

Down the Mine



Down the Mine Vocabulary

Banksman - Someone at the pit top or surface who was responsible for loading and unloading the cage and signalling to the engineman.

Collier - Someone who works with coal, usually the getter.

Furnace - A coal fire at the bottom of the shaft which would help with ventilation. The hot air created by the fire rose and up the shaft and drew cold fresh air in through another shaft.

Shaft - Vertical tunnel which leads from the surface to the underground roadways.

Trapper - Child who opened and closed underground ventilation doors.

Ventilation - System of getting fresh air into the mine and removing stale air.

Ventilation Door - A wooden door that directs the flow of fresh air around the workings of the mine.

Children in the mine!

On 4 August 1842, a law was passed that stopped women and children under ten years from working underground in mines in Britain.

Before this law was passed, it was common for whole families to work together underground to earn enough money for the family to live on.

The Victorians saw child labour as a normal part of working life. Most children started work underground when they were around eight years old, but some were as young as five. They would work the same hours as adults, sometimes longer, at jobs that paid far less.

Wages in the Mine!

Although mining was hard work and dangerous, compared with other manual jobs working underground was relatively well paid. Families would work together in a team and the amount of money they earned depended on how much coal they brought up to the surface. The team's wages would be paid to the collier who was 'hewing' or cutting the coal, who was often the father of the children he worked with. These wages were often essential for a family's survival.

Snap Tin



- “Snap” is a Yorkshire dialect word meaning food.
- A snap tin is a metal container made the same shape as a slice of bread, which a miner would use to carry his lunch.
- Traditional miners’ meals may include bread and jam or bread and dripping.
- Their lunch was kept in a metal container to keep it safe from mice and rats.

Pony Shoe



- Ponies were an important part of the underground workforce.
- The floor underground was hard so ponies’ hooves would crack and split, and make the pony lame unless they were shod.
- Some blacksmiths would work underground where the ponies lived, to make and fit the shoes cold.

Motty



- Motties were iron tags that colliers would tie on to the tubs of coal that they had mined.
- This would let mine managers know how much coal each of their miners had mined.
- Miners pay was linked to the amount of coal got out.

Safety Lamp



- The flame safety lamp was invented by Sir Humphrey Davy in 1815 to provide a safe source of light underground.
- The lamp allowed oxygen for the flame to get in, but stopped a flame or spark mixing with explosive gases found in mines.

Tallow Candles



- Many early miners used tallow candles to help them see as they worked underground.
- Tallow is a hard waxy substance made from animal fat.
- Using candles was dangerous because of the explosive gases found underground.

Shovel



- Shovels, and similar tools have been used since the early days of mining
- They were used to load loose coal into carts and corves.

Corfe



- Corves were large baskets made of sticks that were used to carry coal from the coalface.
- It would be put on a type of sled to be pushed underground, and then winched up at the shaft.
- This corfe is over a metre across, and could probably carry over half a tonne of coal.

Pick



- Picks were used to dig coal out from the coalface.
- They could also be used to break up large pieces of coal.