

INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY KEELMEN

Frequently, during the 18th century, the keelmen took part in strike action against their employers. In fact, there were nine strikes altogether.

In 1708 and 1710, their complaint was that the coal owners were limiting the amount of coal being sold and so there was less work for the keelmen. As a result, they were then paid on a fixed scale of wages according to how far they had to transport the coal.

During the winter of 1739, the Tyne had frozen over and in the early summer, corn prices rose sharply. The keelmen went on strike, protesting about the high cost of food, resulting in a riot on 26th June.

Later strikes and riots occurred because the coal owners tried to make the keelmen carry more than the official limit of eight chaldrons (21 tons) of coal.

As a result, the keelmen gained something of a reputation for violence and rough living.