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# RESEARCHING MINING HISTORY IN THE UK

by Hazel Mary Martell

## INTRODUCTION

A version of this paper first appeared in the Society Newsletters for August and November 1982. With Martin Roe's paper on archaeological surveying appearing in this Memoirs, however, it was felt that this was the time for an updated version.

While the steady supply of material for the Society's Memoirs and Monographs shows that at least some of our members already know their way around the intricacies of libraries and record offices, I am sure there are many more out there who are less sure of how to find out what is available and so this paper is aimed mainly at them.

## USING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The most obvious place to go to first is the local lending library (i.e. local to the area being researched) and the most obvious way to start is by asking the person behind the desk for help and advice. As most people can only go to the library at the time when most other people go, however, the person behind the desk is likely to be already rushed off their feet with other queries when you arrive and, though your project is all-important to you, it'll come a long way down their list of priorities at that moment.

But you don't have to be a librarian to find your way around a library. Most have catalogues, either in the form of card indexes or on computer, which are accessible to the public and most (but not quite all) arrange their books on the shelves according to subject, with the Dewey Decimal System of classification being the one used most often.

Those who have worked out for themselves the significance of the numbers on the spines of library books need not read the next few paragraphs, but for those who think the numbers are only there because the librarian had a lot of time and a lot of sticky labels to spare, I will try and explain how the system works and what are its successes and failures in relation to researching mining history in a general library.

Melvil Dewey, the American librarian after whom it is named, first published this system in 1876 and, although it is now in its 20th edition, the basics remain the same. For this reason, some of the scheme's priorities seem strange to us today and the allocations of classification numbers to certain subjects seem either over-generous or sadly too few. In the times in which he lived, it would seem logical to allocate 100 numbers each to Philosophy and Religion and only 10 numbers to the whole of Engineering!

His idea was to separate books into 10 main groups according to subject as follows:-

000-099	General Works (Encyclopædias etc)	500-599	Pure Sciences
100-199	Philosophy	600-699	Applied Sciences
200-299	Religion	700-799	The Arts
300-399	Social Sciences	800-899	Literature
400-499	Languages	900-999	Geography/Biography/ Archaeology/History

Each group was then split into 10 again and again, then split further with the use of the decimal point to give narrower and narrower subject groups, until eventually specific numbers were allocated to specific subjects (and not just chosen at random by a librarian with nothing better to do!). For example, the class number for **Coal Mining** is 622.33 which is made up as follows:-

600	Applied Sciences	622.3	Mining
620	Engineering	622.33	Coal Mining
622	Mineral Industries		

Class numbers for other sorts of mining are made up in the same way, e.g.:-

622.343	Copper Mining	622.3453	Tin Mining
622.344	Lead Mining	622.3452	Zinc Mining

If you find nothing at these class numbers, however, don't despair, for Dewey also allocated numbers for the economic aspect of mining and these are as follows:-

338.272	Coal	338.27453	Tin
338.2743	Copper	338.27452	Zinc
338.2744	Lead		

Information on different aspects of mining might also be found in books at other classification numbers. These include:-

330.942	Economic History of Britain	553	Economic Geology
331.7622	Economic History of the Working Classes	554	Geology of specific areas
331.88	Trade Union History	609	History of Inventions
385	Railway History and Economics	609.42	Industrial Archaeology of Britain
385.5	Narrow Gauge Railways		

Also, check out the bibliographies/references which are to be found in most non-fiction books and see if anything is listed there which is relevant. (And, if it's not in stock, remember that you can always request it by filling in a card with as many appropriate details as possible – author, title, publisher, date and place of publication, ISBN, but not whether it has a red, green or purple cover – and handing over the card and some money to the librarian.)

Go next to either the Local Studies section or the reference library. This may well have its own catalogue and, for Local Studies especially, its own

system of classification. It may also have a system of closed access, which means you have to find the details of the items you want in the catalogue, enter them up on the appropriate form and hand it in at the desk. A member of the library staff will then bring the item to you. Depending on the size of the library, some or all of the following printed sources, plus photographs and maps, should be available. Studied carefully, they will give useful clues, though not absolute proof, as to the state of the mining industry in the area at any period from the early 19th century onwards.

**Trade Directories:** These were very popular in the 19th century. Most cities and large towns had at least one. In general, people paid to be in these and so non-appearance doesn't always mean non-existence!

**Parliamentary Papers:** Again, in the 19th century, it was fashionable for Parliamentary Committees to tour the country, taking evidence on various matters. The most famous of these relating to mining is that of the Kinnaird Commission, entitled, *Mining Accidents*. Other useful reports include those on *Children's Employment*.

**Mineral Statistics:** Another useful guide, but with many pitfalls. Published originally by HMSO, they have been reorganised into a more readily useable form and many have been re-issued, with minimal editing, on a county basis, by the Department of Economic History at the University of Exeter.

**National Census Returns:** Taken at ten yearly intervals from 1801, the details are released after 100 years have elapsed. Between 1801 and 1831, the censuses gave the following data on each township: its acreage, a total of males and females, the numbers of families and inhabited and uninhabited dwellings, and a figure of those employed in agriculture, trade or other. This data is summarised in British Parliamentary Papers. From 1841 onward, however, the returns provide details of age, employment and county of birth. This information is often available on microfilm at local history libraries (or County Record Offices in some cases.)

**Parish Registers:** These are often of value for the mid 18th century onwards. Often, details of trades were included in the births, marriages and deaths register. Many have been transcribed by Parish Register societies and are available in printed form in reference libraries (while the originals are usually to be found in the relevant County Record Office).

**Local Newspapers:** Usually available on microfilm, these are often a good source of information on local mines and the area in general. As well as looking at the news items and reports of social events, remember to look at advertisements and obituaries.

**Geological Survey Memoirs:** General memoirs have been published for every area and usually contain some details of interest. More specific memoirs have also been published for both coal and metal mining.

## **FINDING OTHER LIBRARIES**

**The Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries Year Book** lists all public and special libraries, museums and art galleries in the British Isles, with an indication of their scope and of any special collections they may have.

**The ASLIB Directory** (Association of Special Libraries) lists and describes in some detail all the specialised libraries in Britain.

**University Libraries** will normally allow bona-fide researchers to use their facilities, but write first and state clearly the nature of your work.

## **WHERE NEXT?**

Having read as much as you can find on your subject in secondary sources, it is time to start looking at primary sources, such as estate papers, company records and so on. These can usually be found in the appropriate County Record Office for the place you are researching, but relevant material might also be in a more distant Record Office.

## **COUNTY RECORD OFFICES**

Public depositories of all manner of information, most Record Offices are open at regular hours during the week and some have a late evening. Most are free, but some may make a small admission charge. It is advisable to write in advance and, on the assumption that it has the records required, make an appointment, giving an idea of the material that you wish to use. Once there, make full use of any indexes to the deposit, as often something of interest is slipped away in seemingly irrelevant material.

To make yourself popular, follow these general rules:-

1. State clearly the subject and purpose of your enquiry.
2. Do not smoke, eat or drink in the Search Room.
3. Material may be subject to copyright, or other restrictions, on its use. Consult the archivist, who will advise you and provide appropriate forms of acknowledgement. This is particularly important, as **PLAGIARISM IS A SIN!**
4. **USE ONLY PENCIL** - Ink or Biro should **NEVER** be used.
5. Permission should be obtained before tracing any document or plan, which should be covered with a transparent sheet before starting.
6. Take care to keep documents in the order and condition in which you find them.
7. If you have any problems, **AT ALL**, ask a member of staff for assistance.

## **PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE**

Many of the PRO's indexes are on a searchable database on its web site: [www.pro.gov.uk](http://www.pro.gov.uk) It can be slow, but is well worth it as documents can be identified and ordered before going to Kew.

Information on mining companies can be found under: BT41 (pre limited liability); BT31 (registered limited liability companies); BT34 (Liquidators' reports from the late 19th and 20th centuries); and BT286 (Companies registered in Truro). The BT (Board of Trade) records are incomplete as, under government policy, some files were selectively destroyed prior to the collection being archived. Other useful categories include COAL, for the British Coal Industry, and MUN, for the Ministry of Munitions (1st World War). Miscellaneous company references appear under Foreign Office etc.

For the history of British Business Legislation, the PRO leaflet *Domestic Records Information Sheet 40: Registration of Companies and Businesses* is downloadable. This describes the files under each classification heading. It also gives the various policies adopted for retaining files and lists other repositories of company archives.

For material on gold mining, for example in the Dolgellau area of north Wales, see CRES (Crown Estates) particularly CRES55.

Chancery, state papers, exchequer records and Star Chamber proceedings are also on the database. These cover mediæval and early modern records. Sometimes, depending on the diligence of the compilers of the printed indexes, the early spelling of some place names has to be used for these records. The more background knowledge you have, the more likely you are to pick up stray references. For example, many of the chancery proceedings are just lists of the surnames of the plaintiffs and defendants.

### **MINING RECORDS OFFICE**

This was established, by the government, as a repository for plans of abandoned mine workings. It was originally in London, but plans of metalliferous mines were moved to Bootle in the 1980s and then distributed to the respective county record offices. At the time of writing, however, abandonment plans for Cumbrian mines are housed with the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh.

The Coal Authority, Mining Records Office, Bretby Business Park, Burton on Trent, Staffordshire (Tel: 01283-553463, Fax: 01283-553464), holds over 100,000 coal abandonment plans covering England, Scotland and Wales. These plans, which have been deposited since 1872, are held under an agreement with the Health & Safety Executive. They vary greatly in scale and size and cover both opencast and deep mining operations. In order to prevent damage to the plans, they have been microfilmed and prints can be purchased. Quotation for the cost of copying plans are supplied.

An appointment can be made to view the plans at the Mining Records Office any day, Monday to Friday, between the hours of 9.00 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. (4.00 p.m. Fridays). There is no charge for inspecting coal abandonment plans, but for Geological data, the Coal Holdings Register and the Licence

Register, there is a room-hire fee, payable at the time of visit, of £45.00 plus VAT per half-day. Postal requests for searches are accepted, subject to payment of the appropriate search fee with the request.

The Coal Authority's, Mining Records Office web-site is at:-

<http://www.coal.gov.uk/departments/miningrecords/miningrecords.htm>

### **ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS**

Information (address, opening hours, etc.) on all record offices in Britain and Ireland are available on the RCHM website at:-

<http://www2.hmc.gov.uk/archon/archon.htm>

ARCHON (Archives on line) is a gateway to the holdings of record offices, libraries, museums and other archival institutions in the British Isles. From here you can access information on all repositories in the United Kingdom and all those repositories throughout the world which have collections of manuscripts which are noted on the British National Register of Archives.

### **BRITISH LIBRARY**

This was formed in 1973 by the merger of the national lending, patent and science reference libraries with the collections of the printed-book and manuscript departments of the British Museum. It is based at The Library near St Pancras railway station, London; the Document Supply Centre at Boston Spa, Wetherby, Yorkshire; and the Newspaper Library, Colindale, Hendon, London. Another useful resource is the National Sound Archive, which incorporates the BBC Sound Archive, which is searchable by locality (county or place), dialect and subject.

British Library catalogues are available on the web at:-

<http://www.bl.uk>

### **ADVICE AND CONTACTS**

#### **MINING HISTORY E-MAIL DISCUSSION LIST**

This is a useful means of contacting other mining historians and getting answers to specific questions. If you are on e-mail it is easy to join the list by sending the following message to [mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk](mailto:mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk)

join mining-history your-first-name your-last-name  
stop

For more information go to:- <http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/mining-history/>

Messages sent to the list, which include queries, comments and book reviews, are then distributed amongst its members. It is, however, not permissible to send messages with attachments to the list.

## THE INTERNET

There is a growing number of web-sites relating to mining history and allied subjects. Some are good, but others are, at best, of dubious value. Like conventionally published work, a good test of a web-site purporting to be authoritative is the quantity and quality of referencing. There should also be a contact address, whereby queries can be raised with the author.

The principal site for mining historians is:-

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~RBurt/MinHistNet/welcome.html#ToC>

This takes you to the Mining History Network's table of contents, which gives access to a range of useful tools and has links to others. One such option is 'British Mining', which is an index of mining related publications since 1987. There is also a link to the *Bibliography of the History of British Metal Mining: 1945 to 1987*. The latter was published conventionally, but went out of print, and there are also plans to put the county based mineral statistics (see below) on the network.

This Society's own web pages can be viewed at:-

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~RBurt/MinHistNet/NMRS.html>

The text of Peter Claughton's presentation on *Mining History and the Internet*, made to the NAMHO '99 conference, is available at:-

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/~pfclaugh/mhinf/fod.htm>

Another useful site is the British Mining Database at:-

<http://wkweb4.cableinet.co.uk/adrian.pearce/BMD.HTM>

## IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS - FIELD WORK

Besides all this library work it is imperative that the researcher acquires a comprehensive knowledge of the area with which he or she is concerned. This knowledge cannot be too detailed and should include such things as relative heights of the major features (from O.S. Sheets), sources of water power, rock and vein outcrops, tracks – especial care should be taken to note older ones which may be abandoned, remains of buildings, spoil-heaps etc. This will enable you to draw up sketch maps of the area at any time, for discussion with other researchers, farmers etc.

## MAKING NOTES AND WRITING UP

The importance of keeping lucid notes cannot be over-stressed. Make sure that your file is kept up to date, preferably on the same day as your last visit, and that you note where every piece of information has come from. One of the most convenient ways of doing this is by using a card index. This is



cheap to establish and easy to update. It is also relatively simple to include cards in the form of cross-references. A diary is useful for keeping a record of visits and work done, but is not so convenient for detailed notes.

Computerised databases, such as Microsoft's Access, are a very powerful means of storing and manipulating large numbers of records. Remember to make regular back-ups of you data.

When writing, as when researching, remember to go from the general to the specific and not the other way around. Keep the language as simple as possible – your readers will be more interested in hard facts than in long words – and try to put the information together in a logical order. Don't just write everything you know on the subject in the order it comes into your mind – and don't forget to cite all your sources as follows!

### **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

When writing up your project (for publication in British Mining!), it is most imperative that you list precisely all the sources from which you have drawn. The following are standardised ways of giving such citations.

#### **1. BOOKS** (i.e. the whole publication)

Author or Editor (surname followed by initials). Title of work in italics. Place of publication, surname of publisher, year of publication. Number of volumes, if more than one. Title of series and volume number in such series.

Example:- Noall, C. *St. Just Mining District* (Truro: Bradford Barton, 1973). Monographs on Metalliferous Mining History - Vol. 5.

#### **2. PARTS OF BOOKS** (eg. Chapters, sections, passages, contributions to a collection)

Author of contribution (surname followed by initials). Title of contribution, in speech marks. In:- followed by author/editor of whole book. Title of book. Edition of book. Volume number. Place of publication, publisher, year of publication. Pagination, or chapter or section number.

Example:- Henwood, G. "Gwennap Pit" In: Burt, R. (Ed.) *Cornwall's Mines and Miners* (Truro: Bradford Barton, 1972), pp.125-130.

#### **3. PERIODICALS AND OTHER SERIALS: COMPLETE OR LIMITED RUNS OR SINGLE VOLUME**

Title of periodical. First and last volume and part numbers. Period covered.

Example:- Peak District Mines Historical Society, Bulletin. Volumes 1-2, 1959-65.

N.B. Where the name of the issuing body forms an integral part of the title, the title should be reversed, if necessary, so that the name of the issuing body appears first.

#### 4. ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS

Author of article (surname followed by initials), title of article, in speech marks. Title of periodical, volume number, date of volume or part, pagination.

Example:- Gill, M.C. "Mining and Proto-industrialisation" *British Mining*, No.41 (1990), pp.99-110.

By using this system of noting citations it is possible for you, and your readers, to identify clearly any work to which you refer.

#### OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

From time to time, the Association for Industrial Archaeology publishes a *Directory of Local Organisations* which gives valuable information on other groups with an interest in a particular area or topic.

The National Association of Mining History Organisations now has all the major mining history societies and museums in its membership. From time to time, it publishes a *Mining Heritage Guide*, which gives details of its members activities and their addresses. This information is also available from the NAMHO secretary:-

c/o Peak District Mining Museum, The Pavilion, Matlock Bath,  
Derbyshire, DE4 3PS

Finally, remember the following points:-

1. When seeking information or carrying out research, go first to the places where access is no problem and only then worry about other restricted sources.
2. Everyone comes to blank ends, as sometimes the information is no longer available.
3. We all get side-tracked or make mistakes.
4. We all get despondent over our projects at times. If it happens to you, file away your notes for a while and start on something else. Often such a pause and the subsequent new start will give you a clearer view of the work you have already done and new information may have surfaced in the meantime.

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