

**A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES IN  
ENGLAND**

**A Seminar held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January**

**The National Coal Mining Museum, Caphouse Colliery, Wakefield,**

**A SUMMARY of the MAIN TOPICS DISCUSSED**

*[The seminar was attended by 40 delegates representing a cross-section of professionals (curatorial and research based) and independent researchers/recorders including a number of railway enthusiasts. The discussion was led by Prof Marilyn Palmer. Although it was anticipated that contributors would wish to raise specific topics where past research has fallen short or been neglected, surprisingly the topics were of a more general type concerning matters of training, infrastructure and communications within the sector.]*

**HLC**

The usefulness of historic landscape characterization was discussed. It was pointed out that HLC had played a minor role in the data gathering exercise for the individual assessments, but that it should not be overlooked as an important tool to inform both the planning process and future research. However, it was also argued that some HLCs are a little piecemeal and all tend to deal in dominant characteristics, while overlooking lesser landscape components. Some more recent HLCs (such as the Black Country) had managed to incorporate a greater proportion of extractive landscapes and these it was agreed stand as important statements on industrial landscapes and would form a sound basis for further research as well as offering detailed overview of landscape change. HLC can be used to establish the presence of evidence not just an absence. *[NB: HLC will form a topic in the assessment under the heading Landscape Archaeology and when drafted it will be available on the NAMHO website]*

**Independent researchers and HERs**

Some independent researchers would like to see mechanisms that would allow the results of their fieldwork to be input into HERs. The mining industries sector is well served by knowledgeable people capable of a good standard of fieldwork and documentary research, which could enhance the quality and breadth of HER databases. There is a perception among some that the data is not wanted or would not be utilised if given. It was also mentioned that authorities could abuse their position by possessing this sometimes sensitive data, particularly in the case of shaft capping, and examples of this had been suspected in some circles.

Although there was general agreement from the curatorial professionals present at the meeting that such material would be welcomed by HERs, it may be that this is not always widely publicised and that it is often difficult for members of the public to know how they may have a positive input into HERs. However, it was also stated that new mechanisms which may help with this issue are on the horizon. There can be problems with quality control and some expressed concerns about verification of material presented. But it was suggested that if guidelines were in place, then contributors could easily conform to them. A central (i.e. all England) point for deposition was generally considered too ambitious an aim.

There was broad agreement that this issue needs to be taken forward. Also, that channels of communication between experts and HERs need to be improved generally.

[NB: as a follow-up to the seminar, information has been requested from HER officers on this topic and their responses will be summarised as part of the draft framework document which will be circulated for consultation]

### **Cross-cutting Themes**

There was some discussion as how wide the scope of the *Framework* should be regarding crosscutting themes, including transport, settlement and social landscapes. Most present acknowledged that all these themes fall under the heading of ‘the impact of extractive industries in England’. However, recommendations for the framework would need to be selective. Worker housing for example must be specifically associated with these industries, and transport networks only included if their origins lie strongly or wholly associated with the conveyance of raw materials from source. The assessment results have suggested so far that these subjects had been poorly covered archaeologically and would therefore represent a weakness in the known data which needs addressing.

### **Other issues**

- Communication between mining historians and archaeologists needs improving and perception as to methodologies, objectives and product from each discipline, needs to be clarified. A cross-disciplinary approach is usually more productive.
- Networks or lists of regional experts are needed.
- We need to consider museums as a research resource. Future research may result in more artefacts and museums will need to curate these collections. Collection of artefacts is in crisis and there are difficulties housing the products of excavations.
- More use should be made of railway histories which, contrary to popular opinion, do often consider the origins of the materials being freighted. Much railway history writing contains record of mines, which would be useful in future archaeological research. Railways associated with extractive industries have earlier origins than many are aware of and are worth considering archaeologically.
- There needs to be liaison between archaeologists and geologists for a more complete understanding of the resource.
- Capacity building and training in both the professional and independent sectors is necessary. For the former, there is a need to increase knowledge on the topic of mining and quarrying as a means to interpreting and evaluating field evidence; for the latter, training in archaeological recording standards and survey would be useful. More community archaeology events could help with this.
- A dialogue between the historic environment sector and active quarry companies could be beneficial in researching the past and with recording current artefacts and buildings which may be under threat.
- More recording of standing structures needs to be carried out either by survey or photographically – far more use of digital technology should be encouraged.
- It would be very useful if the bibliography resulting from the assessments could remain as a continually updatable resource after completion of the project.