

Edward Miller and his family of Spens

Edward Miller was the youngest son of William Miller, boot, shoe and clog maker of Wray, and his wife Isabella. In 1881 they were living in the cottage next to Poplar House in Wray, and some of Edward's older brothers had followed in their father's trade although the eldest, also William, had become a carrier in Carnforth ten years later and the younger sons who remained at home worked in the stone quarries.

By 1891 Edward was boarding as an under-gardener with Edward Mallinson of Ryelands Lodge, Lancaster, presumably working for the lino and oil cloth manufacturer, James Williamson (late Lord Ashton). In 1899 he married Margaret, known as Minnie. Ten years later he was gardening for Thomas Henderson, a gentleman of independent means, the younger son of a hide and leather merchant from Liverpool, at Crow Trees, Melling but who been brought up by his aunt in the south of England, attended Oxford and was always described as of independent means. Edward's family were resident in one of the adjacent cottages with their ten month old daughter Maud and two young nephews, John and Frank, born in Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire and Chelsea, London respectively. These were presumably sons of Edward's brother John who lived next door and who was described as a 'domestic coachman' and they were possibly boarding temporarily since John's wife had delivered an as-yet-unnamed baby just 4 days earlier and the family had a nurse staying with them. John had clearly travelled since his wife hailed from Surrey and their eldest son Leonard had been born in Bournemouth, suggesting that his duties as coachman for the Hendersons took him around the country. Ten years later the Hendersons had returned to Hampshire and were living at New Milton, Lymington. John, however, was no longer his coachman. He and Emma ran a 'fish and chipped potato business' in Walton le Dale. His sons John and Frank, however, were page and groom so were clearly working for a wealthy family.

Edward's wife Minnie Hall had been born in Hornby where Edward had also worked as gardener for Hornby Castle in the 1880s. In 1881 her father, Andrew, who had been born in Cockerham was a labourer, living in one of the cottages near the castle gates. Boarding with them were three stonemasons from Queensbury, near Halifax where the Fosters, who owned Hornby Castle, had their mills. Ten years later Andrew had established himself as a small farmer at Lower Broadwood, Botton a mile outside Wray and Minnie was the only child still at home, assisting on the farm.

By 1911 Edward was a farmer in Farleton and his family now also included John, aged 7 who had been born in Yealand, suggesting that the family had moved there at some stage from Melling before coming back to the Hornby area.

Edward moved to Spens Farm on the banks of the River Hindburn in c1913 (this could be confirmed from the rate books) and stayed for over two decades. His long stay at the farm was unusual since it had had a succession of short term tenancies over the previous 40 years. Possibly it was his unique talent as both a farmer and a gardener which enabled him to make a success of this small farm with its unusual large walled garden, hot houses and ornamental central fountain. His granddaughter

Lucy remembers from her visits in the 1930s that he was grew a variety of exotic fruits including grapes and peaches. His son John took the tenancy of Millhouse Farm in 1933 and Edward Payne had taken the tenancy by the time of the Second World War

Edward's career, like that of his brother John, suggests that, then as now, young families were often very mobile, moving house every few years. Both he and Minnie's families also give an insight into the background of the men who took the small farming tenancies which were once very common in the area. Neither were the sons of farmers, and both took the farms not when they married but when they were settled with young families.