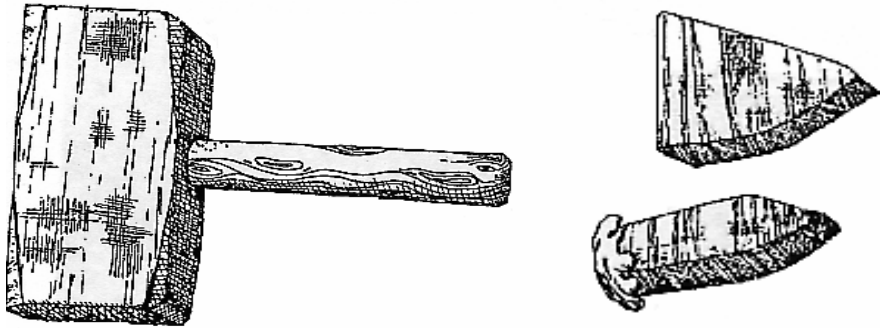


EARLY MINING

Getting out the coal

The first miners had only simple hand tools to work with underground. They 'hewed', or cut out, the bottom of a coal seam with a pick. They used a heavy hammer to knock in iron or stone wedges to break off great lumps of coal. The hammer had a large block head and was called a mell. The hammer had a large block head and was called a mell.

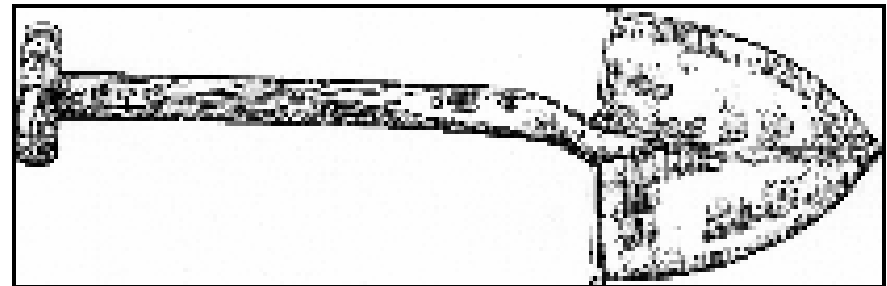


A mell and wedges

The seams of coal were usually very narrow. Miners often used their tools lying down on their side on a cold wet floor. Short wooden props held up the roof. The only light was from a tiny lamp. The lamp burned tallow or animal fat through a wick and the flame was smoky and smelt bad.



A coal miner lying on his side in a narrow seam to under-cut the coal with his pick. His lamp is hanging on a hook on the wall.



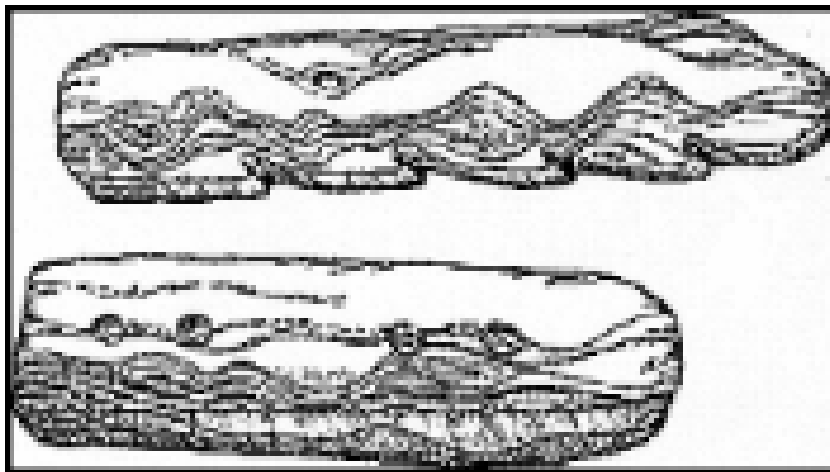
A shovel, used to put coal into containers at the coalface

EARLY MINING

Once the coal was cut it was moved to the surface. 'Putters' shovelled up the coal and put it into a container to be carried away. These containers could be baskets, wooden buckets, or leather sacks.

Sometimes 'bearers' carried the containers up steep flights of stairs or ladders all the way to the surface. These 'bearers' were often women and children. In some mines the coal was emptied into a larger container, called a 'kibble', which was wound up a shaft at the end of a rope.

A miner was paid for how much coal he managed to get to the surface. It was usually members of his own family who worked as his 'putters' and 'bearers'. A miner put his tally stick into each container of coal he filled to identify it as his. A tally stick was a carved and notched piece of wood that acted as the miner's signature in the days before most people could read and write.



A tally stick, used by a miner to identify the coal he had cut
