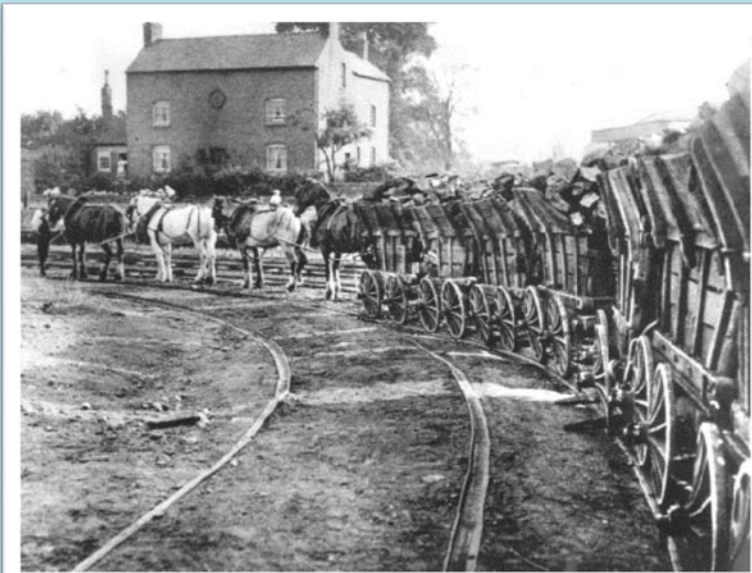


Background Information:

Pit Ponies, A Brief History

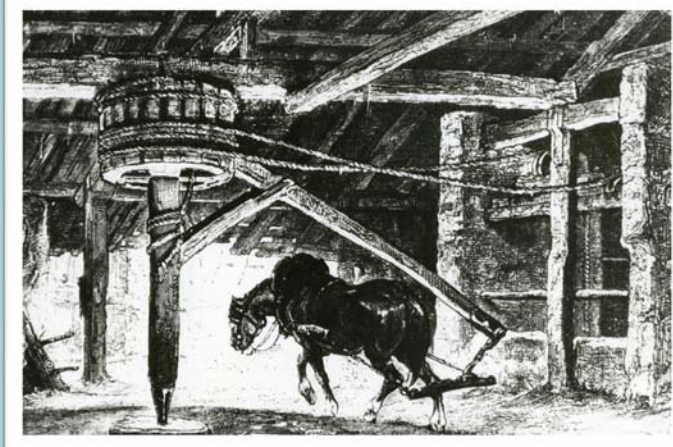


Horses have been used for many years in different industries to help provide power or transportation. Coal mining was no exception, with horses used to transport coal from the pit site to local users.



A team of horses ready to pull a train of carts containing coal.
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Horse-powered engines (gins) were commonly used both in agriculture and in mining. They were used in some cases to replace manual winding up and down shafts, the horses being able to lift heavier loads and for longer periods.



A horse-powered gin, used to wind coal up a shaft.
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The use of steam power, firstly for pumping and later for winding coal and men, had an impact on horse use at the pit surface. Steam winding was used extensively by the 1840s, but in common with many other pit innovations, older gins continued to be used at some small mines well into the twentieth century.

After the 1842 Act which prevented children under the age of 10 and women from working underground, horses and ponies were used more to pull tubs of coal and materials underground, where roof heights allowed. Gradually, though, much of this work was done by haulage engines, particularly on long, straight roadways.



A pony and driver.

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The number of working ponies reached a peak just before World War I, with 70,000 ponies in 1913. After this the number declined, firstly due to the demands of the War, and after that, as more machines were introduced. This meant that by 1932, only 32,000 ponies were used by mines. In 1947, the coal industry in the UK was nationalised. This made the process of modernisation quicker, and so fewer ponies were needed.

By 1962, only 6,400 ponies were used underground, and the number continued to drop. In 1978 there were only 149 ponies employed to work underground. A very small number of mines continued to employ ponies until the 1990s.



further reading

Fact

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museum links

Find out more about ponies and horses, on site at the Museum in the Coal Interface Gallery, at the stables and on the underground tour.

National Coal Mining Museum for England
Caphouse Colliery, New Road, Overton, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF4 4RH

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Reg. Charity No.: 517325 VAT Reg. No.: 457 548 314 Reg. Office: Caphouse Colliery
T: 01924 848806 F: 01924 844567 E: info@ncm.org.uk www.ncm.org.uk

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