

# Adult education for miners

For most of the 20th century, coal mining dominated Britain's economy and politics. In 1920, 1¼ million miners made up nearly 10 per cent of the country's manual workers. In the 1940s and 1950s, around 700,000 still worked in the pits.

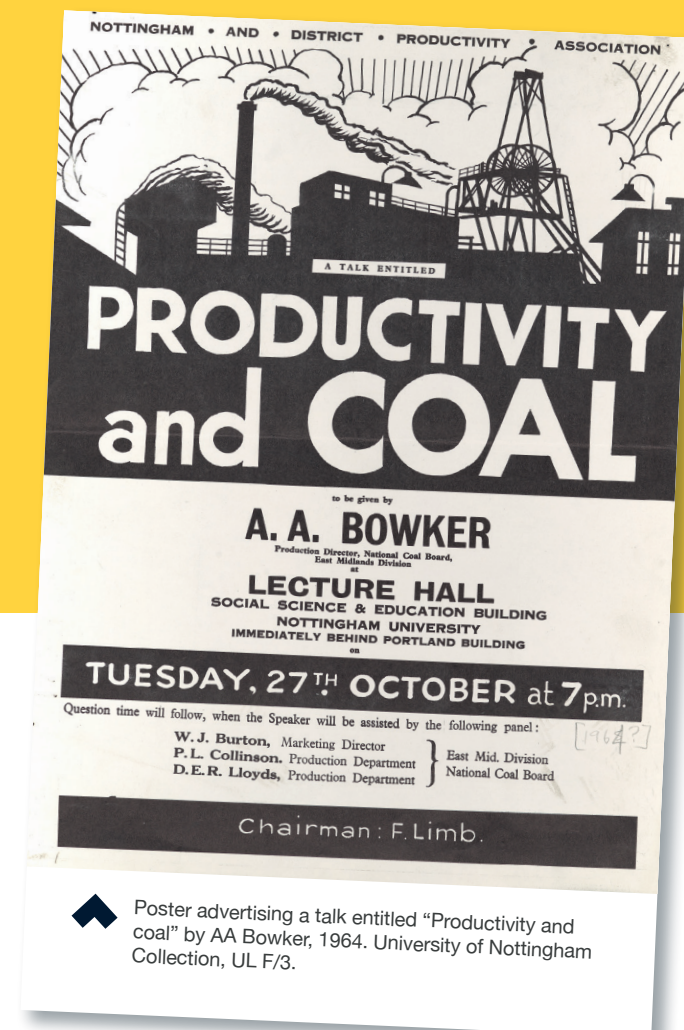


Though overall mining employment fell to just over 200,000 in the early 1980s, the East Midlands share of the industry grew, with nearly a quarter of the country's miners employed in the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire coalfields.

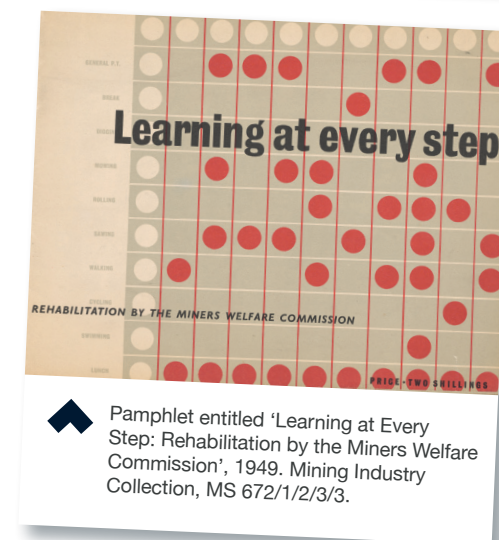
The area covered by Nottingham's Adult Education Department (all or most Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Lincolnshire) was "thickly dotted" with mining villages and towns. In 1922 the department appointed an organising lecturer for its mining communities. In 1924, a Miners' Welfare Joint Adult Education Committee was established. In 1925/26, 15 courses and a total of 275 lectures were offered, and 325 miner-students attended two weekend schools. Another initiative was "day release": between the wars, around 100 working-class adults, mostly miners, attended classes at the University College for two days each week over two years. The author Walter Brierley was one such miner-student.

Further opportunities for adult education opened up: by the mid-1950s miners were attending university courses in liberal studies on day release. In the 1960s, these focussed increasingly on political economy and industrial relations. The industrial turmoil surrounding the great strike of 1984 brought them to an end.

After the Second World War, the Labour government took the mines into public ownership. Hugh Gaitskell (1906 – 1963), a few years later Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the Labour Party, but then a junior minister, moved the Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill in the House of Commons. His first job had been in Nottingham's Adult Education department, educating miners after the General Strike: "They taught me what the naked exercise of arbitrary economic power meant. They taught me what it was to be victimised. Half the miners in my class had been victimised".



Poster advertising a talk entitled "Productivity and coal" by AA Bowker, 1964. University of Nottingham Collection, UL F/3.



Pamphlet entitled 'Learning at Every Step: Rehabilitation by the Miners Welfare Commission', 1949. Mining Industry Collection, MS 672/1/2/3/3.

Photograph of Walter Brierley (1900 – 1972), c. 1930s. Artificial collection of material relating to Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, MS 484.