

Jubilee Colliery: Preserving the Past

Short description of the project

'Jubilee Colliery: Preserving the Past' is a six-month project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It follows on from a hugely successful pilot project entitled 'Jubilee Colliery: Unearthing the Past', which was delivered in 2012-13 and confirmed that the site is a heritage asset of significant regional importance. The project is being led by Groundwork Oldham and Rochdale in partnership with Oxford Archaeology North and Oldham Council.

The principal aims are to increase awareness of Oldham's rich mining heritage through engaging local communities, provide a unique learning and training opportunity for the participants, and develop a plan to preserve and interpret the site for future generations. A core component of the project is to enable local volunteers to carry out the excavation of key elements of the colliery. This has provided the participants with professional training in the techniques of archaeological excavation, recording and interpretation. The excavation has been coupled with a programme of educational outreach with local primary schools (delivery of classroom-based sessions on the story of the colliery, the historic importance of coal mining to the area, plus fieldwork days with the opportunity to look at historic structures and undertake excavation). Local groups have also visited and participated, including the Parish Council, local Friends groups, a food-growing group and some disabled visitors.

The volunteers have been drawn largely from groups of people who do not normally participate in such projects, and the project has created opportunities for greater involvement by ethnic minorities, disabled groups and young people. The excavation has also provided the project team with an informed understanding of the historical use of the colliery. Once completed, the final excavation report will be an important point of reference for the Lancashire Coalfield, and the industrial heritage of Oldham and surrounding areas.

What would have happened without this project?

Jubilee Colliery was for many years primarily a nature site with some interesting industrial structures. Until recently, the historic remains had become overgrown, making preservation and interpretation of the colliery increasingly difficult. The project has reversed this trend by combating intrusive vegetation growth and exposing the fascinating historic remains, with a view to undertaking appropriate consolidation and permanent interpretation. Without this project, the remains of the colliery could have ultimately been lost. In addition many new audiences have been engaged in their local heritage, who otherwise would not have visited the site or understood the significance of their local history. They have also been introduced to a local nature reserve and footpaths, and many have expressed interest in visiting again. Many visitors have offered information and links about their own family

histories, which would not otherwise have been accessed, and will be included on the project website (<http://jubileecolliery.wordpress.com>). In addition to new interpretive boards and consolidation of the historic structures, Groundwork Oldham and Rochdale intend to include interactive QR-codes for people to find out more.



Holycross School visit to Jubilee Colliery © Oxford Archaeology

What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

The project has firmly established Jubilee Colliery as a site of regional historical significance, rather than simply a nature reserve and, with a Preservation Plan agreed with Oldham Council and Groundwork Oldham and Rochdale, the site will be managed appropriately as a heritage asset (through Groundwork and volunteer days).

The project has enabled the key components and historical use of the colliery to be better understood, which has informed interpretation of the visible remains. This will be presented via new information boards and a website accessed through a series of on-site QR codes providing a more interactive experience (tours, aural history, acted scenes and filmed project summaries). This will allow a better understanding of the site as a working colliery and act as a more engaging resource for people of all ages.

Training has been provided, including in archaeological skills, sessions in building repair and maintenance in the heritage sector (ensuring historic structures are improved and preserved in line with professional guidance), and 'Working with Volunteers' (improving skills and employability).

More people who do not normally participate in such projects, including different ethnic minority groups, older people, disabled groups, deprived communities and young people have become involved. It has also generated much interest and enthusiasm (people have stated that they were unaware of the site, while children

have enjoying the project so much, they want to be archaeologists when they grow up!).

More people have become involved in healthy activity – excavation, walks, and outdoor facilities on their doorsteps

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges overcome?

A significant challenge was undertaking a community-led project on a publicly accessible site. Whilst this had the clear benefits of attracting the welcome interest of casual visitors, there were some issues with unwelcome activities, such as dog fouling and fly-tipping during evening hours.

The project was focused on drawing participants from deprived/less well-off sectors of the local community, many of whom faced challenges associated with travelling to the relatively remote site of Jubilee Colliery. This was overcome successfully by providing transport, or reimbursing the costs expended by volunteers on public transport.

What is the future of the project?

Individuals and groups will continue to be involved in local heritage initiatives; it is anticipated that the success of 'Preserving the Past' will ensure greater participation in other projects by these groups in the future, thereby encouraging a more inclusive approach to community heritage. The long-term future of Jubilee Colliery as a cherished heritage asset has been secured and disseminated via widely accessible digital and web-based media. The project experience has been shared with local special interest heritage groups, such as the Friends of Castleshaw and the Greater Manchester Archaeological Federation, via inclusion in newsletters and evening lecture programmes.

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