

Death date for William Beattie,
first husband of Mary Ann Higham.

I am considering having to engage a professional researcher to try and resolve the following conundrum as 'Family Tree' magazine isn't taking on any new queries at present due to a backlog.

I have been searching for the death date of William Beattie on and off for many years, having another look every so often in the hope that I have become wiser in the ways of family history research, or more likely, that genealogical databases have gathered in more relevant records. The only document I have is his marriage certificate to Mary Ann Higham, my 2x great grandmother, which took place at St John's Church, Preston, Lancashire, in 1859. William was listed as being 22 years of age, and putting this with various census records, I have assumed he was born around 1837, in the Bolton area.

Mary Ann had seven children between 1860 and 1874, William appearing as father on three of their birth certificates and five of their baptism records. The second child, William Henry, died in the workhouse in 1861. On 18th February 1877, Mary Ann Beattie married widower Lawrence Hodge, at St Thomas's Church, Preston; he had seven surviving children of his own, and they went on to have four children together although two died in infancy. Their surviving daughter, Ada, was my great grandmother.

Taking a different route to try and find out about William, I tried to trace his father Richard, described as a [cotton] dresser on the marriage certificate. Much here is speculation, but I think he was Richard Bettie – the surname is spelt many ways - born in 1804 in Lancaster, who married Margaret (Peggy) Redfern in Stockport in 1823. She had an illegitimate daughter, Harriet, born two years previously, who became Richard's second wife in 1844! I cannot find any records of children born to Richard and Margaret, but there seems to have been a Robert, born about 1827, who married Mary Pritchard in Eccles, Lancashire, in 1849. They were living at 26 Poplar Street, Preston, on the 1861 census, with William and Mary Ann living at 10 Poplar Street with their first child, Alice.

On the 1871 census, Mary Ann Beattie was at 24 Poplar Street with her mother and sisters and various children, but no William. If I am right about him and his birth family, he was at 18 Duckett Street, Habergham Eaves, near Burnley, with his father Richard and step mother Harriet, and step siblings. Misleadingly, the entry also included a Hephizibah Beattie as his wife, but she is actually the sister of Mary Beattie (nee Pritchard) wife of his brother Robert! Also on the 1871 census in Habergham Eaves, is John Beattie, a 30 year old lodger with Thomas and Ann Coupe. He could well be another half sibling of William's, as he was born to Harriet Batty, a single woman in Bedford, near Leigh, Lancashire, in 1839. This Harriet was the daughter of Peggy Redfern, brought up with the Beattie family, before marrying her stepfather in 1844 at Edge Hill, Liverpool. (Her marriage certificate stated her father was an Isaac Downes.)

The truly unsettling fact, from my point of view, is that on the 1881 census there is a William Beattie lodging with Thomas and Ann Coupe, a 44 year old cotton weaver from Bolton, here listed as unmarried. Is this the same William Beattie for whom I cannot find a death date? Mary Ann Beattie had married Lawrence Hodge four years earlier, supposedly a widow; they certainly weren't in a position to get a divorce, so perhaps they just agreed to go their separate ways? Perhaps William followed another half sibling, Richard, a legitimate son of his father Richard and second wife Harriet, to America? Who knows, as Beattie is a difficult name to pinpoint with any certainty in emigration lists, with many going from Scotland to start a new life.