

**Durham Miners Heritage Group  
Information and Activities Package**

# **Teaching Notes**

## **Other Uses for Coal than as a Fuel**

Coal has been used as a source of gas since the mid nineteenth century. The most modern method of mining coal is to turn it into gas *in situ*, actually within the coal seam itself, involving no workers actually below ground. (see Teaching Notes, *The Future of Coal Mining*).

Coal is one of a large group of mined materials formed from the remains of dead plants and animals, known collectively as 'fossil fuels'. However, the value of fossil fuels lies as much in their being a source of synthetic chemicals as in their potential for supplying mere heat on combustion, some of which are listed in the pupils' Unit, *What is Coal Used For?*

One might argue that coal is therefore too valuable to waste by burning. Indeed, with the current imperative to reduce the combustion of fossil fuels, a strong argument can be made for not using coal, in particular, as a primary source of energy.

However, there are vast problems in implementing such a change in the way industrialized countries function.

The first is the developed world's apparent insatiable market for energy.

The second is that to make any of the synthetic products listed above (plastics, paints and dyes, textiles and fabrics, pharmaceuticals and fertilizers, the list is almost endless) itself demands very high energy consumption. So to use coal for purposes other than energy production requires in itself very high energy consumption. Where is the energy to use coal for other purposes to come from if not from fossil fuels?