

Swaledale Mining Families

Metcalfes of Lane End



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Cooper Metcalfe was born in 1876 in a house at Lane End mine. His father, Thomas, was the engine man at the mine. In 1850 Thomas, at around 30 years of age, was involved in an accident; he had reached over to grease the machine and his sleeve caught in the engine. Initially he had to have his hand amputated, and then his forearm, before finally having to have a hook fitted.

When the mine closed in the 1860s, Thomas took over Hill Top Quarry, near Birkdale Tarn. When Cooper was thirteen years old he started work at the Tan Hill coal pits. Initially he filled and pushed out the tubs of coal from the mine on piece work rates. He was paid 6d for each tub filled, and 2 ½ d for each tub he carried out. He averaged 15 to 16 tubs per day.

One day in December, Cooper and two other men were trapped for over three hours due to a rock fall in the mine. Their only escape route was up a shaft but there was no-one above ground to pull them out. They managed to make a small hole in the pile of collapsed stones and then enlarged it with a length of rail. They were all able to squeeze through and then had to walk through freezing water up to their thighs to get out of the mine. *'It was t'worst night as I ivver knawed'* Cooper reflected.

When the Tan Hill pit closed Cooper then took over the Hill Top quarry from his father and worked there single-handed, he died in 1947. The quarry was subsequently taken over by another family member, George Clarkson from Keld; and then by George's son-in-law, Keith Brogden of South Stainmore.

Fawcetts of Muker - Edward Ralph Fawcett (1871 – 1939)

The Fawcett family were recorded on the Muker parish registers in the seventeenth century. Generation after generation farmed and worked part-time in the lead mines in the Muker area. In the early nineteenth century Mr Fawcett's grandfather worked at the woollen mill at Low Row when hard times hit, he then moved to Lancashire and died there, having left his family back in Muker.

Mr Fawcett's father was brought up a miner, starting at King's Pit coal mine at Tan Hill but then moving into lead mining. He found employment at the Old Field Hush, Beldi Hill for many years. His wages were eleven shillings per week and he became a skilled poacher.

In 1864 he went to Sardinia with a Newcastle-based company to open mines there. He returned to Swaledale in less than two years and married 'Mary O'Kisdon' and found work in the Mukerside mines.

He and another miner formed a partnership to trial ground on Kisdon Hill, only to find that the 'Old Man' (earlier miners) had already been there. He then moved to Askrigg and worked in the Worton mine, and after this he and his brother found work on the building of the new railway in Wensleydale. Edward Ralph Fawcett was born in Askrigg in 1871.

When the railway was complete, the family moved back to Muker and Mr Fawcett Snr found work in the Sir Francis mine in Gunnerside Gill, but this did not last long so they moved to Westmoreland to find work in the London Lead Company mines. In 1881 they moved to Lancashire, where both father and children found work in the cotton mills.

Edward Fawcett returned to Muker in 1916 and opened a shop, worked as a pack man and began to develop a deep interest in mining and antiquities. He contributed articles to the Darlington and Stockton Times, and had compiled a manuscript on the history of Swaledale lead mining when he died in 1939. This document, although never fully completed, is rich in local detail and has become one of the best known sources of history of Swaledale. Mr Fawcett was held in high esteem by many authors and historians who held an interest in dales heritage.

Marie Hartley wrote the following account having spent an evening in Thwaite with Edward Ralph Fawcett and Richard Coates (former lead miner and Old Gang agent)

'The two men began to talk with enthusiasm of the romance of lead mining, of the adventures and lives of the old miners, of the miles of levels like catacombs under the moors, and the fortunes that made and lost. Their tales brought back the long tradition of mining in Swaledale when father and son followed each other in the same occupation in the mines, and when the industry supported a much larger population than nowadays – tales that often ended in the familiar phrase 'They went into Lancashire'. It is a story closely linked with human happiness and the struggle for existence, and was one of the most graphic conversations we ever heard'