

Starting Points Series

5. Mines Rescue



Mapperley Colliery Rescue Team (1918)

Background

In 1911 a Coal Mines Act was passed that made it compulsory for mine owners to provide teams of trained rescue men, equipped with rescue apparatus. Although a Royal Commission of 1886 had recommended the creation of rescue stations, they did not become compulsory until 1911. Before this there were no formal rescue teams at the pits. Once a successful type of breathing equipment had been developed, following the Act, the number of rescue stations and teams increased rapidly. If a mine employed more than 100 men it could not be more than ten miles from a rescue station. This distance was increased as vehicles and communications improved.

When mines were taken into public ownership, at Nationalisation in 1947, there were great variations in rescue provision. Emergency procedures were standardised and the Mines Rescue Service grew into an effective branch of the mining industry.

In 1957 there were two rescue systems working in parallel. One system involved a rescue station with permanent trained rescue workers on site, and the other depended solely on trained voluntary rescue workers at the collieries.

In today's Mines Rescue Service, all rescue men undertake a fourteen day induction course which includes studying mining gases and different types of apparatus. Rescue men also have to know how to maintain and fix their equipment. The rescue stations are now using Draeger BG4 breathing apparatus sets which are self contained, ready for immediate use and last for a minimum of two hours. These sets are easy to service and have accurate digital gauges.

The closest Mines Rescue Station to the Museum is based at Kellingley Colliery. It moved there recently following the closure of the Selby Mines Complex. This station covers Kellingley, Maltby and Hatfield Collieries and smaller West Yorkshire mines. It is also the second call station to Mansfield Rescue Station so it can be called out to the Nottinghamshire pits. There are now fewer mines for the rescue stations to serve; this, combined with improvements in health and safety procedures, means fewer callouts for the rescue teams.

A selection of sources in the Museum library

British Coal Mines Rescue Service, 1986. *A History of Wakefield Mines Rescue Station 1914-1986*
British Coal Corporation North Yorkshire Area *Ventilation, Rescue and Fire Fighting Report*
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Capek, K, 1939. *The First Rescue Party* (London)
Clifford, A. B, 1922. *The Rescue Man's Manual* (London)
Coulshed, A J G, 1955. *Manual of Mine Rescue Instructions* (Nottingham)
Garforth, W.E, 1909. *Suggested Rules for Recovering Coal Mines after Explosions and Fires* (London)
Jenkins, J. D, 1956. *Coal Mines Rescue & Fire Fighting* (London)
Health & Safety Commission, 1995. *Escape and Rescue from Mines Regulations 1995* (London)
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McAdam, R, 1955. *Mine Rescue Work* (London)
Mines Rescue Service, 1990. *Mines Rescue Service*
NCB Mines Rescue Service, 1977. *Handbook of Rules & Procedures for Rescue Station Staff*
Statham, I (ed), 1958. *Coal Mining Practice* (London)
Strag, J, 1985. *A Manual on Mines Rescue, Safety and Gas Detection* (Woonona)
Waltham, J.W, 1934. *Mine Rescue and First Aid* (London)

Other sources to try

Mines Rescue Service Ltd
Mines Rescue Station
Leeming Lane South
Mansfield
NG19 9AQ
Tel (01623) 623263
Website <http://www.minesrescue.com>

The 'Mines Rescue arrangements' page on the Health & Safety Executive's website provides a downloadable PDF file which looks at alternative structures for the provision of mines rescue:

http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_hm/2002/crr02448.htm

Interesting facts

- The Mines Rescue Service underwater dive team is available to non-mining organisations
- The first rescue station in the country opened in 1902 at Tankersley in South Yorkshire.
- In 1908 the first central rescue station opened at Howe Bridge.
- Canaries were used to detect carbon monoxide underground until the 1990s.