First steps for the Ashington Colliery heritage trail

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The town of Ashington in Northumberland, owes its existence to the mining of coal but only the memories of older generations and a single insignificant building remains to suggest the presence of a colliery which at its peak, employed 5,500 men. The the story of “the pit” and the social history of the town will now be told through a new heritage trail and website thanks to HLF.

When commissioned in 1867, Ashington Colliery attracted workers from across Britain and transformed an agricultural hamlet into what became known as the biggest mining village in the world. After a 121 year contribution to the culture, wealth and prosperity of the town and the surrounding area, the colliery ceased operations in 1988 and the main site was then turned into a business park.

The HLF award will enable the building of a heritage trail which will depict the structures and activities of the mine in their actual locations. A website will also be created to tell the story in both words and pictures of how the colliery and the town grew.

The project has been the ambition of George Nichol who was born and raised in Ashington and spent a large part of his working life at Ashington Colliery. It was on a nostalgic walk through the site with his grandson in 2011 that George came to the sad realisation that no marker or landmark existed for the colliery and immediately set out on a personal crusade to create something which celebrated the town’s proud history and heritage in the place where it all originated.

Sadly, George died suddenly at the age of 65 in July after forming an Ashington Colliery Heritage Group and drawing up plans for the heritage trail and website. The baton has now been picked up by George’s son Paul, who submitted the Group’s application to HLF and he is now taking the lead on the construction of the trail. Paul said: “The social and economic structure of Ashington has changed to such an extent over the last 25 years that the reasons for the origin of the town and its subsequent development have been lost. My father wanted to do something about that and in the last year, he conducted guided heritage walks around the site and gave a series of presentations across the North East.

Ironically, many people now think of the nearby Woodhorn Colliery, which is the location of a museum and the county records office, as being Ashington Colliery. The fact is, Woodhorn was a much smaller neighbour and it would be a mistake to let the tales and memories of Ashington Colliery, which was less than a mile from Woodhorn, be forgotten.

My dad was very proud of his Ashington roots and extremely passionate about the heritage trail. He wanted the local schools to be a part of a project by developing a website and including the mining history of the town in their syllabus. He also gathered together a small but enthusiastic group of former colliery managers, miners and heritage experts including local writer and historian Mike Kirkup. We are all determined to bring this trail and its associated activities to fruition as both a tribute to my dad and the many thousands of men, women and boys who worked at the colliery over its lifetime.”

Ivor Crowther Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, added: “We are delighted to be able to support this project. The social history of Ashington, stemming from the colliery, is fascinating and is a story that needs to be told. The trail

will give local people and visitors to the town an opportunity to walk through the site of a major colliery, where they can learn about its most prominent and interesting features in the area where they once stood. As well as providing former miners with a place of reflection, it will enable young people and newcomers to identify with the heritage of their community."

The Ashington Colliery Heritage Trail and website is scheduled for completion in summer 2014. The Heritage Group are also hoping to include features such as an archway, which previously formed an underground access tunnel to mine workings. They hope in future, to have the opportunity to extend the trail to some of the outlying locations linked to Ashington Colliery and to incorporate a sculptural landmark.

Notes to editors

Ashington Colliery Heritage Group
The Ashington Colliery Heritage Group is a formally constituted organisation made up of former colliery managers and mine workers along with history, heritage and tourism professionals. All members have a personal or professional connection with Ashington Colliery and are committed to communicating its history and significance to current and future generations.

Further information

Paul Nichol, c/o Northumberland County Council, on 01670 624 758 or email: Paul.Nichol@northumberland.gov.uk.

HLF Contact: Lucinda Tyrrell on 0207 591 6031, email: lucindat@hlf.org.uk.