

# “The King of the Coal Trade” John Buddle



Local People : Local Heroes





## John Buddle: Local hero?

The name of John Buddle is a familiar one in the west end of Newcastle. There is Buddle Road, an established thoroughfare which runs through South Benwell parallel to Scotswood Road, and the John Buddle Work Village, a recent development of small workshops and office units adjacent to what remains of a large housing estate bearing the Buddle name. The imposing neo-Norman St James' Church in Benwell contains a large bust and memorial plaque dedicated to John Buddle. He is buried in the churchyard in a vault designed by the eminent architect John Dobson, one of the men responsible for the 19th century re-development of Newcastle city centre including Grey Street and the Theatre Royal.



Buddle Road, Benwell

There are memories of Buddle in other areas too. Jarrow and Seaham both had streets named after Buddle, while Wallsend had schools and an arts centre bearing his name as well as a Buddle Street next to Segedunum Roman fort. Further afield, there was a Buddle pit in Cumbria, and the first steam locomotive to run in Canada was called the John Buddle. Why was Buddle so well known, and what is his connection with Benwell?

John Buddle was a self-made man without any formal education who became the leading mining engineer of his day. He was an entrepreneur who had a huge influence on the development of the northern coalfield in the first half of the 19th century. He made a major contribution to mine safety and is always pictured with a Davy lamp, which he helped to introduce into the northern coalfield. He was one of the first to understand the importance of good ventilation in mines and also campaigned for records to be kept of plans of old mine workings in order to prevent flooding. Buddle transformed the job of a colliery viewer from an overseer to the scientific and professional role of the modern mining engineer. He was also a mine owner in his own right. It is not surprising that he was known locally as the “King of the Coal Trade”.

Coal mining was not Buddle's only interest. He had a passion for ships and personally owned three of them. He built Seaham Harbour and established it as an important port in the first half of the 19th century. He was chairman of the company that built Tyne Dock at South Shields, advised the developers of Blyth and Warkworth harbours, and was involved in the Thames Archway Company which attempted to construct a tunnel under the River Thames from Limehouse to Rotherhithe. A seat on the Board of the Norwich Union Insurance Office was yet another example of Buddle's wide-ranging commercial interests.

When John Buddle died in 1843, his funeral procession was over a mile long and took over three hours to travel from his home in Wallsend to the burial place in Benwell. The number of mourners was so great that, according to a contemporary newspaper report, “so large a concourse of people was perhaps never before assembled in Newcastle on such a mournful occasion”. The long list of pall bearers and principal mourners included many of the most rich and powerful men in Newcastle, such as local councillor and wealthy corn merchant William Armstrong and his son, also William, who was just a few years away from setting up his great engineering works on the banks of the Tyne in Elswick.

Today few people remember who John Buddle was or why he was held in such high regard in his time. This booklet is an introduction to Buddle's life, and his significance for the North East and for coalmining and for Benwell in particular.

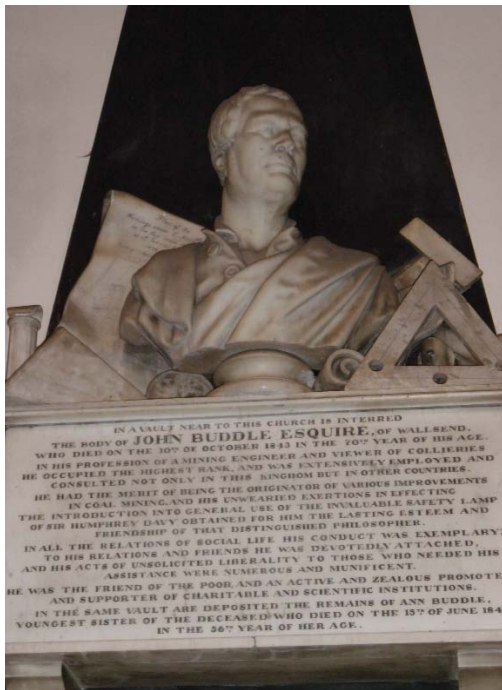
## Buddle's life

John Buddle was born on 15th September 1773 at Kyo near Tanfield. He was the only son and the fourth of six children born to John Buddle and Mary Reay. John Buddle Senior was a mathematician who worked as a school teacher at Chester-le-Street before becoming involved in mining. He gave his son a wide education, passing on to him a deep interest in mathematics and science. One of John's early notebooks survives in the Mining Institute in Newcastle containing notes on a wide range of scientific and geographical topics.

Buddle's father also gave him a practical education in mining. Much later in life, Buddle was to say that he had been “initiated into the mysteries of pit work when not quite six years old”. During the time the family lived at Kyo, Buddle's father was the viewer at Silvertops Bushblades Colliery, and later became manager of the Greenside pit near Ryton before moving to Wallsend Colliery in 1792.

In the same year, at the age of 19, John Buddle became the underviewer to his father. Sixteen years later, on his father's death, he became manager of Wallsend Colliery at the age of 33.

Buddle's activities in the mining industry were not restricted to the Wallsend Colliery. In 1801 he was appointed viewer of Benwell Colliery, and within two years he had taken his first step into mine ownership with the purchase of a thirteenth share in the colliery worth £2,700, becoming a director with a salary of £100 a year. His success at Benwell brought him new opportunities and within ten years he was managing large modern collieries all over the northern coalfield including Washington and North Hetton, and earning an estimated annual salary of more than £1,200



*Bust and memorial plaque of John Buddle sited in St James' Church, Benwell. The bust is made from a death mask. Buddle is depicted wearing a pit jacket. Displayed in front of him, from left to right, are a Davy lamp, a plan of Wallsend Colliery, a mining engineer's surveying tools, and a steel flint mill (precursor of a safety lamp).*

Perhaps the most important appointment to come Buddle's way arrived in 1819 when he was appointed as General Manager and Colliery Agent to Charles Stewart the third Marquis of Londonderry. At the age of 41 and in dire financial straits, Londonderry had married the 19 year old heiress Lady Frances Anne Vane Tempest, said to be the richest woman in Britain, and he was keen to exploit her Durham collieries to solve his financial problems. Buddle retained this post until his death. It was his relationship with Lord Londonderry that led to what was perhaps Buddle's greatest project, the development of a port at Seaham. This was intended to bypass the Tyne and Wear monopolies. The building of Seaham Harbour started in 1828 and occupied much of Buddle's attention for the next 15 years. Buddle's own ship, the Lord Seaham, took the first shipment of coal from the port. He was involved in every aspect of the development of the new town whose public buildings were designed by John Dobson. Buddle's central role is illustrated by the fact that, when his sister Ann died in 1841, Seaham went into mourning as the ships

dressed in black and the shops closed as a mark of respect. Buddle also managed Londonderry's estate properties and represented his collieries on the committee of North East coal owners which sought to regulate the quantity and price of coal on the London market.

Buddle still found time to develop his own business interests. He had shares in the Stella Coal Company as well as Heaton, Sheriff Hill, Backworth, Elswick and other collieries. Although he was mainly active in the Great North Coalfield, the records show that he took on work all over Britain, including commissions in Scotland for Lord Elgin, and Wales for Sir Josiah Guest, as well as advising on mining matters in Portugal, South America, Russia and Nova Scotia. Two of his latest colliery appointments were in 1837 when he became the owner of West Towneley Colliery and also the viewer to the Bishop of Durham - a post previously held by his father.

Father and son shared the same house in Wallsend from 1792 until Buddle Senior's death in 1806 after which it passed to his son who remained there for the rest of his life. His sister Ann was his lifelong companion and together they entertained local dignitaries and literary, scientific and musical guests. A contemporary visitor to the house remarked that

*"A man of his great reputation and wealth slept in a room carpetless and nearly bare of furniture, and showed that whatever fortunes he was instrumental in making for others, he cared little for luxury himself".*

This account is at odds with the fact that the household included at least five servants in 1841. Buddle also owned other property such as Pensher House on the River Wear, which was next to the offices for the Londonderry collieries and where his sister Mary Atkinson lived with her family.

Buddle enjoyed mixing with rich and influential people, and his social circle included several members of the nobility. Like many in high society at the time, Buddle had his portrait painted by Thomas Carrick. This was made into an engraving by MacInnes in 1838. The image was advertised for sale in the Newcastle Courant on 14th September 1838 at a price of 21 shillings (the equivalent of about £76 today) and again ten days after Buddle's death in 1843.

John Buddle's long and active working life came to an abrupt end in 1843 at the age of 70. After riding with Lord Londonderry in bad weather to inspect collieries, he became ill and died within a few days on the 10th October at Wallsend House. His estate was valued at £150,000 (about £12.5 million today). As Buddle had remained unmarried and had no direct descendants, the estate was bequeathed to his nephew Robert Thomas Atkinson who was to survive him by less than two years. Robert died at the age of 38 and is buried with his uncle and aunt in the same vault at St James' churchyard, Benwell.

# “The King of the Coal Trade”



The Buddle grave at St James', 2010. The vault was designed by John Dobson. The inscription is believed to have been added later.

## Buddle and coal mining

John Buddle is best known for his role in the mining industry, as the memorial plaque at St James' Church proclaims:

*"In his profession of a mining engineer and viewer of collieries he occupied the highest rank, and was extensively employed and consulted not only in this kingdom but in other countries. He had the merit of being the originator of various improvements in coal mining."*

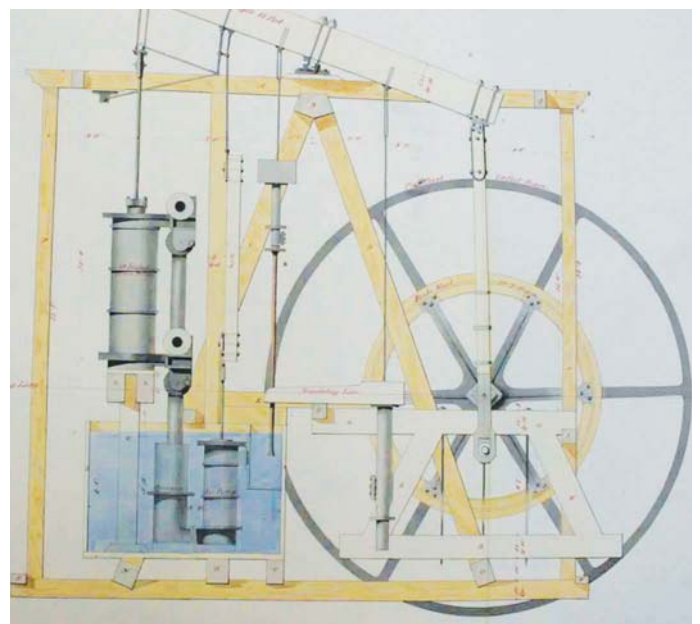
Buddle knew more than anyone else about the dangers of mining. His diaries record details of thousands of deaths in the pits from individual tragedies such as the death of a child run over on the pit railway to national disasters such as the explosions at Felling, Wallsend and Jarrow. When there was an explosion, Buddle would lead the rescue efforts and was often the first down the pit, earning the respect of the pitmen. He always wanted to know if such deaths could have been prevented, and played a major role in improving safety in the mining industry, ensuring that the Davy safety lamp was widely adopted, bringing about a number of important improvements in ventilation intended to reduce the risk of explosions, and striving to convince his contemporaries of the importance of preserving mining records.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the northern coalfield suffered a series of devastating explosions. Most pits were unsafe. The sinking of deeper pits and opening of new seams made gas a major problem. New seams were often full of fire-damp – explosive methane gas that could accumulate in poorly ventilated areas and be fired by the miners' candles or lamps. Buddle tried to reduce the risk of explosion by improving the ventilation and splitting the

air course through the workings, making sure that each part of the pit received fresh air, and introducing daily inspections of all the workings before work started. Between 1807 and 1810, he tried various ventilation solutions at Wallsend, Hebburn and Heaton collieries, including the use of a steam ventilator, the hot cylinder, and an air pump. He pioneered the use of barometers to assess the risk of gas.

Buddle was a founder member of the Society for the Prevention of Accidents in Coal Mines, set up in 1813 after the Felling Colliery disaster of May 1812. He wrote its first report in the form of an open letter. Included in the Society's initial membership was the Reverend John Hodgson, Vicar of Jarrow, who had conducted the funeral for the 92 victims of the disaster and worked strenuously to bring the problem of explosions in coal mines to the attention of the wider public. During Buddle's tenure as colliery viewer, several major accidents occurred. Between 1785 and 1838 there were nine explosions at the Wallsend Colliery alone, which claimed 207 lives. Buddle was aware however that many more lives were lost by single accidents caused by rock falls or underground railways than in these major disasters.

At that time most of the lighting within coal mines was either naked flames from candles or shards of light from the steel mill in which a flint was held against a rotating metal wheel. After the first, impractical, version of a safety lamp was produced by Dr Clanny, the main competitors were the Davy and Stephenson lamps. Controversy has continued ever since their 1815 debuts. John Buddle supported Sir Humphrey Davy, and trialed his lamp at Hebburn in 1816. He was vehemently critical of Stephenson's lamp which he considered to be unsafe because of the risk of the glass breaking.



Buddle's 1796 drawing for a steam engine. This engine was in use at the Charlotte pit.

Another major cause of coal mining accidents was flooding. Buddle had direct experience of this when the Heaton Colliery, of which he was part-owner, flooded on 3rd May 1815 when hewers broke through into old workings. The flood trapped 75 miners who survived for some time by eating horse flesh. It took seven months for the water to be drained, despite round-the-clock pumping. Buddle's diary contains a graphic account of the accident and a description of re-entering the workings on 6th January 1816. Buddle thought that such accidents, caused by breaking through to the flooded parts of nearby unused mines, were avoidable. He suggested that old mining maps should be kept in a central depository to prevent this occurrence. However, it took another hundred years and a major disaster at the Montagu Pit in Scotswood claiming 38 lives for Buddle's recommendations to be finally implemented.

One of Buddle's major contributions is to have brought rational scientific thinking to bear on issues such as mining accidents, which were widely thought at the time to be unavoidable acts of God. He promoted the study of science in general and in relation to mine managers in particular. When, in 1838, the prestigious British Association held its meeting in Newcastle, Buddle was called on to give a talk. His topic was the structure of the Newcastle coalfield, illustrated with working models and geological maps. It was so popular that it continued the following day.

As Buddle's reputation grew, he was often called upon to entertain visiting dignitaries, and liked to take visitors down the pit. In 1815 the Archdukes John and Lewis of Austria came to Newcastle and visited Wallsend, Percy Main and other collieries. A few days later the Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia visited Wallsend Colliery. He is reported to have refused an invitation to go down into the mine, saying

*"Ah! My God it is the mouth of Hell, none but a madman would venture into it."*

When the Duke of Wellington visited Lord Londonderry's collieries in 1827, including the new colliery at Pitington, Buddle was reported as having given a greetings address in which he described the miners as a "corps of Sappers and Miners attached to the noble House of Wynyard" whose objective was "to supply an article of domestic comfort to enable every Englishman to enjoy his own fireside".

Buddle's fame led to frequent requests to give evidence as an expert witness about the mining industry. In 1829 he warned a House of Lords inquiry about the danger of destructive actions by miners if further reductions in wages occurred. He returned in 1836, the year after the Wallsend disaster, to a House of Commons inquiry into accidents in the mining industry. He emphasised his practical experience, telling the committee that he knew his native county "better underground than above". Three years later, at the age of 66 years, he told a committee of the Institute

of Civil Engineers that he was spending eight hours a day underground.

Although passionately concerned about mine safety, Buddle often acted as a spokesman for Lord Londonderry, opposing several of the proposals in the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act, which set out to prevent boys under ten years from working in coal mines as well as introducing a system of inspection. Buddle argued that "mining should not dispense with the services of young boys" and represented the coal owners and managers as "decidedly of the opinion that if [boys] are not initiated before 13 or 14 - much less 16-18 - they never will become colliers". Buddle's own view was that children working in mines learned the skills necessary to survive, and that without child labour the "breed" of colliers would be weakened. The Mines and Collieries Act was passed, but it was to be another eight years before legislation was passed for the inspection of coal mines and 18 years before the age-limit for working in the mines was raised from ten to 12 years old.

Buddle had an interest in miners' welfare, supporting schools in mining communities for example, although he believed that practical training was more valuable than schooling. Many commentators said that he was popular with pitmen as he often paid higher wages and at the time of accidents would personally descend into the mine and give assistance. However he was an aggressive opponent of unions, operated a blacklist of union members, and did not hesitate to use the law against union men and their families. In 1825 he had men imprisoned and families evicted from their homes in Jarrow and Hebburn, and even took out injunctions against women at Jarrow who were abusing the outsiders brought in as blacklegs. In 1831 the feeling against him among striking miners was so strong that there was a riot outside his house and an effigy of him was burned in the pit yard.

The first half of the 19th century was characterised by disputes over pay and conditions of employment in the mining industry. A particular issue was the "bond". The miners of Northumberland and Durham, unlike other areas, were individually employed on a one year contract which was called the bond. The details of the bond were usually agreed by October but in 1810 it had been proposed that the binding date would be moved to December. The mine owners, with Buddle acting as their secretary, decided to change the date of the bond and reduce the rates of pay, and decreed that those who did not sign the bond would not work. The pitmen rejected the conditions of the new bond, with the result that more than 300 were imprisoned in Durham gaol, including 160 who were guarded by militia in the stable yard of the Bishop of Durham, himself a coal owner. The strike was resolved by the intervention of a magistrate.

During the strike of 1831-32, Buddle was the chief

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negotiator for the mine owners and was regarded as a hardliner. He tried to keep the owners together in a united front against the pitmen and even threatened to emigrate if they gave in. During the strike Buddle is said to have been "beset hooted and hissed" where ever he went. The miners were successful in 1831 when the unity of the employers crumbled, but in 1832 the coalowners stood firm and crushed the union. At the end of the strike, Buddle was said to have suffered a breakdown through stress and exhaustion.

## Man of many interests

John Buddle had a wide range of other industrial and commercial interests as well as his involvement in areas such as law, science and politics.

He made a notable contribution as a civil engineer, and was involved in several major projects including the Victoria Bridge which took the first main railway line from Newcastle to London over the River Wear. Built of stone from Buddle's own quarries, this was the largest single-span bridge in the world at that time. Buddle was also instrumental in persuading Durham University to establish a course in civil engineering and mining which was far ahead of its time and included languages and humanities in its curriculum as well as scientific and technical subjects.

Like many viewers, Buddle was deeply involved in the building of railways which were an essential part of the colliery infrastructure. In 1813 he experimented with steam locomotives on the Heaton, Washington, Lambton and Wallsend waggonways, in conjunction with his friend William Chapman. A replica of one of the Buddle-Chapman locomotives, "The Steam Elephant", can be seen at Beamish Museum.

During the Napoleonic wars, Buddle was the commander of Wallsend Rifle Corps of Volunteers. The Corps was established in 1803, and was equipped by the owner of Wallsend Colliery, William Russell. Within a year there were 145 members. It appears to have been well maintained and, from the Muster Rolls in 1812, still had 147 members. Buddle's interest in law and order is also illustrated by his long-standing membership of both the Greenside and the Wallsend, Willington and Howdon Associations for Prosecuting Felons. Towards the end of his life, in 1842, he achieved one of his lifelong ambitions when he was made a Magistrate through the influence of Lord Londonderry,

Buddle was an active member of Newcastle society, and held a number of important positions during his lifetime. In 1838 he was elected vice-president of the prestigious Literary and Philosophical Society, and also became vice-president of the North of England Fine Arts Society. In 1842 he was appointed as Steward for Northumberland at

the Newcastle Infirmary, a position which allowed him to appoint physicians to the hospital. One of his more interesting positions was Chairman of the committee for the new theatre in the 1830s, and he personally designed the heating system for the first Theatre Royal. Philanthropy was fashionable at this period among the well-to-do, and contemporary newspapers record donations by Buddle to good causes as diverse as the relief of poverty for seamen employed in the Northern Whale Fishery, the benefit of widows and orphans of mining disasters, and the erection of Penshaw monument in memory of his friend John George Lambton, first Earl of Durham.

Buddle had a lifelong passion for music. He was himself an accomplished musician, playing the cello regularly at concerts in Newcastle, and held regular recitals at his home in Wallsend.

## Buddle and Benwell

John Buddle was buried in Benwell in 1843 at St James'. He was buried in a vault designed by John Dobson, who was also the architect of St James' Church. Why did a man who was part of Tyneside's elite, and who lived several miles away in Wallsend, choose to be buried in Benwell?

Part of the explanation lies in the fact that Benwell at that period was rather a smart place to live. This was some 70 years before Benwell became part of the city of Newcastle. At that time it was a mainly rural area with a considerable number of large houses and mansions in their own

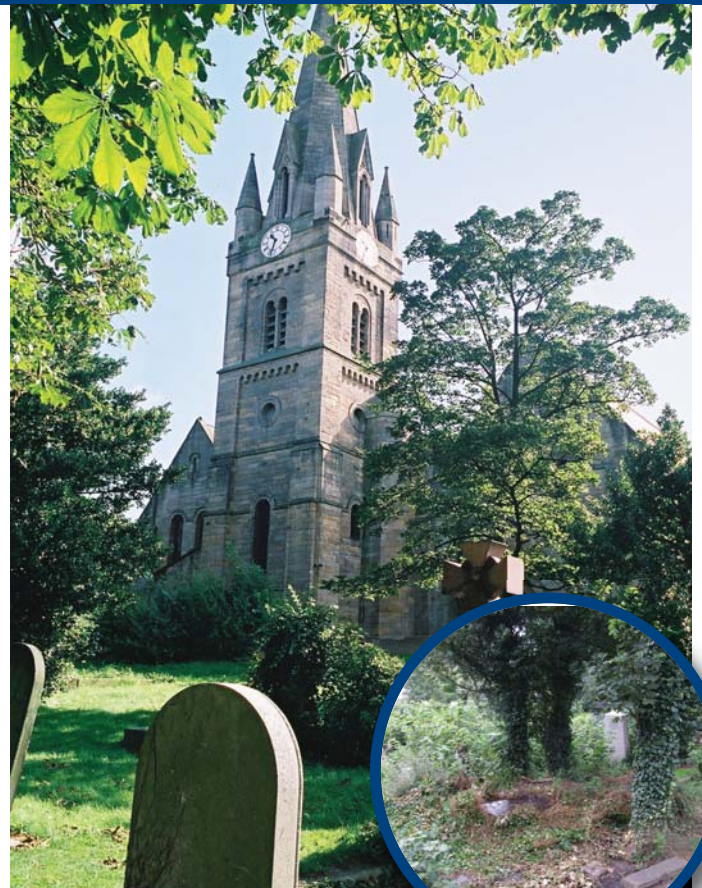


Extract from 1801 map showing coalmines in Newcastle with (inset) cross-section of strata at Benwell showing the High Main coal seam outcropping at or near St James'.

grounds. Some of the richest and most powerful families on Tyneside lived here, including bankers, industrialists, merchants and mine owners. St James' Church was built for these families as a "chapel of ease" for those parishioners of St John's Church in the city who lived to the west and found it inconvenient to travel into town on a Sunday. Buddle knew these people socially and through business.

Another factor was that Buddle himself, although he lived in Wallsend, did not worship there. Although he sometimes attended Church of England services because he liked the music, he was in fact a Unitarian, belonging to the congregation of the Reverend William Turner at Hanover Square. Buddle had helped to found St James' Church only a decade before his death, donating land for the building, graveyard and vicarage. For Buddle, giving money to an Anglican church (he gave money and land to other churches too, paying for the erection of a gallery for a church in Wallsend, for example) was perhaps more of a social act than a religious one. Choosing to be buried in land that he himself had donated as an act of philanthropy has a neat symbolism.

But the key reason for choosing Benwell as his last resting place was probably its coal. The west end is where coal mining on Tyneside began, because this is where the coal seams come close to the surface on the steep riverbanks. The area is criss-crossed underground by extensive mine workings. Benwell Colliery was Buddle's first independent venture in 1801 at a time when his father was still in control at Wallsend. Benwell marked a change of status from employee to mine owner. It was also a clever investment, reflecting Buddle's ability to apply science and rational analysis to practical problems. At that date, the Charlotte Pit on Condercum Road was believed to be almost exhausted. Buddle, as a geologist, knew that good coal could be found far below the main seam. He took over the colliery and sank two new shafts – the Edward Pit to



*St James' Church with (inset) the Buddle grave, 2010.*

the north and the Beaumont Pit to the south - ensuring that Benwell Colliery continued to be hugely profitable for many years.

John Buddle spent his life working the High Main seam, the best coal seam in the northern coalfield and the source of the most valuable Wallsend coal. This seam outcrops at St James' Church, which may therefore be the only church in the world deliberately built on a coal seam. Buddle himself supervised the excavation of the vault where he was to be buried, with the result that the King of the Coal Trade was buried in the material to which he devoted

### Find out more about John Buddle

A longer account of Buddle's life and significance (John Buddle 1773-1843), including a bibliography of source material, can be found on the Mining Institute website, [www.mininginstitute.org.uk](http://www.mininginstitute.org.uk).

The collected papers of John Buddle are kept at the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1SE: 0191 233 2459

Newcastle newspapers of the period can be accessed at Newcastle City Library, New Bridge Street West: Tel 0191 277 4100

### Thanks

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### Front Cover Illustrations

Image of John Buddle

Edward Pit, c1820. This shaft, which was part of Benwell Colliery, was sunk in 1809. The other shafts were Charlotte and Beaumont.

# “The King of the Coal Trade”: John Buddle

When John Buddle died in 1843, his funeral procession was over a mile long and took over three hours to travel from his home in Wallsend to the burial place in Benwell. Today few people remember who John Buddle was or why he was held in such high regard in his time. This booklet is an introduction to Buddle’s life and his enormous significance to the coal mining industry in the north east and nationally.

“We are delighted to have assisted with this project about the life and work of John Buddle, one of the first great mining viewers and a man whose diligent recording of his work, and that of the miners of the day and the innovations being introduced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries paved the way for the science of mining to be advanced.”

*North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers*

## St James’ Heritage and Environment Group

St James’ Heritage and Environment Group is an independent voluntary organisation set up in 2010 to support the restoration and improvement of St James’ Church building and churchyard. The group is currently involved in a major project to map and research the graveyard, and has developed a data-base of the graves and burials at St James’ as a resource for people interested in researching family or local history. The group welcomes new members, financial donations, and also volunteers to support its work.

The group runs events and activities intended to explore and celebrate the history of the west end of Newcastle. This booklet is the first in a planned series of local history publications focusing on “Local People: Local Heroes”.

Contact: St James’ Heritage and Environment Group, c/o Cornerstone, 64 Armstrong Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 7TU, or email the Secretary at [judith.green@unn.ac.uk](mailto:judith.green@unn.ac.uk)



*Members of the St James’ Heritage and Environment Group pictured at the Buddle grave just after its “rediscovery” in 2010.*

## The Mining Institute

The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers (known locally as the Mining Institute) was founded in 1852 to improve the art and science of coal mining by a group of colliery viewers (or engineers) who were dedicated to improving safety in the coal mines. These men were at the very forefront of industrial and transport science and geology.

Today the Mining Institute houses the world’s largest mining library and globally important archives relating to the history of mining. Amongst these are John Buddle’s papers. The library is located in Neville Hall next to Newcastle Central Station, and is open to the public every weekday.

Contact: North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1SE

Tel: 0191 233 2459 [www.mininginstitute.org.uk](http://www.mininginstitute.org.uk)

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