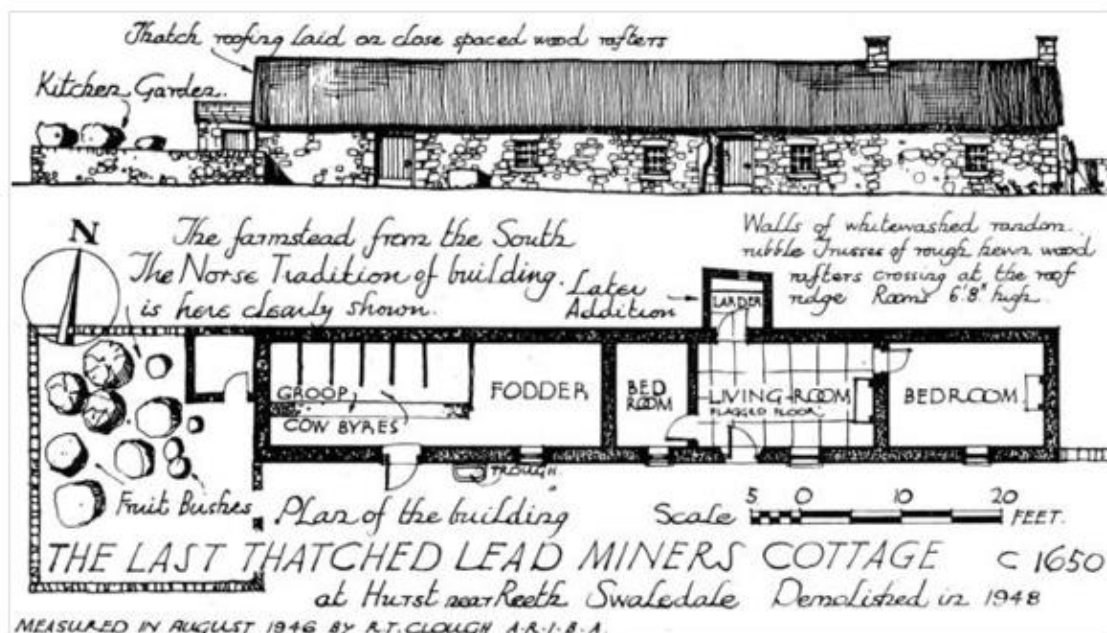


## Life of Miners

Due to the speculative uncertainty of mining, miners often had to supplement their income. Many miners held small holdings, keeping a cow, pig or sheep and growing vegetables and a small hay crop. During hay time miners left the mines to provide additional farm labour, this was considered an annual holiday and provided the opportunity for them to breathe fresh air. Miners also cut peat, which was required in great quantity for the smelt mills. Others earned extra money by dry stone walling or road mending which were considered healthier occupations. Poaching was also a common practice to supplement the basic family diet of oatmeal porridge and havercakes.

Housing conditions were very poor and basic, some little more than hovels. Large families had to endure cramped conditions, and very often additional miners were taken in as lodgers to provide an extra income.



Copyright: R.T. Clough 1962

**The Last Thatched Lead Miner's cottage (approximate date 1650) at Hurst near Reeth, Swaledale. Demolished 1948.**

Knitting was a valuable income which all the family were involved in. Miners would often knit on their long walk to and from the mines. Taking a short rest was called 'to sit for six stitches'. The mining families would exchange their knitted stockings at local markets for goods, or sell to agents who would then supply the wool for the next batch to be knitted up. Weekly markets and annual fairs allowed for both business and pleasure; a chance to meet family and friends, socialise with dancing and often long drinking sessions.

Religion played an important part in the mining community and Methodism was embraced. In 1691 Lord Wharton built Smarber Chapel as an Independent Meeting House and established his Bible Charity which ensured all children on his estate received a bible. Chapels were built in many villages, paid for by donations from the mining families and the men offering their labour for free. Methodism also encouraged abstinence, much to the relief of anxious wives who feared their miner husbands heading straight to the public houses when pay day finally arrived.

Literary Institutes were built to encourage self-improvement; these included libraries making books more accessible, concerts were staged by the local brass bands, self-improvement talks and lectures attended. Some mining companies introduced welfare schemes; Dr John Bathurst founded and funded a free school for the children of Arkengarthdale and gave financial provision to poor widows.



*Keld Band* (date and source unknown)

Other recreational activities would include cockfighting, wrestling, quoits and horse racing at Hurst and Reeth. Betting was discouraged and some miner's wives banned playing cards from the house for fear of their husband falling into debt.

The Poor Law in 1834 gave some provision for small sums to be distributed within the parish, many families had to run up credit at the mine shop for basic goods, but for those who hit really hard times the only option was the workhouse.