

Former miner forges new career with Linbrooke Services Ltd

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After 38 years as a coal miner, Sheldon Griffin feared his working life was over - but a new career with Linbrooke Services Ltd beckoned.

Telecoms, power, and signalling specialist [Linbrooke Services Ltd](#) is renowned for its commitment to people development. The Sheffield-headquartered business aims to help its employees grow professionally, creating a supportive environment in which they can gain new skills and reach their full potential.

Linbrooke's work with former miners - including telecoms engineer Sheldon Griffin - is testament to its people-first ethos. Sheldon joined Linbrooke in 2015, after pit closures brought his 38-year mining career to an end. Speaking to Rail Business Daily, he reflected on the experience of retraining for a new role in a challenging new industry - and the invaluable support he received from his new employer.

The last miners

Sheldon began his career in coal mining at just 17, applying to the local pit after leaving school. There, he found both camaraderie, and the opportunity to learn and progress.

“The comradeship you had with people who were down the pit was massive,” he said. “There was also the chance to progress through the industry and climb the ladder. I started right at the bottom, and went from making teas for the undermanagement to being what we call a command supervisor.”

As command supervisor at Kellingley Colliery, Sheldon oversaw £30 million worth of equipment, and up to 35 men on a single shift.

Kellingley later became the last deep coal mine in Britain – and, when it closed in 2015, he and his colleagues found themselves facing an uncertain future.

“You get caught in that cycle of thinking, ‘I’m not going to get a job, who’s going to want me at my age’,” he explained.

New opportunities

Sheldon and his colleague Gary Lane began looking for career opportunities that would allow them to make use of their impressive skillset. When a friend suggested that fibre splicing might be a good fit for the duo, they jumped at the chance to retrain with multidisciplinary engineering specialist Linbrooke.

With the help of government funding awarded to them after Kellingley Colliery closed, Sheldon and Gary set about training as telecoms engineers for the rail industry. The National Construction Training Services (NCTS) course proved challenging, but Sheldon threw himself into his studies.

“It was definitely a challenge, but you get out of anything what you put into it,” he explained. “You have to go in with an open mind, study, and put the effort in.”

A fresh start in the rail industry

After completing their retraining, Sheldon, Gary, and several former colleagues began work as telecoms engineers for Linbrooke. This involved installing and repairing fibreoptic lines across the country.

“There isn’t an average day – they’re all different,” Sheldon said. “We’ve recently been installing CCTV that will cover level crossings. We’ve put in the backbone, so that all the images can travel back to York ROC (Rail Operating Centre). Next week, though, we’ll be installing the fibre network for Hot Axel Box Detectors (HABD).”

While Sheldon enjoys this varied and challenging work, he has had to adjust to an entirely new environment.

“Down in the coal mine it was 32 degrees, and all I’d wear was a pair of shorts,” he explained. “Coming out

of the pit and working in a railway environment, I've had to get used to the cold and rain – but you just get on with it."



Sheldon became used to the 32 degree heat of a coal mine

The right attitude

The communication skills he honed as command supervisor at Kellingley Colliery have proved useful, enabling him to engage confidently with new teams and take ownership of projects.

"I used to give toolbox talks every day, so I was never daunted about talking to a gang of people who were just about to go onto the railway," he explained.

Sheldon's positive attitude and unshakable work ethic have also served him well, just as they did over 40 years ago when he began his mining career.

"I had to get myself up at 3.30 am, make my sandwiches, and get myself to work," he recalled. "Is it an attitude instilled in me by my parents, or did I get it through working down the pit? I often wonder."

Ultimately, Sheldon believes that, regardless of their professional background, job seekers with the right attitude can find success in a new career.

“People with a good attitude and work ethic come from all walks of life,” he added. “Linbrooke gave us the opportunity to prove ourselves, and we ran with that.”

Career highlights

This enthusiasm and commitment were rewarded when Linbrooke selected Sheldon to install a 432 ribbon fibre network between Manchester and York – a first for UK rail.

“Linbrooke won the contract to install the 432 ribbon fibre, and staff came down to the training centres to learn about how it was done,” he explained. “Because Gary and I showed real interest and enthusiasm, we were the first people chosen to install it on the railway. I was really proud of that.”

Looking to the future

Sheldon is proud of his professional achievements at Linbrooke, and plans to continue learning and progressing. He and colleague Gary recently undertook a Trackworks recertification course, and were commended for their knowledge, enthusiasm, and diligence.

“It was a pleasure to have Sheldon on the course, and for someone who came into the industry later, he had very good knowledge and understanding,” explained Trackworks trainer assessor Brian Hunter. “I talked him through the new rules and regulations, and he took them on board with a positive attitude. He was an excellent delegate.”

“I enjoy being given something to do that’s new and different,” Sheldon commented. “Then going with that, achieving something, and getting good, positive feedback.”

Reflecting on his own experiences, he had advice for anyone set to embark on a career in the rail industry.

“The first conversation I’d have with them is health and safety,” he said. “You’re going into a dangerous environment. I would instil in them that they need to listen to the COS (Controller of Site Safety), listen to any briefs given, follow the rules, and if they think anything is wrong, challenge it.

“Learning is also important. Whatever anybody gives you to do, do it. The more skills you learn, the better off you’ll be.”

While Sheldon will always be a miner at heart, he has found job satisfaction, camaraderie, and a sense of purpose at Linbrooke, and plans to continue working for as long as possible.

“I’m totally, 100% enjoying my job,” he concluded. “I enjoy what I do, and I enjoy the challenges it throws at you. Linbrooke deserve my loyalty as much as I deserve theirs.”

Linbrooke offers an excellent employee benefits plan, with training and development opportunities available for anyone looking to retrain or enhance their skills in the rail sector. Linbrooke currently has 30+ entry to senior level positions open. Find more information on their website: www.linbrooke.co.uk