

Youngs' Patent Oil Wick Lamp

by Dave Johnson

What exactly is the odd sounding occupation of coal getter? According to *The History, Topography, and Directory of the County Palatine of Durham* by Francis Whellan. Second edition published in 1894, "The actual coal getter is the one who is directly employed in digging and filling away the coal. This work while it lasts is of all the occupations in a coal-mine the most laborious. Whether the seam be so narrow that he can only creep into it on his hands and knees, or whether it be lofty enough for him to stand upright in, he is the responsible workman who loosens the coal from its bed. All the arrangements below ground are made to suit him; he is in fact the centre of the mining system. The getters are divided into what are called fore-shift and back-shift men. The former are usually roused by the caller at three in the morning, commence work at four, and leave off at eleven. The back-shift men start at ten, and cease work at four. All the men work in each shift one week alternately. For all the working places in a colliery "cavels" or lots are drawn as to which places the men are to work during the ensuing three months. This system prevents them from being subject to the caprice or favor of the overmen, and may account in some degree for the spirit of sturdy independence which so strongly characterizes the northern miner." The coal getter was the skilled miner, the most highly paid underground worker. I have also heard these individuals referred to as a faceman, hewer and coal digger.



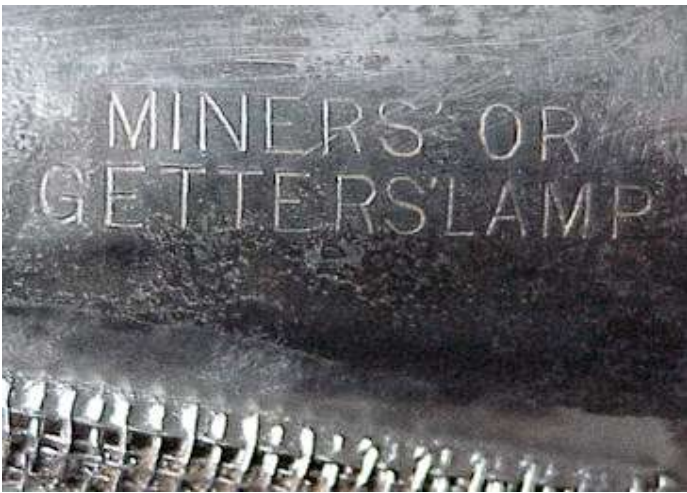
Few mining artifacts are actually marked with the word miners' and even fewer the unusual term getters'. The lamp shown here carries both terms. It is a Scottish-style oilwick cap lamp stamped YOUNG'S PATENT MINERS' OR GETTERS' LAMP. While the Scottish-style oilwick is a unique shape, this oilwick lamp is unique among Scottish-style lamps both for its stamping and for several physical attributes. Of the 71 Scottish-style oilwick cap lamps in my collection, this is the only steel one to have a copper wick tube. It is also the only one (steel brass or copper) to have holes in the wick tube, vent holes in the outer spout brace, holes around the wick tube where it pierces the outer spout brace and the hanging hook attached to a bracket made of fine wire mesh that is soldered to the front. The only function I see for this mesh is to act as a match striker. This is truly a unique little lamp.



Having tracked all known oilwick names for years, when I first saw this lamp listed on ebay I recognized the Youngs' Patent to be a new name. It is the only Scottish-style oilwick I have seen that makes any reference to a patent, either being patented or a patent date.

In the photos shown in the listing the Young's Patent stamping could be made out. However, I could see that there was a stamping on the other side of the lamp that the seller did not include in the listing and that was not legible in the photo. When asked about this, the seller could not see the second stamping.

It was not until I received the lamp that I was able to determine that it said Miners' or Getters' Lamp. The lamp was covered with a heavy coat of gold paint that was obviously added after the lamp was used (see before photos). When the paint was removed the two deep stampings were fully revealed. While obviously used, this lamp was not at all beat up. It stands 2 7/8" tall to the top of the dome lid.



The lamp as it appeared on eBay before removing old paint.