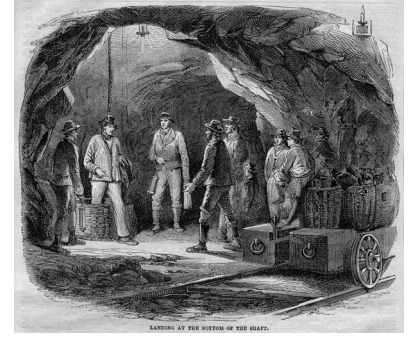
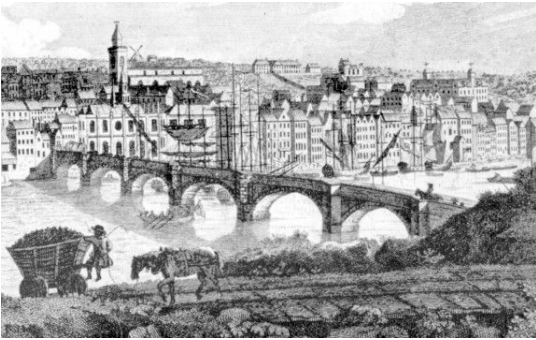


# TAKING COALS TO (AND FROM) NEWCASTLE(S)

Coal mining has been important to the history of many of the Newcastles in the World, and for some it remains a key element of the local economy.

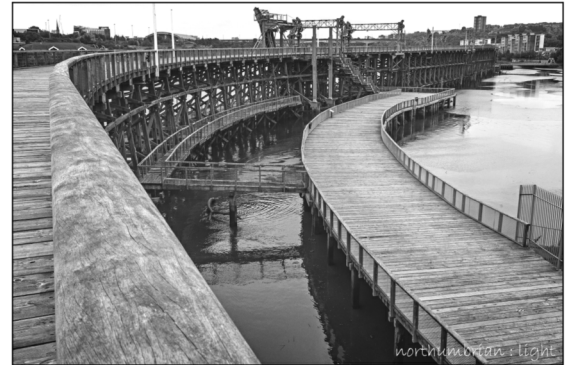
The phrase “taking coals to Newcastle” is well-known – meaning doing something that is unnecessary or pointless (like “selling snow to Eskimos”!). It comes from the fact that **NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE** in the North East of England was once the centre of a huge coal mining area and the world’s largest coal distributing port. Although the coal industry of the area is now mostly a matter of history, the expression can still be used today with a degree of literal accuracy, since the harbour of **NEWCASTLE** in **NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA** has succeeded its UK namesake as the largest exporter of coal in the modern world. (Newcastle NSW was named after Newcastle upon Tyne after abundant rich deposits were discovered there and exploited by early European settlers).



In England, the North East, around Newcastle upon Tyne, is the oldest intensive coal mining district in the country and evidence suggests that the Romans burned and excavated coal in the region. But it was not until the 13th and 14th centuries that it became more widespread, with demand spurred on by expanding towns and a growing population. It was the merchants of Newcastle who stood to gain the most. This was primarily because Newcastle was a seaport, but also because the shallowest, most accessible coal seams lay so close to the Tyne. The Tyne quickly developed into the major river for exporting coal to London. By the 13th century coal mining was well established along the river, and by the next century Newcastle was the fourth wealthiest town in England after London, Bristol and York.

Dunston Staiths, on the River Tyne, is believed to be the largest timber structure in Europe. It is a Scheduled Monument, Grade II listed.

Opened in 1893 by the North East Railway Company, it was built to allow large quantities of coal arriving by rail from the coalfields on the south side of the river to be loaded directly onto waiting colliers (coal ships) ready for the onward journey down the river and to customers in London and abroad. Millions of tonnes of coal were moved this way each year.



The North East of England is known as “the birthplace of railways”; coal mining in the region was inextricably linked to the development of steam locomotives and the great railway age of steam. The greatest railway pioneers such as George and Robert Stephenson, were all from the North East and all actively involved with the railway developments of the region’s coal mining industry. In the early 1950s the Port of Tyne was also the second largest ship builder and the largest ship-repairing port in the world.

So the exploitation of the Great Northern Coalfield, north and south of Newcastle, led to the rise of railways and shipbuilding, and also iron, steel and glass-making, potteries and chemical works in this cradle of the industrial revolution. At its peak just before the First World War, the coalfield employed almost 250,000 men, producing almost 60 million tonnes of coal a year from about 400 pits.

The last deep mine in the North East closed in 2005, but there are two open cut (surface) coal mines immediately north of Newcastle and a controversial planning application under consideration for a site within the city’s boundary to mine 800,000 tonnes of coal and 400,000 tonnes of fire clay.

Based in **Newcastle upon Tyne** next to the main railway station, the Mining Institute (it's full title is the **North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers**) is an organisation dedicated to the professions of mining engineering, mechanical engineering and related professions. It is the world's oldest professional mining organisation and was dedicated to training engineers to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding coal mining industry in the UK and abroad.

Lying within the walls of its building are centuries of history relating to the Great Northern Coalfield, full of tales of engineering excellence, of efforts to wrest resources from the earth and the dangers that it brought. The Library is of importance globally, the finest and largest coal mining library in the world and perhaps the best place to study the early Industrial Revolution which began with the use of coal as a fuel in the Great Northern Coalfield 600 years ago.

The Institute has always aimed at making mining a safer occupation and in its early years it undertook many studies and experiments; its Members investigated accidents aimed at understanding the causes of mining disasters to ensure measures were put in hand to prevent further disasters. This scientific analysis of accidents is common today but was ground-breaking at the time.

Over the years, the Institute pushed for legislation to improve mine safety.

The Institute's resources and collections cover maps, plans, photographs as well as books, reports, notebooks, letters and much more. Most importantly, its early members and their predecessors collected information from the rest of the industrialising areas of the world, including detailed records of costs and the processes and methods used in mining. As well as a fascinating record of mining life and technology, accounting techniques enabled forecasts of competitiveness and efficiency. The collections now comprise probably the finest archive in the world in which to study the early industrial revolution. Together with its own collection of tracts and transactions, in which the reports of its members were published, the Mining Institute became a globally important organisation with members spread across the world and its publications sent around the globe.



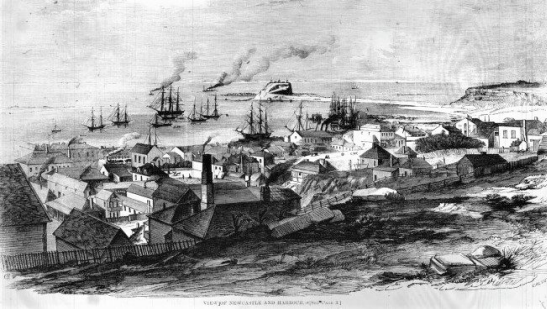
The Mining Institute owns one of the finest buildings in Newcastle, Neville Hall, a Victorian building built at the time when high-Gothic architecture was coming into fashion. It has an outstanding Victorian Library with exquisite carved stone, wood and paintings, with a beautifully decorated ceiling, a vast glass roof and filled with furniture designed for the library in 1872. Below the Library is the Edwardian Lecture Theatre, modelled on the Royal Institution in London and constructed in deep red Cuban mahogany. These rooms are amongst Newcastle's finest architectural treasures.

The Institute has a reputation as a friendly and welcoming place to study. It encourages visits from everyone to learn about the history of mining and accommodates school visits, students, academic researchers and the general public wishing to learn more or carry out genealogical research. The Institute still encourages the study of mining and involves both practising mining engineers and laymen amongst its members. Many of the members are experts in their field and it encourages people to work together and learn from each other. As an increasingly active Institute it is once again growing with more members joining every year. Very large numbers of people make use of the Institute's collections which are available to the visiting public and via the internet. The Institute is currently undergoing a multi-million euro redevelopment of the building, a reorganised collection, new governance structure and a programme of activities.

See: <https://mininginstitute.org.uk/>



Looking back, in the 1930s 20 million tonnes of coal were exported annually from the Port of Tyne, but compare that with the huge numbers now in **NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA** – in 2018 around 160m tonnes of coal were exported from the city's harbour!



How did it all start there? The first European to explore the area was Lieutenant John Shortland in 1797. His discovery of the area was largely accidental, as he had been sent in search of convicts who had seized HMS Cumberland as she was sailing from Sydney Cove. While returning, Lt. Shortland entered what he later described as "a very fine coal river". He returned with reports of the deep-water port and the area's abundant coal. The settlement that grew up there was originally called "Coal River", then "King's Town", then - in 1804 - "Newcastle", named after Newcastle upon Tyne because of the association with coal and mining.

Large scale commercial coal mining began in earnest in 1833 when the Australian Agricultural Company received land grants at Newcastle plus a 30- year monopoly on that town's coal traffic. The same company had just opened Australia's first railway, serving Newcastle. Many other collieries were opened close to Newcastle.

Although, after many years of high production, mining operations had ceased in Newcastle itself by the early 1960s, there were still many collieries in the wider Hunter Valley area for the port to serve.



(Right) Miner Charlie Barker's hard hat and tokens and Arthur Butterworth's pick c.1922–1944. Courtesy of the Newcastle Museum

Here is the Coal Monument erected by the citizens of Newcastle as symbolic of the coal mining industry for which the city was famous. The base of comprises 3 steps of Pyrmont stone, surmounted by a large block, on the four sides of which are bas-reliefs in bronze, representing the chief phases of the coal industry from mine to ship. This supports 4 columns, on which rests a representation in rough black marble of a large block of coal.



The Hunter Valley Coal Chain (HVCC) is the chain of coal delivery in New South Wales from - now mainly open-cut (surface) - coal mines in the Hunter Region to the Port of Newcastle and domestic coal-fired power stations in the Hunter Valley. The HVCC essentially follows the path of the Hunter River travelling south-east from the mining areas in the Hunter Valley to Newcastle.

Coal still makes up about 90% of the New South Wales port's throughput by value (even more by tonnage), including some of the world's highest quality coal for steel production and electricity generation. However, with doubts over the long-term outlook for coal as the transition from fossil fuels speeds up, the port recognises the need to diversify as a "viable and competitive container terminal"





**South Africa** produces over 250 million tonnes of coal each year. Over 90% of the coal consumed in the whole of Africa is produced in South Africa. Predominantly used to generate electricity (by South Africa's national electricity provider, Eskom) coal is also used by the steel industry to extract iron from iron ore and in the production of cement.

The coal mining industry in KwaZulu-Natal is located primarily in the northern areas of the province and in Zululand. The main inland mines are located near Dundee (anthracite), Newcastle, Utrecht and Hlobane (bituminous coal) in Northern KwaZulu Natal province.

Coal mining, steel and cement have been hugely important industries and employers in **NEWCASTLE KWAZULU NATAL**. The first geological survey of the Natal coalfields was made in the 1860s and proved that there were workable coal deposits.

Two events facilitated the development of commercial mining operations in the region.

In 1881 Frederick W. North, the British geological expert who had been appointed to investigate Natal's coal resources, attracted much attention to the region by reporting that Klip River County was endowed with a workable coalfield which was no less than 1350 square miles (3500 square kilometres) in extent and contained over 2000 million tons of coal, much of it suitable for generating steam in locomotives. Then, in 1889, the railway from Durban through Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith advanced through Glencoe and Newcastle en route to the Transvaal border.



The town of Dundee, close to Newcastle, became the heart of the richest coal producing area in South Africa.

The remains of coal mines that created the vibrant economy of the area still mark the hillsides and valleys. Talana Museum and Heritage Park in Dundee is one of the most important locations in South Africa for finding out about the history of coal mining, with four extensive coal exhibits depicting the many aspects of coal mining of the area and preserving a unique culture. See

<https://www.talana.co.za/>



Uitkomst surface colliery, near Newcastle



Many coal mines in and around Newcastle are now closed or mothballed, but a huge – and controversial – opencast coal site is under construction in Newcastle.



This is the Kliprand Colliery, the first phase of Ikwezi Mining's Newcastle Project. The Australian company will eventually tap more than 12 000 hectares of South Africa's largest remaining undeveloped coal resources. The local community has campaigned strongly against the development because of the loss of people's homes and the impact upon health and the environment.



The North Staffordshire Coalfield was an English coalfield with 50 collieries, employing 20,000 miners at its peak, located almost all within the city of Stoke on Trent and the borough of **NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME**.

The last deep mine (Silverdale) was closed in December 1998 and most former colliery sites have since been reclaimed. Silverdale, near Newcastle, produced over 600,000 tonnes of coal annually, mainly for powers stations and the industrial market (and in one year it mined a million tonnes - see photo below)



Coal mining in the Chesterton area of Newcastle-under-Lyme had been carried out since Roman times. The area around Red Street (itself a Roman name) had large, deep mines but also a number of much smaller “Bell pits” (with coal close to the surface) and “Footerills” (drift mines).

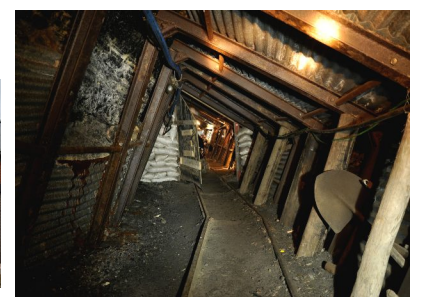
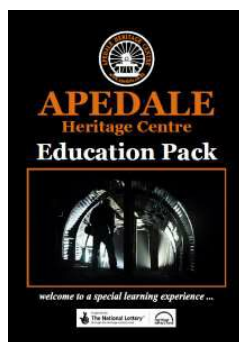


The Apedale Heritage Centre, in Chesterton, Newcastle, was founded in 2001 on the site of Apedale Colliery, which had closed a few years earlier in 1998.

Apedale, a former agricultural valley, has a long history of mining throughout the industrial revolution and back even further. Many of the coal seams in Apedale came close to the surface allowing small scale mining to take place very early on, before technology allowed the development of deep mines.

Iron ore was also mined - this coal and iron was destined for local uses such as domestic fuel, potteries and blacksmithing.

With the coming of the industrial revolution demand grew for coal, and so did the scale of mining operations in Apedale. Several deep mines operated in Apedale at various times from the late 18th century to the start of the 20th century, notably Sladderhill Colliery (at one time the deepest in England), Wood Pit, Burley Pit (see photo, below left) and Watermills Colliery.



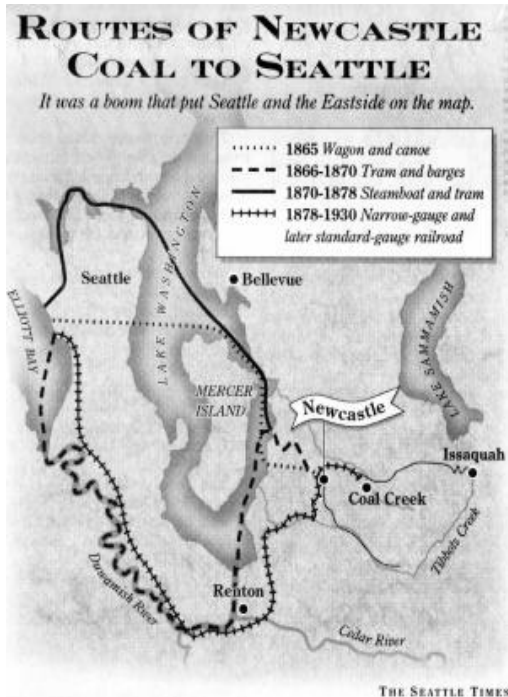
The last working mines in the area were drift mines (entered on foot at a shallow angle) operated by Aurora Mine Ltd, but the company ceased production in 1998, bringing coal mining to an end in Apedale. The Apedale Heritage Centre is on the site of the Aurora mine and offers mine tours as well as a wealth of information in the museum about the local industries and their history.



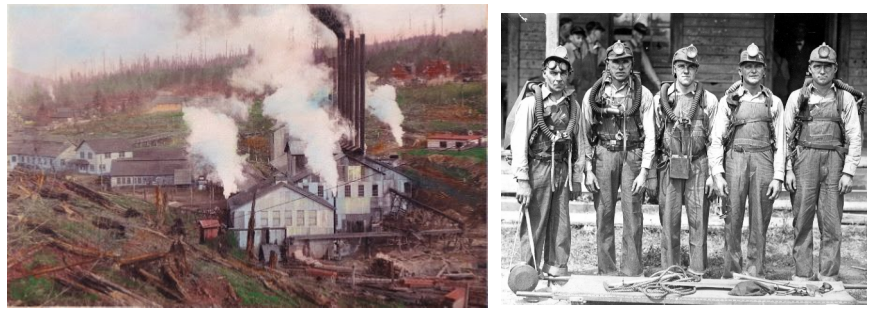


Many of the “Newcastles” (or “New Castles”) in the **USA** have a coal-mining heritage.

**NEWCASTLE** is a city in King County, **WASHINGTON STATE** (population around 10,000). It has been an important settlement and town since the late 19th century and played a major role in the development of Seattle and the Seattle region. The town began as an unincorporated community known as Newport Hills; it became its own city in 1994 and changed its name to Newcastle, taken from the name of a coal mining community that had been within its boundaries in years past and which itself had been originally named after Newcastle upon Tyne.



Newcastle was one of the region's earliest coal mining areas and its railroad link to Seattle was the first in King County. Coal delivered by rail from Newcastle's mines to Seattle fuelled the growth of the Port of Seattle and attracted railroads, most notably the Great Northern Railway. The Newcastle coal mine began producing coal by the 1870s. More than 13 million tons of coal had been extracted by the time the mine closed in 1963. Newcastle's coal mining heritage is reflected in local place names such as Coal Creek.



*Above right - a mining rescue team, Newcastle, 1924*

**NEW CASTLE, COLORADO** (population almost 5000) is located on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. It is also named after the coal mining town of Newcastle upon Tyne and was incorporated in 1888. The mountains rich with coal surrounding the town were the impetus for New Castle's development into the bustling mining community it became in the late 1880s.



The largest and most productive of the mines, the Vulcan, was closed after the 1896 explosion but new owners resumed mining in 1910. Sadly, the Vulcan exploded again, in 1913 and 1918, with many deaths. Following this accident, it was permanently closed.

The Vulcan coal seam is still burning in Coal Ridge, south of the Colorado River, and the Consolidated Mine still burns in “Burning Mountain” (the Hogback). The heat from the fires destroys vegetation and melts snow along the long scars in the Hogback. The “Burning Mountain Festival” is New Castle's signature event which takes place over two days in early September to remember the Town's mining history - it is named after the iconic mountain in which the seam still burns.





**NEWCASTLE** is a city in and the county seat of Weston County, **WYOMING** (population around 3,500) and began as a product of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. In the 1880s when railroad officials planned to expand from the Midwest toward the Northwest, the owners looked for routes with a ready coal supply to fuel their locomotives.



Newcastle was established by Joseph H. Hemingway, superintendent of the Cambria Coal Company, and was named by him after his hometown in England – Newcastle upon Tyne. The first Newcastle residents were coal miners and railroad workers. In 1987 Wyoming became the largest coal producing state in the US with coal reserves total about 69.3 billion tons, or over 14% of the U.S. coal reserves.

One of the Newcastles of the World main partners, the City of **NEW CASTLE**, in Lawrence County, western **PENNSYLVANIA** (population 23,000) was settled in about 1798 by John Stewart. The area was rich in local deposits of coal, iron ore, limestone, and fire clay, and Stewart built an iron furnace and named the place after the English industrial city of Newcastle upon Tyne. By the turn of the century, New Castle was one of the fastest growing cities in the country as it became the “tin plate capital of the world”.

The town of **NEWCASTLE** in Young County, **TEXAS** (population 600) was established in 1908. The first settlers arrived in 1906 at nearby Whiskey Creek to work for the Merrill and Clark Strip Mining Company. The Belknap Coal Company sank a shaft in 1908, and the first car of coal was shipped to Wichita Falls later that year. In 1908 a post office was moved from old Fort Belknap to Newcastle, at which point the town was named after Newcastle upon Tyne.

This was at the suggestion of Samuel H. Hardy, who was the Superintendent of the Newcastle and Bridgeport coal mines. Coal mining ended in Newcastle in 1942.



There are other small places in the USA with a coal mining heritage which are understood to be named after Newcastle upon Tyne. These include **New Castle in Jefferson County, Alabama** (which was formerly home to coal mines operated by John T. Milner.); **New Castle in Iron County, Utah**; and **Newcastle in Carrier Mills township (Saline County), Illinois**.

Coal has been mined in **CANADA** since 1639 when a small mine was opened at Grand Lake, New Brunswick. **Newcastle** is an urban neighbourhood in the city of Miramichi, New Brunswick, Canada, and it was once a city in its own right before amalgamation.

Commercial coal mining in New Brunswick began in 1825 and the largest coal mining area was in the Newcastle Creek valley. In the 1850s, significant amounts of 'Newcastle coal' was being shipped down river from Grand Lake to the Saint John River.



**Newcastle Island** (Saysutshun) is a provincial park located on a small island off the coast of Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada. The island was named after Newcastle upon Tyne when coal was discovered in 1849. The British needed a colony on the west coast of North America to provide good quality coal for their steamships.

There were two mines on Newcastle Island - the Newcastle Mine which was opened in 1853 and the Fitzwilliam Mine in 1872, but all production had ceased by 1882.

# COAL MINING IN LITERATURE, SONG AND ART

As can be seen from the references to **New Castle, Colorado** (page 6), working in the mines was an arduous and dangerous occupation. Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of people have died over time through explosions, collapses, floodings and other causes. Although safety is better these days where there is still underground mining, accidents still occur. For example, in the 1996 Gretley coal mine disaster, near **Newcastle, Australia**, four men were killed when they unknowingly cut into the flooded workings of an old coalmine, abandoned over 80 years earlier.



The worst disaster in any of our Newcastles was in 1918.

The Minnie Pit (pit = colliery or mine), which was named after Minnie Craig, the daughter of one of the owners, was opened in 1881 in the small village of Halmer End, **Newcastle-under-Lyme**.

It was one of the most profitable collieries in the North Staffordshire coalfield but also one of the most dangerous because of the presence of “firedamp” (flammable gases).

On Saturday, 12 January 1918 a huge explosion tore apart the Bullhurst and Banbury Seams and within minutes 155 men died from the effects of the explosion, roof falls or inhaling poisonous gases – and the captain of the rescue team also died.

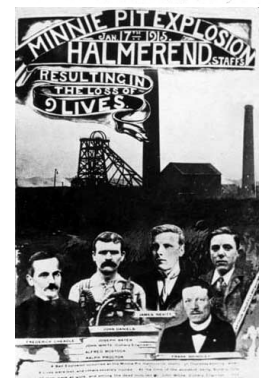
*Miners* is a poem by **Wilfred Owen**, the most famous of the “war poets” of the First World War (*Dulce et Decorum est*, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, *Futility*, *Spring Offensive*, *Strange Meeting*).

He wrote the poem in early 1918, a few weeks after leaving Craiglockhart War Hospital where he had been recovering from shell shock.

Owen wrote the poem in direct response to the appalling Minnie pit disaster.



There was a whispering in my hearth, a sigh of the coal,  
Grown wistful of a former earth it might recall.  
I listened for a tale of leaves and smothered ferns,  
Fronde-forests, and the low sly lives before the fauns.  
My fire might show steam-phantoms simmer from Time's old cauldron,  
Before the birds made nests in summer, or men had children.  
But the coals were murmuring of their mine, and moans down there  
Of boys that slept wry sleep, and men writhing for air.  
And I saw white bones in the cinder-shard, bones without number.  
Many the muscled bodies charred, and few remember.  
I thought of all that worked dark pits of war, and died  
Digging the rock where Death reposes - Peace lies indeed.  
Comforted years will sit soft-chaired, in rooms of amber;  
The years will stretch their hands, well-cheered by our life's ember;  
The centuries will burn rich loads with which we groaned,  
Whose warmth shall lull their dreaming lids, while songs are crooned;  
But they will not dream of us poor lads, left in the ground.







Jock Graham had lost a leg in a mine accident. He was also a well-known poet for the trade union newspaper, *Common Cause*, and had had two books published.

In 1946 the miner and poet, John (Jock) Graham, from **Newcastle, Australia** (known as “The Poet of the Coalfield”) published a collection titled “*Blood on the Coal*”. The title poem was already well known among miners and was written as if to invite those who were always ready to condemn miners for their militancy to come down and see for themselves:

You’ve learned to know the miner—the “black” man, the “slack” man.  
 But come with me below ground and amid the sweat and stress,  
 And watch him at his hard work, his drill work, his skilled work,  
 See for yourself his true life before you read your press.  
 Come down and breathe the dank air, the foul air, the rank air;  
 Fill up your lungs with coal dust, disease dust, for proof;  
 Come down and see the ‘slave’ man, the cave man, the brave man  
 Risk life to save his mate’s life beneath a falling roof.  
 Learn of the grim disasters, the churned up, the burned up:  
 Go seek the mining churchyards and count the growing roll;  
 Weigh justice then, so feted, so treated, and meted  
 Against the dark stain spreading, the blood upon the coal.  
 You’ll see conditions slipping, through tricking, pin-pricking;  
 The guilt with which he’s burdened you’ll place where it belongs;  
 And you will be a just man. a fair man. a rare man,  
 If you’ll raise coal production by righting miners’ wrongs.

**There is a wonderful rich history of songs about coal miners and mining, right across the world, but especially in Britain, the USA and Australia.**

Jock Graham also wrote songs such as *Marching to Freedom* to the tune *Waltzing Matilda* and *Australian Working-Class March* to the tune *Men of Harlech*. More of Graham’s poems were given tunes when the folk revival got under way. The most famous is the *Song of the Coal Miner*:

I carried my swag through Australia’s out-back,  
 And between cane and shearin’ I lived on the track;  
 I once shared your coal dust, your danger and fear,  
 And I haven’t met miners for many a year.

#### CHORUS

Then fill up your glasses and have what you want,  
 A toast to the miners I’ll say:  
 Here’s an end to the toll in the miners’ Red Roll. . .  
 I’m the man you don’t meet every day.

Down mines in the bush, in the mountain and hill,  
 Miners cut, bore and blast, and they timber and fill;  
 They labour and strain and they send coal ‘out-bye’,  
 And the Red Roll is waiting for miners to die.

We once cavilled pillars in the three-panel west,  
 And we set up our long props as good as the best:  
 She was laggin’ a little way back in the gob,  
 And the deputy came and he OK’d the job.

The roof it caved in with a thunderous roar,  
 And it crashed on my mate and buried him o’er  
 I left with my sorrow and nothing could sate;  
 But a miner can never forget an old mate.

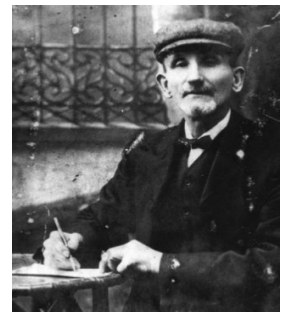
I swear now to work for the miners ‘in-bye’,  
 Till no danger is left by which miners may die —  
 Oh, perhaps there’s amongst us we’ll never see more,  
 So, let’s drink all our healths with a full bumper more.





In the Newcastle upon Tyne area there were great 19th century performers/composers such as Tommy Armstrong and Geordie Ridley (who also wrote *The Blaydon Races*, the song of Newcastle United fans).

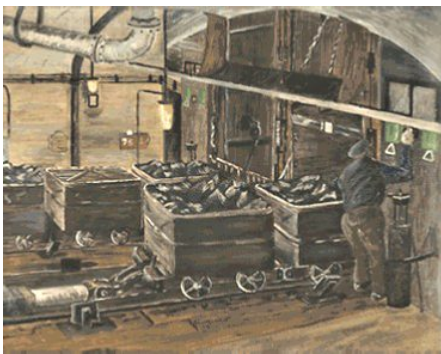
Armstrong (right) – known as “the Pitman Poet” or “the Bard of the Northern Coalfield” - wrote a memorable song *The Trimdon Grange Explosion*, which in 1882 killed 74 miners, and also *The Row between the Cages* about the introduction of new technology.



From early times the miners had viewed the pit with suspicion, and it was part folk lore, part fright, and part plain superstition, that many of the disasters had been attributed to the de'il (the devil) or his henchmen who lived at the bottom of the shaft in every pit. *The Collier's Rant* is a traditional Geordie folk song (people from the Newcastle area are called “Geordies”), written possibly as early as 1650, the writer unknown. It's one of the oldest mining songs in existence and is still a very popular piece by choirs throughout the North East of England.

As me an' me marra was gannin' to wark, We met wi' the devil, it was l' the dark;  
Aw up wi' mi pick, it being l' the neet, Aw knock't off his horns, likewise his club-feet.

Chorus: Foller the horses, Johnny me laddie, Foller them through, me canny lad, oh!  
Foller the horses, Johnny me laddie, Oh lad lye away, me canny lad, oh!



## THE PITMEN PAINTERS

The Ashington Group was a society of artists from Ashington, Northumberland, just north of Newcastle upon Tyne, which met regularly between 1934 and 1983. They began as a branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Despite being composed largely of mine workers with no formal artistic training, the Group and its work became celebrated in the British art world of the 1930s and 1940s.

The group held its first exhibition at the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and, by the early 1940s, the Group had exhibited in London and their work was praised by a number of prominent British artists and critics.

The art critic William Feaver met one of the Group's members in the early 1970s, and began a renewal of interest in their work, which was restored and featured in several touring exhibitions. In the 1980s, the Group's "Permanent Collection" became the first western exhibition in China after the Cultural Revolution. Oliver Kilbourn, the last of the Group's founder members, arranged for the paintings to be put in trust prior to his death in 1993, and they are now kept in Woodhorn Museum, near Ashington.



Feaver's book about the Group, *Pitmen Painters: The Ashington Group 1934-1984*, was adapted as a play by the Newcastle-born writer Lee Hall. Following a sell-out run at Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne in 2007 it transferred to the Royal National Theatre in London, then a UK tour, before opening for a run on Broadway in 2010.

Lee Hall is also known for writing the 2000 film *Billy Elliot* (also set in North East England) and the book and lyrics for its stage musical adaptation, as well as the screenplays for the films *Rocketman* and *Cats*.

