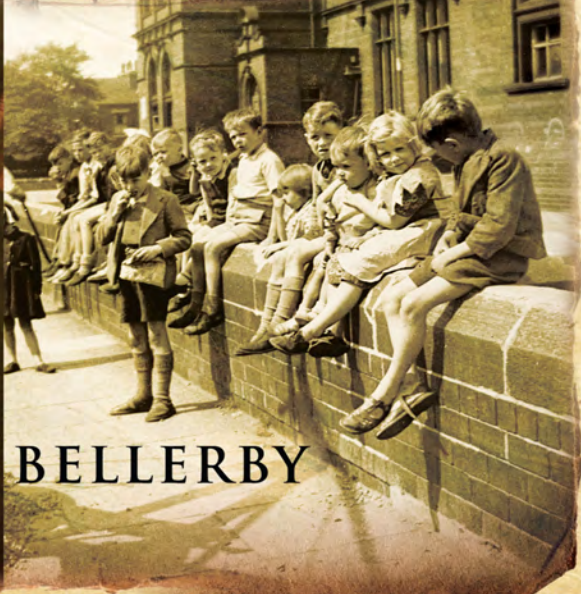
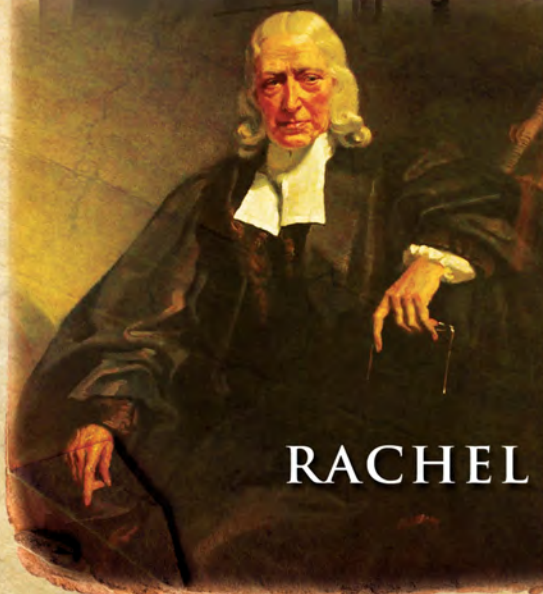


# TRACING YOUR LEEDS ANCESTORS

A GUIDE FOR FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORIANS



RACHEL BELLERBY

# TRACING YOUR LEEDS ANCESTORS



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# TRACING YOUR LEADS ANCESTORS

*A Guide for Family Historians*

Rachel Bellerby



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# INTRODUCTION

The city of Leeds in West Yorkshire is home to some 750,000 people and is one of the five biggest cities in the UK. For centuries, Leeds has attracted incomers from across the UK and further afield; people drawn here by the city's plethora of trades, its position midway between the east and west coasts; and the easy access to the countryside of the Dales.

*Tracing Your Leeds Ancestors* is an adventure which can go way beyond discovering the birth, marriage and death records of your ancestors. As we'll discover throughout this book, there are hundreds of resources to help you find out where your ancestors would have lived, what the surrounding streets were like and what their schooling would have been. You can find out about your ancestor's place of work, what leisure pursuits they might have followed and the shops and markets they would have visited.

The city is home to a number of fine archives, libraries and museums, all of which will be explored through the coming themed chapters, which cover topics including education, housing, leisure time, poverty and immigration. From an archive devoted to the history of shopping through to a modern museum facility which holds more than one million historic Leeds-related items, we learn what material is available to you and how to make the most of it to really bring your research to life. And to help you take your research that little bit further, Chapter 10 is devoted to bygone Leeds through walking trails, museum trips and themed tours.

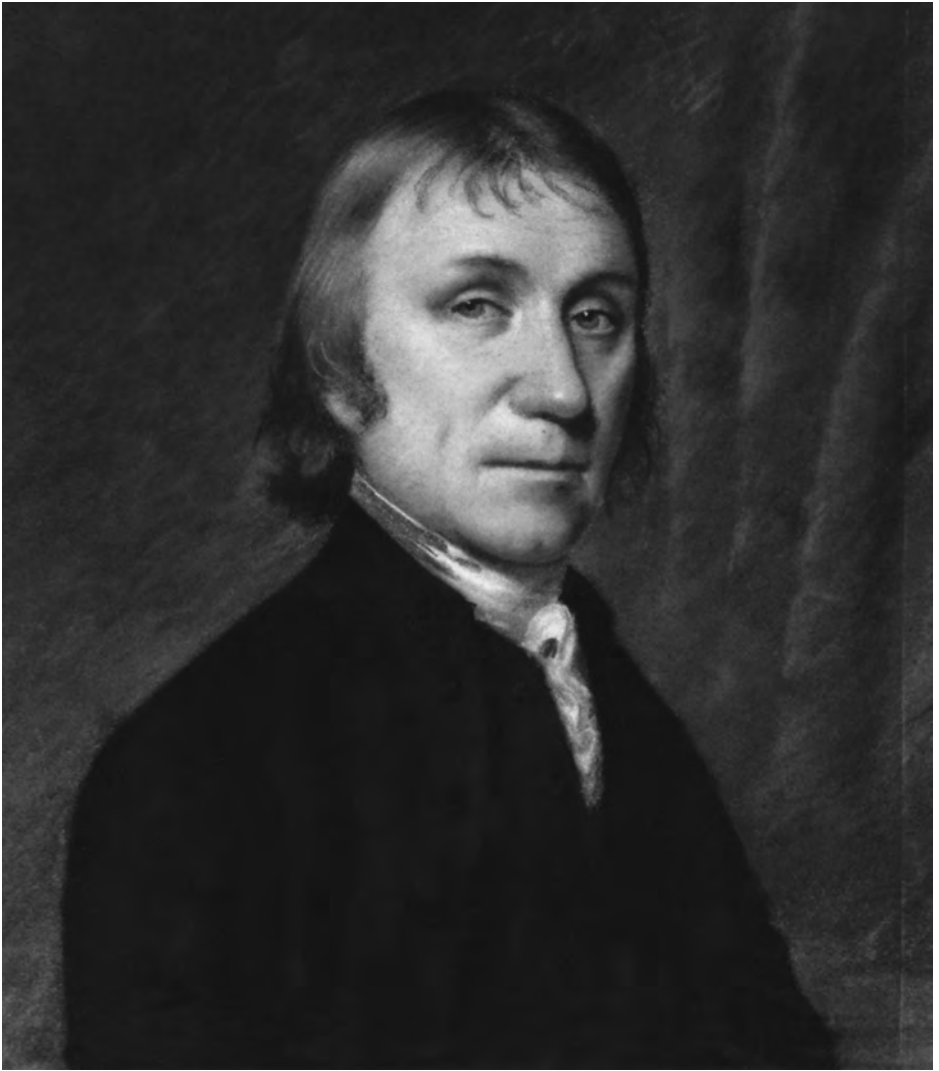
Don't worry, though, if you're not able to visit Leeds in person; there are plenty of ideas for online research – online family history research has never been so exciting and, with photographs, oral recordings and archive film, you can enjoy the city's history unfolding from the comfort of your own home.

## Introduction

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So, whether you're new to family history and curious to find out about what life was like in bygone Leeds or you're an experienced researcher looking to take your findings a stage further, there's plenty to explore here. So let's start our journey into the history of Leeds, the city of 1,000 trades.





*Joseph Priestley, a prominent Leeds clergyman and scientist.*

## *Chapter 1*

# A HISTORY OF LEEDS

In this chapter we take a broad-ranging look at how the town (and later the city) of Leeds developed from the first settlements on the bank of the River Aire, through the emergence of a settled market town, the boom years of the Industrial Revolution and on to the development of post-war Leeds.

### **The Earliest Settlement**

Leeds began as a settlement named ‘Loidis’ which was part of the kingdom of Elmet, a kingdom roughly corresponding to the area of the West Riding. Within twenty years of the Norman Conquest of 1066, Leeds was a manor with a population of around 200 under the overlordship of a man named Ilbert de Lacy. In these early years, the area was predominantly agricultural: a mill, church and farm labourers working for a master.

The settlement stood beside the River Aire, close to where today’s Leeds Minster stands, and extending outwards to the west. This spot was close to an important crossing point of the River Aire which was to prove so valuable to trade and industry in the centuries to come.

### **Leeds in the Middle Ages**

The town’s first charter was granted in 1207, but unlike some of its neighbours like York and Pontefract, Leeds had no key territorial advantages. There was no castle and the town didn’t stand on a key trade route, although it did have the River Aire as a means of transport for trading activities.

Nevertheless, Leeds’s position at roughly halfway between London and Edinburgh and between the east and west coasts meant that its potential for trading could not be overlooked, as would be proved during the centuries to come. Under the terms of the town’s



*Leeds Bridge, close to one of the earliest crossing points of the Aire.*

charter, an organised community began to take shape, with a bailiff who oversaw a court of justice, the first streets developing around Briggate, and an organised market attended by those in the surrounding settlements.

Just before the Black Death in 1348, which is estimated to have wiped out up to half the UK's population, the parish of Leeds had around 1,000 inhabitants – 300 of whom lived in the town centre. This was a small settlement when compared with the likes of Yorkshire towns which are now themselves much smaller than Leeds, including Selby and Ripon.

The heart of life in Leeds during the medieval era was the land between Briggate, Kirkgate and the River Aire. After having passed through ownership of the de Gant family (who received the manor of Leeds after the Norman Conquest), Ranulf, Earl of Chester, and



then the de Lacys, King Henry IV was the overlord of Leeds on his accession in 1399.

In the early Middle Ages, most wool was produced in the south of England. However by 1300, as guild regulations became stricter even in towns such as York and Beverley, northern wool producers began to move south to Leeds and the surrounding areas. By the early sixteenth century, whole families were involved in the production of wool – cleaning it, teasing it, spinning and then weaving. It was finally sent on to a fulling mill to be finished and then sold on. Leeds was particularly well known for the production of broadcloth – a cheap but good quality textile.

By the Tudor period, Leeds was known as a textile town, helped no doubt by the presence of nearby Kirkstall Abbey, a large wool producer and trader. However, until the thirteenth century, wool was only produced on a small scale, for those who would be using it themselves.

In 1533, the town was described in *The Annals of Yorkshire* as being

two miles lower than Christal Abbey, on Aire river, is a praty market, having one parochie churche reasonably well buildid, and as large as Bradford, but not so quik as it.

### **War and Plague**

Leeds received its royal charter in 1626, just twenty years before some of the most horrific years in its history. The middle of the seventeenth century was a traumatic time in Leeds, with the town being affected by the Civil War, and then by the plague.

At the start of the Civil War, Leeds was under Royalist control but in January 1643 faced an attack by 1,500 men under the command of Sir Thomas Fairfax during which 500 prisoners were taken. The shattered town was laid low once again in 1645 when plague struck Leeds and killed 1,300 people between March and December.

### **Leeds as a Centre for Trade and Industry**

Seventeenth-century Leeds centred on the thoroughfares of Briggate, Boar Lane and Kirkgate, with few buildings south of the river – a situation that would change dramatically with the coming

of the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the textile and engineering industries.

Now a busy area of modern office blocks and chic boutique hotels, The Calls in the 1600s was described by historian Percy Robinson (writing in 1926) as ‘an open space with orchards and a pleasant footpath along the riverside to the church’. The area which would later become the suburb of Burley was ‘a remote village’, and Park Lane was a country road bordered by fields.

By the eighteenth century Leeds was gaining a reputation for industry, with Daniel Defoe describing the town’s ‘inexhaustible stores’ of coal. This fuel would prove crucial to the town’s role in the coming Industrial Revolution.

In 1700, Leeds became an inland port, as the River Aire was made navigable from Leeds Bridge to the east, as part of the Aire & Calder Navigation. This meant that a coast-to-coast navigable waterway ran from Liverpool to Hull, with all the advantages to trade that this brought to the towns along the way, as they now could ship goods both in and out of the country.

In the busy streets of the core of town, as small as it was then compared to now, inns were plentiful and popular and were regarded as places for conducting business just as much as they were valued for leisure pursuits. The Kings Arms on Briggate and the White Swan at Kirkgate were two of the longest established – the Kings Arms was one of the city’s oldest coaching inns, whilst the White Swan is still in existence, enjoying a busy position adjacent to the City Varieties Music Hall.

Briggate was a focal point for displays and parades, with townspeople enjoying bonfires on civic occasions and religious festivals. In the early eighteenth century, cockfighting took place at Chapeltown Moor, where there was also a popular horse fair upon which bets were placed. There were other cockfighting pits at the Talbot and the Rose & Crown inns in Briggate.

Ralph Thoresby’s *Ducatus Leodunensis*, published in 1715, gave the most detailed account of the town since the Domesday Survey. Thoresby described the abbey ruins with their mills for grinding corn. Mills were also mentioned at Armley and we are told that

Hunslet was ‘chiefly inhabited by clothiers’, with nearby Farnley having plenty of stone and coal. In 1726, cartographer John Cossins produced a map known as ‘A new and exact plan of the town of Leeds’ which captured a moment in time before the town changed forever with the beginnings of heavy industry and textile production in the century that followed.

The eighteenth century saw the town’s potential to trade with distant markets expand with the establishment of the first horse and coach service between Leeds and London, ‘flying machines on steel springs’, which advertised services between London and Leeds in three days.

The first coach service to London operated on 19 May 1760 and the reality of the journey makes for sobering reading: a traveller would leave London at dawn, around 5am and spend the first night after a day on the road at Northampton. There would be further nights spent in Nottingham and Sheffield, before the weary journey finally came to an end on the late evening of the fourth day, when Leeds was finally reached.

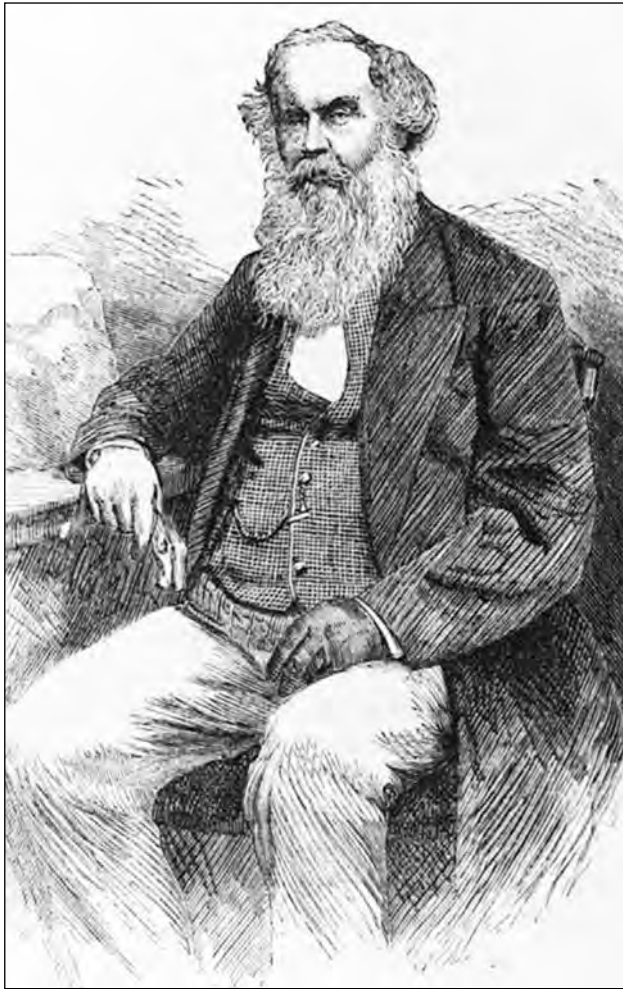
### **An End to Domestic Industry**

After centuries of industries flourishing in households alongside the River Aire, the domestic system of manufacturing began to come to an end as firms such as Marshalls (linen) and Gotts (wool) were established in the early nineteenth century. The demand for machinery to run the burgeoning textile trade stimulated an engineering industry in Leeds, with the associated development of trade in coal and iron as well as the growth of a fledgling railway industry.

Railways came to Leeds early, with the opening in 1811 of a railway at Middleton Colliery, which had been a coal mine since the thirteenth century. The railway ran from Middleton to Leeds Bridge and could pull up to thirty wagons at thirty miles an hour. A public railway service in the town followed in 1834; beginning at precisely 6.30am on 22 September, when the first line from Marsh Lane station in Leeds to Selby opened, running one train per day initially, which served both passengers and goods traffic.

Within fifteen years, Leeds had four different railways – Midland





*Sir Titus Salt, founder of Saltaire Mills, born in Morley in 1803. © Library of Congress, digital id: cph.3c28482.*

Railway opened in 1842, Leeds & Bradford in 1846, the Great Northern in 1848 and the Leeds, Dewsbury & Manchester the same year.

### Victorian Leeds

One of the most vibrant and memorable eras in the history of Leeds was the Victorian age, when key buildings such as the Town Hall and Civic Hall were built, industry was booming and Leeds achieved city status. But behind the splendour, life for thousands of Leeds inhabitants was merely a struggle for survival, with substandard housing, little or no education and poor working conditions.

At the start of the Victorian period, the population of Leeds was 150,000 and by the end of the nineteenth century this figure was approaching half a million. Textiles, engineering and printing all attracted incomers in their thousands, from across the UK and overseas.

*Leeds in 1866.*





*Leeds Town Hall, built in 1858. © Tuck DB Postcards.*

The town's growing wealth and population was given a focus when Leeds Town Hall was built in 1858, replacing the Moot Hall on Briggate as a centre of administration and a symbol of local pride.

The Town Hall, which was designed by Cuthbert Brodick, cost £132,000 to build and was opened by Queen Victoria, with local mills coming to a close for the day in celebration. Such was the interest in the opening that an official report recorded that 'at the town hall the crowds were so great that the barriers seemed quite inadequate and last cracked and splintered before the immense pressure'. Since its official opening the Town Hall has served its citizens through a variety of uses including council business, a police station, concert hall and court. Some 150 years on, it is for many a true symbol of Leeds life.

Within three years of the creation of the Town Hall, the Corn