

**A Short Memoir**

OF THE LATE

**MR. JOHN LAYCOCK,**

ORGAN BUILDER,

OF WEST CLOSES, GLUSBURN.

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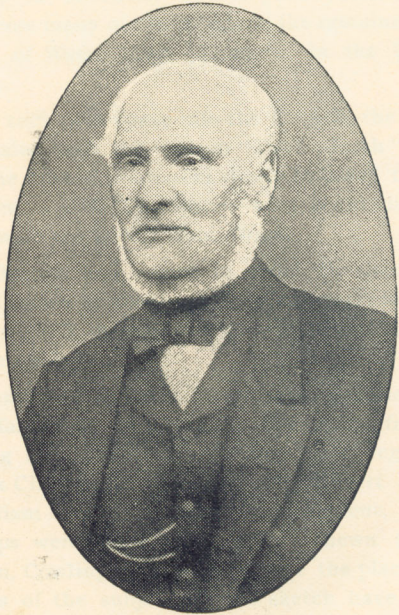
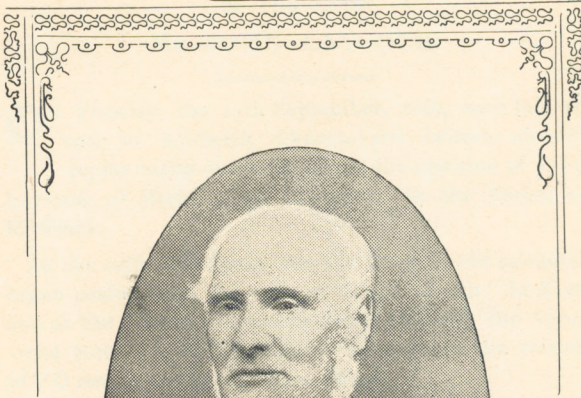
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THE LATE MR. LAYCOCK.

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ON Tuesday, the 17th September, 1889, were laid to rest in Kildwick Church-yard (where already repose many of his ancestors) the remains of John Laycock, of West Closes, Glusburn, in the Parish of Kildwick.

As the coffin was borne into the Church, the splendid organ pealed forth the solemn "Dead March" in *Saul*, and as the funeral procession slowly followed the Vicar—the Rev. A. D. C. Thompson—were heard the strains of "O rest in the Lord," from *Elijah*.

The affection and esteem in which the deceased was held was shewn by a wide circle of mourners from miles around, as well as from the immediate neighbourhood where he resided.

The family of Laycock is, perhaps, the oldest residential family in this parish, the name frequently occurring as "Laicocke" in the early registers of Kildwick Church. In the year 1671, Robert Laycocke and William Laycocke were Churchwardens, but what townships were represented is not shewn (probably Glusburn, Cowling, or Cononley were the places). The ancestors of the subject of this sketch have lived at West Closes for many generations.

John Laycock was a member of an old Cowling family, two heiresses of which were married to the Wainmans, of Carrhead, and the late W. B. Wainman, Esq., always retained a great personal friendship for the deceased.

"Old John's" tall and dignified figure, with his noble, cheerful countenance, was often seen moving about this district in the interests of his calling, and will be sorely missed. In face and figure he was a typical Northman, and his character was equally sturdy and honest. The possessor of a splendid physique, he used to think lightly, in his younger days, of walking thirty miles and upwards; and, prior to the construction of the railway, he frequently walked to Leeds to attend Morning Service at the Parish Church, when Dr. Wesley was the Organist.

Until an accident in his workshop deprived him of the use of the fingers of his left hand, he was the principal pianoforte tuner in the district. He was also unfortunate in having his leg broken on two different occasions; but he, nevertheless, enjoyed good health until recently, when he nominally retired from the business which he had founded, and which is now carried on by his son and late foreman, under the name of Laycock and Bannister. The last occasion on which he was present at an organ opening was at Clitheroe, and the last organ in which he took an active part in building was for Foulridge.

Born on November 24th, 1809, at Cook House, Glusburn, the deceased has passed the allotted span; and, now, full of years and honour, with eye undimmed and natural force almost unabated, and preserving his faculties to the last, he passed away on Friday, the 13th September, 1889, his end being hastened by a slight paralytic stroke.

As an instance of cultivation of great natural powers, by assiduous study and indomitable perseverance, amid adverse surroundings, his life is almost unique, and well

deserves a place among the records of those worthies, whose memory future generations will delight to honour.

After a few brief years of school life, under the tuition of the late Mr. Wilcock, of Crosshills (under whom he learnt the rudiments of the three R's), he commenced life as a hand-loom weaver; but whether he ever attained to excellence in this calling is doubtful. Certainly the bent of his genius was otherwise, as most of his play-hours and a great portion of what ought to have been his work-hours, were employed in making water-wheels and other mechanical contrivances.

He was soon after this apprenticed to his uncle, a cartwright; but his early training at the loom was not entirely fruitless, for in after years, when his powers were more developed, he supplied the looms throughout the district with "dobbies"—contrivances used in pattern weaving. As a cartwright he continued to work until his thirtieth year, devoting his hours of recreation to mechanics and physics.

Then came the turning point of his life, for about this time it was that an old organ used in Ickornshaw Wesleyan Chapel came into his possession, and after a minute examination of its mechanism he determined to construct one similar. He succeeded, and this his first essay at organ building was purchased by Mr. James Hartley, of Glusburn, now of Ilkley. Finally, in 1840, he discontinued the business of cartwright, and devoted himself to that of organ builder, with which his name is now closely connected. Though he never received an hour's training in the workshop of a professional builder, he was able to successfully compete with the best makers of the north, and examples of his skilled

workmanship are to be found in numerous places of worship throughout a wide range, extending as far as Liverpool and Birmingham.

His first large organ was placed in the Wesleyan Chapel, Crosshills, and afterwards removed to the meeting-house of another denomination in Bingley, and, after thirty years' service, it is still in use. But the great wish of his life was that he might have the opportunity of placing in the Parish Church of Kildwick (the Lang Kirk) and in the more famous sanctuary of Bolton Abbey, organs not only creditable to his musical skill, but worthy of their sacred and historic surroundings. The latter was granted, but the first portion of his wish was denied him, much to his disappointment. The organ in Bolton Priory Church has been admired by all who have heard its tones, the members of the Cavendish family, who were the chief contributors, especially being loud in their admiration of its qualities. In the construction of his organs he never sacrificed purity of tone and sweetness to loudness, while his keen sense of the artistic was a guarantee that the external appearance was in harmony with the architectural surroundings. He has received numerous unsolicited testimonials from Dr. Spark, of Leeds, and other well-known musicians, the first-mentioned of whom states that a more conscientious builder he has never met with.

Fifty years ago, or more, Mr. Laycock was one of a band of eager and intelligent students of the sciences (among whom may be mentioned Richard Petty, Thomas Hopkinson, John Turner, Samuel Bottomley, William Shuttleworth, and the Rev. Mr. Marsh), some of whom acquired considerable mechanical skill. Mr. Laycock's influence upon his *confreres* had many and various

effects, a fine example of which is seen in the successes of Mr. T. O. Dixon, of Steeton, formerly of Glusburn, who was at the time of his residence at the latter place intimately associated with Mr. Laycock, and no doubt had his fine inventive genius stimulated by this association.

It is a question whether his musical or mechanical powers were the more fully developed. Almost all inventors have at some portion of their lives devoted some time to clock-making. In the workshop at West Closes, an old clock hangs, which for thirty years has told the hours. It contains three wheels, only two having the power of motion. He constructed another clock which was made entirely of wood, and indicating not only the time of the day, but also the days of the month. Fifteen years ago in order to get additional power for his machinery he erected a set of windsails with movable shutters, which by a simple movement of levers can be opened or shut, and the whole thrown into action instantaneously. His greatest delight, however, was a turning lathe, provided with an eccentric chuck, entirely his own invention, by means of which he could turn out geometrical carvings of the most beautiful and delicate workmanship. Specimens of his turned work, in the form of snuff and tobacco boxes, egg cups, &c., were frequent gifts to friends, to bazaars, and in fact for the benefit of any deserving object. He never cared to make a monetary profit by his lathe work; his one object was to do good work—not to amass a fortune—and whatever his hand found to do, he did it with his might.

The subject of this memoir had a fine artistic taste, and though very modest in his pretensions, several landscapes bear evidence of his ability to use the brush.

It is but seldom that the opportunity to chronicle the details of a life so full of interest and example, presents itself; and, as the influence of such men extends beyond the present into the distant future, we present our readers with the before-going portrait of one of the most remarkable men this shire has given birth to, and one of whom Yorkshire may well feel proud.

Thus has passed away one of nature's noblemen, leaving to his family an untarnished name, and to the youth of the parish a most splendid example of difficulties overcome, and ends achieved by study and untiring perseverance. "He was a man, take him for all in all, we ne'er shall look upon his like again."

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[It is worthy of note that through the extension of the organ building business (founded by the subject of this pamphlet) the accommodation at West Closes was found to be inadequate, and new works, up-to-date in every department, were erected in Aire Street, Crosshills, where the thriving industry is successfully carried on with greater facility. The Kildwick Church organ, which was one of Mr. Laycock's ideals, is at present (March, 1903) undergoing restoration and thorough re-modelling at their works, including a blowing apparatus, the arrangement of which will be a novelty in the district.]

