

News story: Coal Authority flying the flag for women's suffrage

The green, white and violet suffrage flag arrived at the Coal Authority's headquarters as part of a national flag relay, which has seen it touring government departments across Britain.

During its week-long stay with the organisation it featured at various events, such as at talks by industry experts and at national meetings in London attended by the Coal Authority's Chief Executive. It also accompanied female members of staff to various sites in former coalfields, such as at the Blackwell A-Winning mine water treatment scheme, the National Coal Mining Museum at Caphouse Colliery in West Yorkshire, and the Farmilo Primary School at Pleasley, which had carried out projects on the suffragette movement earlier in the year.

In July, children from Farmilo Primary School attended a picnic at St. Barnabas Church in the village as part of the re-enactment of a suffragette pilgrimage from Newcastle to London in 1917, when the suffragettes, including Millicent Fawcett, had stopped at the church.

On Thursday, the flag was at the centre of a pictorial exhibition featuring women in the coal mining industry at the Coal Authority's Mining Heritage Centre based in Nottinghamshire. Taken from the extensive archives, the pictures depict women working within the mining industry, ranging from coal picking on pit surfaces to female pithead baths and right through to the days of the annual Coal Queen contest in Blackpool.

Women worked underground in coal mines until the Coal Mines Act 1842, which banned all females and boys under 10 from working underground. However, in the Lancashire, Cumberland and West Yorkshire coalfields they were still allowed to work on the surface, carrying out general duties such as emptying tubs of coal and working on the screening plant.

The flag marks the 100 year anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which not only gave women over the age of 30 who owned property the right to vote in local and national elections, but also gave all men the right to vote for the first time too.

It began its country-wide journey in February and since then has been touring around various government departments and offices.

The Coal Authority employs 242 people and 40% are women working in a variety of roles, including engineers, geochemists, programme managers and hydrogeologist.

It appointed its first female Chief Executive, Lisa Pinney MBE, in May 2018.

She is delighted that the Coal Authority is hosting the flag:

We are really honoured to be part of the flag's journey, it's a great boost for us as an organisation because it not only commemorates all those women and men who fought for the right to vote but also highlights the massive role women have played within the mining industry. In the past they actually worked underground, then carried out many roles on the surface and in more recent years became a driving force within mining communities.

The flag also gives us the opportunity to celebrate the diversity and inclusion that can be found across Britain today, such as here at the Coal Authority where we have female workers right across the organisation, such as engineers, geochemists and project managers.