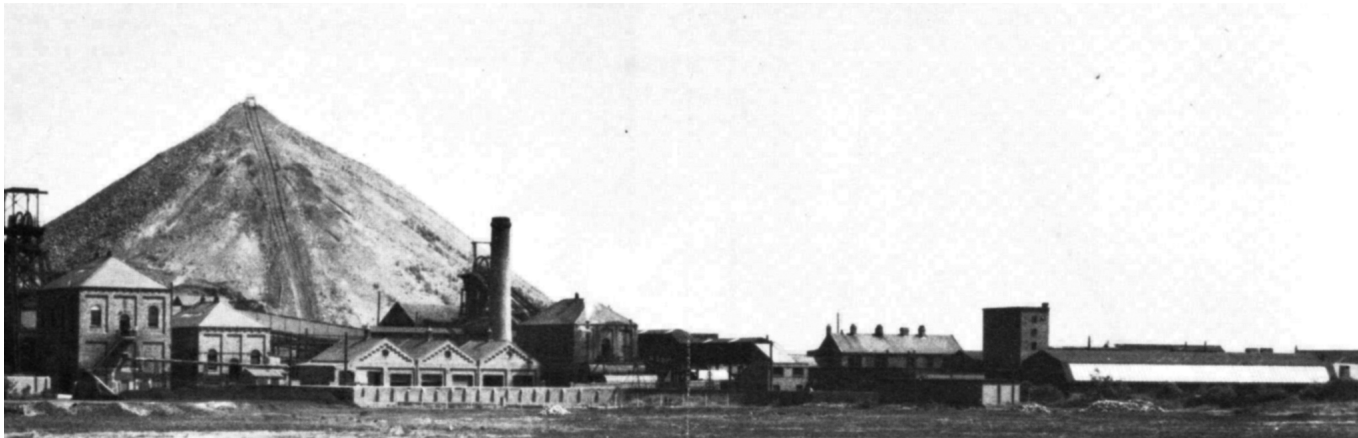


Washington F Pit



F Pit and J Pit in the 1930s with the slack or waste heap in the background.

A brief history of Washington F Pit

In December 1775 Robert Shafto, Sir Gilfred Lawson and Sir James Musgrave, the Lords of the Manor of Washington, leased the coal under the northern part of the Parish to William Russel and Partners. Russel was a coal shipping agent (known as a coal fitter) from Sunderland who also owned the Wallsend Colliery on Tyneside.

Russel's Washington Colliery was made up of eight pits spread around the Washington area. These were given letters for names from A Pit to I Pit. F Pit was probably sunk in 1777 and continued in use until 1796 when it had to be abandoned after an explosion followed by flooding. Another shaft was sunk nearby in 1820 and the pit was reopened. The underground seams of coal in the Durham Coalfield were given names by the mining companies.

In 1856 F Pit was deepened to reach the Hutton Seam 660 feet deep below ground. By 1870 it was producing the most coal of all of the pits in Washington Colliery. In 1903 F Pit went through its third and final re-modelling, although new buildings were still built from time to time up to the 1950s. In 1927 F Pit was modernised by the owners who introduced electricity to the site and pneumatic picks at the coal face. A new pit, called J Pit, was sunk nearby and this reached the Busty Seam, 927 feet below ground.

In 1947 F Pit, along with nearly every coal mine in the United Kingdom, was taken over by the National Coal Board (NCB) who continued to develop the site. In 1954 the shaft was deepened so that it also reached the Busty Seam. Production levels were greatest in 1964/65 when it produced 486,000 tons of saleable coal per year and employed over 1500 men. However, F Pit was getting old and did not fit in with the NCB's vision of Super Pits and the last coals were drawn to the surface on 21 June 1968.

The Site

Except for the entrance, which was added by the Washington Development Corporation, the Engine House is all original and is a Grade 2 Listed Building.



The heapstead about 1960.

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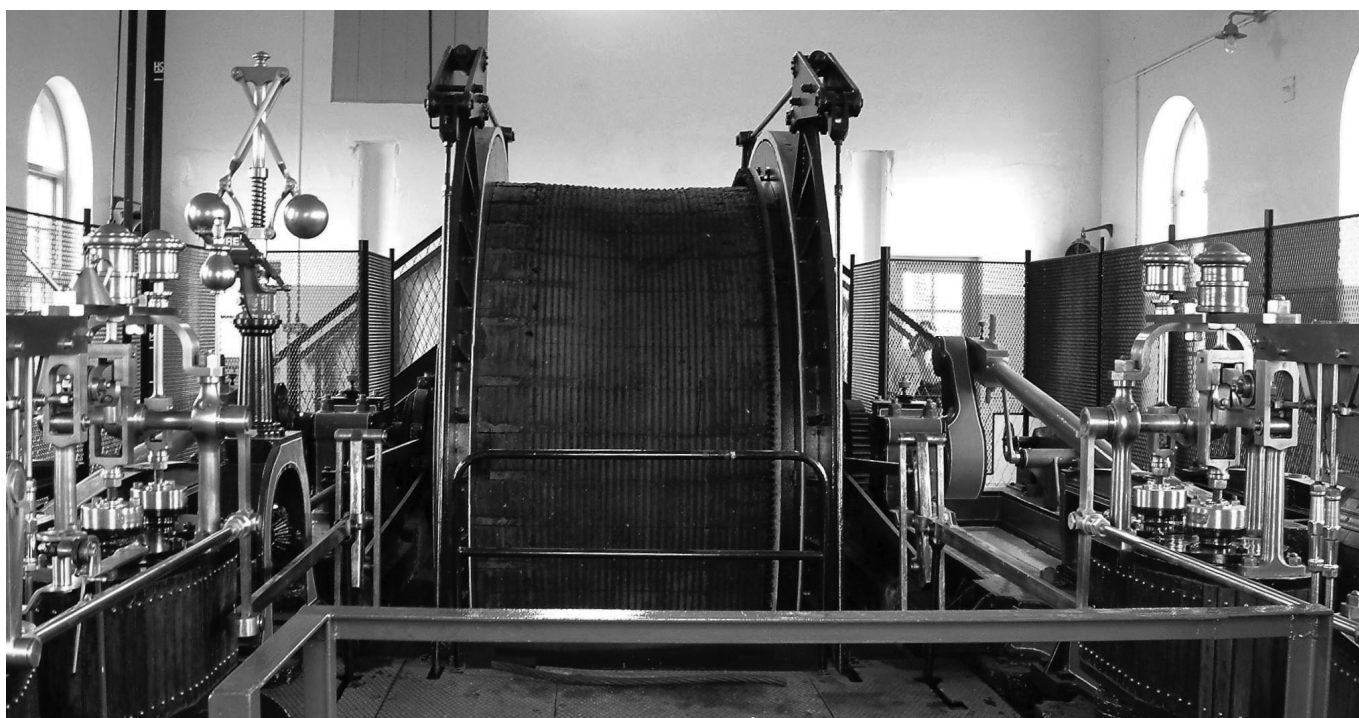
The Engine House you see today represents only a very small part of what made up the colliery when it was a working coal mine. The building was built in 1903 to house the engine on show today. The engine was built in 1888 by the Grange Iron Company of Durham City, originally for an unidentified coal mine. When it was moved and installed at F Pit in 1903, it was fitted with the Grange Iron Company's patent expansion valve gear in order to save steam and, therefore, fuel and money!

The engine was only one of many buildings that covered the site. The boiler house stood in the area now occupied by the car park and beyond that was the compressor house supplying air to work the coal cutting machinery. The winding house and head gear for J Pit was to the north of that. South of F Pit was the office block, the lamp cabin and maintenance workshops. Across the road was a water reservoir for the boilers and, from the 1940s, the pit head baths.

The pit head frame, that held the wheels over which the ropes from the winding engine passed before disappearing underground, was surrounded by a building under which were railway sidings. This heapstead building was where the cages were unloaded and contained the tippers which emptied the wagons from underground as well as the screens and picking belts for grading the coal. Further east was the slackheap, the waste from the colliery. This was quickly removed after the closure of the mine.

Washington F Pit Museum

The winding house and head gear were presented by the NCB to the people of Washington as a monument to the importance of mining to the town and its people. The Museum was opened in 1976 by the Washington Development Corporation and is now owned by Sunderland City Council. Admission to Washington F Pit is free and the site is open seasonally.



The winding engine today. Now driven at slow speed by a small electric motor for demonstration purposes, when driven by steam and at full speed it could raise a cage with coal wagons 1,000 feet in one minute.

Find out more about Washington F Pit Museum

For more information, visit the Local History Library (Q ETR, 64 Fawcett Street, which has books on Washington F Pit, such as:

- 'Banners of the Durham Coalfield' by Norman Emery 1988

Also visit the Heritage area at Washington Town Centre Library.

More information can also be found on the following websites:

www.dmm.org.uk

www.twmuseums.org.uk/washington