The Last Coal Extraction in Newcastle?

On 5 December 2013, there was an opportunity to visit what may well be the last extraction of coal in Newcastle. This was arranged as a pre-event to AV Festival 14, the international Festival of contemporary art, music and film, Spanish artist Lara Almarcegui invited members of the public to see the last coal excavation on Science Central in Newcastle.

The site, 'Science Central' was undergoing major ground works to prepare for building development over the next decade. Mining has been recorded in the area from around 1794 and with the sinking of Mill Pit in 1828 to 1940. (Durham Mining Museum: 
http://www.dmm.org.uk/colliey/e023.htm)

Around 12 shafts were known to be on site from plans and records, at least 10 more have been discovered in the course of the works, the deepest going to below sea level. Mining may well go back to medieval times, at the north end of the site, the 'High Main' seam is just a few metres below ground level and there is a shadow of what may have been a bell pit in the wall of the excavation. (Some borehole logs are available in Geology of Britain Viewer, BGS.)

With all of the shafts and voids left by previous mining a major effort was required to prepare the site for building, this involved removing what coal could be extracted, grouting and filling voids left by collapse caused by previous coal extraction and grouting and capping shafts.

They were a little behind schedule, due to the hardness of the sandstones between the 'Metal' and 'High Main' seams. This was coming out in huge blocks and some taken off site to be cut and used as facing stone, the rest crushed on site and used for fill.

Most coal had been removed from the site, with a small amount left to cut and remove, they hoped to reach a total of 40,000 tons in total, good quality from the 'High Main' seam, poorer from the 'Metal'. The work will be complete by mid December with nothing left to see.

A further point of interest about the site is that it could become an energy source, certainly for the buildings on site, but also possibly for Eldon Square as well. In 2011 a borehole was drilled to the 90 Fathom Fault, the northern margin of the Alston Block. This seems to be acting as a chimney, allowing higher than expected heatflows from the Weardale Granite, which could be exploited for geothermal energy. (For further detail see: Geothermal upon Tyne: 

If you are interested in seeing some other effects of the Weardale Granite, you could visit Carrs Mine at Nenthead; see: 

The Science Central site occupies the old Scottish and Newcastle brewery site, along with some surrounding housing, it lies between Westgate Road and St Jame's Park, bounded by Wellington; Pitt; Buckingham and Corporation Streets. NZ242643: NE4 5QR.

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8 December 2013