'Ultimate DIYer': The man who dug a coal mine at the bottom of his garden

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Nowadays, the idea of building a coal mine in your back yard would have the health and safety inspectors frothing at the mouth.

But in the aftermath of World War II, an entrepreneurial spirit was needed to get Britain back on its feet.

So father-of-four Bramwell Pashley studied old mine plans to trace coal seams and used his life savings to buy a semi-detached house right over one.

Working from home: Bramwell Pashley used his wife's mangle and wash tub to bring the coal up to the surface.
He then started digging and to the astonishment of neighbours built a DIY mine over five years. The ingenious former pit engineer even pinched his wife Winifred’s household gadgets and adapted them for the mine.

A vacuum cleaner was used as an air extractor, while the washing mangle hauled coal up in a metal wash tub, hence the pit being dubbed the Peggy Tub mine.

The winding gear was linked to three small electric motors and then the household meter.

The mine ended up employing seven men and hauling several tons of coal a day up the 40ft shaft in an era of coal-rationing.

The bizarre story was discovered by Mr Pashley’s grandson Steven Harrison when researching his family history.

Mr Harrison, 44, who is wheelchair-bound after breaking his neck in a diving accident in 1998, said: 'He must be the ultimate DIYer.'

After leaving school at 13, Mr Pashley worked down a colliery for nine years. Problems with his feet meant he didn’t go to war; instead he ran a haulage business and built his mine at the back of his home in Durkar, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire.
He struck the coal seam 25ft below the surface, then built and lined the shaft by hand using 5,500 bricks and, after a lengthy battle with the National Coal Board for a licence, his business was up and running by 1947.

Carrying a candle for light and a pickaxe to cut out the coal, he ignored the potential dangers from methane gas.

Hard graft: Mr Pashley in his 'Peggy Tub mine' in the 1940s

Mr Pashley hoped to employ as many as 35 men and extract 100 tons of coal a week, but in the mid-1960s his mine hit other nearby pit workings and was flooded.

By then plans to extend the M1 motorway were approved and the mine closed for good when his home was bought by compulsory purchase order in around 1967.

Undeterred, Mr Pashley moved to nearby Newmillerdam and built a drift - or horizontal - mine. He died in 1981 aged 66.

Mr Harrison said: 'I remember as a youngster going to the mine at Newmillerdam. At the time I didn't think anything of it, I thought everybody's granddad must have his own pit.'