

North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers  
Nicholas Wood Memorial Library

# Mining poems and songs

## a resource guide

### Introduction

The Institute Library doesn't have a huge collection of mining songs and poems, but has some archival and other material that may not be available elsewhere and this guide indicates how to find these items. Useful websites are also noted.

### Books

Armstrong, K and Dixon, P *Still the sea rolls on: the Hartley Pit calamity of 1862*. 2012  
Poems modern and contemporary

*The Hartley calamity* Joseph Skipsey (poem)

*The Hartley men are noble and  
Ye'll hear a tale of woe  
I'll tell the doom of Hartley men -  
The year of sixty two*

*Twas on the Thursday morning, on  
The first month of the year  
When there befell the thing that well  
May rend the heart to hear  
etc.*

Colls, R. *The collier's rant: song and culture in the industrial village*. 1977

Cooke, George *The miner's pocket companion, a poem: enlarged and corrected, containing the principal accidents in collieries in the counties of Durham and Northumberland. Also the loss of the royal charter to which is added as an appendix, the Hetton Colliery explosion*. 1861

Griffiths, B. *Pitmatic: the talk of the North East coalfield*. 2007  
Songs/poems used to illustrate the language

Harker, D. I. *Songs from the manuscript collection of John Bell*. 1985  
Section: Coalwork

*Colliers of Wear and of Tyne* J.M. Clarke (song) 1811

*The brewer may sing of his barrel  
And tell you the strength of his ale  
The sailor may sing of the ocean  
And tell you how nicely they sail  
The soldier may sing of the battle*

*The well ordered phalanx and line  
I'll sing you a song about colliers  
The colliers of Wear and of Tyne*

*Hard wrought but still cheerful and hearty  
The life of a collier you know  
With picks made of very good metal  
We hew down the board as we go  
And tho in the colliers black market  
There's nothing but coals for to sell  
The numbers that live by our labour  
Would make a long story to tell  
etc.*

McCumiskey, W.D and Thornton, R. K. R. *Selected poems of Joseph Skipsey*. 2012

Maurice, W. *A pitman's anthology*. 2004.  
Poems, prose and songs.

*Joe Skipsey: pitman poet of Percy Main 1832-1903*. 1975.

Newton, Gwen (ed) *We are women, we are strong: the stories of Northumberland miner's wives 1984-85*. 1985  
Has poems and songs

Wilson, Thomas *The pitman's pay and other poems*. 1893

Wood, P. *The Elliotts of Birtley*. 2008  
Biography of the singing mining family with words and music of their songs

## **Some individual songs/poems**

### **In the Tracts**

(Bound collections of a variety of pamphlets, reports, leaflets, newspaper cuttings, etc)

Not all songs in the *Tracts* are in the Library catalogue – a spreadsheet listing others is available.

Verses on the Cruelty of the Masters to the Pitmen 1844  
*Tracts* **54**, 227

*O Lord hear the poor pitmen's cry  
Look down on us with pitying eye  
With heavy bondage are opprest  
And all our families are distrest*

*Thou heard the Israelites of old  
And led them to a blessed fold  
Deliver us from slavery  
And set the sons of Britain free  
etc.*

*The pitmen's union* by William Walker Story and George Watson  
*A new song on the pitmen's grievances* by Jane Knight  
Sunderland T. Huntley 184?  
*Tracts*, **214**, 53.

*The miner's right*, by James Purdy  
**Tracts 54**, 251

*The miner's complaint*, by R.H.Fawcett  
**Tracts 214**, 36 (from *Miners advocate* 2 Dec 1843)

*Ryhope Colliery; or, The Black Diamond Wallsend*  
A new song - tune, "Dog cappy"  
**Tracts, 64**, p55-56

*They may talk of their pits on the Wear or the Tyne,  
Of their Primrose so good or their Wallsend so fine;  
I care not to brag but I'll drink no both rivers,  
If Ryhope coal beat not their best samples to shivers.*

Chorus  
*Weel done Ryhope, canny place Ryhope,  
Ryhope's the place, Tally O! Tally O!*

*It's as bonny a coal as the world ever saw,  
As clean as a sixpence, as black as a crow;  
So bright that like sunshine it dazzles us a',  
So roundey, folks axes "what's gotten the sum?"  
etc*

### **In the NEIMME Archives**

Currently there is no online access to the archives lists, so you will need to contact the Library for assistance.

#### Forster archive

NRO 3410/For/1/18/100  
c1831

Song entitled *The Pitmen's Complaint*, by J. Knox, printed by J. Marshall, Newcastle

#### Bell archive

NRO 3410/Bell/12/256  
July 1844

Song entitled *The Miner's Doom*, by Henderson Fawcett

Poem entitled *Verses on the Cruelty of the Masters to the Pitmen*, [1844]

#### Watson archive

NRO 3410/Wat/1/27/32

Song entitled *Fish Betty's Account of Herself. A Parody on Billy Oliver*

### **Websites**

Coal Mining Songs and Poems - Pitwork site

<http://www.dmm.org.uk/pitwork/html/menu6.htm>

FARNE: Folk archive resource North East

<http://www.folknortheast.com/>

Searchable archive of songs

Yorkshire Garland Group

<http://www.yorkshirefolksong.net/song.cfm>

Search for mining.

A collection of poems - Coalmining history resource centre

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160316170445/http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/site/literature/poetry/index.html>

Some poems and stories all with a mining theme - Welsh Coal Mines site

<http://welshcoalmines.co.uk/Poems.htm>

Coalfield Web Materials

<http://www.agor.org.uk/cwm/>

Poems, songs

The Tommy Armstrong Society

<http://www.pitmanpoet.org.uk>

'The pitman poet' from North West Durham

*Trimdon Grange explosion* (song) 1882

*Let's not think of tomorrow,  
Lest we disappointed be;  
Our joys may turn to sorrow,  
As we all may daily see.  
Today we're strong and healthy,  
But how soon there comes a change.  
As we may see from the explosion  
That has been at Trimdon Grange.*

*Men and boys left home that morning  
For to earn their daily bread,  
Little thought before the evening  
They'd be numbered with the dead;  
Let us think of Mrs Burnett,  
Once had sons and now has none -  
With the Trimdon Grange explosion,  
Joseph, George and James are gone  
etc.*

Joseph Skipsey

<http://www.gerald-massey.org.uk/skipsey/index.htm>

Bersham Colliery Poems

<http://www.aditnow.co.uk/documents/Bersham-Coal-Colliery/Bersham-Poems.pdf>

Scotland's songs

<http://www.scotlandssongs.com>

Janey Buchan Political Song Collection

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/music/projectsandnetworks/jbpsc/>

Mudcat cafe

<http://www.mudcat.org/>

Folksong lyrics search and discussion forum

English Folk Dance and Song Society song collections search

<http://www.vwml.org/search>