

Miners at Work

PHB Soap



PHB soap was used in the Pit Head Baths (PHB) which was a building with lockers and showers used after a miner's time working underground. The soap would be made from animal fat. Miners could buy PHB soap and a towel from the attendant. If the miner didn't have enough money, there are stories of miners scraping the soap off the shower floor and forming it into a ball to get showered with.

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Compressed Helmet



Before plastic was widely used, miner's helmets were made from compressed cardboard that has been hardened and painted. The helmets were fixed together with metal fixtures and the size of the helmet could be altered by adjusting the leather inside. It wasn't compulsory to wear a hard hat underground until 1960 and before that some miners wore flat caps or nothing, meaning their heads wouldn't have been protected from rock falls.

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Cap Lamp and Battery



The Cap Lamp consisted of a battery encased in a self-locking steel case worn on the miner's belt, with a flexible cord attached to a cap lamp. The battery could power a six-candlepower lamp for 12- hours and was recharged at the end of a miner's shift. A metal clip was designed to fix onto the miner's helmet so the lamp could be attached. Miners used to communicate with one another by flashing their cap lamp on and off.

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Self Rescuer



Miners wore a self-rescuer on their belts, and this was a compulsory piece of safety equipment. If there had been a fire or explosion, carbon monoxide is one of the gases produced and cannot be seen or smelt and can be fatal if breathed in. When a self-rescuer was worn, any carbon monoxide in the air is changed to carbon dioxide, which is breathable. The air breathed through the self-rescuer usually could keep a miner alive for 30-40 minutes.

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Snap Tin

The term, 'snap' was used to refer to a miner's lunch. It was made of strong tin and airtight to protect the contents from coal dust and vermin. It was shaped like a slice of bread and was just the right size for sandwiches. The miners would usually have bread and dripping (meat fat) or fruit jam. In hot coal mines, food could very quickly go rancid. The clip was used to thread the tin onto a belt or hang it up. ACME was the trade name and it means "the best".



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Plastic Helmet with Ear Defenders



In 1963 plastic helmets became compulsory for miners to wear. The helmet had to meet the standard of 40 pound in weight falling from 40 feet in height to ensure that a miner's head would be protected in a rock fall. Some helmets included side slots for mounting ear defenders for hearing protection, a cap lamp to help the miner to see and a face shield to protect their eyes.

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Steel Cap Boots



Leather boots would have a steel cap to stop miner's feet getting crushed under falling rocks. The sole is anti-static to reduce the risk of sparks, which could cause an explosion. Rubber is oil resistant, so having rubber soles reduces the risk of miners slipping and falling. Miners can stumble and trip on the uneven floor underground and the ankle support in the boots helped to prevent them from having strained and twisted ankles.

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Safety Gloves



Miners were issued with gloves depending upon what type of job the miner was doing. Most miners wore "criss-cross" gloves, which are woven mesh with rubber, criss-crossing. The rubber is very important, as this gave the miner a good grip. Some miners wore cotton lined gloves which were coated with a substance called "Nytrial" that protected the miners hands from cuts and were waterproof to keep the miners hands dry.

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Orange Overalls



In the 1980s miners were issued with a vest, pants and overalls as the standard work uniform. When these became dirty a miner would put these clothes in a laundry bag – which looked like a string vest and they would be collected for cleaning. The miners believed the underwear was grey because British Coal would not be able to get it nice and clean if it was white. The overalls were orange so that the miners could easily be seen underground.

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Metal Checks



Every miner who worked underground had two metal checks with their own number. One Brass (gold) and one alloy (silver). The miners would hand the silver check at the start of the shift to the banksman and the gold check at the end of the shift. At the end of the day, if there were silver checks with gold checks missing in front of them, this meant the banksman could see how many miners were still underground. This is similar to having a register taken at school.

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Tipple Tin



Traditionally miners' wages each week were put in a numbered tipple tin, which the miners picked up either at the Tommy Shop (the local store run by the mine owner) or at the local pub. If a miner worked in several mines during the week, he would have to go to several stores or pubs to receive his wages. After numerous complaints, mine owners agreed to pay wages in the pit yard to make it easier.