

Gunnerside

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GUNNERSIDE: A BRIEF HISTORY

At the start of the third millennium, Gunnerside is a small village of about one hundred inhabitants situated at the western end of the parish of Melbecks, in upper Swaledale. Visitors to the Yorkshire dales admire its solid, grey, stone-built cottages straggling along the roadsides or fringing its small greens; and perhaps even more they appreciate the mixed landscape of river meadows, hillside pastures, and heather moorlands against which the village is set. Straddling Gunnerside beck, which flows southward to join the river Swale just below the village, Gunnerside was originally two small hamlets - Lodge Green to the east side of the beck, and Gunnerside proper, to the west. It takes its name from a legendary Norseman called Gunnar, an early settler who is assumed to have arrived here from the west about one thousand years ago.

In medieval times, upper Swaledale was heavily wooded but thinly peopled. Its inhabitants gradually cleared the tree-cover in order to rear livestock on the slopes of the fells in scattered farmsteads. Such farms, often very small in acreage, remained characteristic of Melbecks until well into the nineteenth

century. However, the creation of a concentrated nuclear settlement around the bridge linking Lodge Green and Gunnerside was the result, not of the slow evolution of farming, but rather of the rapid development of lead-mining in Gunnerside Gill in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Lead was mined in Swaledale long before the eighteenth century, and some of Gunnerside's buildings are of a much earlier date. Nevertheless, apart from some obvious later alterations and additions, most of the present village was probably built between 1750 and 1850, in the heyday of lead-mining. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Lord of the Manor, Lord Wharton, provided financial backing to a partnership, headed by his steward, Philip Swale, which mined at Lownathwaite, in Gunnerside Gill. But it was a hundred years later that the Pomfret/Denys family, who had inherited the Wharton mining rights, drove the long levels into Melbecks moor which made it possible to exploit the rich Friarfold vein. By the early nineteenth century, an elaborate system of underground workings, often referred to as the A.D. mines and including the famous Old Gang complex north-east of Gunnerside, was in full operation. The

growing village of Gunnerside provided a convenient home - within an hours walk of the main workings - for miners who moved into the district.

Gunnerside's development as a community of lead-miners and their families was thus one aspect of Britain's early industrial revolution. By 1831, about two-thirds of the adult male population of Melbecks worked in the mining industry. Whereas residents of neighbouring hill-side settlements such as Winterings and Heights still combined mining with 'cow-keeping', the men of the village were mainly full-time miners. Gunnerside's population also included self-employed people who followed other occupations: more substantial farmers; craftsmen such as blacksmiths and shoemakers; and the carriers, shopkeepers, and publicans who supplied essential services. But basically, this was a village of wage-earners and small-scale entrepreneurs. There were doubtless many subtle gradations of income, wealth, and status: but there were not the great extremes of wealth and poverty typical of many agricultural villages in southern England, nor the clear class divisions between masters and men which characterised the Lancashire mill-towns in the early Victorian period.

Lead-mining was a dangerous and precarious occupation. Except in some of the surface work, where young women were employed, it was a man's job; and boys had usually joined their fathers underground by the time they had reached their teens. Compared with coal-mining, major disasters were rare, because explosions of gas were virtually unknown. However, individual accidents could easily happen; and damp and dusty working conditions made miners especially liable to diseases of the chest and lungs. The mortality rate among miners was high, and a common cause of poverty was the large number of widows and orphans who had been left without an adult bread-winner. Not that the pay of working miners was generous - although their working day was relatively short and they were largely free to work at their own pace. The lead industry suffered wide fluctuations in its output and its profits, and this in turn meant uncertain and irregular earnings for its workers.

The price of lead in the market was inherently unstable. It varied because of the shifting demands of lead's main users in the building and armaments industries; at the same time the prosperity of an individual mine depended crucially on its ability to find and exploit new veins of ore. During the wartime boom between

1790 and 1810, demand and supply both moved upward; but market conditions gradually deteriorated thereafter. Swaledale's mining communities experienced serious depression around 1830, and a process of slow population decline set in. However the A.D. mines regained their momentum in the 1840s; and under the energetic guidance of Sir George Denys, of Draycott hall in Fremington, they enjoyed an Indian summer of prosperity in the 1860s and 1870s. It was during this final boom that Gunnerside's two great public buildings - the present Methodist chapel and the Literary Institute - were built.

If Gunnerside's economic fortunes originally rested on the one word 'lead', its cultural tradition can be summed up in the one word 'Methodism'. The village's rapid growth in the late eighteenth century coincided exactly with the rise of Wesleyanism which, throughout England, found fertile ground in new, expanding industrial communities which lacked parish churches. Gunnerside's first chapel was built in 1789, and its reputation as a major Methodist centre was confirmed when a new circuit was created in Reeth with its junior minister - usually a bachelor, fresh from college - resident at Gunnerside. That reputation was further enhanced by the opening of a Methodist day school in 1855: it remains

the village school to this day, albeit now housed in modern premises. The Methodist monopoly went unchallenged until the 1840s, when the new Anglican parish of Melbecks came into being: but, significantly, the parish church was built in Low Row, not in Gunnerside. A more serious Anglican threat emerged in the 1860s, after a rival Church of England school was built by the side of Gunnerside beck, in what is now Gunnersgill hall. For over twenty years the two schools competed for pupils and for the modest government grants which went with them: but when the collapse of lead-mining sharply reduced the number of village children in the 1880s, it was the Church school which had to close its doors. After standing empty for some years, the building was re-opened as an Anglican 'mission church' just before the First World War. Apart from this limited intrusion, however, religious life in Gunnerside was dominated by the chapel for two hundred years.

In the absence of a resident parson or squire, it was left to chapel folk to exercise a civilising influence on a rough, raw, unplanned, and unpoliced frontier community. In the early 1800s, miners generally were regarded as a feckless, uncouth, ungovernable body of men, who wasted their all-too-ample leisure and

their all-too-limited means on drinking, gambling, and poaching. By contrast, the chapel encouraged a culture of thrift, sobriety, and responsibility which appealed particularly to miners' wives and children. Much effort was devoted - and with some success - to impressing these values on the menfolk. Over and above the cumulative effects of Sunday- and day-school teaching, the Literary Institute (first set up in 1864) provided continuing opportunities for self-improvement and 'rational recreation'. In addition, periodic revivalist campaigns based on the chapel could sometimes yield extraordinary results. In 1887, for example, the entire village brass band experienced religious conversion, and re-formed - briefly - as 'the Gunnerside Gospel Temperance Band' ! However, the main thrust of Methodism's attempt to inculcate respectability lay in the temperance movement, and particularly in the Band of Hope, whose juvenile members were encouraged to 'sign the pledge' that they would never touch alcohol.

The two rival cultures clashed over such symbolic issues as the proper celebration of midsummer, which was observed as a customary holiday in Melbecks. When the traditional miners' sports at Rowleth Bottom were re-organised in 1880, Gunnerside chapel deliberately held its Band of Hope

procession and tea-party on the same day, in order, presumably, to provide a wholesome counter-attraction to an event which had come to be associated with drunken and disorderly behaviour. Temperance attitudes remained firmly entrenched during the twentieth century, and help to explain why Gunnerside gained a reputation for Liberalism in what was increasingly seen as solidly Conservative territory.

Methodist influences still lingered in Gunnerside at the end of the twentieth century: lead-mining, on the other hand, vanished almost overnight at the end of the nineteenth. By the late 1870s the most productive veins of the A.D. mines had been worked out, and hopes of further profitable developments from the ambitious new 'Sir Francis' mine (named after Sir George Denys's son) were sadly disappointed. On top of all this came a sharp decline in the price of lead as cheaper foreign imports flooded into Britain. By 1887, the local mines had virtually ceased production, with catastrophic effect. Swaledale as a whole lost one-third of its population between 1881 and 1891, as families left in search of work. Many moved to the cotton towns of north-east Lancashire, now relatively accessible thanks to the Settle-Carlisle railway. In 1891, one in five of the

houses in Gunnerside was reported to be uninhabited; and the ratio of women to men in the population stood at 4:3 - a telling sign of the serious effect of mine closures on men's employment prospects. Apart from the provision of basic services to meet the needs of a dwindling and still quite isolated community, farming once again appeared to be the mainstay of the local economy.

In 1900, Gunnerside must have presented a run-down and impoverished appearance: but in fact, changes were already gathering force which were to shape the village as it is today. In a nutshell, old-established families moved out: but newcomers moved in, attracted by the very remoteness of this strangely beautiful, and now de-industrialised, countryside. As early as the 1880s, the local Medical Officer of Health was warning that visitors would be discouraged unless the villagers abandoned their easygoing habits and improved their defective sanitary arrangements! At first the visitors were short-term: they came on holiday to walk, to cycle, to paint, to fish, and - in the case of a few wealthy individuals - to shoot the grouse moors. Accommodating their needs - for rooms, food, drink, stabling, and other services - meant new opportunities for making money to enterprising ladies like Mary Shaw, of the Troutbeck hotel. The pace of

change quickened further with the coming of the motor car. In the 1920s there were complaints that char-a-banc parties from the towns were disturbing the peace and decorum of the traditional Swaledale Sunday; and during the following decade it was noticed that 'outsiders' were buying empty cottages to use as second homes.

All this meant new work. Visitors' cars had to be repaired; but the internal combustion engine also gave an opportunity to provide better services for local people in the form of both haulage and passenger transport. Old cottages had to be renovated to meet the demands of visitors and 'incomers' for more comfortable houses with improved amenities. The outstanding example here was the rebuilding of Gunnerside Lodge in the late 1920s. Formerly offering Spartan accommodation for visiting sportsmen who rented the shooting from the Lord of the Manor, it was transformed into a luxurious, modern family home by its new owner, the textile magnate Lord Rochdale, who had bought the estate to enjoy the shooting for himself. In this curious manner, Gunnerside acquired a 'big house' and an occasionally-resident and benevolent squire for the first time in its history.

As the private motor car became more common after the Second World War, its impact on villages like Gunnerside became even more marked. If it allowed outsiders to come in, it also enabled the locals to get out - for their secondary schooling, for shopping, for work, and for entertainment. Electricity had a similar impact: some private generators were in use before the war, but it was the coming of the National Grid in the early 1950s which marked another stage of 'modernisation' for the whole community. Together, electricity and the motor car changed patterns of life in Swaledale in ways that the steam engine had failed to do in the nineteenth century. Village shops began to close, and Saturday night dances and concerts in the village hall fell out of favour. At the start of the new millennium, Gunnerside lost its last village store, and its post office now operated on a part-time basis only. On the other hand it still had its place of worship, its public house, and its school: both the chapel and the Literary Institute had just been refurbished; and the local bus service had improved.

In recent years a 'culture gap' is said to have opened up between natives and incomers and created tension in rural England. It is doubtful if this is really true

of Gunnerside. Whatever their origins, locals and immigrants now largely share the same predominantly secular and materialist values, read the same newspapers, and watch the same television programmes. Thanks to modern technology, old and new residents are equally alive to the complexity of the greater world outside. At the same time, they find a common pleasure in the relative simplicity of that more intimate world of 'community' which a place like Gunnerside still embodies.

Duncan Bythell, July 2000

MEMORIES OF A LEAD MINER

I was born in 1884 at Gunnerside in Swaledale and I went to School till I was sixteen. Why I left school, my father said he could not afford to let me go to study for a schoolmaster, because it was more useful for me to be adding money to help to keep the family. I was the eldest of a family of fourteen, eleven of them being born before I started work, the other three came afterwards. Some of them died quite young, there was thirteen boys and one girl. Seven of us grew up to men and women, one was killed in the first World War, but the rest had a very healthy life, and are still living bar one, and he was over 80 when he died. We used to have a small holding that provided us with milk, eggs, butter and home fed bacon as well.

I started in't mines with me father at Blind Gill up Gunnerside Gill with the help of other two miners to open up a lead mine, and work there two years, and then we came down to Priscilla which turned out to be good lead ore and employed twelve of us miners. After three years we were moved to Bunting and then to the Old Gang for another three years in all. I was then twenty four years old and I

got married. We went to Arkengarthdale where I worked for another five years as a miner, first at Punchard Gill and finished at Faggergill.

When War broke out in 1914, I was back in Swaledale. I went to Catterick Camp where I was employed as foreman at roadmaking, and from then on my working life was spent mending roads under North Riding County Council until I retired. I received many tributes, especially from the surveyors I worked for and advised during nearly forty years of my life.

I am proud of them but I still think my best days were spent in the mines. I was an ordinary miner, boring by hand into hard rock with a jumper and hammer. Turning the jumper needed a lot of skill. We broke by hand and sorted the lead ore the old fashioned way in the hand-sieve, it wasn't an easy life.

My father and me together, earned between two pounds ten and three pounds a month. To get from Winterings to the mine was three miles each way, and you can imagine what it was like in winter. The weather is much worse on the moors than down in the valley bottom, what with snow, rain and wind to put up with.

Many a time I have been wet through before I got to the mine and then done a days work. No wonder a lot of miners died young, having to face such conditions. They got an illness known as the miners complaint which was caused through breathing bad air and dust from boring into the rock. I think what kept us going, was, that we were working for our relations as well as our selves.

In our spare time we played quoits, hand ball and knurr and spell. By local standards, I was a good pole jumper, high jumper and quoit player, I have also done a lot of fly fishing and rabbiting. At night we went to the pub on the understanding that beer was good for miners as it washed the dust away, beer was nobbut 1½d a gill in those days. Swaledale being a musical dale, the singing of old songs in the pubs and at local concerts was very common.

When I look back I sometimes think they were hard times, but by God, they were good times.

John Tom (J.T.) Rutter, the last leadminer in Gunnerside (as told to Jean Rutter)

ROSEDENE, DEVON COTTAGE AND THE MINERS ARMS

The block which now comprises Rosedene and Devon Cottage was originally all one property - the Miners Arms public house. It is believed to have been built in at least three phases between 1700 and 1780, pre-dating the present Kings Head pub in the village. The Miners Arms apparently closed around 1920 with the final stage in the decline of the lead mining industry and the consequent depopulation of Swaledale. At least one ex-Gunnerside resident living today (Tom Milner, born 1st January 1910) remembers the Miners Arms being fully operational as a pub during his childhood, when it served both food and drink.

John Hardy, in his book *'Swaledale – Portrait of a Lead Mining Community'* (published 1998), records that lead miners *'were paid very infrequently until the late 1820s at the Miners Arms, where they often "drank for days on end"*. It was to discourage such excessive drinking that, coinciding with the miners' pay days, the women of the village arranged preaching services in the nearby Methodist Chapel, followed by a *'good feed'*. Thus, according to John Hardy's researches,

the Mid Summer and Shortest Day Festivals which are unique to Gunnerside, were born.

There is little evidence today that Rosedene was once a flourishing pub although there are still some iron hooks and rings in the front external wall where horses were tethered whilst their owners took refreshment. The floor plan of Rosedene indicates that it could well have been purpose-built as an ale-house, the present living room being the former public bar area. Until 1988, there was an old wall in the entrance passageway to Rosedene which had a small serving hatch window through which it is said that drinks were served from barrels on the heavy stone shelves behind. It is also very likely that it was from the security of this hatch that the miners' pay was handed out – violence was commonplace in those days.

The pub's cellar, which still exists underneath the present dining room of Devon Cottage, was sealed off from Rosedene in 1975. The drainage gulley in the corner of the back yard to Rosedene would once have been an essential and much-used facility, the wall around it having been built high enough to ensure modesty.

Originally an 'Upper Room of an Inn', the rear annexe to Rosedene (with the five stone steps up to the external door) is believed to have been a large, open, common lodging room or 'doss house' where tired and exhausted men could sleep after an evening at the Miners Arms! Whilst most of the regulars would be lead miners, it is also likely that itinerant farm labourers, mostly Irishmen, would have stayed here from time to time. The guests' horses were kept in the stable below. The accommodation would have been rather less comfortable than it is today. A straw mattress would have been a luxury - it was not unknown in such places for men to be crowded in and have to hang over ropes stretched from wall to wall, giving a new meaning to the term 'hangover'!

In former days, the upper lodging room was completely divided off from the Miners Arms by a solid wood partition, ensuring that the landlord's family (especially his daughters) were safely separated from the overnight guests. The only access was from the external door, the original opening of which has been retained, and the external steps re-built. When refurbishment of the room began in 1988 after many years of disuse, several old clay pipes and irons for wooden

clogs were discovered in the debris. The room originally had only one small window (on the south side), but there had been a fireplace on the west gable and the walls were plastered, confirming that this had always been a habitable room and not simply a hayloft over the stable.

The small plot of land in which the telephone exchange building now stands (on the west side of Rosedene) was also in the ownership of the Miners Arms. It was used for cockfighting - an entertainment for visitors to the pub! Old maps show it named as the "Cockpit" and the access was originally directly behind the gate from the back yard of Rosedene where the opening can still be traced in vertical joints in the drystone wall. As late as the 1960s, certain older residents of Gunnerside could recall cockfighting being carried on here.

Property title deeds of 1862 record that tenancy of *"Two Dwellinghouses, One Stable, One Parcel of Ground called Cockpit and One Garden"* was taken up by *George Calvert* under the jurisdiction of *"The Special Court Baron of the Manor of Healaugh"* for a consideration of £550, plus an annual rent of *One Penny*. It is

believed that after 1862, the Miners Arms pub continued to operate in what is now Rosedene, and Devon Cottage became part dwelling, part cobbler's shop.

I acquired Rosedene as a second home in November 1987, and it became my main residence in March 1991. The various alterations and improvements which I have made to the property have been recorded and photographed in detail. From 1966 to 1987 Rosedene was owned by my father's sister and her husband, Freda and Bill Kitching, who now live in Reeth. Prior to 1966, Rosedene was occupied by Harry Beswick's parents. Mr Beswick currently lives next door at Farmendon. Rosedene was previously owned by Tommy Brown and Annie Kleeman, legendary former residents of Troutbeck House, Gunnerside.

Paul Hodgson, April 2000

MEMORIES OF THE MINERS ARMS

Tom Milner was born in Gunnerside on 1st January 1910 and lived in the village until 1918. At the age of 91, Tom was still fit, well, living in sheltered housing in Richmond and regularly driving up the dale in a new car he bought himself when he was 90. In the millennium year Tom was featured in Yorkshire Television's 'Dales Diary' programme and was filmed singing with the Swale Singers. A visit to Rosedene (formerly the Miners Arms) on 25th May 2000 brought back the following clear memories for Tom:-

The Innkeeper

Although Tom would have been only seven or eight, he recalls that he 'got on very well' with the landlord of the Miner's Arms and used to help around the place, clearing up pots and bottles etc., especially on Saturday mornings which followed late Friday nights. The landlord was John Batty, grandfather of the legendary Anty (Anthony) Batty who died on Christmas Eve 1996, and great

grandfather of the present John Batty, who farms at Banks Head, opposite Low Row.

Marbles and Glass 'Alleys'

Before the First World War, lemonade bottles had a loose glass ball or 'alley' cast inside the neck to make the bottles airtight. These glass balls were highly prized by young boys for use as marbles, but because all bottles had to be returned for re-use under penalty of a deposit, supplies were severely limited. One Saturday morning, Tom remembers offering to help John Batty by taking seven or eight empty lemonade bottles round to the back of the pub where the empties were kept in wooden crates for collection when the next delivery was made (which in those days would have been by horse and cart). When carrying the bottles, Tom dropped one of them, accidentally of course, and went back to John Batty in tears, pleading forgiveness. John put his hand on Tom's shoulder, told him not to worry, just to go back and clean up the broken glass. But the marble was already in Tom's pocket! Afterwards, Tom hurried home with his precious new marble, and in order to disguise it and not to be found out, gave it several coats

of paint to make it look like one of the pot marbles which could be bought for a halfpenny, a price Tom could not afford. The illicitly obtained alley turned out to be a winner of seemingly quite magical powers. In games with his friends, Tom won and won their marbles from them with his favourite alley, the ill-gotten gains posing something of a challenge to the teachings of Tom's disciplined Methodist upbringing!

John Batty's Horse

Before the 1920's, and the advent of tractors or motorised transport, everyone in the dales relied on heavy horses, especially the local farmers. As a diversification from his business as innkeeper at the Miners Arms, an extra service offered by John Batty was the use of his stallion which was kept in the stable underneath what is now Rosedene Cottage Apartment. By arrangement, farmers would lead their mares, when 'in season', down to the back gate of the pub, and John would bring out his huge and highly-acclaimed stallion into the back yard. The stallion would be held in the yard, and allowed to sniff at the mare over the top of the half gate. When both were judged to be 'ready' and the

moment was right, the gate would be opened to allow the stallion out to mount the mare just outside.

Tom recalls that the task of siring the mare was achieved with much man-handling, snorting, quivering and clattering of hooves, after which the stallion was dragged back into the yard. Given the number of horses around, this procedure was performed on a regular basis, sometimes more than once a day. For eight-year old Tom and the other little boys hiding and peeping out from behind the nearby wall, this was an educational and exciting spectacle never to be forgotten!

Handball

Tom remembers that men of Gunnerside regularly played handball against the north wall of the Miners Arms in front of what is now Bruich Cottage. Handball was apparently a very popular game when Tom was small, and he remembers watching his dad, who was quite an expert. Tom says that the windows and drainage pipes which now exist on this wall were not there prior to 1920 – the wall was blank.

Fish and Chips

Tom recalls the Miners Arms serving fish and chips, cooked by John Batty's wife Mary. Tom thinks that the food was passed out through the small hatch in the wall in the entrance passageway, the same hatch through which the lead miner's pay would have been distributed a hundred years before. Tom says that the fish and chips were always excessively salted, to make the men thirsty and to encourage drinking.

A 'Footing'

Tom remembers talk about the drinkers at the Miner's Arms having what was called a 'footing' – a sum of one penny placed with the innkeeper to secure an evening's drinking!

Paul Hodgson, May 2000

GUNNERSIDE METHODIST CHAPEL

“The Pub is the Hub” is the latest campaign for preserving village life. But it was not always so. You have only to look at Gunnerside, as you approach it from the bridge, to see that the chapel, tall fair and handsome, dominates the village. And you might ask “Why such a large building for such a small community?”

The answer is in the history of Upper Swaledale. When the “new” chapel was dedicated in 1866, to replace the earlier building, there were regular congregations of 400 and more; these were the years when the lead mines were at their most active, and the valley was a busy and prosperous place.

The local Methodist families, descendants of the early worshippers converted by John Wesley, followed the example of those who had themselves hewn the stones for the first chapel, and paid for it by working overtime at the lead mines. They raised a new building to fill the needs of the community, for worship, for

entertainment and for education – classes and concerts were a regular feature of village life, and the chapel was the hub.

But no sooner was the new Chapel dedicated than the decline in lead mining began; many families had to leave the Dale to find work (often emigrating to America to work in mines over there), and so chapel attendances dwindled as the population almost halved in twenty years.

This has continued over the last hundred years; a gradual ebbing away of locals, especially the young who have been forced to leave the Dale to find jobs.

Of course the village and its clusters of lovely cottages remain, many occupied by descendants of those early Methodist families – the Sunters, Coates, Calverts, Aldersons, Spensleys, Rutters, Bells, Milners and Waggetts. More than 40 properties are now second homes or holiday cottages; but the fulltime residents have been determined to maintain their chapel, and have indeed undertaken a fine refurbishment of the interior.

The building and its graveyard are history in stone – inscriptions list the names of those same families which appear in early account books;

J. Calvert, for mending the Chapel lock, 7d.

Elkanah Bell, 2 besoms to sweep the chapel with, 5d.

Jos Sunter, 2 flags to set the gallery pillars in, 6d.

R. Milner, nails to repair the Chapel window shutter, 1d.

Ralph Waggett, for mending one candlestick, 6d.

Hannah Harker, for cleaning the chapel, 2s.0d.

Geo. Coates, for brush to sweep chapel with 3s.3d.

There is still a Calvert smithy in Gunnerside, and there are Coates, Bells and Sunters, and the other old names.

Keeping a handsome building such as the chapel open and maintained is a heavy burden, which falls on a very few people.

It's a pity that more visitors don't venture in to appreciate the light interior, with new blue carpets and upholstered chairs instead of the hard upright pews. It's a very good place for singing, indeed, its acoustics make the chapel an ideal place for all kinds of music. Continuing support from locals and visitors alike will help ensure that this building continues to stand proud at the head of the village.

Sylvia Crookes, August 2001