult to put together a profile for this family. William and Ann Rutherford appear at Haughton on the 1841, 1851 and 1861 census. On the earlier two, their address was Haughton Pastures, the tiny shepherd's cottage on the ridge behind Keepersfield Farm. In both 1841 and 1851, William was described as an agricultural labourer. In 1861, their address was Haughton Mid Town, which seems to have been nearer to the castle. At the age of 100, William was now described as a former agricultural labourer.

These documents suggest that William was a working man until a very advanced age, but there is a discrepancy in the ages recorded in the census. In 1841, he was recorded as being 60, in 1851 as 85, and in 1861 as 100. According to the documents, William had gained forty years in the twenty between 1841 and 1861. This is considerable, even though the 1841 census rounded adults' ages to the nearest 5 years. There are various reasons why people changed their ages on the census, so we will never know the truth. William was certainly believed to be 101 when he died and is recorded as such in the burial register, on January 25th 1862, by the curate George Brice. In January 1862, this death notice appeared in the Newcastle Courant.

At Haughton near Hexham, on 22nd, aged 101, much respected Mr William Rutherford, Two grandsons of the deceased were amongst the unfortunate men who lost their lives in the Hartley New Pit.

The above disaster, occurred on 16th January 1862, less than a week before William Rutherford's death and took the lives of 204 men and boys. His grandsons have been identified as two unmarried brothers, William Rutherford, 23 and John Rutherford, 25. These men can be traced through census documents as being the sons of John and Mary Rutherford and were born in the village of Bothal, between Morpeth and Ashington. Prior to the accident they were living in Hartley with their married sister's family. Their father, John, was born in the parish of St John Lee and was most likely the son of William and Ann, although documentary proof has not been found.

Ann Rutherford died on 5th October 1865 and was buried on 8th October. Curate George Brice records her age as 96, as is written on the headstone and her abode as Humshaugh, suggesting that she had moved from Haughton after the death of her husband. There were several families in the village, who may have been related to Ann.

It has been very difficult to identify Ann, but there is a marriage record of a William Rutherford to an Ann Thompson, at St John, Lee in March 1809. One of the census documents tells us that Ann was born at Hartburn in Northumberland and there was indeed an Ann Thompson baptised there in February 1784. This birthdate cannot be reconciled with Ann Rutherford's death age of 96 in 1865. She would only have been 81 when she died. As with her husband, there are discrepancies in Ann's age from census to census. She added on years each time the census was taken. In 1841, her age is recorded as being 50, most likely rounded to the nearest 5 years. In 1851 it was given as 73, and in

1861, as 96. She had gained 46 years over twenty years. This would put her birth year as being anywhere between 1765 and 1791, so it is more than likely that she was Ann Thompson, baptised in 1784. This is supported by the ages of her known children. Jane appears on the census with her parents and, if we are to believe the ages on the document, she would have been born when her mother was 53, which is highly unlikely in the early 19th century. James, also remembered on the headstone, will have been born when his mother was 47. However, Ann Thompson, born in 1784, will have been a suitable age to have been the mother of James and Jane. William's age could be correct, whilst Ann exaggerated hers to make the age gap seem less. We will never know.

Little has been found about their son James, except that he was baptised at St John, Lee in 1813 and, according to the headstone, died at the age of 25 on 13th June 1837 at Whittington. As he predates the census documents, it is difficult to ascertain anything else about his life.

The Rutherford headstone itself is very interesting, having a Star of David carved at the top. Although associated more with Judaism, it was sometimes used as a Christian symbol, the six points of the star representing the six attributes of God, power, wisdom, majesty, love, mercy and justice. Close inspection would suggest that the stone was prepared in advance. It is beautifully carved, but looks as though spaces have been left for dates and ages, which have been added later in a smaller, less professional script.

