Mining in the Deerness Valley Area

by Joe Halpin

Introduction

This survey attempts to briefly identify the mines operating in and around the Deerness Valley in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and to further provide brief details relating to them, the area and to the settlements within the area.

The Valley

The Deerness Valley lies to the west of Durham City and before the advent of coal mining (and associated deposits) in any great quantities was mainly agricultural (arable and mixed stock) and consisted of farms and a few small villages. The River Deerness begins near Tow Law and meanders down through the valley, and is fed by a number of small tributaries with names such as 'Stanley Beck, Crow Gill, Cuddy Burn, Hedleyhope Burn, Rowley Burn, Holburn Beck and Red Burn'. It eventually joins the River Browney in Holliday Park near Langley Moor, from whence it flows into the River Wear just past Sunderland Bridge near Croxdale.

Small-scale extraction of coal had taken place in earlier times, but it was not until the nineteenth century that coal extraction took place in the valley in any great quantities.

Mines and Mineowners

The table below shows the names' of collieries surveyed, and dates when they opened.

A	Broompark	1870
B	New Brancepeth	1858

	(Sleetburn)	
C	Ushaw Moor	1865
D	Esh	1866
E	Hamsteels	1868
F	Cornsay	1868
G	Waterhouses	1859
H	Ivesley	1871?
I	Hedley Hill	1870's
J	East Hedleyhope	1836
K	Hedley Fell	?
L	Hedleyhope	1836
M	Black Prince	1846
N	West Brandon Drift	after 1947
O	Wooley	1864
P	Stanley	1856?
Q	Sunniside	1867
R	West Thornley	1890's
S	Inkerman	1873
T	Cornsay Fell Drifts	?
U	Fellwall	Before 1927

One mine owner was Joseph Pease (1799-1872) the son of Edward Pease (1765- 1858) who supported the construction of the Stockton to Darlington Railway. Joseph Pease went into mining in both coal, ironstone and limestone quarrying and in 1836 moved his operations into the Deerness Valley area and began test-boring at Hedley Hope and established his first mine.

By 1896 Pease and Partners Ltd. owned the following collieries in the area

- Esh
- Stanley
- Sunniside
- Usher Moor
- Waterhouses
- Wooley

Employment, Output, Seams Worked

With regard to the number employed in the survey area, analyse and calculation of the number of men and boys working in the mines in 1896 from the data presently available show a total of 6974 made up of 5186 underground and 1788 surface workers.

The table below gives the breakdown of the employment statistics within each colliery in 1896

Code	Colliery	Underground	Surface	Total	Comments
A	Broompark	302	46	348	
B	New Brancepeth (Sleetburn)	395	280	675	
C	Ushaw Moor	378	120	498	
D	Esh	490	139	629	
E	Hamsteels	419	199	618	
F	Cornsay	412	161	573	

G	Waterhouses	363	129	492	
H	Ivesley	-	-	-	abandoned 1896
I	Hedley Hill	263	98	361	
J	East Hedleyhope	310	100	410	
K	Hedley Fell	n/a	n/a	n/a	
L	Hedleyhope	-	-	-	standing
M	Black Prince	530	194	724	
N	West Brandon Drift	n/a	n/a	n/a	
O	Wooley	291	69	360	
P	Stanley	490	130	620	
Q	Sunniside	274	38	312	
R	West Thornley	266	84	350	
S	Inkerman	3	1	4	
T	Cornsay Fell Drifts	n/a	n/a	n/a	
U	Fellwell	n/a	n/a	n/a	
	Total:	**5,186**	**1,788**	**6,974**	

The output from the collieries consisted of Coal – Coke, Gas, Household, Bunker, Industrial, Steam, manufacturing and Fireclay and Clay. Also at both New Brancepeth and Ushaw Moor barites and witherite deposits were extracted.

The various seams worked in the area were as follows, with mining being by either shaft or drift:

Five Quarter	Top Busty
Brass	Thill Busty
Main Coal	Ballarat
Hutton	Three Quarter
Harvey	Brockwell
Tilley	Victoria

Wagonways and Railways

Wagonways existed in the area, examples been on the steep gradient between the High Drift and the Low Drift at Cornsay Colliery, and also from the Ragpath Drift to the Colpike Drift.

Incline Railways were also operating in the area examples being the Stanley Incline from Waterhouses that connected to the Sunniside Branch Railway Line, and also the Hedleyhope Incline from Hedleyhope to Sunniside.

Mineral Railways operated from East Hedleyhope to Waterhouses and the Cornsay Mineral Railway operated from Cornsay Colliery and connected with the Deerness Branch Line at Esh Winning.

Joseph Pease invested in an independent company to construct a railway line through the valley in order to link the collieries with the main railway line at Relly, thus making transportation of the coal and associated products more efficient, the track ran from Waterhouses where a station was opened and in September 1884 an intermediate station was opened at Ushaw Moor. The Deerness Valley Railway was authorised under an act of July 1855, and in1858 responsibility of the line was taken over by the N.E.R. that had opened for mineral traffic only. In November 1877 the line was further opened for passenger traffic

and existed until October 1951, although British Rail ran passenger excursions on miners gala day until final closure in December 1964 when freight transportation was withdrawn.

The former railway track has now been reclaimed and forms one of the many countryside paths and cycle routes in County Durham providing great woodland settings and panoramic views and is now named the 'Deerness Valley Walk'.

The Settlements and Dwellings

With the opening of the mines the population in the area increased dramatically and resulted in the growth of the settlements. In the early years the majority of the workers were drawn from the northern counties, namely Durham, Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland. Further miners migrated from other coalfields such as Staffordshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Wales as well as from other counties in England. Also, due to the famine and starvation in Ireland in the 1840s and 1850s, many Irish emigrants migrated to various parts of the world and some with their families settled in the Deerness Valley area.

Housing for the mineworkers and their families was normally provided by the mine owners, as the isolated and rural area lacked the necessary housing for them. Initially, in some parts this would have consisted of wooden dwellings, but rows of stone or brick built houses eventually replaced them.

With the construction of the dwellings and a rising population came the development of the villages, and schools, churches, chapels, shops etc were built, initially some of the buildings would be temporary structures, but were eventually replaced by brick buildings.

Waterhouses was termed 'a model village' and W. Whelan in his book 'The History, Topography and Directory of the County Palatine of Durham (London)' in 1894 stated the following:

"Waterhouses – though a colliery village, is one of the cleanest and best arranged in the county. It is surrounded by wooded scenery very pleasing and attractive in the bright seasons of the year. The houses, which form a square, are built of white brick; the central area is divided into garden plots for the workpeople, and the colliery owners have erected a good school, and a most complete Miner's Institute. On the south of the railway is situated the church, also the chapels and the extensive Co-operative Stores. It is seven miles west of Durham, and the passenger station is nearly a mile to the east of the village."

Although this description gives the impression of an ideal place to live for the workers, what the sanitary conditions were at the time are not stated, and during the 1890s many cases of typhoid and scarlet fever occurred in the area.

In comparison to Waterhouses of the nineteenth century, just down the valley an intense and turbulent strike took place during the years 1881 – 1883 at the Ushaw Moor Colliery, many of the miners living in dreadful conditions in the village. The colliery owner Mr. Henry Chaytor who was opposed to unions, and was not a member of the Durham Coal Owners Association set his own rules and attempted to stamp out any trade unions at the colliery. When the workers went on strike he resorted to evicting the workers (the first evictions being the workers who represented their colleagues) and their families from their homes, their furniture and belongings being dumped in the streets and the houses boarded up. He also brought in blacklegs to attempt to break the strike. In 1883 after the strike was over Mr. Chaytor sold the colliery to Pease & Partners, probably weary of the years of industrial unrest.

The colliery owners at Sleetburn also erected dwellings for the mineworkers and their families. One row of dwellings was named Church Terrace, or generally referred to as Church Street, these dwellings were in a row of 24 and were erected to the south of the colliery in the 1870s, and were demolished in the 1950s.

These dwellings had the advantage of each having a garden located at the front of the dwelling, enabling the mineworkers to grow their own vegetables. The coalhouse and privy were located across the dirt road at the back of the dwellings; the coalhouses were built in pairs, with the privies in blocks of three or four.

The following table gathered from the data in the 1881 census of Cornsay Colliery shows the names of the streets and number of dwellings in each street.

Name	Occupied	Unoccupied
Stable House	1	
Stable Row	19	1
Hogarth Terrace	28	
Liddle Street	59	2
Chadwick Street	52	1
Gillow Street	27	
High Street	30	1
Hawkhills Terrace	9	
Hawkhills Terrace Elementary Teachers School House	1	
Fortin Villa Roman Catholic House	1	
Union Square	41	1
West Street	20	
South Cottages	16	
Click Em in Farmhouse	1	
Viewers House	1	

Total	306	6

A comparison of Cornsay Colliery circa 1890 with that of Cornsay Colliery of 2003 shows that the settlement decreased after the reduction and eventual closure of the mines, reclamation returning the land of the former colliery and colliery dwellings to green fields and picturesque wooded areas.

The Population

Taking the settlement of Cornsay Colliery as an example, the information below shows how the settlement had grown since the colliery opened in 1868. The small village of Cornsay is situated a short distance to the north west, but with the opening of the colliery a new settlement was established, and was originally referred to as 'New Cornsay'.

The total population of Cornsay Colliery by 1881 amounted to 1,737 individuals, and the following table gives the breakdown of adults and children, both male and female.

	Adults				Children	
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
569	414	1,003	379	355	734

The above figures also includes 140 lodgers and visitors who were resident in the settlement at the time of the census, of these 122 were male and 18 were female; 61 registering their place of birth as Ireland.

The population of the settlement originated from various counties in England as well as from Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The following statistics shows where the 'Head of the household' originated:

Durham	131	Cornwall	3
Northumberland	28	Norfolk	3
Yorkshire	14	Westmorland	2
Cumberland	9	Shropshire	2
Staffordshire	7	Suffolk	2
Lancashire	7	Berkshire	1
Worcester	7	Ireland	62
Somerset	5	Wales	11
Essex	5	Scotland	3
Devon	4	**Total:**	**306**

The following table gives the number of mineworkers in Cornsay Colliery during the period 1896 to 1955, and shows how the employment in the mines peaked and then decreased; thus making it necessary for families to move to other mining settlements where work was available.

Employment in the mines in Cornsay Colliery 1896 - 1955

Year	Above	Below	Total
1896	161	412	573
1902	202	370	572
1914	187	417	604
1921	22	54	76
1930	26	161	187

1940	18	144	162
1945	11	20	31
1948	17	31	48
1949	16	31	47
1951	16	31	47
1953	16	31	47
1954	16	31	47
1955	16	31	47

Conclusion

Most of the collieries in the area closed in the 1950s and 1960s, the last colliery to close was Esh Colliery (located at Esh Winning) and this closed in 1968. Many workers transferred to coalfields in other parts of the country, as had the workers from the other collieries that had closed earlier.

A certain amount of 'Opencast Mining' took place in the late 1960s and early 70s in the area, namely at Gladdow, Hedley Hope, Sunniside and Stanley Hill.

Within the area surveyed, and as in other areas of County Durham, a tremendous amount of work has been undertaken to improve the environment over the years since the closure of the mines; including reclaiming of pit heaps and degraded landscapes. At the present time a multi-million pound programme is underway in the region to identify improvements that could be made in settlements that have suffered from economic, social and environmental decline in recent years, and includes certain settlements in the Deerness Valley area. The project, which is being developed by the County Durham Economic Partnership, is to receive funding from One NorthEast and from Durham County Council.

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