

CASE STUDY

Lesley Garrett pt 1

Lesley Garrett was born in Thorne, near Doncaster, in the traditional heart of Yorkshire's mining belt. Her love of music came from growing up in a musical family and in a community where music went hand in hand with the industry of the area. Lesley knew that some branches of her family had worked in the mining industry. Yet when she dug deeper, she discovered that a talent for music appears to have run in her family for several generations.

Lesley was intrigued by her maternal great-grandfather, William Wall. Born in 1874, he had worked down the pit most of his life, as had his father before him. However, his son Colin – Lesley's grandfather – was born with a weak chest. Realizing that Colin could never work in a mine, William took the radical step of introducing him to music in the hope he would find alternative employment.

William borrowed a book from the library and taught himself to play the piano. By keeping a few lessons ahead of Colin, he was able to teach his son to play. Colin would become a fine classical pianist and father and son even composed their own music.

Colin won a silver medal in the London School of Music exams in December 1915. He went on to make a good living playing the piano with a small orchestra that gave concerts for the miners and accompanied silent movies. Later, during and after the depression, he played at the White Hart Hotel in

Thorne. Though this was a marked change, Colin insisted on playing an hour of classical music before agreeing to accompany the popular performers of the day (the 'turns'). Soon classical music lovers from across the area came to hear this talented musician play.

Although employment records no longer survived for mining members of her family such as great-grandfather Frank Appleton of Beeston, Nottinghamshire, Lesley was able to gain a greater understanding of their lives, and the daily conditions they faced, by visiting the National Coalmining Museum in Wakefield, Yorkshire, and travelling 450 feet underground to the coalface. By seeing first hand the cramped conditions, the equipment they used, the dust and danger they faced, she finally began to understand quite why they made the most of their time above ground – and used music to celebrate their close community spirit.



◀ Lesley's maternal grandfather, Colin Wall, who won a silver medal in the London School of Music exams.