
50 Woodhorn Museum

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

Just northeast of Ashington on the A189 [NZ 289 885].

Description

Woodhorn Museum was once a coal mine. It now tells the story of what it was like to be a coal miner and also paints a picture of the lives of their families and the decline of the mining industry in Northumberland.

The coal seams that Woodhorn Colliery mined are Carboniferous and around 312 million years old. The mine itself began in 1894 and closed in 1981 as workable resources of coal declined. It is one of the few coal mine sites where the pit headgear and winding houses still survive — and can be visited. Woodhorn Colliery was one of over 600 collieries in the Northumberland and Durham Coalfield. There are none today. The last one to close in Northumberland was Ellington in 2005. While coal and other fossil fuels are now, rightly, regarded as the cause of our changing climate, their impact on the culture and heritage of Northumberland should never be underestimated.

Like all other pits Woodhorn was an area of heavy and dirty industry. It had its own pit heap where the waste from mining was dumped. While the pits were working these were barren areas, devoid of much, if any, vegetation and wildlife. Since closure Woodhorn colliery has been intensively landscaped, with planting of amenity woodland and a manicured meadow. Common birds such as long-tailed tit, jay and sparrowhawk may be found as well as a few woodland plants along the margins. The meadows, and other open areas, such as the narrow gauge railway track have interesting plants such as yellow-wort, and attract many bees and hoverflies. The adjacent lake at QEII Country Park was once the spoil heap but now supports a variety of water birds including great crested grebe. Its margins host emergent plants such as water mint and branched bur-reed, as well as damselflies and dragonflies.

Photographs

(Photo 50-1) Woodhorn Museum. National Union of Mineworkers banner.

(Photo 50-2) The twin coal mine shafts at Woodhorn Museum.



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(Photo 50-2) The twin coal mine shafts at Woodhorn Museum.