

Left standing at the altar.

The first marriages at the newly built St Mary's Church, Embsay, were in 1853. Of all the marriage records at St Mary's, one of the more enigmatic is that of Joseph Bell and Alice Betsy Boyd in September 1870.

Joseph Bell was a shoemaker born in Skipton in 1848. He was the son of William Bell, a master shoemaker, and lived at the family shop at the corner of Swadford Street. Alice Betsy Boyd was from Lincolnshire, and in the summer of 1870 she was living in Embsay and working as a barmaid. She was the daughter of John Boyd, a land steward and former army officer.

Banns were called on three consecutive Sundays by Charles Leonard Hardman, the vicar of St Mary's, and on Saturday 24th September 1870, the morning of the wedding, he had prepared for the ceremony by writing the following details in the marriage register: Joseph Bell aged 22, bachelor and shoemaker of Skipton, and Alice Betsy Boyd, aged 21, spinster and barmaid of Embsay.

However, the rest of the marriage register is blank and the vicar subsequently put a line through it followed by the words: "Cancelled – the persons not appearing."

Whatever the reason for the change of heart Alice left Embsay for Leeds where she quickly received another proposal from a different suitor. Only eight weeks after her intended wedding in Embsay, Banns were called at St John's Church, Leeds, announcing the forthcoming marriage of Alice Betsy Boyd and John Hull, a confectioner from Nottingham. Prior to their wedding they were both living at 35 Merrion Street, Leeds. However, at this time she went through with it and they were married on 13th December 1870.

The former potential groom Joseph Bell continued to live with his parents and to work at their shoemaker's shop in Skipton, but two years later in 1872 he married Jane Lofthouse from Whalley in Lancashire where they settled. So who was left standing at the altar? It was the Vicar.

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