

## **Memories of a Lead Miner: John Tom (J.T.) Rutter, the last lead miner in Gunnerside**

(as told to Jean Rutter)

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 study for a schoolmaster, because it was more useful for me to be adding money to help 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 be 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 eighty when he died. We used to have a smallholding 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 two other miners to open up a lead mine and worked there for two years. We then 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 a 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 the old fashioned way in the hand sieve, it wasn't an easy life.

My father and I together earned between two pounds and three pounds a month. To get from Winterings to the mine was three mile 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 day's work. No wonder a lot of miners died young, having to face such conditions. They got an illness, known as the miner's 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 for ourselves.

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 quoits 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 1 ½ d 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.