



Vision Fountain cic

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Kings of The Underground by Vision Fountain

An exhibition of three-dimensional (3D) portraits of Welsh Miners called “Kings of the Underground” opens at the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea, Wales 07th November. The exhibition uses technology popular in gaming culture and virtual reality (VR) to create a cross generational project that youngsters can easily engage.

“Kings of the Underground” captures the memories and physiognomies (facial features) of the last generation of Welsh coalminers.

“Kings of the Underground” is produced by Vision Fountain, whose gaming culture to create a bridge between heritage, museums and young people.

Working across the south Wales coalfield, Vision Fountain captured forty colliers’ faces in 3D using a process called photogrammetry. Photogrammetry converts 2-dimensional images into 3D images.

As well as recording their facial features, the “last generation of Welsh coalminers” were also interviewed.

Audio-visual presentations mix the miners’ 3D portraits with snippets from their interviews and eight-foot-high printed 3D portraits form the heart of the exhibition at the National Waterfront Museum.

Prior to the exhibition the project engaged with primary schools in ex-coalmining communities in the valleys.

The technology Vision Fountain used in the outreach is popular amongst gamers and created immediate interest amongst the school children.

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A series of school workshops introduced 3D modeling and portraiture. The children were also given the opportunity to model their classmates and upload the results to 3D modeling platforms. Children also experienced a virtual reality Welsh drift mine.

After listening to the miners' recordings each school created a collage of a coal-miner. Seven large miners collages are part of the exhibition in the National Waterfront Museum where the children were invited to the opening.

Whilst the school's involvement was an integral part of the project, the need to capture, what will amount to be the last testimony of the "last generation of coalminers" was the initial driving force behind the project.

Richard Jones, founder and creative director at Vision Fountain, grew-up in a coal-mining community, but spent 25 years living in China and Japan, working in the media industry. Richard was struck how most remnants of the coal mining landscape he grew up with had been erased during his time away. That provided the initial impetus to preserve the faces and the memories of the last generation of coalminers before they were lost too.

Several Welsh coal-mining museums have partnered on the project during its production phase, lending experienced staff, know-how, networks and venues. The National Waterfront Museum, Big Pit National Museum, Rhondda Heritage Park and South Wales Miners Museum have been instrumental.

The long-term partner for the project is the National Museum of Wales' archive and Swansea University's South Wales Miners Library, who will store the recordings and the portraits for posterity, enabling future generations to listen-to and engage with their past.

The importance of the project was made more poignant with the passing of several of the miners as the project progressed. Around ten percent of the miners passed during the project's production.

Mellard Lloyd, was 95 years old when he sat down in the photogrammetry studio that was set-up in the Winding House Museum, Rhymney. Sadly, Mellard passed away just months after the recordings. Mellard was born in 1923 and entered the mining industry, to become a Blacksmith, a week after his 14th birthday.

"I was 14 on the Wednesday and I an appointment to see the engineer Mr. Hargreaves and he said, right, you can start Monday. I come home and I was crying to my mother. 'I can't start till next Monday.' He said.

Richard attended Mellard's funeral, which took place in a traditional Welsh chapel. "I was flabbergasted when the project was mentioned in the eulogy. That really hit home how important retaining these faces and recording are for generations of families and Welsh culture in general. Whilst using gaming technology, something that most kids are familiar with, seemed an obvious way to leverage them towards their heritage."



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Press Release from Museum of Wales:

<https://museum.wales/news/1296/Kings-of-the-Underground/>