



Information for teachers The Colliery Village at Beamish Museum

About Beamish Museum

Beamish Museum shows how people lived in North East England during two time periods, 1825 and 1913.

This pack is focused on life in the community of a 1913 colliery village.

Religion was a major part of people's lives at this time and evidence of their beliefs can be seen throughout the buildings and exhibits.

The Colliery Village

Beamish Museum has recreated a 1913 colliery village including a row of cottages, a school, a Methodist chapel, a pit head and a drift mine.

1913 was a very prosperous year for coal mining across the Great Northern coalfield. Compared with other manual workers, miners were well paid, with a free house and coal provided.

Working conditions were dark, cramped and dangerous. Roof falls, fires, explosions and sudden flooding killed many men.

Serious injury underground was common and many miners suffered from diseases of the respiratory and nervous systems.

The pits, on average, worked thirteen days in a fortnight, with Sunday being a day of rest and worship.





The Chapel (1913)

The Rise of Methodism

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, first came to the area in 1743. Converts from these visits met for worship in each other's homes. In 1854, the Methodist Society built a chapel in Beamish village, previously called Pit Hill. This seated 160 people and on Sunday evening services were full. In 1903, a new chapel seating 350 people was built and the old chapel became the Sunday School.

The chapel at Beamish Museum is the original part of the chapel from Beamish village, which closed in 1985 when the congregation joined with that of West Pelton.

Life on a Sunday

Sunday was strictly observed. Young people often found it monotonous, as one person described:

"You got up on a morning on a Sunday, Chapel half past ten. You came out, you went for a walk, weather permitting. You had your dinner. Sunday School, 2 o'clock. You were there till 3 o'clock. You came out, you went for another walk weather permitting. You came out and you had your Sunday tea. Sunday, why,

homemade scones, homemade cakes, buns and so on. And then back to Chapel again at night 6 o'clock to 7 o'clock, well longer because we used to have a long prayer meeting in those days."

Sunday School

In the early twentieth century most children went to Sunday School. The emphasis was on bible stories, hymn singing and prayer. The Sunday School Outing was a trip to the country or the seaside.

The Sunday School Anniversary was an annual celebration service when children recited and sang religious poems and songs, followed by a social event.

Social Life

In the early 1900s the chapel was often the focus of the community. Throughout the week, various activities took place, such as brass band practice, choirs, youth groups, quilting clubs, and bible study groups.

Chapels were famous for singing and hymns were popular music of the day. Travelling speakers came to visit and magic lantern shows were well attended. Highlights of the year included Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and Harvest Festival.



Christmas – members would meet in the chapel just before midnight on Christmas Eve and parade through the village singing until the early hours of Christmas Day.

Easter – this was probably the most important religious festival and everyone had new clothes for the celebration. Paste eggs, hard boiled eggs dyed in various colours and designs, were rolled down a hill on Easter Sunday.

Whitsuntide – a procession or an open air camp meeting was held.

Harvest – chapels were decorated with fruits, flowers, bread and a large piece of coal. Produce would be sold off cheaply at a chapel auction. Sharing was key to chapel life.

Love feasts – usually held on a Sunday, this would begin with singing and prayers, followed by eating bread and drinking water from the Love Cup and more hymn singing and discussion.

The influence of Methodism

Methodism had strong values of Christian service, temperance, thrift and hard work. Methodists were known for their sombre dress, dignity and attention to duty. Coal owners often supported the Methodist movement as they considered it a good influence on their workforce.

In Methodist chapels there was a general feeling against drink. Some people signed the temperance pledge, promising to abstain from all intoxicating liquors as beverages. Refusing to drink also meant breaking with tradition and culture, as the pub was often a focal point of the community.

Chapels were for the most part working class institutions, run for working class congregations. They were in touch with the social conditions around them and believed in helping people to improve themselves, such as by teaching people to read.

Chapel was a training ground for working class leaders in trade unions, political parties and the Co-operative movement. It gave its members political aspirations and encouraged members to fight for higher wages, better conditions and shorter hours. Active trade union leaders remained pillars of the chapel and drew support largely from the chapel.

The chapel had a greater influence on society than any other religious body. Principles of thrift, independence, self denial, hard work, non-gambling and temperance spread through the communities.



Pit Cottages (1913)

People were drawn to North East England from across the country to work in the mines. Pit communities were self contained, with pitmen and their families living and socialising together, developing their own interests and amusements. Families were often large and life centred on the home. Houses were small but well organised and well furnished.

Sunday was a day of rest and worship. It was practice in most houses to say grace before meals. Christian homes would read a chapter from the bible and children would pray before going to bed.

The pit cottages, Francis Street, were built from 1860 to 1865 at Hetton-le-Hole. At Beamish Museum, the cottages represent the homes and lifestyles of different families.

Pit Cottage Number 2

This cottage shows the home of a Methodist family with a good income. The miner would have been a winding engineman. He would be trustworthy, reliable, interested in current events and politics and a self educator. He would also be teetotal. His sons would work in the mine and his wife would be heavily involved in chapel life.

The Kitchen: look for the pictures, religious texts, decorative pottery and the temperance certificate.

The Parlour: look for pictures of texts and the Lord's Prayer, along with the table set for tea.





Pit Cottage Number 3

This is furnished as the home of a Roman Catholic family of Irish descent. Many Irish families came to find work in the coal mines in North East England. This family has prospered. Families were large and working sons would bring in a good income. In contrast to the Methodist family, the Irish sometimes distilled and sold their own drink and may have kept, raced and gambled on whippets and greyhounds.

The Kitchen: look out for the God in a Bottle. This is a piece of folk art, depicting the crucifixion. There are also pictures and statues with a religious theme.

The Parlour: prints include those of Pope Pius X (the Pope from 1903 to 1914), Mary the Madonna, the Last Supper and Jesus. There are rosary beads and a crucifix.

Pit Cottage Number 4

This is set as the home of a pitman's widow who has lost her husband in a mining accident. A teenage son would be working down the mine, enabling them to keep the house after the death of her husband. The widow would earn money taking in laundry and making rugs. The family would be Methodists. They would observe Sunday worship and live by principles of abstinence and self-education.

The Kitchen: look for a Band of Hope certificate relating to the abstinence movement and Sunday School certificates.

The Parlour: over the bed hangs a text of the Morning Hymn.

