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# Chain Migration from the Lead Mines of Yorkshire to the Coal Mines and Cotton Mills of Lancashire\*

Phil Batman and Jack Southern<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Lead mining families migrated en masse out of Swaledale in North Yorkshire as the mines failed in the late nineteenth century. Many emigrated overseas, and many more left for other industrial areas of England to find work. One attractive destination was North East Lancashire, with particular focus on Burnley and nearby settlements. Analysing transcripts of all individuals listed in the censuses of the 1800s shows that 92 entire groups of people with the same surname (isonymic groups or 'clans') left the dale (or became extinct) over the course of the second half of the century. The clan with the greatest decline in the number of individuals in Swaledale over this time period was that with the surname Alderson. Family reconstitution from census data shows that 42 people called Alderson made the journey from Swaledale to Burnley between 1851 and 1911. Migrant men found employment as coal miners and their wives and daughters worked in the cotton mills. Arrivals concentrated in the vicinity of other migrants in the cotton town of Brierfield and the south-eastern part of Burnley. Family units tended to reside in their destinations close to other dalesmen in a pattern of chain migration.*

## Introduction

Chain migration refers to a social process whereby migrants from a specific area follow others from that same area to a particular destination, often facilitated by existing social connections and networks. Contemporary studies around the world have found that family migration has become dominant in many countries, some suggesting that the dramatic movements of people in recent times are the direct result of chain migration.<sup>2</sup>

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\* <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps114115.2025.x>.

1 Phil Batman: [pabacman@aol.com](mailto:pabacman@aol.com); Jack Southern: [jsouthern2@lancashire.ac.uk](mailto:jsouthern2@lancashire.ac.uk)

2 H. Wray, K. Charsley, G. Kolbaşı-Muyan and L. Smith, 'Introduction to special issue: family migration in times of crisis', *Migration Studies* 11 (2023), pp. 363-79,

Migrants are heavily dependent on the experience of people who have gone before; this explains why migration tends to run in families. The majority of out-migrants and emigrants in the nineteenth century came from places that were in the mainstream of economic change. Some people in such areas could have been totally ignorant of the possibility of migration and could not therefore have considered it; some people probably had a vague notion of migration; while others had a much more detailed and sophisticated understanding of the benefits they could gain from it.<sup>3</sup> There was, however, a vast difference between being aware of migration and doing it. In an era when literacy was poor, when the urban world even a few streets away could feel alien, and when rural social contact could be limited to how far someone could walk or ride on a horse, encouragement to join a migrant could hinge upon word of mouth or a shared sporadic letter.

### Swaledale: lead mining decline in the nineteenth century

Swaledale is the most northerly and remote of the Yorkshire Pennine Dales. Today it is a sparsely populated landscape (Figure 1). This solitude was not always the case, however, and the scars of Victorian lead mining on the dale sides are a visible reminder of a past age of intense activity. The dale includes several townships within four districts, namely Muker in the uppermost westerly part of the dale, Melbecks, Arkengarthdale, and Reeth, in the eastern lower part of the dale. All of these districts were mined from the beginning of the nineteenth century (Figure 2). The mines enjoyed great prosperity in the middle of the century, but this economic boom was succeeded by a severe depression, decline and eventual extinction of the industry in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

Extensive exploration of the mineral resources of the dale before the Victorian era had uncovered a rich lead mining field by the middle of the eighteenth century. Most of the potentially lucrative veins lay in an east-west complex on the north side of the River Swale. The men who extracted the ore from Swaledale mines came originally from farming families, and their involvement in the industry eventually overshadowed agriculture. As early as the middle of the seventeenth century, Swaledale farmers began to engage in part-time mining, and within the next century

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnad026> ; B. Yu, *Chain Migration Explained: the Power of the Immigration Multiplier* (New York, 2008).

3 D. Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy: Emigration and Internal Migration in England and Wales, 1861-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 175-7 and 279-82.

4 For an overview of the topography, archaeology and history of Swaledale and its mines, see A. Fleming, *Swaledale: Valley of the Wild River* (Edinburgh, 1998); R. Fieldhouse and B. Jennings, *A History of Richmond and Swaledale* (Chichester, 2005); and A. Raistrick and B. Jennings, *A History of Lead Mining in the Pennines* (London, 1965).

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their descendants were miners who engaged in part-time farming.<sup>5</sup> Those farming communities within which lead mines were opened were transformed into

**Figure 1** Village of Muker, Swaledale



communities of miners, many of whom held small plots of land. The Melbecks and Arkengarthdale regions of Swaledale experienced a considerable influx of migrants at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Those miners already established when the immigrants arrived retained their smallholdings. However, most of the immigrants would have been unable to rent a holding of land. About half of the workforce in Swaledale was employed by the lead mining industry in 1851. This proportion fell progressively

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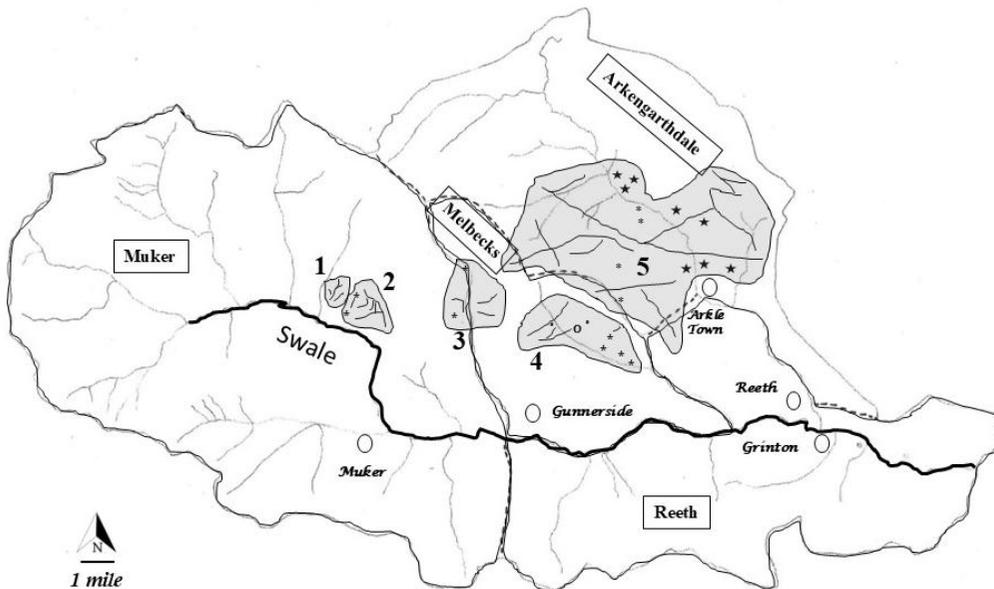
5 Raistrick and Jennings, *History of Lead Mining*, pp. 311–24.

6 C. Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization: the North Yorkshire Pennines 1790-1914* (Bern, Switzerland, 1999), pp. 19-30.

and was about 20 per cent in 1891 by which time agriculture had once again become the largest employment sector.

The price of lead rose towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, fell in a post-war depression, but recovered thereafter to reach a peak in 1825. However, all the lead mining areas of Britain suffered a prolonged depression beginning with the general trade slump of 1826. Trade recovered in Swaledale in 1827, but the

**Figure 2** The four districts, villages and main mines in Upper Swaledale



**Notes.** Mines: 1 – Beldi Hill, 2 – Swinnergill, 3 – Lownathwaite/Blakethwaite, 4 – Old Gang/Surrender, 5 – Arkengarthdale. Lines in mining areas denote major veins or levels and small asterisks denote smelt mills.

**Source:** Redrawn from the Ordnance Survey map of Swaledale 1856-1857, original scale six inches to the mile (1:10,560).

price of lead continued to fall. The profitability of the mines depended more upon the fortunes of development and the discovery of new seams than upon short-term price fluctuations. Small changes in the price affected profit margins and the amount of money available for prospecting. A company fortunate enough to find

a rich deposit of ore could make a profit even with lead at a low price, but a high price would not ensure prosperity if the workings were meagre. The driving of levels into veins of lead was an expensive business, and output and profits varied from year to year. The depression lifted to an extent in the 1830s in the Swaledale mines when they were managed effectively by a small group of local investors.<sup>7</sup> The eventual demise of the industry was a slow process, picking off districts and townships selectively. The mines in Muker failed early, the Old Gang mine in Melbecks between 1871 and 1891, and the Arkengarthdale mines between 1881 and 1901. The last mines were abandoned at the outbreak of the Great War in 1914.<sup>8</sup>

### Population decline in the nineteenth century

The population trends in Swaledale reflect the people's reliance upon, and the balance between, the lead mining industry and farming. Open field farming had virtually disappeared from Swaledale by the seventeenth century, and arable farming was almost non-existent in the upper dale in the 1800s. There were only about 120 acres of ploughing in Swaledale above Grinton during the 1820s and 200 acres in Grinton parish in 1840, most of which was at Reeth.<sup>9</sup>

The population of Swaledale enjoyed rapid growth in the early decades of the nineteenth century, reaching a peak in 1821 with an increase of about 30 per cent between 1801 and 1821. In Arkengarthdale, the population increase of 30 per cent between 1801 and 1811 is attributed to an influx of mineworkers from the agricultural districts of the North Riding and South Durham. The entire dale suffered severe difficulties following the near total collapse of its lead industry towards the end of the nineteenth century, and a large proportion of the population left the dale. By 1911 Swaledale had lost two thirds of its population since the peak of almost a century before (Figure 3).<sup>10</sup>

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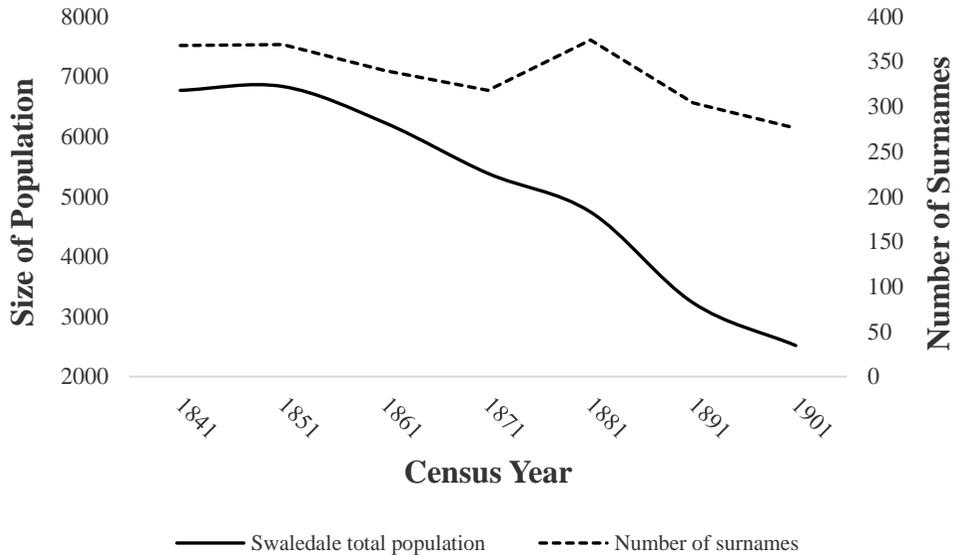
7 Fieldhouse and Jennings, *History of Richmond and Swaledale*, pp. 204–32. Swaledale lead-mining deeds, leases, accounts and papers from the nineteenth century are held at: North Yorkshire County Record Office [hereafter NYCRO], reference ZLB.

8 British exports of lead averaged 18,000 tons a year in the years 1816–1820. They fell to about 10,000 tons a year in 1829–1833. Lead production in Spain and other countries had increased significantly by the late 1870s. From being the world's largest producer of lead in the 1820s, by 1880 Britain imported nearly twice as much lead as was mined at home.

9 M. Hartley and J. Ingilby, *Life and Tradition in the Yorkshire Dales* (London, 1968); Fieldhouse and Jennings, *History of Richmond and Swaledale*, pp. 466–75.

10 Census data for Swaledale have been taken from transcripts made and kindly provided by Marion Hearfield, Marion Moverley, Christine Amsden and Tracy Little of the Upper Dales Family History Group; see also Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, pp. 14–18.

**Figure 3** Population and number of surnames in Swaledale during the nineteenth century



**Sources:** The National Archives, Census enumerators’ books: Reeth registration district, parishes of Muker, Melbecks, Arkengarthdale and Reeth, 1841-1901. The data for the total population may be found at Great Britain Historical Geographical Information Systems and University of Portsmouth, *A Vision of Britain through Time: Reeth through Time, Population Statistics, Total Population* [2009-2025] [https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10034553/cube/TOT\\_POP](https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10034553/cube/TOT_POP) [accessed 21 October 2025].

In the early years of the nineteenth century, the greatest growth in population occurred in townships with a substantial lead industry; similarly, the most severe losses in the second half of the century occurred in those townships where the industry had been most influential. Population change thus varied considerably between townships. It was the strength of its underlying agricultural base that enabled the economy to survive.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, p. 44. Hallas concludes that it was the diversity of occupations within the rural economy of Swaledale, with resilient supporting crafts and services, that enabled the community to survive the collapse of its lead industry. See also C. Hallas, ‘Craft occupations in the late nineteenth century: some local considerations’, *Local*

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Lead miners were the most mobile section of the population.<sup>12</sup> Out-migration of these families from the Yorkshire mines in the economic depression of the 1820s was predominantly to the textile or mixed textile-coal districts of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire and the coal mining areas of the North East.<sup>13</sup> The poorest families generally could not raise enough capital to leave, and early migrants were from the farming classes rather than labourers. Many more migrated to other parts of Britain than overseas.<sup>14</sup> There was a strong tradition of currents of migration between the coal- and lead-mining regions of the dales and the Durham fields, the movements fluctuating with the fortunes of each industry.

Some families emigrated to the United States or Canada. Waves of migration occurred particularly in the 1830s, 1840s, 1870s and 1880s, this final decade accounting for more than a third of the total migration from Wensleydale and Swaledale.<sup>15</sup> Emigrants from Swaledale sailed particularly for Dubuque on the Mississippi River in Iowa, attracted by the lead ore, profitable farming opportunities, and the low prices of land, livestock and provisions.<sup>16</sup> The boom in mining in Dubuque was from 1835 to 1849. Immigrant families became integrated over a wide area of the mining and farming country and individual families developed their own specific areas of land.<sup>17</sup>

Out-migrant families during the later depression towards the end of the century left for the same areas as their predecessors in general, namely to East Lancashire

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*Population Studies*, 44 (1990), pp. 22–8; and Upper Dales Family History Group, *Those Who Left the Dales*, edited by G. Marriott (York, 2010).

12 C.S. Hallas, 'Migration in nineteenth-century Wensleydale and Swaledale', *Northern History* 27 (1991), pp. 139-61, here at pp. 153-5, <https://doi.org/10.1179/007817291790175664>.

13 The social conditions and population movements in the mining areas in decline are described in Raistrick and Jennings, *History of Lead Mining*, pp. 324–7. David Morris suggests that recent arrivals to the dales without mining or farming work were the first to migrate to the mills of Lancashire or South Yorkshire or the coalfields from about 1830 (D. Morris, *The Dalesmen of the Mississippi River* (York, 1989), p. 2.). See also M. Hartley and J. Ingilby, *Dales Memories* (Clapham, 1986).

14 Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, pp. 265-94.

15 See C.J. Erickson, 'Emigration from the British Isles to the U.S.A. in 1841: Part I. Emigration from the British Isles', *Population Studies* 43 (1989), pp. 347-67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472031000144186>, and C.J. Erickson, 'Emigration from the British Isles to the U.S.A. in 1841: Part II. Who were the English emigrants', *Population Studies* 44 (1990), pp. 21-40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472031000144366>; Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, pp. 274 and 292; and W.H. Long and G.M. Davies, *Farm Life in a Yorkshire Dale* (Clapham, 1948).

16 Hallas, 'Migration in nineteenth-century Wensleydale and Swaledale', pp. 152 and 157.

17 Upper Dales Family History Group, *Those Who Left the Dales*, p. 76.

and the industrial West Riding. A smaller proportion of the migrants emigrated abroad, on this occasion to Australia as well as North America.<sup>18</sup>

Numerous dales yeomen families persisted and survived throughout the century. Many were anxious to remain in the dale even when this was not their best chance of survival. They drew increasingly during this period on members of their family to provide the agricultural workforce.<sup>19</sup> The declining population lived off larger plots of land during the lead industry's demise. Many deserted farms and cottages, most of them of late eighteenth or nineteenth century origin, today lie high on the dale side as reminders of an era long gone. Lead mining in this community has now disappeared, and so (almost) has the small family farm.

### Surname decline in the nineteenth century

The catastrophic effects of the collapse of the lead mining industry upon families in the dale are reflected in both the population size and number of surnames. The population declined as the industry collapsed. The number of surnames also fell over time (Figure 3). In other words, entire groups of isonymic people (or clans) disappeared from the dale (either by migration or extinction).<sup>20</sup> The decline in surname numbers was proportionally less than the fall in the number of people. There were 368 surnames in the Swaledale census population of 6,770 of 1841, and 276 in the census population of 2,518 of 1901, that is, there was a net fall of 92 surnames (or 25 per cent) and a fall in the average clan size from 18 to 9 people over the half century. By 1908, a commentator felt able to write: '[t]oday the population of Swaledale answers to not many more than a dozen or two names. Century after century these have intermarried. Few men in the dale obtain their brides from the world beyond the dale's hill barriers.'<sup>21</sup>

### Swaledale clans

The movement of individual members of clans within the dale and migration out of it can be measured with a simple count of the household heads of any particular

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18 NYCRO, ZRD: Muker select vestry and overseers account book 1797 – 1840, Muker select vestry minutes 1819 – 1837; Fieldhouse and Jennings, *History of Richmond and Swaledale*, pp. 301–3.

19 Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, pp. 26, 71 and 294.

20 'Isonymy' refers to sharing of the same surname; a clan may be defined as a group of people connected by shared ancestry; see G. Lasker, 'Using surnames to analyse population structure', in D. Postles (ed.), *Naming, Society and Regional Identity* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 3–24.

21 E. Bogg, *Richmondshire: An Account of its History and Antiquities, Characters and Customs, Legendary Lore, and Natural History* (Leeds, 1908), p. 216.

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surname at each of the Victorian censuses. Having identified the household heads of the family by forename, the genealogical descent of individual household heads and their occupations by district of residence in Swaledale can be confirmed and plotted.<sup>22</sup>

Swaledale clans with the greatest overall changes in number between 1841 and 1901 are shown below (Table 1), tabulated as the number of household heads in each clan taken from the census returns. There were 16 clans with a decline of at least ten household heads, and 11 clans with a growth of at most four heads. The five clans that showed the greatest decline in numbers of household heads between 1841 and 1901 were the Alderson, Harker, Metcalfe, Peacock and Raw clans, the Aldersons showing the greatest drop in number from their base of 80 heads in 1841. The fall in the number of households of these 16 largest clans in Swaledale was constant and relentless, notably by more than a half in the second half of the century.

As employment in the mines diminished, some families may have had the opportunity, or felt the economic pressure, to move into farming or increase the sizes of their farms. The demographics of the largest clans differed in the various districts of the dale and between each other. Farming dominated the economy in

**Table 1 Swaledale clans with the greatest decline in the number of household heads, 1841-1901**

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Surname	Number of heads of household		Change in number of heads of household 1841-1901	Percentage decline in number of heads of household, 1841-1901
	1841	1901		
Alderson	80	45	-35	44
Harker	49	20	-29	59
Metcalfe	45	20	-25	56
Peacock	48	26	-22	46
Raw	32	10	-22	69

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**Sources:** The National Archives, Census enumerators' books: parishes of Muker, Melbecks, Arkengarthdale and Reeth, 1841 and 1901.

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<sup>22</sup> For details see: P. Batman, 'A comparison of kinship family survival in York and Swaledale in the nineteenth century' (unpub. PhD. Thesis, University of Leicester, 2020).

Muker. The large clans here showed stability or growth in number of household heads. The slow steady decline in population in Muker parish can be attributed to this dependence on agriculture, in contrast to the more pronounced precipitous depopulation in areas reliant on the fortunes of failing mines. Similarly the rising birth rate in Muker in the first half of the nineteenth century reflects parental optimism in farming. Lead mining predominated in Melbecks and Arkengarthdale. The majority of the lead-mining clans in Melbecks fell in numbers after a period of stability until 1861, but in Arkengarthdale mining clans declined progressively. Neither mining nor farming held sway in Reeth. Some clans enjoyed a boom in both industries in this district, but followed by a slump, while some witnessed only a steady decline in their mining fortunes.

The collapse of mining employment in these families of the dale was almost total by 1901. The mining community collapsed in Muker district after 1841. The industry was the backbone of the local economy in the district of Melbecks, the site of the Lownathwaite and Blakethwaite, Surrender and Old Gang mines. There were two patterns of mining households in Melbecks, the predominant one of a stable number of miners until 1861 or thereabouts, after which the numbers fell away. The Aldersons in Melbecks were able to diversify into farming after the Old Gang and other mines failed, but the Harkers could not. Vagaries of landowning practices may explain the difference between these two families. The Peacock miners of Melbecks actually grew in number. The mainstay of the local economy in Arkengarthdale was also the mining industry. Two of the five prominent clans had no real presence in Arkengarthdale, but the numbers of mining households of the other three families fell progressively. In Reeth a couple of the five clans showed growth followed by a slump in the number of mining heads of household, while the other three showed only a drop in their number over the half century. Most of the Aldersons of Reeth at the start of the period serviced the needs of this small community: they included the workhouse master.

The fortunes of these five families were much more buoyant in the agricultural economy. The five Swaledale clans that showed the greatest decline were landlords in the 1840s that tended to own more land than they occupied, although this differential varied between the families and between the regions of the dale.<sup>23</sup> The districts apart from Arkengarthdale showed an increase in the number of farming

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23 Tithes holdings taken from listings of Muker 1844, Melbecks 1844, Arkendale 1838 and Reeth 1844 in the Parish of Grinton held by TheGenealogist. See TheGenealogist, *The National Tithe Record Collection* [2025] [https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/tithe/?referrer=GAW\\_C20923457427&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAADfej9uo8\\_2oX433YF5wU5NiRb\]c&gclid=CjwKCAjw3tzHBhBREiwAlM\]oUseIych5\]2vzhedsRE98qixmjBmnlnsnaMw2ONsQm3FhSMQ1uCBpWB0Cr8MQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/tithe/?referrer=GAW_C20923457427&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAADfej9uo8_2oX433YF5wU5NiRb]c&gclid=CjwKCAjw3tzHBhBREiwAlM]oUseIych5]2vzhedsRE98qixmjBmnlnsnaMw2ONsQm3FhSMQ1uCBpWB0Cr8MQAvD_BwE) [accessed 21 October 2025].

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household heads between 1841 and 1901. There was a general slump in the number of farming households of these clans across the dale in the 1850s and 1880s, but growth in their numbers in the other four decades of the second half of the century. Two patterns emerge in farming families in Muker, namely one of stability in the number of farmers in the families across the period, and the other of growth in number. In Reeth there was a mixed economy of industry and agriculture, where most of these clans enjoyed a rise then a drop in the number of farmers.

### **Burnley: industrial growth in the nineteenth century**

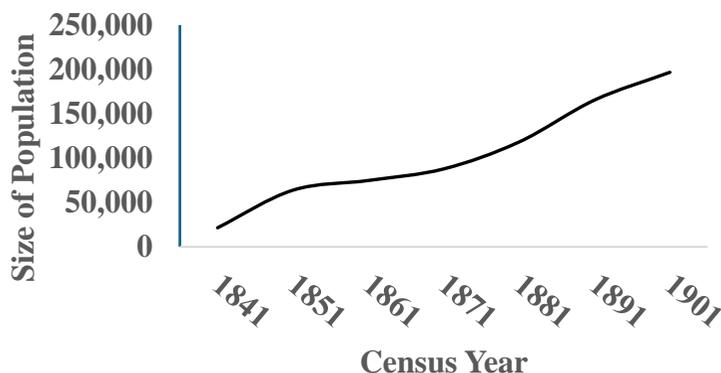
#### *Cotton industry*

By the late nineteenth century, north-east Lancashire had developed into a patchwork of separate but intensely interconnected settlements. All of them relied upon the cotton industry to a great extent, even in the rural areas, with some ancillary industries such as mining and engineering largely feeding into cotton. Some of these settlements developed from established places, while others were effectively new. Colne was probably the first that could be classed as a town proper, but it only really emerged as a substantial place of importance in the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> It served as a gateway between Lancashire and Yorkshire, and established the wider area as a focal point between the two counties as well as encouraging cross-border cultural exchange. Colne was eclipsed by Burnley, which emerged as the socio-economic focal point of the area from the late eighteenth century. Burnley rapidly grew from a locally important market town into a centre of cotton production, and with that came the development of mining and engineering. The manufacture of cotton began to replace wool in Burnley in the second half of the eighteenth century. The earliest known factories, from the mid-1700s relied on 'overpowered from water wheels'.<sup>25</sup> The arrival of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in 1801 enabled the transportation of goods in bulk, and dozens of mills were constructed as the economy boomed.<sup>26</sup> Half a century later, the East Lancashire Railway Company linked Accrington to Burnley in 1848, allowing access to the national railway network. The town boasted about 50 spinning firms by 1850,

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25 W. Bennett, *The History of Burnley 1650 to 1850* (Burnley, 1986), pp. 173-82.  
24 J. Swain, *Industry before the Industrial Revolution: North-East Lancashire, c. 1500-1640*  
26 Bennett, *History of Burnley*, pp. 156-9.  
(Manchester, 1986), p. 4.

**Figure 4** Population of Burnley, 1841-1901



**Source:** Censuses of population, 1841-1901. The figures are for Burnley registration district. The data may be found at Great Britain Historical Geographical Information Systems and University of Portsmouth, *A Vision of Britain through Time: Burnley Poor Law Union/Registration District Total Population* [2009-2025] [https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139752/cube/TOT\\_POP](https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10139752/cube/TOT_POP) [accessed 21 October 2025].

although there were no mills engaged solely in weaving at that time.<sup>27</sup> There were 80 firms connected with both spinning and weaving in Burnley by 1878. Eight large spinning firms went out of business soon after 1880, however, and spinners had to leave Burnley to seek employment elsewhere. The local industry became highly specialised thereafter, with weaving concentrated in north-east Lancashire, and spinning in the south of the county. Many mills were extended and many more new mills erected during the period 1852 to 1890. This also stimulated urban growth, as mills began to be built on the periphery pushing towards the surrounding countryside.<sup>28</sup> In 1886, the 50,000 Burnley looms produced a greater length of cloth than any other town in the world. Such a boom in cloth production continued well into the twentieth century. By the eve of the First World War, 75 per cent of the workforce in the region were dependent on weaving for their livelihood.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, *History of Burnley*, pp. 95-7.

<sup>28</sup> J. Southern, 'On the periphery? Autonomy, localism and community in a Lancashire cotton weaving district, Harle Syke c.1840-1936', in J.F. Wilson, C. Corker and J. Lane (eds), *Industrial Clusters: Knowledge, Innovation Systems and Sustainability in the UK* (New York, 2022), available as e-book at <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036357>.

<sup>29</sup> J. Hill, *Nelson: Politics, Economy, Community* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 27.

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As the cotton industry expanded in Lancashire, so its impact upon migration and employment grew; this boom in the industry is reflected in the population growth of Burnley (Figure 4).<sup>30</sup>

The majority of the migrants came from nearby, particularly those places where handloom textile weaving had been traditionally practised. By 1851 25 per cent of Burnley's population had migrated from within eight miles.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, about 70 per cent of the migrants in Nelson during the 1860s originated from destinations within a five-mile radius.<sup>32</sup> Nelson emerged effectively as an immigrant town, albeit slightly later than Burnley, but its growth led to significant depopulation along the Lancashire-Yorkshire border areas.

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Lancashire and Liverpool  
Leeds and Liverpool  
Brierfield, another example of the 'spillover' settlements, began as woodland on the edge of Marsden adjacent to Nelson, initially providing employment for several years then to handloom weavers in their houses in the countryside. He admitted two sons, Robert (1824-1890) of Brierfield House and William (1828-1903) of Reedyford Hall to the business, which developed into one of the largest cotton spinning and manufacturing concerns in north-east Lancashire with interests in Nelson and Burnley. Harry (1852-1928) and Robert Tunstall (1860-1902), sons of William, then formed the family firm of Tunstall Brothers working with their father, who increasingly became a benevolent but distant presence.<sup>34</sup> Harry became the sole owner of Brierfield Mills Limited after his partners' deaths. After the founding father's death in 1854, William Tunstall built a large new spinning mill in the proximity of the old one. Proposals were made to form a 'room and power'

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30 In 1811, 242,000 workers were employed in Lancashire cotton industry (or 36 per cent of the population); by 1861, this figure had risen to 446,000 (M.B. Rose, 'Introduction: the rise of the cotton industry in Lancashire to 1830', in M.B. Rose (ed.) *The Lancashire Cotton Industry: a History since 1700* (Preston, 1996), pp. 1-28, here at p. 14.) There were 3 times more people in Burnley than in Swaledale in 1841 (21,481 compared with. 6,770), and 78 times more in 1901 (196,773 compared with 2,518).

31 E. Higham, 'An investigation into the migrant population of Burnley in 1851' (unpublished

33 PGCE Dissertation, Chorley College of Education 1972. Burnley Library Local Studies, Burnley, 3 May 1890, obituary Robert Tunstall.

34 Hill, *Nelson*, p. 37.

32 Hill, *Nelson*, p. 11.

company, a concept intended to aid underpaid employees.<sup>35</sup> In 1872, however, a fire gutted the old mill, following which the site was rebuilt and substantially extended (Figure 5). By 1890, Tunstill Brothers was operating 116,000 spindles and 2,213 looms in its operations in Brierfield, Newton Mill in Burnley and Throstle Nest in Nelson, and employing 1,200 workers in Brierfield.

**Figure 5** Tunstill Mill and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Brierfield



### *Coal industry*

The coal industry in Burnley underwent a period of marked improvement in the second half of the nineteenth century, many of the older pits facing closure and new pits undergoing modernisation.<sup>36</sup> On the Burnley coal seam, mining began at

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35 A 'room and power' company was a mill in which small businesses could rent space for their machines and power to operate them.

36 W. Bennett, *The History of Burnley from 1850* (Burnley, 1979), p. 109; see also J. Nadin, *Collieries of North East Lancashire* (Cheltenham, 2010).

Brierfield pit in 1811. However, coal pits in Brierfield (including the one near Tunstill's cotton mill) were closed in the 1870s.<sup>37</sup> The number of miners rose from about 1,600 in 1850 to 2,400 in 1900, most of the coal being used for domestic consumption, cotton mills and foundries.

### Alderson surname distribution and migration

A search of TheGenealogist web site for persons with the surname Alderson in 1851 and 1881 census databases showed a clear concentration of individuals with this surname in the northern English counties of Yorkshire, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Westmorland and Cumberland.<sup>38</sup> These six counties accounted for 84 per cent of the Alderson population in England, Wales and Scotland in 1851 and 85 per cent in 1881 (Table 2).

Clearly the surname Alderson has origins in the North of England. Individuals with the surname were concentrated in the northern counties of Yorkshire and Durham in the censuses of 1851 and 1881, with somewhat lower numbers in other northern counties including Lancashire. The distribution followed the same pattern in both censuses, but with an increase in absolute numbers over the 30 year period. The largest increase in number of individuals with the surname Alderson occurred in Durham, but the greatest increase in percentage terms occurred in Lancashire by 1881, where there had been over a three-fold increase since 1851.

All individuals named Alderson in TheGenealogist website in the 1851 and 1881 census databases were transcribed into a searchable Excel spreadsheet. Entries were classified by place of birth, address, registration district and occupation and some summary statistics are presented in Table 3. Details of the migration of Aldersons from Upper Swaledale to Lancashire between 1851 and 1881 may be deduced from this table. A few Aldersons had migrated into Lancashire by 1851 (two heads of household and three individuals in total), but these numbers increased substantially over the succeeding 30 years (15 heads of household and 45 individuals in total by 1881). A small number of individuals had migrated out of

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37 J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (London, 1984), p. 33; *Burnley Express*, 3 May 1890, obituary Robert Tunstill.

38 The Genealogist, UK Census [2025] [https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/census?referrer=GAW\\_C20923457427&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAADfej-139HWRku5Zpz1otS33jk2I&gclid=CjwKCAjwpOfHBhAxEiwAm1SwEhQRj\\_IJ5p6GjXLW3vNaLbx7FhWND-Hzy\\_p6CnHif0oKOhEj0BiSUxoC5-kQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/census?referrer=GAW_C20923457427&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAADfej-139HWRku5Zpz1otS33jk2I&gclid=CjwKCAjwpOfHBhAxEiwAm1SwEhQRj_IJ5p6GjXLW3vNaLbx7FhWND-Hzy_p6CnHif0oKOhEj0BiSUxoC5-kQAvD_BwE) [accessed 27 July 2024]. Of the 2,965 Aldersons in Great Britain in 1851, 2,480 were in the six northern counties; in 1881 the corresponding figures were 4,190 and 3,567.

Swaledale into other areas of Yorkshire. The number of households in the dale headed by an individual with the surname Alderson dropped significantly over a period of mining decline by 1881. Among the households remaining in Swaledale, however, there had been a switch in employment for these individuals between agriculture and lead mining, rising in the latter category (from 64 to 85) and declining in the former (from 78 to 21). Alderson migrants into Lancashire by 1881 had found work in agriculture, the cotton industry and coal mining in similar numbers.

**Table 2** Numbers of people with the surname Alderson in six northern counties, 1851 and 1881

County	1851	1881	Increase 1851-1881	
			N	%
Cumberland	23	63	40	174
Durham	878	1,382	504	57
Lancashire	112	368	256	229
Northumberland	90	93	3	3
Westmorland	157	156	-1	0
Yorkshire	1,221	1,505	284	23

**Source:** The Genealogist, *UK Census* [2025]  
[https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/census?referrer=GAW\\_C20923457427&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAAD\\_fej-139HWRku5Zpz1otS33jk2l&gclid=CjwKCAjwpOfHBhAxEiwAm1SwEhQRj\\_IJ5p6GJXLW3vNaLbx7FhWND-Hzy\\_p6CnHif0oKOhEj0BiSUxoC5-kQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/census?referrer=GAW_C20923457427&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAAD_fej-139HWRku5Zpz1otS33jk2l&gclid=CjwKCAjwpOfHBhAxEiwAm1SwEhQRj_IJ5p6GJXLW3vNaLbx7FhWND-Hzy_p6CnHif0oKOhEj0BiSUxoC5-kQAvD_BwE)  
 [accessed 1 November 2025]

## Alderson migrants from Swaledale to Burnley

### *Numbers and origins*

Figure 6 shows the population of Burnley taken from census transcripts plotted against the number of people with the surname of Alderson whose origins could be traced back by family reconstitution to Swaledale. This number, rising progressively from 4 in the census of 1851 to 117 in the census of 1911, includes male migrants from the dale called Alderson together with their spouses and

## Chain Migration from Yorkshire to Lancashire

children who may have been born in Swaledale, Burnley or elsewhere. Aldersons appear to have arrived in Burnley from Swaledale over the half century by chain

**Table 3 Aldersons in Yorkshire and Lancashire, 1851 and 1881**

	1851		1881	
	Yorkshire	Lancashire	Yorkshire	Lancashire
Total number	1,221	112	1,505	368
Born in upper Swaledale	341	3	280	45
Migrated out of Swaledale	18		20	
Heads of household born in upper Swaledale	80	2	65	15
Average household size in upper Swaledale	4.3	na	4.3	na
Born in upper Swaledale and employed in agriculture	64	0	85	8
Born in Upper <b>upper</b> Swaledale and employed in lead mining	78	0	21	0
Born in upper Swaledale and employed in cotton industry	0	0	0	7
Born in upper Swaledale and employed in coal mining	1	1	1	7

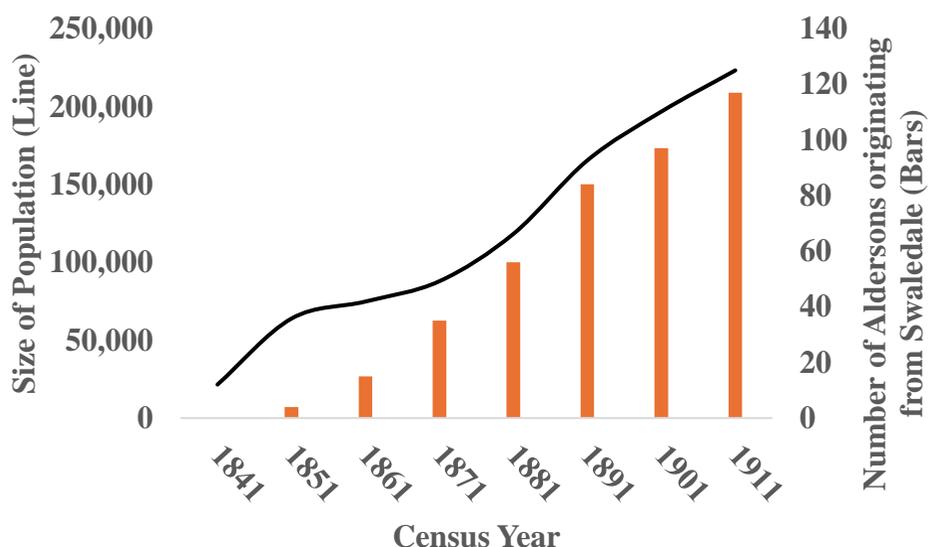
**Source:** The Genealogist, *UK Census* [2025]  
[https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/census?referrer=GAW\\_C20923457427&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAADfej-139HWRku5Zpz1otS33jk2l&gclid=CjwKCAjwpOfHBhAxEiwAm1SwEhQRj\\_IJ5p6GJXLW3vNaLbx7FhWND-Hzy\\_p6CnHif0oKOhEj0BiSUxoC5-kQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/census?referrer=GAW_C20923457427&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20923457427&gbraid=0AAAAADfej-139HWRku5Zpz1otS33jk2l&gclid=CjwKCAjwpOfHBhAxEiwAm1SwEhQRj_IJ5p6GJXLW3vNaLbx7FhWND-Hzy_p6CnHif0oKOhEj0BiSUxoC5-kQAvD_BwE)  
 [accessed 1 November 2025]

migration. Figure 7 shows the migration patterns of all individuals named Alderson in the Burnley censuses of 1841 to 1911 who had made the journey from Swaledale. It excludes spouses and children named Alderson in the Burnley censuses who had not been born in Swaledale.

Some 42 individuals in a total of 12 households migrated from Swaledale between the censuses of 1851 and 1911. Of these 12 households, one had first arrived by the census of 1851, one more by 1861, two more by 1871, another three

by 1881, three more by 1891, and the last two by 1901. The large majority of these people (37) migrated from Muker and the remainder came from Reeth. Several Aldersons shared a household at their first recorded census in Burnley with Aldersons who had not migrated from Swaledale (that is, wives and children); one made the journey with family members who did not share their surname (affinal

**Figure 6 Total population of Burnley and number of Aldersons living in Burnley and originating from Swaledale, 1841-1911**



**Sources:** Census enumerators' books, Burnley 1841-1911.

kin); and others had no other migrants or a lodger living with them at their first census in Burnley. Five of these households migrated as a sole Alderson, five as nuclear (or simple) families (parent(s) usually with children), and two as extended family households (with brothers, wives and children).<sup>39</sup> The ages at which these

<sup>39</sup> P. Laslett, 'Introduction: the history of the family', in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 1-90, here at p. 31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511561207.003>. The individuals in this table did not have the surname Alderson at the time of her migration, although her children did, having married her second husband Johnson Tindall on the death of her first, Thomas Alderson (the father of her children).

# Chain Migration from Yorkshire to Lancashire

**Figure 7 Migration to Burnley from Swaledale of individuals called Alderson**

Migrant Individuals and Households	Place of Birth	Age	Residence in Censuses											
			1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911				
John	Muker	30	Muker	Spencers Row, Little Marsden										
Thomas: Bro	Muker	27	Muker	Muker	Brierfield	(1) Wood St, LM	Burnley	Burnley						
Miles: Bro of Thomas	Muker	26	Muker	Muker	Brierfield	Muker								
Miles: Thomas: Stepson of Miles	Muker	34												
Mary J: Wife of Miles Thomas	Muker	26												
William: Bro of Thomas	Muker	24	Muker	Muker	Brierfield	(2) Wood St, LM	Little Marsden							
Phyllis: Wife of Wm	Muker	23												
John: Bro of Thomas	Muker	22	Muker	Muker	Little Marsden									
James: Bro of Thomas	Muker	20												
Isabella: Wife of James	Muker	24												
Phils: Mother (with 2nd husband J Tindal)	Muker	43	Muker	Muker	(2) Muker Village	Civiger								
Thomas: Bro	Muker	19												
Edward: Bro	Muker	17												
Dinah: Sis	Muker	15												
Eleanor: Sis	Muker	13												
Phils: Sis	Muker	11												
Miles: Father	Muker	40	Muker	Muker	Muker	Little Marsden								
Isabella: Wife of Miles	Muker	36												
Thomas: Son	Muker	15												
Alice: Dau	Muker	13												
David: Son	Muker	11												
James: Father	Reeth	32												
Eleanor: Wife of James	Reeth	32												
Thomas	Muker	44	Muker	Muker	Muker									
Jemima: Wife of Thomas	Muker	42	Muker	Muker	Muker									
Stepson	Reeth	33												
George: Father	Muker	65												
James: Son	Muker	28												
Joseph: Son	Muker	22												
Elizabeth: Dau	Muker	19												
Margaret: Dau	Muker	13												
John Bland	Wimorland	51												
Mary: Wife of John Bland	Durham	49												
George: Son	Muker	26												
Christiana: Wife of George	Muker	10												
Sarah: Dau	Muker	24												
John: Son	Muker	21												
Nathan: Son	Muker	13												
Nathan: Bro of John Bland	Muker	30												
Ann: Wife of Nathan	Muker	17												
John James	Reeth	28												
Elizabeth Alderson: Domestic cook for Wm Alderson (h. Brierfield: no relation)	Muker	26												
James	Reeth	41												

	Residence in Swaledale
	Residence in Registration District of Burnley
	Residence not in S'dale or Reg District of Burnley
	Not alive or Not found in Censuses
1 & 2	Neighbouring households
LM	Little Marsden
Age	Age at first entry on Burnley census

**Sources:** Census enumerators' books: Burnley and Swaledale, 1841-1911.



## Chain Migration from Yorkshire to Lancashire

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individuals were first recorded in a census in the registration district of Burnley were evenly spread, with a range of 11 to 65 years. Not all of these people migrated directly from Swaledale to Burnley; one individual made the return journey to Swaledale from Burnley, was enumerated in Swaledale at one census, and then returned to Burnley; two people migrated to Swaledale from other northern counties before onward migration to Burnley; and members of the two extended households did not all migrate at the same time.

### *Employment*

Figure 8 shows some employment details of the 42 Aldersons who migrated from Swaledale to the registration district of Burnley. The last recorded employment for each individual in the censuses from Swaledale is recorded, along with the first recorded employment in the censuses after migration to Burnley district.

Of the 42 Aldersons who migrated from Swaledale to Burnley, 25 were male and 17 female. The 25 males recorded at their last census enumeration in Swaledale included 8 miners (5 lead and 3 coal) and 11 children (other employments in Swaledale were 2 servants, 1 farm labourer, 1 wood carrier, 1 farmer and 1 individual with no recorded employment). Early migrant men found employment as coal miners, while their subsequent wives and daughters worked in the cotton mills of the district. Of the 25 males who arrived in Burnley, 16 found employment in the coal mines at their first recorded employment (and none in the cotton mills). Of the 17 females who arrived in Burnley district, 7 were working at their first census there in a cotton mill, with an age range of 13 to 24 years. The youngest employee whose age was recorded in the first census after arrival in Burnley was a 13 year old female cotton weaver.

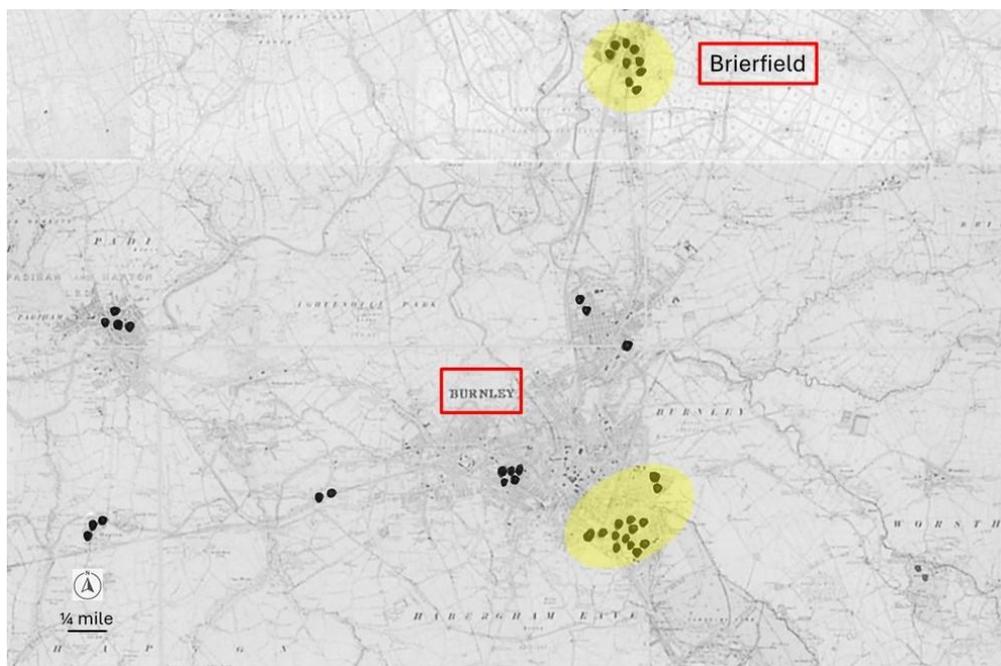
### *Places of residence*

The map of the registration district of Burnley (Figure 9) shows all the houses occupied over the second half of the nineteenth century by those migrants called Alderson who had made the journey from Swaledale.<sup>40</sup> Brierfield first attracted to the district chain migrants by the name of Alderson: five brothers (and one of their

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40 The registration district of Burnley included the following places: Burnley, Briercliffe, Hebergham Eaves, Burnley Moor, Burnley Woods, Gannow, Ightenhill, Briercliffe, Worsthorpe with Hurstwood, Whalley, Cliviger, Readley Hallows, Padigham, Altham, Hapton, Heyhouses, Higham with West Colne Booth, Huncoat, Read, Simonstone, Great and Little Marsden (including Brierfield), Colne, Barrowford, Trawden, Foulridge, Goldshaw, Rough LeBooth, Barley and Old Laund Booth.

**Figure 9** Registration district of Burnley, indicating locations of houses occupied by migrants with the name Alderson



**Notes:** The dots indicate houses occupied by migrants with the name Alderson. The highlighted areas are zones where Aldersons were concentrated.

**Source:** Based on an Ordnance Survey map of 1890, original scale 1:10,560.

wives) arriving in nearby houses by the census of 1861. There were in total 42 houses occupied by 42 migrants over a period of at least 70 years. These individuals, and the members of their households, tended to concentrate in Brierfield and the southeast corner of Burnley. Alderson migrants tended to take up residence initially in houses in the vicinity of other migrants, and subsequently to remain in that residence, in nearby streets, or migrate together within the district (on occasion over a distance of some miles) to other areas where Aldersons were living.<sup>41</sup> Once having arrived in family units in the district, these people tended to

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41 Only one Alderson migrant to Burnley district was living alone at the 1881 census. He was then aged 33 years and he subsequently disappeared from the historical record.

attract and migrate locally with other dalesmen, encouraged by kinship or the prospect of employment, or both, in a pattern of chain migration.

### Discussion: chain migration from Swaledale to Lancashire

#### *Swaledale collapse*

Swaledale in North Yorkshire, a remote uphill landscape, today still bears the scars of lead mining on its dale sides. The industry collapsed over the course of the nineteenth century for the reasons that many extractive industries tend to fail: exhaustion of its seams; and competition, in this case from lead exported from Spain. The terminal collapse of the economy set in when the main seams of lead in the major mines became exhausted over the quarter of a century from the late 1870s. Those families reliant on the agricultural economy fared relatively well, but the largest Swaledale clans engaged in the mining industry bore the brunt of the exodus.

#### *Migration overseas*

Many Swaledale families emigrated to America, Canada and Australia during the nineteenth century. Immigrant families in North America became integrated over a wide area of the mining and farming country and individual families developed their own specific areas of land.<sup>42</sup> These newcomers enjoyed political equality and the opportunity of a better life than they had in their native land.<sup>43</sup>

Migrants destined for North America went to considerable effort to share kinship links with families who had gone before.<sup>44</sup> They continued to feel affinity with their former communities over long distances and periods of time and the flow of information about new opportunities encouraged the process. People moving out of the dale tended to be accompanied or followed by kin or individuals with the same surname. Emigration directed at a new employment often used existing contacts. It was common for relatives who had emigrated to send back home information and encouragement for kin to follow in their footsteps.<sup>45</sup> Chain

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42 See Upper Dales Family History Group, *Those Who Left the Dales*.

43 See Morris, *Dalesmen of the Mississippi River*, and M.H. Blewitt, *The Yankee Yorkshireman: Migration Lived and Imagined* (Champaign, IL, 2009).

44 Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy*, quoted in W.E. Van Vugt, *Portrait of an English Migration: North Yorkshire People in North America* (Montreal, 2021), p. 18.

45 Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, p. 279. See, for example, the letters held at NYCRO: Amos Alderson Arkengarthdale Papers; 5. Personal Papers; 3. Letters from America:

migration of family members magnified the exodus as word got back about life outside the dale. The number of letters sent home grew with the rate of emigration. These letters might be placed in public libraries of towns with an overseas connection.<sup>46</sup>

### *Internal migration demographics*

The population of Swaledale declined steadily and by about two thirds over the second half of the nineteenth century. An analysis of the census transcripts over this period shows that the number of household heads of the five largest surname groups (isonymic groups or ‘clans’) fell by about half. The largest clan at the beginning of the period, the Aldersons, saw a reduction from a total of 80 household heads in 1841 to 45 by 1901. Furthermore, the transcripts of the censuses of all the individuals in every household shows that there was a loss of 92 surnames from the dale, either by migration or natural extinction.

As the population of Swaledale fell with its collapsing lead-mining economy, so the population of the district of Burnley in Lancashire expanded by a factor of more than nine between 1841 and 1901. New transport links boosted the economy and, in the later nineteenth century, the majority of the town’s workforce employed in the cotton mills generated more cloth than any other town in the world.

### *Alderson migration*

In this article we have focused on the history of the largest clan to have declined in size in Swaledale over the period of collapse of the lead mining industry. The Alderson name had clear origins in the north of England, concentrating in mid-century in Yorkshire and Durham. Thereafter there was a significant growth in the number of Aldersons in Lancashire, such that there had been a three-fold increase in their number by 1881. Drilling down into the origins of these migrants into Lancashire shows that 45 people (or 18 per cent of the increase of 256) had moved from Swaledale. The Alderson household heads remaining in Swaledale in 1881 had switched in employment from lead mining to farming, while the arrivals in Lancashire had found work in the coal mines, cotton factories and agriculture in similar numbers.

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Edmond Alderson at Counsilhill 1841; Jonathan Alderson at New Diggins 1843; Edmond Alderson at New Diggins 1844; Jonathan Alderson at Counsil Hill 1848; Jonathan Alderson at Argile 1855.

46 Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy*, pp. 26-31.

Longitudinal and lifetime residential histories of chain migrants have repeatedly emphasised the importance and common occurrence of family, friendship and kinship networks in promoting and easing resettlement.<sup>47</sup> The majority of moves were undertaken by people in family groupings. The number of people in this study with the surname Alderson and whose ancestry could be traced back to Swaledale rose in tandem with the Burnley population in the second half of the nineteenth century. These figures, increasing from 4 in the census of 1841 to 117 in 1911, include men who had been born in Swaledale, together with their wives and children wherever they had been born. Focusing on individuals who made the journey from the dale across the Pennines, 42 Aldersons arrived in Burnley district. The chain migration of Aldersons from Swaledale, and principally from the sub-district of Muker, the most remote westerly region of the dale where the lead mines failed earliest, was staggered over several decades of the nineteenth century. The migrants settled into 12 households, arriving generally as a sole Alderson, as nuclear families with children, or as extended families including brothers. Their journeys were also often staggered, including different years of arrival of extended family members, step migration via other northern counties, and a temporary return visit to Swaledale.

Studies of the residents of textile towns in Lancashire have stressed the pivotal role of family networks in providing regular mutual assistance in the nineteenth century when state welfare was not adequate to help people navigate the crises that so often affected their lives.<sup>48</sup> People tried to live near kin or other people they

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- 47 C. Pooley and J. Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1998), pp. 193 and 323-7, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203976548>; see also D.B. Grigg, 'E.G. Ravenstein and the "laws of migration"', in M. Drake (ed.), *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 147-64 (originally published in *Journal of Historical Geography* 3 (1977), pp. 41-54, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-7488\(77\)90143-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-7488(77)90143-8)); D. Friedlander and R.J. Roshier, 'A study of internal migration in England and Wales: Part 1', *Population Studies* 19 (1966), pp. 239-79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.1966.10406016>; K. Schürer and D.R. Mills, 'Population and demography', in D. Mills and K. Schürer (eds), *Local Communities in the Victorian Census Enumerators' Books* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 72-85; K. Schürer and D.R. Mills, 'Migration and population turnover', in Mills and Schürer, *Local Communities*, pp. 218-28; A. Hinde, 'The use of nineteenth-century census data to investigate local migration', *Local Population Studies* 73 (2004), pp. 8-28; and B. Deacon, 'Reconstructing a regional migration system: net migration in Cornwall', *Local Population Studies* 78 (2007), pp. 28-46.
- 48 M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 136-7; see also M. Anderson, 'How different were Lancashire families in the Victorian period? Some reflections on another 40 years of research', in A. Gritt (ed.) *Family History in Lancashire: Issues and Approaches* (Newcastle, 2009), pp. 43-80.

knew, as this was felt to improve economic and social security.<sup>49</sup> Choosing to reside near close family could reflect shared knowledge of housing and employment even if personal attachment was fragile.<sup>50</sup> Unrelated people who were born in the same place would cluster in the same neighbourhood.<sup>51</sup> Kinship bonds helped migrants cope with the alien culture and find accommodation and employment. Most migrants to Preston were able to maintain relationships with family and wider kin despite the challenges of migration itself, residential and employment insecurity and high mortality. Significant advantages in securing well-paid employment were available to migrants who maintained such relationships.<sup>52</sup>

New arrivals of the Alderson clan over a period of 70 years from 1841 gravitated to geographically defined areas of south-east Burnley and the village of Brierfield a couple of miles north of the town. They occupied a total of 42 houses in neighbouring terraced streets, occasionally migrating together within the district to other areas of smaller concentration. Dalesmen who made the journey across the Pennines from Swaledale to Burnley were clearly aware of the potential benefits of kinship links in their new environment.

Men outnumbered women and girls among the Aldersons who crossed the Pennines to Burnley, with a broad age range from childhood to relative old age. Lead mining had been the employment of most of the men in Swaledale, and most found work in the coal mines of Burnley district on arrival. Many wives and girls worked in the cotton mills. In Swaledale during the nineteenth century miners had formed partnerships of a few men in order to bargain for the price of land and the ore they extracted. These self-reliant men had tight social and professional bonds and their families had intermarried, so many would migrate together.<sup>53</sup> Miners elsewhere were known for their readiness to migrate.<sup>54</sup> The mines in the Burnley

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49 Anderson, *Family Structure*, pp. 60-1 and 162; see also R. Lawton and C.G. Pooley, 'The social geography of nineteenth century Merseyside: a research project', *Historical Methods Newsletter* 7 (1974), pp. 276-84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00182494.1974.10112682>; C.G. Pooley, 'Residential mobility in the Victorian city', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 4 (1979), pp. 258-77, ; and R. Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century: a Social Geography* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 264.

50 Anderson, *Family Structure*, pp. 56-67; A.G. Crosby, 'For better or for worse: the Shaw family and its experiences, 1790-1840', in A. Gritt (ed.) *Family History in Lancashire: Issues and Approaches* (Newcastle, 2009), pp. 21-42.

51 Anderson, *Family Structure*, p. 101.

52 Anderson, *Family Structure*, pp. 118-35 and 160.

53 Van Vugt, *Portrait of an English Migration*, pp. 19 and 52.

54 See for examples: A. Redford, *Labour Migration in England, 1800-1850* (Manchester, 1964), pp. 57-9; M. Kinsey, C. Gerrard and J. Warburton, 'Metal mines and moorland: the changing lead mining landscapes of the north Pennines, UK, 1700-1948', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 56 (2022), pp. 1-27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00794236.2022.2058221>; I. Webster, 'Internal

## Chain Migration from Yorkshire to Lancashire

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area required men with similar skills to those possessed by the lead miners from North Yorkshire. Some Swaledale miners found work in quarries in Wensleydale as their prospects at home diminished and then moved to Lancashire when those Wensleydale quarries declined.<sup>55</sup> Chain migration was a feature of other semi-skilled men; migrating stone workers from the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset, for example, commonly followed other migrants to locations where work in the same trade was available and family links existed.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Tunstill family and Wesleyan Methodism*

Brierfield, the destination of many lead miner migrants from Swaledale, was dominated by the Tunstill family cotton business, one of the largest concerns in north-east Lancashire.<sup>57</sup> The Tunstill dynasty assisted greatly with various enterprises connected with Wesleyan Methodism

All Methodist buildings in Nelson and Brierfield, such as the chapel in Railway Street opened in 1890, were assisted by the firm.<sup>58</sup> William Tunstill of Reedyford Hall directed most of the profits of the business into Wesleyan Methodism, the obituary of his brother Robert in the *Burnley Express* remarking on his integrity, support and benevolence to the workforce.<sup>59</sup>

, and remained active in the day-to-day running of the town.

William became a prominent figure in the development of Nelson, and a cock, from the Tunstill family coat of arms, also forms part of the town of Nelson's coat of arms.<sup>60</sup> The family, like others, had a firm belief in industry and local reinvestment, which came to characterise the socio-economic outlook of the towns in which they lived and worked.

North-east Lancashire was culturally similar to the Yorkshire borderlands. Religion was a significant factor in attracting migrants and building networks, and communities could be formed, built and developed around the church and the chapel. For Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, p. 281.

56 M. Edgar and A.Hinde, 'The stone workers of Purbeck', *Rural History* 10 (1999), pp. 75-90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956793300001692>.

57 The number of dales-people living in Brierfield increased from 62 to 248 between 1851 and 1871, where migrants tended to settle even in the same streets. A review of the parish of Little Marsden in Brierfield in the census of 1871 shows that 27 of 197 households were headed by men born in Swaledale. Most were concentrated in three streets in the town (Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, pp. 265-94).

58 Hill, *Nelson*, p. 44.

59 Hill, *Nelson*, p. 37; *Burnley Express*, 3 May 1890, obituary Robert Tunstill.

60 *Nelson Leader*, 12 June 1970.

familiarity and established community networks. The area had deep-rooted ties to nonconformity.<sup>61</sup> It was one of the earliest areas to be receptive to Methodism, which arrived probably from Haworth, over the Yorkshire border. There were gatherings in Roughlee, near Colne, in the 1740s, and Methodism's founder John Wesley having travelled through the area in 1749, he returned in Burnley, as a step in his efforts to evangelise the region, and to a local squire.<sup>64</sup> Such was the outlook of the area beforehand.<sup>62</sup> The routes and networks were thus long established. The independently-minded miners and farmers of the northern Pennine dales.<sup>65</sup> The identity of these arrivals in urban Lancashire was kept alive by the culture and community of mill and chapel. This sense of belonging could assume particular importance for those who had recently left life in the countryside and moved to a new town. Just as they had been in their former villages, these immigrants were voteless and radical.<sup>67</sup> Mill owners shared their self-sufficient mentality and often adhered to the religion of Wesleyan Methodism. Commerce was regarded as a God-given vocation, whereby wealth was the result of, but not the reason for, business. Stewardship of wealth was thus an imperative, a proportion of which was therefore devoted to religious purposes.<sup>68</sup>

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61 Brierfield had an early relationship with nonconformity, and there were Quakers in the area from the late seventeenth century: see Quaker Meeting House Heritage Project [2017] *Friends Meeting House, Marsden*, <https://heritage.quaker.org.uk/files/Marsden%20LM.pdf> [accessed 27 October 2025].

64 Hill, *Nelson*, p. 56.

62 G.H. Whitaker, 'Nonconformity in north east Lancashire, 1662-1962' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1961). See C.L. Hunt, *The Miners of the Northern Pennines* (Manchester, 1970), pp. 214–23.

63 See W.B. Ryan, 'Methodist mentality: the cell described in M.N. Batty, *Gun, Pistol, Chapel and Gunnerside* (2014) *Folk* (Reeth, 1967). See also Bogg, *Richmondshire*, p. 359.

66 Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 19 and 49. See R. Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics: the Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge, 1974) for an in-depth analysis of Methodism in another mining community.

67 Hill, *Nelson*, p. 56; see also Philip Viscount Snowden, *An Autobiography: Vol. 1, 1864-1919* (London, 1934), pp. 40-44.

68 A. Howe, *The Cotton Masters 1830–1860* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 61-6.

## Chain Migration from Yorkshire to Lancashire

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### *Politics and Community*

By the 1880s Nelson, including Brierfield, was a town of immigrants, likened to a frontier town of the American West.<sup>69</sup>

North-east Lancashire was a spirited place, more akin to the Yorkshire Dales than to the Midlands. In the case of a war, it would appear that the town comes as a kind of holding potential for immigrants from Yorkshire. Active politics involved working class engagement, but also combined elements of nonconformity, temperance, and basic societal notions of thrift and self-betterment through hard work. The Yorkshire-Lancashire borders provided many of these immigrants.<sup>70</sup> Each immigrant community tended to make its own enclave clustered around a focal point. Such a focus may have been an institution imported by the immigrants, or derived from a shared belief like Methodism found both at points of departure and arrival. Immigrant communities tended to remain together in their new environment many years, typically in a peaceable coexistence with the native population. Houses built with stone from local quarries were laid out in the 1860s and 1870s in an orderly pattern. Mill buildings and terraced housing dominated the landscape, the uniformity of the urban perspective concealing the existence of distinct communities within the whole.<sup>71</sup>

### *Keeping the flame alive*

Attempts to keep alive local family history were a feature of the migrant communities, and in 1925 they became more proactive with the founding of the 'Reunion of Swaledale People', which quickly became an annual event. The first 'Reunion' was held in October 1925, when around 400 people gathered in the Queensgate Wesleyan School in Burnley. It was a chance for Swaledale 'folks' who now resided in the north-east Lancashire cotton conurbation to join a celebration and attempt to rekindle old friendships and networks. The event included a series of short talks about history, the physical longevity of the community, a concert, and a lantern show of images of Swaledale.<sup>72</sup> A year later the event returned with a larger audience and under the auspices of the 'Dalesmen's Reunion'. At the Primitive Methodist Church in Brierfield, over 500 people who hailed from the Valley of the

<sup>69</sup> Liddington, *Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, pp. 23-33.

<sup>70</sup> Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 41-4.

<sup>71</sup> Hill, *Nelson*, p. 18. A second wave of immigrants arrived almost 100 years later from Pakistan: mill workers recruited from the Indian subcontinent, offered good wages and free passage (Hill, *Nelson*, p. 140).

<sup>72</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 23 October 1925.

Swale, or were descendants of Swaledalers' attended. The company 'bore well-known Swaledale names' and the concert was performed by 'Swaledalers or their descendants'. Through the evening folk memories were discussed, how 'Lancashire lads had married Yorkshire lasses and vice versa', and Brierfield's 'debt to the dales'.<sup>73</sup> The event took place until 1929 at various nonconformist schools and chapels. It was revived in 1933, and given publicity in Yorkshire as well as north-east Lancashire.

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* tracked the history of the group to 50 years previously, when the lead mining industry of Gunnerside and Hurst collapsed, and families migrated to Lancashire via Askrigg.<sup>74</sup> The report also focused on the life story of one migrant, who still remembered the exodus. It described how, moving to Burnley aged 12 years, she had found community through Swaledalers and the church. Her story emphasised how the crossing between the dales and north-east Lancashire included friends and family, and indeed friends who became family, bonded together by a close-knit community, reinforced through religion, and attempts to keep their local culture alive. 'They banded together, and all the Burnley contingent attended the same chapel. So year after year they met every Sunday under the same roof.'<sup>75</sup> That Swaledalers were an identifiable grouping locally was testament to their importance and significance to the development of the town, and that the community there had an element of migration of families during the nineteenth century with deserted hamlets.<sup>76</sup> The drain of families during the nineteenth century depleted the dales community of its entrepreneurial spirit and much of its vitality.<sup>77</sup> **Conclusion** behind by the exodus became progressively fewer in number and smaller in size. Migrants took with them their mining expertise to similar cultures in Britain or overseas. Religion, and in particular Wesleyan Methodism, was at the heart of dales existence in the nineteenth century, including decisions made to migrate.<sup>78</sup> Burnley in the textile region of east Lancashire was one favoured destination,

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74 *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 September 1933.

75 *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 September 1933.

76 J.E. Morris, *The North Riding of Yorkshire* (London, 1904), p. 17.

73 *Nelson Leader*, 22 October 1926.

77 Hallas, *Rural Responses to Industrialization*, pp. 290-1. The closure of inns in Reeth and the decline in markets and fairs was described by an author at the time: H. Speight, *Romantic Richmondshire* (London, 1897), p. 233.

78 Van Vugt, *Portrait of an English Migration*, pp. 181-202; see also T. Armstrong, *Adam Brunskill* (London, 1952).

attracting family members in a chain migration, lured by a similar mentality of Wesleyan Methodism and the boom of its burgeoning economy.

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