

Mining Durham's Hidden Depths Project



Workmen building the first colliery houses in Esh Winning, n.d., c.1860 – 1870 (DCRO D/Ph 94/2)



About the Project

In the six months to March 2010 Durham County Record Office worked with over 100 adult volunteers to unlock the secrets of the Durham Miners' Association archives for family and local historians.

The Mining Durham's Hidden Depths project set out to:

- identify records with information about individual coal miners, their families and where they worked
- recruit volunteers to index the records as part of informal adult learning create an online database, helping people to discover more about their mining ancestors and the history of their neighbourhood.

Hundreds of volumes and boxes of union records from the Miners' Hall at Redhills are preserved in the archives at County Hall. Archivists started by cataloguing these records in more detail, to locate the names of thousands of miners for indexing. Then they digitised and copied the relevant pages ready for the volunteers to work on.

The appeal for volunteers to help with the project received a huge response. Some people joined because they had worked in the mines themselves, and many more had a mining family background. For some the project was a way to develop data entry skills to improve employment prospects. Others got involved simply for something interesting to do in their spare time.

Many said they wanted to help preserve the County's mining heritage because it was important to them, something they had always been interested in, and because they wanted to learn more.

Volunteers were able to index the records in their local library or community centre, or in the Record Office. The majority chose to work at home. Janet Hughes, project outreach worker, met volunteers regularly in libraries to provide support, exchange indexing material and advise about progression to other learning opportunities.

Volunteers also visited the Record Office to find out more about the archives they were working on. They learned how the records are stored and repaired, and how they can be used, free, by anyone looking for information.



In one of the strongrooms

Finally, a searchable database was developed for all the returned indexing. A test version was ready in January 2010 and the online database went live on the Record Office website in March 2010: www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk

You will be able to search for information from the Durham Miners' Association records by name, place, date, occupation, or by event (accident, death, employment, training etc.). Then you can come and read the records yourself or order a copy.



Find out:

- who worked in the colliery in your village and what job they did
- how many miners were injured and awarded compensation
- what happened to the families of miners who died
- who was given an award for long service or bravery
- who carried the banner on Gala Day
- who got strike relief money from the union

The Record Office thanks all the volunteers, partners and staff for their hard work in helping to make this such a successful project.



Volunteers on a visit to the record office



Learning about document conservation

Mining Durham's Depths Project | Durham County Record Office 03000 267 619 | www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk