

Wheldale Newsletter

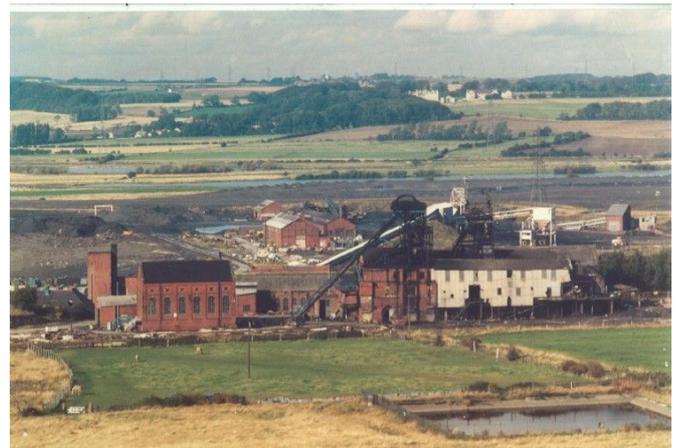


Embsay and Bolton Abbey Steam Railway
History Sheet H2 Issue 1

Wheldale Colliery

Wheldale colliery was located to the East of Castleford, not far from the Aire and Calder Navigation. In 1868, two 13 foot diameter shafts were sunk to reach the Beeston coal seam at a depth of 564 yards with production starting in 1870.

Wheldale was the first deep mine in the area, later followed by Merefield and Fryston collieries.. The colliery operated for 117 years, finally closing in October 1987 with the loss of hundreds of jobs. In 1982 it had achieved a record annual output of 500 000 tons of coal and it was the last coal mine in the country to use a steam engine in its sidings— and that's where the Wheldale Colliery story connects with our railway..



Wheldale Colliery. Image by British Coal



Locos at the colliery. Author's credit being sought.

In 1899 the Wheldale Coal Company and the Fryston coal company amalgamated in 1919 Wheldale coal company amalgamated with Allerton Bywater colliery to form Airedale Collieries Ltd.

As there was no coal washing plant at Wheldale, a mineral line was laid in the 1930s to Fryston Colliery and coal that required washing was sent there.

A couple of years after the 1948 nationalisation, the colliery benefited from a series of improvements:

- An electricity supply was installed
- The winders were fitted with electric motors
- New double-decked cages installed in the upcast shaft for men and materials
- Two 6 ton skips were installed in the downcast shaft (coal winding)
- Conveyors were installed underground
- Diesel locomotive haulage was installed underground although pit ponies were still in use until 1972

Wheldale was the first colliery to have a conveyor over a mile in length.

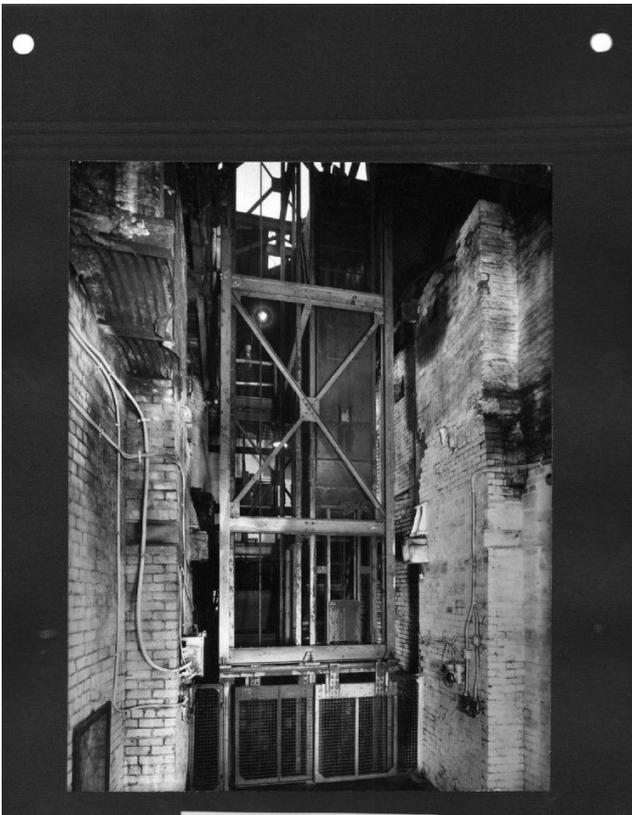
Coal was supplied to Ferrybridge Power Station and Glasshoughton Coking Plant.

When Fryston Colliery closed in 1985 a barrel washer had to be set up to clean coal at Wheldale but this was short-lived as Wheldale Colliery closed in October 1987.

After closure the site was cleared but the shafts were not infilled. Methane gas from the workings was captured and is used to generate electricity, around 10 MW, enough to power about 800 homes.

Coal seams at depth intersected by the shafts:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------|
| • Warren House | 600 ft |
| • Haigh Moor | 846 ft |
| • Flockton Thick | 1135 ft |
| • Middleton Little | 1312 ft |
| • Silkstone | 1430 ft |
| • Beeston | 1692 ft |



Mine Cage: Image by British Coal



Wheldale Headgear: Photo by Derek Dye



The sun sets on a proud industry: Image by British Coal