THE story of Woolley Colliery is, in many ways, the story of the Yorkshire coalfield.

It is a story of small beginnings as men burrowed into hillsides where the valuable seams of coal outcropped near the surface. As the coal went deeper, so did the men; eventually sinking shafts to explore the richness of the seams at greater depth.

As skills and equipment improved more shafts were sunk, machinery underwent of in earlier years was introduced and Woolley — like the coalfield on which it stands — grew in stature and importance.

And in 1969, when Woolley Colliery celebrated its centenary, it marked the occasion by producing a million tons of coal in a year for the first time in its history — the mark of a big and successful colliery.

In the 1850's coal was worked on the hillsides above Woolley Colliery by simple adits, or tunnels, driven into the hillsides. The methods had changed very little from those used by the monks who first worked the coal in this part of the world as far back as the 13th century.

It was in 1869 that the colliery proper was born — when the owners decided to sink a shaft to reach the deepening coal. That shaft exists to this day at Wheatley Wood, a mile from the present pit yard but now dwarfed in size and complexity by the new shafts and headgear which have taken over most of its functions during the past 100 years.

The last 20 years have, perhaps, seen more changes than any comparable period in the mining industry's history. All Woolley's coal is now mined by machine — horsepower has taken over from musclepower. In 1947, the first year of nationalisation, about 2,400 men produced 650,000 tons of coal. The pit's productivity — measured in terms of the amount of coal produced for every shift worked by each man above and below ground — stood at 261 cwt., a man. In centenary year that figure had almost doubled — to nearly 52 cwt., a man. With almost 500 fewer men Woolley Colliery proudly achieved the remarkable output figure of 1,000,000 tons in a year.

The pride of management and men in this achievement is fully justified for Woolley Colliery has more than its share of mining problems. Its seams are much thinner than the average for the coalfield and this has called for considerable ingenuity and perseverance in introducing machinery and modernising the methods of work.