

## **History Group Visit.**

### **Visit to the Kippax Coalmining Exhibition held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at Kippax British Legion Club.**

The exhibition was opened by Martin Eyre, Chair of the Kippax Parish Council.

At the start of the exhibition Helen Pratt who previously worked for Leeds City Council at Temple Newsam House, as a member of the curators' team, spoke about her involvement in the creation of the 'Blot on the Landscape' exhibition in 2019. From 1942 to 1984 there was open cast mining near Temple Newsam House which began because of the shortage of coal during the second World War. She explained that within Leeds City Council the idea of exploring this part of Temple Newsam's history was controversial. Some people simply wanted to preserve the image of its Capability Brown landscaping. Developing the exhibition had involved not just staff at Temple Newsam but also miners themselves and volunteer researchers. Helen emphasised the importance of the area's mining tradition being fully recognised in the work of Leeds City Council 's Museums and Galleries and said that had not always been the case.

The Blot on the Landscape exhibition won the National Marsh Trust Award for Volunteers for Museum Learning. This is a British Museum award and recognised the strong community engagement evident in the work to create the exhibition. Helen was completely taken by surprise by this success and at the awards event had to improvise an acceptance speech as she had nothing prepared. Helen mentioned that the Blot on the Landscape exhibition would be returning to Temple Newsam and had resulted in the creation of the Temple Newsam Mining Trails.

A booklet 'Blot on the Landscape: The Collection' was on display at the Kippax Coalmining Exhibition. This contained a variety of interesting material including the earlier history of mining on the Temple Newsam estate which probably began with 'bell pits' in and around the park before the 17<sup>th</sup> C. In 1815 a deep mine was sunk on the estate at Thorpe Stapleton. It was named Waterloo Colliery after the famous battle of the same year. It produced coal for over 150 years.

The Kippax Coalmining Exhibition included various displays, put together by miners, of mining memorabilia such as miners' lamps and commemorative plates. For example, Roger Monks, who played a leading role in mounting the Exhibition, combined photographs and models in his display, showing how mining had developed over the years from the very basic and risky 'bell pits' through the time of pit ponies to the pits of the post-nationalisation era using modern cutting equipment to extract the coal. He said that Lockdown had given him more time to work on his contribution.

Another contributor highlighted the issue of children working in the pits. When legislation in the 19<sup>th</sup> C. outlawed young children working in the pits this was followed by a reduction in the number of accidents overall. It was thought that young children, not able to cope with the long hours or the working environment, were inadvertently contributing to accidents.

Hearing miners talking informally at the exhibition there was concern about the importance of passing on the history of mining: 'children are growing up not even knowing what coal is'. Also political views were in evidence and strong feelings were voiced about how the industry was treated

in the period when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister and the 1984 Miners' Strike took place. Positive experiences of the mining life were also recalled highlighting the camaraderie among miners.