

Benjamin Hill lived around Littleborough on the Yorkshire–Lancashire border between Huddersfield and Manchester, now within the Greater Manchester area. The first record found on him was in 1831, when he was about 23 years old.

Bradford Sessions, Yorkshire, 30 June 1831:

That Benjamin Hill, lately of Wakefield in the West Riding of the County of York, labourer, on 20 May in the first year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord William the Fourth by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland King Defender of the Faith with Force and arms at the Township of Quick in the West Riding in the County of York one Metal Watch of the value of fifteen shillings and seven Pecks of Flour of the value of two shillings and seven Pecks of Meal of the value of two shillings of the Goods and Chattels of one John Schofield then and there found did then and there feloniously steal, take and carry away against the peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity.

Witnesses: John Schofield, Robert Brierly, John Broadbent and James Kershaw.

Puts - Guilty - To be confined in the House of Correction 3 calendar months and kept to hard labour.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing more has been found of Benjamin until 1848. Whether he had been summarily convicted in the intervening years is not known.

A Thief Capitally Caught. On Tuesday afternoon, a man went into the Bee Hive public house, Kings Cross, and asked for a pint of ale. He got the ale and shuffled payment by saying that a man would come in shortly who would pay for it. Being left alone, however, he contrived to get hold of a pig's cheek, with which he was moving off, when Mr Spencer, the landlord, who was accidentally coming into the house, met and captured him with the cheek upon him. He appears to have practised the same trick of obtaining ale without payment at several other public houses in the town. He was brought before G.T. Pollard Esq on Wednesday when his defence to the charge was that he had not got away with the cheek; therefore, the felony had not been completed. He gave his name as Benjamin Hill and said he came from Littleborough. He was committed for trial at the ensuing adjourned sessions.

At the Wakefield Sessions, Yorkshire, 8 March 1848:

Than Benjamin Hill late of Wakefield in the West Riding in the County of York, labourer, on 15 February in the eleventh year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Victoria, etc., at the parish of Halifax in the West Riding in the County of York, Two pounds weight of Bacon of the value of one shilling the goods and chattels of one Joseph Spencer then and there found did then and there feloniously steal, take and carry away against the peace of our said Lady the Queen her Crown and Dignity.

Witnesses: Joseph Spencer, James Dawson.

Puts Guilty. To be imprisoned in the House of Correction for One calendar month and kept to hard labour.<sup>2</sup>

He was again in trouble about a month after being released from gaol.

In May 1848, the Manchester Examiner reported: Old Offender Caught. Benjamin Hill was brought up by the police before John Crossley Esq, charged with having, on the 25th, committed a highway robbery by taking from the person of John Fielden, of Walsden, the sum of £1 15s. The case was clearly made out, and he was committed to Kirkdale to await trial. Great praise is due to the police for their indefatigable exertions in capturing this villain, who has been out of the way for over four years, a warrant being out for his apprehension. He has only been liberated from Wakefield gaol, on

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<sup>1</sup> Yorkshire, England, Quarter Session Records, 1637-1914; Leeds Intelligencer, 07 July 1831, p4

<sup>2</sup> Yorkshire, England, Quarter Session Records, 1637-1914; Halifax Guardian, 19 February, p5

a charge of felony, a few weeks. Since his liberation, we have heard of several attempts at highway robbery in the neighbourhood of Walsden.<sup>3</sup>

In August at the Liverpool Assizes, Benjamin Hill was indicted for a highway robbery at Todmorden. On Easter Monday, 24 April last, John Fielden had been drinking with the prisoner and had paid for beer for the prisoner. At midnight, they both started going to their respective homes. Before, however, Fielden had gone far, the prisoner came up to him and put his hand in Fielden's waistcoat pocket where he had his money, amounting to £1 15s. [One sovereign, two half-crowns and ten shillings]. The prisoner took the whole of it and then went away. The prisoner was apprehended on the following Friday when it appeared that he had spent, in eating and drinking, almost the whole of what he had feloniously acquired.

There was also a previous conviction for felony proved against the prisoner, whereby it appeared that he had only been discharged from prison a fortnight before the present robbery.<sup>4</sup>

The Prison Registers show Benjamin Hill, 40, single, imperfectly read and write, labourer, convicted 16 August 1848 at Liverpool Assizes of robbery after a previous conviction and sentenced to 7 years transportation. He was received at Wakefield Prison on 17 August 1849 from Kirkdale Gaol in Liverpool and transferred to the *York* hulk at Gosport on 12 August 1850. He had two previous convictions for felony, in 1831 and 1848.<sup>5</sup>

While on the *York* hulk, a description of Benjamin was recorded:

Benjamin Hill was born in Littleborough, Lancashire. He has light brown hair, blue eyes, Protestant, fresh complexion, oval face, stout make, 5'3¾", farmer's labourer, sister Ellen Crossley resides at Littleborough, hairy breast and arms, scar of **left** palm, single, read and write imperfectly. Benjamin boarded the *Pyrenees* on 10 March 1851. He was healthy, and his behaviour was very good after two-quarters of good behaviour. **Note:** Ellen Crossley is possibly his mother, not his sister.

On arrival at Fremantle, Western Australia, on 28 June 1851, his description is slightly different. He was 3 inches taller, and the scar appeared on a different hand.

Benjamin Hill, aged 40, 5'7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", has light brown hair, blue eyes, an oval face, fair complexion, a scar on the right hand, arm and shin, and is a single labourer.

Benjamin received his Ticket of Leave on arrival.<sup>6</sup>

Superintendents Journal, 4 July 1851. The following Prisoners will be received from the ship *Pyrenees* and located to Division No 3, consisting of 45 men from the *York* Hulk at Gosport and 12 men from the *Stirling Castle* Hulk, including 443 Benjn Hill.<sup>7</sup>

On 10 July, 50 Ticket of Leave men from the *Pyrenees* were sent to Mount Eliza Station under the Superintendence of Mr. C. F. Gregory, including 443 Benjamin Hill, Farmer's Labourer.<sup>8</sup>

On 21 July, Benjamin was one of 4 men replaced by four others, to proceed by boat to York. The following day, however, he proceeded to York with 39 other men. His occupation is a shepherd and labourer.<sup>9</sup> A Conditional Pardon was granted in June 1853. His sentence expired in 1855.

Benjamin Hill, age unknown, died on 10 October 1857 at Northam. He was a labourer and died of disease of the heart. He would have been about 50 years old.

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<sup>3</sup> Manchester Examiner, 6 May 1848, p7.

<sup>4</sup> Morning Advertiser, 21 August 1848, p4; TNA,UK, PCOM2/322

<sup>5</sup> TNA, UK, HO23/14; HO8/107; PCOM2/136, York hulk.

<sup>6</sup> SROWA, ACC 128/40-43

<sup>7</sup> SROWA, Superintendent Orders, 1850 - 1854 (So1 - So3), p51

<sup>8</sup> The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News, 18 Jul 1851, p2; SROWA, Superintendent Orders, 1850 - 1854 (So1 - So3), p54

<sup>9</sup> SROWA, Superintendent Orders, 1850 - 1854 (So1 - So3), p65, 66.

The early life of Benjamin is unknown, apart from the fact that he said he was born about 1808 in Littleborough, Yorkshire, and his sister Ellen Crossley lived in Littleborough in 1850.

**The following is one possibility.**

Benjamin Hill may have been Ellen Hill's illegitimate child.

At the Todmorden, Christ Church: William Crossley and Ellen Hill, of this parish, banns were published 25 April, 3 May and 10 May 1812, to be married 11 May 1812. William signed, and Ellen made her mark. Ellen Hill was not recorded as being a widow. Todmorden is about 9km from Littleborough.

The children of William and Ellen Crossley, all baptised at Wesleyan Methodist in the Town of Littleborough, Rochdale, were: <sup>10</sup>

Rebeka, daughter of Wm and Elen Crosley of Lowermillbarn in the Township of Undersfield was baptised on 25 December 1813. Rebecca died at Lowermillbarn on 18 December 1823, aged 10.

Elizabeth, daughter of William and Elen Crossley of Lowermillbarn in the Township of Undersfield was baptised on 26 November 1815

John Crosland, son of William Crosland & Ellen, residing at Lowermillbarn in the Township of Undersfield was baptised on 21 August 1820

William, son of William and Ellen Crossley nee Hill, occupation Fuller, residing at Littleborough, Town of Undersfield, parish of Rochdale, baptised on 23 December 1827. Ellen was about 42 years old.

On the 1841 census, Littleboro Mill, Rochdale.<sup>11</sup>  
William Crossley, 50, Fuller Miller <sup>12</sup>  
Ellen, 50  
William 15, Fuller Miller

The records from the *York hulk* say Benjamin's sister Ellen Crossley resides at Littleborough. The only Ellen Crossley found in Littleborough is his mother.<sup>13</sup>  
On 3 May 1849, at Littleborough Blatchinworth, Nelly Crossley, 64 years, wife of William Crossley, Fuller, died of Consumption. William Crossley was present at the death and resides in Littleborough, parish of Rochdale.  
Benjamin was in Kirkdale Prison, Liverpool, about 80km away, when Ellen died.

1851 census, Littleborough, Rochdale. <sup>14</sup>  
William Crossley, head, widower, 63, Fuller, born Walsden  
William Crossley, son, 25, Fuller, born Littleboro.

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<sup>10</sup> TNA, UK, RG4/992; RG4/993

<sup>11</sup> TNA, UK, HO107/550/1

<sup>12</sup> Fuller: One who "fulls" cloth; the process of cleaning (removing the natural oils and lanolin) wool in preparation for spinning and weaving, using fuller's earth.

Fulling Miller: Milled Fullers Earth for Fulling woolen cloth.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, UK, PCOM2/136, York hulk.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, UK, HO107/2247