

Witham/Dunn: Draft of Terry's Piece for website

The facts

Father Thomas Witham became parish priest in 1830 and stayed 10 years. He was the son of Henry Witham of Lartington Hall, who had been born Henry Silvertop, brother of George Silvertop (who had inherited Minsteracres) but changed his name by Royal licence to become the Squire of Lartington Hall.

When Father Witham came to Stella, the owner of the hall was widow Bridget Dunn, nee Todd. The previous owner, Matthias Dunn, who had the quarter share in the Stella Grand Lease, had died in 1825.

Bridget Dunn's nephew, Matthias William Dunn, was living at Hedgefield House with his first wife Mary Dunn (nee Emerson).

Mary Dunn having died in 1838, Matthias William Dunn married again three years later. In 1841, at the age of 61, he married the sister of Father Witham, who had left Stella the previous year. Emma Witham of Lartington Hall was 30 years younger than her new husband.

On the 1851 census, she is shown aged 41 at Hedgefield House with her husband Matthias William Dunn 30 years her senior and a house full of servants

He died 1858 but what became of Emma after that remains a mystery since she died Southport, Lancashire in 1863 however her Will still records her "of Hedgefield House". Nor can I trace her anywhere in the 1861 census, at which point Hedgefield House is occupied by Matthew Liddell, his wife and servants. Matthew Liddell was another wealthy Catholic landed colliery owner who by 1870 was living Prudhoe Hall where he had built a new Catholic church within the grounds later to be removed brick by brick and rebuilt where it is today. So Emma must have let Hedgefield House to Matthew Liddell but where she was and what she was doing in Southport where she died 1863 remains a mystery.

Terry's account



Born 1941 among my earliest memories was walking the dog through the pit fields from Woodside to meet my step-father with his pipe and tobacco in the 1940's coming out of the Emma pit, yet almost 80 years passed no oral tradition appears to exist which tells us who this lady Emma actually was even though the pit village of Emmaville was built to house miners employed there and later a street of houses named Emma View whilst the question often arises who Emma was so I decided to do my own research.

John Terence Arthur (born 6th September 1941) with his brother and father at South Shields in c1952. (John Thomas Lynch was the boys' stepfather, their father having been killed. Peggy Arthur nee Keenan married John Thomas Lynch 21st October 1944 at St Agnes' Church.)



COPYRIGHT
ROT. 1

EMMA COLLIERY, CRAWCROOK, NR. RYTON.

LILYWHITE LTD.,
SOWERBY BRIDGE.

Sinking of the Emma pit, first called the Townley Main New Winning 1845 owned by the Stella Coal Company founded in 1839 and not long before Matthias William Dunn a wealthy landowner who built Hedgefield House and lived there became a major shareholder. In the 1851 census Matthias William Dunn by then aged 71 was living at Hedgefield House with his wife Emma Dunn 40 years his junior with many servants including a butler. The name Emma does not occur in any of the other families of the directors of the Stella Coal Company making Emma Dunn the most likely lady who the Emma pit was named after, so who was she?

With no sign of an Emma Dunn in either 1841 or 1861 census returns and needing to find her surname I switched my attention to Matthias William Dunn and hit lucky when I found a record of his marriage to Emma Witham reported in Fordyce's 'Remarkable Events' for the year 1841.

Matthias William Dunn, Esq., of Hedgefield, near Stella, on the Tyne, was married November 24th, at the chapel of Lartington Hall, near Barnard Castle, the seat of H. T. M. Witham, Esq., to Emma, eldest unmarried daughter of that amiable and deservedly popular gentleman. The happy pair set off after the marriage for Penrith, on their way to Edinburgh. Mr. Witham, during the present week, has been entertaining a distinguished body of friends at his residence.

Matthias William Dunn, Esq., of Hedgefield, near Stella, on the Tyne, was married 24th November at the chapel of Lartington Hall, Nr Barnard Castle the seat of H.T.M. Witham Esq. to Emma his eldest surviving daughter. At last with a surname I found Emma's baptism, her full name Emma Seraphina Mary, her baptismal record having survived in the Durham City Jesuit church registers, only other clues her godfather was a Salvin of Croxdale and godmother a Muncaster of Crosby.

1809 . Die 24^a Maii 1809 nata et eadem die baptizata
 fuit Emma Seraphina Maria Witham filia Henrici
 et Eliæ Witham (Cliff) Patris fuit Gulielmus
 Salter (Crosdale) et matris Catharina Blundell
 (Crosby).
 a me Edwardo Walsh
 M.D.C.C.C.

Having otherwise drawn a blank with Emma I then focussed on her father H.T. M. Witham Esq. of Lartington Hall and found myself on a roll. In normal circumstances Emma's surname would have been Silvertop as her father was born Henry Thomas Silvertop of Minsteracres but by fortune his mother Mrs Catherine Silvertop nee Lawson had inherited the vast Maire Estates which included Lartington Hall and about 1811 gifted it to her favourite son Henry William to place in his care for him and his large family of 10 children to live in thus he took his wife's name Witham (an heiress too) to become the Squire of the Lartington Hall estate as well four other estates he would eventually inherit.



Lartington Hall, c.1860

Of Emma's father there is so much on record which even touches on your research as a friend of John Bowes of Streatham who founded the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle it's hard to know where to start but first the Teeside Mercury gave an account of his family of ten children in 1896 which I found very useful to start with (see) 3rd image and because I have Frank Dobson's 'The life and times of George Silvertop' his older brother who inherited Minsteracres where you get the occasional reference to Henry Thomas and also includes a portrait of him that can no longer be traced and another of Lartington Hall where George Silvertop evidently was a frequent visitor as many of his letters were addressed from there.



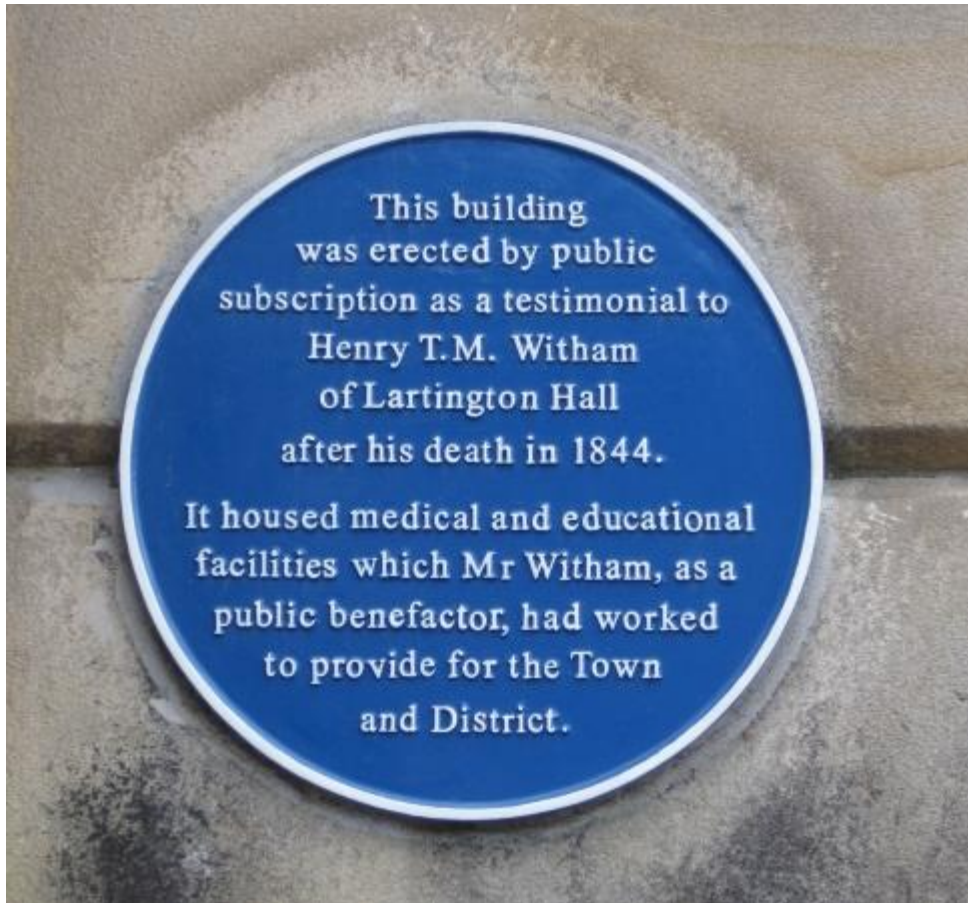
Using Frank Dobson's book some useful notes. George and Henry Silvertop had been at Douai College during the storming of the Bastille in July 1789 but the collage had remained reasonably safe until serious disturbances in 1792 forced it to be evacuated and the two boys had to make their own way home where their father met them at Bristol. George never married but Henry was only 21 when he married heiress Eliza Witham in 1800 and by 1811 two years after Emma was born thanks to his mother and his wife's legacies found himself squire of Lartington Hall and four other estates with a new name Edward Thomas Maire Witham dropping Silvertop altogether.



However E.T. M. W. had a major weakness in gambling on the horses and found himself in so much debt by the early 1820's he took flight across the border to Scotland to escape his creditors and settled in Edinburgh where he gained respectability as a geologist of note. I am assuming Emma still of school age lived with them at that stage, (given Emma had her honeymoon in Edinburgh might have had something to do with a connection there, (one of her younger sisters, a nun is also buried there and her older sister Catherine married there in 1824) It is not known exactly Henry he returned from Edinburgh but before he could be summoned home from across the border his mother's estates of Hardwick and Hutton Henry as well as his wife's estate of Cliffe and another had to be sold leaving him only with Lartington he was squire of before and in line to inherit less the other four.

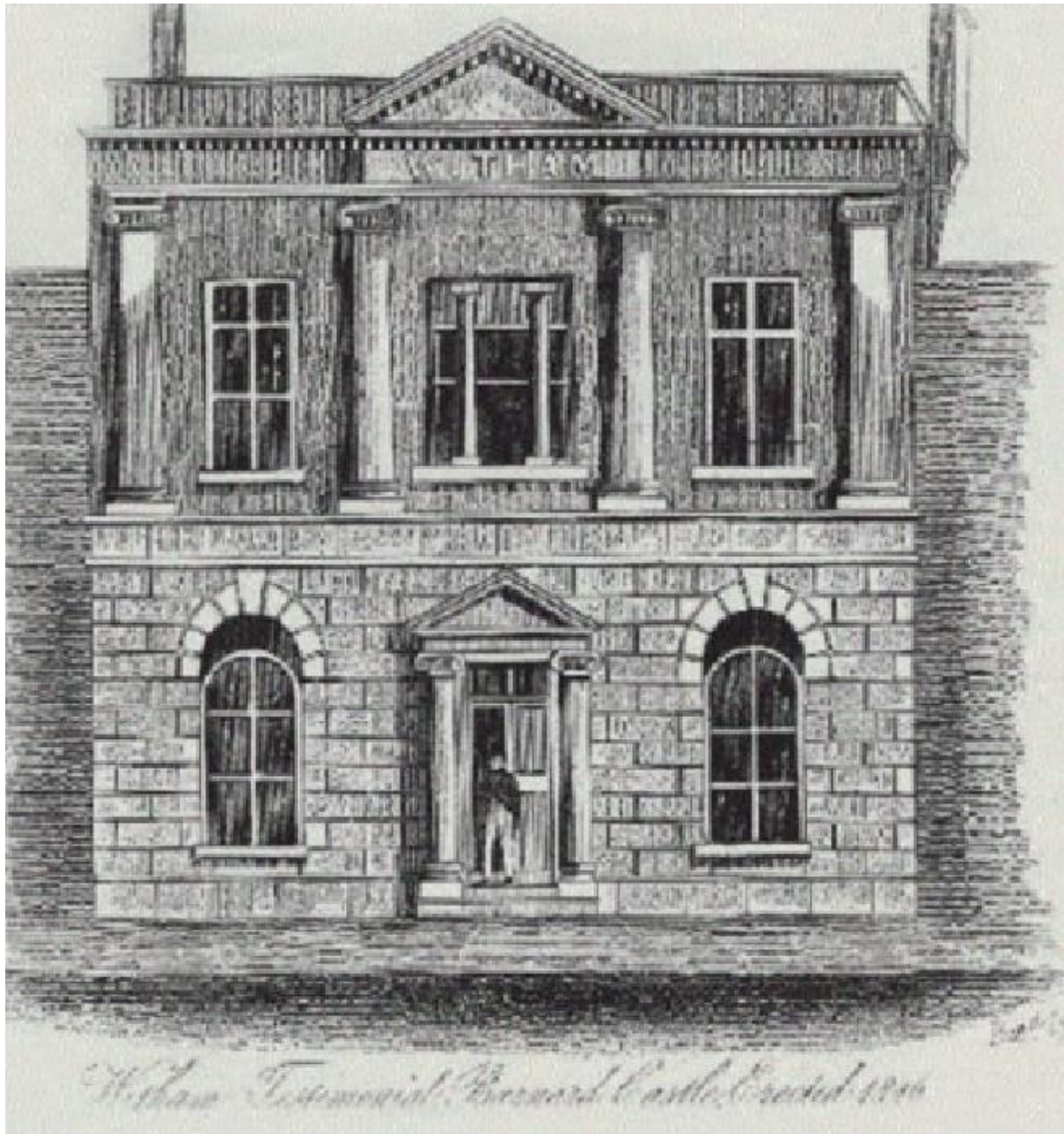
With his interest in geology Henry converted a room at Lartington Hall into a museum of exhibits and paintings no doubt the fourth image, a portrait of himself which can be no longer traced among them and perhaps one of his daughter Emma, I guess we shall never know.

Other reports say he had a great reception from the tenants on his return home. Whatever the case by 1832 he had been appointed High Sheriff of Co Durham and converted a property in Barnard Castle into a Mechanics Hall for the poor of the district with the intention of erecting a purpose built one but died in 1844 however the work still went ahead with money raised by public subscription arranged it is said by his friend John Bowes of Streatham founder of the Bowes Museum who named it the Witham Testimonial Memorial Hall which opened in 1846 and proved so popular a larger Hall was built in 1860 which survives to this day.



Interestingly Henry settled in Edinburgh exactly at a time the Whig reformer Leonard Horner had established what is claimed to be the first Mechanics Institute in 1821. Leonard Horner also studied geology which seems too much of a coincidence for the two not to have known each other and perhaps conspired together and the reason why Henry made the founding of a Mechanics Institute a priority on his return to Lartington. To give an idea of Henry's passion for reform Frank Dobson notes: In same week as opening of Stella Church (1832) Henry made a rousing speech at Morpeth attacking the "factious, unconstitutional and corrupt Boroughmongers who had rejected the Reform Bill already passed by the Commons".

There is no shortage of information for what happened next as both Lartington Hall and the Witham Testimonial Hall have survived and have been reported in the news with detailed accounts of their respective histories. The Northern Echo must have done some delving with an interesting article (see link below) though the dates are a bit out. According to them Henry's debts had amounted to £105,000 converted to 10 million in today's money, accounting for one of Henry's sons to remark on his father's death "If it had not been for my father's extravagance I'd be the richest Commoner in the country".



Returning to Hedgefield: Fordyce (1860) has a piece on Mathias Williams share of the Stella Coal Company which was sold back to the Company by his executors after he died 1858 and James Maughan remarked on celebrations that took place at Stella on the day of his wedding in 1841 though doesn't name his bride, see attached snippets at end.

Of further interest Winifred Salvin nee Witham Emma's younger sister of Croxdale Hall kept a diary for the years 1849 and 1850 where she notes visiting Stella with her brother Henry the priest and staying at Hedgefield, Some time ago I read the land Hedgefield Church was built on was owned by Salvin of Croxdale who released that plot to the Rector of Ryton for the church and a further search of Google hit the sale of land Middle Hedgefield by William Fleming of Croxdale in 1879 who was the land agent of the Salvin estates which looks as if Emma who died 1863 may have left land at Hedgefield to her sister Winifred in her Will.

Finally this has been an attempt to prove Emma Witham daughter of Henry Silvertop Witham was named after the Emma Colliery where sinking began in 1845 but there no absolute proof, it is all circumstantial: however put another way, If I were to suggest there is no absolute proof Clara Simpson nee Draper was named after Clara Vale colliery and village where they have a community centre full of images and write ups of Clara they would say I was mad and a member of the Flat Earth Society yet Clara had nothing Emma ever had both wife's of directors, both lived at Hedgefield House and both from well to do families though with Emma no stranger to stately homes, I'd give an extra tick in the box.

In reality the difference is Emma and Clara pits were sunk almost 50 years apart, before the age of the camera for Emma and just as the camera was becoming popular for Clara to featured in albums giving her that tangible legacy not possible for Emma so we have many photos Clara but none of Emma. I hope you and others will agree with me that it is time we gave Emma Witham the credit she deserves, there are no other candidates of that name to consider. In the meantime I shall continue with this interesting research I have barely just begun. See also links below.

Sources and related material:

[Losing a fortune on the horses didn't stop Henry Witham from creating building that still bears his name | The Northern Echo](#)

[History - The Witham](#)

[A magnificent Grade II listed house near the Yorkshire Dales that has only had five owners since 1635 - Country Life](#)

[Northern-Catholic-History_No.-39_1998.pdf \(diocesehn.org.uk\)](#)

[D079169_1_0001.tif \(dur.ac.uk\)](#) (Gooch From Jacobite to Radical).

[Mechanics Institutes](#)

[Leonard Horner \(1785-1864\) - Our History \(ed.ac.uk\)](#)

[Henry Thomas Maire Silvertop on Ancestry](#)

Birth	28 May 1779 Yorkshire, England
Marriage	5 Jun 1800 Colwell, Northumberland, England
Residence	1834 Lartington, Yorkshire, England
Death	28 Nov 1844 Lartington, Yorkshire, England

