

The Nightingales' upper-class lifestyle was enabled by a fortune acquired in the eighteenth-century Derbyshire lead industry.

When the industry boomed with the advent of coal-fired furnaces in the 1730s, the Nightingales, a nonconformist Christian family of humble origins, emerged with new wealth. Peter Nightingale senior (1705-63) was an innovative entrepreneur who experimented with the new furnaces. By 1754 he was rich enough to buy Lea Hall, his local manor house.

His son, the second Peter Nightingale (1737-1803), built up a large landed estate around Lea, Cromford and Matlock, and served as High Sheriff of Derbyshire.

This was the same area in which Sir Richard Arkwright's water-powered cotton mills pioneered the modern factory system. Arkwright and Peter Nightingale knew each other well – at one point, Nightingale was Arkwright's landlord. In 1783, Nightingale invested £2,000 in a cotton mill of his own, by the Derwent at Lea Bridge. This later became the John Smedley Mill that remains in operation today, giving it a claim to being the world's longest-running textile factory.

A Derbyshire Family



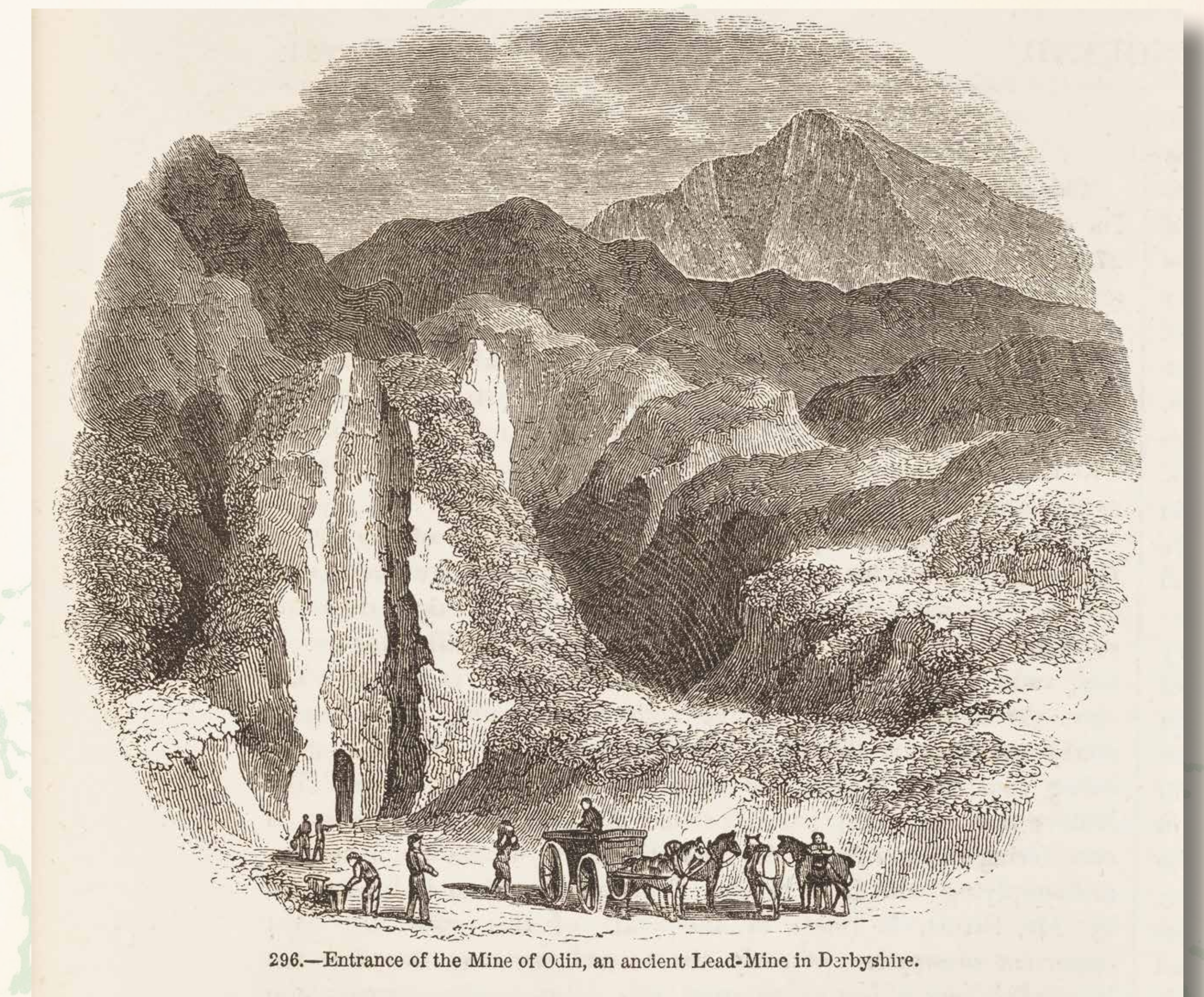
Print of sketch of Lea Hurst, the Nightingale family home in Derbyshire, n.d. Claydon House Trust, Verney/Claydon Estate Papers, From Verney 13/2.

Peter Nightingale died childless. His estate passed to his great-nephew William Shore, who assumed the Nightingale name in 1815. William used the money to lead the life of a Romantic country gentleman. He studied Classics at Cambridge and toured Italy with his wife Frances from 1818. He built Lea Hurst as a Romantic Derbyshire retreat and bought a partridge-shooting estate in Pleasley. In 1825, he purchased

Embley, a 3,500-acre estate and house in Hampshire, where he stood (unsuccessfully) for Parliament.

William Nightingale had two daughters, Parthenope and Florence, whose unusual names underlined the family's wealth and culture. Their childhood was like something from a Jane Austen novel: a life of drawing rooms, flowers, books, balls, music and gossip.

 Florence
Nightingale
Comes Home



Engraving of an ancient lead mine in Derbyshire from *Old England* edited by Charles Knight, volume 1, (c1860). Charles Knight Collection Oversize X, DA 144.K6



Watercolour of Embley, the Nightingale family home in Hampshire, n.d. Claydon House Trust, Verney/Claydon Estate Papers, From Verney 13/2.