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ORAL HISTORY OF BOB REAY, RETIRED MINER

REFERENCE: T/6A, IMAGE: NRO 6371/27 | 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.

BOB REAY

Bob was interviewed by Robin Gard, Northumberland County Archivist, 13 September 1971. There is another voice on the recording that hasn't been

identified.

Bob Reay was a retired miner from Coxlodge near Newcastle. He was 78 years old when the recording was made. He was born in Seaton Terrace, Seaton Delaval around 1894. He spent over 50 years working at the Hazelrigg mine, retiring in 1958. The mine closed in 1964.



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SUMMARY OF EXTRACT (2 MINUTES 30 SECONDS)

The colliery had a brass band which preformed locally and competed at the Northumberland Miner's Picnic, which was held in Bedlington (before that Morpeth). They might also go to the Durham Gala, which was the biggest miners' festival in the North East. Mr Reay used to go the Miner's Picnic every year and it was a big day out for everyone. He remembers hearing speeches from some of the early Labour Party dignitaries such as Thomas (Tommy) Burt, who was the Father of the House of Commons and Charles (Charlie) Fenwick, MP. Mr Reay himself was not a very political man, although he did go to some of the Lodge meetings. The unions helped organise the arrangements for going to the Picnic and Gala days.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE PICNICS

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.

BRASS BANDS

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).

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.

SPEECHES

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.

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

Northumberland Archives website, blog post about Bob Reay: <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/2021/01/04/mr-robert-reay/>

Northumberland Archives website, page with podcast about Bob Reay: <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/2021/06/30/northumberland-voices-a-reay-of-sunshine/>

ORAL HISTORY

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>

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



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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>

MINERS' PICNIC

BBC website, description of "Insideout" programme broadcast 7 March 2005: 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 150th 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>

DURHAM MINERS' GALA

YouTube website, the history of Durham Miners' Gala (9 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQTSgrKAKHc&ab_channel=DurhamMinersGala

YouTube website, film on brass bands at Durham Miners' Gala (6 minutes):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgCP_WmPatU&ab_channel=DurhamMinersGala

YouTube website, British Pathé footage of Durham Miners' Gala 1947 (20 seconds):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYI9NBcUQfU&ab_channel=BritishPath%C3%A9

YouTube website, footage of Durham Miners' Gala 2022 (38 minutes):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89m9FOQCDBE&ab_channel=JohnTheBassmanBaxter



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LEARNING ACTIVITIES: ORAL HISTORY OF BOB REAY, RETIRED MINER

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

SUBJECT AREAS: HISTORY, LITERACY, MUSIC



Background	Activity	Resources
<p>The colliery had a brass band which preformed locally and competed at the Northumberland Miner's Picnic, which was held in Bedlington (before that Morpeth). They might also go to the Durham Gala, which was the biggest miners' festival in the North East. Mr Reay used to go to the Miner's Picnic every year and it was a big day out for everyone. He remembers hearing speeches from some of the early Labour Party</p>	<p>See: Who is Bob Reay? See: Where did Bob Reay work? See: What competition did miners' brass bands take part in? See: What is the Durham Gala? See: Who spoke at Miners' Picnics? See: Where does Bob reference Miners' Picnics taking place at? See: Which miners' festival does Bob mention as being the biggest?</p> <hr/> <p>Think: Why were there brass bands at Miners' Picnics? Think: What is a colliery band? Think: What types of music would the colliery bands have played? Think: Why were there Miners' Picnics in different places?</p>	<p>https://www.ecband.org.uk/ https://museumsnorthumberland.org.uk/project/northumberland-miners-picnic/brass-bands/ https://vimeo.com/427701403 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bq71UeWuUM&ab_channel=DaleGravill https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89m9FOQCDBE&ab_channel=JohnTheBassmanBaxter https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYI9NBcUQfU&ab_channel=BritishPath%C3%A9</p>



<p>dignitaries such as Thomas (Tommy) Burt, who was the Father of the House of Commons and Charles (Charlie) Fenwick, MP. Mr Reay himself was not a very political man, although he did go to some of the Lodge meetings. The unions helped organise the arrangements for going to the Picnic and Gala days.</p>	<p>Think: Where does the Miners’ Picnic take place in Northumberland today?</p> <p>Think: Does Durham Gala still take place today?</p> <p>Think: What was the original aim of the Durham Miners’ Gala?</p> <p>Think: What is the aim of the Durham Miners’ Gala today?</p> <p>Think: How many brass bands play at the Durham Miners’ Gala?</p>	<p>https://www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/working-lives/miners/mining-and-mineworkers/</p> <p>https://www.durhamminers.org/gala</p>
	<p>Do: Watch the YouTube clip of Durham Miners’ Gala 1947.</p> <p>Do: Watch the YouTube clip of Durham Miners’ Gala 2022.</p> <p>Do: Discuss the similarities and differences between the 1947 and 2022 Durham Miners’ Gala.</p> <p>Do: Try to identify some of the songs being played by brass bands at the Durham Miners’ Gala.</p> <p>Do: Watch video clips of North East colliery brass bands performing. Discuss whether the bands always play traditional music or if some also play contemporary music.</p> <p>Do: Have a go at playing some traditional miners’ music.</p> <p>Do: Have a go at singing some traditional miners’ songs.</p> <p>Do: Perform a contemporary song or piece of music in the style of a traditional colliery band.</p>	



	<p>Do: Write your own song or piece of music inspired by mining culture.</p> <p>Do: Look at the banners paraded at Durham Miners' Gala over the years.</p> <p>Do: Try to identify some of the causes or political messages shown on the banners at Durham Miners' Gala.</p> <p>Do: Create a banner for a cause or political message that you support.</p> <p>Do: Parade your banner alongside music.</p> <p>Do: Research the speakers at the most recent Durham Miners' Gala. What was the message of their speeches?</p> <p>Do: Write your own speech to perform at Durham Miners' Gala. Think about the message that you would like to convey. Does it fit with the message on your banner?</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</p>	<p>See: Why were these oral histories recorded?</p> <p>See: Who took part in these oral history interviews?</p> <p>See: What is included in the oral history extracts?</p> <hr/> <p>Think: What is an oral history?</p> <p>Think: Why is it important to record oral histories?</p> <p>Think: What is the value of oral histories?</p>	<p>https://www.ohs.org.uk/</p> <p>https://www.le.ac.uk/ur/emoha/training/no1.pdf</p> <p>https://womenslibrary.org.uk/2017/08/09/what-are-oral-histories-and-why-are-they-important/</p>



<p>Morpeth; “Memories of Morpeth,” 2011.</p>	<p>Think: What useful information can we learn from this oral history?</p> <p>Think: Who might use oral histories?</p> <p>Think: How might this oral history be used and by whom?</p> <p>Think: How reliable are oral histories?</p> <p>Think: What types of oral histories might be recorded?</p>	<p>https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history</p> <p>https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history</p> <p>https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/sound</p>
	<p>Do: 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>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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?</p> <p>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.</p>	



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Learning and Educational Archive Resources from Northumberland

	<p>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.</p>	
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