



Freeminers

Background

Since the 14th century freeminers have had the right to mine anywhere within the Forest of Dean. Under the terms of a royal decree, any man over 21 born within the hundred of St Briavels who has worked a year and a day underground can become a freeminer. The hundred of St Briavels includes the parishes of Coleford, Newland, Staunton, English Bicknor, Hewelsfield, St Briavels, Ruardean, Mitcheldean, Abenhall, Flaxley, Littledean and the East and West Dean areas.

They mined coal, iron and stone. The plot of land that a freeminer was given to mine was known as a gale. The Dean Forest Mines Act of 1838 allowed freeminers to sell their gales to industrial miners. The Act also required a formal register of freeminers to be kept. From 2010 women were allowed to become freeminers.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

D5947: Records of the Forestry Commission relating to Freeminers

Most of the records relating to freeminers were made by the Forestry Commission who look after the Forest of Dean. Records relating to the Forest of Dean are held at Gloucestershire Archives under the reference D5947.

The collection includes:

- Freeminers applications 1838-1956 (D5947/1/2, use the index to find the application number – D5947/1/3)
- Gale books 1811-1838 (D5947/3/1)
- Register of applications for gales 1838-1920 (D5947/3/3)
- Gale rent ledgers 1789-1841 (D5947/5/1)
- Coal and iron mine ledgers 1841-1938 (D5947/5/2)
- Plans of coal and iron workings

D9096: Forestry Commission

This collection contains other records that relate to the Forest of Dean. They were transferred from the National Archives in 2002. The collection includes:

- Correspondence and papers (D9096/F3)
- Free miners and Verderers' Courts records
- Maps and plans (D9096/F16) 1662-1935;
- Deputy Gaveler's Office papers (D9096/F26) 1706-1777, 1838-1946

How to Find the Records

To view a list of records in these collections please use our online catalogue, which can be found on our website: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives. Click on the link which says "online catalogue". Select "Search the Archives Only" and type the reference given above into the Finding Ref field. Click on "search" and then "overview of records" to view the list of items under that reference. Click on the blue number on the left hand side to view more information about each item.

D9096 is not listed in detail on the online catalogue but a printed list of the collection is available on site