

## Activism linked to local industries

This leaflet looks at community activism linked to industry in Midlothian.

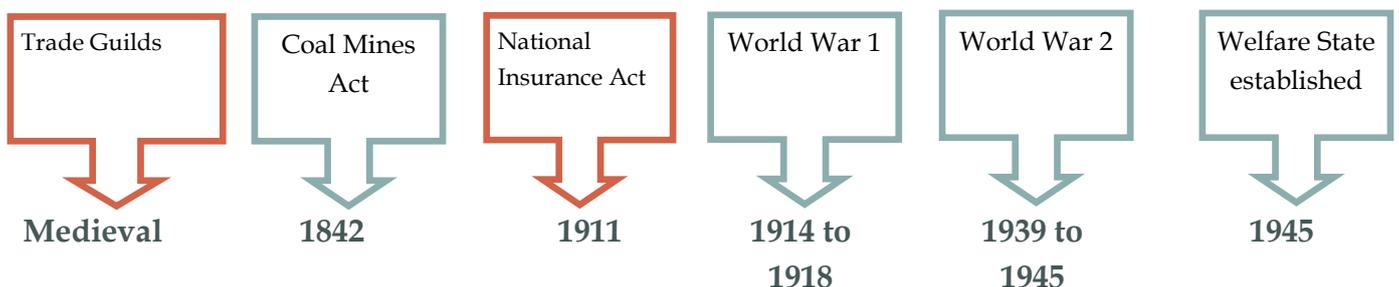
### Early days

Some of the earliest recorded community activism was when working men set up trade guilds and mutual benefit societies or “friendly societies” to support themselves and protect their interests. Such societies in Midlothian included ones set up for shepherds, masons, weavers, hammermen, butchers, colliers, carters, engine keepers, brick workers, and more.

These societies were vitally important in the absence of welfare benefits and the National Health Service. Of all these societies, the only one still surviving in Midlothian is the Freemasons. The lodge in Dalkeith is the oldest in Midlothian dating from at least 1724 (but probably 17th century).

Some of the trade guilds and benefit societies were set up to support employers and self-employed tradesmen. Other societies were set up by employed workers. They were the modern equivalent of many are trade unions.

### Coal mining



Mining was one of Midlothian’s main traditional industries and did a lot to shape modern Midlothian. Villages grew up around the pits and sons followed their fathers down them. Before the 1842 Coal Mines Act, campaigned for by mineworkers and their supporters, women and children worked underground. The hours were long, the work was dangerous, and wages for many years were low.

There were trades guilds and benefit societies set up around the coal industry in Midlothian at least as early as the 1730s. By the late 19th century it is known there were societies for colliers around Midlothian, including Arniston, Newbattle, and several around Newton. In the twentieth century there were a number of unions, the main one of which was the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers).

### Miners’ Strike 1984/85

There had been miners’ strikes before but this strike continued for a whole year from March 1984 to March 1985 during which time the men were not paid wages and many individuals and families struggled hugely.



Communities rallied round to help the striking miners and the unions set up strike centres which were used to coordinate picketing etc. but also for organising the provision of food and donated money to striking miners and their families. There was a Regional Strike Centre in Dalkeith and others throughout Midlothian.

A number of local ex-miners who were active in the strike went on to become heavily involved in community councils and in local and national politics, including a number of past and present Midlothian Councillors and David Hamilton, MP.

©National Mining Museum

Some also got involved in local organisations and McSence (Mayfield Community Self-Employed Collective Exercise) was set up in 1988 as a response by the community of Mayfield to the closure of pits and factories. It is now very important for the provision of training and jobs, meeting spaces, and grants to local groups.

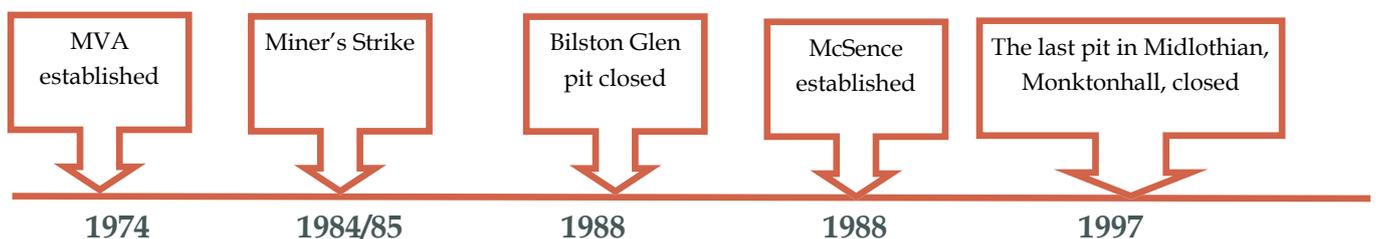
Since the last deep pit closed in 1997 one of the main signs that there were mines in the community is the existence of miners welfare societies and social clubs. There are still active miners welfares in Bilston; Dalkeith; Danderhall & Newton; Easthouses; Armiston; Loanhead; and Penicuik (Shottstown). There was also, until recently, a miners welfare club in Roslin, and the Cousland Village Hall was originally built in the 1930s as a miner's institute and as a billiards and

reading room for the miners. Most of the miners welfares now are still very important to the local communities they serve. Miners welfares are linked in with CISWO (the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation) which is a National Charity that has a focus on delivering community and personal welfare services within mining and former mining communities.



Cousland Village Hall

In addition to activism on wages and conditions etc., many social activities grew up in mining communities, for example, brass bands, football clubs etc. Activities based round today's miners welfares in Midlothian include bowling clubs; football teams; lunch clubs for older people; youth clubs and meeting spaces for local groups and classes. The Monktonhall Colliery First Aid Company still meets, based at Gorebridge Primary School.



## Other industries

In the past there was much more heavy industry in Midlothian than there is today, including paper mills; glass production; carpet factories and engineering.

Co-operative societies were set up to provide members with affordable good quality food. Two such societies in Midlothian were the Penicuik Co-operative Society (formed in 1860 from the idea of four paper mill workers) and the Dalkeith Co-op (which later merged with the Musselburgh and Fisherrow Co-op).



**Dalkeith Burgh Band, c 1952**

© Dalkeith History Society

As well as activism to improve working conditions, for example through trade unions, social activities grew up around some of the major employers, including brass and silver bands, sports clubs, and events, etc. Bands included the Dalkeith Burgh Band which was formed out of a band that had been linked to the Henry Widnell and Stuart Carpet Factory in Dalkeith (Westfield). In 1989 it merged to become the Dalkeith and Monktonhall Brass Band.

Other bands which still exist include the Penicuik Silver Band (est. 1835 with many paper mill workers); the MacTaggart Scott Loanhead Band which was established as an engineering works band in 1943 (following the

disbandment of earlier bands during the two World Wars); and the Newtongrange Silver Band (est. 1892) which had strong links to the coal mining industry. Other societies based round industries included a railwayman's social club at Hardengreen, and a railway first aid society.

There is still a strong military presence at the Glencorse Barracks near Penicuik and there are a number of groups with links to the services, for example, various ex-servicemen's clubs and branches of Legion Scotland. A recent group set up with links to the military is the Lothian Veterans Centre (previously the Mark Wright Centre) set up to support local ex-servicemen and women.



**Penicuik Instrumental Band – 1899**

© Penicuik Silver Band

## Present day

Most of Midlothian's heavy industry closed down in the 20th century and many of the towns and villages serve at least partly as dormitory settlements for Edinburgh. According to the "Profile of Midlothian 2014" the main employers in Midlothian in 2014 were the public sector; retail; engineering and research (mostly at the Bush, Roslin). There are also many smaller employers including increasing numbers of innovative start-ups.

There are less obvious connections to current local industries than there were when there was heavy industry. However, there are still many local people involved in trade unions, for example, Unison Midlothian, Unite the Union and Midlothian Council have an agreement to promote Lifelong Learning in the workplace.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) was formed in 1903 to open up education for working people and continues to have members from Midlothian.

In addition, some employees hold fundraising events for good causes, and some employers offer opportunities to get involved with volunteering days.

As in many areas where there was heavy industry, there remains a proud tradition of children's gala days. These continue to be organised by local residents and are hugely popular in the local communities. The oldest is the Loanhead Children's Gala Day which was established in 1903.

In a number of communities where industries have closed, community development trusts have been set up to regenerate the local communities and increase links between local people.

## References

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- Dean Tavern website – <http://www.deantavern.com/>
- Profile of Midlothian 2014 – [www.midlothian.gov.uk](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk)

### Funding

Funding for this project was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

It is proposed that when the project is complete, all the materials are donated to the new Dalkeith Museum located in the Corn Exchange.

