

John and Elizabeth Parkinson, Whitfield Sike Mill

The following article was written for the Embsay News parish magazine by Chris Lunnon, and published in May 2010.

The Census returns show that the cotton mill workers moved around the countryside. But among the workers at Whitfield one long term resident stands out. John Parkinson is first mentioned in the 1851 census with his wife Elizabeth, daughters Mary and Ellen, and Thomas their son. Was he working in Addingham in 1841 as Thomas was born there a little later? Is the Joseph Parkinson, working in the Eastby Mill in 1841 his brother?

John lived at High Mills, the name then for Whitfield Mill. He came from Skerton, near Lancaster and his wife came from Sedbergh. In 1851 he and his 13 year old daughter Mary were cotton mill operatives together with a James Parkinson from Lancaster.

In 1861 John Parkinson is a carter and his three children all work in the mill. Thomas is a 'striper and grinder'; in other words a mechanic. Also living there is John's grand-daughter, Mary (or possibly Margaret) Parkinson. Is this Mary's daughter?

In 1871 John was a carrier and farmer of 7 acres. Ellen and Thomas still lived at home. Ellen was a worsted weaver, so probably worked at Primrose Mill or Millholme Mill. Thomas was a carrier. There were three grand-daughter Parkinsons, all born at Embsay: Margaret, Flora and Annie.

In 1881 John was, once again, a cotton factory operative. Although he and Elizabeth were still living in the same place, he must have been working at another mill, as the Whitfield mill stopped working around 1875. Margaret and Annie still lived with them together with James, aged 6 months. Thomas was the sub-postmaster for the village. Flora was not in the village. At aged 15 she could have been in service, or maybe she died an early death.

In 1891 John and Elizabeth were still living at High Mills. Aged 76 he was a farm worker. Elizabeth died in 1896. In 1901 John was the second oldest person in the village at 86, a 'retired farmer', still living at the same place, now called Whitfield, with one of his grand-daughters.

John died in 1904 and was buried, with Elizabeth, in Embsay Churchyard. Their son Thomas, and his wife Sarah, lived in the village. He was a coal merchant in 1891, and a Farmer/Grazier in 1901.

Which of the cottages on the moor-side did John, Elizabeth and family occupy? We know he lived 3 doors away from the Miss Tattersall who operated the boarding house and served teas at the time the reservoir was built. Hopefully further research will fill in more of the details.

If John and Elizabeth were your ancestors, then please let us know if you have more information.