

Benjamin Gilson WAY

THE SAD STORY OF LITTLE BENNIE.

One of the many graves that mark the place of an individual in the thousands of cemeteries in towns and villages across this country. They mark the last resting place of those who made our country, town, village communities. They are our history they need to be preserved once they have gone our past has gone.



Benjamin Gilson WAY aka 'Little Bennie' born 28 Dec. 1857 (christened at St Thomas Church, Newport on 03 Oct. 1861) he died 09 Nov. 1869 confirmed by birth and death index. He was buried in Newport Cemetery on 12 Nov. 1869. He was 11 years old and his little grave drew my interest....the how? the why? the real questions were about the real person.

His father was Benjamin Way (a Barrister at Law) born in approx. 1819 in Newport the son of Edward Way (1795-1867) and Ann Way nee Cotton (1794-1865) The family were Millers, and lived in Northwood, Carisbrooke and Newport in Lugley Street, possibly Lugley House which is where Edward died. It is likely that this is why Little Bennie was left here given they family was quite big. When Edward died he left £16,000 and it is said he is buried in St Thomas, Newport.

He was shown in the 1851 census age 30 living in Islington with Elizabeth Gilson a widow age 53 and her daughter Elisabeth Gilson age 26 (born 1825). The Baptism records shows that Benjamin Way being baptised on 08 Oct. 1819 to Ann Way and her husband Edward (?)

He married Elizabeth Sarah Gilson on 04 Sept. 1856 aged 35 at St Andrews, Barnsbury. The 1861 census shows 'Little Bennie' age 3 in 21 Albion Grove West, Islington. Benjamin senior is age 41 a Barrister at Law in the Strand. Also shown is Elizabeth Sarah, age 36, also present is Elizabeth S Gilson aged 60 (mother-in-law)

Elizabeth 'Little Bennies' mother died in 1866 in London (before her son) She is thought to be buried in Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington.

Poor 'Little Bennie' died from Scarlet Fever while living at 68 Monkton Street, Ryde where one Elizabeth Langdon was resident and witness to his death. His father was away in Lagos, Nigeria where he was working as Chief Magistrate. Given the year it is likely that it was a long while before Benjamin senior heard the news...and unable to get back. The small head stone is a very moving monument with both parents named and the term 'Little Bennie' used.

Things get no better the 1871 census shows Benjamin Way senior aged 52 in The George Hotel, Dale Street, Liverpool. He was apparently bound for Canada. In 1881 he is residing in Muokoka Canada. He dies in an asylum for the incurably insane in a place called Mimico on 15 Mar. 1896. Probate shows this location of death, the occupation Barrister at Law leaving £143, 5 shillings and 1 penny left for Rebecca Way, his sister a spinster (1834-1925)

A child dies shortly after his mother while he is alone with his father working far away in the British Empire.....precious time lost. One can only assume Benjamin Way senior died driven mad by a broken heart.

Children died early, a walk round any cemetery will tell you that. People need to understand that cemeteries give them a place.



I walk past this grave regularly and say hello to 'Little Bennie' he was alone when he died. His mother already dead (waiting for him) and his father far away. I wonder who ever visited this grave? It is all that is left of him Why? Must we forget him....this little Victorian child a child of Empire.

Article by Helen Barnard MA

Supplementary information by Tony Barton, <https://www.foncc.org.uk>

The two graves to the south of Little Bennie's are Rebecca Way and Caroline Way; two of his aunts. Two graves to the east of Little Bennie's are Edward and Ann Way, his grandparents.