

Starting Points Series

2. Mining Words

Introduction

There are many words that are unique to the mining industry, and especially to coal miners. Not only does mining have, like any other industry, numbers of technical words or jargon, but also different dialects in different regions. A person who hauled the wagons or tubs might be known as a **waggoner** in one part of the country, a **hurrier** in Yorkshire, a **drawer** in Lancashire, a **putter** in Northumberland or a **haulage-man** in Scotland!

The language that a miner would use in the pit was usually confined to the pit, and he would use words there that he would not use at home. The use of a different language in the mines emphasized and strengthened the brotherhood which existed amongst miners. Sometimes a particular pit word such as '**cracket**' in Durham would be used in the mining community on the surface, meaning wooden stool.

The same mining words can mean very different things. In Yorkshire, **snap** is the food a miner takes with him to eat. To a Durham miner, **snap** is an instrument used on the screens to cut waste material off coal. The Durham miner calls his lunch '**bait**', and in Scotland it would be a '**piece**'. Local variations in dialect and use of words can vary even between villages within one area as well as between coalfields.

Dictionaries and glossaries are the two main sources for meanings of words, but there have been a few studies done on how the words were used in different contexts which are listed below.

Songs and poetry are also sources to use to study language and the Museum library has a good collection of these.

Sources in the Museum Library

Colls, R (1977) *The collier's rant: songs and culture in the industrial village*

Douglas, D (1977) *Pit talk in County Durham IN Mines, Quarrymen and Saltworkers* I Samuel, Raphael London RKP

Fairley, W (1868) *Glossary of terms used in the coal mining districts of South Wales, Bristol and Somerset*

Greenwell, G (1839) *A glossary of terms used in the coal trade of Northumberland and Durham* T H Hair

Hooson, W (1747) *The miner's dictionary*

Griffiths, B (ed), (2007) *Pitmatic: the talk of the North East.*

Other sources to try

- Vicinus, M, 1974. *The industrial muse: a study of nineteenth century British working class literature*
- Barrowman, J, 1886. *Glossary of Scottish mining terms*
- Davies, L , 1976. *Geirfa'r Glawr [the vocabulary of the miner]*
- Jones, T, 1935. *Coal Mining terms* in Bulletin of Celtic Studies 1935-37 p 208-224
- Forster, W, 1971. *Pit-talk: a survey of terms used by miners in the South Midlands* 1933.
- Nicholson, W. E, 1888. *A glossary of terms used in the coal trade of Northumberland and Durham*

Some Mining Words

Banksman	A banksman takes out loaded tubs from the cage and pushes empty ones in. He supervises the loading and discharging of men from the cage.
Checkweighman	A person paid for by the miners themselves to check the records of the man who weighed the coal as it was taken out of the mine.
Dataller	A dataller, or day-man, was given work on a daily basis as required. One of his jobs may have been to build and repair the roadways.
Deputy	A deputy is in charge of the safety of the men underground. He checks to ensure the mine is free from gas and is safe to work in.
Hewer	A coal miner; someone who cut the coal.
Putter	A putter used to bring empty tubs up to the workers at the coal face and take loaded tubs to the pit bottom.
Shaftsinker	A person employed to sink the shafts of a new mine. He usually migrated to new coalfields as these were developed.
Shotfirer	A shotfirer lays charges and carries out the explosions to bring down the coal.
Trapper	A child employed to open and close the door in a roadway through which coal was brought.
Winder	A winder is responsible for the winding engine which raises and lowers the cage, bringing up the coal and men out of the pit.