

The William 'Billy' Pit

This is the site of the 'Billy' Pit. This pit was the first to be sunk in South Moor. Work began on the shaft in 1839 and the first coal was brought to the surface on 25 July 1841. The sinkers had to mine down to a depth of 461 feet (140.5 metres) in order to reach the Hutton coal seam.

William Pit was also known as 'West Craghead Pit' and the 'New South Moor Colliery'. It is thought that the pit was eventually named 'William' after William Hedley, who was one of the partners in the original company that sunk the pit, Bell and Partners. Hedley was to dominate this partnership and eventually take over the running of the South Moor mines.

The sinking of the Louisa Pit to the north in 1864 made William Pit redundant and so it was mothballed. The William reopened in 1889 after refurbishment. It is said that the pit was rechristened the William, this time in honour of William Hedley's son, William. From then on, the pit was always known locally as Billy Pit.

Billy Pit had a vertical steam winder that lowered the miners' cage from the surface to the coal seam. The chuffing noise of this engine could be heard throughout the surrounding area for many years.

At the beginning of the First World War, Billy Pit was producing 164,534 tons (167,174 tonnes) of coal per year. By 1918, this figure had fallen to 127,030 tons (129,068 tonnes).

In October 1953 the South Moor Welfare Hall opened in the former colliery canteen at Billy Pit, and working was transferred to Louisa Pit.



The Billy Pit, photo courtesy of the National Coal Museum



William Hedley's engine 'Wylam Dilly' at Craghead colliery after restoration. (Left) Hedley's sons George and William are standing on the left. (Source: National Coal Museum)

William Hedley (1779-1843)

William Hedley was born on 13 July 1779 at Newburn, near Newcastle. Before the age of 22 he was appointed as a viewer at Walbottle Colliery. He continued to manage collieries in Northumberland and County Durham throughout his working career and his experience in the mining industry helped him to become a ground-breaking inventor.

His first steam locomotive, the 'Puffing Billy', built in 1813, can be seen in the Science Museum in London. There is also a replica at Beamish Museum. Inspired by its early success, Hedley quickly built a second engine, the 'Wylam Dilly', which operated in

Northumberland for almost 50 years. Thanks to the family partnership with William Bell, William Hedley's inventions and influence spread to the South Moor area. In 1862 Hedley's son moved 'Dilly' to Craghead colliery where it remained until 1879. 'Wylam Dilly' was restored in 1983 then presented to what is now the Royal Museum of Scotland.

Hedley died at Burnhospide Hall, near Lancheston, on 9 January 1843, and was buried at Newburn. He had four sons, Oswald Dodd Hedley, Thomas Hedley, William Hedley, and George Hedley, who carried on the colliery business as Thomas Hedley Brothers.

South Moor Heritage Trail

South Moor and Quaking Houses were typical colliery villages that developed before and just after the First World War, around four collieries of William Hedley's South Moor Colliery Company.

South Moor Heritage trail is a five mile circular walk around key eight heritage sites of South Moor and Quaking Houses that existed during or soon after the First World War. Each site is marked by an interpretation board detailing the significance and heritage of the site. Each interpretation board is linked via a QR code to a South Moor heritage website providing further information about the history of the site. Rights of way between the eight sites along the trail are marked by 'way markers' to keep you on the right path.

Over two hundred miners from South Moor and Quaking Houses were killed in the First World War. Their names are engraved at the gates of the First World War Memorial Park. The Heritage Trail marks the former colliery houses in which they lived with a fallen soldier plaque - can you find them in the colliery terraces?

