

Coal Mining in Middleton Park, Leeds, contains one of the largest areas of woodland in West Yorkshire. This lottery funded community archaeology project, run by Meerstone for the Friends of Middleton Park, recorded and interpreted coal mining remains in the woodland within the park, demonstrating the survival of a wide range of features associated with different styles of mining dating from the 17th to the 19th century, including almost 300 shaft mounds ranging from small areas of shallow bell pit workings to deeper shafts wound by horse gins and steam engines.

As well as coal mining, Middleton is also known for its railway, developed to Leeds in 1758. Within the park more than 2km of waggonway were identified. This project, run over two winters, carried out by volunteers from the local community used a number of different surveying techniques to investigate and understand the site.

Season one comprised a rapid assessment recording over 340 features, including 272 shaft mounds, waggonways, earthworks, and hollow ways defining old trackways using navigation grade GPS. Documentary research was undertaken using both primary and secondary resources mainly by the volunteers after received training in research skills.

Season two focussed on detailed earthwork surveys of key areas to illustrate the main styles of coal mining present in the park. The more detailed survey, using total station alongside tape survey techniques increased the number of recorded features to 397 including 293 shaft mounds. All the survey results were brought together in a GIS environment to allow integration with the local HER.

To understand our findings we had to model past mining activities and then test these models against our field evidence. This was partly because little detailed work has been done on the archaeology of coal mining. This allowed us to produce a sophisticated project that will considerably enhance the understanding of similar landscapes. We therefore took a simple community project and produced a significant piece of archaeological research. This was presented in a publication written by Martin Roe at the request of the project volunteers who provided editorial input. This sold out within a year.

The project was awarded a Highly Commended in the 2008 British Archaeology Awards. Since this project Meerstone have carried out further work in Middleton Park including an evaluation

excavation assisted by many of the volunteers from the coal mining project.

