

Coalfields Mining Heritage Project

A commemorative community engagement public art installation

About the artist:

Mark Burns Cassell is a ceramic artist and published writer with a broad range of experience in delivering arts education projects across the North of England.

Project Concept:

A full-sized sculpture of a miner will be produced using plaster, wire, and steel netting. The plaster will be painted black, significant of the deep coal seams running beneath the Coalfields area that have been mined for hundreds of years.

The miner will stand on a fabricated steel base, flame cut to the shape of a map of the Coalfields area, with the names of each of the known pits from the Coalfields area cut into the steel. A steel armature will rise from this base to secure the miner into position.

Engaging Coalfields communities in the production of the piece is central to reflecting the shared community heritage the sculpture represents. As part of this project, Mark will work with community groups across the local area, leading three workshops in each of the four wards. Overall Mark will work with around 200 individual participants in the production of this installation. Workshops will enable school groups and adult community groups in each ward to engage with the piece, bringing an inter-generational input to the project.

Workshops will consist of an overview of the history and significance of the mining heritage of the region, facilitating group discussions on this topic within the sessions. Participants will then each create a ceramic 'token' – these would have been issued to miners to hand over in return for a Davey Lamp at the lamp cabin. Each token that is created will be given a unique number, and the participant will push their thumb print into the back of the token they create; quite literally 'leaving their mark' on the piece, and representing the enormous importance of each brass token as a life-saver for each individual life: they were used to ensure all miners had safely returned from the pit at the end of their shift.

Once created, the tokens will be taken away and high-fired in the kiln. Each token will then be coated in metallic brass/copper paint. Tacks will be added to the back of the sculpture of the miner, where the tags will be placed in position.

The cost of the workshops and production of the miner will be around £4,000 which will be met from the current Celebrations and Heritage SIB project.

The January 2016 Place Board meeting will agree the final detail of the project including the geographical area to be covered and names of pits within the area. The Board will also review suggestions of who should be involved and provide contact details to the artist. An art workshop will be held for Area Committee members in January or February 2016, anyone wishing to participate should inform the Place Board Chair or Area Community Officer.