

TRIMDON GRANGE walk – approximately 18 minutes duration

Audio 1

Before we begin our stroll, let's look at where we're going to go. How does our view compare with what previous generations would have seen?

If you base yourself by the bus stop outside St Alban's Church, and face the woodlands, you're looking at where our walk will begin.

Look at the trees opposite. Move your eyes to the tops of the trees. Then imagine 12 trees on top of those, one on top of the other. You're looking way up into the sky now.

But just forty years ago, you'd have been looking at a huge pit heap. It reached 150 feet into the air. As you can imagine, its great bulk dominated the lives of the people who lived around its edges in the village. Every day, as the sun moved around, its chilly shadow moved across the houses. It reduced the warmth and daylight by up to two hours – a lot, when there's no electric lighting or central heating.

Just down the road to your left is the local infants' school. It's been there more than a hundred years – children's earliest memories would have been coming to school in the huge presence of the mine, then going home into households where the family depended on the mine for work. Their own future was almost certainly as a miner or the wife of a miner. This pattern lasted more than a century – only ending with the closure of mine in 1968.

Our walk will show how astonishingly quickly the signs of that dominating influence are vanishing. We'll find out how Nature's doing its part – and how reclamation schemes have made a difference for the special wildlife beginning to flourish here.

We'll also turn the clock back as we spot clues to the dramatically different views that we'd have seen, not just hundreds of years back, but millions!

To begin, cross the road and follow Grange Terrace behind the Funeral Services. Go to the right of the garages and you'll see a cut through the fence and a path through. Once you've gone through it into the plantation, turn right and follow the path lined with pine needles, keeping the ditch to your right. You're walking directly through what would have been the huge pit heap. Your next audio point is when you reach the end of the fencing and are ready to turn left.

Audio 2

You should now have open grassland to your left. You may well be able to hear sheep calling, perhaps seagull cries, maybe the rustle of the trees. But a hundred years ago – this would have been more likely.

AUDIO BURST – approximately 12 seconds

As you've probably worked out, crossing the grassland to your left, on this side of the pit heap, was a railway line, heading for the village. This took the coal, and also quarried rocks, across to Hartlepool at the coast, to be sold around the UK and Europe.

Straight in front of you, what is now woodland was the main area of the mine workings. The first shaft was sunk in 1845. It was called Trimdon Grange after a nearby farmhouse, the Grange – to distinguish it from other Trimdon workings. Two years later, more shafts were added.

The mine had an immediate impact on the whole area. Workers and their families travelled from as far away as Cornwall Wales and Lancashire. Hundreds upon hundreds of jobs were created, and homes built in a huddle right by the mine. At its peak, more than one thousand three hundred men and boys worked here: just yards in front of you was intensely busy, the pit head where most of them went underground six days a week, for the whole of their working lives.

Memories of those days are bittersweet. The former mining communities remember the close ties, the neighbours who supported each other through good times and bad. But the battle to save the mining industry divided families and still leaves scars.

And there are memories of tragedies too. The worst here was on the 16th of February 1882.

AUDIO BURST

The explosion came while a hundred and thirty men and boys were underground in the Harvey seam. Flames and rocks were blown up the shaft – the lift was stuck – the rescuers could not get down. Miners from all over the county came during the next few days to help, but they faced the risks of gas poisoning and further explosions. 74 miners were killed. They are buried in Trimdon and Church Kelloe – you can still see the monuments there. (pause)

The incident became famous locally, and was the subject of a poem written by Tommy Armstrong, the pitman poet:

*“Let's not think of tomorrow,
Lest we disappointed be;
Our joys may turn to sorrow,
As we all may daily see.
Today we're strong and healthy,
But how soon there comes a change.
As we may see from the explosion
That has been at Trimdon Grange”.*

You'll next be walking beside the fence to your left, until you reach a metal gate. But before we move on, spend a moment to picture the miners arriving here every day to go down the shaft, knowing the risks facing their friends and families, and themselves.

Audio 3

Now you're in the heart of the mine workings. You've just walked through the former coke ovens. Look to your right down the short lane: across the road would have been the reservoir where the water, pumped from the mine to avoid flooding, was stored.

Trimdon Grange Colliery was established in 1845, when a shaft was sunk into the 'Five quarter' seam by Joseph Smith, a Newcastle merchant,

For a while the prospects did not look promising; the pits were worked irregularly, and were unlikely to have been profitable

By the 1880s, however, it was owned by Walter Scott who spent large sums improving the plant. The colliery began to be worked on a larger scale and its workers had more secure prospects.

The beginning of the next century was the most productive time for the colliery, but by the late 1920s it was again failing.

A notice to close was issued in 1930 to the one thousand two hundred men and boys employed here. This came as an unpleasant surprise, as up to the week before, new coal cutting machines were being installed.

The colliery shut on 6th September 1930 and remained closed for the next 7 years, until it was bought by East Hetton Collieries. They continued to operate it for a further 30 years but it was closed for good in February 1968, with the loss of 692 jobs.

So a chapter closed on the mining activity which had caused such upheaval in lives and the landscape for more than a century.

But why was this area so rich in coal? And since the closure, how has the area changed so rapidly in such a short space of time?

We'll be looking backwards and forwards in the next stages of our walk. For now, climb the stiles and look out for the different signs of renewal as you walk through the plantation. Our next stop is when you reach the lane; just follow the trees and the fence and they'll lead eventually round to the right.

Audio 4

Now the views have opened – this is a good spot to find out more about why this part of County Durham has its many seams of coal.

- The answer lies about three hundred million years ago, in a time called the Carboniferous era. This land was almost on the equator, submerged beneath a shallow, tropical sea, where beds of limestone were accumulating.
- Sand and mud drifted in, which allowed swamp and lush tropical rainforests to develop. Plant remains, such as tree stumps, didn't decay completely in the wet conditions, and built up into layers of peat. Flooding brought in more layers of mud and sand, repeatedly, over millions of years. Eventually, the weight of the sediment above, combined with intense heat hardened the peat deposits to become coal measures.

How amazing that mankind set itself the challenge of digging out that coal in just a few centuries, coal that took millions of years to create.

There's been one more geological phase which is still influencing our lives, and is very special to this area. About 280 million years ago, the North Pennines were created, at same time as a large area of desert in this part of County Durham. Another shallow sea flowed in, and the result was the formation of layers of Magnesian Limestone.

That's influenced much of our landscape here, and one of the most obvious signs of this is quarrying. We'll hear memories from a former worker at our next stop.

Although the coal is often well below the layers of limestone, its special properties were discovered earlier than you might think.

Two thousand years ago, the Romans were burning it. The monks of Jarrow heated their halls with it. But the dramatic transformation from small-scale domestic fires to industrial powerhouses that changed Britain took place just two hundred years ago.

The magnesian limestone was broken through for the first time in 1821, when a shaft a thousand feet deep was sunk at Hetton Colliery. As we've already seen, this was a historic moment, starting a

chain of events written deep into our histories as individuals, for the landscape, and for our nation as a whole.

But nearly two centuries later, the coal mining chapter closed. Next, we'll be looking at how the area has changed since then. Across the road from you is the route of the former railway line, now a bridle path. Please cross the road carefully, and walk along the path with, on your right, the Raisby Way and Trimdon Grange Quarry Nature Reserve.

Audio 5

You're now standing next to the wildlife reserve. The restoration of woodland and grassland we've just seen is all helping to restore biodiversity – there is now an exceptionally rich range of wildlife.

Floral areas of grassland around here have as many as seven different species of orchid, including those that are very rare in this area such as common spotted, northern marsh, fragrant, pyramidal, and bee.

The woodland contains two nationally rare plants, bluemoor-grass and dark red helleborine.

Other plants to look out for are adderstongue fern, yellow-wort, fleabane, kidney vetch and devil's bit scabious. The locally rare spiked sedge also grows here.

Birds are flourishing too. Here are some to listen out for: first we hear the green woodpecker and then its smaller relative, the great spotted woodpecker, followed by the tree creeper.

AUDIO BURST.

Two others you're less likely to hear – unless you're here after dark – are the tawny and little owl.

AUDIO BURST

If it's the right time of the year, you're likely to have seen plenty of butterflies as well. There are now 18 different species recorded, including the common blue, meadow brown, orange tip, peacock, red admiral, painted lady and dingy skipper.

Work is continuing to improve the site for wildlife. The young trees slowly growing in the woodland will be thinned, to allow the regeneration of more native broadleaf species, and help protect the new open areas of grassland.

Looking beyond the reserve, you may already have seen the four wind turbines. These are just one of many ways we're changing the way we produce our energy now. They are run by the Cumbrian Wind Farm, and went into operation in 2008. Opposition came from local people, who succeeded in winning an agreement to knock 50 metres off the height of the turbines.

Ahead of you down this path is the huge Trimdon Grange Quarry. The mines might have gone, but our geological heritage is still creating work and income for local people.

But the quarrying too has changed – let's find out more in a recording made with former worker Harry Hoban. He's aged nearly 85 here - you can hear him rustling his papers and memorabilia as he casts his mind back to his teenage years.

And I worked with the pump and I worked in the sidings where the full trucks used to come, of limestone to be taken away to the blast furnace. There was four separate jobs I was taught, there was two of us lads. We were a week on the locomotives, we were a

week on the pump job and we were a week at the sidings and we were a week at what they called the top of the bank.

Then eventually I went quarrying.

we were governed by the price of pig iron. If it went up we might get a penny, if it went down we were dropped tuppence.

Harry moved from job to job seeking a bigger wage. This was especially important when he felt ready to get married. He found a solution to afford that big step into matrimony – a new role at Trimdon Grange colliery.

So I came back to the pits. Big boiler, 6ft. fires, 9ft pokers and about four boilers, you had four fires, 2 mates and you had to create the steam for the winding engines. It was very hard work. In the summer, it nearly killed you with the heat you see.

Harry reminding us there of a very different world.

At this point of the walk, you have a choice – you can head towards the quarry and turn back when you wish. Or you can turn now and walk back to the village. Cross the road again, climb over the stile and pause before we go up the field.

Audio 6

You're about to tread the route that many thousands of workers tramped daily, between the village and their work, alongside that busy railway line which would have been on our left.

At the start of the shift, crowds of men and boys would be making their way towards the pit through the dark just a few hours after midnight.

There were no clock radios and mobile phone alarms then – the workers would pay a person called the knocker-up to walk through the village in the early hours and wake up people due on early shifts. Start times were written outside the front door, so there could be no mistake about when to get up.

And the direction in which we're now walking would be the weary trail home at the end of the shift. They'd be returning to a village of tightly packed houses, which grew rapidly as the mine expanded. The population grew from 300 to one thousand six hundred by 1851.

By the turn of the century there were 5 grocers, 4 pubs, 3 butchers, 2 hardware shops, a post office, a fruiterer and four churches.

Houses were built in colliery rows, and usually had one very large bedroom upstairs and two rooms downstairs, a living room and a back kitchen.

Toilets or 'nettys' were in sets of four in the back street away from the house. Ashes from the fire and kitchen waste were put down the netty.

"I remember being told by my grandmother that when she came to Trimdon as a bride in 1830, she was astounded that there was not even an individual toilet in their street, Railway Row, and her husband had to build one in order to keep his wife."

Water had to be carried from a communal tap in the street, and the women went with their buckets to get steam water from the pit for their weekly wash.

Let's walk their route now, picturing how we'd feel if we'd made this trip, winter and summer, for the last forty years or so of our working lives.

There's a stile to the right of the gate you can see at the top of the field. Go through that, and our final stop will be when we reach the woodland again. Watch out for livestock along this part of the walk.

Audio 7

We're back in the plantation again and almost back in the village. Before we come back into the here and now, here's how the poet Arthur Davison affectionately marks the birth – and death – of the ghostly presence we've been marking on our stroll.

POEM

Poem by Arthur Davison (taken from Trimdon Snippets)

At last her long, long life is done

Her troubles and her trial o'er

Her head bowed now, her hope is gone

She can give her best no more

Her wheels are stilled, her chatter hushed

This mother of a thousand souls

But still her pride has not been crushed

In man's demand for better coals

A century and a half she's had

And watched the village around her change

Some for the good, some for the bad

The grand old lady of Trimdon Grange

Fade into medley pit sounds then birdsong then fade out – approximately 12 seconds.