

A LOST ANCESTOR

Roger Holden 1854 -- 1883

In St Mary's old burial ground in Chipping, close to a very large tree, lies the grave of Sarah Holden, widow of Thomas Holden of Bowland. They were my great great grandparents. The death of my great grandfather, Roger Holden, is also recorded on the headstone. However, he is not in that grave nor in any other grave for that matter.

Roger was born at Townley House, Leagram, on 19th February 1854, the eldest son.



Townley House, Leagram, 1840 -- 50.
From a painting by John Weld of Leagram Hall.
Harris Art Gallery, Preston.

On 24th May 1882 at Hull Registry Office, Roger married Catherine Reed nee Bowers whose first husband had died at sea. Roger is described as a fisherman and they both lived on Hessle Road which was the centre of the fishing community in Hull. Their only daughter, Gertrude, was born on 3rd December the same year.

On Tuesday, 6th March 1883, Roger was fishing in the ketch, *Bernice*, on the Dogger Bank. The wind was blowing from the north and all the vessels in the area already had their sails double-reefed.* Then came heavy snow and the wind built up to hurricane force.

Hull had no daily paper at that time, only the Hull and Lincolnshire Times and its rival the Hull News. They both published on Saturday and reported the storm. By Thursday afternoon 80 vessels had returned to port, many dismasted with their sails split. Some flew flags at half mast. 18 lives had been lost, but the figure was expected to rise.

There was hardly any mention of the tragedy in the following week's papers, but on 24th March they confessed that they were hoping that missing ships might have turned up, but now the full tragedy had to be revealed. The worst storm in the memory of Hull fishermen had claimed 150 lives, and 23 fishing smacks had not returned from the fishing grounds 150 to 170 miles north east of Spurn Point.

On heaving up their trawl the crew of the *Ceres* found two bundles of tallies⁺ which bore the name of the *Bernice*. Since these were normally kept in the cabin, it was presumed that the *Bernice* had been broken up either by the heavy seas or by collision before sinking. The whole crew perished.

My great grandmother, Catherine, wrote of the tragedy to Thomas and Sarah Holden, her husband's parents, who then lived at Beatrix near Dunsop Bridge. They offered financial help in bringing up Gertrude, but for whatever reasons the offer was not taken up.

Catherine subsequently married a carter and lived on the south side of the Humber until her death in the 1930s. I remember Gertrude well, although she died when I was nine.

*Double reefed. Sails reduced.

+Tallies. Tokens used instead of cash to pay crew.

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Since contacting Chipping Local History Society, Brian has already been put in touch with one distant relation. He would be pleased to hear from any others.

