

Who was Darby Tucker?

High Littleton Overseers' Accounts record on 5th Feb 1826 the cost of a pauper's funeral for "Darby" Tucker, yet no one of that name appears in either the High Littleton baptism, marriage or burial registers. Who was he? A surviving settlement examination and research into other records reveals a fascinating story.

James Tucker was born in High Littleton in 1770, the son of James Tucker, an engineer and blacksmith, who had married Ann Gould at Midsomer Norton the previous year. Soon afterwards the family removed to Midsomer Norton and, when son James was only 11 years old, his father died. Young James became a miner and worked for Mr James of Welton at Grove Coal Works for 5 or 6 years and later at Radstock and other places. In 1789 he was belatedly baptised at Midsomer Norton Church, his parents having omitted to have him done at High Littleton nearly 20 years previously!

At the age of 21 James left the pit and enlisted as a soldier in the 115th Regiment of Foot. Army service was normally for life but he was discharged in Northumberland two years later because he was incapacitated with a bad leg. James made his way south to Gloucestershire, where he worked as a tunnel driver at Newent for 9 months. Whilst there he married Eleanor Bonner at St. Nicholas Church, Gloucester, his younger brother William attending the wedding. James then went back to being a miner and worked in pits in Staffordshire and Derbyshire for 2 or 3 years and then in Lancashire, followed by a spell in Northumberland and Yorkshire for nearly a year before returning to Derbyshire. In about 1802 he rented a lodging room with a bed and some furniture for 2/- p.w. from George Jordan of Mesham near Ashby, finding his own board. Jordan's family lived in another part of the same house.

In 1805/6, shortly after his fifth child was born, James was in the seaport town of Liverpool, when he was press-ganged and taken aboard the frigate "Ceres". He remained on the Ceres for 5 years until he was discharged with a back injury after being bruised between some timbers. James returned to Mesham in Derbyshire, where he found his wife and family still living in the same lodgings. He subsequently acquired a couple of chaff beds and a little furniture of his own, walled up the door which communicated with the landlord's quarters and got the weekly rent reduced to 14d. (6 pence).

Three years after his return from sea, James left Derby for good. He arrived in High Littleton with his wife and 5 children in June 1813, some 40 years after first leaving and immediately sought parish relief from the overseers. James was duly examined and found to have a legal settlement in High Littleton. There were other James Tuckers living in High Littleton at the time and he must have acquired the nickname "Darby" for obvious reasons. He soon found employment as a miner. By 1823 he was living and working at Clandown. Clandown was a fairly new pit, coal having been found there in 1811 at a depth of 1,200 feet. During the following 2 or 3 years Darby was relieved periodically by the High Littleton overseers and received blankets from Mary Jones' Charity when he was ill. He died at Clandown in January 1826, aged 55 and was buried at Midsomer Norton. For the next 10 years his widow Eleanor received 2/- p.w. relief from High Littleton until Clutton Union ultimately assumed responsibility for her.

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