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## ORAL HISTORY OF JOHN CAFFREY, NATURALIST AND ARTIST

REFERENCE: T/715, IMAGE: NRO 6371/24 | SUGGESTED AGE GROUPS: KS1, KS2, KS3, KS4, LIFELONG LEARNERS |  
INDUSTRIAL HISTORY, COAL MINING, MINING CULTURAL HERITAGE, ORAL HISTORY

### ORAL HISTORIES

These sound files are extracts (short, edited pieces) from longer oral history interviews preserved by Northumberland Archives. These interviews were made as part of a project to collect the memories of people who lived and worked in Morpeth; “Memories of Morpeth,” 2011.

### JOHN CAFFREY

John Caffrey was interviewed by Liz O’Donnell on 23 August 2011. John was born in 1938 and attended school in Morpeth. John lived in Morpeth all his life.

### EXTRACT 1 (45 SECONDS)

John remembered the Miners' Picnic being held at the park in Morpeth: the banners, bands playing in the bandstand and the politicians who came to make speeches. A lot of people in Morpeth worked in the mines at Pegswood, Ashington and Bedlington.



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### EXTRACT 2 (1 MINUTE)

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The Miners' Picnic was a great day out but it moved to Bedlington. From the late 1950s, mines were closing and a way of life fast disappearing. The community spirit of the miners was tremendous, the only other place he had come across it was with the paratroopers.

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### EXTRACT 3 (1 MINUTE)

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John remembered the shop where he would buy a penn'orth of broken biscuits. Taking back the pop bottles gave you money in your pocket and after the Miners' Picnic the young people would search the park for bottles to take back. You had to make sure you took them back to the right shop, as there were two pop factories in town, and only certain shops sold each type. It was a service to the town, clearing things up.

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## THE BACKGROUND TO THE PICNICS

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The first few picnics took place in Blyth, but it was also held in Morpeth for a number of years and was associated with Bedlington in the 1950s-1970s. The event also took place in Tynemouth, Ashington and on the Town Moor in Newcastle. Since the closure of the mines, Museums Northumberland has taken over the organisation of the Picnic. The Picnic has been held at Woodhorn Museum near Ashington since 1992.

The Picnics were made up of a series of events. To begin with, representatives of the mining communities would march to the meeting place. Each mine would have its own banner and many would also have a brass band that would accompany them on the procession.

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## BRASS BANDS

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The brass bands entered competitions which were judged on the day of the Picnic. Winning bands were awarded trophies (Burt Challenge Cup and Northern Divisional Coal Board Challenge Cup).



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## COAL QUEENS

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Communities from around the county also chose beauty queens. Each colliery queen would then compete to become “Picnic Queen” or “Labour Queen” at the Picnic. These two Queens would then sit on a float at the beginning of the procession.

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## SPEECHES

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Once the procession was over speeches would be given by local and national political figures. Famous speakers at the Picnics included Betty Boothroyd, Clement Atlee, Hugh Gaitskell, Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot.

There were also entertainments for children, including games, funfairs, and food.

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## OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

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Guardian newspaper website, obituary for John Caffrey, 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jan/17/john-caffrey-obituary>

MorpethNewsTV YouTube video about exhibition of John Caffrey’s work, 2017:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEx0paxH9Ag&ab\\_channel=MorpethNewsTV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEx0paxH9Ag&ab_channel=MorpethNewsTV)

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## ORAL HISTORY

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Website for Oral History Society, includes definition of oral history: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

University of Leicester information sheet on oral history (pdf). Although the language isn’t the most accessible it does discuss value and reliability of oral histories: <https://www.le.ac.uk/ur/emoha/training/no1.pdf>

Website for Glasgow Women’s Library, blog discussing oral history project, includes definition: <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/2017/08/09/what-are-oral-histories-and-why-are-they-important/>

British Library website, page for oral history collections: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history>



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British Library Sounds website, includes oral history recordings: <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history>

Imperial War Museum website page for oral history collections, one of the biggest oral history collections in the country. Many can be searched and listened to online: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/sound>

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### MINERS' PICNIC

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BBC website, description of "Insideout" programme broadcast 7 March 2005: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/northeast/series7/russell\\_miners.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/northeast/series7/russell_miners.shtml)

YouTube website, home movie footage of Bedlington Miners' Picnic, 19 (about 6 minutes): <https://youtu.be/fKipahb9gLI>

YouTube website, "Bedlington: A Picnic to Remember", short documentary about Miners' Picnic, including interviews (5 minutes):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7iYg1hDtl4>

Film of 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Miners' Picnic at Woodhorn Museum (13 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooLwEOICN98>

Museums Northumberland website, page about Northumberland Miners' Picnic, including a timeline:  
<https://museumsnorthumberland.org.uk/project/northumberland-miners-picnic/picnic-history>



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# LEARNING ACTIVITIES: ORAL HISTORY OF JOHN CAFFREY, NATURALIST AND ARTIST



**TOPIC:** MINING, INDUSTRIAL HISTORY, COAL MINING, COAL MINING CULTURE, ORAL HISTORY

**SUBJECT AREAS:** HISTORY, LITERACY, ART, CITIZENSHIP

Background	Activity	Resources
<p>John Caffrey was interviewed by Liz O'Donnell on 23 August 2011. John was born in 1938 and attended school in Morpeth. John lived in Morpeth all his life. John remembered the Miners' Picnic being held at the park in Morpeth: the banners, bands playing in the bandstand and the politicians who came to make speeches. A lot of people in Morpeth worked in the mines at Pegswood, Ashington and Bedlington.</p>	<p><b>See:</b> Where does John say the Miners' Picnic was held in Morpeth?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Who does John say spoke at the Miners' Picnic?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What two things does John mention that each colliery brought to the Miners' Picnic?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Which collieries does John say that people in Morpeth worked at?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Where did the Miners' Picnic move to after Morpeth?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What does John compare the mining community spirit to?</p> <hr/> <p><b>Think:</b> What impression does John give of the mining community?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Why did the mining community have so much community spirit?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What was the purpose of the Miners' Picnic?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What was the purpose of mining banners?</p>	<p><a href="https://www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/working-lives/miners/mining-and-mineworkers/">https://www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/working-lives/miners/mining-and-mineworkers/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooLwEOICN98">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooLwEOICN98</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ncm.org.uk/news/voices-in-the-coalshed-the-language-of-banners/">https://www.ncm.org.uk/news/voices-in-the-coalshed-the-language-of-banners/</a></p> <p><a href="https://youtu.be/fKipahb9gLI">https://youtu.be/fKipahb9gLI</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7iYg1hDtI4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7iYg1hDtI4</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooLwEOICN98">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooLwEOICN98</a></p>



**Think:** Why do Museums Northumberland continue the tradition of holding Miners’ Picnics today?

**Think:** Did other communities hold events like the Miners’ Picnic?

**Do:** Create a mind map of what the word “community” means to you. You could think about the different communities that you are part of.

**Do:** Create a mind map of what you think the word “community” meant to John Caffrey and the Morpeth mining community.

**Do:** Discuss how communities have changed over time and list what the reasons for this might be.

**Do:** Discuss the impact that the closure of the mines had on the mining community.

**Do:** Write a poem inspired by John’s description of the Miners’ Picnic and the mining community.

**Do:** Create a piece of art to celebrate one of the communities that you belong to.

**Do:** In groups, use your drawings to come up with a design for a community banner.

**Do:** Read the article about the first Miners’ Picnic.

**Do:** Watch the videos of the Miners’ Picnics in Bedlington.



	<p><b>Do:</b> Watch the video of the Museums Northumberland Miners’ Picnic.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Compare the three versions of the Miners’ Picnic.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Plan a community picnic inspired by the Miners’ Picnic.</p>	
<p>These sound files are extracts (short, edited pieces) from longer oral history interviews preserved by Northumberland Archives. These interviews were made as part of a project to collect the memories of people who lived and worked in Morpeth; “Memories of Morpeth,” 2011.</p>	<p><b>See:</b> Why were these oral histories recorded?</p> <p><b>See:</b> Who took part in these oral history interviews?</p> <p><b>See:</b> What is included in the oral history extracts?</p> <hr/> <p><b>Think:</b> What is an oral history?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Why is it important to record oral histories?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What is the value of oral histories?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What useful information can we learn from this oral history?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> Who might use oral histories?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> How might this oral history be used and by whom?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> How reliable are oral histories?</p> <p><b>Think:</b> What types of oral histories might be recorded?</p> <hr/> <p><b>Do:</b> Imagine you are about to interview a someone who lived and worked in the mining community for an oral history. Write down a list of questions or talking points that you might use to prompt them during the interview.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.ohs.org.uk/">https://www.ohs.org.uk/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.le.ac.uk/ur/emoha/training/no1.pdf">https://www.le.ac.uk/ur/emoha/training/no1.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="https://womenslibrary.org.uk/2017/08/09/what-are-oral-histories-and-why-are-they-important/">https://womenslibrary.org.uk/2017/08/09/what-are-oral-histories-and-why-are-they-important/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history">https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history</a></p> <p><a href="https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history">https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/sound">https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/sound</a></p>





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Learning and Educational Archive Resources from Northumberland

**Do:** Write down a list of events that have taken place during your lifetime that you think it would be important to create oral history records of.

**Do:** Write down a list of events that have taken place before your lifetime that you think it would be important to have oral history records of.

**Do:** Look at the British Library, British Library Sounds and Imperial War Museum websites. Can you find oral history recordings about the events from your lists?

**Do:** Think of an event that you have experienced first-hand. In pairs, interview each other about your chosen events and create oral history recordings.

**Do:** Do you think oral history recordings should be made using second-hand stories or should they be made using only first-hand events? Debate this in groups.