MINING THE INSTITUTE

The Great Northern Coalfield supplied not only equipment, tools and expertise to emerging coalfields and other areas of mining activity overseas, but also carried the men and families, each with the skills and experience of mining but also with their cultural values, heritage and belief systems. These people also supplied a nomenclature of mining terms and place names, the latter were bestowed upon new collieries and settlements overseas often as a signal to the market of the mineral riches of the new development. As a result there are many ‘Newcastles’, around the world, but there are almost as many Bentons, Gosforths, Stocktons and so on. Our emigrant colliers and engineers also took their family names with them and those that settled have left a surname footprint upon their chosen settlements. By utilising UCL’s new interactive national and international surname mapping website we can historically track the Armstrongs, Milburns, Donkins, Charltons and others as they travelled the world in search of work and prosperity and in turn unlocking the mineral wealth of the continents.

Historian Bill Lancaster explores the antecedents of the Institute and the cluster of talented mining engineers who helped create the modern world. Coal was at the heart of the industrial revolution. Solving the problems of winning it and then moving it produced innovations that heralded the birth of modern industrial society. The advent of railways and deep mining in the Great Northern Coalfield were important milestones in human history: north east coal fuelled the industrialisation of Britain which was quickly copied in other countries.

Much of this story involved a group of men from Tyneside, Wearside and the Great Northern Coalfield who were part of a circle centred on the Mining Institute’s first president Nicholas Wood. Apart from the Stephensons, few of these men are known outside our Region. This group of people revolutionised mining and transportation, not just in Britain, but in Europe and North America, Australia and South Africa, India and South America. Skills developed and honed in places such as Wylam, Killingworth, Gateshead and Hetton were quickly applied, often by the men who developed them, in places as far afield as the Ruhr and Nova Scotia.

Even less is known of the next generation of engineers, most of who were trained by the Wood circle. Yet their achievements arguably matched their mentors and were undertaken in the golden age of the Institute’s first half century. What is equally surprising is the often humble nature of their background and early lives. But their success was not just the product of the much celebrated phenomena of Victorian ‘Self Help’, it was also based upon the mutual support of the fellow members of the Institute. The contemporary vogue amongst business theorists for ‘clusters’ and ‘knowledge transfer’ has antecedents in the Mining Institute, whose members had an impact at least equal to ‘Silicon Valley’.

Mining the Institute is designed to offer you the opportunity to explore the impact of these people. Each talk, workshop and exhibition will be held in the Mining Institute’s historic lecture theatre within Neville Hall, unless indicated otherwise. We aim for a series of friendly, informal events with opportunities for discussion both in the lecture theatre and afterwards in the magnificent Wood Library where refreshments and a bar will be available.

YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

The project will encourage you to be actively involved in researching members of the Mining Institute and tracing their journeys around the globe. You will follow these engineers on their travels and find out how they influenced cultures in four continents and their remaining legacy. You will have access to the collections, materials and facilities of the Mining Institute and to partner organisations in the Region and abroad.

You will have expert guidance from Bill Lancaster and the staff at the Institute. You will have free access to our resources and archives which stretch back to 1570 and offer an unparalleled view of the development of the coal industry and
industrial revolution. You are assured that your research will be new and original. Your research will be published on the Institute’s web site potentially seen by 750,000 people a year. Perhaps your research may be offered as future talks at the Institute and to others beyond? We hope to offer expert training to you in adding pages to Wikipedia to benefit the world’s scholars, inform academic debate and raise the profile of the importance of the people of the Great Northern Coalfield, their talent, innovation, invention and expertise and the tremendous impact they made on the modern world.

As a Mining Institute volunteer you will be paid travel expenses and enjoy working in the magnificent and inspiring Wood Memorial Hall Library, a real gem of a library. You’ll also be able to carry out research at Beamish, the North of England Open Air Museum, at Woodhorn Museum and Northumberland Archives and at NEEMARC at Sunderland University with access to the archives at our partner sites.

Courses are also being run by our partners, the WEA. Please contact us for more information about these.

Of course, if you just want to come along and listen to the talks and take part in discussion you’ll also be very welcome. All our events are free of charge.

BONNIE GEORDIE ELLIOT

George Elliot was born in Gateshead in 1814; nine years later he was a trapper boy at Penshaw pit. A bright, technically minded boy by 1832 he was apprenticed to Thomas Sopwith, the leading mining engineer. He helped to pioneer deep mining in East Durham and was soon a mine owner in his own right. George was a founder member of the Institute and its third president. His business acumen matched his technical ability, in the 1860’s he had interests in the Nova Scotia coalfield and he became the owner of the Powell Duffryn Company in South Wales. Always interested in technical matters George bought the wire rope company of Kuper and Company in 1849 and diversified its interests into the new field of telegraph cables. His company produced the cross channel cable and the Atlantic link in 1866. He was elected Conservative MP for North Durham in 1868. Known as Bonnie Geordie amongst his mining constituents, he was returned as member until the boundary changes of 1885. Close to Disraeli, Elliot persuaded the prime minister to buy shares in the Suez Canal Company and he assisted Egypt in the financial crisis of the 1870’s. The Khedive of Egypt allowed him to remove two stones from the Pyramid of Cheops and other items. The stones today can be seen in the walls of Penshaw and Rainton churches.

He acquired estates and town houses including one on the Royal Crescent, Whitby. It was here that George entertained his good friend Bram Stoker, who awoke one morning to find he was sharing the room with an Egyptian Mummy, a present to Elliot from the Khedive. Stoker’s stay in Whitby inspired his novels “The Seal of the Seven Stars” and “Dracula”. After Elliot’s wife’s death he led a colourful life in London theatrical circles with Stoker and his good friend Henry Irving. His mining interests continued and with remarkable prescience he foresaw the difficulties that the industry would face in the twentieth century. He proposed the establishment of a coal monopoly overseen by the Board of Trade; many mocked the scheme, but fifty five years after his death in 1893, the industry was nationalised.
PROGRAMME OF EVENTS
All talks and events are free and take place at the Mining Institute at 7:00pm

18th October - 31st January 2014
THE LOST WORLD OF NORMAN CORNISH

Our project partner, Northumbria Gallery is presenting an exhibition of Cornish’s work from October 18th 2013 until January 31st 2014. The Institute will be participating in this celebration with a display in Neville Hall of examples of his work alongside paintings and artwork by other contemporary coalfield artists and a display of images by the world famous photographer Chris Perkin Steele, of pit village life. Mining the Institute will also be presenting Cornish’s World, a study day devoted to his work, at the Gallery on Sunday 3rd of November. Please apply to the Gallery for details of this event.

Tuesday 5th November 2013
COLLIERS, VIEWERS, ENGINEERS AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD

Bill Lancaster will outline the long history of the region’s influence upon mining at home and overseas. Beginning with the highly influential group of viewers and engineers in the first half of the nineteenth century, who helped found the Institute, we will explore the impact of coal mining in the north and how the industry heralded and made possible the industrial revolution and the rise of modern society. The social background of the early engineers, many coming from the ordinary mining families, will form a backcloth to the evening’s discussion.

Tuesday 3rd December 2013
WHEREEVER YOU GAN’

The great miners’ leader Peter Lee was not unusual in travelling to the USA and South Africa in search of work. Our mining engineers pioneered coalfields and other forms of mining on all continents bringing with them modern mining techniques and transport systems. Northern pitmen worked the early coal mines of Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois, helping to create the industrial revolution in the USA and they became highly significant figures in the American coal industry. We can also follow them to Nova Scotia, Vancouver Island, the Eastern Cape of South Africa, New South Wales and New Zealand, as Britain searched for bunkering coal for its rapidly expanding steam powered, naval and mercantile fleet. Industrialisation often followed coal and mineral discovery, which in turn gave rise to demand for skilled labour and expertise from the North East. They introduced to these far flung locations trade unionism and their political traditions. They also brought their cultural baggage which could range from Primitive Methodism to Quoits and Harry Clasper’s version of rowing races. This broadcasting of northern mining expertise and culture continued throughout the twentieth century up to the present day. This theme will be another opportunity to highlight current overseas activities of the Institute’s members. Bill Lancaster will guide us on an intercontinental tour following these pioneers.

Peter Lee
Tuesday 14 January 2014
MIGRATING MINERS

This session will explore the diaspora of pitmen and their families within the United Kingdom during the last century. We will follow individuals and communities to other British coalfields including South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Kent. The event will draw upon visual material including film footage and the large amount of printed material including the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, which in the first half of the twentieth century was a major source of news and communication for individuals and families that had migrated to other coalfields and trade publications such as the *Colliery Guardian*.

Tuesday 11 February
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GREAT UNCLE GEORGE AND GREAT AUNT ‘BELLA’?

We will continue our survey of the twentieth century British diaspora by drawing upon the expertise of family historians who have tracked the migration of coalfield families at an intimate level. The event will be illustrated by surviving diary material and ephemera. We will try to recreate the *songlines* and communication links between the ‘sending’ and ‘host’ communities displaying items such as Hall Brothers and the United coach companies route diagrams, fares and timetables. A special focus will be given to the numerous daughters of the coalfield and the Ministry of Labour’s 1930’s scheme to encourage single women to leave the region for, often menial, low paid domestic and retail employment in the Midlands and Southeast. Professor Brindley Thomas’s pioneering 1930’s study of the migration of labour from coalfields to the areas of new manufacturing industry will be drawn upon for rare statistical insights.

Tuesday 11 March
YOUNG PEOPLES PROJECT *

We; that is those of us who can trace our families back three or four generations in the North-East, tend to think that our antecedents have always been here.

We are Geordies, the real thing, untrammelled by other traces of migration. But shake the family tree, ever so imperceptibly, and it’s surprising what will fall out!

The pilot project with Newcastle Schools began with the premise; ‘Whatever happened to Great Uncle George and Great Aunt Bella’ and, indeed, where did they come from? What cultural baggage did they bring with them and what did they take with them when they left and transplanted wherever they settled? The purpose of the project was designed for students and by students to map some of this uncharted territory.

This session will explore the work undertaken by young people from schools in the area participating in the Project and illustrate their findings through their work.

Notes:
*If you are a teacher interested in knowing more about this aspect of our work, please contact Simon Brooks at the Mining Institute on 0191 233 2459.*

Tuesday 8 April 2014
TWO ELLIOTS, PETER LEE AND A PENSHAW PIT. THE GEORDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

This topic will consist of material tracking colliers and engineers who went to the Eastern Cape to develop the region’s mining industry. Research is currently in progress that is focusing upon a number of important people. These will include the miners’ leader Peter Lee, who spent
several years in Eastern Cape coal mines; the Northumbrian aristocrat and Institute member Umfreville Percy Swinburne, who had a distinguished career in South African mining and Geordie Elliot who appears to have pioneered coalmining in the Eastern Cape with his nephew John George Elliot who opened one of the very first mines in South Africa at Molteno in the Eastern Cape and named it 'The Penshaw Mine'.

This research is ongoing and work is underway on the Peter Lee archive; colleagues in South Africa are pursuing local material and the School of Oriental and African Studies is to be visited in order to examine archive material concerning Primitive Methodist missionaries from the North East mining communities who played a major role in the religious and educational life of the eastern Cape.

**Tuesday 20 May**

**PITMATIC THE LANGUAGE OF THE COALFIELD**

Bill Lancaster was the Director of the HLF ‘Wor Language’ project which published Bill Griffiths’ outstanding work on coalfield dialect. Lancaster will give a lecture on the topic which will be followed by ‘Pitmatic’ readings and recitations delivered by speakers of this rapidly disappearing language. Tyne and Wear Archives have a collection of ‘Pitmatic’ recordings made at the Durham Miners’ Gala during the 1970’s and these will be played with the screening of the silent, colour film of the Gala. We will also draw upon the rich resources of our Beamish partners and present recently digitised recordings of pitmen recounting colliery life from the 1920’s to the 1980’s, mainly spoken in *Pitmatic*. 

**Tuesday 27 May 2014**

**EXTRA-SPECIAL GUEST LECTURER, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF HISTORY MARGARET JACOB, UCLA CALIFORNIA.**

Professor Jacob is generously making a special trip to the Mining Institute. Margaret’s new book, “The First Knowledge Economy” draws extensively on the Institute’s archives. Margaret will be providing fresh insights into the storehouse of treasures found here at the launch of the book. This will be a very special evening. The event starts at 6pm. More details will be available on our website next year.

**Late June 2014**

**MINING THE INSTITUTE FESTIVAL**

**A Festival of Mining Film**

No other industry has received as much attention by film makers as mining. The NCB film unit has left a rich legacy of colliery life with many documentaries in the *Mining Review* series, scripted and directed by Sid Chaplin. The North East Film Archive based at Teesside University has an abundance of mining footage. There are short documentaries, often celebratory, dealing with social events and everyday life such as the Durham Gala and the Bedlington picnic, whilst Methodism in the coalfield is the subject of a particularly well-crafted documentary. The diaspora of regional coalminers and the new communities they moved to is the subject of a lengthy *Mining Review* and addresses some of the programme’s central themes.

Pit closures are the subject of several documentaries in the regional archive and these include a hard hitting survey of the impact of the ending of coal mining to the Northumberland village of Blackhill. The last shift in the last of the Cleveland ironstone mine in 1966, is captured in colour in *The End of an Era* which includes
an abundance of underground footage rarely captured in mining documentaries. Coalmining could command a national and international stage with major dramatic productions such as Carol Reed’s, 1939, *The Stars Look Down*, based upon the 1925 Montagu disaster and written by A J Cronin, the regional medical inspector of mines. At a more prosaic level the Co-operative Film Unit, established in the late 1890’s, was possibly the first to record everyday working class life. Their early productions include work on Durham mining communities such as Bishop Auckland. More recently Bill Morrison, the acclaimed American film maker, has produced *Miners’ Hymns*, 2012, a well-received elegiac survey of the Durham coalfield using footage from the early days of mining documentaries up until the 1990’s.

A survey lecture by Bill Lancaster will be delivered on Tuesday the 10th, followed by three days of screenings.

**Pitmen Painters: A Celebration and Exploration**

An exhibition of art from the coalfield a show of past and contemporary visual art that will celebrate the achievements of our coalfield’s artists.

Natasha Vall, who has published widely on the Spennymoor Settlement, including the works of Cornish and McGuinness, will lead a session on this major part of the region’s heritage. As well as an exhibition of mining art we will also stage a screening of NCB films on visual art, including the 1950 documentary of Norman Cornish in Paris.

The exhibition will conclude with a talk by the leading curators of north east mining art, Robert McManners and Gillian Wales.

**Mining Writers: A Celebration**

Vall’s discussion on the Spennymoor Settlement will link with this celebration of coalfield writing. The Region has produced many outstanding writers, playwrights and poets including Skipsey, Heslop and Chaplin, all miners. Bunting was the son of a colliery doctor and Plater’s family worked in the coal depots of Tyneside.

Today the region has earned an international reputation for its literary and dramatic output, much of it based upon or inspired by our mining past. This topic takes the form of a mini literary festival in partnership with writers and publishers.

‘*Byker Hill and Walker Shore*. Songs of The Coalfield.’

The North East has one of the strongest and most distinguished folk music traditions in Britain and coalmining is an enduring feature of northern song. Jude Murphy will give a talk based upon her PhD on North East folk music and with help from others, sing her way through two centuries of mining song from ‘*Byker Hill*’ in the eighteenth century to the near present.

2014 marks Peter Lee’s 150th anniversary and we will stage a re-creation of songs written in his American diary during the mid-1890’s. Some very special performances will feature guest artists contributing to this celebration of the coalfield in music.

**Tuesday 4th July 2014**

**A CENTURY AND A HALF OF THE MINING INSTITUTE**

We will conclude with a celebration of the Institute’s past achievements, the people who made it all possible and contemplate the Institute’s future role in the region.
THE MINING INSTITUTE

The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, widely known as the Mining Institute, was founded in 1852 to advance the science and art of Mining. It still fulfils this role today with active mining engineers still working around the world. The Institute has always promoted learning, in fact it was the home of the College of Physical Science, the forerunner of today’s Newcastle University. Celebrating over 160 years of continuous service, the Mining Institute is growing with an increasing membership which welcomes professional and public audiences. The Institute is expanding, having acquired all of Neville Hall in order to provide improved access and facilities to the public.

Since 1854 the Mining Institute has occupied premises next to Central Station. Its outstanding library was built as a memorial to Nicholas Wood between 1870 and 1872. The adjacent Neville Hall was built for the Institute and Coal Trade Chambers Company housing the Northumberland and Durham Coal Trades offices and from 1947 part of the National Coal Board. The building is built in the high gothic style fashionable in 1870 and designed by noted local architect Archibald Matthias Dunn.

The stunning Lecture Theatre was added in 1902 by Cackett and Burns Dick and, together with the library, provides two of the finest rooms to be found in Newcastle.

HOW TO FIND US

The Mining Institute is located on Westgate Road opposite Stephenson’s Monument. It is less than a two minute walk from Newcastle Central railway Station and Central Station Metro. Many buses stop close to the station on Neville Street.

Tel: 0191 233 2459. Open 10am-5pm Mon-Fri weekly. Late night Thursdays until 9pm. Closed Bank Holidays.

E-mail: librarian@mininginstitute.org.uk

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