

DR. JOHN WATSON (1790/91-1847) OF BURNOPFIELD
AND HIS ASSISTANT DR. JOHN SNOW

During recent research into the early life of Dr. John Snow (1813-1858), a famous epidemiologist and anaesthetist,¹ information was obtained about John Watson of Burnopfield in County Durham, for whom John Snow worked as an assistant in his practice in 1834 and 1835. This biographical sketch of the Watson family is presented so that the material collected is available to local historians and others who may wish to undertake further research into this local family.

John Watson's early life and medical education

Very little is known about the early life of John Watson. His will records that he died on or about 9 July 1847 at the age of 56 years² and thus he must have been born between July 1790 and July 1791. In the 1841 census the enumerator's return records that his place of birth was County Durham. Where in the county he was born, however, is not known. His name appears in one of the earliest medical directories, that for the year 1847. The entry simply states:

WATSON, JOHN, Burnopfield, Lanchester, Durham,

no qualifications being recorded. Furthermore, his name does not appear in the records of the Society of Apothecaries of London as having obtained a licence to practice. That is, he was not a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries (L.S.A.). Nor does his name appear in the records of the Royal College of Surgeons of England as having passed the examination for membership of the College. That is, he was not a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (M.R.C.S.). The records of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, however, show that on 29 September 1812 Licentiatehip was granted to a John Watson following his serving as an apprentice to a well-known Edinburgh practice of Messrs. John Bell, Charles Wardrop and James Russell.³ Although the year of birth of John Watson of Burnopfield was compatible with this date of qualification, his name was not found in the records of the Russell practice held in the archives of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.⁴ Hence, it seems likely that John Watson of Burnopfield entered practice as a surgeon-apothecary before medical qualifications became mandatory and that he never obtained such formal qualifications. His tombstone was inscribed 'John Watson M.D.' (*see below*) but this degree was not recorded in the medical directory of 1847. It is doubtful, therefore, if he was a university graduate, particularly because he would certainly have wished to publicise that he was a Doctor of Medicine in his entry in the directory if he had, in fact, obtained this prestigious university degree.

The early nineteenth century was a period of medical reform during which the unqualified apothecary evolved into a qualified and licensed surgeon-apothecary, later becoming known as a general medical practitioner.⁵ Before the Apothecaries Act of 1815 medical education was diverse and practice unregulated. Nevertheless, a scheme for

the training of apothecaries had gradually emerged. This usually included apprenticeship to a respected apothecary, attendance at courses of lectures and a period of attachment to a hospital known as 'walking the wards'. After the Act of 1815 a similar but formal training scheme became the compulsory national training programme for surgeon-apothecaries or general practitioners in England and Wales. This comprised an apprenticeship to an established practitioner for five years, a period of hospital training of between six and twelve months and attendance at prescribed courses of lectures. Only after completion of this instruction was the student permitted to sit the examination for the L.S.A. In the early nineteenth century this examination was principally a medical diploma so that many students also obtained a surgical qualification, usually the M.R.C.S.

Following the Apothecaries Act all those in practice as principals before 1815 were exempted from licensing and became known as 'pre-1815' medical men. Those in training or working as assistants in 1815, however, were required to complete the new training programme before sitting the L.S.A. examination. For example, William Hardcastle, to whom John Snow was apprenticed in Newcastle upon Tyne before moving to Dr. Watson's practice, was in 1815 an assistant to Mr. Burnett, a surgeon in the city. Consequently, he was required to qualify L.S.A. and also obtained the M.R.C.S. before starting his own practice in 1818.

Practice in Burnopfield in the early nineteenth century

John Watson probably trained as an apothecary by serving an apprenticeship for between five and seven years from the age of about fourteen years, the usual age to begin apprenticeships to established apothecaries at that time. He may then have completed his medical education with a period of hospital training of about a year, including attendance at courses of lectures. If such was his informal training, he is likely to have set up in practice on his own account in Burnopfield between 1810 and 1815, when he was aged in his early twenties, the customary age at which apothecaries entered practice. He would thus have been a 'pre-1815' medical man and entitled to practice without the prescribed medical qualifications. The first record of his practice which was found was when he moved house to Burnopfield Hall (Figure 1):

The well known Watson family became tenants of Burnopfield [Hall or House] in the middle of the 1820's John Watson was a surgeon and later his son Henry William Watson took over the practice. The family remained in residence for nearly 100 years."

Presumably, therefore, he must have practised from other premises in the village for some years before moving to Burnopfield Hall. Also, several years before moving to this large imposing house, he married in Chester-le-Street, County Durham, on 1 December 1818



Fig. 1 Burnopfield Hall, 1994

John Watson of the Chapelry of Tanfield and Jane Toward of this Parish [Chester-le-Street] were married by licence this first day of December in the year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighteen By Me John Dodd Sub Curate. This Marriage was solemnized between us - signed John Watson and Jane Toward - in the presence of Sarah Dixon, Jane Watson, Abigail Jefferson, Wm. Pybus.⁷

This was almost certainly John Watson of Burnopfield because his first child, Nicholas John Watson, was born in July 1819 and his mother's name was Jane Watson, matching that of one of the witnesses to the signing of the marriage register. Furthermore, his wife's unusual maiden name of 'Toward' appears as a forename of two of his grandchildren, John Nicholson Toward Watson, who died in infancy in 1866, and Arthur Toward Watson, christened 24 June 1870 in St. Margaret's church, Tanfield, sons of Henry William Watson and Elizabeth.

John and Jane Watson had at least seven children, according to information recorded in the International Genealogical Index (IGI) and by Rand.⁸ The eldest, Nicholas John Watson, was christened at Tanfield on 6 October 1819, when he would have been about three months old. The second child, Henry William Watson, was christened on 28 February 1821 at Tanfield. The other five children were girls, namely: Jane Watson, christened on 16 February 1823 at Tanfield; Elizabeth Watson of Burnopfield, christened in 1824, died at the age of 24 days; Elizabeth Ann Watson, christened on 13 June 1829 at Hamsterley-by-Bishop [presumably Hamsterley near Bishop Auckland]; Margaret Watson of Burnopfield, christened in 1832; and Mary Watson, christened on 28 March 1834 at Hamsterley-by-Bishop [Auckland]. John Watson also had an illegitimate son by a local girl, reputedly an attractive red-haired cook who was one of his servants at Burnopfield Hall; this son was named George Henry Weedy and was born in 1832 or 1833.⁹

Burnopfield was at this time a small village about seven miles south-west of Newcastle upon Tyne (Figure 2) in the chapelry of Tanfield, a prosperous mining area, which at the 1831 census had a population of just under 2,500. In 1841 the parish contained 554 inhabited houses, fourteen uninhabited houses and one being built.¹⁰ The population of Burnopfield village itself was 467, with about 100 houses. Burnopfield Colliery was the principal coal mine. It was owned by John Bowes, William Hutt and others (*see below*). Burnopfield Hall or House, situated in the main street, known as Front Street, at the south end of the village, was the largest and most impressive dwelling. It was built in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and is now a grade 2 listed building. At present divided into three dwellings, it has three storeys and five bays, with a two-storey, four-bay wing on the right as seen from the front (Figure 1).

Most men in the parish in the early nineteenth century were employed in the mining industry. The miners and their families lived in overcrowded conditions, usually in single-roomed back-to-back terraced houses, many of which still existed in the area at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹ The whole family lived in the one room but, if there were four or more children, the family was entitled to an additional room in the roof accessed by ladder (Figure 3).



Fig. 2 Front Street, Burnopfield, 1906

The main roads appear to have been suitable for wheeled traffic by about this time because a coach service between Gateshead and Burnopfield was inaugurated in 1834

Aug 1st 1834. Monday, a new Joint stock coach, commenced to run between Gateshead and Stanhope, by way of Whickham, Burnopfield, Lanchester, Wolsingham, etc.. This is the first coach ever attempted on that line of road.¹²

In the nineteenth century a good reliable horse was one of the most essential requirements of a country practitioner and usually the most expensive item in his equipment.¹³ A horse and carriage were too costly for most country practitioners and in any case probably unsuitable for many of the by-roads at that time, certainly in Burnopfield, which is situated on a very steep slope leading down to the River Derwent. It seems likely, therefore, that John Watson had a horse rather than a horse and carriage on which to visit his patients in Burnopfield and the surrounding area. It is even possible that he managed without any form of transport and visited his patients on foot because, surprisingly, at the 1841 census, taken on Sunday 6 June¹⁴, the enumerator's return lists just two female servants in his household but no male servant who might have cared for a horse. This may not imply, however, that the Watsons did not possess a horse; another possible explanation for the absence of a groom is that some of the servants were away on census day. Of the family, only John Watson, his wife Jane and two daughters, Elizabeth, aged twelve years, and Margaret, aged eight years, were at home. Four of the children were away, suggesting that some staff may, indeed, have been given that Sunday off work. Nicholas John, aged twenty-two years, and Henry William, aged twenty years,

were training in medicine at this time (*see below*). It is not known why the two daughters, Jane, aged eighteen years, and Mary, aged sixteen years, were away from home.

About one mile from Burnopfield village was the large country mansion of Gibside, one of the homes of the Bowes family, the Earls of Strathmore¹⁵ (Figure 4). The mansion is now in ruins but the chapel has survived and was restored, together with the grand walk, by the National Trust in the early 1990s. The chapel and estate are now open to the public. The tenth Earl of Strathmore (1769-1820) had only one son, John, by his mistress Mary Millner (1787-1860), whom he later married on his death bed in 1820. It was this son John Bowes (1811-1885), the creator, together with his French wife Josephine, of the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, who would have been a contemporary of John Watson and John Snow. The Bowes lived at Streatlam Hall, another home of the Earls of Strathmore, while John Bowes allowed his mother, then the Dowager Countess of Strathmore, and her second husband, William Hutt (1801-1882), whom she married in 1831, to reside at Gibside Hall.

John Watson was known to the Bowes family and may have been their local doctor. A visit of a John Watson to Gibside, almost certainly Dr. John Watson of Burnopfield, was recorded by William Hutt and is likely to have taken place in the 1830s:

I was showing Watson (the wizard of Burnopfield) the pictures all over the house a few days ago to his great illumination. He stopped opposite the Lucretia and evidently noticed it with great interest; at last he said, 'Was that Lady with the poniard, Sir, one of the family?'¹⁶

The picture to which he referred was described as formerly attributed to Guido Reni, and shows Lucrece plunging a dagger into her heart.

John Watson appears to have been a man of some local importance. Although poor mining families must have made up most of the patients in his practice, there would have been many well-to-do families in the neighbourhood, such as the Bowes and Hutt families, who consulted him. He was also part-owner of Hamsterley coal mine, Medomsley, County Durham¹⁷ and his will records his ownership of local freehold property in Burnopfield, Bourne Crook and Bryans Leap valued at £2,000. He was able to leave his wife in comfortable circumstances and bequeath to his three daughters the sum of £1,000 each¹⁸. In 1845 he was apparently a member of the Tanfield 'Gentlemen of the Twelve' or Select Vestry.¹⁹ Wade²⁰ describes this body of local gentlemen, under the chairmanship of the resident clergyman of the parish, as being responsible for the levying of rates, relief of the poor, administration of the workhouse, repair of the highways and other parish business. They were made up of the major land owners, such as Sir John Eden of Beamish Park, the Marquis of Bute and John Bowes of Gibside. The earliest record of their meeting in Tanfield was in 1722. Later, in the middle of the nineteenth century, this body was replaced by locally elected councils and boards of guardians, the beginning of the modern form of democratic local government. No confirmation of Dr. Watson's important local status and association with the Bowes family could be found in the Strathmore Papers. In the index to the catalogue of these papers there were nineteen entries referring to a John Watson but these concerned an architect employed by the family. None mentioned Dr. John Watson of Burnopfield.²¹



*Fig. 3 Miner's Cottage interior, Marley Hill,
from L.W. Darra, Report ... on the Sanitary Circumstances of the Whickham Urban District
(1906)*

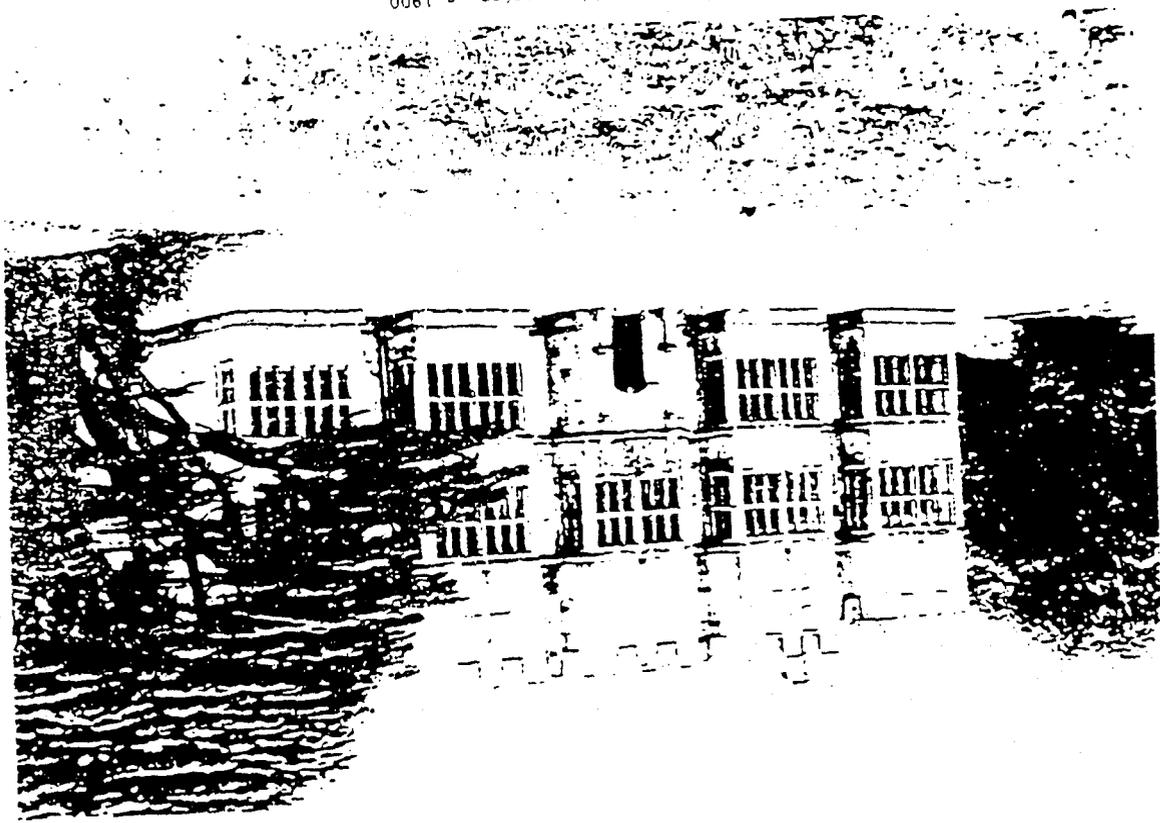
John Snow, assistant to Dr. Watson 1833-1834

John Snow was born in York on 15 March 1813. Little is known of his early education, except that he went to a private school in York. In 1827, at the age of fourteen years, he began his medical training as an apprentice to William Hardcastle, surgeon, of Westgate, Newcastle upon Tyne. Dr. Hardcastle was also the doctor to the collieries in Killingworth, north-east of Newcastle. When cholera arrived in the district in 1832 Dr. Hardcastle sent John Snow to care for the afflicted mining population of the village, where Snow gained his first experience of the disease. He left Dr. Hardcastle's practice in 1833 to become assistant to Dr. John Watson for twelve months.²²

He left Newcastle in 1833, and engaged himself as assistant to Mr. Watson of Burnop Field, near Newcastle. Here he resided for twelve months, fulfilling the assistant duties; regarding which it can be said, and that from analogy, that they were neither without their anxiety nor their reward. Leaving Burnop Field in 1834-35, ...

It is not known why Snow chose to become an assistant instead of following the usual course for a young apothecary of continuing his training in hospital and attending courses of lectures so that he could sit the examination of the Society of Apothecaries for his licence to practice. Ellis²³ suggested that Snow, who came from a poor family,

0061-C (Upside mansion, c.1900)



was likely to have been short of money and probably wished to earn sufficient funds to continue his medical studies in London. Nor is it known why Snow chose Dr. Watson's practice in Burnopfield for his assistantship. It may have been simply that he found this vacancy in a local mining district and that it suited his experience at the time he had completed his apprenticeship. A less likely possibility is that John Bowes of Gibside may have influenced the move. Bowes had extensive mining interests; indeed the Bowes family wealth came from coal mining. He was part-owner not only of Burnopfield Colliery but also of mines further afield in the North-East. He may well have been acquainted with Dr. Hardcastle as a mining doctor and have been aware of Snow's wish for an assistantship. Furthermore, he could have known of Dr. Watson's need for help in his practice and have suggested the move. No evidence, however, was found to support this supposition.

Whatever the reason for Snow's move, he does not appear to have been very happy in Dr. Watson's practice. Richardson²⁴ records a description by Snow of one practice in which he worked and which can only have been Dr. Watson's practice. The event he described must have taken place in Burnopfield Hall in 1833:

Once, when a friend of ours related at dinner some of the economical measures of an odd old doctor who was known to some of the company, he gave us an anecdote, showing how a man may work too hard for his money. 'When I was a very young man' he [Snow] said, 'I went for a brief period to assist a gentleman who had a large parochial practice. I found his surgery in a very disorderly state, and thinking on my first day with him that I would enhance myself in his opinion by my industry, I set to work, as soon as his back was turned, to cleanse the Augean stable. I took off my coat, cleared out every drawer, relieved the counter of its unnecessary covering, relabelled the bottles, and got everything clean as a new pin. When the doctor returned, he was taken by storm by the change, and commenced to prescribe in his day book. There was a patient who required a blister, and the worthy doctor, to make dispensing short, put his hand in a drawer to produce one. To his horror, the drawer was cleansed. "Goodness!" cried he, "why where are all the blisters?" "The blisters", I replied, "the blisters in that drawer? I burnt them all; they were old ones". "Nay my good fellow", was the answer, "that is the most extravagant act I ever heard of; such proceedings would ruin a parish doctor. Why, I make all my parochial people return their blisters when they have done with them. One good blister is enough for at least half a dozen patients. You must never do such a thing again, indeed you must not". I did not, for he and I soon found a good many miles of ground between us, though we never had any serious misunderstanding'.

Snow became a vegetarian and a strong supporter of the temperance cause whilst in Newcastle:²⁵

During the third year of his apprenticeship, viz., when he was seventeen years old, he formed an idea that the vegetarian body-feeding faith was the true and the old; and with that consistency which throughout life attended him, tried the system rigidly for more than eight years. He was a noted swimmer at this time, and could make head against the tide longer than any of his omnivorous friends ...

At or about the same time that he adopted his vegetarian views, he also took the extremity of view and of action, in reference to the temperance cause. He not only joined the ranks of the total abstinence reformers, but he became a powerful advocate of their principles for many succeeding years ...

No accounts were found of these aspects of Snow's life during his year in Burnopfield. There can be little doubt, however, that he would have remained a teetotaler, but whether or not the Watson household accommodated his dietary preferences is less certain. Indeed, it is possible that his vegetarianism gave rise to difficulties, another reason why he was unhappy in the practice. This suggestion is perhaps supported by Richardson's emphasis on how helpful was the household when Snow moved to his second assistantship in Pateley Bridge in West Yorkshire:

His culinary peculiarities were, however, attended to with great kindness.²⁶

Apart from these extracts from Snow's biography, no original material of his stay in Burnopfield was found. No reference to Snow was made in the book by Hardy²⁷, nor in the index to the catalogue of the Strathmore papers²⁸, nor was any reference known in the archives of the Bowes Museum.²⁹ Snow probably left as soon as his contract would allow, that is after twelve months, in the summer of 1834, and moved to Pateley Bridge to become assistant to Dr. Joseph Warburton in his rural practice in upper Nidderdale for eighteen months, where he was obviously much more contented.³⁰

In the summer of 1836 Snow returned home to York for a few months and then in the autumn left for London so as to complete his medical education. He attended the Hunterian School of Anatomy and the Westminster Hospital and qualified L.S.A. and M.R.C.S. in 1838. He graduated M.B. in London University in 1843 and proceeded to M.D. in the following year. Having first set up in practice in Frith Street, Soho, in 1838, he later moved to Sackville Street³¹, both in the parish of St. James, Westminster. Snow later achieved national fame in epidemiology by his discovery of the mode of spread of cholera³² and in anaesthetics by designing an inhaler for the administration of ether.³³ His fame as an anaesthetist was such that he was called upon to administer chloroform to Queen Victoria at the birth of her son, Prince Leopold, on 7 April 1853³⁴ John Snow died at the young age of 45 years following a stroke³⁵ and was buried in the Brompton cemetery, London.

The Burnopfield practice after John Watson's death

John Watson died at the age of 56 years in 1847:

John Watson buried July 13th 1847, aged 56 years, St. Margaret's Tanfield.³⁶

There were no records of the location of the gravestone in the churchyard of St. Margaret's, Tanfield, nor had the vicar any knowledge of the stone. Furthermore, it was not found on searches of the churchyard in 1994. However, handwritten notes by Ralph Powton, the local historian, and held by his daughter, contain a record of the inscription said to have been on the gravestone in Tanfield churchyard.³⁷ This transcription contains several errors which have been corrected with information obtained from other sources and reads as follows:

This tablet is erected in memory of the late John Watson, M.D., Burnopfield, by his bereaved widow and sorrowing family from whom he was taken at the age of 56 years in the year of our Lord 1817 [1847³⁸] Also in memory of Nicholas John, eldest son of the above named John Watson, who died in Sierra Leone on 15th Jan. 1861 [1852³⁹] in the 32nd year of his age. Jane, wife of the above named John Watson died on the 22nd December 1868 in the 79th year of her age. Also in memory of Margaret Watson, daughter of the above John Watson, who died on 11th March 1879 in the 17th year [47th year, she was christened in 1832⁴⁰] of her age. Interred in Willesden Cemetery, London. Also in memory of Henry William Watson, second son of the above named John Watson, born 1821, died Mar. 4th 1886 in his sixty-sixth year. Interred in Burnopfield Churchyard.

This stone is erected in affectionate remembrance of John Nicholson Toward Watson, infant son of Henry William and Mary Elizabeth Watson of Burnopfield who died February 22nd 1866 aged 11 weeks.

The word 'tablet' in the first part of this transcription suggests a plaque within St. Margaret's church but none is known to exist. The second part of the transcription clearly refers to a gravestone and there was, indeed, such a stone with this inscription still standing in the churchyard in 1994. It seems that Powton's notes may have become muddled but, even so, they provide additional useful information about the Watson family.

John Watson's eldest son Nicholas qualified L.S.A. in 1842 and may have been working in the practice at the time of his father's death in 1847:

Nicholas John Watson L.S.A. 28.7.1842. Son of Mr. John Watson of Burnopfield, Durham, Surgeon. Baptised 6.10.1819. Apprenticed to Mr. Thomas Leighton, Newcastle. Evidence of apprenticeship dated 30.7.1833. Attended Guy's Hospital for 12 months and Hospital de la Charite for 3 months.⁴¹

His admission to Guy's Hospital was recorded on 12 October 1836.⁴² The records of the Royal College of Surgeons of England show that he was born in Tanfield, Durham on 31 July 1819 and qualified M.R.C.S. as well as L.S.A. in 1842 and that he left general practice in 1850 to become an army surgeon with the rank of Staff Assistant-Surgeon and died in Sierra Leone in 1852.⁴³

His younger brother, Henry William Watson, qualified a year later in 1843. He probably joined Nicholas in the Burnopfield practice, becoming principal after Nicholas left to join the army in 1850.

Henry William Watson. L.S.A. 19.7.1843. Son of Mr. John Watson of Burnopfield, Durham. Baptised 8.2.1821 [*The IGI records his baptism on 28 February 1821*]. Apprenticed to his father. Evidence of apprenticeship dated 1.9.1835. Later to Thos. Greenhow, Newcastle. Evidence of apprenticeship dated 20.4.1839. Attended Newcastle Infirmary for 12 months, Guy's Hospital for 13 months, Hospital de la Charite for 3 months and Aucclatur [*difficult to read*] for 3 months.⁴⁴

At the 1851 census the enumerator's return records Henry William Watson aged thirty years as a general practitioner at Burnopfield Hall. He was living with his mother Jane Watson, the head of the household, a widow aged sixty-one years, but her place of birth was not given. The return lists his three sisters, Jane, aged twenty-seven years, Elizabeth Ann, aged twenty-one years, and Mary, aged eighteen years, all born in Tanfield. Listed also was a medical assistant, John Tho. Younger, aged twenty-four years, born in Newcastle, and a servant Catherine Gillis, aged twenty-one years, born in Scotland.

The Watson practice appeared in the local newspaper in 1855 because of the notorious murder of Dr. Watson's assistant, Mr. Robert Stirling⁴⁵, an event described by Powton⁴⁶ and also recorded by Fordyce as follows:⁴⁷

THE BURNOPFIELD MURDER. Mr. Robert Stirling, assistant to Mr. Watson, surgeon, of Burnopfield, was murdered at mid-day, on the 1st of November, 1855, in a lonely road called Smailes's Lane, about a mile north from the village, and in the parish of Winton. He had been little more than a week in the service of Mr. Watson and was returning from visiting the patients of that gentleman when he was shot by some persons lurking near the road, his throat cut, and his head and face frightfully injured, apparently by the butt of a gun. His watch, money and lancets were taken from his pockets and his body was dragged through a fence on the south side of the road and deposited amongst the bushes in a plantation which covers a steep declivity, where it was not discovered till about a week afterwards.

Two men were arrested and charged with the murder. One was John Kane, who kept an illicit still near Smailes Lane. The other was Richard Rayne, a blacksmith, of Winton. Their trial took place in the following year, in July 1866. Both were acquitted.⁴⁵ The culprit(s) were never found. Robert Stirling was buried in the churchyard of St Margaret's church, Tanfield (Figure 5). In 1994 the gravestone was in a good state with a legible inscription:

Sacred to the Memory of Robert Stirling, Surgeon of Burnopfield, who was barbarously murdered in the Smailes Lane near Rowlands Gill Gate, between one and two o'clock P.M. on the first day of November AD 1855, aged 25 years. He was a native of Kirkinulloch, Dumbartonshire. Beloved for his virtues, admired for his talents, and respected for his untiring industry. His untimely end was deeply lamented by all who knew him. This stone is erected by his bereaved parents who sorrow indeed, yet not as much as those who have no hope.

By the time of the 1861 census Henry William Watson was married with four children. The enumerator's return lists at Burnopfield House: Henry William Watson, head of the household, aged forty years, general practitioner, Mary Elizabeth, his wife, aged thirty years, born in Scotland, and four children: Jane Rachel, aged eight years, Henry William, aged six years, Elizabeth Highat, aged four years, and Winifred Mary, aged one year. Listed also were William A.C. Ward, aged fifteen years, surgeon's apprentice, born in Lanchester, and three house servants, Alice Ridley, aged twenty years, Ann Fairbridge, aged eighteen years, born in Folkestone, and Maria Huggins, aged twenty-four years. It is not known why Henry Watson's mother, Jane Watson, and her daughters do not appear in this census nor the censuses of 1871 and 1891. Presumably they must have moved away. Possibly Jane and her unmarried daughters moved out of Burnopfield House and lived elsewhere in the village when her son Henry William married in the 1850s. Jane Watson died in 1868 aged 79 years and was buried in the churchyard of St. Margaret's, Tanfield, where her name was recorded on the Watson gravestone (*see above*).

The 1871 census enumerator's return shows that by then there were five more children in Henry William Watson's family, but his eldest son, also named Henry William Watson, who would then have been aged sixteen years, was away from home on census day. The return lists Henry William Watson, head of the household, aged fifty years, general practitioner in medicine, Mary Elizabeth, his wife, aged forty years, and eight children, Jane Rachel, aged eighteen years, Elizabeth Highat, aged fourteen years, Winifred M., aged eleven years, Mary Elizabeth, aged nine years, Alice Edith, aged seven years, Eleanor Maud, aged five years, Mabel Marian, aged three years, and Arthur Toward, aged ten months. There were three servants in the house on census day, Mary Margaret Gibson, aged thirty-seven years, a cook, born in Edinburgh, Mary Temple, aged twenty-eight years, a housemaid, born in Tweedmouth, Northumberland, and Martha Corner, aged twenty-four years, a nurse, born in Heworth, Durham. It seems that Henry William and Mary Elizabeth Watson had altogether eleven children, one of whom, Nicholson Toward, died in infancy.



Fig 5 Stirling gravestone in St. Margaret's, Tintfield (buried) 1994

Henry William Watson died on 4 March 1886. He was a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and a brief obituary appeared in *Plarr's Lives of Fellows of the Royal College* ... :

Watson, Henry William (1821-1886) MRCS 6.5.1842, FRCS 18.11.1858; L.S.A. 1843. Studied at Guy's Hospital, and practised at Burnopfield [probably a typographical error for Burnopfield] Durham, where he died on March 4th, 1886.⁴⁹

He was buried in the family grave in the churchyard of St. James, Burnopfield. The parish of Burnopfield had been created on 31 December 1871 and St. James's church was built as the parish church for the village in 1873, taking the place of St. Margaret's church, Tanfield, which had previously been the parish church for a larger district. The inscription on the gravestone was recorded in Powton's notes:⁵⁰

Dr. Henry William Watson, born 5th February 1821, died 4th March 1886 aged 65 years. Mary Elizabeth, his wife, born 24th January 1831, died April 1st 1917, also their sons:- Henry William, who died in Texas 15th July 1891 aged 36 years. Arthur Toward (Major), King's Royal Rifle Corps. Killed in Flanders 4th August 1917 aged 47 years. Alfred Boyd who died in Kansas City, 15th July 1902, aged 30 years.

It appears that the Watson practice in Burnopfield came to an end with Henry William Watson's death in 1886.

An entry in the Durham probate registers shows that the will of Dr Henry William Watson was proved three years after his death, on 24 April 1889. He left a substantial personal estate with a gross value of £22,472 18s. 4d., net of £14,033 3s. 4d.⁵¹ His family must have been well provided for and thus were able to remain residents of Burnopfield House until the early 20th century. At the 1891 census, taken on Sunday 5 April, the enumerator's return lists Henry William Watson's widow, aged sixty years, four of his children and a grandchild. As well as Henry W. Watson, J.P., aged thirty-six years, a mine-owner who was unmarried, Mary E. Lane, a married daughter, aged twenty-eight years, Alice E. Watson, aged twenty-seven years, Arthur T. Watson, aged twenty years, a student undergraduate, and Charles W. Lane, aged two years, Dr. Henry William Watson's grandchild, born in India, there was a visitor, John D. Dunville, aged twenty-four years, born in Ireland, together with a household staff of six servants, some of whose names were difficult to read: Mary A. Hughes, aged fifty-four years, born in Gosforth. Margaret Spoon, aged twenty-seven years, born in Gateshead, Elizabeth Stirey, aged twenty-eight years, born in Lanchester, Mary J. Armstrong, aged twenty-five years, born in Gateshead, Jane Smith, aged eighteen years, born in Cambois, Northumberland, and Mary L. Salmon, aged thirty-three years, born in Garboldisham, Norfolk.

In July 1891, four months after this census, Henry William Watson died of malarial fever while on a visit to the U.S.A. (*see above*). Being unmarried he must have left a valuable estate to his mother. He was the principal owner of Hamsterley Colliery and an extensive landowner, most of his property presumably having been inherited from his father. He was also a magistrate at Consett and Lanchester. His mother, Mary Elizabeth

Watson, lived for another sixteen years. She died in April 1917 in Broadmeadows in Selkirk in Scotland but her place of abode was given as Burnopfield in the entry in the Durham probate registers.⁵² According to the *Durham County Advertiser*⁵³ she had gone to stay at Broadmeadows about eighteen months previously in the hope that the change might improve her failing health but she died there on 8 April 1917. (The gravestone in St. James's churchyard, Burnopfield gives the date of death as 1 April: see above) The funeral took place on Thursday 12 April at St. James's church, Burnopfield, where the principal mourners were Captain and Mrs. Watson, son and daughter-in-law, Mr. John Watson, grandson, Miss Anna Watson, grand-daughter, Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith and Lady Smith, son-in-law and daughter, Master Smith (London), Miss Mabel Watson, Miss Watson, Mrs. Lane (County Meath, Ireland) and Mrs. Mitchell (Jesmond Towers), daughters, as well as Major and Mrs. Belfield. Captain and Mrs. Watson, Mr. John Watson and Miss Anna Watson may have been living in Burnopfield House. Possibly they were the last of the Watson family to reside there.

It was only a few years later, in 1925, following Mrs. Mary Watson's death in 1917, that the Watson family finally left Burnopfield after about a century of residence at Burnopfield House.⁵⁴

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