



Coal Mining Records For Family Historians

RECORDS FOR FAMILY HISTORIANS WITH ANCESTORS EMPLOYED IN THE COALMINING INDUSTRY

Many of our users are interested in discovering information about ancestors who were coalminers or worked in the coalmining industry. We hold extensive collections of records relating to the history of coalmining in Northumberland and it may be possible to discover some information about ancestors who worked in the coalmining industry. Finding information is at best difficult – there are no ‘service records’ of individuals employed in the Northumberland coalfield and in order to discover any information it is often necessary to look across a range of sources to piece together information about an ancestor. Survival of records is sporadic and it may not be possible to find any information.

Prior to the creation of the National Coal Board in 1947 individual Coal Companies managed the various collieries in the county and many of these companies were created by local landowners wishing to exploit the reserves of coal lying beneath their landholdings. It may therefore be necessary to look at records of individual coal companies and estate records in the course of your research. The first step may be to discover which coal company or estate owned the colliery in which an ancestor was employed. We have a number of finding aids in our searchroom at Woodhorn that can assist with this initial research.

Catalogue lists of some of our holdings of Coal Company, National Coal Board and estate records have been included in the Discovery database – see <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/advanced-search>. We are also moving towards including some of this content into our own electronic catalogue – see www.northumberlandarchives.com/catalogue. Making a search of these catalogues is often a useful starting point.

We recommend consulting the publication ‘My Ancestor was a Coal Miner’ by David Tonks. This is a useful guide to researching coalmining ancestors. A copy is available for consultation in our searchroom.

This leaflet aims to give a brief overview of some of the records that we hold that may provide further information about coalmining ancestors. All of the records that we hold are subject to Data Protection legislation and therefore may be subject to closure periods.

Possible Sources for Researching Coalmining Ancestors

REGISTERS - include new starters, leavers and change of occupation ledgers. Most ledgers give minimal information – usually just a name, but some also give tally numbers, addresses and dates of birth as well as job title.

TRUCK/FINES BOOKS - provide the name of the man fined, the reason for the fine and date of fine.

TRAINING LEDGERS - post Nationalisation - gives details of colliery of employment, job title, training and date of training.

STOPPAGES REGISTERS - itemising deductions from pay e.g. for doctors, insurance, rates and rents, Infirmary, check-weighman, coal leading, Guardians Relief.

ESTATE PAPERS - some estate records include lists of names of men employed in the collieries and details of payments made to the men. Occasionally these records include pitmens' bonds and pay bills. Records may also include reference to men employed in sinking the mines. These records are mainly 18th and 19th century.

COLLIERY HOUSING RECORDS – records the names, addresses, dates of tenancies and sometimes the name of the colliery at which the person was employed.

INDEMNITY BOOKS - provide the signature of workers at the colliery and are dated.

UNION RECORDS - may include correspondence with members, reference to compensation cases, housing issues, strikes and other matters.

PAY BILLS - record the job title, name and payment over a fortnight period. In some instances also list tally numbers.

DISASTER AND FATALITIES RECORDS - depending on the records, most will give name, address, cause of death, date, name of colliery at which employed, job role, details of compensation payment and provide some give family information.

COMPENSATION RECORDS - record name of employee, date and cause of accident, name of colliery at which employed, job title and details of compensation. Examples of record that provide this kind of information include Northumberland Coal Owners Mutual Protection Association Minute Books; Coal Company Injury Compensation Registers and Northumberland Mutual Confident Association Minute Books.

SUPERANNUATION RECORDS - generally provide the name of the employee and monies paid into the scheme. Can be used to locate a particular worker at a colliery if no other records exist.

MINES INSPECTORATE REPORTS - provide details of fatal and non-fatal accidents. Post 1940 the annual reports become anonymous dealing only with the accident details and attributed colliery. We do not hold records prior to 1900. These can be consulted locally at The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers in Newcastle upon Tyne (www.mininginstitute.org.uk).

MORE GENERAL SOURCES – we hold a range of more general and published sources that provide useful information about local collieries, colliery housing, working conditions and gives background to the conditions of working and home life. These sources include “Our Colliery Villages” – a series of articles published in a local newspaper in the 1860s and 1870s; Royal Commission reports into the employment of women and children in mines, 1842; Condition of Mines reports 1864; Ashington Collieries Magazine 1921 - 1941; and 19th and 20th century locally published newspapers.

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