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PHOTOGRAPHS OF PIGEON KEEPING AND RACING, 1904-1947

REFERENCE: NRO 05757/24, NRO 05729/J/7/4 | SUGGESTED AGE GROUPS: KS1, KS2, KS3, KS4, LIFELONG LEARNERS | MINING, CULTURE, SPORTS & LEISURE

PHOTOGRAPHS

NRO 05757/34 Black and white photograph of two pigeon fanciers from Chevington Drift, Red Row with cup and certificate for Lille Race, 1947

NRO 05729/J/7/4 Black and white photograph of Billy and Tom Oliver at their pigeon creel at Dene Row, Holywell, 1905



During the late-1800s and 1900s keeping, racing, and showing pigeons became popular with industrial workers and especially the miners of northern England.

SHOWS

Men (very few women took part) took their pigeons to shows. The judges at the shows examined the pigeons and awarded prizes, like a dog or cat show. These were sometimes at “Feather and Fur” shows where other birds and animals, such as rabbits would be “shown”. Northumberland Archives holds a document from Bedlington Poultry Society’s 10th Annual

Exhibition in 1874 (SANT/BEQ/5/4/9/2/7 and 8).



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RACING

Pigeon fanciers use the birds' ability to find their way back home in races. The birds are transported long distances and set free. A timer is started. When the birds reach their home the timer is stopped.

NRO 05757/34 shows a cup won by the men in the photograph whose pigeon flew from Lille in France to Red Row, Northumberland (according to Google Maps, this journey would be 762km by car).

WAR TIME

During the First and Second World Wars restrictions were put on pigeon keeping. The British authorities feared that pigeons could be used to carry messages to their enemies.

VOCABULARY

Pigeon fancier – someone who kept pigeons

Pigeon creel – loft or shed built (or repurposed) to keep pigeons

Homing pigeon – a racing pigeon that would be released and would fly home

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

PIGEON RACING

Royal Pigeon Racing Association website, page about the history of pigeon racing: <https://www.rpra.org/pigeon-history/>

Royal Pigeon Racing Association website, page about pigeons during Second World War: <https://www.rpra.org/pigeon-history/pigeons-in-war/>



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British Pathe website, video of a pigeon race. Shows baskets used for transporting pigeons being unloaded from a train, pigeons being released and arriving home. (1947, 1 min 20 seconds) <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/pigeon-race>

BBC website, pdf download of PIGEON RACING AND WORKING-CLASS CULTURE IN BRITAIN, c. 1870–1950, Cultural and Social History, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2007 by Martin Johnes, from https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/making_history/pigeon.pdf

YouTube website, Channel 4 document “The Fancy” (1986, 1 hour). Shows men in industrial communities raising and racing pigeons.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-xBn4u5C5g>

YouTube website, video animation of Sid Chaplin short story “The Pigeon Cree”, narrated by Mike Neville, animated by Sheila Graber (about 9 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDpvyWJTp70>

Tutorial by Sheila Graber on using chalks/pastels for animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrrejxYtdLU>

Sid Chaplin’s archive can be found at Newcastle University Library Special Collections: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/browse/collection_details/?id=56

YouTube website, BBC Earth video “How Do Homing Pigeons Get Home?” (2014, 2 minutes 25 seconds) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WI0li29XmNk>

DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACT, WW1

Spartacus Educational website, page about the Defence of the Realm Act in First World War: <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWdora.htm>

PIGEONS DURING WW1

Museum of History of Science, Oxford University, pdf download about pigeons during First World War:

<https://blogs.mhs.ox.ac.uk/innovatingincombat/files/2013/03/loC-carrier-pigeons.pdf>

The National Archives “Great Wharton” website, page about control of pigeons during First World War: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/home-front-stories/policing-pigeons/#:~:text=Under%20the%20Defence%20of%20the,a%20permit%20from%20the%20police>



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LEARNING ACTIVITIES: PHOTOGRAPHS OF PIGEON KEEPING AND RACING, 1904-1947



TOPIC: MINING, CULTURE, TRADITION, SPORTS & LEISURE

SUBJECT AREAS: HISTORY, LITERACY, ART, MATHS



Background	Activity	Resources
<p>During the late-1800s and 1900s keeping, racing, and showing pigeons became popular with industrial workers and especially the miners of northern England.</p>	<p>See: What is pigeon racing?</p> <p>See: What is pigeon showing?</p> <p>See: Who was involved in pigeon keeping?</p> <p>See: When was pigeon keeping most popular?</p> <p>See: What is shown in each of these photographs?</p>	<p>https://pigeonpedia.com/how-fast-do-pigeons-fly/</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDpvvWJTp70&ab_channel=SheilaGraber</p> <p>http://www.origami-instructions.com/origami-pigeon.html</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YcOZ7SpyTA&ab_channel=BBCTeach</p>
	<p>Think: Why were mostly men involved in pigeon keeping?</p> <p>Think: What types of hobbies were women from mining communities involved in?</p> <p>Think: What took place at pigeon shows?</p> <p>Think: What traits might a winning pigeon have?</p>	
	<p>Do: Create a map showing the route the pigeons might have taken from Lille to Red Row.</p>	



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Learning and Educational Archive Resources from Northumberland

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| | <p>Do: Find out the average speed of a racing pigeon.</p> <p>Do: Work out how long it might take a pigeon to fly from Lille to Red Row.</p> <p>Do: Write a poem about your journey from the perspective of a racing pigeon.</p> <p>Do: Draw a prize winning pigeon.</p> <p>Do: Create an origami pigeon.</p> <p>Do: Create a coop to keep your origami pigeons in.</p> <p>Do: Watch the Sid Chaplin “The Pigeon Cree” animation.</p> <p>Do: Create a stop-motion animation of a pigeon race.</p> | |
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