

# Mining Records and Reports Service



The Coal Authority was established by Parliament in 1994 to undertake specific statutory responsibilities associated with:

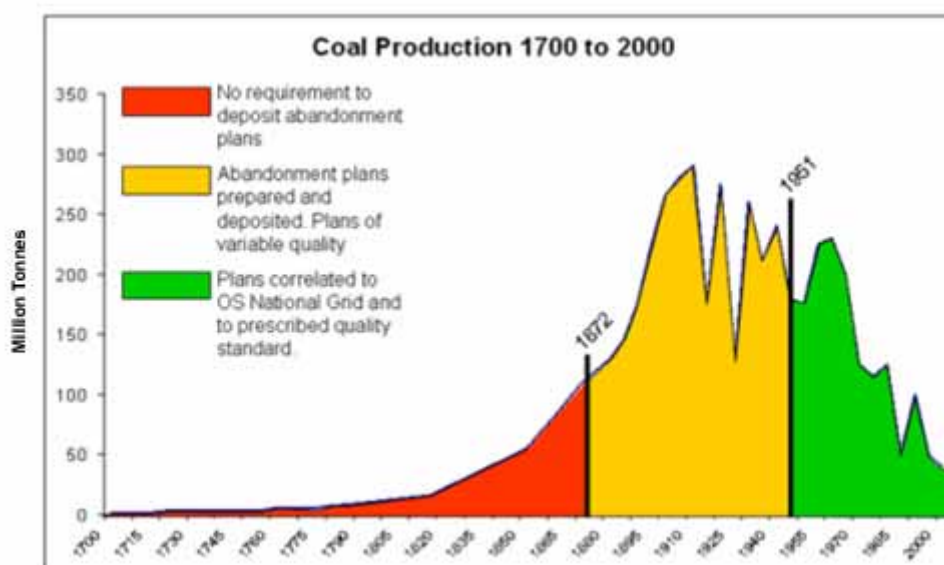
1. Licensing coal mining operations in Britain;
2. Handling subsidence damage claims which are not the responsibility of licensed coalmine operators;
3. Dealing with property and historic liability issues, such as treatment of mine water discharges;
4. Providing public access to information on past, present and future coal mining operations.

## 1. Coal Mining History

The mining of coal goes back to antiquity although the demand for it was relatively small until the 1700's. During this period of industrial growth within Great Britain, coal production increased rapidly and by the early 1800's over 10 million tonnes of coal was being mined annually.



Coal production continued to increase reaching its peak in the early 1900's when over 250 million tonnes was being produced each year. Since then production has declined and today annual output is approximately 30 million tonnes.



## 2. Mine Plans

As demand for coal increased the number of working coal mines also increased. These mines worked at greater depth and their underground workings were far more extensive than at the earlier mines which worked coal at shallow depths, mainly along the line of the outcrops. However, although coal mining had become intensive, with a very large number of underground workings being exploited, there was no legislative requirement for the mine owners to record the extent, depth and nature of their underground activities.



It was not until 1872 that the Coal Mines Regulation Act introduced the requirement for the deposit of accurate mines abandonment plans with the Secretary of State. Regrettably, many thousands of workings had been abandoned by the time this legislation was introduced and the knowledge and understanding of those unrecorded workings was, in many cases, lost forever.

The earlier mine plans would have been produced using simple surveying equipment which did not give the accuracy expected in mine plans of today. In this regard, a report by the Mines Department Water Dangers Committee in 1927, concluded that plans, certainly prior to 1887, may not indicate the actual position of workings and may only be evidence that old workings exist. The Committee also concluded that from 1887 the standard of accuracy improved and the plans became more reliable.

In accordance with the Mines and Quarries Act 1954, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated regulations, mine owners must still prepare and maintain working plans of any coal mines. These plans must be kept at the office of the mine or other location approved by the Health and Safety Executive and retained after abandonment.

## Mines Records

With the introduction of the Coal Mines Regulation Act in 1872 came the first repository for plans of abandoned mines, at the Mines Department in London; despite this many mine plans were still retained by mine owners and agents. However, in 1925, an appeal for the deposit of plans resulted in an increase in the number of plans deposited. Although there was a good response, the Secretary for Mines recognised that both completeness and total accuracy of coal mines records was not achievable.

In 1950, following nationalisation of the coal industry, it was decided that the National Coal Board should become the custodian of all abandonment records relating to coal mining activities. All plans, by this time housed in Buxton, were distributed to various locations throughout Great Britain, by agreement with H.M. Inspectorate of Mines.

Over the years, and along with the downturn of the coal mining industry, records were moved to new locations. Subsequently, in 1991, it was decided that because of the importance of these records and in order to best serve the needs of the industry, the records would be better housed at one central location. Premises at Bretby, Burton on Trent were selected.



Following privatisation of the coal industry in 1994, the custodianship of the records transferred to the Coal Authority, which now maintains the collection and makes it available for inspection by the public under the provisions of the Coal Industry Act 1994. In Autumn 2001 the records were transferred from Bretby to be housed in new purpose-built premises at the Authority's Headquarters in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. New records are continually added to the collection, both from ongoing mining activity by licensed operators and from new information being submitted to the Authority concerning past mining activities.

### 3. Mining Reports

From the collection of approximately 100,000 abandoned mine plans and other source documents, the Coal Authority has developed a unique database of mining information which supplies the information for its Mining Reports and Surface Damage System (MRSDS). The Authority currently provides in excess of 550,000 coal and brine reports annually and demand for the service continues to grow. Despite this, most enquiries are replied to within two working days. The MRSDS is a state of the art computerised system incorporating one of the largest Geographic Information Systems in Europe. It can accept electronic requests for property searches and delivers mining reports through a number of electronic channels (eMail, Internet download, XML).



Mining reports contain information about past, present and proposed mining activities, and refer to:

- Underground Coal Mining
- Opencast Coal Mining
- Surface Geology (e.g. Coal Seam Outcrops)
- Shafts and Adits (Mine Entries)
- Mine Gas
- Surface Hazards
- Working Rights
- Coal Mining Subsidence
- Cheshire Brine Subsidence Compensation Board information (England and Wales)

At the moment most property search requests - around 85% - are received and despatched by electronic means, however some searches still arrive by means of a standard enquiry in a paper format, agreed and approved by the Law Society. The Guidance Notes for the scheme detail how, and in which areas, searches should be made; the Coal Authority's online reports service is available at [www.groundstability.com](http://www.groundstability.com) and also offers a free of charge property referral service to determine if a mining report is recommended. Mining reports are also available via



the National Land Information Service (NLIS) through its four channel providers [www.transaction-online.co.uk](http://www.transaction-online.co.uk), [www.searchflow.co.uk](http://www.searchflow.co.uk), [www.tmproperty.co.uk](http://www.tmproperty.co.uk) and [www.jordansproperty.co.uk](http://www.jordansproperty.co.uk).

Searches should be made for every transaction involving land or property in coal mining areas, including purchase, initial mortgage, re-mortgage or prior to development taking place. The report should be obtained before contracts are exchanged or binding obligations entered into.

Replies to mining enquiries are provided in accordance with the Authority's duties under the Coal Industry Act 1994. Those replies are given using the information available to the Authority at the time of the request, but because the mining database is updated as new information becomes available old coal mining reports should not be relied upon for further property transactions.

### Ground Stability Reports Service

The Authority also provides a more comprehensive Ground Stability Report (GSR) which provides all the coal mining and brine subsidence claim search information outlined above, together with property specific information in simple language on the potential hazards related to natural subsidence throughout Great Britain based on information supplied by the British Geological Survey (BGS) [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk).



The information supplied by the BGS allows the reporting of potential natural hazards that may affect a property or area of land with regards to running sand, compressible and collapsible materials, soluble rocks, swelling and shrinking clays and also the potential for landslide. The Ground Stability Report is authorised and fully compliant for inclusion in Home Information Packs, please visit [www.groundstability.com](http://www.groundstability.com) for further information.

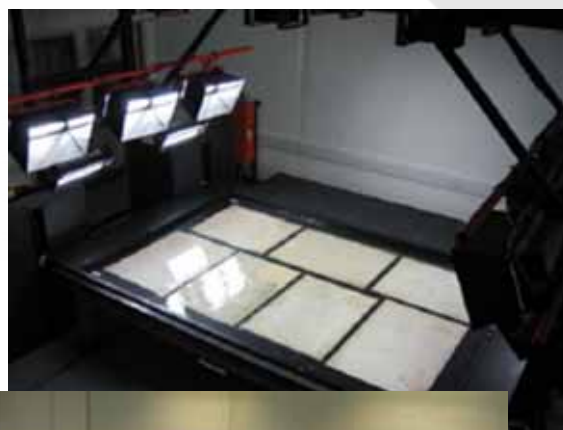
### **The Interpretive Report Service**

The Authority also offers an interpretative reports service, at a cost of £75.00 plus VAT. This service is offered to customers when a mine entry is disclosed in either a standard residential Mining or Ground Stability report. This report will provide more detailed analysis and advice about the mine entries. This will include a risk assessment as to whether, in the expert opinion of the Coal Authority, the main building of the property is inside or outside the possible zone of ground movement from any reported mine entry.

Please note that it may not be possible to produce a report if the main building to the property cannot be identified from Coal Authority plans (ie: for development sites and new builds)

### **Commercial Scanning Service**

The Coal Authority's state of the art scanning and plan reproduction centre offers a range of services for the copying of maps, plans and other media.



The variety of scanning methods available to the Authority enables us to cope with any size of plan and media up to 3 metres in width, and of virtually any length. Take advantage of our expertise in dealing with our own historic plans (totalling over 100,000), including some that were generally in poor condition. Benefit from our experience in dealing with large scanning projects, successfully carried out for a portfolio of clients, including local government bodies.

You can be certain that your precious documents are in safe hands during their stay with us. Alongside our unique coal abandonment plans, your documents will be kept in one of only a handful of records stores in the country meeting both the National Archives Standard for Record Repositories (2004) and BS5454 (2000).

We have purpose-built storage facilities meeting the required temperature, humidity and fire control standards - giving the required protection against dust, pollution, pest and unauthorized access. Where necessary we operate a white glove approach in handling your documents during the scanning process. This ensures that these irreplaceable and potentially fragile documents are not affected by our scanning process. For further information and to discover the potential of this work please visit [www.coal.gov.uk/services/scanning](http://www.coal.gov.uk/services/scanning)

#### **4. Understanding and Interpretation of Mining Reports**

One of the Authority's prime duties under the Coal Industry Act 1994 is to hold, on behalf of the nation, information concerning past, present and possible future coal mining activity and to make that information available to the public. It has to be noted that this information has been, and continues to be, supplied by others with the Authority acting as custodian.

The mining reports database, from which mining reports are produced, is created from that information. Although the information has been checked prior to its inclusion in the database, the Authority cannot guarantee the accuracy of the source information and equally cannot guarantee that what is shown on an abandonment plan actually exists in that form. The Authority's duty of care when producing mining reports is to ensure that the information given within the body of the report reflects the information held by the Authority as accurately as possible.

It follows, therefore, that a mining report may not necessarily reflect the true mining circumstances for a variety of reasons. These include:

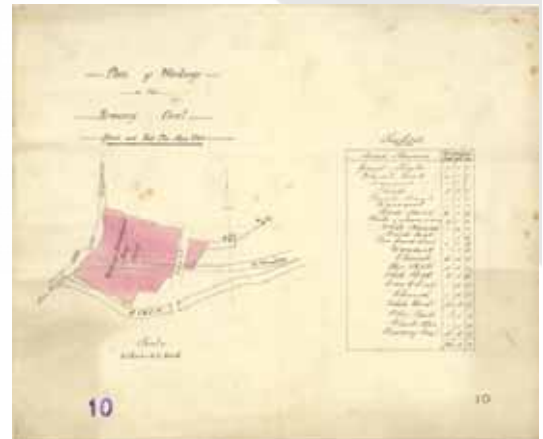
- The information and records in the Authority's possession are derived from a variety of sources and the source information varies greatly in age. Many of the abandonment plans date back to, and before, the 19th Century. They have been produced on different and outdated scales to varying standards.
- It is known that there are many unrecorded mine workings, some of which only come to light following an incident such as a ground collapse or an escape of gas.
- New information comes into the Authority's possession from a variety of sources. That new information does, on occasion, challenge the accuracy of what is contained in earlier available records.

- The information held may not be complete.
- Correlation of old mining plans with more modern plans showing the surface can be difficult. The old plans may not include all mining information and any surface features which are shown do not always match exactly with modern surface layouts.
- Some of the plans have deteriorated with age and use so that localised features may no longer be clearly legible.

Although the information supplied by others and held by the Authority is not always complete, accurate or representative of what exists on site, qualified mining surveyors are employed to interpret this information and give the best possible technical interpretation of the data. There are instances, however, where assumptions have to be made in respect of the available information, particularly when it is incomplete, to enable mining reports to be produced. These normally relate to the depth or date of coal workings, the number and inclination of coal seams worked and the names of those seams.

On those occasions where there is reasonable doubt on the validity of the information contained within a mining report, the Authority will try to assist in determining the true picture. This, however, does not extend to carrying out widespread site investigation.

A Trade and Industry Select Committee which met in 1996 investigated this issue and in response the Government ratified this approach.



## 5. Mining Reports - Facts and Perceptions

The vast majority of mining reports which are produced each year are despatched and used in the conveyancing process without any further reference to the Authority. Some result in minor queries and these are usually dealt with by a simple explanation over the telephone or by letter. Most reports do not give rise to any concerns from the public whatsoever.

Most queries which are made relate to references in reports about shallow mine workings, subsidence claims, licensed coal mining areas, gas emissions, geological information or mine entries. The most common query is in respect of mine entries.

There are approximately 168,000 recorded coal mine entries throughout Great Britain. Most of these are now abandoned and are not visible at the surface. Some have been backfilled and treated although, in the majority of cases, the treatment

carried out at the time of abandonment is unknown. Problems with the movement of old shafts, particularly the settlement of fill material, may result in damage to property but such occurrences are rare. In a typical year across the entire country, there are around 100 events related to mineshafts and only a handful of these involve structural damage to property.

If new coal mining subsidence damage does occur to property (including those rare occasions of ground movement over or near to coal mine entries), the Coal Authority or licensed mine operators are responsible for remedying the damage.

Owners/occupiers, or their professional representatives, should immediately report new damage to the Coal Authority in case urgent attention is needed and to also find out how to make a claim. The remedies available to claimants are contained in the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 and supporting legislation.

The DTI Booklet entitled "A Guide to Claimants Rights" explains the claim process and copies can be obtained from the Coal Authority. For a downloadable copy please visit [www.coal.gov.uk/services](http://www.coal.gov.uk/services).

In 1991, the question in the Law Society CON29M Mining Report Request Form (England and Wales) about mine entries was changed to enquire about all mine entries within the boundary of a property or within 20 metres of the boundary. Prior to that time the provision of information about mine entries was not consistent throughout the country. The same 20 metre search area exists in Scotland by arrangement with the Law Society of Scotland.



In some locations, particularly those with a high incidence of mine entries and where the property market is depressed for other reasons, some owners have experienced reductions in the values of their properties when mining reports refer to the presence of mine entries. Clearly, the adoption of the 20 metre search area did not increase the instability risk to property but what does seem to have changed in respect of certain properties in these locations is the requirements of lenders and insurers and the perceptions of prospective purchasers when mine entries are reported.

As recommended by the Trade and Industry Select Committee, and at the request of the Law Society, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors reviewed the "20 metre rule" used in coal mining searches. Consultation was carried out with Local Authorities in coal mining areas, government agencies and other professional bodies. The recommendation was that the 20 metre rule be retained.

## **6. Purposes of a Mining Report**

The main purpose of a mining report is to provide information on the past, present and possible future coal mining and brine extraction activities. However, it should not be assumed that the purchase of a mining report is the end to the investigation process concerning coal mine workings. Depending on exactly what is reported within the mining search, further consultation may be required between clients and their advisors, including experienced mine surveyors or mining/structural engineers who can advise on what, if any, further surveys or investigations should be made.

Seeking professional advice is particularly important if a mine entry is recorded within a mining report. The reported position of that mine entry should not be assumed to be precise. Further investigation may be required to determine its exact location and condition.

### **Further information:**

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The Coal Authority at [www.coal.gov.uk](http://www.coal.gov.uk)

The Coal Authority Mining Reports and Ground Stability Reports Service  
Website at: [www.groundstability.com](http://www.groundstability.com)

Scanning Information at: [www.coal.gov.uk/services/scanning](http://www.coal.gov.uk/services/scanning)