

18th Century

After the 1715 rebellion the current Lord Wharton's estates were confiscated by the Crown and in 1721 placed in the hands of trustees for payment of his debts. Surplus income from the estate went to his sisters Lady Jane Coke and Lady Lucy Morris. Lady Coke's niece inherited the estate income and in 1764 married George Fermor, Lord Pomfret 2nd. Their daughter, Lady Charlotte, married Peter Denys, a London lead merchant. In due course their son, George Denys, inherited all the mines and passed them on to his son, Sir George Denys, who was very well regarded by local people and cared passionately about the mines and the miners. In 1738 Thomas Smith bought the manors of Muker and Healaugh from the Wharton trustees for £10,500, but the mining rights on all 'wastes and commons' were reserved by the trustees.

The Spout Gill mines in Oxnop Gill had proven very rich, it was said in one year £40,000 of ore was raised from one shaft alone. In 1732 a smelt mill was built on the west side of the Gill which was of an improved design containing two ore hearths, a pair of bellows for each hearth operated by a waterwheel. Up until 1770 the mill smelted ore for the Spout Gill mine, the nearby Beezy mines, and the Beldi Hill mines near Keld. By 1771 the Beldi Hill mine had become profitable enough to justify the building of its own smelt mill at the mouth of Swinnergill at the junction with Kisdon.

In 1742 The London Lead Company leased the land east of Swinnergill from Lord Pomfret. The lease was for 31 years and they were free to follow all cross veins for 1200 yards and to pay a royalty of one-seventh of all smelted lead. With their considerable experience of mining in Derbyshire and the northern Pennines, the company introduced improved technical mining methods and smelting processes.

The Beldi Hill complex, near Crackpot Hall, was taken over in 1742 by a local company of brothers, John, Thomas and Ralph Parkes and Leonard Hartley. They developed the earlier workings of the Old Field Hush and drove a level (Parke's level) west from Swinnergill to drain the developing complex. At this time Lord Pomfret's company were working eastwards from Swinnergill and an agreement was made that the Parkes level would also drain out the Pomfret workings too. However after a year the Parkes Company walled up their level so flooding the Pomfret workings. A bitter quarrel ensued and in 1752 Lord Pomfret drove another level east further up Swinnergill and in 1769 built his own smelt mill higher up Swinnergill where the remains can still be seen today.

In 1767 the Parke's Company and Lord Pomfret had further disputes due to contested land and mineral rights. The resulting high profile trials, which became known as the Great Beldi Hill Trials, involved many local miners and people as witnesses and was a scandalous affair within the Swaledale community. However the trials allowed a review of mine law and custom, and as a result there were clearer definitions over leases and ownership of land and mineral rights.

In 1773 Lord Pomfret made changes to how miners were paid. The custom of working mines for 'bing tale' provided opportunity for agents to cheat and treat family and friends more favourably. Bing tale was the price paid to miners for the rough ore before smelting. Agents may pay for partly dressed ore (i.e. still mixed with dirt) from friends or family, while they would make other miners do far more dressing (sorting the ore from dirt and waste) before

paying. Pomfret stated that all mines should pay miners for the amount of smelted lead so all would receive the same terms.

Mining began to be conducted at greater depths with levels being driven into hillsides for great distances. Ore hearths became the main smelting furnaces for the small mines throughout the area. Hotching tubs, dolly tubs and power driven rollers were used for the dressing process. New reservoirs were built to meet the increased demand for water to power the water wheels and many remain today as tarns on the moor, such as Birkdale Tarn, Summer Lodge Tarn, Satron Tarn.



Waterwheel at Bunton, Gunnerside Gill.

The Nineteenth Century

At one period in the 18th century Swaledale held the premier place in the lead producing districts of Great Britain.

The nineteenth century was a time when a few large partnerships of local people worked large areas of the dale. A depression from 1829 resulted in many small mines having to close. Larger companies were able to survive through having sufficient capital, cutting men's wages and setting miners to carry out maintenance work on roads, extending or walling levels.

The boom times returned during the 1840's and 1850's. The industry expansion in the late eighteenth century caused the population of the dale to grow to the extent that there were not enough jobs for all the men. Many families could not survive and were forced to relocate to the textile areas of Lancashire or the coalfields of Durham where work was plentiful.

Between the censuses of 1891 and 1971 the population of Swaledale had halved. In 1851 Melbecks had a population count of 1,661 by 1998 it had reduced to 300.