

Eliza Ryder and William Brown

Eliza Ryder (nee Brown) had a hard life. She was born in Quorn in 1838, the only child of Warden and Sarah Brown. They lived on Leicester Road, and Warden was an agricultural labourer. Not only would this job have been poorly paid, but Warden was also profoundly deaf and unable to speak. He appears on census returns, starkly labelled as 'deaf and dumb'. This must have been an added difficulty for the family, and despite Quorn Primary School opening in 1834, it is unlikely that the young Eliza attended, as there was a weekly charge, which it is doubtful that the family could afford. This is supported by the fact that Eliza never learnt to write her own name, and signed the 1911 census return with a cross.



Eliza and William

By the time Eliza was 13, in 1851, she was working as a seamstress, but shortly after this, disaster struck, and in June 1854 her father died aged only 50. He was buried in Quorn St Bartholomew's Parish Churchyard in an unmarked grave. Sarah and Eliza were forced to move from their home on Leicester Road, and found themselves living in a small cottage almost next to the Church.

It seems as though by 1861 the mother and daughter had settled into their new circumstances, with Sarah working as a charwoman and Eliza working in one of the lace factories in Quorn. However, this stability was to be short lived. Later that year, 23 year old Eliza found that she was pregnant. Whilst illegitimacy was not uncommon, it was still a terrible disgrace, and Eliza would have gone through some very troubled times. Her mother Sarah must have come to terms with the situation, as they continued to live together, and Eliza went on to give birth to a baby boy in 1862. She called him William.



The Banks cottages in the early 1900s

The 1871 census tells us that William was attending school, and between 1871 and 1881 Sarah, Eliza and

William moved to a cottage on the Banks in Quorn. This row of small 'two up, two down' cottages was owned by Quorn Town Lands Charity, and were allocated to the poorest people and those in need through age, health or disability. The first photograph was taken in the very early 1900s.

By examining various census returns it was possible to ascertain that the Browns lived in the third cottage from the north (Rawlins) end of the row. It then became apparent that Eliza and William were actually included in the photograph!



The Banks cottages in about 1909

The pavement outside the little homes was fairly wide, and there was a drop of over 3 feet (1 metre), straight down to the road. In about 1906 High Street was widened and railings were added to improve safety. The railings can be seen in the later picture.

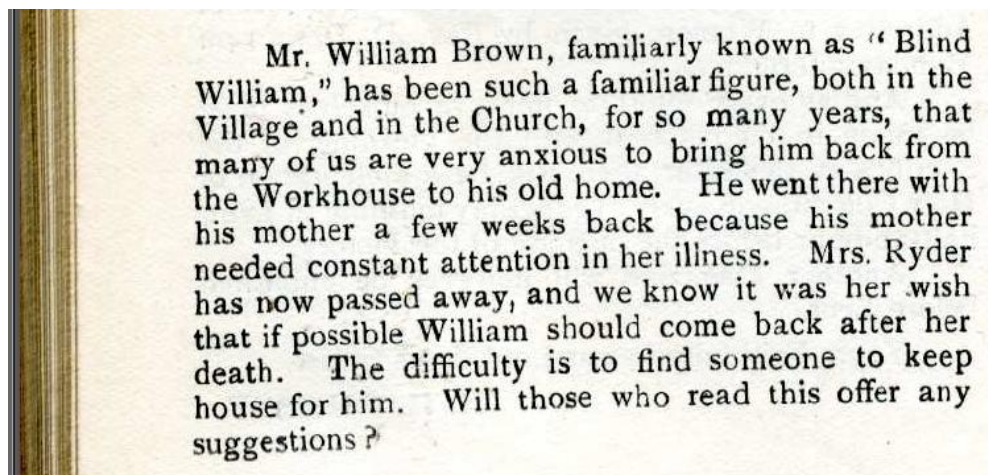
When William was 19, he appears on the 1881 census as an errand boy, but by 1891 he is declared as blind. Sometime in the intervening ten years, something must have happened, but we can only imagine what this might have been. His health or eyesight may have been poor in 1881, as at the age of 19 you would have expected someone in his circumstances to be employed as more than just an errand boy, or maybe there was an accident that took his sight. The 1880s were an eventful period for Eliza. In 1886 at the age of 49, Eliza married John Ryder, who worked at one of the many lime pits at Barrow. Less than a year later in March 1887, her mother Sarah died, at the age of 76 – this was a very good age in Victorian times. Like her husband Warden, she was buried in St Bartholomew's Churchyard in an unmarked grave. The 1901 census does not add much to our story, although, despite being blind, William's occupation is recorded as being a 'wood chopper'!

After only 10 years of marriage Eliza's husband, John Ryder, died early in 1896, and Eliza and her son William continued to live in their cottage on the Banks.

In 1911 Eliza was aged 73, William was 49 and declared as 'totally blind for 25 years'. Eliza was getting older and her health was deteriorating. In January 1914 she was so ill that she was confined to bed, and there was no alternative but for both her and William to go into

Barrow Union Workhouse on the border of Mountsorrel and Rothley. This would have been very harsh for both of them, especially as men and women were separated. They had always lived together and Eliza had acted as William's eyes, so his sense of bewilderment at his lonely and unfamiliar surroundings can only be imagined. Eliza died two weeks later on Sunday 25th January.

In the February Parish magazine, the vicar, Rev Henry Rumsey, made an appeal for someone to 'keep house' for him, so that he could leave the workhouse and return to Quorn. Sadly this didn't happen and William remained in the workhouse for twenty years until his death in November 1933, aged 71.



His body was returned to his home parish of Quorn for burial in an unmarked grave, as was normal with all deaths in the workhouse. The following item appeared in the local newspaper:

"The funeral of William Brown in the Churchyard on Wednesday, called to mind a once familiar figure. Until twenty years ago William lived with his mother on the bank, and since then, when he left the village after her death, has seldom been seen in Quorn. William who was 71 years of age when he died, was blind, but his affliction was always borne patiently and "Blind Billy", as he was known to everybody, was frequent in his attendance at the Parish Church on week days as well as Sundays, and he was a regular communicant. He was followed to his last resting place by his cousins Mr John Cross, Mr William Cross and Mrs L Harris. The funeral service was conducted by the vicar, Canon Rumsey, who made an allusion to the deceased as one who was formerly a very real part of the Church in Quorn."