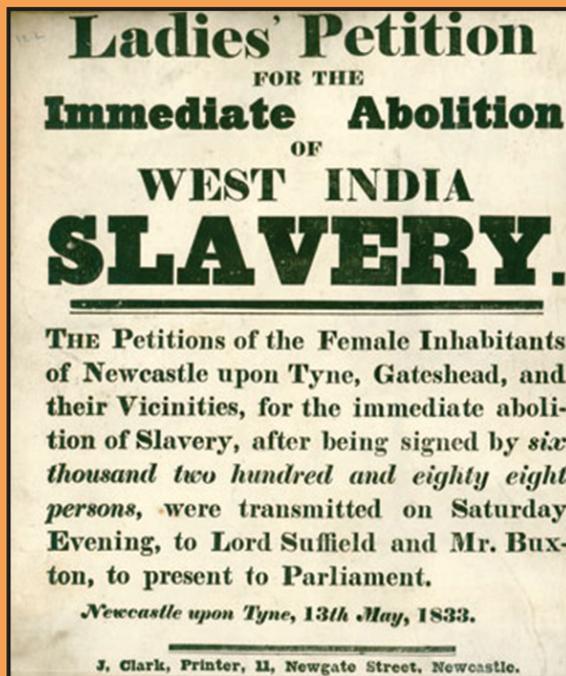


north east history

Volume 39 2008



Special Theme: **Slavery, abolition & north east England**

1819: Newcastle Town Moor Reform Demonstration

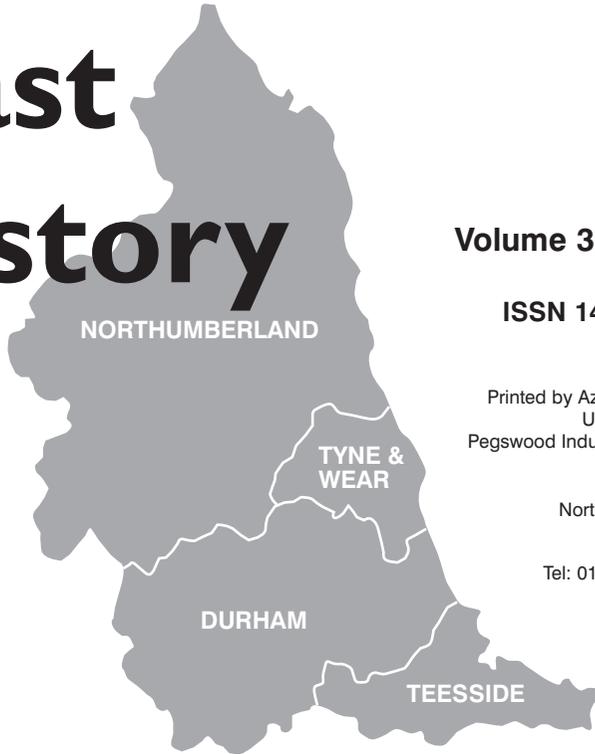
Chartism: Repression or restraint

19th Century Vaccination controversies plus oral history and reviews

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EDITORIAL

In 1807 the British government was at last pressured (after procrastinating for nearly two decades supposedly to protect British liberties from French revolutionaries) into declaring the prohibition of the slave trade which had flourished for nearly a century and a half – though this measure did not abolish slavery itself, which remained wholly legal in the British Empire (mostly the West Indies) until 1833 – and even then the slaves were not fully freed until five years later. The trade itself continued illegally of course, but at least this was a start.

Forced, or virtually forced, labour in various forms was intrinsic to the Industrial Revolution; slavery was the tip of the iceberg. Marx commented on the most advanced form of industrial production being tightly linked to the most primitive – Lancashire cotton mills with the slave plantations in the USA.

In commemoration of the bicentenary, North East History No. 39 features a selection of items dealing with various aspects of connections between the North East, the slave trade, slave production and the campaign for abolition. It is surprising to discover how significant both slave connections and the abolition campaign were to the North East, as had been generally assumed that, so far as slavery was concerned, the west coast and its ports were the only really important areas. This article provides the main section of the issue.

2008 also sees the 40th anniversary of the North East Labour History Society's foundation and we are publishing in this issue a special article by Stuart Howard to mark the event. The article is based on an interview with Archie Potts, a founder member of the Society and well known to our readers.

It is accompanied by articles dealing with labour struggles along with social and cultural issues in the region during the nineteenth century – principally an account of the strike action and radical agitation in Newcastle in 1819; the authorities response to Chartist activity later in the century; the issue of compulsory vaccination towards its end and a first-hand account of the Newcastle People's Theatre. Poetry, an innovation in North East History and is represented in this number with a striking poem by Keith Armstrong.

The next main section takes us into life histories in the twentieth century, two in the form of a lengthy interviews with labour activists John Toft and Dougie Malloch, another the other the first part of an engaging and thoughtful account by Rene Chaplin of her early life. The section following consists of a number of obituaries of recently deceased Society members and friends.

Reviews on a variety of themes complete the main part of this number, ranging from an analysis of Chartism to a striking and very innovative history of Sunderland in comic-book but very substantial format, and is followed by the usual reports and announcements which keep members and the public in touch with what the Society is doing.

North East History welcomes articles and short items submitted for publication and is particularly keen to encourage new writers on any relevant historical subject.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Keith Armstrong is a poet, freelance writer and community publisher living in Whitley Bay. He was awarded a doctorate at the University of Durham in 2007 for his work on Jack Common. An archive of Armstrong's literary output is available for consultation at Durham University's Palace Green Library.

Candice Brockwell, graduated from Newcastle University in 2007 and is currently completing a masters in British History there on Victorian Sexuality and the Beetons. Her article is adapted from the dissertation which won her the Sid Chaplin Prize.

John Charlton was born and educated in Newcastle. He taught history at Leeds Polytechnic and Leeds University for thirty years before returning 'home'. His published work includes books on Chartism and New Unionism. His new book, *The Slavery Business and North East England* will be published in October 2008. He is Secretary of the North East Labour History Society.

Sean Creighton is a freelance historian. He was Archival Mapping and Research Officer for the Tyne & Wear Remembering Slavery Project 2007. He is volunteer co-ordinator of the North East Slavery & Abolition Group. His historical involvements include labour, mutual and social action, UK Black & Asian, and culture. www.seancreighton.co.uk

Valerie Glass became interested in Caribbean History through teaching pupils of Caribbean origin in Primary Schools in Bedford, Leicester and Leeds. She retired from her position as Head Teacher in 2004 and now lives in North Northumberland. She is Secretary of the local branch of the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society.

Patricia Hix taught in Hampshire Primary Schools with special responsibility for Environmental Studies including History. She

became Hampshire's Multicultural Development Officer and then Intercultural Resources Officer. From 1991 until she retired, she was Slide Librarian and then Lecture Service Co-ordinator for the National Trust. Her special interests are social history and the history of race relations. She is currently secretary to both Fawdon and Coxlodge Local History Society and the Association of Northumberland History Societies. (At the time of writing,)

Tamsin Lilley was Curatorial Assistant for the Tyne and Wear Museums' Remembering Slavery 2007 programme. She is now working as Heritage Officer for the Greater Morpeth Development Trust, working with the local community to develop and promote Morpeth's heritage.

Peter Livsey was Senior Education Inspector - Secondary with Durham LEA. He is a member of the Literary and Philosophical Society and was a volunteer on projects commemorating the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

Ben James Nixon is a postgraduate at Newcastle University and a native of Wallsend. He is a self-proclaimed all-rounder with interests ranging from the Classical World to the Modern period. He looks forward to a restful break and seeing his work on Chartism in print.

Acknowledgements and permissions

Thanks to the Tyne and Wear Archives for use of the Women's Anti-slavery Petition (cover), the portrait of James Field Stanfield and the Milk Jug. To Local Studies, Newcastle Central Library for Radical Monday illustration, to Bryan Talbot for use of the *Alice in Sunderland* cover image.

SPECIAL THEME

Remembering Slavery: some north east connections

Introduction

*The ending of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807 was marked last year with a range of commemorative activities across the British Isles. As part of the north east's contribution four archives [Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, Robinson Library Special Collections and the Lit & Phil] made a successful Heritage Lottery bid to conduct a deep search of their records for evidence of connections between the area and the business of slavery and the campaigns to abolish it. A team of volunteers was assembled. Very few of them had previous experience of historical research but they applied themselves with enormous enthusiasm to the task. The four archives were extensively combed. Given the region's location and its economic history expectations were modest. However a formidable volume of material was found. It has all been recorded and is available on CD [**Tyne & Wear Remembering Slavery Resource Disc**] at each Library/Archive for the use of researchers.*

Four of the volunteer group and the project director, Sean Creighton have researched and written articles on aspects of the slavery business and abolition for the current North East History journal. Tamsin Lilley, a project officer herself with the T & W Archives, brings

north east history

together what is known about the part played by Sunderland people. Patricia Hix looks at the interesting connection between north eastern Quakers and North American Friends. Peter Livsey takes a close look at the role of the Lit and Phil and especially its book collection relating to slavery. Using one of several sets of relevant family letters at the Northumberland Record Office, Valerie Glass recounts the story of a family of modest means who went from the Morpeth area to Jamaica almost at the end of the slavery era. Sean Creighton makes a preliminary survey of the part played by black people in the 19th Century history of the region.

*Each of the writers regard their work as first stabs at their topics in the hope that their success might stimulate further research. The group keep in touch personally and through a regular Newsletter [**NESAG Newsletter**, available at T & W Archives web-site, www.tyneandweararchives.co.uk]. Anyone interested in participating will be most welcome and should contact the group at the Lit & Phil [NESAG@litandphil.org.uk]*

Black People and the North East

Sean Creighton

Introduction

When the Project began there was very little information available about black people in the North East before the 1860s. Africans had been coming to Britain from the late 15th Century. Their number increased as the colonies in America and the West Indies were developed exploiting the labour power of enslaved Africans. It became fashionable for the aristocracy, and even the moderately well-off, to own slave and free servants. Sometimes these servants were given, or purchased their freedom. By the second half of the 1780s there are estimated to have been at least 20,000 Africans and people of African descent in Britain. The evidence about those visiting, living, working, marrying and having children in the North East has been growing going back to at least the early 18th Century. Many were short term visitors, others stayed for longer. The evidence comes particularly from the parish records. Virtually all free blacks were members of the working-class, labouring alongside their

co-workers as servants, soldiers and sailors. Their leading advocate for freedom from the 1770s to the 1790s was Olaudah Equiano.

Oluadah Equiano in Newcastle

Following his successful anti-slavery tour around Scotland in the summer of 1792 Equiano arrived in Newcastle in early September.¹ He advertised his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative* in the local papers.² One of his biographers writes: 'At least some of his twenty-eight thousand potential buyers in Newcastle were already familiar with his narrative because it was available to them through a local circulating library. Perhaps because he did not have to work as hard as elsewhere to make himself known, he had the leisure to go '90 fathoms down St Anthony's Colliery, at Newcastle, under the river Tyne, some hundreds of yards on the Durham side.'³

Kidnapped in West Africa and sold in the slave market on Tobago, Equiano had a truly remarkable life, going on the same expedition to the Arctic as the young Horatio Nelson, and being able to buy his freedom. In the 1770s he had worked in London closely with Granville, a member of the Durham based Sharp family, in taking slave owners to Court to try to gain freedom for their slaves. He was the leading black abolitionist in Britain, and a member of the London Corresponding Society, one of the early artisan working class political reform organisations. His friend Thomas Hardy, Secretary of the Society, was tried and acquitted of treason. Equiano attended the trial, as did the pro-reform and abolition Northumberland MP Sir Charles Grey.⁴

By the time Equiano visited Newcastle, the town already had a very active Abolition Society. It had been set up in 1791. It had organised a large petition and helped to encourage other petitions in the towns and villages in Northumberland and County Durham. It had published its own version of the summary of the Parliamentary

report on the trade using an engraving by its supporter Thomas Bewick showing a kneeling slave with a plantation background.⁵ We do not know who Equiano met, but it is likely to have included Rev. William Turner, the Unitarian Chairman of the Society, leading Committee members, the Quakers, and supporters of the Corresponding Society movement. Turner may have shown him his school. Among the pupils were mixed race boys from the East Indies: William Robert Bulman, and Francis Prinsep Scott. William, the natural son of Job Bulman, an East India Company official, was described as, 'A young man of colour'. He went on to study medicine and died in the East Indies. Scott, the 'slightly coloured' son of Major Scott, became a major himself.⁶

As a Methodist Equiano may have visited local chapels or at least met some of the leading clergy. We have no evidence of him addressing a public meeting, but he may have addressed private meetings. He based himself at Robert Denton's bookshop, opposite the Turk's Head in Bigge Market. When he left he wrote to the local newspapers offering his 'warmest thanks of a heart growing with gratitude to you, for your fellow-feeling for the Africans and their cause. Having received marks of kindness, from you who have purchased my interesting narrative, particularly from George Johnson, Esq. of Byker, I am therefore happy that my narrative has afforded pleasure in the perusal; and heartily will all of you every blessing that this world can afford, and every fullness of joy which divine revelation has promised us in the next.'⁷ Johnson had subscribed for 100 copies. He was a colliery manager and owner who installed steam engines between 1796 and 1798.⁸ Equiano's visit probably contributed to the growth in support for the Newcastle Anti-Slavery Society.

He then went on to Durham in October and Stockton, en route to Hull. His English wife accompanied him. The sixth

edition of his book was published in January 1793 with letters of introduction from subscribers in Durham and Hull.

1715-1740s

The first reference to a black person in the region is from March 1715 when a negro named Wandoe was baptised at Hexham. The parish entry states he had been brought into the country by Captain Roger Carnaby. In his will dated 31 March, 1713, Carnaby left 10/- 'to my black boy Wandoe, my present man servant.' A Roger Carnaby was involved in importing slaves into America in 1703/4, including suppressing an on-board revolt.⁹ On 10 November 1723 Elizabeth, the daughter of Francis Sellar, Mr Chilton's 'Moor' was baptised. A Francis Sellar is buried in the churchyard of St Michael & All Angels Church in Houghton-le-Spring.¹⁰

In the 1740s Thomas Bardwell painted the Northumberland landowner Captain Robert Fenwick with his bride, Isabella Orde and her sister, with Norham Castle in the background. Isabella's father William had given the Castle as her dowry. The painting's significance is the portrayal of a black servant.¹¹

The 1760s and 1770s

There several examples of Africans in the region from the 1760s and 1770s. On April 21 1762 'A black boy from the Malabar coast, who was brought over in Admiral Pocock's fleet was baptised at St. Nicholas' church in Newcastle, by the name of Thomas Gateshead.'¹² Malabar was in India, so he could have been a dark-skinned Indian. However, it is also possible that he was African as there were many enslaved taken across to India.

John London was 'a negro boy' aged about 8 belonging to John Craster of Shoreswood baptised at Norham church on 15 September 1763.¹³ George Sylla was 'an African and servant to Mr

Ralph Foster, a merchant of Berwick. Baptised 1/3/1767'.¹⁴ John Crow was an 'adult black near 16 years old. Baptised 28/3/1768' A James Crow, servant of John Reavley, Chatton, was baptised on 17 January 1770. It is not clear whether the two Crows are related.¹⁵

Blackett Shafto, servant to William Shafto of Jamaica, was baptised in 1778.¹⁶ Charles Reed was the 15 year old negro son of Francis Reed of Virginia, a servant to Captain Charles Ogle. Charles was baptised on 17 April 1778 in Eglington's St. Maurice Church.¹⁷ Charles Ogle may have been visiting his relatives in Eglington from America. John Ogle (1649-1687) a Parliamentary supporter in the Civil War, had gone there aged 15 with Col. Richard Nicolls' force to capture New York and New Amstel from the Dutch in 1664. As deputy governor for the Duke of York, Nicolls renamed New Amstel as New-Castle after Newcastle-upon-Tyne.¹⁸

There will be others in the North East who did not get baptised, marry or die while in the region, but might have done so elsewhere in the country as they travelled around with their owners and employers. As is shown above little is known about those whose race was recorded in the parish registers. Surprisingly little is known even about someone portrayed in a famous painting like W.C. Irving's 'The Blaydon Races': the black boxer known as the 'Black Diamond' who lived in the village of Seaton Burn.¹⁹

American Independence and Bill Richmond

On the other hand as with Equiano other sources have enabled us to know a lot about some people. One of these is Bill Richmond. During 1777, while New York was held by British soldiers, the 14/15 year old Richmond beat three of them in succession in a tavern. He came under the patronage of General Percy, the son of the Duke of Northumberland, either as a result of these victories or because he was the son of Percy's washerwoman. In the same year Percy bought

him over to England.²⁰ It is likely that Richmond was with him when Percy came to Alnwick Castle in July.²¹ Percy sent him to school in Yorkshire and then into apprenticeship to a cabinet maker in York. He went on to be a bare-knuckle boxer, running a boxing academy for London society's elite, marrying an English woman and running the Horse and Dolphin pub in Leicester Square. He trained Tom Molineaux, another black American, who was defeated by the English champion Cribb in 1810 and 1811. Richmond 'was described as intelligent, communicative, humorous, and an excellent cricketer. He died at his home in London's Haymarket on 28 December 1829.

The Barretts of Jamaica

Slave owners in America and the West Indies often had children by slave women, producing mixed race children. One of the most powerful families in Jamaica was the Barretts. In 1794 or 1795 Edward Barrett and members of his family came for a visit to England, with the intention of leaving his grand daughter Elizabeth and her mixed-race ward Mary Trepsack in England after his return to Jamaica.²² In 1795 six black children of George Goodin Barrett, deceased, and Elissa Peters, one of the family's slaves, were sent over to the guardianship of John Graham-Clarke, the Newcastle businessman and Jamaica plantation owner. George Goodin had also granted their freedom. He left each of them two thousand Jamaican pounds. He wanted them educated in England in 'a moral manner at the charge of his Estate and at the discretion of their Guardians'. He also expressed his earnest wish that they should 'Not fix their abode in Jamaica but do settle and reside in such countries where those distinctions respecting colour (which the policy of the West Indies renders necessary) are not maintained.'²³

In addition to looking after these mixed-race children, in 1788 John Graham-Clarke, took under his wing, Edward Moulton

Barrett when he came from Jamaica prior to going to Trinity College, Oxford at the age of 18. Later he married Graham-Clarke's daughter Mary. They lived at Coxhoe Hall, Kelloe, in County Durham. Elizabeth Barrett joined them with Mary Trepsack.²⁴

Edward and Mary's daughter, the poetess Elizabeth Barrett (Browning), was born at Coxhoe in 1806. They moved to Hope End in Hertfordshire in 1809.²⁵ Mary became a close friend of the young Elizabeth. She financed the publication of Elizabeth's second work, *The Essay on Mind*, in 1826. Later she was a victim of deception.²⁶

The 'Negro Servant'

We know of another freed slave, William, who was baptised in America but lived for a while as servant of a naval Captain in a seaside parish in the North East. He told his story to Rev. Legh Richmond in a pamphlet published in Newcastle in either 1800 or 1809 called 'The Negro Servant'.

Me left father and mother one day at home to go and get shells by the seashore, and as I was stooping down to gather them up, some white sailors came out of a boat and took me away. Me never saw Father or Mother again—me was put into ship and brought to Jamaica and sold to a master who kept me in his house to serve him some years: when about three years ago, Captain W--- my master that spoke to you, bought me to be his servant on board his ship and he be good master: he gave me my liberty, and made me free , and me live with him ever since.

The Captain took him to America where he was baptised.²⁷ The abolitionist and Northumberland coal mine owner Elizabeth Wortley Montagu had a black servant called Tom.²⁸

William Fifefield

About two years after Equiano's visit William Fifefield arrived in Newcastle. He came from St. Kitts. As a millwright he was a skilled worker, valuable both on sugar plantations and in the agriculture and industry of the North East. He settled in Newcastle. He quickly joined the Newcastle Volunteers, formed in 1795 under the command of Col. Blakeney to protect the locality against invasion by the forces of the French Revolution. He continued to be active in the volunteer movement until at least 1825. For many years he ran a 'comfortable' sailing boat taking people from Newcastle to Shields. William married Margaret Wintrup, a Northumberland farmer's daughter, at St. Mary's, Gateshead in 1803. They had two children, both baptised at St. Nicholas, Newcastle, and lived in Bailiffgate, near the Castle. He died on 18 January 1834, aged 65, and was buried at St. John's Church, Newcastle. His son, William Thomas Fifefield, became a hairdresser, with a shop in the Groat Market. He married Mary Ann Sessford whose father was a Groat Market watchmaker.²⁹

At some stage John Bowes, the 10th Earl of Strathmore (1769-1820) at Gibside in County Durham took on a negro servant called William Johnson. They must have fallen out because on 10 December 1810 a request was made for charity for him.³⁰

Afro West Indians in the British Armed Forces

Many Afro West Indians joined the British armed forces. When their units were stationed in Britain they moved around the country staying for varying lengths of times in different localities. In 1824/5 the 1st King's Dragoon Guards were in Newcastle ready to deal with any rioting. Among them was Lovelace Overton, a free born Barbadian and a member of the Royal Clarence Lodge of freemasons. He appears in a painting by H. P. Parker depicting

them moving their baggage train near St Nicholas's Church. A veteran of Waterloo he had been arrested and accused of trying to foment a slave rebellion when he visited Barbados in 1817, and was refused admittance of freemasons' lodges on the island when he visited there again in 1823. He was pensioned off due to ill health in December 1828.³¹

Another soldier pensioned off from the the Queen's Bays (2nd Queen's Dragoon Guards) while stationed in Darlington was 'Black Tommy' Crawford. He was described as 'an inoffensive, industrious man, and increased his means of maintenance by hard work as a bricklayer's labourer.' He was so grief-stricken by the death of his thirteen year old son in 1830, that he died a few months later.³²

Because of its role as a major port area people living close to the Tyne would have regularly seen black sailors, sometimes from Royal Navy ships, but mostly on merchant ships. In July 1831 a black Royal Navy sailor, Africanus Maxwell, died after falling or being thrown from a quay in North Shields, while out drinking with two fellow sailors from his ship the HMS *Orestes*. The inquest and their trial for murder were fully covered in the *Tyne Mercury*. The men were acquitted.³³

African-Americans On Tyneside

Theatre flourished in Newcastle and Sunderland. The Newcastle Theatre, for example, had staged plays on themes of slavery and the West Indies in 1792. In 1827 Ira Aldridge, a black American actor, who specialised in playing Shakespeare's 'Othello' came to Newcastle and Sunderland to perform. He played to packed houses, was well received and received high praise.³⁴

Mary Ann Mackham arrived in North Shields in 1831 or 1832, having escaped from slavery in Richmond, Virginia. She became servant to various members of the Spence family until she married a local man, James Blyth, in 1841, when she was aged about 35. They lived in various houses on Howard Street. He was a ropemaker, then a bankers' porter (possibly for the Spences' bank). They appear not to have had any children. By 1881 she was a widow living in Nelson Street, North Shields. By 1891 she was living with what appear to be relatives of James in South Benwell, Newcastle. She died in 1893 and was buried in Preston Cemetery, North Shields.³⁵

Mary Mackham

Mary's long life spanned across the period from the emancipation on slaves in the West Indies in 1838, across the period of the campaign for and final emancipation of American slaves at the end of the Civil War in 1865, through the period of the growth in the British Empire especially the conquest of large parts of Africa. For black American abolitionists the fight was not just for emancipation but also against racism and for civil rights. Racism had also sat uncomfortably along side abolition solidarity in Britain.

Mary may well have met the many Afro-American abolition campaigners who received a welcome on Tyneside, like Dr James Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet and his family, Charles Lennox Remond, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and the Crafts.³⁶ As a child Robert Spence Watson 'was already familiar at first hand with the hard lot of the American slave, for his father's roof had sheltered as honoured guests well-known fugitives' including some of the forenamed, together with well-known white abolitionists.³⁷ That solidarity included the purchase of freedom for Frederick Douglass and Wells Brown organised by the Quaker Richardsons.³⁸

Mary may have been in the audience watching black entertainers on the area's stages from the 1860s.³⁹ In the 1880s she may have heard about Celestine Edwards, the black Christian 'anti-racist' who lived in Sunderland, and Arthur Wharton, the black athlete and footballer with Darlington.⁴⁰

Conclusion

It was the English who introduced slavery into what their West Indies and American colonies. Racism developed alongside it, and increased once the British began to take control of large parts of Africa in the last decades of the 19th Century. Most people of African background came to Britain because of the enslavement of millions. The list of black people coming to the North East in various capacities continued into and through the 20th Century.⁴¹ When the Yemenis were victims of the race riot in South Shields in 1919, so were Africans, Afro West Indians and Afro-Americans in other ports.⁴²

For post emancipation Afro-American sons and daughters the experience of slavery was part of their parents' experience, and racism and lack of civil rights part of their own. This helped to motivate many into political action. The politics of one of these, Paul Robeson, the left-wing singer and actor, was particularly shaped by his experiences working and living in Britain. He was well received in Newcastle in the 1930s and 1958.⁴³ Like the black presence in the North East the interaction of racism and the fight against it has been a continuous process up to the present day. While the present day black population in the region is small compared with some parts of the country, they make a significant contribution to its rich diversity. The glimpse of black people's lives in this article lays the foundation for a more in-depth story to be researched and shared widely.

- ¹ Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African*, 1789. This autobiography was published in several editions with the support of subscribers, including several in the North East after his visit in 1792. The text is available in several modern printings and on a number of websites.
- ² *Newcastle Chronicle, Newcastle Advertiser & Newcastle Courant*. 15 September 1792. Thanks to Peter Livsey, Project volunteer, and Ruth Blower, student at Newcastle-upon-Tyne University.
- ³ Vincent Caretta. *Equiano The African. Biography of a Self-Made Man*. University of Georgia Press. 2005. p. 354. The Circulating Library was R. Fisher's.
- ⁴ Grey wrote about the trial to his wife Mary. E A Smith. *Lord Grey 1764-1845*. Allan Sutton Publishing. 1990. p. 59.
- ⁵ Tyne & Wear Archives. DX 112/1. Newcastle Society for promoting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. 'An Abstract of the Evidence delivered Before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the Years 1790 and 1791 on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave Trade'. The full Bewick print can be seen in *Local Records; or Historical Register of Remarkable Events which have occurred in Northumberland and Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Berwick-upon-Tweed, from the earliest period of authentic record to the present time with Biographical Notices of deceased persons of talent, eccentricity, and longevity*, John Sykes. In 2 Vols. Newcastle. T Fordyce. 1865 (reprint).
- ⁶ Tyne & Wear Archives. TWA MF 1216. William Turner's School Newcastle Upon Tyne. Register of pupils giving details of their subsequent careers and including an index. Researched by Project volunteer Patricia Hix. Neither Bulman nor Scott appear in Christopher Hawes's book *Poor Relations* on the Eurasian community in British India. The book does include information about Charles Augustus Fenwick (1792-1852), the illegitimate son of a Captain Fenwick. To find out more about the Captain, and whether he was one of the North East Fenwicks, will require research into the archives of the East India Company at the British Library.
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- ¹² John Sykes. Op cit. p. 238.
- ¹³ Norham Church Parish Records.
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- ³⁵ Information provided by Elizabeth O'Donnell. Mary Ann Mackham's Baptism record is in Tyne & Wear Archives. RS2007/TWA/1.
- ³⁶ Pennington, Garnet and Remond are recorded in the Minute Book of the Newcastle Ladies Emancipation & Negro Friends Society 1838ff. TWA. Transcribed and researched by Project volunteer Patricia Hix.
- ³⁷ Percy Corder, *The Life of Robert Spence Watson*, London. Headley Bros. 1914. p. 24.
- ³⁸ Frederick Douglass wrote about Newcastle and the Richardsons in 'My Bondage and My Freedom.' The text can be seen on <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=DouMybo.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=24&division=div2>. Wells Brown recorded his visit to Newcastle in his *The Travels of William Wells Brown*, I Ed. Paul Jefferson. Edinburgh University Press.1991.
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American and North East England's Quaker Anti-Slavery Networks

Patricia Hix

This article examines some of the evidence of Quaker (a) abolitionist links between the North East of England (b) and America. The focus is on less well-known personalities. The importance of these links is assessed. Primary and secondary sources available in Newcastle upon Tyne (c) and via the internet (d) were searched. Many questions remain unanswered but these findings add to our knowledge of North East history.

When George Fox, founder of the religious Society of Friends (Quakers) visited mid-17th century Northumberland and Durham,¹ the region was still in religious and political turmoil. The economy was mainly subsistence agriculture, except for the expanding Tyne Valley coal industry. Newcastle was growing in regional importance but North East populations were comparatively small.² Persecution and imprisonment awaited many of Fox's sixty 'north countries'

itinerant ministers.³ George Whitehead from Westmoreland was imprisoned in Newcastle. Anthony Pearson of Auckland, came to Newcastle with Fox.⁴ A meetings took place in County Durham in 1653.⁵ After a 'great convincement in Northumberland and Durham', a North East Quaker community was established. Sunderland's Richard Wilson became a travelling minister⁶ and William Coatesworth and William Maude were early converts.⁷ Fox had successful visits at Whitby in 1651 and 1663.⁸ Some Whitby and Cleveland Quakers later moved to the North East including the Richardson family, who became prominent abolitionists.⁹

17th Quakerism embraced some common religious thought but its distinctness centred on the guiding Inward Light, spiritual experience, and a new way of life.¹⁰ Inspirational leadership, Christian fellowship and charity were more important than ritual. Record keeping, arranging marriages, recording births and deaths, congregational discipline, 'corporate witness' and the system of Preparative, Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly meetings developed gradually.¹¹

Meetings for the Sufferings initially addressed distress caused by persecution.¹² The first women ministers, Elizabeth Hooton, Margaret Fell¹³ and Yorkshire's Mary Fisher, the Quaker pioneer in New England in 1656,¹⁴ were all persecuted.¹⁵ Fox's belief in equal rights and responsibilities¹⁶ resulted in both men and women becoming Quaker travelling ministers and crossing the Atlantic in both directions.

Other Quakers followed Fisher and settled in Rhode Island; their first meeting was at Newport¹⁷. These early American Quakers sought advice from London's Yearly Meetings.¹⁸ Few questioned the morality of owning slaves¹⁹ until George Fox called for their humane treatment and eventual liberation in 1657 and 1671.²⁰ William Edmundson wrote to 'all slave owning places' from Newport,

Rhode Island, denouncing slavery as unchristian.²¹ Pennsylvania's German Quakers publicly protested against slavery²² and in 1696 Pennsylvania Quakers' asked their merchants and traders 'to write abroad to their correspondents that they send no more Negroes to be disposed of'. Many American Quakers did free slaves by 1710 but others continued as slaveholders and traders.²³ William Moraley of Newcastle was a voluntary slave to a Philadelphia Quaker, Isaac Pearson, whose household also included an African slave.²⁴

North East Quakers received regular transatlantic news and American Quakers consulted each other about slavery via London Yearly Meetings. In 1714 any Quaker emigrating to an American plantation needed consent.²⁵ Newcastle's Quakers received Epistles from North Carolina, The Jerseys, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Long Island and Rhode Island in 1717. Others followed from Virginia, South Carolina and New England by 1726.²⁶ As knowledge of slavery increased, American Quakers pressurised London to take decisive anti-slavery action and, in 1727, gained official disapproval of the slave trade. This interaction is regarded as the impetus for Quaker anti-slavery activism in Britain.²⁷

The provinces received reports of Quakers' American travels. After a troublesome visit in 1709,²⁸ Samuel Bownas, a former Sedbergh and Gateshead blacksmith,²⁹ reported in 1729 that there was 'a great increase in Friends in America who ministered in various parts of the plantations'.³⁰ Bownas became a writer and wealthy merchant supplying excellent goods.³¹ In 1732, reports of prosperity but lax plantation discipline were received.³²

Colchester emigrant, Benjamin Lay, left Barbados for Abington, Pennsylvania in 1710. An aggressive abolitionist, he wrote 'All Slave Keepers that Keep Innocents in Bondage, are Apostates' in 1737.³³ The same year Newcastle Quakers were advised by Pennsylvania and New Jersey that, 'as the Gospel breathes nothing

but a spirit of love and liberty to mankind so it has been the early care of Friends to caution against the practice of trading in Negroes which we think it necessary to repeat, and those who have them, treat them with tenderness as advised in several epistles and minutes of this meeting.¹³⁴

Anthony Benezet, gentler and more influential than Lay,³⁵ corresponded with Israel Pemberton. His son, abolitionist John Pemberton, visited the North East.³⁶ Benezet was held in sufficient esteem by Sunderland's Ogden Family to retain part of his letter to John Pemberton in their papers.³⁷ In 1752 Newcastle Quakers read of an American visit by Jonah Tomson [Thompson], a minister and schoolmaster who established a Quaker school at Compton in Dorset. Benezet also corresponded with Tomson.³⁸ His son John taught in Benezet's Philadelphia school for African-Americans in 1770.³⁹

In 1758 John Woolman viewed slavery as corrupting and oppressive and warned Philadelphia's Quaker slave owners of damnation. He presented an anti-slavery certificate to the London Meeting⁴⁰ and Newcastle Quakers were fervently warned ... 'that they be careful to avoid being in any way concerned in reaping unrighteous profits arising from the iniquitous practice of dealing in Negroes and other slaves.'⁴¹

In 1761 London condemned Quakers still trading in slaves, disowning those who would not 'desist'.⁴²

By 1771 news of fewer American slave owners reached Newcastle Quakers. London encouraged further campaigning.⁴³ Pennsylvania's Abolition Society was formed in 1775 and the Gradual Emancipation Act passed,⁴⁴ in spite of the War of Independence.⁴⁵ The Philadelphia Women's 1777 Epistle ignored slavery,⁴⁶ although the membership included women with abolitionist links; such as Rebecca Jones, Phoebe and Mary Pemberton, related to abolitionist

John Pemberton,⁴⁷ and Joyce Benezet, who supported her husband Anthony's school for African Americans after his death.⁴⁸

In 1780 Tyneside Quakers learned, via Pennsylvania, of North Carolina's manumitted slaves being re-enslaved via public authorities. Christian duty to relieve and educate oppressed Africans was emphasized and profit denounced as perpetuating slavery. The British government was pressed to act. 1781 news implied Quakers' slave owning had almost ceased but the Epistles still referred to its evils.⁴⁹

Sunderland's Hannah Ogden recorded Minister Robert Valentine's visit from Brandywine, America, to the North East in 1782. He probably met the Bainbridge, Ormston and Richardson families.⁵⁰ Robert Ormston, Ralph Bainbridge and George Richardson were members of the first provincial anti-slavery society formed by the Unitarian, Reverend William Turner.⁵¹ Valentine corresponded with Philadelphia's abolitionist Nicholas Waln. Waln was a Yorkshire emigrant, a Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting representative to Britain in 1783, husband of a Sarah Richardson and visitor to the North East in 1784. His papers include his English ministry, Quaker and family activities, West Indies' slave conditions and an interest in Wilberforce.⁵²

Rebecca Jones, also Waln's correspondent,⁵³ was in the North East in 1783.⁵⁴ Jones, an evangelical Quaker educator and minister, was closely associated with leading Philadelphia and New York Quakers.⁵⁵ She corresponded with abolitionist Richard Jordan. Born in Virginia in 1756 but resident in Richsquare, North Carolina by 1768, Richard's father, Joseph, owned slaves but was not convinced of slavery's injustice. Richard emancipated his family's slaves and lobbied the legislature against slavery. He travelled to Britain in 1799 speaking out for oppressed Africans.⁵⁶ The Maude and Ogden papers include a letter written in 1729 about

Virginian Richard Jordan's visit. This may be the younger Richard Jordan's grandfather.⁵⁷

Waln wrote to James Pemberton⁵⁸ in 1783 requesting news of the English Quakers' anti-slave trade petition. His abolitionist brother, John Pemberton, a Philadelphia Quaker minister, visited the North East in 1783 and 1786.⁵⁹ When Philadelphia Quakers followed their abolition petition's progress in 1790, John Pemberton watched 'in disgust' from the Congress Gallery as the northern leaders 'caved in' to Georgia and South Carolina's opposition.⁶⁰

American William Matthews travelled with John Pemberton in 1783.⁶¹ He received letters from English Quakers between 1782 and 1790.⁶² In 1783 he wrote to William Jackson, a minister from Chester County who visited Britain in 1802. He corresponded with John Pemberton, abolitionist Moses Brown and Mehetable Jenkins. Jackson's nephew, William Jackson, an active abolitionist, wrote 'A View on Slavery' in 1838.⁶³

New England's Mehetable Jenkins visited the North East in 1784. Stephen Wanton Gould, of Moses Brown's School in Providence, Rhode Island, remembered her speaking in their Yearly Meeting.⁶⁴ Hannah Ogden letters, while travelling with Mehetable in Scotland, refer to Mehetable and Nicolas Waln's concern for Patience Brayton's.⁶⁵ This link suggests Mehetable was an abolitionist and her biographical sketch may establish this.⁶⁶

Patience Brayton was from Somerset, New England. She was in the North East in 1784.⁶⁷ Sarah Mapps Douglas referred to the spirit forbidding her to be associated with slavery and 'urging her to share her concern in meetings.'⁶⁸ A memorial to Brayton's Quaker and abolitionist contributions was erected in 1976.⁶⁹ Her correspondence and journal is among Moses Brown's papers.⁷⁰

North East Quakers were asked to continue campaigning in 1790 while the anti-slave trade petition was considered.⁷¹ American

Samuel Smith visited Newcastle's Quaker women that year. He may have been from Dartmouth, New Hampshire (these Quakers questioned slavery as early as 1716)⁷² or from Philadelphia.⁷³ Samuel Smith's English ministries were from 1790 to 1791 and with Richard Jordan and John Wigham in 1800 to 1801.⁷⁴ In 1805 North East Quakers read that American Quaker abolitionists had experienced opposition.⁷⁵ Elizabeth Fry and Hannah Field,⁷⁶ wife of William Field,⁷⁷ of West Chester County, New York, visited North East Quakers Mary Oliver, Mary Sutton, Margaret Richardson, Elizabeth Procter, Margaret Binns and Hannah Wilson in 1817.⁷⁸ John Yeardley's described meeting 'the great minister, Hannah Field, from North America,' in 1818.⁷⁹ Her memorial described her as encouraging 'good convincement' and highlighting errors.⁸⁰ Related to Abigail Field Mott, wife of Richard Mott, the memorial and character of H [Hannah] Field were referred to by Abigail in 1829.⁸¹ Hannah was also related to abolitionists Lucretia and James Mott, who helped Richard with his cotton mill.⁸² Hannah was possibly related to Hannah Field Junior of Port Chester, Richard Field of Greenwich, Connecticut and Robert Field who emancipated his slave, Cuffy Field, in 1776.⁸³

New York's Willet Hicks visited North East abolitionists Jane Hewitson, Esther Watson, Jane Unthank, Ann Foster, Margaret Richardson and Mary Backhouse in 1821.⁸⁴ Hicks, a liberal merchant and minister, had lived near Thomas Paine until Paine's death in 1809.⁸⁵ He attended a meeting in Rhode Island with Richard Jordan and Moses Brown, where for 'the first time ever a man of colour,' Paul Cuff [Cuffee], 'delivered his opinion',⁸⁶ Darlington abolitionist, Edward Pease, also referred to the black Quaker and mariner, Paul Cuffee, in his diary.⁸⁷ Willet's cousin Elias Hicks published 'Observations on the Slavery of Africans'; important for defining differences between Quakers abolitionists.

Hicksites had more intense anti-slavery views than Orthodox Quakers. Elias advocated slave produce boycotts several years before the Free Produce movement developed.⁸⁸ Elizabeth Walker from West Chester, New York, visited Newcastle and met Sarah Robinson, Hannah Dixon, Mary Smith, Ann Foster, Ann Bowson and Ann Mounsey in 1826.⁸⁹ Walker was abolitionist Anne Knight's friend. Knight considered emigrating to join her.⁹⁰

Abolitionist minister Sarah Foulke Farquhar Emlen attended a Shields meeting in 1845. She met Sarah John Richardson, Jane Oliver, Mary Unthank and Margaret Wilson.⁹¹ Sarah's husband was related by marriage to the older Philadelphian Sarah Emlen⁹² and to Samuel Emlen (1697-1783). Samuel Emlen's (1766-1837) bequest established a school for free black and coloured orphan boys. This Samuel Emlen and James Emlen, the younger Sarah's husband, were related through their great-great-great-grandfathers, who were brothers.⁹³ Sarah taught the Hicksite-Orthodox separation and the Free Produce Movement at a Chester County Boarding School, Pennsylvania.⁹⁴ She was Edward Pease's 'dear friend'. He later recalled her 1845 visit and opinion of abolitionist Joseph John Gurney, who campaigned in North America and the West Indies from 1837-1840.⁹⁵ She dreamed this 'valuable and dear friend was in the realms of Glory'.⁹⁶

Bradford's Sarah Hustler informed Pease that Elizabeth Coggeshall had returned safely to her family. It is not known if Pease met her⁹⁷ but she visited Britain in 1815. Her travel minutes are in William Wood's papers. As New York's Monthly Meetings Clerk, Wood was interested in slavery and 'Freedmen'. His correspondents included Moses Brown and John Pemberton.⁹⁸ Coggeshall corresponded with abolitionist Elias Hicks in 1815.⁹⁹ She visited the Hicksite abolitionist Minister Lucretia Mott in her formative years.¹⁰⁰ Lucretia boycotted slave grown produce, helped

form American Women's Anti-slavery Associations and was refused entry to the 1840 London Anti-Slavery Convention. Liberality towards women was limited and led Lucretia to campaign for women's rights.¹⁰¹ The North East's Elizabeth Pease was one of the few British Quaker women who tried to gain acceptance for the American women;¹⁰² most still believed it was not respectable to speak publicly.¹⁰³

American Quaker emancipation campaigns appeared to Darlington Quakers to have stalled by the 1820's. Virginia's Quakers did petition for gradual abolition but also wanted the emancipated removed from the state or country. At one meeting, New York's leading Quakers opposed the North East's Jonathan Backhouse. Incidences of colour prejudice were uncovered. Quakers deterred black and coloured membership or had segregated seating where mixed race Meeting Houses existed.¹⁰⁴

Undeterred by opposition and racism, John Pease visited America in 1843 and 1849.¹⁰⁵ Atlantic crossings were tedious, lengthy and hazardous. Richard Jordan sailed through a stormy three week passage back to America in 1801.¹⁰⁶ A privateer captured John Pemberton and William Matthews off the Isle of Wight in 1782, before they eventually reached Britain.¹⁰⁷ Coggeshall's experience at sea was tiresome¹⁰⁸ and Jonathan Backhouse told of his experience of the 'raging of the mighty deep' during his 1832 Atlantic crossing.¹⁰⁹ Edward Pease mourned the deaths of Mahlon Day and family when the 'Artic' sank in 1854.¹¹⁰ Day helped coloured orphans, published anti-slavery literature and was on the committee of the New York's Manumission Society meetings, which met in his store.¹¹¹

In 1844 Edward Pease advised Samuel Rhodes to be patient, kind and charitable in his anti-slavery activities.¹¹² Philadelphians Rhodes and George Taylor promoted the production of Free Labour

Cotton¹¹³ and helped erect a cotton factory, which Taylor ran 'solely by conscientious principles'. North Carolina cotton was, in Levi Coffin's opinion, the product of free labour. Rhodes organised its shipment up river from Memphis on boats crewed by free labour. The Philadelphia Association sent this cotton for England's Manchester mills,¹¹⁴ possibly via Josias Browne's Manchester Free Labour Association warehouse.¹¹⁵ Newcastle's Anna Richardson established a network of British Free Labour Produce Associations.¹¹⁶ Richardson women organised the Newcastle Ladies Free Produce Movement¹¹⁷ and Anna invited the black Presbyterian theologian, Henry Highland Garnet, from America to promote the use of free labour produce.¹¹⁸

Anna Henry Jenkins, possibly Anna Almy Jenkins, Moses Brown's relative, visited Shields from Providence, Rhode Island, in 1844.^{119/120} She met abolitionists Anne Spence and Mary Richardson. Mary's home at Low Lights, North Shields had hosted visits by many abolitionists and fugitive slaves, such as Frederick Douglass, as did the Newcastle Richardsons at Summerhill;¹²¹ Anna, Henry and Ellen raised funds to free fugitive slaves such as Douglass.¹²²

Many more American Quakers visited the North East. Thos Arnett, Elisha Bates and Nathan Hunt from Ohio, Charles Osborne from Indiana, John Warren from New England and John Wilbur from South Kingston, Rhode Island all feature in George Richardson's meeting notes.^{123/124} Ann Richardson visited America in 1805¹²⁵ as did Rachel Priestman and Isabel Casson (nee Richardson) in 1849; Casson stayed with abolitionist Stephen Grellett.¹²⁶

So what did American and North East Quaker networks contribute to abolition? Their access to the printed word, personal contacts, eye witness accounts, epistles and advices were invaluable. Transatlantic travelling ministers played an important part. North

East and American Quakers were able to feed evidence into their national campaigns and influence other denominations but interdenominational alliances were essential to success. Rufus Jones assessment could be applied to Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic. Quakers' 'gifted leaders and importunate efforts of almost the entire membership drove the issue of abolition into the consciousness' of others and 'aroused and stimulated those who finally carried the cause through to its goal'.¹²⁷

Notes

- a. The term Quaker is used to denote members of the Religious Society of Friends. All those referred to by name are Quakers unless otherwise stated.
- b. The North East will be referred to as the North East.
- c. Newcastle upon Tyne will be referred to as Newcastle.
- d. Research was carried out at Tyne and Wear Archive, the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Local Studies Library. Use was also made of the Remembering Slavery Project 2007 Resource Disc, a collection of notes compiled on slavery and abolition by the Project Leader, Sean Creighton, and a team of volunteers at the two institution named above, Northumberland Collection Service and Newcastle University's Robinson Library.

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Abbreviations: Tyne and Wear Archive Service = TWAS

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- ³⁷ 37.TWAS 840/185 Extract from a letter from Anthony Benezet to John Pemberton, Philadelphia 1783.
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- ³⁹ Haverford College Libraries. Thompson Family Papers 1751-1876 MsColl.855 Biographical Background Jonah Thompson (1702-1780) <<http://haverford.edu/library/special/aids/thompson>> Thompson Family Papers 1607 – 1936

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- ⁴⁵ TWAS op cit, MF210.
- ⁴⁶ TWAS 840/13 Epistle from the Yearly Meeting Held at Philadelphia 29th March and 3rd October 1777 to London Yearly meeting.
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- ⁵⁰ TWAS 840/2 Hannah Ogden, Memorandum Book of the Society of Friends Meetings 1781-1784. Prominent Quaker families and American Quakers visiting the North East are listed, TWAS 840/15-16 gives Hannah as the daughter of Bernard and Elizabeth Ogden.
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- ⁵² Richardson Family Papers 1701-1703. Box 2 Folder 2 Item 46 1701-1703. Reference - a letter from Francis Richardson to Uncle John Richardson at Newcastle, England. 1701 Philadelphia. The Winterthur Library. The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera 1675 –ca 1910. Sarah Richardson, Nicholas Waln's wife was possibly related to the North East's Richardsons. Francis Richardson came from South Shields. <http://findingaid.winterthur.org/html/HTML_Finding_Aids/COL0602.htm>
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- ⁵⁵ Russell, Elbert. 'The Separation After A Century. An Archival Piece from the

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Republic of Letters: The Lit and Phil, Slavery and the French Revolution

Peter Livsey

The foundation of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne coincided both with the first great debate on slavery, from 1787 to the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade in 1807, and with the French Revolution, from 1789. The case against the slave trade had been made and a majority in the House of Commons voted to end it in 1792. But the beginning of the Terror in France, the outbreak of war and the threat of the spread of the revolution to Britain delayed abolition as all proposals of reform and their advocates became suspect.

Robert Hopper Williamson, one of the few members of Newcastle's ruling oligarchy to be a founder member, and one of the Vice-Presidents, is said to have resigned because the Lit and Phil's research and inquiries might lead to anarchy and rebellion. Although this was alarmist, to say the least, in the profile of its

members the society was similar to the revolutionary assemblies across the Channel. There was a preponderance of professional men, particularly doctors and lawyers, along with businessmen and a few gentlemen and clergy. As a guidebook to Newcastle made clear, the founders of the Lit and Phil were acutely aware of the situation. 'The subjects for their investigation comprehend mathematics, chemistry, polite literature, antiquities, biography, questions of general law and polity, commerce and the arts. Questions and discussions on religion, and the politics of the day, are strictly prohibited by express law'.¹

But the books they acquired for their library illustrate how they informed themselves on at least one of the great issues of the day. This provides a local example of the intellectual resources available to those who wanted the slave trade abolished, and later, in the case of the younger members, to extend the debate to slavery itself, subject of the next great campaign in 1823 to 1833.

By 1807, the library was a prominent feature of the Society's home in the former Assembly Rooms in the Groat Market, adjacent to Ridley Court. 'A large and valuable library, consisting of a great number of the choicest books is already collected, and is constantly increasing in number and value, from the ample funds applied to the purchase of books, as well as from numerous donations by opulent members and authors'.²

In 1811 the first subject catalogue was attempted, dividing the books into 15 broad categories.³ The annual reports from 1794 onwards enable us to see when the various books relating to slavery were acquired.⁴ It is worth looking at a few of them in detail.

Under Class II of the catalogue, Civil History, we find two key works of the 18th Century. Bryan Edwards' history of the West Indies is a sophisticated apologia for slavery from a planters' spokesman. Slaves generally are cowardly, deceitful and cruel to

people and animals under their authority. They are promiscuous until they are old. Their minds are very capable of observation but are not artistic or musical.

Edwards believes that most were born into slavery, and are better off in West Indies. The slave trade does encourage oppression in Africa, but abolition of it by Britain alone would not stop it. Nor would it help mitigate the conditions of the slaves. Constant agitation risks stirring them up and emancipation would mean destruction for both masters and slaves.⁵

The Abbe Raynal's: *History of the East and West Indies and of the American Revolution*, in six volumes, was the English translation of a book published in 1770 in France and banned there under the monarchy. It was one of the 18th century's most popular works, appearing in at least 50 editions in five languages over thirty years.⁶ The book advocated both American Independence and the abolition of slavery. Its style of argument, from first principles and quotes from authorities, rather than the analysis of first-hand evidence, was not to 19th century taste and the Society no longer has the book. But it still sends a powerful message, not least the passage that seems to predict the slaves taking their fate into their own hands, and even the appearance of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who was to found a republic in Haiti on the principles of the French Revolution. 'Your slaves stand in no need either of your generosity or your counsels in order to break the sacrilegious yolk of their oppression...the Negroes want only a chief, sufficiently courageous, to lead them on to vengeance and slaughter... Where is he? He will undoubtedly appear, he will show himself, he will lift up the sacred standard of liberty'.⁷

This book was presented personally to the Society by its secretary, the Reverend William Turner. He recalled that when he was a boy he had witnessed a physical link between the

enlightenments of Britain, America and France when Joseph Priestley, Benjamin Franklin and Raynal walked arm in arm across his father's lawn in Wakefield.⁸ This link was strained, but not broken, by the perceived excesses of the French Revolution. Turner knew the line that had to be walked. He had been the leader of the local anti-slavery campaign in 1791-2. But, his position as a Unitarian minister made him particularly vulnerable to accusations of sedition. His father's friend, Joseph Priestley had had his house in Birmingham burned by a 'Church and King' mob in July 1791 for celebrating the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Yet Priestley was still enrolled among the Honorary Members on the foundation of the Newcastle Lit and Phil. In Class III: Voyages and Travels, we find another best seller which drew powerfully on a personal experience - Stedman's account of his time in the Dutch colony of Surinam.⁹ He was of mixed British and Dutch parentage, serving with a Dutch expeditionary force in the 1770s to fight slave rebels. His book, published twenty years later, was one of the earliest bought by the Lit & Phil. They later acquired the 1813 edition with colour engravings. The sensual images of women of colour, cruel punishments and brutal executions of the enslaved, several by William Blake, but all based on the author's own sketches, have been described as 'humanitarian pornography'.¹⁰ Stedman's own attitudes and his relations with Blake and his publisher have been fiercely debated.¹¹ However, Stedman shows considerable respect for the black rebels. He set up home with a woman of colour and, although she did not leave Surinam with him, their son did, and died serving in the British navy. The book was undoubtedly an important source for anti-slavery evidence and images. These images are in common use in books and displays today.

In the same broad section we find many other accounts of events and conditions in the West Indies and on the West African

coast that have reference to the slave trade and slavery, mainly by opponents and critics. Notable among them is Rainsford's sympathetic account of the revolution in Haiti.¹²

A particularly powerful reply to apologists for slavery such as Edwards, who based their arguments on the innate inferiority of black people, was by a doctor who was himself a founder member of the Lit and Phil. – Thomas Winterbottom. The author served as doctor to the Sierra Leone colony 1793-1796 and then returned home to practice in South Shields. Shortly after his return he provided several meetings of the Lit and Phil with a preview of his late brother's journal of his travels in the interior, before it went to the African Association. In 1803 he donated to the library Prudhomme's *Voyage a la Guiane et Cayenne*, published in Paris and dated Year VI (1797-8) in the Republican calendar.

His own account of life and customs in the area around the tiny British settlement is scientific yet sympathetic. 'The Author hopes that it may at least tend to remove some prejudices respecting its [Africa's] inhabitants, whose customs have, in various instances, been misrepresented'.¹³ In his section on the physical form of Africans is a long discussion as to why they are black, with a climatic explanation generally favoured. He argues correctly that skin colour is a very superficial difference (although he goes on to suggest that a couple of generations in Scandinavia would turn them white). He rejects the view that they are some sort of intermediate species. Here, he is arguing explicitly against Charles White, a surgeon and 'man-midwife' who was a founder member of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. His book, based on a series of papers he read to that Society in 1795, was held by Newcastle's sister society in its Class VII: Natural History.

White describes an 'immense chain of beings' and argues that: 'The Negro, the American, some of the Asiatic tribes, and the

European, seem evidently to be different species. Ascending the line of gradation, we come at last to the white European; who being most removed from the brute creation, may, on that account, be considered as the most beautiful of the human race'.¹⁴ He argues that hair type and colour are not a result of environment or climate. Europeans and blacks in America remain as they were, unless they intermarry. Jews and Gypsies remain swarthy everywhere.

His conclusion argues that his book does not contradict religion; the Mosaic account of a single creation of man is allegorical. The placing of different kinds of people (and unique animals) around the world still argues a creative intelligence. White is not justifying slavery, which he expresses a wish to see abolished. Yet we see here a foretaste of the perversion of Darwinian ideas into the scientific racism of the next centuries.

Winterbottom argues that none of White's physical proofs of intermediate gradation of blacks between human and lower animals stands up. He also criticises Thomas Jefferson's view of their intellect, saying that it is slavery that degrades people, not race. He quotes Professor Blumenbach, a German natural scientist, as stating that Africans vary in facial line as much as Europeans. Nor are they inferior in mental capacities. He gives examples of the poetic and intellectual achievements of black people in European societies. Winterbottom quotes Thomas Clarkson in support of the Mosaic view of Creation, by which he appears to mean that all races are equal because they descend from a common ancestor.

It is under Class IV: General and British Politics, that we find the classics of abolitionist literature – Sharp, Clarkson, Wilberforce, Stephens and Brougham. The donors of two of them give an insight into the membership of the Lit and Phil in these testing years.

Charles Newby Wawn was 26 and had only recently joined when he gave the society Thomas Clarkson's account of the

campaign to abolish the slave trade. He became a successful society dentist who was prominent in bible societies. In 1826 he would write a pamphlet arguing that one of the country's top judges, William Scott, Lord Stowell, a favourite son of Newcastle, with a street named in his honour, was wrong in his judgement that a slave woman called Grace had not been made free by being brought temporarily to England.¹⁵

Charles William Bigge donated the original 1769 edition of Granville Sharp's seminal *On the Injustice of Tolerating Slavery in England* in 1805, as the debate on the slave trade revived. He was a country gentleman who became partner in Newcastle's leading bank. At various times he was chairman of the Northumberland magistrates, High Sheriff and colonel of militia. He enforced the harsh laws of the day and would have been ready to lead his troops to suppress civil disorder, as well as resist French invasion. But he also travelled widely in Europe and Asia. The house he built, Linden Hall, has been described as 'still in the taste of the French Revolution'.¹⁶ His obituary states: 'Mr. Bigge's tastes, habits and disposition brought late close communication with the republic of letters in Newcastle. He was President of the Literary and Philosophical, Vice President of the Antiquaries and Natural History Societies, and President of the Mechanics Institute'.¹⁷ He seems to have had a particular acquaintance with another member from a very different background.¹⁸ Thomas Bewick, although a famous engraver and successful business man, was born on a farm and apprenticed in Newcastle. He had been a friend of the subversive Thomas Spence. He had seen one of his own favourite debating clubs, Swarley's, which met at the Black Boy, a few doors down Groat Market, close for fear of being targeted for sedition by government agents. But Mr. Bewick could find common ground with Mr. Bigge, not least in opposition to the slave trade.¹⁹

So, in their spacious rooms on the Groat Market, in a time of national insecurity and war, the men (and, from 1801, women) of Newcastle's new intellectual forum, despite their self-denying rule about politics, could find much to occupy them. They could draw not only on contemporary British arguments against the slave trade, but on sources from other countries and accounts of Africa and the Americas to inform their minds on one of the great issues of the day.

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- ¹ *The picture of Newcastle upon Tyne*, facsimile reprint of 1807 edition (London, E and W Books Ltd, 1970) p44.
 - ² Ibid
 - ³ Charles Parish, *The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne: The Building and Development of its Library (1793-1986)* (Newcastle, 1987).
 - ⁴ The Reports, Papers, Catalogues etc. of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, collected by Anthony Hedley (Newcastle 182-).
 - ⁵ Bryan Edwards, *The history, civil and commercial of the British colonies in the West Indies* (London, 1794) Volume II, pp77-88 and 142-150.
 - ⁶ Robert J. Frail, *A Singular Duality: Literary Relations between France and England in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, AMS Press Inc. 2007) p61.
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 - ⁸ Stephen Harbottle, *The Reverend William Turner: Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle upon Tyne*, (Northern Universities Press, 1997) p12.
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 - ¹¹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, OUP, 2004) Vol.52; and James Fenton 'Colour Blind,' *The Guardian* (Saturday May 5th, 2007).
 - ¹² Marcus Rainsford, *An historical account of the black empire of Hayti* (London, 1805).

- ¹³ Thomas Masterman Winterbottom, *An account of the native Africans in the neighbourhood of Sierra Leone: to which is added, an account of the present state of medicine among them* (London, 1803).
- ¹⁴ Charles White, *Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in different animals and vegetables, and from the former to the latter* (London, 1799) p 134.
- ¹⁵ Richard Welford, *Men of Mark 'twixt Tyne and Tweed* (London and Newcastle, 1885) Vol. III pp 585 – 588.
- ¹⁶ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Northumberland* (London, Penguin 1957) p205.
- ¹⁷ *Local Collections or Records of Remarkable Events, connected with the Borough of Gateshead* (Gateshead-on-Tyne (1849) p129.
- ¹⁸ His son's journal quoted in Christopher Baglee, *Linden Hall: a Concise History* (Macdonald Hotel Group, 2006) p10.
- ¹⁹ Jenny Uglow, *Nature's Engraver* (London, Faber and Faber, 2006) pp 224-5.

A Northumbrian family in Jamaica – The Hendersons of Felton

Valerie Glass

'It is a good country for a industers man for anything that you put in the ground it will grow'.

William Henderson 13 March 1838, Orchard Estate, Jamaica

A small bundle of letters written in the mid 19th century on a sugar plantation in Jamaica tell the story of a rural Northumbrian family who forsook the rigours of farming for a new life overseas.¹ I came across these letters whilst working as a volunteer on the Remembering Slavery 2007 Archive Mapping and Research Project.² The project aimed to produce a guide to the resources in four main archive collections in the North-East and my task was to work my way through a list of catalogued items in Northumberland Collections to see if they shed any light on the movement for the abolition of the slave trade. Of the many documents I examined

this particular collection was the one which revealed a vivid picture of daily life on a sugar plantation as experienced by a family of limited means who had left Northumberland simply to earn a living.

All but one of the letters are addressed to William and Mary Johnson. Who were the Johnsons? Mary Fenwick had met William Johnson, a weaver, whilst she was in service at Acton Hall, near Felton. They married and set up home nearby in East Thirston. Mary had been born some miles away in the Stannington area. Her parents were George Fenwick and Sarah Elsdon. Mary's sister, Catherine, had married Edward Henderson.³ One of the earliest letters in the bundle was written by Edward in March 1837 to the Johnsons. The letter explains that he, Catherine and their six children have been living in Devonshire and Bristol since leaving Northumberland. Difficult times in the recent past are alluded to but not described, 'for it would only disturb your mind.' Although living costs are very high and work very dead he refers to his family as 'stout and healthy' and reports that they are about to leave for Jamaica where he has obtained a position for four years

to overlook the estate and work in the Garden occasionally and to brew Malt drink. Catharine can if she thinks proper be employed in the laundry.

He is promised

wages £40 per year, victualling for all the family.... The family all employed a comfortable house and firing, liberty to keep pigs and poultry, a large garden to raise vegetables for the use of pigs, all expenses paid on our passage out... medical attendance free of expense. Should the country

not agree with us after one years trial or any dislike to live longer there our passage paid home to England.⁴

It is easy to see why Edward was tempted to uproot his family at a time when prospects in England were not good. But one wonders what the reaction of the Johnsons was to this news. Would they have seen it as a glorious opportunity for the family to better themselves in a new land? Or would they have been filled with dismay at the prospect of not seeing the Henderson family for some time?

Edward was employed by John Philip Miles, MP for Bristol, who owned several properties and estates in various parishes in Jamaica. He owned slaves who worked on these plantations. As well as owning slaves he was involved in shipping slaves to the Caribbean from Africa.

The next letter, long and full of detail, is addressed to George Fenwick of Bellisses (Bellasis near Morpeth), written one year later from the Orchard Estate in Jamaica.⁵ George was the cousin of Catherine. However, this time the writer is not Edward but his son, William who sends the sad news of the death of his father from 'constitutional decay' a few months after their arrival in Jamaica. Four of the children had been stricken with smallpox during the voyage but recovered. Catherine has given birth to a son, Edward, two months after their arrival. Fortunately, the eldest sons are of an age to be employed, William is working as bookkeeper to the Plantation Manager, Joseph Bowen, for 'food and £20 a year' and Cuthbert has also obtained a bookkeeper's position on another estate although his wage is not yet settled. Robert and George are working as servants and receive their food and clothes. Catharine is running a school for 'the Negroes children' assisted by Joseph, no more than five years old at the time. Elizabeth is promised a position waiting

upon the daughters of Mr Bowen once baby Edward is able to walk.

Despite the tragedy of losing his father William adopts an optimistic tone in his letter and expresses his love of the landscape in his new home:

My poor Father said that Jamaica was one of the prettiest countrys ever he saw with his eyes and it is so, it is a good country for a industers man for anything that you put in the ground it will grow there is a great deal of wild land here in the part of the country which is woods... Blagedon, the orange tree is beautiful hanging all over with yellow oranges the ground where the sugar cain is growing is good land they never plough nor harrow it at all. We have got a very good house to live in and a capital garding and can keep as many fowls as we like... The Clime agrees very well indeed.

William refers to the forthcoming emancipation of slaves, set for the year 1840:

The slaves will be free in the year of 40 here. They are very kind in there ways althoe they are bravish people you would laugh to see them make the suger and Rum.

A vivid description of boiling the sugar, producing molasses and distilling the rum follows. William also helps to supervise the slaves:

I have got to count the Negroes every morning we have got 200-74 slaves on this Estate they only work 4 days

and a half in a week they work 9 hours in a day. I blow the horn every morning at 6 o'clock to turn out.

One more year passes and it is March 1839. William's next letter to his aunt and uncle at East Thirston begins with the news that emancipation has come earlier than expected, on 1 August 1838:

They buried whips chains and handcuffs that is to bury slavery, but I think some of them had better got it yet there are some of the estates going to ruin for the people will not work but this estate is going on very well we are paying 2 sterling which is 24 currency... which I think a very good wage indeed for any labouring... and still they are not satisfied with it. They have a house and 2 acres of... ground besides there half a Dollar per day as we call it. Some of them can make 200 per year out of there ground and they don't care whether they can do anything or not.⁶

By now William is earning £30:

I have nothing to do more than keep the books and the expenses of the Estate correct and when I go out I have a horse to ride on. Cuthbert is doing very well at his place he has the same wage and Robert is waiting on Mr Bowen and George still at Mr Wallson. Elizabeth, Joseph and Edward John is at home with Mother learning there books.

The following year 1840 William has become Mr Bowen's head man and gets £150 per annum. 'We are doing very well indeed and is doing better every year.'⁷

Yet he cautions against Cousin William coming out to Jamaica as he had previously suggested:

I see that it would not do for him to come without being engaged to some certain Gentleman before he left his native home. Many Europeans has comed out to Jamaica on a chance but it is no use for they never get a regular employment.

William is considering sending his younger brother Robert back to England to learn from another uncle how to become a blacksmith 'as there is so few in this Country and they are so much wanted.'

They have had a poor crop on account of the people they are advised by the Baptists Parson not to work unless there masters gives them, and per day that is very high wages indeed, in fact the proprietors is not able to give it and they get now work at all they are some Estates thrown up and I think in a little time there will be more if the rate of wages goes on as they are now. It causes the suger and rum to be very high in price.

He goes on to tell of visiting the Horse Races and his intention to buy a thoroughbred filly and try his luck at the racing next year. It seems that times are becoming more prosperous for the Hendersons. Friends and relatives at home are always remembered in these letters and he tells of meeting a man from Warkworth Mills recently and of sharing reminiscences.

Eighteen months later tragedy strikes. Mr Bowen writes to William and Mary Johnson at East Thirston to inform them of the death of three of the family. Catherine, the mother, Cuthbert and William all died within a few days of each other:

This season has been the most sickly we have experienced for a great many years in fact no person recollects such mortality in so short a period – the four neighbouring Estates have lost their Overseers.⁸

We are not told of the nature of illness nor whether it affected the former slaves. Perhaps Mr Bowen does not feel it necessary to refer to the latter.

George is working as a servant to Mr Bowen, Robert is to be sent to school, Elizabeth and Joseph are with a ‘most respectable family where there are many ladies who attend to their education and conduct so that they may be considered well situated’. Mr Bowen urges William Johnson to consider what he might do for Robert and George in England:

I think it would be as well if you were to take one at least to England. There is little prospect now of white people ever doing better here than they can in England unless as daily labourers and probably you may be able to do something better for them in as...

Some months after receiving this news from Mr Bowen the Johnsons of East Thirston are notified by Mary Johnson’s brother, George Fenwick, of his intention to visit them. It is evident from his letter that he is aware of the recent deaths within the family as he expresses concern for ‘their poor children’. The letter bears a

Gateshead stamp but bears no address of the sender. Travel between Gateshead and Felton would not have been easy in those days: 'I have not made up my mind how we will come whether we will take our own horse or take the coach.'⁹

There now follows a gap in the correspondence of 20 years. We can only speculate on what sort of life the Hendersons have led since emancipation resulted in great changes in Jamaica. Many plantations were abandoned as it was too expensive for owners to pay labourers wages, and profits tumbled.

A letter written to the Johnsons in June 1861 sheds some light on this long interval. It is the first of two letters from Joseph Henderson who had been a child of barely three years when the family had departed from England. He has been brought up in Jamaica and is now 27 years of age. It would appear that he has placed an advertisement in a newspaper in England regarding the whereabouts of his relatives in Northumberland. The letter is well-written and explains what has happened to the other members of the family in the intervening 20 years so it is worth quoting in full:

Rosemount 24th June 1861

Dear Uncle,

I have received your letter with great joy & the reason why you all see the advertisement now in the papers is because I could not get any direction from any of the Bowens Family or I would have written years ago. I tried every way to get your address but I could neither get out nor write. I knew MR Henderson quite well he was Overseer on Fairfield Estate for many years. One Mr Mather told me that he wrote to him to enquire how many of us were alive & at that time

there were four of us in Jamaica viz. Robert, George, Elizabeth and Joseph. Robert died in 1853. George went to America in 1854. Elizabeth went to London in 1860 and I am the only one living in Jamaica and my Dear Uncle I have had enough of it & All I wish is to get home again for I have no hope of doing better here. So Dear Uncle if you could assist me in some way or other to get home Either by money or any other ways. For really what a man earns in Jamaica can scarcely support you. The Bowens Family are all gone to dogs all their property were sold for debts & they have nothing left now. I have received a letter from Mr Anthony Henderson Newcastle 76 Railway Street Scotswood Road & I have also received a letter from my Uncle Robert's Eldest daughter Mary Ochiltie Heartly by North Shields Northumberland & I also receive a letter from one Mr Joseph Robert Newcastle on tye 32 Sandhill. Dear Uncle be kind enough to write a few lines to the different places mentioned and you know more about the Hendersons Family than what I do. The advertisement was not yet paid for I don't know what is the amount. My Sister Elizabeth went away with General Bell, but I do not know the number of the regiment to tell you. Dear Uncle I am quite well at present hoping you all are the same. I am now 27 years of age. I remain Dear Uncle
Your Affectionate and wellwishing Nephew
Joseph Henderson
Rosemount, Montego Bay, Jamaica.¹⁰

Two further letters are sent by Joseph over the next 2 years, both repeating his wish to return 'home'. His attempt to secure a ship home by working his passage was unsuccessful. He has had no word of Elizabeth since she departed for England two years previously. Realising that his relatives in Northumberland know nothing of his character he provides the name and address of his employer's sister, Miss Margaret Lawrence Roper of Bath.¹¹ It seems that William Johnson did indeed contact Miss Roper for a letter in the bundle dated only 1862 provides an excellent reference for Joseph:

He collected my brothers rent, overlooked and measured his field labourers work, superintended the men who had care of his cattle and also worked by the day as a carpenter in fact was ready to do any job about the property... Joseph was his trusted man who reported to me all that was going on. He had 20 tenants under him, collected the rents punctually half-yearly, was always correct in his accounts truthful and upright in his conduct and sober. Any assistance you can render him will be well bestowed for I can speak highly of his principles, as a boy he had no opportunity of learning beyond common reading & writing, if he knew how to keep accounts Mr Roper would get him a place with a good salary, if he came to England he could improve himself... We are all very fond of him & advise his coming to England & letting his family know him, as we are all leaving Montego bay and the negroes are very trying and ... to white people... I know he is a deserving character.¹²

The final letter leaves Joseph still at Rosemount in February 1863. He sends sympathy to his uncle after his aunt's death and repeats his desire to return to England but at present is unable to do so:

My employer has left the parish and living in Kingston – consequently I am compelled to do all his business in his absence – my pay is small but he has been very kind to me.¹³

At this point the letters end and it is a matter for conjecture as to whether Joseph ever did return to England. A search of census returns in England after 1863 has proved inconclusive. There are too many of that name and no clues which might confirm the Joseph in question. Questions about Joseph's surviving siblings also remain unanswered. What became of Elizabeth? And what of Edward, the only child to be born in Jamaica, but not mentioned in the later letters?

The story of the Henderson family is not unique; there would be many who went out to the Caribbean islands for work in that time. It is special, however, because the letters have survived and show a side of post-slavery life less well-documented than that of the main players such as plantation owners. Several autobiographical accounts by former slaves in the Caribbean and America have survived as have documents detailing the process of purchasing, running and selling a plantation maintained with slave labour. Written evidence by such people as the Hendersons is much less common, however, and the very fact that the letters were kept and not thrown away shows that one of the Johnsons recognised their value. It is fortunate that they eventually found their way into the public archives. These letters provide a glimpse into the lives of the members of a family who found

themselves immersed in the aftermath of slavery. When the Remembering Slavery Archive and Mapping Research Project was launched a common response was 'I shouldn't think there were many links with Northumberland.' The findings of the Project quickly dispelled such misconceptions. The Delavals increased their fortunes from plantations in America which enabled the development of their coalmining interests in Northumberland. Grand houses such as Kenton Lodge, Fenham Hall, Paxton House and Brinkburn Priory were acquired from the profits of slavery in the Caribbean. It was not just wealthy plantation owners whose lives were affected by slavery but working class men and women who never ventured out of Northumberland.

I would like to thank Vic Brown for additional information about the letters. Vic inherited the originals which were in the possession of Johnson descendants who lived next door to her grandparents. She transcribed them and donated copies to Northumberland Collections Service in the 1970's.

¹ NRO 02360 Johnson Family of East Thirston: Copy Records, Northumberland Collections Service, Woodhorn Museum

² Institutions participating in the Project were Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, Northumberland Collections Service, Robinson Library Special Collections (University of Newcastle) and Tyne and Wear Archives.

³ Parish Register of Stannington

⁴ 12 March 1837

⁵ 19 March 1838

⁶ 2 March 1839

⁷ 12 June 1840

⁸ 9 Dec 1841

⁹ 31 July 1842¹⁰ 24 June 1861

¹¹ 23 Aug 1862

¹² 1862

north east history

¹³ 7 Feb 1863

I have retained the spelling and syntax of the original documents.

Sunderland and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Tamsin Lilley

At the beginning of 2007, few people thought that the north east was involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its abolition in any way. In light of research undertaken as part of the project, it is now evident that individuals and families from Sunderland invested in (and in some cases owned) plantations in the West Indies. Others played a crucial role in the local campaign to abolish the slave trade; including several African-American abolitionists who visited the area.

This article highlights the significant contribution of key individuals who were involved in the endless campaigns in Sunderland against the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery itself. It will place these in the context of some of the key milestones in the national and international campaign. It does not aim to address the issue of those from the area who benefited from the trade:

those who supplied tools and coals for use on the plantations; nor those who owned land that was worked using enslaved labour. It is, however, important not to forget their role in fuelling the trade in enslaved Africans.

The main focus lies in the first wave of abolition activity from 1780 up until the 1807 Act but it will also touch upon later activity in Sunderland, with particular reference to visits made by African-American abolitionists.

First wave of abolition activity 1780-1807

In 1790, ten years into the first wave of abolition campaigning, the Borough of Sunderland had not yet been formed from the parishes of Monkwearmouth, Bishopwearmouth and Sunderland. At this time, they remained separate but each was growing in industrial strength: Bishopwearmouth had glass works by the Wear, and Sunderland's increasing wealth was largely due to the trade in coal and the expanding trade on the Wear. The trade in lime, glass, and pottery was also developing. Sunderland's population had grown to 12,000 since its creation as a parish in 1719. Larger houses for wealthy merchants and landowners (some of whom may have accrued their wealth through some form of involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade) were fast becoming more visible.

Sunderland was well known as an important shipbuilding centre in the country. This helped the development of the trade in coal, which was taken from Sunderland downriver to the east coast of Britain. Research in 2007 has revealed that coal from pits in the north east was shipped out to the Caribbean islands to heat the pans and boilers used in the conversion of raw sugar into pure sugar on plantations. This coal went to the Caribbean via London so the north east's link to the plantations is not immediately obvious.

On a national level, by 1790, the morality and legality of the

trade in enslaved Africans was being questioned. In the Somerset court case of 1772, Lord Mansfield (Chief Justice) ruled that enslaved Africans living in England could not be forced to go back to the West Indies. 1781 saw the infamous incident of the *Zong*, a slave ship from which 133 enslaved Africans were thrown overboard so that the captain could claim against the insurance for loss of cargo (that is, the enslaved). In 1787, The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was set up by Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson. There was a real climate for reform.

It was around this time that James Field Stanfield (1749-1824) moved to Sunderland, having already published a number of works addressing the anti-slavery issue. Stanfield was the first ordinary seaman involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade to write about its horrors. He became a supporter of the campaign to abolish the slave trade after his experience on a slave ship which he described as 'a floating dungeon'.¹ In 1788 Stanfield wrote *Observations*



James Stanfield

on a Guinea Voyage, vividly describing his experiences on the voyage from Liverpool to Benin in West Africa. It was published as a series of letters addressed to Stanfield's friend and leading anti-slavery campaigner, the Reverend Thomas Clarkson. Clarkson added this to the evidence collected for The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, of which he was a founding member.

James Field Stanfield enjoyed a colourful career. After his experiences at sea, he became an actor and joined the Scarborough-Sunderland theatre circuit in 1789 and set up his own theatre company in 1799. Between 1793 and 1796 he temporarily gave up acting and became a brandy merchant in Sunderland, where he spent the next twenty years. His son, Clarkson Stanfield, was born in Sunderland and became a famous painter. Clarkson was named after the famous abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. During his time living in Sunderland, James Field Stanfield was a principal founder of the town's Subscription Library in 1795 which was to also house the Sunderland Subscription Museum from 1810. He also became involved with Sunderland's two Masonic Lodges.

James Field Stanfield 1749-1824

The *Guinea Voyage* poem by James Field Stanfield was originally published in 1789 as an attack on the slave trade. Appalled by his own experiences on board a slave ship voyage, James Field Stanfield was impelled to write this anti-slavery poem. It was unusual at the time because he speaks of the 'dauntless crew'² as well as the enslaved Africans as being victims of the slave trade. Stanfield is unique in praising (or even talking of) the grief of 'Neptune's Sons' (i.e. the crew) and warned British seamen against the trade:

*'Ye sons of Britain, who, in dangers brave,
Dare all the tumults of th' uncertain wave...'*³

In the previous year, James Field Stanfield published *Observations on a Guinea Voyage in a series of letters addressed to the Rev. Thomas Clarkson*. In 1807 both works were published as a single volume, a copy of which was on display in Tyne and Wear Museums' Remembering Slavery 2007 exhibition and is held at Sunderland Local Studies Centre.

Stanfield disagreed with the pro-slavery argument that commercial interests would ensure the enslaved Africans were well-treated on board – he experienced their maltreatment first hand on a slaving voyage to Benin. In 1788 he stated that ‘One *real* view – one MINUTE absolutely spent in the slave rooms on the middle passage, would do more for the cause of humanity, than the pen of a Robertson, or the whole collective eloquence of the British senate.’⁴ He was successful in suggesting the inexpressibility of the middle passage and the importance of these types of testimonies in helping to abolish the trade. Without the first-hand accounts of sailors like Stanfield, it would have been almost impossible to educate the public and to lift the ‘impenetrable veil’⁵ surrounding the slave ships and what really went on. The sailors had a unique insight into the running of the ships and matters such as stowage, exercise, mortality rates, and so on. He states that even if he is only about to influence the feelings of ‘but a few individuals’, he will have achieved success.

Whilst Stanfield contributed to the abolition campaign, he was not a ‘self propelled crusader’ against the trade (he was probably too busy looking after his 9 or 10 children!), but rather an opportunist who ‘got on a rolling bandwagon, rather than being among the horses that got it going’.⁶

A plaque has been erected on Boddlewell House in Sunderland on the site of Stanfield’s house to commemorate his life. Amongst other things, he is noted as a ‘Campaigner against the Slave Trade’.

Whilst much of Stanfield’s work relating to the abolition campaign had been published prior to his arrival in Sunderland, his involvement with the cause and his connection to the north east is still worthy of note. In 1792, around the time that Stanfield arrived in Sunderland, the inhabitants of the town signed a petition calling for West India slave holders to treat the enslaved people they owned more humanely. Sunderland’s inhabitants were actively joining the national campaign

and this was just one of 519 petitions presented to Parliament in 1792 by The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. In the aftermath of the defeat of the first abolition bill to Parliament in 1792, 400,000 (or so it is estimated) Britons boycotted sugar that had been produced using the labour of enslaved workers. Three years later, on 26th June 1795, a handbill appeared as part of a report by the Committee of The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. It encouraged consumers to use goods from the East Indies, instead of the West Indies where enslaved labour was used. The reference at the end of the handbill to the fact that East India sugar could be obtained from most of the grocers in Sunderland shows that many local people had already made the decision to sell goods that were not produced by enslaved people. Interestingly, the handbill was written by Granville Sharp, the chairman of the Committee, who was born in Durham.⁷

Elsewhere in the world, there was resistance from the enslaved themselves at every stage of their enslavement. The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) of enslaved labourers had already started and eventually led to St Dominique gaining independence in 1804 and becoming Haiti. Visits to the north east by formerly enslaved Africans were also becoming more visible. Olaudah Equiano, a formerly enslaved African, whose *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* was nearly into its 9th edition, visited the north east in 1792 during his campaign against slavery. The list of subscribers to his book includes at least one delegate from Sunderland. All this activity contributed to the passing of the 1807 Act which abolished the trade in enslaved workers in the British colonies.

The campaign from 1823 until 1838

During the years following the 1807 Act, much national activity was building towards a call for the gradual end of slavery itself. In 1823,

the Anti-Slavery Committee was formed in London to campaign for the total abolition of slavery. The Society also campaigned for better conditions for enslaved workers in the West Indies.

The wave of abolition that took place between 1823 and the passing of the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act took on a different form; most significantly, women began to play a more extensive role. Much of the campaign material of the abolition movement at this time was aimed at women in the domestic setting, with slogans and imagery appearing on items such as tea services, medallions, pin cushions, jugs, and rolling pins. This was evident across Sunderland: the Remembering Slavery 2007 exhibition featured several objects of this nature.⁸ Many of the buyers of this type of product were women. Women also arranged boycotts of goods produced using enslaved labour. Although they were not allowed to take an active part in the political debate, ten per cent of the entire financial support for the anti-slavery movement came from women. Women were having a more significant (yet indirect) influence on the campaign – sympathy for the plight of the enslaved was being expressed in all spheres of life and not simply that of politics. This was not just evident in Sunderland, but across the north east. By 1850, the Quaker Anna Richardson was leading the Free Produce Movement which had 10 branches in the north east.

The third wave of the abolition campaign occurred between 1833 and 1838, which saw the passing of the Abolition of Slavery Act which brought into effect the gradual abolition of slavery in all British colonies. A period of apprenticeship was enforced on the enslaved until emancipation in 1838. Earl Grey from Northumberland supported the anti-slavery cause in Parliament and was Prime Minister in 1833 when the Act was passed through both Houses of Parliament.

Sunderland in 1838

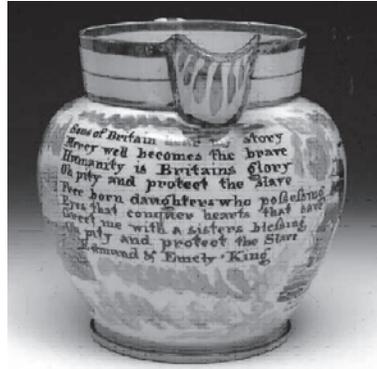
By the time of the emancipation of the enslaved in 1838, Sunderland had grown significantly. The parishes of Monkwearmouth and Bishopwearmouth were now physically linked by the iron bridge built in 1796. Both parishes had greatly expanded and had now joined with Sunderland to form their own Borough.

Sunderland's importance as a shipbuilding settlement was developing. A number of Sunderland's docks were built from 1837 onwards and by 1840 there were somewhere in the region of

76 shipyards in the town. The North Dock had just been opened and the river was overcrowded with ships. The significance of Sunderland grew further with the development of the railway which enabled coal from inland collieries to be taken to sea-going vessels. Whilst the population of Sunderland had more than doubled to 50,000 since 1790, there was little opportunity for the parish of Sunderland to physically expand. Many residents were reduced to living in slums, with 200 people dying of cholera in 1831.

Later activity

Despite the emancipation of enslaved workers in the British colonies in 1838, the campaign was not over: slavery continued in other countries until its eventual abolition in Brazil in 1888. People in the north east continued their support of the abolition campaign



This jug was made in Sunderland in the 1820s, when there would have been potteries along the banks of the River Wear in Sunderland.

It includes an anti-slavery verse. Many of the buyers of this type of product were women.

and this was punctuated by visits from key figures in the American campaign for abolition.

Frederick Douglass (1817-1895), the American fugitive enslaved worker turned anti-slavery campaigner, addressed a meeting in Sunderland on 25th September 1846. His freedom was bought as a result of the fundraising of the Richardsons, a Quaker family in Newcastle who hosted many visits by freed and escaped enslaved workers from America in the 1840s and 1850s. The Dominican Celestine Edwards (1858-1894) briefly lived in Sunderland before moving to London in 1880. Edwards gave speeches across England on the subject of slavery (among other things) and in September 1891 he gave several addresses in Sunderland Assembly Hall. He soon became known as ‘the Negro Lecturer’.

Sunderland was not just getting caught up in the national movement but showed a continued commitment to the local campaign. The decision by grocers in Sunderland to sell goods that were not produced by enslaved people highlights that the interest in the plight of the enslaved and those of African descent was not just taken up by those directly involved in and affected by the trade. The Sunderland artist Stuart Henry Bell (1823-1896) produced six paintings between 1892 and 1893 relating to *The Life of the Slaver Orange Grove* - including a painting of the ship *Leaving Sunderland Harbour* and later being *Chased by an English Frigate*. The Orange Grove was a ship built in 1812, perhaps originally for the fruit trade but it later became involved in the slave trade. The paintings are likely to have been produced in the late 1800s and this highlights the sustained local interest in the trans-Atlantic slave trade throughout the 19th century. It also demonstrates a desire for the cause to be disseminated to a wide audience and for it to be remembered in a more permanent way through the creation and display of these (and possibly other) paintings. All six paintings are at Wilberforce House Museum in Hull.

This article has concentrated on one side of the multifaceted trans-Atlantic slave trade: local involvement in the campaign for abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and of slavery itself. It has shown that Sunderland was committed from the late 1700s and involved all spheres of community at all levels – including painters (Stuart Henry Bell), brandy merchants/sailors (James Field Stanfield), women, and grocers. They were all working towards making people aware of the horrors of the trade as well as campaigning for its abolition. The contribution of women in helping to push for the 1833 Act meant that the campaign took on a different angle and helped it reach a wider and more diverse audience.

The campaign did not stop with the 1833 emancipation Act. A steady flow of activity continued throughout the later parts of the 1800s until at least the turn of the 20th century. However, more extensive research on Sunderland's links is required, involving a closer investigation of records held at Sunderland Local Studies Centre.

What this article has hopefully shown is that Sunderland (and the north east as a whole) was certainly not on the wrong side of the coast to be involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as had first been supposed. Whilst Sunderland alone did not lead the national abolition movement, the rigorous campaigns, boycotts and petitions carried out by its residents and visitors to the area certainly contributed to the pressure put on Government and to changing peoples' attitudes.

¹ Stanfield, J., *The Guinea Voyage: a poem* (London: J. Phillips, 1789), 26

² Stanfield (1789), 3

³ Stanfield (1789), 11

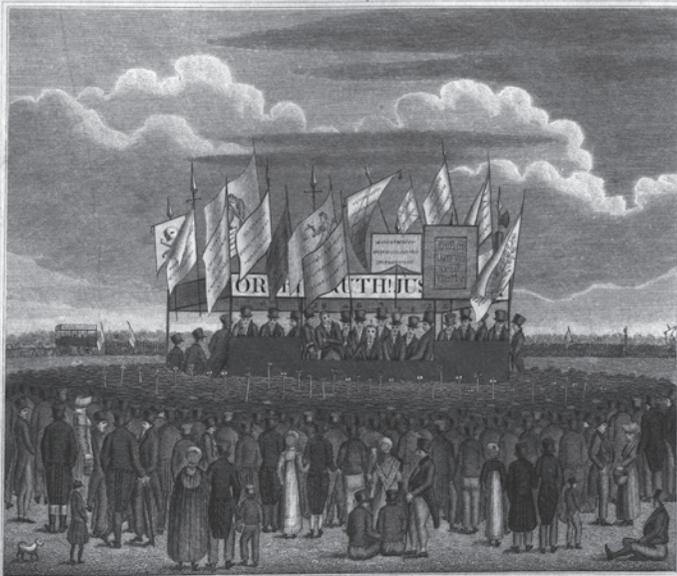
⁴ Stanfield, J. *The Guinea Voyage* (1788)

⁵ Rediker, M., *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2007), 2

⁶ *pers. comm.* Pieter van der Merwe

- ⁷ The 'Report by a Committee of the Society for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 26 June 1795' and 'Notice of a petition to Parliament for the Abolition of the Slave Trade by the inhabitants of Sunderland, 1792' are both held at Durham County Record Office.
- ⁸ See the online exhibition at www.rememberingslavery.com.

THE 11th. OF OCTOBER, 1819.



From a drawing by Geo. J. Mackenzie.

REFERENCE.

- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Mr. MACKENZIE | 4. Mr. THOMAS HODGSON. | 7. Mr. JOB JAMIESON. | 10. SHORT HAND WRITERS. |
| 2. Mr. MARSHALL | 5. THE REV. Mr. MACPHERSON. | 8. Mr. WEATHERSTON. | 11. The Distance exhibits the order |
| 3. Mr. LAYTON. | 6. Mr. STEPHENSON. | 9. Mr. CAMPBELL. | Manner of the Procession. |

OTHER ARTICLES

1819: Waterloo, Peterloo and Newcastle Town Moor

John Charlton

On 11th October 1819 tens of thousands of people poured on to Newcastle Town Moor to register their anger at the recent event in Manchester, the Peterloo Massacre, where unarmed demonstrators had been cut down by the sabre-slashing Yeomanry. In its size the Newcastle gathering may rate, even today, as the biggest political event in the north east region's history, yet it is little known. This article seeks to examine the background and piece together the story of the happenings and their aftermath.

1. Who are the real conspirators?

Summer 1815 marked the end of over twenty years of war with France. The demobilisation of soldiers and sailors, the ending of government war contracts and poor harvests brought wide-scale unemployment and desperate food shortages. The Tyne and Wear areas were sharply affected and in September the seamen went on strike, closed both rivers and interrupted the coal trade.² They

displayed tenacity and solidarity, had a strong organisation, picketed efficiently and were financially supported by riverside workers and miners, while the belligerent ship owners were generally, if sometimes equivocally, backed by local and state authorities.

Strikers are always open to the charge that outsiders are stirring up trouble in a normally compliant work force. *The Seaman's Chronicle* was largely a statement of the seamen's case and strongly refuted the attacks in the Mitchells' *Tyne Mercury*, a reputedly radical paper which might have been expected to have supported them. The *Chronicle* contained no political remarks – perhaps to avoid disunity and gain public support. The strikers stayed out until late October and achieved a raise in pay, but failed to win the higher manning levels they wanted to counter the high levels of unemployment.³ Those suspected of being strike leaders were arraigned at the Northern Assizes in 1816. John McPherson, alias John Grant alias John Reed, was said to be a Scots troublemaker who had been active in previous conflicts, yet he was believed to have recently returned to the area. None of the men's depositions raised political issues.⁴ The seamen appear to have maintained their organisation and struck at least three times more in the next five years.

As the strike was drawing to a close one of the best known English radicals, the veteran Major John Cartwright, visited the north east. He stayed with the ironmaster, lawyer and radical Whig, James Losh, in Jesmond, a suburb of Newcastle.⁵ Cartwright was attempting to draw together radical groups across Britain in order to resume agitation for a reform of Parliament. The Newcastle radicals – mainly middle class businessmen, writers and lawyers subsequently published an address in favour of reform, and formed the United Committee of Political Protestants. Like their organ, the *Tyne Mercury*, they argued for strikers to return to work, despite the workers espousing some of the causes they promoted.

In the bleak summer of 1816, probably caused in part by the volcanic cloud that swept over Europe from the massive volcanic eruption in Indonesia, grain yields fell by 75%,⁶ and it was reported that 'the whole of the wheat and barley this year will be unsound'.⁷ Grain prices rose and the Corn Laws that were designed to protect farmers against foreign imports made matters worse. Across northern England, handloom weavers, framework knitters and similar craftsmen who had had their living standards raised by the demands of the war economy were now being impoverished by the plummeting demand for their products.

On 8th October the *Tyne Mercury* carried an anonymous article entitled, 'Conference of the Alphabet'. 'On Saturday last, a Conference took place, at eleven o'clock in the forenoon. The twenty six letters of the alphabet met on a sheet of paper to take into consideration the hardships of the present times, the causes of the same and the best remedies to be applied'. They decided that the only solution to war, taxation, corruption and 'misrepresentation of the people in Parliament' was 'radical reform of the House of Commons'.

On that date, in Sunderland market 'the whole of the corn was seized by the populace'.⁸ The Corporation and vestries⁹ opened soup kitchens for the 'deserving poor'. Each beneficiary had to obtain a ticket from a former employer and be prepared to do public works such as street cleaning and pavement construction. The kitchens supported 700 seamen. Newcastle, South Shields, North Shields, Morpeth, Gateshead and Winlaton followed suit. The soup kitchen in High Bridge, Newcastle, served over 1500 quarts of soup on its opening day – enough to feed up to 3000, or almost one third of the population, at the recommended ration of one pint each. The Gateshead kitchen supplied soup on two days a week. Fourteen collieries delivered 52 keels of coal on the Quayside for the relief of the poor and a vestry-inspired door to door collection raised over £2,400.¹⁰

In December 1816 and January 1817 the *Tyne Mercury* published three articles by William Cobbett, covering seven and a half pages.¹¹ In spring Henry Hunt addressed a mass meeting in London that turned into a riot and led to the arrests of four alleged leaders who were subsequently charged with ‘conspiracy’. Soon after a march of unemployed weavers – called the ‘Blanketeers’, after the woollen blankets they wove and wore – left the north west but was broken up by Hussars and charged with conspiracy. However, juries found them not guilty. These cases exposed the role of the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth’s, spy system. When London juries also freed Tom Wooler and William Hone¹² it was another blow against the government. Late in 1817 came the trial, conviction and condemnation of Jeremiah Brandreth, William Turner, George Weightman and Isaac Ludlam (a Methodist lay-preacher) for murder and high treason following an abortive rising at Pentrich in Derbyshire. These young and apparently guileless men had been made desperate by the decline of their trades and gnawing hunger. The *Tyne Mercury* reported the judge’s summing up and pronouncement of the death sentence that ‘they severally be carried back to the place from whence they came and that they be drawn upon a hurdle to some place of execution, where they shall be hanged by the neck and their heads severed from their bodies which should be divided into four parts and disposed of as his Majesty should direct. Might the Lord God have compassion on their souls’. The *Tyne Mercury* also reported the last pathetic meetings of the prisoners with their close families and the executions. Ludlam clasped his hands tightly in front of him and prayed. Brandreth asked to be tied tightly in case he fell off the hurdle, but a clergyman stopped him completing the sentence, ‘Oliver is responsible for this’. ‘Oliver’ was the name of an *agent provocateur* who had led them. The *Tyne Mercury* argued the Home Secretary and government,

who had been humiliated by the previous acquittals, were the real conspirators and should have been in the dock, but they were determined to show no mercy in order to deter others.¹³

On September 16th 1817 the *Tyne Mercury* reported the annual dinner to commemorate the birth of Charles James Fox, the great Whig politician, in an unprecedented seven columns. The speakers – Earl Grey, Sir Matthew White Ridley M P, Lord Lambton, Ralph Naters and Robert Donkin - were leading members of the local Whig establishment. They severely condemned the Tory government's repression of dissenters, the deployment of spies and provocateurs, and called for the extension of the franchise and an end to government corruption.¹⁴

Most of the workers from Yorkshire, Lancashire and the midlands who were indicted in 1817 had been hand workers – or their close associates – in the domestic economy, and often lived in isolated communities. They were driven by helpless desperation, because their trades were doomed. Skilled or unskilled factory hands, coal miners, seamen, keelmen and iron founders may have suffered temporary unemployment and dearth, but probably did not see them as permanent, and informal and formal collective organisation offered hope of redress.

In February 1818 the United Committee of Political Protestants in Newcastle petitioned Parliament for reform of the franchise, but there were few other reports of radical activity on Tyneside, and none about the United Committee that year. However the *Tyne Mercury* gave extensive coverage to events in Lancashire, parts of Yorkshire, Nottingham, Derby and London, and its editorial and correspondence columns carried regular discussion of the key trials of the Blanketeers, the alleged attempted risings in Yorkshire and the east midlands and the prosecution of the Spafields rioters and radical journalists in London.

In early summer 1819, the *Manchester Observer* reported many meetings in northern England, Scotland and London. In June, Cartwright and Hunt addressed a meeting in Palace Yard, Westminster, and called for national initiatives on the franchise.¹⁵ In July a large open-air assembly in Newcastle was followed a few days later by another in Spittal Dene, North Shields, said to be over 1,000 strong. Both meetings advocated universal suffrage and annual parliaments, but, following the propagandist methods of the Methodists, they proposed building permanent organisations, based on a system of classes that would be divided when they had twenty members. Similar meetings took place in Sunderland and Winlaton. Police Constable Chadwick was sacked for attending reform meetings and quoting the *Black Dwarf* approvingly, and the radical paper subsequently reported other – unnamed – dismissals from the force.¹⁶ One of the NE reports was by ‘J M’. This was probably John Marshall, the main producer of radical pamphlets and leaflets, from his print shop, bookshop and lending library in the Flesh Market, Newcastle.¹⁷

On the 16th August 1819 a massive crowd assembled in St Peter’s Field, Manchester, to hear leading radical orators make the case for a reform of Parliament. A group of the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry, backed by the 12th Hussars, hacked and slashed their way into the crowd. They killed twelve men and women and wounded over 400. Sardonicly echoing the battle of Waterloo, only four years earlier, the ‘Peter-loo Massacre’ entered the language of class struggle, never to disappear. Reportedly, 100,000 people – more than one in ten of the population - took to the streets in London in protest and there were large gatherings in Birmingham, Bristol, Merthyr, Norwich, Wigan, Carlisle, Brampton, Derby, Sheffield, Huddersfield, Bradford, Leeds and several places in Scotland.¹⁸

The Times reported the carnage at Peterloo on 18th August and copies would have been on the Newcastle coach that day. On the 23rd the *Tyne Mercury* reprinted a large chunk from the *Manchester Observer*. Soon after an *Address of the Reformers of Fawdon to their brothers the Pitmen, Keelmen,¹⁹ and other Labourers on the Tyne and Wear* was published in Newcastle

The bloated tax eaters accuse us of conspiring. Now, the rich keep their arms in their houses – they are now training their tenants and servants in their halls and parks – their obsequious dependents are members of the Yeomanry Corps – they possess unbounded property... Yet after all, who are the real conspirators? Is it not the rich that are conspiring against the unprotected poor?’

John Marshall published it.²⁰

Edward Thompson says of the Tyne and Wear after Peterloo that ‘the whole district seemed to turn over to the reformers’.²¹ That autumn the Home Office correspondence suggests a good deal of anxiety developing about Newcastle and apparently more than any other district.²²

By September the United Committee was discussing petitioning the Mayor to call a protest meeting. On the 18th Reverend Robert Gray of Bishop Wearmouth told the Home Secretary that ‘a man named Brayshaw and other emissaries from Manchester have recently been employed in Sunderland and the contiguous towns and have organised two or three clubs upon the plan of the artful resolutions of which I enclose a copy’.²³ On the 21st Lord Sidmouth thanked ‘Dr Gray’, ‘Though I confess I’m disappointed in the hopes which I

had entertained that the spirit of turbulence would not have reached y[ou]r part of the country'. The Mayor of Newcastle, Archibald Reed was newly in office for the third time, and was not known as a reactionary Tory, but on the 22nd he sent the Home Office 'a mischievous handbill and pamphlet,' *The Necessity of Parliamentary Reform*, written by Joseph Brayshaw from Leeds (not Manchester) and published by John Marshall in Newcastle. He also reported that local reformers had asked him to call a meeting. On the 23rd *The Times* recorded that 'Two troops of carabineers arrived here (Leeds) yesterday, and this morning proceeded on their route for Newcastle. They are to be followed by other troops for the Northern Districts where much alarm and uneasiness still exists'. On the 25th the Tyne keelmen tackled the coal owners' attempts to replace them with new technology, 'spouts', especially below Newcastle Bridge. These devices stretched out over the river and could load collier vessels directly. John Marshall published *The Address of the Keelmen of the River Tyne* and this evidently rekindled the local establishment's old fear that radical reformers might ally with disaffected workers.

On the 27th Sidmouth advised Reed that 'the procession can take place peacefully but if any seditious language is used and applauded you must read the Riot Act' after which failing to disperse 'becomes a Capital Felony'. Reed told the reformers that he could not support or condone the event, but would not stop it if it was peaceful. The acting magistrate at South Shields, Joseph Bulmer, wrote to Sidmouth on the 28th: 'This is not the time, my lord, for masters to do anything that looks like oppressing their labourers'.²⁴ On the 29th Mr W Boyd of North Shields asked Sidmouth for 'an armed militia of the better classes of property owners, armed by the government'. (The Home Secretary had counselled great care in the selection of such people and was wary of handing out

arms, especially in large towns. He generally preferred Yeomanry cavalry.) That same day, Dr Gray opined that 'there has never been a period where the vigilance of magistrates and those loyal' to the government had been more 'urgently necessary'. Sidmouth assured him by return that 'more help will come'.

On 1st October a civil servant replied to Reed on behalf of Sidmouth, regretting the 'disorderly conduct of a body of lightermen (keelmen) employed on the River Tyne', but the Navy were 'sending a sloop from the Forth'. The Vicar of Ryton, Reverend Charles Thorp, was concerned about Winlaton iron workers and pitmen. On the 5th Sidmouth told him about the sloop and noted that 'the persons to whom you particularly refer should be narrowly watched and I have to request that any material Intelligence should be passed on to me'. On the 7th Sidmouth noted that 'The mischief done by the Publication' – the *Black Dwarf* – 'you particularly mention has been extreme'. It was to be 'earnestly wished' that 'the itinerant Vendors of sedition and blasphemous libels were in all flagrant instances apprehended by warrant from the Magistrates'. That same day the Duke of Northumberland told Sidmouth about a report from Nicholas Fairles, a South Shields magistrate.²⁵ Bulmer reported: 'tis certain the reformists will endeavour to promote discord as much as they can. We have some of them here, but 'tis only among the *labouring* class. I have learned they intend to hold a meeting tonight'.²⁶ On 8th and 9th Reed reported that the keelmen were refusing to settle their dispute and he expected 'disturbances' at the reform meeting on the 11th.²⁷

2. The Great Reform Meeting

Careful preparations had been made for the meeting in Newcastle on Monday 11th October 1819.²⁸ Several days before the area was inundated with leaflets, with detailed instructions for the day,

and many pamphlets were in circulation. On the day contingents came from North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland, Gateshead, Whickham, Winlaton, Benwell, Fawdon and Morpeth, as well as Newcastle. There were several assembly points for feeder marches that went to a rally just south west of the Haymarket in Newcastle. Mackenzie recalled: 'Passing the New Jerusalem Temple, Prudhoe St., and Prudhoe Place, we come to the Parade which was first opened for the inspection of the Newcastle Volunteers by Colonel Rawdon, April 20th, 1808. This large angular area had long been a dirty, unseemly waste...' *The Times* reported that 'before half the divisions had arrived' the Parade Ground was 'completely filled'. At four people per square yard it could have held around 15,000, and doubling that suggests there were at least 30,000 demonstrators at that stage.

The organisers decided to march to the Race Course on the Town Moor. It took over an hour for the marchers to move a few hundred yards and cross Barras Bridge. A man carrying a Roman fasces, symbolizing unity as strength, led the way, and Winlaton Brass Band played patriotic tunes including *Rule Britannia* and Robert Burns' *Scots Wha hae*. They were followed by the United Committee members, who each held a white rod with a small knot of crepe tied with white at the top. Then came 'the hustings, drawn by 3 horses, the divisions following each other in close and equal ranks, 4 and 6 men deep'.

Archibald' Dick's etching, 'The Great Reform Meeting', shows a sea of men in black on the Town Moor with women and children playing about the edges. Behind the hustings, at a considerable distance, is a phalanx of banner-carrying marchers, perhaps near the outer rail of the Race Course. Most men wore black top hats, but some had white ones, like 'Orator' Hunt. (He had recently been released from prison and his triumphal

entrance to London was widely reported.) The hats make the men seem mainly middle class, from today's perspective, but keelmen, seamen and miners also wore hard black hats in 1819.

Rank and file participants rather than leaders and speakers usually make slogans on banners, and they can add a valuable dimension to our understanding of the ideas that were generally held. There were many banners and flags on display with slogans including,

'In memory of those who were murdered at Manchester and history recording the dreadful events of that day'.

Surrounding the words, **'We mourn for the massacred at Manchester'** was a wreath composed of rose, thistle and shamrock of England, Scotland and Ireland. **'Order, Love and Unity'**.

A blue flag with gold letters read, **'We'll brothers be for a' that—England, Ireland and Scotland'**.

Former sailors or soldiers were evidently present and angry: **'we fight your wars but look how you treat us'**.

A tri-coloured flag read, **'England expects everyman to do his duty—Do unto all men as they should do unto you'** **'An hour of glorious Liberty is worth a whole eternity of Bondage'**.

'Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished'.

One banner quoted Burns: **'We'll brothers be for a' that'**.

A black flag with red border bore **'Rachel weeping with her children'**, and **'would not be comforted because they were not'**.

Others bore the slogans, **'A wonderful and horrid thing has been committed in the land'**,

'When the wicked beareth rule the people mourn. Solomon',

**‘Excessive Taxation generates poverty’ and,
‘May justice overtake the Manchester murderers’.**

A red flag proclaimed: **‘Take away the wicked before the King, and his throne shall be established—he that smiteth a man so that he die shall surely be put to death’.**

A banner carrying skull and crossbones had slogans front and back: **‘The day of retribution is at hand’** and **‘Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory’**. The strong biblical imagery suggests that Methodist and other dissenting congregations were involved [which ones are not evident].

Another lamented: **‘These are the times to try men’s souls’**. This came from Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, published during the American War in 1776, and suggests his influence remained significant over forty years later.²⁹

The Female Reformers of Winlaton represented **‘THE WINLATON REFORM SOCIETY. Evil to him that evil thinks’**. **‘Annual Parliaments—Universal Suffrage—Vote By Ballot’**. The North Shields Reformers paid homage **‘To the immortal memory of the Reformers massacred at Manchester on 16th Aug. 1819’**.

Another called for **‘Hunt and Reform’**. The Political Protestants of Benwell carried a large red flag with the words, **‘Hunt and Liberty’**. (Some of these slogans were identical to those mentioned in reports from similar meetings, like that at Carlisle, where the main speaker had been Eneas Mackenzie.)

Mackenzie was elected Chairman and pointed out that the enormous attendance should surprise hostile elements, including members of Newcastle Corporation, who were renowned for their corruption and had spent the weeks before the event campaigning against it, vilifying the organisers and advising employers to keep their work people away. Mackenzie was particularly severe on the *Newcastle*

Courant, which he saw as leading this hostility in a quite unprincipled way. Disinterested observers should be impressed, not only by the size of the turnout, but also by its solemn mood and good behaviour, and that order and discipline made the meeting more powerful. He commended the Manchester meeting for its similar intentions, roundly attacked the magistrates and clergy and reserved special contempt for the vicious members of the Yeomanry, ‘a species of force unknown in the English law...these brutes may cover themselves with the honourable garb of soldiers, they are not Englishmen, they are base cowards’. He also attacked the government that had advised the Prince Regent to commend the Yeomanry’s bloody attack.

A series of motions concerning the Manchester events and what to do about them was read out to the meeting. There was no demand for universal suffrage, as expressed on several banners, and the focus was on hitting the authorities where they were most vulnerable. The meeting unanimously passed resolutions that asserted the right of freeborn Englishmen to protest to Parliament and condemned those concerned involved with the deaths at Manchester, or had approved them. A fund to assist the Manchester victims was opened and another was set up to help local people who might fall foul of the authorities when attempting to exercise their constitutional rights. The slogans, the identically worded motions, Mackenzie’s involvement and everything about the conduct of the meeting strongly suggest that a national organisation – secret of course, because of the need to steer clear of possible conspiracy charges – was at work.

Since beginning of the French wars in 1793 the Methodist church generally had taken a very strong line against radical protest and had become a strong – though not necessarily very effective – conservative force among working people. However one speaker on the Town Moor, the Reverend William Stephenson, was a Methodist minister at North Shields. Subsequently, the arch conservative

Methodist leader, Reverend Jabez Bunting, demanded that the church's Committee of Privileges in London sack Stephenson, since 'reform' was not their business. Bunting succeeded, but fourteen congregations on Tyneside later seceded.³⁰

Mr Layton, also from North Shields, referred to the scale of the event: 'This day will long be memorable in the annals of Newcastle. This is the first meeting of the kind that has been held in this part of the country. From York to Glasgow there never has such a meeting taken place before. This day will prove the greatest the Corporation of Newcastle has ever known'. Job Jamieson, a Newcastle tailor, spoke last. He invited the meeting to get involved in the struggle for reform and stressed that the Newcastle 'Society' was not a conspiracy, but was open to all comers. Mackenzie closed the meeting by asking everyone to go home in an orderly fashion and not be provoked by any hostile elements. He recalled that a 'regiment' of sailors returning to North Shields refused free beer!

3. How many people went to Newcastle Town Moor?

The meeting of 11th October 1819 took place in the shadow of Peterloo, but there was no violence, no one died, no one was known to have been injured and there was no riot. It happened far away from the epicentres of revolt – London, Manchester, Yorkshire and the east midlands – and it is not celebrated in modern radical history. Yet several non-participant as well as participant observers described it as vast and some felt it was awesome.

The three Newcastle papers all put 100,000 as a maximum figure attending the meeting. The *Tyne Mercury* suggested 76,000 were in 'the area where the tents are pitched on race days', with the rest spread more thinly beyond. *The Times* reported that it was 'ascertained by actual admeasurement, that the space occupied by the body of the meeting would hold 76,000 persons, at the rate of four to a square yard; but when the thousands of scattered spectators are included, and the close manner

in which they stood, the whole may be stated at 100,000. Perhaps the largest meeting ever held'. *The Black Dwarf*, *An Account of the Meeting and Mackenzie* concurred. The *Durham Advertiser* plumped for 'above 50,000' and was gratified that only 104 had marched from Sunderland. The Mayor of Newcastle told the Home Secretary that 40,000 were present, but the military had given a figure of 'over 12,000'.

Many local historians have looked askance when I mentioned contemporary reports of 76,000 people attending, and some put that down to the tendency of participants to exaggerate the numbers, since nobody had any experience of large crowds. Organisers and reporters get a feel for the size of an event, but if an event 'feels' like over 20,000, you might round up to 30,000, but not to 50,000 or 100,000, especially if you want to maintain credibility. Of course, rounding down takes place too, usually by the law enforcement agencies anxious not to give the demonstrators too much credibility, and Parliament later heard a figure as low as 7,000.³¹ Yet citizens of Newcastle regularly attended fairs and race meetings on the Town Moor and one of the contemporary accounts invoked their previous experiences on the Race Course. An 1881 scale map shows that tents on race days took up around a quarter of the Race Course within the rail, and if people were packed tightly, the figure of 76,000 is by no means unfeasible, but where might they have come from?

The United Committee of Political Protestants, and the Newcastle Branch especially, was probably largely middle class, since it was predominantly a commercial town. Less than one in ten of the adult male population was qualified to vote in Parliamentary elections, but many skilled craftsmen had served apprenticeships and were guild members, freemen and so became voters, though the town had a substantial unfranchised middle class. In 1832 5000 Newcastle men voted for the first time, and allowing for deaths and

population increase, there can't have been many fewer in 1819. Many probably participated in the Town Moor meeting, though the only named Newcastle speaker with a vote was the tailor, Job Jamieson. Few middle class women probably participated, though many may have been observers like Miss Bruce.³²

News of Peterloo had caused widespread outrage and talk of a big meeting would have been on everyone's lips. The slight hint of danger may also have been attractive. Many homes were poorly lit, overcrowded, cold and damp, and so the streets of Gateshead and Newcastle teemed with people and many would have been caught up in the demonstration as it passed their doors. Fairs, race meetings, circuses and grisly public hangings often drew crowds of spectators, especially in clement weather, and we know that the demonstrators were accompanied by hundreds of petty traders and performers. So it seems likely that almost everyone who was not hostile or incapacitated attended. A meeting of a few thousand could plausibly be characterised as a 'middle class' event; with hindsight, this was 'perhaps the biggest assembly ever to take place' in Newcastle,³³ so it must have been mainly working class people, and these were the overwhelming majority of the Tyne and Wear district population. Could they have got to Newcastle?

There could only have been a vast demonstration if very large numbers of people from outside Newcastle had attended. The 1821 census found that just over 400,000 people lived between the Tweed and the Tees. Almost 200,000 lived in Newcastle, Gateshead, Whickham, Winlaton, Wallsend, Byker, Elswick, Westgate, and Castle Ward (Kenton, Gosforth, Fawdon, Kenton, Longbenton, Lemington, Newburn), but a sizeable number were probably too young, too old or too infirm to walk that far, and a maximum potential attendance of around 100,000 is feasible. The number

of working women is not known, but there may have been large numbers of them. There were contingents from Winlaton and Benwell, and it may well be that almost the entire able bodied population from there and from other industrial villages like Fawdon also turned out. Most Tyneside collieries, shipyards, chemical works and potteries were outside Newcastle's boundary, but there would be a substantial number of craft and unskilled workers in the building and brewing trades and among riverside workers, and many craft workers in the furniture, printing, glass and tailoring trades.

The main means of transport for poor people was their legs and they were used to walking long distances. The heavily populated areas on and around the mouth of the Tyne, and near the Wear and Blyth, were home to over 100,000 people, and seamen, keelmen and other river workers and, in all probability, landless labourers from nearby towns and villages, will often have walked to Newcastle, or hitched a lift on a cart or a waggonway, in order to shop, socialise and attend major events. Durham and Hexham are a four-hour walk away from Newcastle, and it takes three hours and twenty minutes from South Shields and Sunderland. We know that at least 300 seamen came from North Shields and over 100 from Sunderland. Since the 17th century workers had celebrated 'Saint Monday' to double their one day of rest,³⁴ and this may well have occurred in 1819. It is possible that most of the striking keelmen had an organised presence to bring their case to the widest audience, and the fact that the meeting took place on a normal working day meant that workers effectively went on strike, and there may even have been a 'general strike'. A figure of 76,000 on the Town Moor – almost one in five of the entire population of Northumberland and Durham – looks somewhat unlikely, but there is no reason to rule out the figure of 40,000.

4. Aftermaths

After 11th October 1819 the Newcastle papers reported a quiet end to the Town Moor meeting, and its organisers emphasised its sobriety and orderliness; yet the fact that it took place at all and drew so many working people on such a contentious political issue was perhaps its most threatening feature to the opponents of reform, who showed their apprehension in private correspondence and loyal public messages to the Prince Regent and the government. Some in Durham, Tynemouth and Ryton were quick to draw up addresses professing intense loyalty, whilst pouring contempt upon reformers and radicals.³⁵ General Byng had commented on an earlier demonstration: 'The peaceable demeanour of so many thousand unemployed men is not natural'.³⁶

On the 12th Archibald Reed, Mayor of Newcastle, told the Home Secretary, Sidmouth: 'It is impossible to contemplate the meeting of the 11th without awe, more particularly if my information is correct that 700 of them were prepared with arms (concealed) to resist the civil power'.³⁷ David Rowe suggests that Reed was 'slightly unhinged',³⁸ yet Edward Thompson believed that 'radical classes were formed' with 'the rapidity of a revivalist campaign in all the surrounding industrial villages and ports' including in Jarrow, Sheriff Hill, Penshaw, Rainton, Houghton, Newbattle, Hetton, Hebburn, South Shields, Winlaton and Sunderland.³⁹

On the 15th the South Shields acting magistrate, Joseph Bulmer, told the Home Secretary that the keelmen 'will not go to work till after Monday, so that all may attempt the meeting'. The Earl of Darlington also reported to Lord Sidmouth that he trusted that 'the refractory keelmen and the Radical Reformers' were 'perfectly separate', but they 'formed a part of that large assemblage who met on Newcastle Town Moor on Monday'.⁴⁰

That same day North Shields radicals and keelmen pelted

the Mayor of Newcastle, Archibald Reed, and his party with stones at the Northumberland Hotel on Shields Quay. Marines fired on the crowd from a boat and Joseph Claxton, a riverside worker, was killed.

That incensed the crowd and Reed was forced to retreat back to Newcastle. The only man arrested was a radical local shoemaker who had been at the Town Moor event, but seamen had walked from North Shields to Newcastle in large numbers four days earlier, and it seems likely that some Newcastle keelmen would have been permanently stationed at North Shields, to picket the new spouts, and knowing that the Mayor wanted to break their strike, more would have made their way to North Shields. By the 17th Reed believed that the keelmen's strike was settled, but 'this will not render us secure. The Reformers are now in a state of Almost Rebellion'.⁴¹

The reform activists appears to have retreated to indoor meetings and respectful addresses. 'Radical Jack', Lord Lambton, tried to organise petitions from Sunderland and Durham, but apart from a very lively correspondence in the Newcastle papers, the movement seemed to submerge. At the Sunderland meeting in October, Lambton made some hostile remarks about alleged wild elements associated with the Town Moor meeting, but the tensions within the reform movement are illustrated by a rejoinder from Thomas Hodgson, a Winlaton weaver, in the *Newcastle Chronicle* on 23rd October: 'A person in your exalted station in life cannot be supposed to have much intelligence of what is going on amongst the lower orders of plebeians and on that account generally abundantly ignorant of what is known to every person but themselves. In short the Reformers wish for such a Reform in the House of Commons as will realise that favourite WHIG toast, the Sovereignty of the People'. On 18th November Lambton's reply in the *Chronicle*

insisted that that he 'had no suspicions of the Reformers as a body of men', but just happened to differ on Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage.

Meanwhile, on the 25th October the reactionary colliery viewer John Buddle wrote to Sidmouth: 'Until within these few weeks our Colliers and the body of Labourers, of every description, connected with the Coal Works, never troubled their heads with politics'; but they had changed, and the *Black Dwarf* and the *Black Book* 'are to be found in the *Hat Crown* of almost every pitman you meet'.⁴²

Newcastle Corporation offered work to redundant keelmen, lest they unite with disputatious pitmen, seamen and radicals, and by late October most keelmen were back at work. Reed was anxious that the employers should all honour the agreement, but undertook to pay them himself and recover the money from the coal owners if he had to. Yet on the 27th he told Sidmouth that 'the disaffection of the pitmen rapidly increases' and at Mount Moor Colliery near Gateshead Fell, 'all the pitmen except five have joined the Radicals, and almost the entire body of the pitmen entertain the same mischievous and abominable principles'.⁴³ Buddle was also astonished by the pitmen's 'constant cry' that they worked 'far too hard for their wages' and 'cannot resist' on them. 'One fellow at Heaton, after having solemnly made this declaration last say [*sic*; i.e. pay] Friday, gave 6s. 10d. next day for a White Hat', just like Orator Hunt.⁴⁴

On 22nd November Reed reported about a shortage of silver coins, because they had been 'hoarded by radicals and the timid';⁴⁵ though he later wrote that he did not think there was a strong connection between workers and reformers.⁴⁶ *The Crimes of Reformers. Address to the labouring classes on Tyne and Wear*, published by John Marshall, ended with a quote from Burns: 'Then

let us fight about, Till Freedom's spark is out, Then we'll be damn'd, no doubt'.

The NE authorities were trying to draw up an inventory of cannon held in private hands and have them removed to secure sites like Tynemouth Barracks.⁴⁷ The loyalists' appeals for military and naval support was answered positively, but the most determined wanted to strengthen the part-time Yeomanry and form squads of special constables. Despite some government caution, this happened. By 4 December the *Newcastle Chronicle* was able to report that the Yeomanry Cavalry, The Coquetdale Rangers, had arrived in Newcastle from Alnwick, and would be there for ten days, while the Yeomanry Cavalry of South Tyneside, Axwell Park and Bywell, were patrolling the streets of Gateshead and would be joined by the 40th regiment of Foot. Durham had also 'taken on a military appearance', thanks to the Durham and Gibside Yeomanry. A group of Newcastle men had appeared before the Mayor – the chief magistrate – charged with assaulting soldiers, while 400 others gathered round. It was probably a drunken fracas, but it merited considerable coverage in the local press because the crowd had shouted slogans such as, 'Liberty or Death! 'Death or Glory!' and 'Hunt for Ever!'

By 6th December Joseph Clark of Benton House had reported to the Home Secretary at least three times about the alleged arming of pitmen at local collieries, but Sidmouth assured him that Parliament would soon be giving magistrates new powers. Sir A F Barnard wrote to Sidmouth expressing his worry at the street disturbances in Newcastle and calling for a full enquiry, but on the 22nd Hobhouse asked the Mayor for an explanation whilst expressing his master's full confidence in his ability to deal with such 'tumults'. The radicals had made further 'requests' to the Mayor to permit outside assemblies on 22nd October and 15th November.

During November Sidmouth advised Reed to use the ancient Borough Charter to refuse to allow non-residents to enter the town, but by 9th December ‘the whole naval force in the North Sea’ was ‘stationed in the Tyne’.⁴⁸ There was no correspondence from ‘the usual suspects’ to the Home Office.

The workers’ upsurge and the *mass* reform movement had subsided. On 20th December the *Newcastle Chronicle* reported what was to be the last big demonstration that year had taken place after 600 people marched from Blyth and Cowpen to Bedlington, ‘preceded by drum and fife, each class leader bearing a white wand bound with crape’ (*sic*) and ‘accompanied by band of musicians bearing a flag, “woe unto the wicked. It shall be ill with them for the reward of their hands shall be given them.”’ Another flag was inscribed ‘Arise Britons and Assert your rights’. The main orator, Mr Layton of North Shields, a recent Town Moor speaker, called for ‘Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments and Vote By Ballot’, and was seconded by a Mr Spoor.

The frigate *Wye*, with a squad of highly visible marines, stayed on the Tyne until the New Year, and the radicals’ proposed meeting on 28th January did not take place. The local press, including the *Tyne Mercury*, recorded no radical initiatives for at least six months.

5. The Six Acts

Lords Castlereagh and Sidmouth aimed to squash the radical upsurge of 1819 by further repressive legislation. On 29th November Castlereagh laid out the case in Parliament for what became known as the ‘Six Acts’ to be enacted through Parliament: ‘nothing can be more obviously useless and mischievous than the assembling of immense multitudes’ and the proponents of the proposed legislation concentrated considerable attention not on Peterloo, but on the north east in general and the Newcastle Town Moor meeting

in particular. They claimed that two magistrates had been forced to flee their homes and take sanctuary in Newcastle. It is quite possible that the Reverend Charles Thorp of Ryton had been so provocative that he might well have feared for his safety among the colliers and iron workers at Winlaton.

Early in December Lord Darlington of Raby Castle, one of the two largest landowners in County Durham, spoke of 'twenty factious demagogues' who 'had done all the mischief and prepared the minds of the people to rebel' and ought to be 'hung or incarcerated'. He had information that '14 to 15,000 men on the banks of the Tyne and Wear were ready for rebellion'. The Duke of Northumberland believed the figure was nearer 100,000 and included 16,600 armed colliers. Darlington quoted a local clergyman – probably Thorp – who had told him that '*The Black Dwarf*, *The Republican* and the *Cap of Liberty* are constant subjects of discussion by colliers'. The Earl of Strathmore of Barnard Castle, the other biggest landowner in County Durham, informed the House that Eneas Mackenzie and John Marshall sold these publications in Newcastle. The government was raising the stakes and feeding a climate of fear in order to justify further repressive legislation. Someone told the tale about 700 armed workers attending at the Newcastle meeting, but a foreman of a local iron works had told Lord Lambton that it was impossible for closely supervised workmen to obtain sufficient material to make weapons. Sir Matthew White Ridley also played down the threat with the preposterous claim that 'scarcely a single person' at the Town Moor meeting 'was really an inhabitant of Newcastle'.⁴⁹

An important part of NE MPs' constituents were reformers who would value British freedoms, but wished to dissociate themselves from the radical wing of the mass movement, so there was also equivocation within the ranks of the reform.⁵⁰ Whig

reformers were acutely aware of the danger from the masses and picked away at the reactionary case, but they were unable to damage it substantially because they shared a ruling class distaste for street politics, especially when it seemed effective. Local authorities, above all those in Newcastle, had overcome their problems in recruiting reliable special constables by the end of 1819.

Under the Seditious Meetings Act of December, indoor meetings could be exempted, so in January 1820 the moderate Newcastle reformers presented a respectful request to the Mayor. He refused, but they held a very large meeting in the Turks Head Hotel Long Room all the same, and reports give a very precise account of what separated them from the radicals. Charles Bigge MP took the chair and referred to a handbill, widely distributed in the town the previous evening. It announced that 'a numerous meeting of deputies from the different reform societies in the town and from various parts of Northumberland and Durham' had gathered 'in one of their reading rooms in Queen Street' and 'unanimously agreed not to form any connection' with 'moderate reformers' or 'attempt to interfere with or disrupt their meeting'. Tensions were still high in the town and the Mayor had asked for troops. The 40th Regiment who had marched from Sunderland, were equipped with ball cartridges. A patrol of constables was on the streets and the Yeomanry Cavalry was in attendance.

Sir Matthew White Ridley, fresh from the Commons debate on the Six Acts, opined that 'a reform of the Commons House was essential to the health of the constitution'. James Losh, who had represented employers against workers several times before and after the Town Moor meeting, firmly attacked the radicals' demands. On Annual Parliaments, he argued that a year was far too short a time to learn how the system worked and would deter men of quality from standing. On Universal Suffrage, he believed that the masses were not

mature enough to vote wisely and power would simply devolve onto the rich and influential, so what was needed was a re-distribution of seats away from rotten boroughs to the centres of trade, and the extension of the franchise to those owning modest amounts of property. (At some distant point in the future it might be extended further.) On Vote by Ballot, the idea of voting secretly was an insult to the British elector. The moderates decided to present a petition to the Prince Regent, and their anxiety was clearly shaped by the feeling that some reform was essential to answer the rising tide of radicalism.⁵¹

At the end of January King George III died. It seemed that the mass reform campaign in the north east had ended. Only the most modest reference to it appeared during the general election campaign⁵² in Newcastle and Ridley was re-elected in spring.⁵³ The radicals supported Queen Caroline, who had been abused and marginalized by her husband, the new King George IV, but they went little further than petitioning.

The reform movement in the north east appears to have been very large indeed. 'Radical Monday' 11th October 1819 had mobilised tens of thousands and whole villages were swept up in it. But behind the turnout lay an organisational network that assembled contingents, created resolutions and banners with slogans, and maintained order and discipline. Its startling presence was confirmed by in the brutal response of its enemies, but was it revolutionary moment?

Probably the most important ingredient of a revolutionary situation, and rarest, is true mass involvement. This is what the numbers on the Town Moor suggest and what the enemies of reform seem to have witnessed before and afterwards, but within weeks of that spectacular event the organisation seems to have disappeared and the movement melted away. There was to be no sign of its re-emergence, or an obvious rupture in the solidarity of the ruling class and its subalterns in the middle class, for another decade.

The Six Acts were the fag end of a prolonged period of savagery from the state and its supporters. The villains of Shelley's *Masque of Anarchy*, written weeks after Peterloo, were the Tory brutes Liverpool, Castlereagh and Sidmouth, but they were reaching the end of their careers. Their successors did not regard overwhelming force as a completely viable method of dealing with organised workers, whether in crowds or at work, and much of the new legislation remained unused, except in the war against the illegal, 'unstamped' press, which rumbled on for years, though its transgressors were gaoled, not sabred, transported or hanged.

The situation had been well short of revolutionary, but it probably had a longer term impact on thinking on both sides of the class divide. If we regard the north east movement as part of a wider national experience it can be seen as a significant transitional moment in radical strategy.⁵⁴ A mass demonstration had succeeded French Jacobin adventurism⁵⁵ and petitioning as the favourite method of radical protest, while Jacobinism may have run its course for the rulers too. The social composition, organisation, order and self discipline of the Town Moor meeting was an important milestone in the development of the reform movement, and when it arose again on a grand scale, in 1830, it was accompanied by a rise in independent action by working people. Yet though the pressure – or the anticipation of pressure – of that very class ensured its ultimate legislative successes, it was ignored in the settlement of 1832.

¹ I am grateful to Malcolm Chase, Dave Harker and Norman McCord who read and commented on earlier versions of this article. They bear no responsibility for the views expressed.

² Norman McCord, 'The Seamen's Strike of 1815', *Economic History Review*, 1968.

³ TS/11/836 PRO, National Archives, Kew.

⁴ ASSI/41/11 Northern Assizes (Newcastle), 1816, and KB28/456/457, PRO.

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- 8 *Tyne Mercury*, 8th October 1816
- 9 The administrative committee of a parish.
- 10 *Tyne Mercury* 25th November, 26th December 1816, 11th January, 11th February 1817.
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- 12 Wooler and Hone were radical newspaper editors constantly pursued by the authorities.
- 13 *Tyne Mercury* 27th October, 10th, 17th November 1817. See also E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1963, pp 602-710.
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- 17 Christopher Hunt, *The Book Trade in Northumberland and Durham to 1860*, Newcastle, 1975, p 65.
- 18 Reports or mentions in sundry local newspapers, August-September-October, 1819.
- 19 The keelmen took coal from the Tyne and Wear riversides to seagoing vessels in small barges called keels.
- 20 Newcastle City Library, Local Studies. [Reprinted: Newcastle, Frank Graham: 1969].
- 21 Thompson, p 690.
- 22 HO41/5 Disturbance Entry Book. Newcastle features 35 times, Manchester 30, the West Riding of Yorkshire 14, Lancashire 13, and Birmingham 12.
- 23 HO42/195.
- 24 HO42/195.
- 25 HO41/5.
- 26 HO42/195. My italics.
- 27 HO41/5.
- 28 The story of the day's events, except where otherwise indicated, is based on three reports in the local press *Tyne Mercury*, 23rd October, *The Times* of 16th October, which was mainly based on a letter dated 12th October that had been published in

the *Newcastle Courant*, and *The Black Dwarf* of the 27th. *The Manchester Observer* of 27th October may have had its own reporter, but *The Nottingham Review* and *The Leeds Mercury* copied from Newcastle papers. Archibald Dick, 'The Great Reform Meeting', etching, Newcastle City Library, Local Studies. The anonymous pamphlet, *An Account of the Meeting...*, was published in Newcastle later in 1819; *Radical Monday, a Letter from Bob in Gotham to his cousin Bob in the country*, was published in Newcastle in 1821; and see also Mackenzie, pp 81-4; Thomas Oliver's scale map of Newcastle, 1831; John Bruce Williamson, *Memorials of John Bruce Schoolmaster in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and of Mary Bruce His Wife* (Newcastle, 1903).

- ²⁹ Local radicals may have been aware that William Cobbett had just returned from America, allegedly carrying Paine's bones, though they seem to have been lost in Liverpool!
- ³⁰ D. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850*, London, 1984, pp 106-108.
- ³¹ 3 December, 1819, *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol XLI, London, (1820).
- ³² op cit. John Bruce Williamson,
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- ³⁴ Douglas Reid, 'Weddings, weekdays, work and leisure in urban England 1791-1911: The decline of Saint Monday revisited', *Past and Present*, Number 153 (November 1996), pp 135-63.
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- ³⁶ Thompson, p 681.
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- ³⁸ D. J. Rowe, 'The Strikes of the Tyneside Keelmen in 1809 and 1819', *International Review of Social History*, 1968, p 72.
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- ⁴⁰ HO42/195,196.
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- ⁴² J.L. & Barbara Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer 1760-1832*, London 1919, p 26.
- ⁴³ HO42/197.
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- ⁴⁵ HO41/5. 22nd November, 1819. The coin shortage was a hot issue and the government soon responded with a new issue.
- ⁴⁶ HO41/5, 22nd November 1819.

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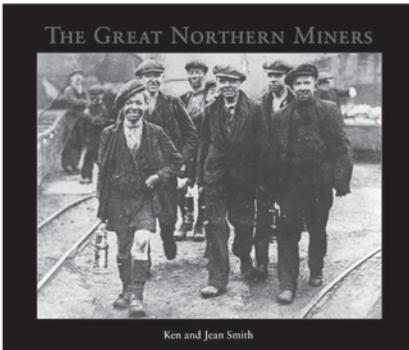
- ⁴⁷ HO41/5 Sidmouth to Bishop of Durham, Duke of Northumberland and Lord Darlington, 6th, 25th November 1819.
- ⁴⁸ HO41/5 25th, 29th November, 6th, 9th, 22nd December 1819.
- ⁴⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol XLI, London, (1820), 3rd, 4th December 1819.
- ⁵⁰ E Halevy, *The Liberal Awakening*, London, 1949 (Revised edition), pp 67-79.
- ⁵¹ *Newcastle Chronicle*, 27th January 1820.
- ⁵² At that time a General Election had to be held following the death of the monarch.
- ⁵³ Poll Book, Newcastle Election, 1820, Newcastle City Library, Local Studies.
- ⁵⁴ Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834*, Cambridge, MA, 1995. Transitions in repertoires of contention is a theme of this rewarding book and chapter 6 deals with the post-1815 period.
- ⁵⁵ The notion that a tiny group of determined people could seize power alone and act for the people at large.

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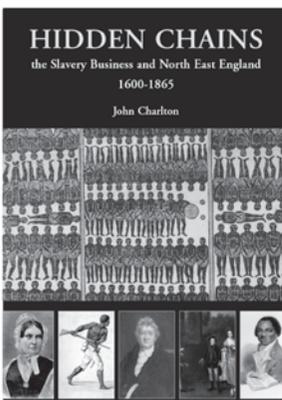
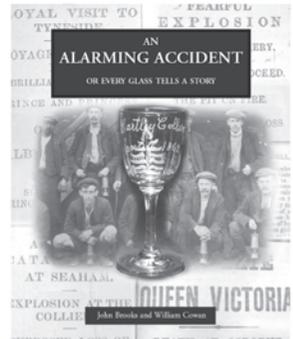
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‘Repression or Restraint’? The Authorities' Perception of Early Chartist Activity in the North East

Ben J. Nixon

Introduction

Gareth Stedman Jones famously declared that

An analysis of Chartist ideology must start from what Chartists actually said or wrote, the terms in which they addressed each other or their opponents.¹

This useful quotation exposes the need to study the Chartists utterances, rather than focus entirely on structural factors. My study attempts to expand on Jones' linguistic methodology to analyse the writings and pronouncements of the opponents of Chartism in the North East. This study examines how the authorities perceived the Chartist movement and goes on to consider whether they viewed the Chartists as a revolutionary threat and how the Chartist problem was managed by municipal authorities in the North East. Finally, this will lead into a discussion of the Home Office's

role and whether the Newport Rising of November 1839, altered these perceptions.

For my purposes, the main work relating to the methods used in controlling the Chartists comes from F C Mather and L Radzinowicz. Mather argued that Home Office input was limited by measures employed by the localities who attempted to control the situation.² Radzinowicz asserted that it was the lack of instructions from the Home Secretary that led to the ambiguous attitude of the magistrates.³ However, the sources I have consulted from the North East⁴ suggest that less extreme measures were employed than might have been expected. Also, it is questionable that the Home Office played a non-existent, or in some instances, a secondary role in combating the perceived Chartist threat.

The John Brown collection⁵ at the Tyne and Wear Archives is an invaluable resource, highlighting the volume of information and knowledge that were exchanged between Newcastle and Carlisle, and demonstrating the influence of the Home Office. Additionally, Durham University Library houses some interesting letters in the 3rd Earl Grey Papers,⁶ regarding methods used to obtain intelligence, plus some letters from Binns, a prominent Chartist in the region, requesting help to emigrate. Both these archival sources are used to offer a small insight into how the authorities viewed the Chartists. Also, local newspapers provide a useful range of perspectives which offer a fuller picture of Chartist activity. This paper asserts two propositions First, I argue that the authorities did not perceive Chartist activity as revolutionary. The language used suggests that the authorities – as well as the local newspapers I consulted – viewed Chartism in terms of riotous behaviour which aimed at attacking property rather than being a sustained attempt to overthrow the status quo. Second, I question the overly simplified interpretation of the relationship between the levels of authority in dealing with civil

disturbances. The local authorities were in frequent contact with each other, exchanging information as will be shown in relation to the authorities of Newcastle and Carlisle. There is also evidence suggesting that the Home Office did not merely advise, but also commanded the situation, recommending restrained actions to combat the Chartist challenge.

Chartism a Revolutionary Threat?

In the House of Commons on 15th May 1839, facing a question regarding the arming of Chartists, *Hansard* summarises Lord John Russell's reply as

While he wished on one hand to guard the House against any exaggerated notion of there being large bodies of men regularly armed, on the other hand he believed there were a considerable number of persons in possession of very dangerous and offensive weapons.⁷

The reference to 'any exaggerated notion' indicates that Russell was not alarmed and considered the Chartist threat to be overstated. However, the source material provided could be criticized as highlighting empty rhetoric, employed to placate a nervous audience. Therefore, it is necessary to trace opinions in private correspondence.

A letter from John Grey to Lord Howick of Durham in December 1839 asked the recipient

Does it appear to your Lordship that the spirit of Chartism ... is a new feature of the character of the operative classes in this country which has its origins in circumstances that remain to be closely investigated?⁸

This suggests that John Grey believed that the root causes of this movement needs to be thoroughly analysed, leading us to believe that rather than just removing the threat, the causes should be properly understood, thereby indicating an absence of panic. His mellow tone does not convey a sense of an impending revolution. Moreover, a letter sent in January 1840 from James Willoughby, clerk to the Mayor of Carlisle, to John Brown, clerk to the Mayor of Newcastle commented that ‘These villainous Chartists are all alive with us ... they are forming secret societies, are threatening mischief in all shapes, especially by private injury’. Furthermore, the letter informs of the numerous preparations used against the Chartists

The factories and other large establishments have had notice to put private watchmen which they have done, muster points have been arrayed for the police in case of sudden alarm and we have a mounted regiment of cavalry night and day. We are quite ready for them.⁹

Within this we get the sense of preparations made against the Chartists, but more importantly, the use of the words ‘villainous’ and ‘mischief’ are not indicative of a perceived revolutionary threat. Consequently, there seems to be some consistency of view on both a national and local level that they do not believe they were combating revolution.

The following examples from the local press completely trivialise the political aspirations of the Chartists by likening them to children. The *Sunderland Herald* in February 1839 reads

The Chartists, in their interference with meetings convened for the purpose of aiding in the demolition of

the tax on food ... seemed to resemble angry children who quarrel... because they are refused immediate possession of a favourite toy.¹⁰

This taunt was reiterated in July 1839 when the *Newcastle Courant* declared that to 'play at Chartists' has become a favourite amusement with the younger branches of society'.¹¹ Therefore, we can deduce that local papers do not project themselves as feeling threatened. The Chartists are presented to the readership as insignificant, being dismissed as infantile.

We can deduce from these that the authorities gave little credence to the notion that the Chartists were a revolutionary threat. Although I do not doubt that other localities expressed high levels of alarm, it is undeniable that the lack of revolutionary language suggests that the authorities felt the need to combat the Chartists, not from the angle of crushing a competitor for power, but merely protecting the public, and private property, from nuisance.

Administering the Problem

Northumberland and Carlisle in July 1839 were tense environments. The rejection of the National Petition and the subsequent threat of 'ulterior measures' and a 'Sacred Month' of strikes around the country meant that the local authorities had to be alert in engaging the Chartists. This tension was apparent in the 'Appeal to the Middle Classes of Northern England' in the *Northern Liberator*.

Gentlemen - We address you language of brotherhood, probably for the last time. Up to the last movement you have shut your senses to reason but now that the last moment for moral appeal has arrived, perhaps you will listen to the last appeal of the people.

It was then added that if the people are defeated, they will 'DISPERSE IN A MILLION INCENDIARIES, your warehouses, your homes, will be given to flames and one black ruin overwhelm England!' ¹² Handbills issued by the local authorities provide useful examples of this attitude. In Tynemouth on 1st August it was considered necessary to recruit Special Constables 'for the preservation of peace in consequence of the disturbed state of the surrounding neighbourhood'.¹³ Although this handbill suggests an urgency to preserve peace, a series of correspondence between the authorities of Carlisle and Newcastle suggest otherwise. James Willoughby of Carlisle wrote on 22nd July

I am directed by the magistrates here to request that you will favour me with as correct a statement as you can conveniently can, of any, even the slightest disturbance connected with the Chartism which may take place within the jurisdiction of the magistrates for which you act.¹⁴

So not only do the Chartists cooperate, so do the magistrates of different localities. When the situation had calmed Willoughby wrote 'This district is much indebted to the authorities of Newcastle'.¹⁵ Furthermore, Willoughby wrote on the 17th August stating that the 'law would scarcely hear us out seizing arms', as a result he asks Brown 'as to the legality of searching private houses for arms'.¹⁶ These highlight the extent of this reciprocal arrangement and the assistance they offered each other.

In fact, William Brockie's narrative account of events on Tyneside, written in 1842, stated that at a meeting held in Newcastle in August 1839, 'The authorities were complimented on their forbearance'.¹⁷ Therefore, the Chartists themselves recognised the restrained actions

of the authorities. However, if we take Brockie's account to be rather dubious, we still have to recognise the emphasis he placed on state legality, thus highlighting its importance in this period.

By predominantly examining the Home Office papers, Mather bases his account on inbound correspondence from the localities, supporting the conception of a nervous grouping of Magistrates. More importantly, Mather largely neglects the outbound correspondence heading towards the localities, neglecting the reciprocal arrangement that exists within them.¹⁸ This section argues that localities were not acting in a state of anarchy, they administered the problem rationally. I suggest that it is unwise to discuss the response of the authorities to the Chartists in such a way that only stresses incompetent and frightened magistrates. The correspondence used suggests that Tyneside and Carlisle were not as panic stricken as Mather suggests. In examining the authorities, I have shown the importance of utilizing the correspondence between the localities, not just outbound letters to the Home Office. Next I will discuss the impact of the Newport Rising of November 1839 on the authorities' reaction.

Newport a Turning of the Tide?

The events of 3rd November 1839 in Newport are of great significance for the Chartist narrative. It pinpoints the time when Chartist tensions boiled to such an extent that an alleged revolutionary situation arose. Thus he offered John Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones with thousands of Chartists stormed the Westgate Hotel signalling the most potent collision of the Chartists and the Government to date.¹⁹ The universal fear that this was a failed coup can be shown via a journalist for *The Times* writing in the immediate aftermath 'the Chartists have almost entire possession of the town ... What the end will be God only knows'.²⁰

Thus, offering an impression of the emotion an event like this presented. Furthermore, the *Tyne Mercury* wrote regarding Frost

His plan was to make the Magistrates prisoners, to take possession of this principal hotel, and to become masters of the whole town, and eventually of the whole of South Wales; then it was thought the Chartists would rise in the North and follow their example.²¹

Although no certain connections can be made with the North East and Newport in terms of events, the authorities feared a combined effort. When John Grey wrote to Lord Howick on November 20th, he uses an intercepted letter from “ML” to highlight his alarm. This letter shows that this individual ‘searched in vain for news from the North’ adding that ‘The Pole is particularly anxious to know when his services will be required’.²² The concern is even more evident when John Grey adds, after references to the Pole, that ‘I considered it to be my duty to forward a copy to Lord Normanby’.²³ Although it suggests that alarm was raised, it stresses further the importance of the Home Office in administering the problem, as Grey felt it was a patriotic duty to forward it to Lord Normanby.

Whether or not the existence of a combined effort is a true reflection of events, what can be deduced from this is the importance the Government played in avoiding an overreaction, strongly aligning itself to legality. Lord Normanby’s letter to the Duke of Northumberland illustrates both the extent, and influence of the Home Office. Normanby requested of the Duke in December 1839

Having received information that emphasis of the Chartists on going about endeavouring to seduce the labouring

classes from their duties... I beg to acquaint your grace that such a proceeding is illegal... I advise any Magistrate ... to deal with offenders according to the law.²⁴

Normanby offered advice and stressed the importance of legality over panic. The authorities of Newcastle wrote to Whitehall requesting advice on the likelihood of prosecuting Chartists. For example, a letter of 11th November, regarding the arrest of the Dr. John Taylor, suggested that the Home Office was reluctant to rashly prosecute; they requested more information. 'Lord Normanby waits for this information, and will then inform you of his opinion as to the expediency of prosecuting him for the speech on Tuesday'.²⁵ In fact, in Whitehall's reply to a similar request with reference to the Tyneside Chartist, Edward Charlton, on December 12th 1839, they advise against prosecution

Charlton appears at the meeting of the 30th November, merely to have said a few words for the purpose of opening the business, and introducing Lowery, and at the meeting of the 1st December to have made a long inflammatory address ... it could therefore only be only to his last speech that Lord Normanby's letter was intended to refer ...²⁶

Not only do these suggest that the Home Secretary advised against rash prosecution, but also that the Newcastle clerk had written to him frequently regarding the Chartists' seditious language, indicating how important the Home Office's opinion was in challenging Chartism. Furthermore, it is also significant that Brockie's narrative of Chartist events omits any reference to Newport's impact, suggesting its inconsequentiality to the local narrative.²⁷ Consulting Binns's reasons for emigration to New Zealand in his letters to Lord Howick, it is evident that it was not due to Government action. In May and June 1842, a letter from Binns solicited Lord Howick's aid in Binns's emigration, stating

Having been unfortunate in my business as a Draper ... seeing no prospect of future employment ... I am bent upon leaving my country for a few years, to enable me to return again with a replenished future and contended mind. I don't care where I go to be it New Zealand, Australia, Texas, East or West Indies.²⁸

This suggests that Binns's departure was centred more as an economic consideration due to failing business, rather the repression at the hands of the state.

Radzinowicz's concentration on Parliamentary papers tends to neglect the importance of the Home Office, calling their instructions vague.²⁹ This section has aimed to revise this perspective. Tyneside, in particular, provides evidence that instructions were not vague. The Home Office had an important role, stressing the importance of legality. Therefore, the evidence strongly points towards recognition of a fuller involvement of the Home Office.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although alarm was expressed, the record in the North East suggests that the challenge was more to remove an aggravating irritant, rather than to combat a revolutionary threat. If they did view it as revolutionary, we would have expected the language used to have been more anxious. The major factor of this view is the issue of violence. The *Tyne Mercury* summed the situation up neatly during the troubles of July 1839, asking the Chartists

Do they remember the well-known fable of the sun and the north wind, trying which could sooner cause a traveller to divest himself of his cloak? Do they not recollect that he only wrapped his cloak closer around him the more the wind blew and the colder and fiercer it became?³⁰

Consequently, the authorities were never going to allow the Chartists a free hand to pursue their cause through coercion; the more the Chartists threatened violent action, the more the authorities grasped the rungs of the situation. The evidence relating to the North East also indicates that the Chartists were dealt with fairly, with the authorities remaining within the boundaries of the law and the Home Office assuming an active role in ensuring that legalities were observed. The cross-fertilization of localities and the input of the Home Office suggests a complex system of interaction between the authorities, suggesting that the Home Office was more proactive than Radzinowicz suggested. These reactions were on the whole restrained rather than repressive. Whilst it is undeniable that the localities displayed a large degree of anxiety, it is important to recognise the important mitigating role of the Home Office in challenging the Chartists. The authorities' reaction was not oppressive; they made a sober assessment of the situation, which translated into actions that were restrained, being largely proportionate to the problem. Thus these actions were, restrained not repressive.

¹ G.S. Jones, *Languages of Class Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982*, (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.94.

² F.C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists*, (Manchester Manchester University Press, 1959), p. 226.

³ L. Radzinowicz, 'Public Order and the Chartist Disturbances', *Cambridge Law Journal*, (1960), p. 55.

⁴ Predominantly from Durham and Tyneside. Due to the predominance of Tyneside, it is referred to more frequently.

⁵ Tyne and Wear Archive Service, John Brown Papers, DFJB.

⁶ Durham University Palace Green Library. Papers of 3rd Earl Grey. GRE/BIO2 & B78.

⁷ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, Vol. XLVII, May 15th 1839, p.

- 1025-1028. Lord Russell was the Home Secretary.
- ⁸ Durham University Palace Green Library. Papers of 3rd Earl Grey, GRE/B102/7/7.
- ⁹ Tyne and Wear Archive Service, John Brown Papers, DFJB/2/14.
- ¹⁰ *Sunderland Herald*, February 8th 1839.
- ¹¹ *Newcastle Courant*, July 19th 1839.
- ¹² *Northern Liberator*, 21st July 1839.
- ¹³ Woodhorn Museum and Archives/ 404/352.
- ¹⁴ Tyne and Wear Archive Services, John Brown Papers, DFJB/2/1.
- ¹⁵ Tyne and Wear Archive Services, John Brown Papers, DFJB/2/4.
- ¹⁶ Tyne and Wear Archive Services, John Brown Papers, DFJB/2/5.
- ¹⁷ Gateshead Public Library, Brockie Collection, 76/18.
- ¹⁸ Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists*, p. 233-235. In his 'Biographical Note', where he discusses the source material, he neglects this fact. Therefore, he predominantly sees what was stated to the Home Office, not to the localities.
- ¹⁹ D.J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839*, (Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 1.
- ²⁰ *The Times*, November 6th, 1839.
- ²¹ *Tyne Mercury*, November 12th, 1839.
- ²² The 'Pole' was a mysterious figure involved in the alleged preparations for simultaneous Chartist uprisings
- ²³ Durham University Palace Green Library, Papers of 3rd Earl Grey, GRE/B102/7/4-5. The Marquess of Normanby was Lord Russell's successor as the Home Secretary.
- ²⁴ Woodhorn Northumberland Museum and Archives. ZSW/620.
- ²⁵ Tyne and Wear Archive Services, John Brown Papers, DFJB1/2.
- ²⁶ Tyne and Wear Archive Services, John Brown Papers, DFJB1/5.
- ²⁷ Gateshead Public Library, Brockie Collection, 76/18.
- ²⁸ Durham University Palace Green Library. Papers of 3rd Earl Grey, GRE/B102/GB/1.
- ²⁹ Radzinowicz, 'New Departures in Maintaining Public Order', p. 55.
- ³⁰ *Tyne Mercury*, July 23rd, 1839.

The Anti-Vaccination Movement and Newcastle

Candice Brockwell

Winner of the Sid Chaplin Trophy 2007

The existing consensus

For many centuries smallpox had been a scourge upon the Western world. Countless measures had been employed to safeguard against its destructive and disfiguring powers: sacrifice, votive offerings and charmed amulets,¹ and yet when a *bona fide* preventive measure, vaccination, was introduced it was met with much trepidation. The Anti-Vaccination Movements that sprang up in opposition to Jenner's discoveries and the subsequent 1853 legislation enforcing compulsory vaccination were fuelled by a variety of factors. On one hand factors such as: fear, ignorance, the inconsistency of the operation's results and the moral implications of infection with an animal disease, provided ample logical motivation. On the other hand, and this is the explanation favoured by most historians, budding political awareness, outrage at government intervention and a desire to protect the liberty of the individual, resulted in

what has been described as a 'widespread resolute opposition.'² The extent and nature of anti-vaccination in Victorian England is thus subject to much debate.

The difficulty with the existing historiography, and therefore the general consensus that this was a broad, national, politically driven movement, is the continued over-reliance on a limited number of highly celebrated cases, namely Leicester and Keighley, from which sweeping conclusions encompassing the whole country have been drawn. By providing a detailed study of Newcastle this article's aim is to broaden the scope of this discussion and challenge the assumptions that have previously been made about oppositional feeling and activity during the late Victorian period.

F. B. Smith, despite claiming anti-vaccination to be a broadly cohesive, national movement: 'from Liskeard to Brighton... to Northampton'³ only provided detailed evidence from the extraordinary example of Keighley, where the Board of Guardians were imprisoned for refusing to enforce compulsory vaccination. Similarly problematic are the Porters' conclusions about a national politically driven movement. They rely almost solely on evidence taken from the London-based, middle-class led Anti-Vaccination Leagues and their propaganda.⁴ Therefore the first issue to be addressed will be the extent of anti-vaccination feeling and activity away from examples such as Keighley, using the previously unstudied area of Newcastle, from which it is hoped the basis for a re-appraisal and further study, will occur.

The second issue arises as a result of the first. With such limited evidence can the conclusions drawn about the nature of anti-vaccination be accepted unquestioningly? On the basis of his findings from Keighley, Smith has argued that liberty and its potential loss due to compulsion were the issues at stake for the campaigners, dismissing the practical concerns of contaminated

lymph as little more than a propaganda tool to garner support from, what he considers, the less political lower classes.⁵ In more recent years Nadja Durbach has attempted to counter this middle-class prejudice, but still she places politics as opposed to practicalities at the heart of the movement amongst the working class.⁶ In fact she goes so far as to suggest that the Anti-Vaccination Movement provided a hotbed for working-class political activism, as integral to the development of working-class consciousness and political awareness as the Trade Union and Co-operative Movements.⁷ This is a radical claim to make and is perhaps undermined by the narrowness of her evidence. Again Durbach's arguments suffer from an over-reliance on examples from Leicester, London and Keighley. This therefore raises questions about the importance of political issues within the Anti-Vaccination Movement, away from these specific areas; and demands a discussion of the relative importance as the movement in comparison with other social and political movements of the time.

Reassessment – the Newcastle experience

For a re-assessment of the nature and extent of Victorian anti-vaccination, Newcastle provides a starting point. With the Tyneside tradition for radicalism and resistance, which included enthusiastic support for Chartism, co-operation and the election in the 1870s of the radical Liberal MP Joseph Cowen, the area was notorious for its progressive stance.⁸ Therefore, despite extensive research encompassing court records, vaccination registers, medical and hospital reports and the 1870s editions of the *Newcastle Courant* and *Chronicle*, the sparse and largely neutral response to vaccination is staggering. The lack of local anti-vaccination literature is incredible, considering the political radicalism of the city at this time, suggesting that the conclusions drawn over the extent and

nature of Victorian anti-vaccination by previous historians may not be watertight.

This paper is little more than a starting point, an initial enquiry into whether a re-assessment of anti-vaccination is possible. The movement, upon further reflection and with a wider reaching study, may in fact prove to be neither the coherent national movement suggested by previous historians, nor as political as has been believed.

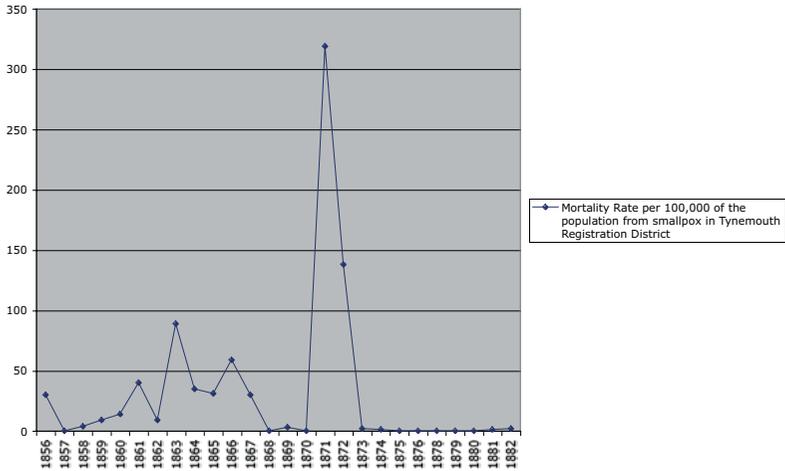
A specific investigation into the extent of anti-vaccination in Newcastle, during the reported peak of the movement in the 1870s and 1880s, is the first step towards this re-appraisal. Had a movement existed it would surely have left some record of itself, or have provoked enough concern to be reported upon. However what is immediately notable is that explicit oppositional literature, or recognition of an organised movement by the press and authorities is glaringly absent. This implies that general acceptance of compulsory vaccination may have been the overwhelming response within the city. However in the radical newspaper the *Newcastle Chronicle* organised anti-vaccination activity is mentioned only three times in the peak year 1871,⁹ a trend reoccurring in the *Newcastle Courant*.¹⁰ The reports are brief and unremarkable, suggesting they evoked little interest beyond their minority support base. The only detailed report of a Newcastle Anti-Vaccination League appears in the Manchester based *Co-operator and Anti-Vaccinator*.¹¹ However newspaper owners frequently used their presses to express personal opinions and it is interesting to note that, as soon as the Co-operative Movement could afford their own publication, *The Co-operative News*, all mention of anti-vaccination disappeared. This suggests that the cause was of specific interest to the owner Henry Pitman, but held little wider resonance with the co-operative movement and the publication's audience.

Within the medical officer's reports spanning the 1850s to 1880s the lack of recognition for anti-vaccination is reiterated. In fact where vaccination has been unsuccessfully enforced it is the Board of Guardians who are blamed for their 'woeful neglect of duty' and 'short-sighted economies'¹² rather than anti-vaccination activity. This blame re-occurs in the South Shields and Newcastle Medical Officer for Health Annual Reports and those of the Newcastle Dispensary and Newcastle and Gateshead Fever Hospital reports. The only references made to the public opposition are fleeting, implying a very small minority who were generally dismissed as ignorant.¹³ This in itself speaks volumes. If the medical officers were willing to criticise the laxity of the authorities they would have had no qualms about condemning an organised anti-vaccination campaign. From this it can only be concluded that the movement was marginal, without organisation or recognition, causing little concern to the authorities.

Another indication that vaccination was widely accepted in Newcastle comes from the hospital statistics in the Tyneside region. Admittedly statistics only account for an undefined portion of the population, particularly at a time when patient death rates were so high that they provided a deterrent to those considering hospitalisation. Nonetheless they provide some sense of how vaccination was received by the population:

Figure one:

A Table Showing Mortality Rates Due To Smallpox In The Tynemouth Region



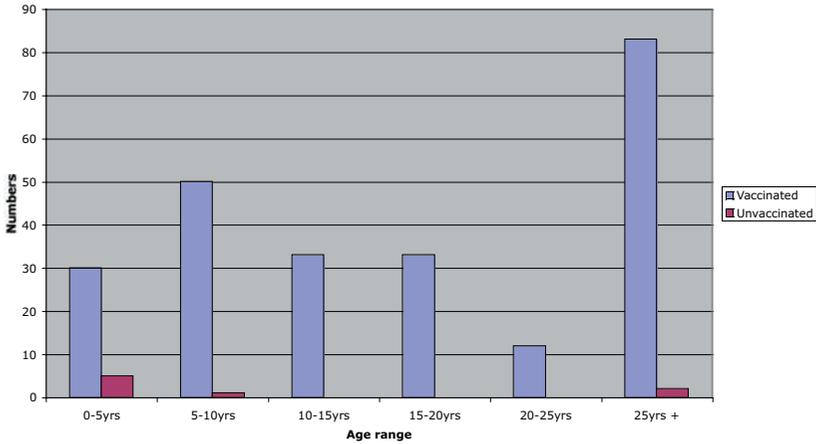
Source: Statistics taken from the Reports of the Medical Officers For Health over a period of thirty years.

Despite the virulence of smallpox, figure 1 shows a remarkably low instance of smallpox on Tyneside between 1856 and 1881.¹⁴ In addition Doctor F. W. Barry's report on the Tynemouth Registration District estimated similarly low mortality rates per annum in Newcastle, the figure being about 0.05 per one hundred thousand from smallpox, compared to London's 2.34.¹⁵ Newcastle was a growing industrial town, far from isolated it had much contact with the rest of England and Europe and so the rates should logically have been higher. It is possible that these low figures indicate the general acceptance of vaccination, which lessened the likelihood of smallpox fatality.

To further this claim figure two compares the instance of smallpox in both the vaccinated and unvaccinated during a local outbreak in 1882-3.¹⁶

Figure two:

Smallpox sufferers in Tynemouth during the 1882-3 outbreak



Source: Doctor F. W. Barry's Report on the Tynemouth Registration District during the 1882-3 epidemic.

At first glance it appears that vaccination increased the chances of suffering smallpox. However when viewed in conjunction with the table below¹⁷ the opposite conclusion arises.

Figure three:

A table showing the correlation between vaccination and smallpox attack rate

Town	Epidemic dates	Attack rate under ten years of age		Attack rate over ten years of age	
		Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated
Sheffield	1887-8	7.9%	67.6%	28.3%	53.6%
Leicester	1892-3	2.5%	35.3%	22.2%	47%
Gloucester	1895-6	8.8%	46.5%	32.2%	50%

Source: The Royal Commission's Report on Smallpox Epidemics, published by the Royal Statistical Society in 1897

It is clear that, generally, those unprotected by vaccination suffered higher instance of smallpox than the vaccinated. Thus the results from figure two should show the reverse. These figures therefore imply that only a small percentage remained unvaccinated in Newcastle, thus accounting for the unusually low rage of suffering amongst the unprotected. Opposition to vaccination may therefore be considered to have been a minority response within the region.

A final indication of the success and acceptance of compulsory vaccination in Newcastle is the regular reference to re-vaccination from the 1870s.¹⁸ By 1872 the Newcastle and Gateshead Fever Hospital was already practising re-vaccination,¹⁹ however it was not until the 1880s that it was advocated on a national scale.²⁰ Surely without widespread acceptance of initial vaccination, re-vaccination would not have been so prevalent, and Newcastle would not have been pioneers in such a scheme.

Reappraisal

A broader appraisal of reactions to vaccination across England suggests Newcastle's results may not have been anomalous. Between 1871 and 1876 only four from six hundred and forty nine Boards of Guardians refused to enforce vaccination, three complying with coercion²¹ and only Keighley remaining in open defiance at the turn of the century.²² In Liverpool, another Northern industrial town and commercial port, no Anti-Vaccination League existed at all, throughout the century.²³ Finally, when a broader time frame is taken into account, the half-heartedness of anti-vaccination sentiment across the country is apparent. Inoculation had occurred since 1721 in England, compulsory vaccination since 1853; and yet

it was not until 1866 that the first London Anti-Vaccination League formed and the 1890s that the Parliamentary lobby was strong enough to affect change, in the form of a conscience clause. Even then the element of compulsion remained until 1948. This inability to bring about significant change reveals the weakness of the general opposition. Had the movement carried wider resonance and gained support and momentum its impact upon the legislation would have been swifter and more effective.

In light of these results and the findings from Newcastle it is possible to suggest that, away from the obvious strongholds such as Leicester and Keighley, nineteenth-century vaccination was met with a large degree of neutrality. Although further study of a broad cross section of regions is necessary, there is already some scope to suggest that the anti-vaccination agitators formed at most a vociferous minority, rather than the widespread opposition claimed by previous historians.

If the assumptions made about the extent of anti-vaccination sympathy and activity can be challenged on the basis of Newcastle's results, then perhaps too the argument for a politically rooted movement are similarly fallible. Although acknowledging the health implications and dangers of the unrefined vaccination process as a factor in the movement, historians have tended to place greater emphasis on the backlash against compulsion and loss of liberty.

Ideology and politics

Taking a broader view of the Victorian political climate it is clear that in the latter period liberty and increasing state intervention were a source of contention within society. With the onslaught of industrialisation, the growth of the Empire and, after the 1832 and 1867 Reform Acts, a widened franchise, the need to rear a healthy and educated population for the country's future economic

development and world leadership led the new Liberal Party to introduce a number of health and educational initiatives, one of which was the 1853 Act. Parliament and the enfranchised classes found themselves embroiled in a battle between old laissez-faire liberalism and the new interventionist liberalism. The old accused the new of Tory-style paternalism, the new considered laissez-faire to be ineffectual and outdated.²⁴ However these issues were only a concern to those involved in and with a notion of political right and expectation. The majority of the male population were still without the right to vote, to say nothing of the multitude of women directly affected by vaccination and prosecution for non-compliance, for whom enfranchisement was even less of a reality. For many therefore concepts of liberty and individual right were little more than an abstract philosophy, their main concern being survival.

Some of the sources do indicate that a political slant was of importance to some campaigners, but they were taken largely from the wealthier classes. F. W. Newman, a committee member of the London Anti-Vaccination League made reference to how the 1867 Act left England living 'under a despotism';²⁵ similarly the intellectual leadership frequently highlighted the comparisons of compulsion to slavery. Louis Breeze Junior's poem 'Slavery: The Horrors of Uncle Tom's Cabin Eclipsed', in 1884, states that the African slaves of the eighteenth century suffered little in comparison to the English men and women living under compulsory vaccination.²⁶ Although this provides some evidence in favour of a political motive, it gives no notion of the feelings and concerns of the vast majority. They do not provide a broad view of English anti-vaccination, only the movements upper echelons and their highbrow debates. The reactions of the lower orders, those directly affected by vaccination, and unable to pay fines to avoid imprisonment for non-compliance in the way the middle classes could, are unaccounted for. Provincial England's

response and the thoughts of the majority are vital when assessing the driving force behind anti-vaccination successfully, this is where localised studies, such as this one, provide such opportunities.

Health issues

The results from Newcastle and the North East suggest that the priorities of the small number who resisted were in fact very different. The motives behind the ordinary person's opposition to vaccination centred upon fear for their child's health and their own. Compulsion only became an issue because it forced a parent to put a child at risk, through potential blood-poisoning, or secondary infection due to lack of precision and care. Stressing the importance of these practical concerns Newcastle therefore provides the opportunity to re-interpret the motives behind anti-vaccination in England.

Even the official Anti-Vaccination League in Newcastle, ineffectual though it was, placed practical concerns at the centre of its manifesto; the failure of vaccination to prevent smallpox infection; the lack of scientific theory to explain the basis of vaccination; the divisions within the medical profession over the efficacy of vaccination; the moral and physical dangers of deliberately poisoning a pure human body with a beast's disease; and the widely acknowledged dangers, such as syphilis, of cross-contamination due to arm to arm vaccinations; these are all acknowledged as chief concerns, liberty and politics are not!²⁷ Thus despite Newcastle's famed radical stance over political issues, the demand for liberty inherent in the middle-class propaganda of London is missing even from the town's official movement's demands. In the wider circles of provincial England it was practical, private concerns for the health of the individual, rather than the political implications of compulsion, which drove the majority of non-compliers.

The individual responses mirror the tone of the official body's complaints. The Darlington prosecutions of June 1871 reveal health implications to be of chief importance. Mr Edward Spence Brown claimed that he would not vaccinate his fourth child, on the basis that he had lost his previous three to vaccination complications, including infected impure lymph.²⁸ Similar concerns were revealed in the Castle Eden prosecutions of 1880, James Robert Good stated: 'That the boy was healthy and strong and he objected to having him vaccinated from the fear of injury to the child's health.'²⁹

Here, again, there is no explicit political motivation for anti-vaccination, only the sensible fears of a father protecting his child, based on the logical grounds that vaccination was widely acknowledged to potentially weaken a child's health. For those faced with the battle to survive and without the luxury of middle class enfranchisement, these practical issues were enough to provoke opposition. The tangible effects and potential fatality of vaccination were thus of greater importance than the political ideology of liberty, to these ordinary individuals. Even in the latter part of the nineteenth century the masses were only just awakening to the possibility of democracy, thus it was not necessarily foremost in their minds. Practical issues were a more plausible explanation for resistance. Newcastle therefore, once again provides grounds for a challenge to the received wisdom on the topic, anti-vaccination may upon reflection thus have been neither as far-reaching nor politically driven as has been previously suggested.

To reiterate just how important these findings from Newcastle are in instigating a re-appraisal of the study of anti-vaccination it is now essential that they be viewed in the light of Nadja Durbach's claims. In her attempt to bring to prominence this largely unstudied topic she has perhaps over-stated her case, arguing that anti-vaccination activity was as instrumental in the development

of working class consciousness and political awareness as the co-operative societies and the trade unions.³⁰ This is an enormously controversial claim to make and demands a direct response, particularly in the light of Newcastle's own radical tradition and yet lack of anti-vaccination sympathy. When viewed in light of this statement, Newcastle's findings prove conclusively that the case for a politically driven Anti-Vaccination Movement across Britain are essentially flawed and thus that it is necessary to re-assess the subject area.

Health and class

There is no denying the validity of the grounds upon which Durbach states her claim. The Vaccination Acts were undoubtedly discriminatory class legislation. Smallpox was considered a disease of the poor, bred in the city slums³¹ consequently the working class body was targeted as a dangerous source of infection. Free public vaccination was unavoidable, the twenty to twenty five shilling fine, or fortnight's imprisonment for non-compliance made resistance an impossibility for the average working class family, whilst the middle classes could afford to pay and defy the law.³²

Public vaccination was more dangerous than the private operations afforded by the better off. A rushed arm-to-arm method with only basic training for operators meant that the operation was riddled with complications. There were therefore plenty of reasons for the working classes to feel aggrieved at the treatment meted out by the authorities and thus plenty of potential for a political class-movement. However the only clear acknowledgement of this prejudice came, once again, from the wealthier classes, when MP P. A. Taylor asked angrily: 'If it is essential that all should be vaccinated for the sake of the nation – then why are only the poor actively compelled to do so?'³³ The class related nature of

the legislation makes the muted response from Newcastle quite remarkable; or perhaps implies that the working classes were far more pragmatic and practical in their approach to life, accepting the general benefits of vaccination and instead focusing on the larger issues at stake in society.

The progressive nature of the North East and in particular their MP and founder of the local paper, Joseph Cowen, is incontrovertible. The history of Chartism, self-help and the swift encompassment of Co-operation between 1858-73 are testament to this radicalism.³⁴ The inches of column space devoted to the Nine Hour Movement, Trade Unionism and even Home Rule for Ireland reinforce this fact. Yet the deafening silence over vaccination, despite its obvious potential as a working-class movement, reinforce the notion that the masses did not necessarily conceive of the issue in the same political bracket. Cowen's own neutrality and apathy are perhaps indicative of the general feeling within the community. When asked if he would support P. A. Taylor's bill for the repeal of compulsory vaccination in 1880 it was reported that: 'He would not bind himself to support Mr P. A. Taylor, but would wait until that gentleman had made out his case before he positively decided one way or another.'³⁵

Conclusions

There were quite clearly more pressing concerns to be addressed, such as wage and working conditions improvements. Although class consciousness and political awareness were emerging during the late nineteenth century, it is clear that they centred upon the bigger issues of survival, poverty, respectability and enfranchisement. The lack of anti-vaccination upon Tyneside, despite its radical nature, is a clear indication that anti-vaccination was not considered a political concern to any aside from a small middle class minority, it's political

importance as a movement has thus been over-stated. Durbach's claims about working class involvement and the movement's significance rivalling that of the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, are thus hard to accept unquestioningly.

It is therefore essential that the topic of anti-vaccination be re-assessed, using a wider base of evidence than the previous over-reliance on the extreme examples such as Keighley. Although this paper only provides one, very localised study, it does lay the foundations for a new approach and interpretation, shaking the premises of Porter, Smith and in particular Durbach. Anti-vaccination it would appear was not as widespread, or coherent a national movement as has been suggested, if anything it appears to have broken out sporadically, the nature and extent varying between different pockets of resistance across the country. The emphasis placed on political notions of liberty and individual right, appear equally flawed; away from the official London leagues, concerns may prove to bear more resemblance to those voiced by the small number of North Eastern campaigners. As a disjointed and at times isolated movement, with practical concerns at the heart of rebellion, Newcastle provides the basis for a new approach which, upon further research, may show that anti-vaccination was of a very different nature to that previously believed and that it was certainly not of as great importance politically as the Co-operative Societies and Trade Unions that emerged at the same time!

¹ F. F. Cartwright, *A Social History of Medicine*, (London, Longman 1977), p. 80.

² F. B. Smith, *The People's Health 1830-1910*, (London, Croom Helm Ltd 1979), p. 167.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴ R. Porter and D. Porter, 'The Politics of Prevention: Anti-Vaccination and Public Health in Nineteenth Century England' *Medical History* 32 1988, pp. 231-252.

- ⁵ Smith, *The Peoples Health*, p.168.
- ⁶ Durbach, N., *Bodily Matters: The Anti-Vaccination Movement in England, 1853-1907*, (Durham and London, Duke University Press 2005); Durbach, Nadja, ‘“They might as well brand us” Working Class Resistance to Compulsory Vaccination in Victorian England’ *Social History of Medicine* 13 2000, pp. 45-62.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48; Durbach, *Bodily Matters*, p. 6.
- ⁸ Joan Hugman, ‘Print and Preach: The entrepreneurial spirit of nineteenth century Newcastle’, in *Newcastle Upon Tyne: A Modern History*, eds. R. Colls and B. Lambert, (Chichester:, Phillimore and Co. Ltd. 2001), p. 132.

Forty Years On, Or So! The Origins of The NELHS

Stuart Howard

One of the tasks of the modern historian is to try to establish so far as possible the facts of history – for these facts act as an antidote to mistaken belief, myth and fiction. It was in 2006 that I suggested that the North East Labour History Society should celebrate its 40th anniversary by recording an interview with its founders and early members. I had assumed that because an editorial ‘A New Society’¹ had announced in October 1967 the emergence of the NELHS, its first year had been 1967-68, and that it would be appropriate to include a piece based upon the interview in the 2008 edition of North East History. However, my researches led me find that the Society was in fact first formed in December 1966,² and therefore we were celebrating 41 rather than 40 years. Such is the use of history.

Moreover, nearly all the interviews I had planned never took place, for most of the founders were too ill, had moved away or had passed away. However, founder member Archie Potts agreed to put down a record, as did long serving member and former Chair

Maureen Callcott. I recorded the interview on May 20th 2008; this article is based upon it and the early records of the Society.

The origins

The Society was initiated by Archie Potts and Joe Clarke (see obituary *NEH* Vol. 38, 2007) some time before autumn 1966. Their motives for forming the society were entirely regional. Both men were members of the national Society for the Study of Labour History and working on projects in the field of labour history, but felt restrained by distance, 'so much was happening in London, wouldn't it be a good idea to bring some of that into the Northeast which after all was very rich in labour history' Potts told me.³

In his first address to the Society, the first Chairman, Professor Edward Allen, noted that 'the inspiration for the formation of the group came from a group of people in Newcastle upon Tyne' and went on to pay tribute to Clarke for 'the energy with which he has propelled the group along the path of its first year.'⁴ This might have been slightly misleading because, as we have seen, Potts and Clarke were working in tandem, they had discussed forming the society earlier in the year and that 'conversation led on to action, phoning around and sending out leaflets'.⁵ An early and significant responder was the WEA tutor Terry McDermott, another was Edward 'Ted' Allen, professor of economics at Durham University; they were joined by J David Rowe of Newcastle University and Duncan Bythell of Durham University. This cadre of essentially economic historians,⁶ with trade unionist E Barnett, formed the first ad hoc organising committee at the inaugural meeting in Rutherford College of Technology in Newcastle during Autumn 1966.⁷ Allen took up the Chair (Potts explained: this 'unassuming man.... We were very lucky to have him, as a professor he devoted himself to the Society and people listened to him')⁸ Potts became Vice Chairman, Clarke Secretary, Mc Dermot Treasurer and

Bythell, Rowe and Barnett the first committee members. Clarke and Rowe became the first bulletin editors.⁹

The early members were representative of the 'wide church' the society was to become. Potts, Clarke, McDermott and Sid Chaplin may be said to the left of Rowe, Bythall, Allen and Professor Norman McCord (who attended the inaugural meeting but stayed in the background during the early period). Potts told me, 'There was an agreement I think, never written down, to keep it above faction...certainly party politics', This policy on the one hand, allowed the Society to avoid the errors of unthinking and narrow dogmatism, and on the other to enjoy the benefits of broad critical debate and the support of an ideologically wide membership. This is not to say there were not passionate debates. The work of E P Thompson and E J Hobsbawm certainly exercised the membership; Potts recalled that Thompson's *The Making of The English Working Class* triggered 'a fierce discussion'. Potts remembered 'there was a little grumbling that the society should be more to the left', but pointed out that the society was 'a very harmonious one, I'm glad to say, you know there was very little back-biting, intrigue or jockeying for things ideologically or personally'.¹⁰

Academics and trade unionists

A characteristic of the early membership was the number of academics involved. When asked who the early members and supporters were, Potts said that they were, 'overwhelmingly, I think, academics to tell you the truth, from the different institutions' Callcott added 'tutors would bring their students'. Potts concurred with this point and pointed to the expansion of higher education during the mid sixties 'as it got going we got more research students coming along'¹¹ [Tony Mason was an early example, he published articles on the General Strike in the Northeast, drawn from his Doctoral thesis, in Bulletins 3 (1969) and 4 (1970). The text derived from that thesis remains the seminal work on this topic]

In fact, the regional academics and their students who made up the early membership went on to produce significant contributions to the historiography of the region. Rowe's numerous articles on the economy of the region, McCord's *North East*, Clarke's definitive *Building Ships on the North East Coast*, Garside's *The Durham miners, 1919-1960*, McDermott early work on the Irish in the region and Callcott's work on the interwar Labour Party, to name but a few.

There were however other members drawn from a wider spectrum. I asked Potts about trade unionists, 'there was a sprinkling of those, it was a busy time for them though, I know we had a number of them who would have like to have been more involved but they just did not have the time'. I asked if there was a wider constituency, people from outside the Newcastle and its districts.

In truth we always tried to make it a Northeast thing, rather than a Newcastle thing: we were conscious of that. A number of us were not Newcastle people in origin, we knew the resentment, you know, that there might be if Newcastle dominated everything. So we tried to make it Northeastern and to have meetings elsewhere as well, but these were not very successful to tell you the truth and we were thrown back on Newcastle whether we liked it or not'.¹²

This was reflected in the Society's first meeting place. 'There was a tendency for the thing to concentrate in the [Newcastle] Polytechnic' Potts told me. Potts and Clarke had taken up posts at the new institution as had Callcott. The Newcastle Polytechnic embraced the Society not only because its founders worked there, but because the Director Dr Bosworth supported it. Bosworth called Potts and Clarke to his office and told them 'how pleased he was that the polytechnic was taking the lead in this [NELHS]' we did not want to look a gift horse in the mouth and we said to him you would not mind Dr Bosworth if we sort of use the facilities of

the Polytechnic? Of course not', he said, 'you go ahead, So we felt we had a blank check in a way.'¹³ Nourished in this way (perhaps the Polytechnic's successor the University of Northumbria might consider continuing this honourable tradition?) the society set about realising itself.

The Articles of the Society – including its objects, namely to bring together those interested in research into labour history, to encourage and help organise such research, to assist in the preservation of existing records, to organise support for these aims by such means as seminars, lectures, bibliographical guides etc.¹⁴ – were the work of Joe Clarke. Potts confirmed this; 'Joe Clarke drew up the articles and what he wrote has held the field for a pretty long time'.¹⁵ Indeed to date, since only last year a sub-committee of the Society recommended that no significant change should be made to the constitution. Like all good constitutions this one has defined and protected essential aims and needs and has had the elasticity to accommodate change. (The Bulletin has changed title to *North East History* and the subscription has risen significantly from an initial 5/-per annum).

The Bulletin

The first editors of the Society's publication, *The Bulletin of the North East Group for the Study of Labour History*, Clarke and Rowe, were guided by the constitution and their interests as economic historians. The *Bulletin* contained reports on Society activities, synopsis of lectures given, obituaries (the first was for Sam Watson by Sid Chaplin) and, interestingly, archive reports and primary source documents rather than articles. Indeed noted editor Rowe, it was an aim of the society to 'ensure that records and documents...are preserved', in a report entitled 'Local records for Labour History' in Bulletin number 1. In 1970 Potts joined the newly styled Editorial Board,¹⁶ he told me, 'there were articles coming in that weren't able to find an outlet in the existing academic press... [This was in] about the third or fourth years. So there was a change in policy to bring these in and people began to write articles for it, specifically for it'.¹⁷ Indeed in Bulletin 7, October 1973 the change in policy

was announced and the first research article appeared, it was by Joe Clarke on the 'Wear Shipwrights and the Arbitration Court of 1853-54'. The *Bulletin* soon began to achieve a wide circulation in university libraries in Britain, and made incursions into institutions in the USA, Japan and Australia. In 1973 the circulation of the *Bulletin* was 120; there were 60 institutional and individual members. Audiences for lectures ranged between 17 and 60.¹⁸

Despite the growing role of the *Bulletin*, speakers remained the essential element of the society's activities in the very early years. Just how important their role was is revealed by Potts: 'The Committee decided that...the first speaker was important and we got John Saville [on 'The present Position and Prospects for Labour History'] to come and we could not have chosen better because he was a good lecturer as well as a spirited one, you know all round, it was golden, got us off to a great start I thought; it could have killed it if we had got a bad speaker'.¹⁹ Other early speakers were of a similar quality, they included; John Foster (on the South Shields labour Movement in the 1830's. This work would make up part of one of the most significant contributions to labour history published during the post war period – *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*) Professor Sidney Pollard, Dr Robert Moore, W R Garside, W H Maehl [University of Oklahoma] Dr N McCord and not least Dr R Chaloner.²⁰ Despite the hub of the society being in Newcastle Polytechnic, events, particularly 'Day Schools', were held at Durham University. It was at one of these events that Collcott gave her first paper to the Society.

The early seventies brought to a close the first chapter of the Society's history. The Society had established itself and the *Bulletin* had evolved. In 1971 Ted Allen retired as Chairman.²¹ (later the Society's most prestigious award The Edward Allen Lecture would be established to celebrate his contribution) and was replaced by Norman McCord. In late 1972 Joe Clarke resigned as Secretary on the grounds of ill health. In October 1973 Duncan Bythell retired from the Editorial Board. All had played key roles in establishing

the Society as a significant regional cultural institution.

I began this article by pointing to one of the tasks of the historian, I end by pointing to one of the duties, and that is to declare an interest, if an interest there be. I have been a member of the NELHS for twenty eight years. I have known and I have been taught by most of the principals recorded in this article. The first formal research paper I heard was given by David Rowe. Ray Chaloner lectured to me. My undergraduate dissertation was supervised by Maureen Callcott, When I began my doctoral research on miners' autobiography Archie Potts gave me a copy of Jack Lawson's life account, I still treasure it. When I had one of my first doctoral students Joe Clarke advised and helped me and my student way beyond the call of duty. Therefore I have reason to be grateful that Clarke and Potts had that wonderful idea in 1966, but then again so have many generations of students of labour history.

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- ¹ Bulletin North East Group for the Study of Labour History, Bulletin No.1, October 1967, p.2
 - ² BNELHS, No.2, First Annual Report, p1
 - ³ W S Howard, Interview with Potts and Callcott, May 2008 See also Bulletin No.1, p.3
 - ⁴ Bulletin No1, p.3
 - ⁵ Howard op.cit.
 - ⁶ BNELHS, No.2, First Annual Report, p.1
 - ⁷ Bulletin No.2,p.1
 - ⁸ Howard. Op. cit.
 - ⁹ Bulletin No. 1, p1
 - ¹⁰ Howard op.cit
 - ¹¹ Ibid.
 - ¹² Ibid.
 - ¹³ Ibid.
 - ¹⁴ Bulletin, No. 1, p1
 - ¹⁵ Howard, op.cit
 - ¹⁶ Bulletin, 4, 1970. Title page
 - ¹⁷ Howard, op.cit.
 - ¹⁸ Bulletin No.6, 1972, Title sheet 3
 - ¹⁹ Howard,op.cit.
 - ²⁰ Bulletins 1-4
 - ²¹ Bulletin, No.6, 1972, sheet 3

People's Theatre: People's Education

Keith Armstrong

In a previously unpublished manuscript, some of which is indecipherable, Jack Common writes about his formative experience, as a youngster of 12 years of age, of Newcastle's People's Theatre, which still exists today. The People's Theatre's first production was in 1911, but was performed under the banner of the Clarion Dramatic Society, like several other Clarion clubs, such as the Clarion Vocal Union and the Clarion Cycling Club, which were established under the wing of the British Socialist Party which held its Newcastle branch meetings in rooms situated in Leazes Park Road.

As Common relates, 'It was probably 1914 [sic] when I first had Experience of the Clarion Dramatic Society. Two of us lads were playing in the street a warm September evening when a 'lady' came along... we thought 'lady' because she was too clean and nicely dressed to be a factory worker or other. She offered us two tickets to a theatre, nothing to pay. My mate Sam was dubious. Theatres didn't let you in for nowt, he knew that. But I was keen to go...I'd just been invited to the theatre and I was bowled over by the experience. I had to go. Sam was accustomed to follow my lead. He weakened.' The Clarion Dramatic Society was

formed in early 1911 at a meeting at Leazes Park Road attended by a handful of people, including four members of the Veitch family who were already experienced members of Newcastle Operatic Society. Colin Veitch was famous as the captain of Newcastle United during the early 1900s when they had won the League Championship four times, as well as the F.A. Cup in 1910. Other early members were Wilf Armstrong, 'a reciter of some local repute', and Tom McEvoy, a clog dancer. Two plays were adapted for the first performance of the Society: an excerpt from 'Les Miserable' known as 'The Bishop's Candlesticks' by Norman McKinnen, and 'Pot Luck' by Gertrude Jennings. The first performance was on 11th July 1911.

Producing plays had another distinct advantage which appealed to the Socialist Party. Some of the best drama that was being written at that time was sympathetic to the cause of socialism. By choosing certain types of play they could kill two birds with one stone: bringing much-needed funds on the one hand, and propagating their doctrines with the other. (Goulding).

The Leazes Park Road premises were very cramped and confined, especially with an average of two plays per month being produced by 1913, and by the early spring of 1915 a set of much more suitable rooms (formerly housing the General Post Office) were located in Newcastle's Royal Arcade and the new theatre was opened on December 20th, 1915, with Galsworthy's 'The Eldest Son'. George Bernard Shaw was a later visitor. Common must have been mistaken when he identifies 1914 as the year he first frequented the 'Clarion' because he located the venue as the Royal Arcade: 'We had to tell our parents where we were off to because the 'Clarion' was in town, over two miles from our street. We walked, of course; it would cost us a penny half-fare to ride.' His article gives us a strong sense of the atmosphere of the occasion: 'Even in 1914

[sic] the Royal Arcade was a shabby backwater. Architecturally one of the Dobson-Grainger creations it suffered neglect... up two flights of stairs and we were in a large room with a stage at the end of it...What we saw was not glamorous, just people in ordinary dress talking, but to me enthralling. Poor Sam probably hoped for Panto...The play went on and on. It was going to be late...It was definitely ten. We should have been home by nine...Perhaps because we didn't see the end of the play. I forget its title...I came to know the place well and the actors ...It was the left-wing cultural centre of the town...The Clarion group's main aim was propaganda for Socialism originally...I have seen professional productions of plays which were not as good.' The chance meeting in the streets of Heaton with the theatrical 'lady' and her gift of free tickets, proved to be a great stimulus for Common and set off a longstanding link with the left-wing and cultural activities of the Royal Arcade.

His friend, railway fireman Tommy McCulloch, a later contributor to *Seven Shifts* which Common edited in 1938 giving seven workers the chance to describe their work in their own words, talked to me at his home in Yetminster, Dorset, in 1984 (prior to his death four years later) of those early days at the Arcade. 'It was', he told me,

in 1924 when I joined the Newcastle Socialist Society. I left in 1929 before I was coming to London. During that time, the relationship (with Jack Common) was more and more. There were four of us who formed a little study circle. There was Teddy Cotton, who lived in the West End of Newcastle; Bill Pearson, who was on the Gateshead side - a railway fireman; and Jack, who was unemployed, like Teddy Cotton.

The strength of the Newcastle Socialist Society as a debating Institution was due to these people. There were Progressive Libraries on both sides of the river, and all sorts of subjects were debated until the small hours. We used to

frequently arrive at meetings late, after backshift, and you could have a couple of hours with the 'gas-fire philosophers'! It was here that I first met Jack Common. He lived at Heaton at the time and we often used to walk home because all public transport was finished, and then the debate used to continue at the top of the street, because he left me on Heaton Park Road and went away to Third Avenue and I just turned in. He frequently used to come to our house when I was on such shifts. We used to discuss the modern drama - socially serious stuff - and politics, progressive politics, socialism, the varying economists, things we had read, and currently how much we differed with points of view in the Society, with whoever had been holding sway...We were reading Shaw, O'Casey, Pirandello. The People's Theatre was going then. Whatever they put on...you would grab...from the library O'Casey's books went 'Thump. Thump. Thump! (from the shelves), the whole lot went. You'd come into the Society, maybe bought a pie and a cup of tea, and you were in the middle of a furious argument in a couple of shakes; similar to the pubs in Newcastle, more or less mini-debating societies, many of them. You'd go into the 'Old George' down the Bigg Market on a Saturday night and all sorts of subjects would be up. The other pub we used was 'The Tiger' (now the 'Market Lane') on Pilgrim Street, straight opposite the Arcade where the Socialist Society was. A room at the back, and it was 'thump, thump, thump', the politics of the day, the latest.

In his book *English Journey* (1934), J.B. Priestley describes a visit to the People's Theatre, giving a strong impression of an institution largely unchanged since Jack Common's involvement:

'Its prices range from sixpence to a half-crown, and if you buy a serial ticket for five shillings you are admitted throughout the season for half-price. The productions that season included 'Peer Gynt', 'Widowers' Houses', 'The Insect Play', 'Loyalties' and 'The Trojan Women': good fare, solid tack, value for money. The players are all amateurs. I met one of the theatre's most enthusiastic helpers, whom I will call Bob.

The Bob Priestley might just as well have been the young Jack Common, given the similarities between the two in terms of background and attitude. Priestley manages to evoke the atmosphere of Tyneside which must have echoed with the mood of Common's times:

... the evening was becoming very unreal, a mad mixture of rain, grill-rooms, trams, rain, peanuts, boxers, trams, rain, Trojan women in coloured mackintoshes, buns in basements, theatricals, rain, buses, remote suburbs, and a never-ending stream of talk about books, plays, railways, shipbuilding, coal, the Means Test, Russia, Germany, politics, sport, life and death.

Bob is described as a man who

... spends nearly all his leisure either helping at the (Bensham Grove) Settlement for the unemployed or lending a hand with such activities as the People's Theatre... In his amateur theatricals, he is a promising comedian. When a bit of holiday comes his way, he likes to do a little careful water-colour sketching, and what he does is very creditable to an untrained man...He is not at all sentimental about his own class - except in its theoretical existence as 'the proletariat' - but quite sternly realistic in his attitude towards it...in spite of

much disagreement, I thought Bob himself a grand chap, and when he told me... that he would be spending the next night conducting a rehearsal of some unemployed young men, for a forthcoming pierrot show at the Unemployed Men's Settlement, I was only too glad to accept his invitation.

Tommy McCulloch, Jack Common's long-term pal, indicates that they were both members of the Bensham Settlement:

We got in with the...Settlement for a time too, and I got a smattering of French with that, and managed a holiday abroad without any assistance! Whilst we were learning French, there was always one evening when you had to use it and think in it and if you fell into English through difficulty you wouldn't get an answer. Eric Barber was the tutor. He wanted to put us through Durham University, the four of us (in the 'little study circle') were degree material he thought, but we didn't make it. The Bensham Settlement was a centre for adult education and spare-time study. Eric Barber was so good, he offered to devote mornings for our benefit when we were late-duty. It was something of a pity we didn't make it to University, it was only a matter of being piloted through.

The aims of the Bensham Grove Settlement (founded in 1919) were described as follows:

1. To provide a centre for Educational, Social and Recreational activities.
2. To promote systematic study of Social, Industrial and International conditions with a view to furthering plans for their improvement.
3. To further the advancement of Education in town and district.
4. By all these means to seek the expression of religion through Fellowship, Education and Service.

The Settlement Report of 1921-1923 asserts that

... the Settlements of today and of the immediate future, with their insistence on the spiritual significance of life, and on the necessity of spiritual freedom, have large part to play in building a new order of Society. An Educational Settlement must seek to unsettle those whose lives are limited by narrow personal aims, or who are content with the injustices and inequalities of the social system in which they live. Its aim must be continually to awaken a reverence for human potentialities, often so tragically undeveloped, to arouse a sense of personal responsibility and to urge purposeful participation in a new way of life. In an atmosphere of friendliness, and in the common pursuit of truth and beauty, it must seek to make incessant demands upon the deepest things in man's nature.

The Bensham Settlement was in close touch with the Educational Settlement Association and the Residential Settlement Association and was represented at both the Conference of British Settlements and the First International Conference of Settlements in 1922. Its national links included the Swathmore Settlement in Leeds, which arranged lectures to young prisoners in Armley Prison; the Sheffield Educational Settlement, which ran its own little theatre; and St Mary's Settlement in York, which arranged a Shakespeare Pageant every summer. The Bensham Settlement was to inspire the establishment of the Spennymoor Settlement in County Durham in 1930 which also had its own theatre and encouraged the likes of writer Sid Chaplin, a long-term associate of Jack Common's, and painter Norman Cornish. A list of occasional lectures given at the Bensham Settlement in the early 1920s offers an indication of the breadth of study which must have inspired Common's mates and associates:

Principles of Economics – Miss G. Jebb; Appreciation of Music - Mr. J.B. Cartner; Industrial History since 1850 – Miss G. Jebb; Natural History - Mr. Wm. Carr; Local Medieval History – Mr. Hamilton Thompson; Modern European History – Miss E. Teshy; Scientific Discovery and Progress – Mr. Carr; The Art of Story Telling – Miss Clark; Readings in Browning's Poems – The Warden; French Reading and Conversation Class The Warden; A Speaker's Class (for Women) – Miss B.L. Browne.'

The report of 1921-1923 also adds that

... the printed aims of the Settlement emphasize the need of close study of international conditions. Good audiences attended Mr. Currie Martin's lectures on Internationalism; and Settlement members have appreciated the opportunity of learning of conditions in Russia from two eye-witnesses Mr. Cuthbert Clayton and Miss M. Bunsley-Richards. We have also been indebted to Miss Winder, of the Women's International League.

J.B. Priestley's 'Bob' gave him the guided tour of the Settlement: 'It is established - and has been for a good many years - in a detached house, the only one of that size I noticed in the neighbourhood. A little theatre has been built in the garden, and there are one or two other small annexes. Conditions are probably worse on the Tyne than anywhere else in this country, but it is only fair to say that in no other districts are more determined efforts being made, by means of these settlements and their various activities, to help the unemployed... There was a play on in the theatre; there were classes being held in various parts of the house; the notice boards were covered with lists and programmes.'

Priestley's wandering through Tyneside took him past 'some little Streets named after the poets, Chaucer and Spenser and Tennyson Streets'. He 'wondered if any poets were growing up in those streets'.

‘We could’, he felt, ‘do with one from such streets; not one of our frigid complicated sniggering rhymers, but a lad with such a flame in his heart and mouth that at last he could set the Tyne on fire.’

These are, I feel, the same instincts of Jack Common plucked from the streets of Heaton for a night at the People’s Theatre and reflected in the series of essays, *Freedom of the Streets*, published in 1938, ten years after he fled Tyneside for the literary world of London.

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RECOLLECTIONS

John Toft Durham villager, Miner, Trade Unionist, Local Politician.

Interviewed by John Creaby

*It was hard to imagine, as I was driving into Murton village to interview **John Toft**, the pit at which he worked which at its peak employed 3500 men. The pit closed in the 1990s along with the others in County Durham. Even the old spoil heaps have disappeared replaced by an out-of-town retail outlet, Dalton Park. John , 86 years old, has a remarkable way of replacing the image I saw with a vivid recollection of village life, the colliery, work and his active involvement in the miners' union and politics of his village and his county, Durham. His community affection and political vision undimmed, our conversation ranged from the early part of and through the twentieth century to the contemporary political /social environment. In the three interviews, I was aware that I was only skimming the surface of John's involvement and significance to the beneficial changes achieved for the working people of Murton and County Durham. This truly is a living past, present and guide.*



John Toft

Village life

I was born in 21, Silver Street in a part of Murton village which was called Cornwall. This was due to the Cornish Tin Miners ¹ who came up at the request of the South Hetton Coal Company in the mid 19th century, (although obviously not part directly of *my* memory) and settled in the village. I made it eight of a family in a one bedroom colliery house. Silver St. consisted of a row of these small houses, where two vehicles could not pass on the front street. However the back street was much wider and therefore the main access. It was here that the street hawkers, with their street calls, sold things such as fish. Electric lights were on the main road, some streets were lit by gas light, but not Silver Street – it was too narrow. The houses had only oil lamps. One great advance was water from a

tap in the house, before this there were three taps for the street. There wasn't such a thing as owning your house; it wouldn't even enter your mind. More often than not, newly-marrieds had to live in with their parents or in-laws – making living space even worse! As time went on, and the increase in population justified it, more houses were built, first for rent in terraces, and eventually in the mid 1930s, Council Houses. But this is a bit ahead of where we are here.

A characteristic of all colliery houses was bed bug and beetle infestation. To rid the house of bed bugs, we put a pail with a sulphur candle in the middle of the room, closed the windows and doors and set it alight. It worked, but they always came back.

To get rid of the beetles we used Keating's Powder. Putting it down at night, in the morning we would sweep the bugs up onto a shovel. But of course, they returned! I remember one occasion, when a friend had a stronger chemical which appeared to work better, apparently the beetles cannibalised, so they were not only dead, they appeared not to return. My mother told our next door neighbour, Gannie² Cook, who was really interested as she said that the beetles were eating her out of 'house and home'. So my mother gave her the last of the compound, and it worked – all the beetles came scurrying back into our house.

In a one room house, everything to do with the family happened there, cooking, eating and having a bath. This meant water boiled on the fire in a set pot, bathing in front of the fire and washing dirty pit clothes, every day. Even so a ballot for a Pit Head Baths in November 1929 was 'Not carried', although it was eventually successful on 19th March 1934.

My dad had joined the army in 1915 to fight in, what we called the Great War (although there's nothing great about wars!), and was invalided out with gas poisoning and discharged in 1917. It was after his return to working in the pit that I was born. Not long after that

another joined the family, so, just before the '26 Strike, there were 9 in the home. It was just as well we had a big pantry in which we had a bed. It was a matter of laying two at one end and two at the other, feet poking between. Mam and dad slept in the kitchen. Times were hard; the top wage for a miner was £3 per week. However, he worked as a marra³ with an Irishman, Paddy Killeen, who lived next door. One of the features of that period was some folk kept hens and things, Paddy kept pigs. So there was not only the meat when he killed one, there was also black pudding, white pudding in fact every part of the pig that was edible, whilst the pigs lasted.

During this time, my mother became seriously ill. Having had a miscarriage, she developed what was then called 'sleeping sickness'. She never got over it and was an invalid for the rest of her life. Later during an air raid, during the Second World war, she fell and fractured her skull. She wouldn't have a doctor and from this she died.

But back to the earlier time. In 1926 after the General Strike and the miners lockout which followed it was noted that we had now more potential workers coming on and we were shifted to 39, North Street, a house with 3 bedrooms. The 'key-man'⁴ Mr. Nicholson came into our Silver St. home, threw the keys down on the table and we moved house! North Street was a palace in comparison to Silver Street!

Village Recreation

One of the things every village had what they thought was a 'world beating whippet' or 'World Champion Whippet'. They used to take it off to Newcastle to race and we would all go up to the station⁵ to 'welcome' it back. I would, also, often go to watch the racing pigeons coming back to the lofts. I remember watching a flock flying off the coast with Joe Hunter, one peeled off, and he said 'that's Richardson's blue hen'. They could pick it out at a distance, even though it wasn't their bird.

Then there is the Murton Amateur Operatic, this society had good audiences going back in my memory, even throughout the County. I was Vice President of the Society from 1978 to 2000 and President in 2001. Also there's the Murton Colliery Band, the miners had a deduction to pay for it. And, of course, every village had its amateur cricket and football teams. I was President for 11 years and Vice President of Murton amateur Football Club between 1978 and 1996. But cricket, as you know, is my sport. I have been Vice President of Murton Cricket Club since 1960 and now I'm a Life Member of Durham County Cricket Club.

School

I went to school just prior to the '26 Strike, and the rudiment of my education was at the hands of the village school. It was a same site school, infants, juniors and seniors. The infants and juniors had Miss May as the Head Teacher and although strong on discipline, it was a very good school. When I entered the infants there were 50 in the class. My memory is that the school meals had just started and we regularly got highly seasoned pies, which was the best cure for constipation!

My only recollection of what has now been called the General Strike was, as a youngster, the weather was fine, fathers were home, and the pit ponies were enjoying the rest, brought from underground. At the time of the '26 Strike I was privileged, if you like, because my dad was working with the Soup Kitchen at the school, and so in the morning I would nip down and get a slice of dripping and bread and a drink of milk. On one occasion, I wandered off following a large crowd of villagers, about half a mile, to Democratic Field. There A. J. Cook, National Secretary of the Miners' Union was the speaker. All I knew was that he was somebody important.

At a later period, in the senior school, Mr. Palmer was the teacher. My memory of him is when he said, 'You should vote for

the individual, not the Party'. This obviously didn't fit with my family's attitude. I think he was voting for Ramsey MacDonald, a founder of the Labour Party who had been Seaham's MP as well as the Labour Prime Minister in the 1920s. Having betrayed Labour, as my family and most Labour activists saw it, when he formed a coalition National Government with Tories and Liberals in 1931, our vote was for Labour. Coxon, the Labour candidate was beaten by MacDonald in 1931, but it was short lived. Mannie Shinwell⁶ was to win it back in 1935 with a 20,000 plus majority. But I'll talk about Shinwell later. There must have been a few who thought like this teacher, or possibly that MacDonald was still Labour!

As I was third from the top, I was sat at the back of the class. At the time I was very short sighted, although I wasn't aware of this, which affected my ability to see the board. I state this as a fact, rather than an excuse, but I do think I otherwise would have passed the '11 plus'. Nevertheless in the school I was in the 'A' class which had only 30 pupils, in the other classes, 'B' had 50 plus and 'C' had even more. It was a good school and gave me a good start.

Work

I left school in December 1934, but did not get started down the pit until March 1935. My dad took me down to the pit head office every week during these months, but Mr. Blenkinsop, a local fellow, the undermanager, would breeze in and looking around would say, 'there are no vacancies for boys!'. I was lucky as at the time I had an uncle who was a plasterer and worked with him for a while, but I wanted, like all the village lads, to work down the pit. Given a start as a landing lad, my job was to trace up the ponies with the tracing gear. The pony putters drove the tubs, 10cwt, to the landing and you had to trace them up the landing. At 15 years I began pony wayside putting for 5 shillings a day. I would change tubs to keep

men in the shift. One day, I missed the turn ending up in the wrong place. At the time I was servicing two men. Therefore, the other men had an extra tub. The men, who I missed lost on the shift. They were obviously very angry. Some even wanted me to pay up for their loss of a tub. In a wet pit the water can be up to the hub of the tub. You are plodging⁷ in water. It's dark. But I made sure it didn't happen again. Remember I was only just over 15 years old! You had to be aware all the time in case of accidents. For instance, the coal company had installed a Kopye winder, a German winder, the cage had to go down the shaft a certain way. One day in 1934 the ropes surged and the cage shot down the shaft, down to the buntings (buffers), which held. If it had gone below, they would have all been drowned in the sump down there, many were injured. My brother Tom, first aid trained by St. John's Ambulance, was on the scene. I recall him giving first aid to the injured. It wasn't until afterwards he realised he had a broken leg.

I then had a spell then watching the landing.⁸ I was there in 1937 when there was a explosion. This was in the next district.⁹ Hearing the noise, a sound, it was a sort of 'woosh', it was my job to ring the overman in bye.¹⁰ It was an antiquated system. Gas was ignited by a lamp; you have to understand, a coal face is bleeding gas all the time. In fact there are levels of gas in which it is safe. Four men died.

A lad I used to travel in bye with, Billy White a stone putter, died in the major explosion in 1942. We used to talk politics as we were both politically active. He was 18 years old and I was a little older. On that day gas was ignited by spark from the battery the Deputy¹¹ used to activate the shot. The method was to drill the seam, put in the charge and activate. The ignition, the explosion was traced to that.

Billy White and his marras had just finished their shift. When they found them, they were sitting by the ventilation door, dead.

Carbon monoxide killed them; there they sat with their lamps on just waiting. The whole pit was in danger. It was such an explosion. Luckily, it burnt itself out, otherwise it could have gone through the whole pit. A couple of hundred would have been killed if that had happened.

Of course, there are many accidents, injuries and deaths in pits. As always there was a Union meeting after any fatal accident, as apart from the one I have referred to, other fatal accidents did occur. We were in a dangerous job. They are tragedy for the village: men, boys, neighbours, families. It lives on in memory.

Men were paid on what was called the 'Maister Note'.¹² In control of this was the 'Maister Shifter' (MS). You have to understand the relationship with this fellow, a fellow like that had power. He allotted the shifts. Two instances come to mind.

In one he (the MS) was having an affair with a miner's wife and did this by allotting more nightshifts to the man. You cannot blame the woman, money was scarce, she had a big family. I don't think the miner knew anything about it. In fact I read of a similar thing in a novel I was given about mines in Scotland. In the novel, he (the MS) was thrown down a pit shaft. (Laugh).

Another was concerning a miner who started paying income tax, when it turns out he shouldn't have. The Maister shifter was helping himself out of the note.¹³ He was found out and was demoted.

I did face training, shot firing and considered taking my Deputy's Ticket. I got my shot firer's ticket, but discontinued going further. I had become more interested in the union and politics. So I went on to pick work, a windy pick. The seam I worked on was the Hutton seam, fortunately not for long. Most who stayed on this seam ended up with pneumoconiosis. This was by the very nature of the seam, coal and stone dust and drilling. A terrible disease, you just lose weight and die. In the early days Murton was a 'family pit', but with closures the pit had miners from all round the district.

At its peak there was 3,500 plus working here. By this time I was becoming more active in the union

The Union

The union was the miners' strength. It seemed at times that Coal Company owned everything, your house, your job, but the union was ours!

Well, the union the Durham Miners (Assoc.) had been in the village for 3 generations of my family, my grandfather often showed me the 'membership token' he had presented when the union first started. The union had secret members then. By the time my father was involved, he became vice chair of the Lodge¹⁴, the union was well established. In fact the coal company provided material and support to build the miners' hall and the Wesleyan Chapel. Methodism played a big part in the community's development socially, but was very anti-communist. It was very much their argument that we all have our position in life, but should treat each other fairly. Anyway, there was only the odd communist in the village, but there were many radicals. For example there was the Clarion Cycle Club, where you would find radicals meeting, communists and socialists.

The union had fortnightly meetings of the Lodge, though if there was to be a special meeting, the crake¹⁵ man would come around rattling his crake; 'Meeting in the miners' hall, very important business'. Of course, the meetings were packed. We always had a good turnout to meetings. The coal company had the pull, had the money, the power if you like, but we had our union! The Union was strong in Murton.

The highlight of the year was the 'Big Meeting', the Durham Miners' Gala. In those early days we got the train from Murton Station to Elvet Station in Durham. The field was packed: banners, bands and speeches from the trade union and Labour Party leaders.

And of course the NUM and DMA. As you know it has continued, but back then with all the pits it was a sight to see.

During the '26 strike loan accounts for married miners were set up by retailers in the village, single men got vouchers. This credit was repaid through the Miners' Federation Committee, a group representing colliery mechanics, winders, miners; deductions of about 7/6 per week off the pay. As an example of allocation, the Committee Minutes, 27th April 1927, shows cheques paid

Murton Cooperative Soc.	£50 - 0 - 0
Wm. Skilbeck Ltd	£25 - 0 - 0
W & R Fletcher Ltd	£15 - 0 - 0
Mr. Greenwell	£10 - 0 - 0
Mr S. Minns	£25 - 0 - 0
W. Wakefield Ltd	£3 - 10 - 0

and listed. Allocations were made until debts were gone. Those that had helped were remembered many years after the strike: the Store¹⁶ particularly for its continuing help.

Another example, the Miners Federation 'owned' the Doctors' Practice – 2 pence a week off the note. Obviously during the '26 Strike, the doctors didn't get paid. So in February 1928, at a Federation full meeting, Dr. McIntyre from the panel attended and agreed to accept 10 shilling per man to pay off the arrears, this amount to be met by an extra 2 pence levy. The Doctor's practice remained like this until the middle of the '30s.

In the minutes of the full Meeting, 28th May 1934, it was recorded that a consulting room would be set aside in the surgery for miners resident in Murton, those miners working at Murton but not residents would have to pay for the service. In that year a new surgery was built.

The doctors, as minuted 24th January 1937, requested us to sign over the practice to them while continuing to contract with us

with an offer of £25 donation to the Aged Miners' Homes. The offer was increased to £100 and after some problem was accepted and a letter sent recognising the Doctors becoming the panel. The minutes show a continuing practice of special arrangement for the miners until the National Health was set up.

After the Second World War

I was called up to join the army at the start of the war, but was found to have eyesight problems, anyway mining was reserved work. The Labour Government in 1947 nationalised the coal industry. Of course, people were enthusiastic, some of the lads thought this would be the new millennium, all our problems would be over, but locally we had the same managers, supervisors, the people who run the coal companies. Mind it couldn't be any other way, these fellows were local, trained and we depended on their skills. But what had changed? South Hetton Coal Company didn't own the pit and a national view was to be more significant.

In 1952 I was elected to the Miners' Lodge Committee, and to do this you had to be popular, although I never canvassed. There were only 21 members on the committee. But at the election there was a list as long as a 'store bill'.¹⁷ Rules were applied rigidly.

I was elected to chairman of the Lodge in 1957. Well, there had been a falling out between the secretary and the chairman, and the union effectiveness was being affected. So I said, if I'm nominated I'll stand and was elected. I held that position for 22 years, until I retired from the post in 1979. I was only contested once. Further to this I was Miners' Federation Committee President for the duration of my Lodge Chairmanship. During that time I came off the face.

During my term of office I had the privilege of serving a great group of men and the community, in fact apart from the national

strikes we were able to negotiate out of difficulties, except for once. It was to do with bonus payment. The lads were incensed, and walked off, mind without consulting the union. Well I tore a strip off them and then went in and tore a strip off the manager. The lads got their bonus back.

The national strikes of 1972 and 1974, were successful. This was during the Tory Government of Edward Heath. Gormley¹⁸ and the National Executive had picked the right time, the winter, and we had other unions and public support. In 1972, the (union) Area allocated us Teesside, to picket the docks and local coal depots. The pits didn't need picketing; no miner was breaking the strike. Of course the lads had nothing coming in, so out of funds we paid them £1.50 for the picket. I was involved closely with organisation of pickets, transport, the planning, however, one of the lads complained so I said, 'Right, I'm on the Bus tonight.' We were picketing down Teesside with Easington Colliery lads. A Polish ship was standing off with coal and the Dock Company wanted to get it off and stock it at the dock. They said they would whitewash the coal so we could identify it. But the lads on the dock, who knew their bosses better than us, said, 'Don't you trust them!' So we blacked it and the dockers supported us, refusing to unload coal from the ship.

Instructions from national was to picket the movement of fuel, however, an undertaking had been given to allow fuel to go to hospitals, schools etc, so on one occasion a driver showed us a note at a depot that the coal was for an old people's home, mind there was no way to check this, so we let it go through. Honour was done! The strike was effective; the country was put on a three day week to conserve electricity. We won that strike: a major pay increase and allowances.

By 1974 our wages had fallen back again and the union wanted to also negotiate on benefits. Negotiations broke down and

the Ballot was for strike. Gormley wasn't too sure about calling it during a General Election; Heath had called a snap election on 'Who runs the Country'? The strike went ahead! Our first port of call was to see the local police superintendent. He invited us in and started by thanking us for the cooperation and the way our members had conducted themselves in the 1972 strike. Being local, he knew the sympathy of the community in which he served. He asked about our programme, and we referred to various depots. He said, 'I'll arrange a police car to show you where other places are, to avoid any frustration looking for them'. That was the level of local sympathy for our cause. People were donating to the (strike) fund, some small amounts, but some £5 and £10. All the action was organised by committee from the Welfare Hall. I remember one day, these two fellows came in and wanted to know if they could help. They were big lads and appeared to have no links to anyone. We obviously thought, these are from Special Branch or what have you. So we just said that we can manage thanks, but if you have any donations just leave it.

One problem was that the deputies and shot firers were working. Obviously we had to picket. It was a shame, their union hadn't instructed them. You know, some of these lads had been on the miners' committee; they were local lads. The issue spread into the village. Going down to the village Welfare Hall, half past six in the morning I saw 600 pickets and the jeering was rough. I did feel sorry for these lads, because their union wasn't involved and as I say hadn't instructed them. I spoke to the meeting and argued that we had proved our point. Feelings were so high that only one man supported this. The following morning it was worse: no jeering the Deputies going in were given the 'silence treatment' and miners just stood and turned their backs. This was worse than any shouting! Mind I blame the managers, there should have been a clear

indication that the lads (Deputies) were only doing safety work.

Well, the Tories were replaced by a Labour Government, the strike was settled.

As I said I retired as Lodge Chairman in 1979, but stayed on until 1980 as Vice-chairman to ease my successor in. That's when I retired from the pit.

Politics

Obviously to the politically articulate we were aware that it wasn't just better wages and working conditions we wanted, but a better life for our community and our country. So I like many others, including in my family, became active in the Labour Party. The Miners' Union had always been political. The Miners' Federation nominated local parish councillors; this was before the Labour Party came to the district. The union was Lib/Lab then rather than Labour. In fact so was community attitude. Although we elected Sidney Webb in 1922-1924, Labour for Seaham Division, Seaham Party didn't come into existence in 1928. The inaugural meeting took place in Murton Miners Hall. Before the Labour Party, the area was Liberal, then the colliery manager would stand for the Parish and get elected, but the union now became that election machine.

My family always supported Labour and were activists. My dad was an Easington District Councillor as well as the Lodge Vice-chairman, so there was always political literature in the house. I joined, officially, in 1939, was League of Youth chairman, delegate to the (Seaham) Divisional Party. But my politics had to go forward from just the gut reaction of workers' support for Labour.

I was very influenced at the time by, what people now call, mentors. There were many of these in the union and the (Labour) Party, but, if asked, the most significant was Norman Nicholson. This lad at 15 (years) was sitting in a tub being conveyed to the

workface when a fall of stones put him in hospital. He was a staunch Roman Catholic and whilst in bed decided to study theology. His studying led to him being converted to Marxism. He ended up with curvature of the spine due to the accident and couldn't work so studied, read and discussed issues. He was a remarkable person. I linked up with him on my journey. We joined the WEA together and my first course was in Social Psychology, a three year tutorial. On the academic subjects the WEA had lecturers from the local university and colleges. In one instance Professor Rutherford from Newcastle, a college was named after him, came through and after a while said he wanted to sponsor Norman to go for a degree. But he couldn't take up the offer as he would have lost his compensation payment.

Norman and I went together for a period to the WEA, but became disillusioned with the academic refusal to take sides so we joined the NCLC., National Council of Labour Colleges.¹⁹ This was where I was introduced to all the political theories, practical politics, lectures by leading, usually left wing, speakers. The Durham Miners' Association was affiliated as was most unions. A fellow called Stan Reese was our lead tutor and he was excellent. I think he eventually became a Newcastle Councillor.

I recall one visiting tutor came who through. Imagine him with his big black hat and cloak coat. He looked every bit the anarchist revolutionary. I cannot remember his name. By the way, Norman Nicholson later became clerk to the Parish Council when I was the Vice-chairman of the Parish Council. That was a influential time for developing my politics awareness. Through the NCLC and the Durham NUM I was awarded a scholarship to Paris in 1946. My essay was successful and the scholarship was for a week staying at the City University. This was a European event and, as the effects of the Second World War were still being felt, it was a first insight into different ways of looking at how to meet the challenge.

Speakers included politicians from European countries. Even Leon Blum²⁰ paid a visit and opened the course. As an aside, I regret one thing that I was unable to follow through. I met a Russian, who was living in Millfield, Sunderland. He was a refugee escaping after the 1905 Revolution. He offered to teach me Russian and on the train coming home, we exchanged addresses. But I couldn't do it as transport was a difficulty. Aye, I still regret that!



Paris 1947, Leon Blum in centre, John Toft is at the back

I held all the usual grass roots positions in the Labour Party: Ward Secretary, Delegate to Local Party, Divisional Party, on the Executive. When Seaham Division was dissolved we went into the Easington Division, in 1949. A celebration dinner was held in Hartlepool and as the commemoration document showed parliamentary contests results – Liberal 1918, and from 1922 to 1949, Labour: the MPs being Sidney Webb, Ramsay McDonald, Manny Shinwell, all important names of Labour history.²¹

In 1949 I was a lay delegate to the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool. This was my first time and quite the greenhorn. I wasn't even on the miners' committee at the time. I was friendly with a fellow delegate, Norman Pentland, later to be MP for Chester-le-Street, who had been to conference before. This was the time of the Platts-Mills and Konni Zilliacus's²² expulsions from the Labour Party. Platts-Mills had gone and Zilliacus's issue was to come before the conference. The normal practice at that time was for the miners' union National Executive to decide how the delegation would vote. Well they made up the majority of delegates anyway. But this time the Labour Party National Executive's report on the issue was not presented until the conference was in session, so the union would have to make its decision then. Ned Moore was in the chair and he said, 'Well here's the Report from the NEC. Will somebody move it and second it'? And I said, 'Hang on a bit. A divvent like what yer deein! And A divvent like like the way yer deein' it!'²³ Sam Watson,²⁴ who was leading the delegation (he was the NUM's elected nominee on the Party's NEC) was personally very hostile to Zilliacus. So he read out the report; this is what Zilliacus was saying and writing. Well I knew this already as I had heard him speak and I read the *Keep Left* newspaper to which he often contributed articles. Zilliacus was MP for Gateshead East and I thought he was first class. I always thought it was one of Labour's tragedies that he wasn't involved in our foreign policy. Here was a man, who had been a secretary to the League of Nations, who had a grasp of world affairs, a foreign affairs expert, who was seen as extreme left by the right wing and extreme right by the communist sympathising left. I thought he was just about spot on. The delegation voted and I was in a minority of one! When I was coming out of the delegation meeting Norman Pentland said 'Lad yer just like yer father.— Ye'll get nee-where'. I replied 'Norman, A'm gannin nee-where'²⁵

At the conference when the report came up Sam (Watson) indicated to the delegation chairman to get Ned Cowan's son Paul up to speak on behalf of the NUM in favour of the report, as he came from Zilliacus's constituency. Cowan did not speak about the report, but launched into a personal and racist attack, because Zilliacus was of Finnish origin and a Jew. The conference booed him and if Sam could have crawled under the table he would have done. Zilliacus was expelled.

Sam (Watson) was a giant amongst pygmies. I wasn't keen on his politics, too right wing, but industrially he had no equal, a great negotiator and was held high by the miners. He wielded power in the movement, obviously through the miners' position. But he was a self-educated man, who early on ran Sunday classes, very well read, but close to Bevin.²⁶ and the right wing of the party. Well I suppose I did get somewhere and knew where *I* wanted to go!

I was Easington Divisional Party Chairman and was Executive Member during much of Manny Shinwell's time. In fact I was on the Executives of Seaham, then Easington, Houghton due to boundary changes, and back to Easington, 1950 through to 1994. By 1950 the Labour Government had run out of steam, trying to be all things to all, but at local level the Party was very healthy indeed.

Back to Manny; as Minister of Fuel he saw through the Nationalisation and came to Murton with Lord Hindley, chairman of the National Coal Board on Vesting Day. Nevertheless he was our MP and we saw him as that, first and foremost. He knew his place with regards the Divisional Party Meetings and the Divisional Executive.

There was one incident at the time of the Tories' Suez adventure,²⁷ the invasion of Egypt. Now, as you know, the Labour Party denounced this action and this was Party policy! Well, Manny had gone off to Australia and called off at Singapore, where he made a speech in support

of the invasion. I'm sure this had something to do with his empathy with the new state of Israel. However, my brother, Tom, who was Manny's Agent and Secretary of the (Divisional) Party, had received a cutting from the *Jewish Chronicle*, which reported the speech. We decided to instruct Manny to appear before the Executive. With me in the chair, at Easington Workingmen's Club, we called him before us. The members made it abundantly clear that they were livid. Manny was shaking. His line was that he could not understand why we had called him before us; after all wasn't he a good MP? this Divisional Party had often opposed the national line, etc. Our reply was that we confined our opinions inside the Party and he should do the same. Opinions which differ to agreed policy should not be put out in public. We found a form of words for the Minutes, but he was told – 'Don't do it again!' That's how strong the local parties were. Jack Dormand at that time wasn't on the local party executive and was sitting out in the entrance, taking notice no doubt! Jack and Manny did not get on at all. Jack, as you know, did eventually become Manny's successor in 1970.

Being out of power, especially for that length of time, the Party leadership then tried to change the basic principle. Its often forgotten, but Gaitskell²⁸ tried to get rid of Clause 4.²⁹ He failed. But we didn't get back into power at Westminster until 1964, by which time my involvement politically was in local government.

Public Life

I was nominated, as I say, by the miners and elected to the Parish Council in 1947. During this time the control of the coal company of the town's facilities was falling; for example electric street lighting was handed over to the parish council. I was Vice Chair in 1950-1953 and was on the Association of Parish Councils. One success for the Parish Council was the establishing of a Public Library at Murton. I fought for this, as previously we had ad hoc systems.

At this time the County Council met in Durham Shire Hall when in 1964, due to the need to replace a County Councillor, who had been made an Alderman, I was again the miners' nomination and became the candidate. The vote was 44 for me and 40 for Ivy Spry, from the Labour Women's Section. To her credit she came from a strong Labour family and her whole life was the Party. A worthy challenger. In fact we had challenged each other previously in the debate contests that were held on political subjects. Elections were an active period, canvassing door to door, green and white rosette to indicate you were Labour. Of course, I was elected, to what was then the old Durham County Council, before the Local Government Reorganisation in 1973. The boundaries stretched from Billingham down in Teesside up to Felling on Tyneside. It was a big county. I always advocated a good relationship with the District Councillors.

I then began my Council service: Highways and Bridges Committee, was Vice-chairman in 1966, and when after a year the Chairman up and died, I was elected Chairman, 1967 to 1969. At this time there was a considerable shift in the County residents, what with large scale Council Housing Estates and New Towns created such as Peterlee and Washington. I was involved in assuring the road set up was there to meet need. The Highways development was obviously essential. Then on to the Local Government sub-committee from 1969 to 1973, as Vice-chairman and chairman.

1973 saw Local Authority reorganisation, a new Durham County Council with new boundaries. We lost the Tyneside, Washington, Wearside and Billingham districts and saw a reduction of our residents to 650,000. I was elected to the new Council and was shadow Chairman for the year lead in, the period of establishing the committee structure and discussion with the Districts (Councils). Thereafter from 1973 to 1975 I was the elected Chairman. As you can imagine there was discussions with various agencies and organisations. I was determined to get the best

working arrangements between the District Councils and the County Council. The Aldermanic Bench, appointees of serving councillors, was abolished and we replaced it with an honorary status Alderman to those Councillors who have served at least 12 years on the Council.

From 1975 I held posts that I had a great feeling for, including the Education Committee member. In the four years, I was also Chairman of the Higher Education Committee, that's to 1979. I have had a long active role in the community education sphere as a governor of three Primary Schools, Secondary Moderns, Nursery Schools from the late sixties right through to 1996. So obviously I had been part of that lobby that pressed repeatedly successive Ministers (later Secretaries of State) for Education for allocation to replace schools in the older industrial areas. Then came the Labour government policy on Comprehensives (Schools) which the Council readily adopted in 1965. That was a better progress for the 11 to 18 year olds, than selection at 11!

I became a governor of Easington Comprehensive in 1970, a spell at chairman from 1970-1978, until 1996. The Education Committee was a good platform – mind you I was beaten for the Finance Committee at the time. Finance is the motor of the Council and affects all choices. I was to get there, but later. Anyway, concerning my involvement with Higher Education: Durham University is not only an important higher education institution its also important to the County's economy. So when I was put on to the Durham University Council in 1977, I didn't realise I'd be there for over 17 years! During that time I sat on a number of committees. But one of the important things for me was being a governor of the St. Cuthbert's Society. St. Cuthbert's is the college for mature students in all disciplines and my involvement with the St. Cuthbert's Society has given me huge satisfaction. I was made a Fellow of the College for which I am very honoured. I went on to Youth & Community in 1975 and was there

for 15 years; Chairman and Vice-chairman. A success of mine, I felt, was the establishing of a Youth Parliament in Durham, setting up a Community Association and a Youth Association, being Chairman of both during the '80s and '90s, later Honorary President of the Community Association – these are still functioning organisations.

I was on the Finance Committee from 1983 to 1987 as a member and chairman for two years. This was the period of developing the County Development plan. Economic development was the major topic. I then moved on to Land and Property until 1993. From the Council I was appointed as its representative to the Association of County Councils (ACC) and was on from 1973 to 1993. With all the number of shire councils which were members, inevitably it was Tory controlled, but interestingly there were often aims in common as we were all local councils faced with often central level officialdom. For instance, in October 1981 Thatcher's Government was trying to remove the councils' freedom to fix their rates. Heseltine, the Environment Secretary, had proposed a local referendum as a check on high-spending councils. Some Tories on the ACC were in agreement, as it would control the extreme councils. However we argued and got a compromise resolution, which, as I say, wasn't as strong as we would have liked. But it did reassert the importance of local councils' autonomy. As it says in the newspaper, 'This motion is considerably more hostile than the one originally submitted by the Conservatives and represents a negotiating success for the Labour Group.' I was Labour Group Leader at the time and led the negotiations. However it had little effect on the Tory Government. Having been Group Whip from 1973 to 1977, I was elected the Group Leader in 1977 and was there until 1985.

One incident happened during the 1984 to 1985 miners' strike. As you know I no longer had a position in the lodge, I had retired. Like a lot of people I was making a weekly contribution to the strike fund. Obviously we were all, in a mining village, affected by

the strike. So I wasn't directly involved whether or not a ballot should have taken place. This was their struggle, their decisions. But it was also a battle of community pride, an ideological battle. The Tory Government was out to smash the union. As I said to the county Party³⁰ at the time, we are dealing with the shrewdest ruling class in the world'. The incident I refer to was at a ACC meeting held in York, a dinner had been arranged for the representatives. I said to the Labour Group, 'Look the folks in mining communities are suffering in extreme, so we cannot do this.' So we boycotted the dinner.

I was on the three main committees, Policy, Finance, Manpower and representative to the International Union of Local Authorities. With regards Internationalism, I went to Germany, Denmark, the Soviet Union and we had colleagues come here on a return visit. This was an amazing learning opportunity for me. I was also on the negotiating bodies with the trade unions, the Provincial Council, from 1966 to 1993, with 21 years as chairman, the final arbitration in the region on claims and appeals. Nationally I was on both the staff and manual workers National Joint Councils. I suppose it's like poacher turned gamekeeper, but in the public service both sides were trying to reach agreeable settlements.

I retired from public service in 1993 and was made an honorary Alderman.

As for the present

I nearly resigned from the Labour Party over the invasion of Iraq. My Party has changed and maybe there is need for change, but we seem to have lost our principle. We seem to have bought into the 'I'm alright Jack' of Thatcher, and don't see the bigger practical issues. I was close to leaving over the continuing lack of understanding of the importance of local democracy, local authorities as against privatisation, particularly this, equating a private monopoly with a

public monopoly without any regard to democratic control, nor the responsibility to people not profit. You know Councils have a long practice of starting new services, making it a better life for people.

Iraq really made me think hard. I suppose I have loyalty to the party that has trade union support, one I have served for many years and has the possibility to change... Anyway I remain a member. I knew we were in for trouble when Blair wangled the change to Clause 4. But I'm a natural optimist, I believe in the working people, the hardships we went through the achievements we were able to win, but I do worry about what is happening now – the slighting of parliamentarianism, political parties discredited: the clamour for powers that flout your rights. We've been there before – extremes that can open a way to the extreme right. Hopefully we can learn from the past

August 2007

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- ¹ Murton Colliery. Sinking of Murton pit 1838 opened April 1843 closed November 1991
 - ² 'Gannie' – dialect for 'grannie' although not necessarily grandmother; it was often used as a term of respect for an old neighbour.
 - ³ 'Marra' – dialect for mate/work mate. The miner had a close relationship with his workmate, often his life depended on his marra. This closeness extended often beyond the workplace.
 - ⁴ Key man – later, rented property was used by the colliery. The keyman was the link to the landlord.
 - ⁵ Murton had its own railway station, Murton Junction. It linked to Durham City- Elvet Station, Seaham and Sunderland. It also had a private spur off to Seaham Harbour at the coast for the coal. The station and railway lines no longer exist.
 - ⁶ Mannie Shinwell: 1884 -1986. In the early 1920s was an activist in the Glasgow 40 hour week campaign (Red Clydeside) and went to jail for his activity (earlier he had been tried for murder but was acquitted). Labour MP for Lithgow 1922, lost in 1924 and regained in 1928. Although initially, in ILP times, close to MacDonald eventually became a critic, especially over the forming of the National Coalition Government 1931. Lost Lithgow in the 1931 election standing as Labour Candidate. Returned to the Commons for Seaham (including Murton) in 1935, defeating MacDonald. Shinwell was MP from 1935 -1970.
 - ⁷ 'plodging' – dialect for paddling.
 - ⁸ Landing – place where a set of tuns are collected, 2 full tubs at one side and empty tubs at the other.
 - ⁹ District – a sector of the pit.

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- ¹⁰ In bye and Out bye – refers to the passages in the pit by the circulation of air.
- ¹¹ Deputy – supervisor who had in his team a district overman and shift overman.
- ¹² Maister – dialect for master
- ¹³ Note – pay slip
- ¹⁴ Lodge – miners’ union local branch.
- ¹⁵ Crake – a wooden hand held rattle which when turned made a continuous clicking noise.
- ¹⁶ Store – amongst working people the Cooperative Society shop was known as the Store.
- ¹⁷ Store Bill – At the end of each quarter a bill was produced by the Cooperative Society for all its customers/members to show their spend and to determine their dividend – ‘the Divi’ which was paid in cash and was a welcome ‘saving’. As it was for all purchases the bill was very long.
- ¹⁸ Joe Gormley 1917-1993 – National President of the NUM 1971-1982.
- ¹⁹ National Council of Labour Colleges – an independent (of government grants or of the TUC) trade union education body based in Scotland, which published a monthly journal, *Plebs*. It had as its ethos ‘the education of the worker from the working class point of view through the medium of Colleges, classes and public lectures’. Funded by national trade union affiliations, it provided correspondence courses and regular local evening courses on economics, politics, labour movement history, labour and culture. It had a ‘cell structure’, its learning groups based on union branches, with ‘Colleges’ based on local areas, for example ‘Hartlepool and District Labour College’, which arranged one-day public lectures. It was taken over by the TUC in 1963 and in 1964 was wound up when the TUC established its own (non-political) Education Facility.
- ²⁰ Leon Blum 1872-950 – Socialist, Premier of French Popular Front Government 1936 -7 and Premier of the Provisional Government of France 1946-7.
- ²¹ Celebration Dinner, March 28th 1949, commemorating the dissolution of the Seaham Division Labour Party and the Inauguration of the Easington Division Labour Party noted in the Programme. ‘... in the lifetime period of the Party has been covered by three Labour MPs – Sydney Webb, J.R. MacDonald, E. Shinwell. All three MPs have held Cabinet rank, with MacDonald for a period Prime Minister. All the County Seats in the Seaham Division are held by Labour Representatives. The Personnel of the Easington RDC is 35 Labour and 8 Moderates, Seaham UDC 26 Labour and 5 Moderates’.
- ²² Konni Zilliacus MP. 1894-1967 – Gateshead Labour MP 1945 -1949. After his expulsion from Labour Party he stood as Independent Labour in the 1951 General Election and was defeated by the Labour Party Candidate. Readmitted to Labour Party in 1952 and elected Labour MP for Gorton (Manchester) in 1955. See A. Potts. *Zilliacus. Life For Peace And Socialism* (London 2002) The Merlin Press Ltd.
- ²³ For those unaccustomed to North East dialect. ‘ Stop a moment, I don’t like what you are doing. And I don’t like the way you are doing it’.
- ²⁴ Sam Watson 1898-1967 – Started work at 14 years in Boldon Colliery, became its

Lodge Secretary at 20 years old. General Secretary Durham Miners Association and National Executive of the NUM 1936- 1963. NEC of Labour Party 1941-1963 and National Chairman 1949. An international as well as a national Trade Union personality. Self educated and well read, he ran classes for his members at the union headquarters in Durham. Closely associated with Ernest Bevin (see below).

- ²⁵ Dialect for 'Lad, your just like you're father. You'll get nowhere.' 'Norman, I'm going nowhere'.
- ²⁶ Ernest Bevin 1881-1951. Founding official of the Transport & General Workers' Union in 1922 after amalgamation of a number of unions, to become the largest union for decades. General Secretary 1922- 1945. President of the TUC 1937. He was unsuccessful as Labour Candidate at Gateshead in 1931. It was probably at this time that his friendship with Sam Watson started as the Durham Miners Union was strong in the local party. Became Labour MP for Wandsworth 1940 -1950. During Second World War was Minister of Labour and National Service in the All Party Coalition Government. Due to boundary changes, became Labour MP for Woolwich 1950 -1951. In the post war Labour Government, Foreign Minister 1945-1951. Anti-Communist and pro-American.
- ²⁷ Suez adventure: British/French invasion of the Suez Canal, Egypt in 1956. The Canal was the main oil route from the Middle East, and Nasser, the President of Egypt, was to nationalise it. The British and French had no international support (including negative response from USA). The Labour party was part of the 'Law Not War' campaign and the Tory Government had little support in Britain. The invading forces eventually withdrew which led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden (allegedly due to ill health) in 1957.
- ²⁸ Hugh Gaitskell 1906-1963. Labour MP for Leeds South 1945. Held Ministerial posts in the post War Labour Government. The Labour Government introduced a free at the point of need Health Service – National Health Service Act 1948, so when Gaitskell, as Chancellor of the Exchequer (1950-1951) tried to introduce certain charges e.g. one shilling on the prescription, this resulted in the resignation of cabinet ministers Wilson (Labour PM 1964) and Nye Bevan. Gaitskell was elected Party Leader with the help of the block vote of the right wing trade union leaders, in 1955 and the left/right arguments began.
- ²⁹ Clause 4 (part iv) of the Labour Party constitution called for the ' common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'.
- ³⁰ County Party – The Labour Party structure is based upon Parliamentary Constituencies and made up of Constituency Labour Parties. However, as Local Authorities and Parliamentary constituencies are not coterminous, there are also Party organisations which reflects this: Local Labour Parties for unitary municipalities and in the case of the Counties with a two tier system, a County Council and a District Council, there are District Labour Parties and County Labour Parties (thus the County Party) to consider and debate the provision of council services and to shadow the work of the Labour Group on Local Authorities.

Interview

John Charlton with Douglas Malloch, Feb 2008

Douglas (Dougie) had been active in the Tyneside labour and socialist movement for over seventy years. This spring John Charlton conducted an interview with him. He had just lost his wife, Breda, of over sixty years. He was physically frail but his spirits were high and his memory extraordinary for the detail of his long life. It was a long interview and inevitably both parties became tired. The ground covered was his youth and early employment. The plan was for a second session covering his later life and his political activity. Sadly the second session will not take place for Dougie died in May. However readers will certainly enjoy the first part. His stories of work at Parsons and as a mental nurse are really vivid.. It is especially rare to have a worker's view of a mental ward over sixty years ago. [transcription was done by Val Duncan]

Early life

I'm in my ninetieth year. I was born in Byker, Newcastle. My father's family come from Glasgow. He came down from the Clyde to look for

work before 1900 because he's in the 1901 census for Newcastle. My grandparents, my mother's family, were born and bred in Walker. My grandmother had a boarding house and my Dad was a boarder and that's where he met my mother. He was 72 when he died in 1952. He must have been just out of his time when he came down here.

My Father was a Scot; my mother a local girl from Walker. I'm one of eight children, the last of the family. I lived at 258 Bolam Street beside the school. My father was a marine engineer by trade. He'd worked for Stephens on the Clyde. He would be in the forefront of industrial action up there. He was one of the Red Clyde people. He came down to the Tyne to look for work. There was no work on Clydeside but he was blackballed for his activity in Glasgow. He never worked until the first World War but he worked through the War. Then he was blackballed again.

My Mam was a school teacher. In those days school teachers weren't trained as they are now. They picked good monitors from the school and kept them to regulate the class, about 60 in a class at that time. She was a teacher at St Anthony's Church School. It's still there at the top of Pottery Bank. When we moved to Walker my other brother brought a friend home and he wouldn't come in the house. My Mother said, 'what's this'? He says, 'you're the teacher', he wouldn't come in.

I started school at Wall Street Infant school and then I went to Welbeck Road School Juniors and there punishment, physical punishment, was rampant. I got 6 off the Headmaster for smoking and 6 off the teacher to double it up. It was dreadful. Then I passed an exam and went to the technical school at Middle Street. Same teachers. No punishment, a different school again. I blossomed. I loved it. I really loved it. The only punishment you had was no games. They stopped your games. There was a teacher called Davy, he was great. A French teacher Miss Galloway and Miss Foster the history teacher. All the boys were in love with them.

By the time I was 16 I could handle a lathe and a drilling machine I could forge and do lead joints. I could handle tools. There was an agreement made with Walker Naval Yard that they would take apprentices straight from the school when they were 16. Half of the lads, (there were 20 lads in the class and 20 girls) went for an apprenticeship and all went on the battleship *Hood* and were blown up. If I'd stayed to 16 I'd been on it. I would have been blown up. Funny life isn't it?

The technical teachers were all craftsmen. The woodwork teacher was a fully time-served cabinet maker and so was the metalwork teacher who was a fully apprenticed engineer. Then we had art, a good art teacher, Mr Grant. He set something up in me. I still paint. I've got a lot of paintings at home, oil paintings. I thoroughly enjoy it. This is what they did you know. Daly, the English teacher, he'd say today we're going to read 'today so-and-so I want your dictionaries out'. Someone would start to read and he'd say, 'stop there, that word there *dichotomy*, look it up in your dictionary' and you'd look it up. 'Find the root' so you did that. He was teaching you two languages, Latin as well. Very clever. I can still remember the roots of words. In fact I went through a trial, a test, with a clinical psychologist and she was asking me the meaning of different words so I said that's the root of... She was a German and she said she'd learned some words from me. I hope they're not swear words.

They really went out of their way those teachers to instil in you knowledge and the love of obtaining knowledge.

In my spare time I played football. I would read. I was a member of the Walker library. I read most of the English classics, Dickens particularly. I liked his earthiness. I specially liked the *The Old Curiosity Shop*. There were some very peculiar characters you know in that period in the twenties and thirties. It seemed to bring out people in various ways. I could understand the characters. They were like people I knew.

I was just a lad when the Depression hit. My main impression was that it was always cold and I could see poverty around. There were men out of work. My father had his own little business at that time, in 1928. In most pit villages at that time one of the residents would turn their front room into a shop because nobody would put a shop in a small little enclave. He used to go to these shops with haberdashery, gas mantles, light bulbs, laces, anything you mention that he could sell. I used to go with him to help with the bags. We used to go round Durham and Northumberland, the pit villages. He was in his element. This was his answer to the blacklist.

First jobs

After school I started work in the Parks at Heaton Park taking money on the tennis court and cutting the bowling greens. Me and another chap did two bowling greens in an afternoon. You were pulling a grass cutter that wasn't motorised. It was very hard work but good money for the time. About 21 bob a week compared to labourers in a factory who were getting 32 bob a week.

I went to Parsons in about 1937 or 38. I was in the boiler shop. They made big condensers for power stations and they had two gangs of boiler makers. Each had an apprentice and somebody near serving their time out. Boilermakers were very, very strong and what they did there in that shop was they got everyone into a union, any union would do. I joined when I went there. Something unique for Tyneside, it was 100 percent union. I was in the Transport and General Workers Union and at that time they wouldn't allow a meeting of the general workers. All you did was pay your subs. But no meeting for the two years I was there. The boilermakers gave the lead because they were key workers. Anything that happened they just downed tools and the job stopped. Something was drummed into me when I was young. My father, and also the leader of the Clydeside workers, said if you're good at your job they're not interested in your politics. He was never out of work

all through the depression. He was a boilermaker. That's the concept I took up. I would be good at my work and tell them what I was, trade unionwise. I never got the sack for my activity.

When I worked at Parsons I worked with a chap who was very good at his job. I worked with him on the bending machines bending plates and bars. We were on bonus. We got £5.50 a week. I was keeping the house because my mother and father had split up at that time which wasn't unique but a bit different at that time. Sadly now it's quite common. So I was the breadwinner, me and a sister. She was getting 7/6 a week as a cashier at Bevans on Shields Road. I was coming home with over 5 quid, nearly 6 quid.

Lots of skilled blokes had their little ways of keeping control. At Parsons you had to be in by half-past 7 otherwise you lost a half days work. You couldn't smoke; you couldn't eat or drink tea. Consequently everybody did. There was a fellow there called Jeff Payne, a member of the CP. I said to him one day 'Jeff you come in any old time, you smoke, you drink tea, you make tea and you do it in front of the foreman. How do you get away with it.?' he says if I go that goes – pointing at a clock, a big clock. He was a burner and attached to it was the arm of the burner. He used to go round and put a profile and it was so smooth. That saves them about 6 hours in smoothing it off. Straight onto the job.

When my father worked in the shipyard they used to sit and stand in groups in sties, what they called sties, joiners, plumbers, engineers, riveters, and the foreman would come along and pick what he wanted out. He came along this day and he said 'plumbers?' 'Yes'. 'Can you bend pipes?' 'Yes'. 'Come and I'll show you a job'. Well they had a job on two destroyers that wanted finishing to pay off, and the steam feed from the boiler to the turbine had to go through the engine room and bending. Every time they had tried to get the bend right they got on a seam. If you bend on a seam it splits. 'Can you do that?' he said. 'Yes'. 'Then do it'. 'Hang on a minute. 200 guineas. Give me a labourer and I'll do it in a fortnight'. Only too

pleased, two destroyers to pay off. So he did it. They were tested and he said, 'I want my 200 guineas now'. They said, 'look why don't you stay, we'll put you on the staff, you'll have holidays and sick pay, what-have-you' – which was unique then. 'No he says, give me my 200 guineas. Me father said he would go away and live off that for about 6 months. Have the time of his life, no work. There was quite a number that did that.

Another fellow, lived two doors from us. Ginger Timmons. He was a riveter at Armstrong Whitworths during the last war. What he did was clock in and then climb the wall and go to the nearest pub. He'd spend a few hours there then he'd go back, probably 4 hours, and earn his wage for the night, his bonus. He earned big bonuses because he was riveting the turret of a tank to the chassis which had to be very strong. You can imagine in a little hole doing this job with red hot rivets. They knew what he was doing and they came up and said, 'we know what you're doing', and they offered him money, I don't know how much, if he'd tell them how he did it. But he wouldn't tell them. He said, 'it's my secret, my little secret'. So there were these unique men who found a way to do a thing particularly well and kept it to themselves and made a good living out of it.

I'll tell you a funny thing, not about work but about making a living. There used to be a man, came round the street, to give a few shouts. Of course gambling was a thing then, and how a lot of men spent their time weighing up the form, didn't have the money they have now, put two pence or thrupence on a horse. He used to come round shouting, he was well known, and a group of men would form round him at the top corner of Bolam Street, and he had a handicap book and he'd read out the 2.30 at Chepstow and he'd read out the horses and the prices and he'd say I'll take any bets. They'd bet on them and at the end he'd read out the winners. This was a handicap book and a programme about 5 years old and he'd make a living at that.

There's another man came round and he would paint your door number, as if that was *the* thing, your door number in black paint and your door handle and letterbox for tuppence. Another one sold clothes props for 9 pence. He'd come round with a bundle of clothes props, about 12 foot long. I asked him once how he cut the notch in the top. He said I put it against the wall, lean out of the bedroom window and cut the notch.

You'll know about the Economic League. Well here's a thing. If there was a disruption anywhere or talk of industrial action, the Economic League used to send a van with a loudspeaker and pamphlets. Pamphlets were distributed. They would interrupt the meeting to confuse people. The peculiarity is very few working men could drive in that period the 20s and 30s, and the fellow who got the job to drive the E.L. van was a Communist Party member. It was rigged. Somebody wrote a flowing letter of recommendation about him. His name was George Roberts and he lived in St Thomas's Crescent in the Haymarket. He would come along to the meeting and the leaflets weren't distributed and mysteriously the loudspeaker wouldn't work. They found out about George and got rid of him. That was something we were very proud of.

At Parsons we used to work on a gas oven to anneal electric motor casings. They were red hot. You had to pull them out and cool them. We used to do this winter and summer. Winter was disastrous as there were no facilities for changing. You had to jump on your bike and cycle home. I contracted pneumonia and then rheumatic fever and I was told by the doctor that I had to chuck it or if I had it again I would be dead.

Mental nursing

So I chucked it and went into a mental hospital, not as a patient! I trained as a mental nurse, at Stannington near Morpeth. George Roberts got me that job. He had been an ambulance man at Parsons. The ambulance men had the ethics of the miners. They were in COHSE and of course I joined. This was just before the

war. Mental hospitals were hell holes. They smelt. They were noisy. The food was terrible. The hours were 12 hour shifts and at nights you were locked in with 60 patients and 8 in the side rooms with delusions and shouting. You had these 60 patients in an open ward. Your help (colleague) was asleep in a side room and many times you'd have trouble and he wouldn't hear it. It was dangerous. There were two people killed when I was there. The patients had jobs like sweeping up a side of the ward and got a pot of tea or a packet of fags for doing that. A French person came not knowing it (that the patients helped). The patient was sleeping. He took the brush off him and swept up. The patient took offence and hit him over the head and he died. I've seen myself in the morning when they were getting up having two of them on my back. The only thing you had in your defence was that they wore polished leather soles on polished floors and they couldn't keep their footing very well. We wore rubber soled shoes or sandshoes. If you had trouble you kicked their feet from under them and put a hand towel round their neck to restrain them. They usually gave in. That was done on the quiet but it was well known that it was done. You were protecting yourself. You choked them until the vigour went out of them. They were like a wet rag after that. You kept a sharp eye on them.

Incidentally, there was chemical restraint as well you know. One of the main things was paraldehyde. Now the standard dose for an adult was 30mls and we only got a bottle with 15mls in, never a full dose, the reason being in those days before the NHS the medical superintendent of a mental hospital had to pay for all the medicines. It came out of their salary. That also applied in a workhouse. I worked at the General Hospital for a while. I'll tell you about that. It was relevant there as well. The medical superintendent of the workhouse had the medicines taken off his pay. For a short while I worked at Preston Hospital North Shields and the same applied

there. Consequently you never got medication which was relevant or efficient. The only thing if you asked for it was a codeine tablet.

Eventually I worked for a Danish chemical and pharmaceutical company and I used to go to Glasgow and at Glasgow Royal Infirmary there was a huge waiting room and at about half past eleven when all outpatients were in the pharmacist used to come out and say, people with chests over there, all those with stomach in that corner, people with pain and so on. He went through the gambit and then he would give them a bottle. They all got the same bottle, black bottle for coughing, white bottle for stomach and for some people it would be marked GOK, god only knows, they were all mixed up. Yeh.

My father and mother had been on the Board of Guardians and they were voted for, similar to the councillor in those days as they regulated the Poor Law monies, and on a Thursday they would have a clinic. They would have a clinic where people would come and plead their case. They were mostly people who were threatened with the workhouse and the family being split up, men, women and children. Later in 1945-6 when I was at the General the workhouse patients were on the next two floors up from us. There was a Doctor Harland there. He was the medical superintendent of the workhouse, and in charge of the ward where I worked which was a mental observation ward for assessment whether they should be certified or not. He came up to me one day and said, 'are your mother and father on the Board of Guardians?' so I said yes. He said, 'they give me a lot of trouble, I hope you don't'. I said, 'I don't intend to'. That was that. Then one day the Charge of the ward said I want you to clean the windows. Climb up and clean the windows. You know the Victorian wards, had huge windows. There were gammy trestles so I said. 'if I fall down the first thing they would ask me would be what were you doing cleaning windows, a nurse'. So he said he'd report me. So I went in front of the medical superintendent who I knew because I had worked on the TB ward at Walkergate. We

were quite friendly as we went cycling together. He said, 'you disobeyed an order'. So I asked if he knew what the order was. He didn't, so I told him. 12 foot windows and slippery floor. I was waiting to play my ace but he said, 'you did quite right because I've had a circular from the Ministry of Health about no nurse doing domestic work'. Because I was secretary of the union at the General and I used to get circulars from the Ministry of Health, Aneurin Bevan. Prior to that that nurses did all domestic jobs. They were dogsbodies, but we got that stopped. I was asked to be secretary of the union and we got them organised. Some of the female nurses would come and say I've come because my father told me to join. I thought that was very good.

Conscientious objector

I was a mental nurse before and after the War. During the war I was sent to London on air raids, accident and emergency during the air raids. I was there for four years and then returned home and got the job at the General where the window cleaning episode took place. I didn't do military service because I was a conscientious objector. I had a colleague at the mental hospital who was anti-military and coming from the home I did, I was anti-military. We got together and said we would both be conscientious objectors. We were tried by Judge Richardson whose own son was a conscientious objector. The Richardsons were Quakers. When the war broke out I wanted to do something to alleviate injury so I volunteered to go on air raid precautions and I was sent to London, I worked at Hammersmith, West Middlesex Hospital. I lived in Richmond where you could get away from bombing and you could sleep but there was one period for two months where there was an air raid every night. My job was triage. Like in the army you'd sort out those who wouldn't recover, those who might recover and those who would recover. Second triage were treated in the theatre of the hospital.

After the war I moved to a place in Newcastle, Spital Tongues, spiteful tongues we called it. My brother's wife lived there and I took over the community centre with two other people. It was dead. Nothing was being done. They saw my name and that was enough to set 'spiteful tongues' wagging. Robsons the furniture people had a factory there. They did period and reproduction furniture and they had a big order book but no workers, cabinet makers or French polishers. They went to Belfast and gathered some workers but they weren't discriminating enough. They brought a mixture of UVF and IRA. I knew a fellow, Bob Hall, who drove a delivery van for Robsons. He said I'd never been anywhere like it. They're throwing things at each other at dinner time. So what you have is a second generation of Irishman with a Stormont House in Spital Tongues and a wee church, a feature of Ireland and Scotland – the wee frees. They were what I call gung ho. Most of them were in the army and had this idea that I was a coward. There are three bars there that I still can't go in.

My family was mainly supportive but my younger sister was hostile. I can understand that. She worked as a clerk at Parsons. It was in the newspapers. It wasn't secret. Your hearing and the result was in the newspapers so everybody knew. They made it so because I was one of the first and they set out to shame you and to stop anybody else. I thought, one of the reasons I did it, at that time in history, the Germans were about to occupy Norway and Churchill was advocating that the British troops should move to Narvik and go to Finland to help attack Russia and that made my decision, straight away. That was 1940. I got call up papers, 8th May 1940, and you were to report for a medical. If not you had to fill in a form saying you're not going and to register as a CO and take it to the Labour Exchange. You get a letter saying your trial is a certain date.

There were others CO's in Newcastle like the Saddlers of Byker, who were builders and Bob Morley who had a garage and motor hiring business and brothers who had a cycle shop in Brighton

Grove. It is now an Indian grocer's. Occasionally there would be a meeting on Jesmond Road at the Friends Meeting House. Some of them had been to jail and they would recount their experiences and give you advice in case you were sent to jail. I never was.

I eventually landed up as an orthopaedic technician where you deal a lot with plaster of paris. The fellow who taught me on a crash course at the RVI was a fellow called Fiddler, Harry Fiddler. Oh he was marvellous with (plaster of paris), a real master, who could do anything. One of the things you had to do when you put in what was known as a hip spiker, you put plaster down one leg right to the toes. What we are going to do with this? and you had to cut a hole with a very sharp knife while the plaster was still damp. He was an expert at it. You could tell the way a man handles a tool if he's a craftsman. The way he picks it up, puts it down. He was a craftsman, a joy to watch. The minimum of movement and the maximum effect. Also there were surgeons that were very good at certain things. One very good at prostates, another one very good with fractures. But not with everything. It's funny that. Then diagnosing from X rays was another very highly skilled job. One of the most highly skilled men I saw. You know when a femur is broken, you know at the top where it fits into the sacrum, just like that. This is the part that goes, the neck, the surgical neck. So you have the femur there and the ball there. And when that's broken they put pins in, steel wires, steel pins, up like that. These are guides for guide wires. They put them in and do an X ray and find which one to go up to put the stinment pin which will eventually hold the whole lot together. Its guessing, just guessing which one will do it. It's a highly skilled job. There was one fellow used to do it, Arden, he'd passed the theoretical exam but he hadn't passed the practical exam. They had to take him off that because it'd take him a long while. He'd get the wrong wire. That's what medicine is about. Experience and know how. That's all. He sees something, blots on a skin and 25 years later he sees the same blots on a skin and he treats it with the same thing and gets the same result.

Educating René

Growing up in a Durham pit village in the 1920's and 30's – Part 1

Like countless children in 20th century Britain, my young life reached a crossroads at a very tender age. The 11-Plus examination took place in March each year. As a pupil in the top class of the junior section of the Crag School in Ferryhill, I looked forward to the day very much. I don't remember my parents being worried or anxious – an ease which perhaps rubbed off on me. Just a few quiet words: 'Do your best'. The morning tests passed off well and at 12 noon we all went home for dinner after being told to be back for 1.30 sharp. With plenty of time to spare, I set off back for school. In my happy haste I didn't see the iron boiler hoop in the road as I skipped along. I tripped and fell, badly scraping my writing hand and knocking out a front tooth. I ran home, blood flowing, tears falling, and was hurried to the dentist. He staunched the blood and removed the tooth, but couldn't do much about the tears. All I could think about was the missed exam. In those harsher times there was no question of taking it again or indeed of going to the grammar

school and getting a proper education. I have often pondered what life would have been life if I hadn't encountered what my husband Sid later called, in the title of a short story, 'a ring of burnished steel'. I think of that day and what it meant to me every time my tongue touches the false tooth that replaced my own.

But then again, I've had so much good luck throughout my long life I can hardly grieve over that one piece of bad. And I set about educating myself, in other, less formal ways.

There was no library in Ferryhill until the beginning of the 1930's so as a small child I had little access to books. There were only a very few in our house, but my parents did buy me Arthur Mee's Children's Newspaper¹ every week and sometimes the Rainbow comic. They also took the Northern Echo, which had a Children's Corner and an associated club, which went by the now-appalling title of the Nig-Nogs. My father bought Titbits magazine and Amateur Gardening. My mother read Home and Country, the magazine of the Women's Institute. She'd been a founder member of the Mainsforth branch when it was established in 1927 and it played an important and educative role in my life until I moved with Sid and our children to Essex in 1953. For years before and after the Second World War the WI put on all kinds of events, including plays and pantos, and over the years I took part in many of them. In the biggest, held I think in 1935, Morgan's Field (where the last boar in England was allegedly killed by Sir Roger de Fery) the field was taken over for a medieval pageant, featuring maypole dancing and the story of Robin Hood. I got to play Maid Marian!

I did have some story-books of my own, many given as Christmas presents by my numerous aunts and uncles. My favourites were the *Bumper Book for Girls* and *Rapunzel* by the Brothers Grimm, which featured a wonderful colour plate of the heroine letting down her blonde hair out of the tower window

for her Prince to climb and rescue her. Sadly I no longer have that book, but I do have a tiny book given to me by Michael and Susan, my son and daughter-in-law, of six of the Grimm stories with marvellous etchings by David Hockney. I treasure it.

I also used to read two books of my father's, both given to him as prizes at the Sunday school at Lesbury, the village in Northumberland where he was born and brought up. They were *A Bag of Farthings* and *Captain Curly's Boy* by Isabel Hornibrook. Many nights I cried myself to sleep after reading the latter, a sad story read subsequently by my children and grandchildren. I still have both books, in the small bookcase in my bedroom.

The scope of my reading improved greatly when the library opened in the Miners Welfare Hall at Ferryhill Station in 1931, partly funded by weekly donations of one penny from the miners at Mainsforth Colliery. It was open on Tuesday afternoons and evenings and supervised by a gentle, learned man called Richard Bulmer, known to everyone as Dick. Unable to work at the pit after an accident, he habitually wore a trilby hat and a shabby gabardine coat and sat in the back row of the Methodist chapel at every service. My father liked and respected Mr Bulmer and it was my job every Saturday morning to take him vegetables from our allotment. Perhaps because of this, he put a book aside for me on the library's opening day – *Anne of Green Gables*, an exciting story and a very good choice. I used the library from that time onwards.

I did have access to another library – at the Crag County School. I'd been in the junior school there, in a class of 48, and having failed the 11-Plus, went onto to the senior school, where I learnt a little French, but my favourite and best subject was English. Once you reached the age of 12 you were allowed to take one book home a week from the school library, but I was fortunate to have a remarkable teacher who introduced me to a great array of

wonderful literature, opening up avenues I have explored ever since. Our English teacher Dorothy Carr – Miss Carr - was formidable, committed and ambitious for her pupils, believing passionately that miners' children deserved the best of everything. Under her tutelage, we read and acted out the classics – Shakespeare, Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson – as well as the great poets. Among these were Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson, but she also had a passion for W.B. Yeats, which she passed on to us.

When I was about 12 Miss Carr started a class in mime and movement, which I loved. She chose the Greek myths as a theme, with a narrator to tell the story while the rest of the class moved in a way we hope matched the words! I have such a strong memory of these classes. We hand-sewed our own costumes – cotton saxe-blue knee-length tunics, gathered at shoulder and waists, with head-band to match, and white socks and plimsoll shoes. I took great pleasure in the act of performance and ever since I've had a deep love of the theatre – in another life I might have been an actress! – and still maintain close links with my two favourite Newcastle theatres, Live and the People's. Later Miss Carr moved to Dean Bank School in Ferryhill, where in turn she taught English to my daughter Gillian and then became Drama Organiser for the county. We kept in touch for years and years, and the last time I heard from her was in 1986 on the death of my Sid, whose work she deeply admired. Having nurtured the imaginations of countless children, she died in a Church of England nursing home at the age of 96. She never married.

I have to say there were times when reading books did not go down well at home. Perhaps I became too avid a reader. Certainly it irritated my mother when she wanted a hand sewing pillowcases, turning sheets side to middle or one of the other countless household chores, and I was sat in a chair with my head in a novel. Perhaps she felt it was idleness for a working class girl. It was the same when the

headmaster Mr Stringer and Miss Carr asked my father if he would pay for his actress-declamer daughter to have elocution lessons. The answer was no. I've always regretted this, but I can perhaps now understand Father's point of view.

After I left school I worked as a shop assistant in Stapleton's general store for five shillings a week (the Co-op was for grammar school girls). Two years later I left Ferryhill itself, to work in Harrogate as second parlour maid for Mr and Mrs Charles Grange, a consultant surgeon and his wife. My father decided I should go. How I wish I'd had the courage to say no, but really I had no say in the whole business. I didn't enjoy the work and two years later came home to Ferryhill and got back my old job at Stapleton's shop.

Shortly afterwards I went to Sunday service at the chapel in nearby Kirk Merrington and there heard a preacher, a rather opinionated and self-confident young man called Sid Chaplin. After a little initial problem between us – I thought he was going out with someone else – we became sweethearts, with many things in common, including books, and so in a modest way we began our own collection. We went on Saturday afternoons either to Durham or Bishop Auckland to bookshops new and second hand. Sid was fanatically interested in all books, but then had a passion for science fiction, which wasn't my taste, but we always found something to enjoy together. When we married in January 1941, Sid brought to our new home in Gladstone Terrace an Underwood typewriter (still in his old desk where I'm writing this), all his books, a bureau with fold-down desk, a very old painted bookcase that hung on the wall. Pride of place on the top shelf was Walt Whitman's *Collected Poems*, which we used to read to each other, and I still look at today. Of course I still had the Ferryhill library, but Sid used the libraries at the Spennymoor Settlement and the Durham University library on Palace Green, where he'd managed to get a ticket. He also subscribed

to wartime periodicals and magazines, to many of which he later became a contributor, including *Penguin New Writing*, *English Story*, *Seven*, *Horizon*, *Encounter* and many more. Our own collection grew slowly, with money destined for household needs often being spent on books instead, like the purchase of a set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* instead of a sewing machine in 1947.



René and Sid

Gradually my reading began to include Sid's own work. It began with a poem called 'A Widow Wept' published in *Penguin New Writing*, edited by John Lehman, who became an enthusiast for Sid's writing and went on to publish short stories. The £5 fee for this we spent on a dinner service bought at Binns in Darlington for his parents' silver wedding. Later Sid's stories about Durham were gathered together in a collection called *A Leaping Lad* – that very exciting thing, a whole book! After

all these years the pride and joy at this is very strong in my memory. Subsequently the book won an Atlantic Award in Literature of £300, which enabled Sid to take a year off from the pit to write his next book, *My Fate Cries Out*, published in 1949. We managed to stretch the money out for 18 months, but eventually, when there was only one shilling left in the Post Office, Sid went unwillingly back to the pit to what his dad called 'a proper job'. More books, stories and articles followed, each one bringing its own demands and rewards, the best of which was seeing the books in bookshop windows and knowing that I had helped in my own small way to grow and nurture them.

Reading stories to my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren has been very special to me. Now in my older years and widowhood, books are still a great joy to me and I can read to my hearts' content without anyone telling to get up and do something else.

(To be continued)

René Chaplin

¹ Arthur Mee was also the creator of the *Children's Encyclopedia*, which was arranged in sections rather than alphabetically.

SPLINTERS

(FOR MY FATHER)

You picked splinters
with a pin each day
from under blackened fingernails;
shreds of metal
from the shipyard grime,
minute memories of days swept by:
the dusty remnants of a life
spent in the shadow of the sea;
the tears in your shattered eyes
at the end of work.
And your hands were strong,
so sensitive and capable
of building boats
and nursing roses;
a kind and gentle man
who never hurt a soul,
the sort of quiet knackered man
who built a nation.
Dad, I watched your ashes float away
down to the ocean bed
and in each splinter
I saw your caring eyes
and gracious smile.

I think of your strong silence every day
and I am full of you,
the waves you scaled,
and all the sleeping Tyneside streets
you taught me to dance my fleeting feet along.

When I fly, you are with me.
I see your fine face
in sun-kissed clouds
and in the gold ring on my finger,
and in the heaving crowd on Saturday,
and in the lung of Grainger Market,
and in the ancient breath
of our own Newcastle.

Keith Armstrong

APPRECIATIONS

Bill Griffiths 1948-2007

Bill Griffiths completed the preliminary draft of his book on the dialect of the North East Coast just days before his death in September 2007. It concluded a remarkable achievement, being the third volume of the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Wor' Language* project. The previous books *Stotty 'n Spicecake: The Story of North East Cooking*, 2006, and *Pitmatic: The Talk of the North East Coalfield*, 2007, received local and national acclaim and alongwith his *Dictionary of North East Dialect*, 2004, 2005, established Bill's reputation as the region's foremost dialect scholar. He was a unique talent who possessed an unusual combination of skills. He came from an orchestra family, was trained as a classical pianist and had performed solo at the Barbican Centre. His musical education was followed by a degree in History at UCL and a Doctorate in Old English from Kings College, London. He also wrote poetry which was of the highest order, one of his many obituarists in the national press described his work as without equal in English since Ezra Pound. That he deliberately chose to publish with small presses, of which he was an ardent participant, partly explains why his work was not more widely known. In recent years, however, he had

north east history

been appointed Visiting Professor in Poetry in many universities, particularly in the U S A where his work is highly regarded. His role as a Fellow and a researcher at the Centre for Northern Studies at Northumbria University since 2000 provided a material security – unusual for Bill like many other poets – and it was during these years that he tirelessly researched regional dialect.



Bill Griffiths

Bill moved from London to the North East, settling at Seaham, in 1990. To many this seemed an odd choice as he had a growing reputation as a poet with a particular London focus. But, for Bill there was a strong logic to his northern journey. Since the 1960's he had frequently visited the region, drawn to the Morden Tower poetry scene and the poets who were emerging under the guiding influence of Basil Bunting. Bill was a strong admirer of Tom Pickard

and their relationship of mutual respect produced the delightful collaborative work *Tyne Txts* in 2003. Above all it was the region's language that drew him here. Bill was a formidable student of Saxon literature who took great pleasure in living amongst the vestiges of Old English which forms the core of North East dialect. He quickly became part of the local cultural scene-in its widest sense. Professor Rosemary Cramp would visit his marvellously unkempt Tyneside flat at Seaham, surrounded by four pianos, including two grands! –to discuss aspects of Seaham's Saxon History. He wrote numerous books on Seaham from its Saxon origins to the Londonderry years. He was a champion of the local environment, drawing attention to the plight of the Durham Denes and attacking the local authority plans to develop the notorious *Get Carter* beach. These drew Bill into politics and he came within a few votes of winning a council seat as an Independent in this Labour stronghold. He became the leading figure and inspiration in the Seaham local history scene and helped to establish the Tyneside and Durham Dialect Society. He had a remarkable ability to blend in to local society; he could more than hold his own in academic circles, but it was his involvement with ordinary local people that gave him greatest pleasure. His half time post at the university allowed him to visit and talk to old people – Thursday afternoons were always reserved for making one elderly resident's lunch. He was well known amongst teenagers, many who participated, in his dialect projects. With his dishevelled appearance, tattoos that were a legacy of his involvement with the Hells Angels during the 1960's, and colourful American sportswear and shellsuits he developed an easy rapport with people who would normally be reluctant to participate in scholarly research. Indeed Bill always managed to invoke amongst those involved in his work a strong sense of shared ownership: he was there to help them preserve and defend 'their' language, a dimension all too apparent

at his numerous dialect meetings when he was accompanied by an entourage of locals. To hear young men and women give demonstrations of contemporary dialect were memorable moments at these events.

Music, History, Poetry, as if this was not enough, stood alongside Bill's other great skill as an archivist. He was a member of the Society of Archivists; his membership was achieved in recognition of the important work he performed at the Kings College Poetry Archive during the 1990's. In recent years he catalogued the papers of the Northern Sinfonia and during the spring of 2007 he completed the task of listing over one hundred hours of oral recordings of T. Dan Smith. Listening, studying and compiling were central to Bill's work. We can marvel at the thousand year plus etymologies to many local words; take surprise at his demonstration of the important Dutch contribution to the language of the region, and puzzle over the failure of Irish to have a linguistic impact upon the region despite the scale of nineteenth century immigration. Labour historians are indebted to his rescue and preservation of Pitmatic, the rapidly disappearing language of the Great Northern Coalfield – this alone is an achievement of historic significance. And in his forthcoming book *Fishing Folk* (to be published in July 2008) we witness Bill at the height of his powers. The community involvement is ever present – he became a leading figure in the Keel and Cobble Boat Society and he scoured the towns and villages of the region's coast in his quest. His research became more multi-dimensional and arguably this book is as important a work of the social history of the North Sea Coast as it is a record the community's language.

At the time of his death we were planning a new project on the dialect of children's games and pastimes and it is the intention of all those involved with Bill that this work should be undertaken.

Thanks to him the people of the North East have a wonderful cultural resource – a resource that Bill would insist was as much their making as his – and his greatest legacy is that he has created something that will be enduring. Bill died within a few weeks of Murray Martin, a founder and inspirational figure at Amber Films. They both shared a passion that working people of the region should be able to represent themselves whether in film or voice. The summer of 2007 so brilliantly explored in the Newcastle writer Gordon Burn's *Born Yesterday, The News as a Novel*, was miserable on many counts and there was much that we would rather forget. Bill's passing will not be forgotten and his life is a reminder that genius is often all around us.

Bill Lancaster

Director of the Centre for Northern Studies, 1997-2008.

Don Edwards 1912-2005

Don Edwards was born in Toxteth, Liverpool in 1912. His father was a Petty Officer in the Navy who died at the Battle of Jutland in 1916. His mother went into deep depression, surviving him by only a year. As very small children, Don and his siblings were orphans. He was brought up by his paternal aunt and uncle, Liverpool Orange Tories. He was a bright boy who went to Toxteth Technical Institute. Unusually for the 1920's he remained at school till 16 when he took up an electrical apprenticeship. He met his wife Edith Irene Edge in 1932 before the end of his apprenticeship and married in 1933 by which time under the influence of his wife's family he had shifted to the left having become active in the T U movement. In 1938 he was helping to organise a strike which ended in lockout and blacklisting on the Mersey.

In 1939 with war looming Don moved up to Tyneside looking for work leaving the family in a village in North Wales near Llanberis where Edith stayed with the two boys for six months. Don lodged in Walker, working briefly in the ship yards. Having registered and being classed A1 fit for the RAF, he awaited call up but it never came. He always attributed this to his membership of

the CP which he had joined in Liverpool a few years earlier. As it happened he had become disillusioned with the Party when Stalin did his infamous deal with Hitler.

He soon moved into a more permanent job as a maintenance man at the Royal Victoria Infirmary where he stayed till 1943. During the war he had continued his union work and served on the Newcastle and district Trades Council. By 1945 he had worked for two years at Carville Power Station as a linesman and in that year he was elected Secretary of the Trades Council a post he was to hold till 1982. By this point he had left the CP although he always maintained friendly relations with Party members. His daughter Irene remembers the front room of the house being an office with the presence of a phone and duplicator making it almost unique among working class houses in the forties. She also remembers being an unofficial secretary from about the age of eight, addressing and stuffing envelopes monthly with Trades Council minutes.



Don Edwards

Irene describes her father as ‘a new man’ before ‘new’ men. He was not shy of doing domestic tasks and was much involved with the children taking them off to the swimming pool every Saturday afternoon and to the Library when time allowed. There wasn’t much time to spare. He worked a five and a half day week and two overtime shifts late on a Thursday and Sunday. With five children her mother could not work out of the home and it was a struggle to make ends meet. Her mother did rule the home but Don took the big decisions. Out of work his trade union work took up two further evenings per week.

Don was a prodigious reader. Plato's *Republic* was on the shelf along with the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, the latter pressed onto the children as essential reading. Even before the trial in 1962 a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was also in the house. He also subscribed to the *National Geographic* and was keen for the family to follow both world affairs and the world's nature. He also encouraged the Trades Council into cultural pursuits. Around 1952 Irene remembers answering the door to a woman in an old raincoat. It turned out to be Joan Littlewood who had brought The Theatre Workshop to Newcastle at the invitation of the Trades Council. Two plays were performed, 'The Long Shift', a mining drama starring Harry H Corbett, and 'Henry IV' pt 1, with Corbett as Prince Hal.

In the fifties Don was also active in the local Labour Party and a delegate to the City Party, forming a close relationship with fellow Liverpoolian, Secretary Joe Eagles. His political ideas were on the left of the LP and included opposition to the British Bomb and an antagonism to capital punishment. He also petitioned against the restrictions put by the US government on Paul Robeson.

In 1962 he was elected a full time officer for the ETU just at the time when the leadership was being witch-hunted out of office. His own election was challenged and declared null and void. He was entirely cleared of any rigging and in the re-run won with a bigger majority. During the sixties he became a member of the National Assistance Board and ultimately Chairman, where he said his sympathies lay firmly with the claimant.

John Charlton

Tony Hepburn 1940-2008

Tony Hepburn who has died of motor neurone disease aged 67 was one of the foremost historians of modern Ireland and Professor of Modern Irish History at the University of Sunderland where he taught from 1988 until his retirement in 2007.

Tony became an Irish historian more by accident than by design. While at Cambridge in the early 1960s his decision to take the third-year special subject on Home Rule – which sparked his interest in Irish history – was motivated mainly by the fact that it was one of the few topics that did not require knowledge of a language other than English. Once gripped by the subject, however, Tony quickly became an expert in the field and completed his magisterial doctoral dissertation ‘Liberal policies and nationalist politics in Ireland, 1905-10’ (University of Kent, Ph. D, 1968) under the supervision of F.S.L. Lyons. The Ph. D was a very fine piece of work, not least because it included a great deal of ‘history from below’ which had then been very little investigated in an Irish context. (Indeed, Tony’s lament in the final pages of his doctorate that ‘The Irish revolution awaits its Georges Lefebvre’ (p. 825) resonated a great deal with me when I worked on the same

subject almost thirty years' later.) Tony then took up a postdoctoral fellowship at the Queen's University, Belfast, when he worked with Erhard Rumpf in producing a translation and expanded version of the seminal work: *Nationalism And Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Liverpool University Press, 1977). This influential book explored the social dynamics that underpinned nationalist politics during the revolutionary period (and beyond), and is regarded as a key contribution to the continuing debate on the nature of the Irish revolution (1916-23).

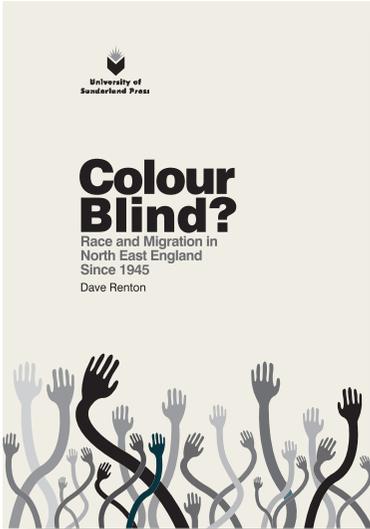
Tony then worked as a lecturer at the new university of Ulster at Coleraine where he began researching the nature of the sectarian and ethnic divide in Northern Irish society. He published a number of key works on this subject but the pinnacle of his academic achievement will be his forthcoming monograph, *Catholic Belfast and Nationalist Ireland In the Era of Joe Devlin, 1871-1934* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press, October 2008). This book – the fruit of a lifetime's research – rescues the Belfast barman, Joe Devlin, and the Home Rule political tradition that he represented, from the enormous condescension of posterity; and it promises to be Tony's masterpiece.

I had the good fortune to become friends with Tony when I moved to Newcastle University in 2004 and we had many interesting lunches discussing Irish history (and Irish historians), as well as his love of music (especially the blues) and his electric guitar-playing (he had a Fender Stratocaster copy). Tony was a fine historian, a generous colleague and friend, very good humoured, and excellent company. He is survived by his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren.

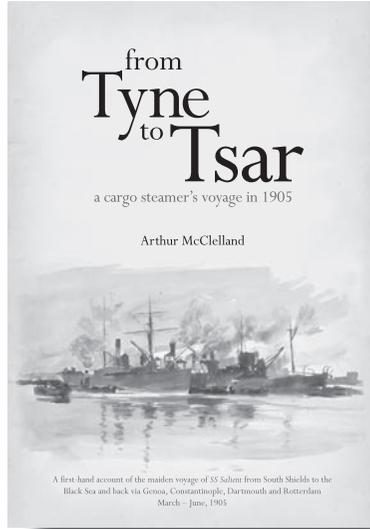
A. C. (Tony) Hepburn was born on 28 November 1940 and died on 25 April
Fergus Campbell



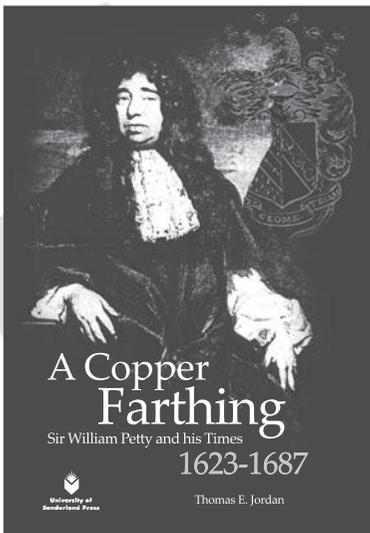
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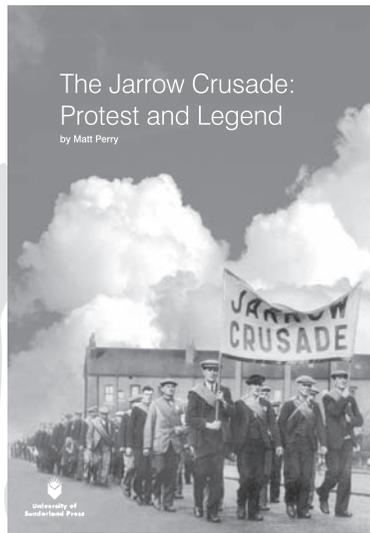
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REVIEWS

Lewis H. Mates, *The Spanish Civil War and British Left: Political Activism and the Popular Front* (Tauris Academic Studies 2007) ISBN 978-1-84511-298-1, 292p, £52.50 hbk

Although somewhat camouflaged by the title this book is in fact North East labour history. It is the first full-length published study of grassroots labour movement activism on Spain since Hywel Francis's work on Wales (*Miners Against Fascism*) appeared more than twenty years ago. The book uses points of comparison with other parts of the country (principally South Wales but also Birmingham and London) but the primary source material is all from the North East, defined as Tyneside and the Northumberland and Durham coalfields. It is the experience of political activists in this region that provides the focus. Lewis argues that local history can shed light on national issues and interrogate the assumptions and generalisations of national historians to good effect, and he demonstrates the truth of this very well indeed.

The main purpose of the book is to critique the attempts to build a 'popular front' of 'all progressive forces' against fascism and appeasement in Britain between 1936 and 1939, the attempt that was the major discourse for many on the left at that time. On Spain the key task for the left was to end the British government-inspired 'Non-Intervention' policy that denied the Republic the ability to

obtain arms whilst ignoring the sustained military support Franco received from the European fascist nations. At the time many on the left believed that the leaderships of the TUC and the Labour Party were not prepared to be active enough to achieve this change of government policy. Lewis argues that the popular front efforts inadvertently had a detrimental effect on support for the Spanish Republic. Spain became a distraction from the popular front agenda for some influential figures, and the advocacy of 'unconstitutional' or direct action, such as industrial action, to try to force a change of government policy was unacceptable because it risked alienating moderate opinion. Only a political perspective that saw the Spanish conflict in terms of defending working class gains rather than just defending democracy, the popular front line, would have been based on calls for direct action.

A chapter on the International Brigade volunteers makes use of the records of the British Battalion that have become available recently. This provides information about those who had left this area before volunteering and so generally went unmentioned by the local press. Lewis is less concerned about the numbers, backgrounds and activities of the volunteers than with topics that have not been covered well in other works: the political effect of their involvement on their families, their effect on the Aid Spain campaigns at home, particularly on their return, and any subsequent activities. This means that there is no complete picture of the local Brigade volunteers provided, but that could easily be a project for another time. He uses the local press reports of meetings to argue that the returning volunteers were not used to the effect they might have had in arguing against Non-Intervention. He also believes that their tendency in letters and speeches to claim the 'inevitability' of a Republican victory was a function of the belief that the popular front way in Spain was the only way. In fact it is more likely to have

been a function of Prime Minister Negrin's political-diplomatic stances during 1938.

A minor quibble as regards the individuals who are discussed there is no mention of the role of Sam Langley: like Bob Elliott and Wilf Jobling he had a national status in the unemployed movement, and in his case for longer, but historians have generally missed this out. Presumably the deaths of the other two have overshadowed him. Langley returned to NUWM headquarters on his return from Spain.



International Brigade memorial meeting poster

Politics and religion

As Lewis says the membership of the North East was always the smallest of all the Districts in the CP and it could ill afford to have absent, and still less to lose permanently, activists of the calibre of

those who went to Spain. Neither could the local NUWM. But those who served continue to provide an unsurpassed example of socialist internationalism in action.

Lewis makes extensive use of the trades union and Labour Party records that have survived to plot the grass roots responses to Spain. He examines the different levels at which organisations could be active, and how this was both 'external', public campaigning, and 'internal', attempting to galvanise the national leadership of the labour movement into more action. Some unions saw the Labour Party as their political arm and thus the more appropriate body to campaign. The Durham Miners' Association (DMA) in particular raised an unprecedented amount of money, which Lewis notes is not mentioned in histories of the union. Although the picture is highly varied and often conditioned by the organisational cultures of the particular unions or Labour Parties, it is a far more active picture than may have been appreciated. There was undoubtedly torpor at the national level but it should not be assumed that this was always reflected locally. This is particularly true from spring 1938 when the Labour and TUC leaderships opened up a campaign against Non-Intervention, although some branches were active before then.

This did not necessarily relate to or depend on any willingness to co-operate with the CP, and overall it seems that in the region there was little enthusiasm in the mainstream labour and trades union movements to do so. The book shows that patterns of good and bad CP-Labour relations in the region had largely been set before Spain, and were unaffected by the campaigns.

A frequent theme is an argument that industrial direct action was needed to create pressure for a change in government policy towards Non-Intervention. The possibilities included strikes, blacking Franco's trade with Britain, or preventing the printing of anti-Republican atrocity stories in the press. There was a certain

level of background from earlier in the decade when labour or trades union calls for industrial action in the event of war for example had been made. The DMA had called for a one-day general strike against the Means Test, a motion on which had been rejected by the TUC conference in 1936. Was there a mood for this? Lewis cites a motion for industrial action for Spain agreed by the North East Federation of Trades Councils and the Northumberland and Tyneside Federation of Labour Parties, normally moderate bodies, to suggest that there was. Some historians might be wary of building a case from one instance, especially since it is not known how far the constituent bodies had debated the motion beforehand, and especially since the DMA lodges had decisively voted against a strike against Non-Intervention. But there is no doubt that many rank and file activists wanted far more action than their national leaderships were prepared to take. The apparent lack of arguments for industrial action by leading local left-wingers (all miners) is taken to be an effect of the popular front: avoid militant action that might alienate middle-class opinion. The one local example of direct action in the region of study – the strike on board the *S.S. Linaria*, led by North Shields Communist Spike Robson – was an exception, and in the early days of the popular front policy.

The support of the Catholic Church for Franco caused concerns among the TUC leaders that to support Republican Spain might split the labour movement on religious grounds, with the Catholics opposing efforts to help the Republican government. This certainly happened to some extent in Glasgow and also in the North West of England. But in one chapter Lewis demonstrates that the North East was free of this, contrary to some Communist claims, with no apparent evidence that Catholics here mounted any noteworthy opposition or voiced any disquiet about labour movement activity over Spain. Their reactions were diverse, even

within small geographical areas. The circulation of the Catholic press in the region was small, and the CP not large enough to worry the priests. More importantly, Lewis suggests that Catholics seem to have been better integrated into the local labour movement, as office holders for example, than was the case elsewhere. The chapter is of more than passing interest. At that time the local catholic population was largely working class and of Irish descent. There is quite a body of literature now on Irish immigration to the North East but much less on the political effects that it may or may not have had at particular times. This chapter offers a start and a useful point of comparison.

Campaigns

One chapter examines the nature and function of the various Aid Spain campaigns in the region and a companion one aims to discuss their political meaning. An extensive and thorough use of the local press of the time gives an account of the Spanish Medical Aid Campaigns (there were about eighteen in the region), the Basque Children's campaign, the support for the crew of the *Linaria*, the International Brigade Dependents' Aid Committee, and particularly the Tyneside Foodship campaign, which was massive and regarded as a model for the rest of the country. A good account is given of their range, social and political diversity and depth. The argument is that, overall, the press coverage of these campaigns shows a humanitarian approach at the expense of political, that is to say pro-Republican, positions. Lewis argues that the activists in these campaigns consciously de-politicised their work because they believed this was essential to raise the funds they needed. For financial appeals to succeed, they believed, they had to reach out to the respectable and the affluent as well as the working class movement and this meant avoiding anything other than charitable approaches. In the event though enough funds could have been raised from working class support without any need to avoid pro-Republican messages.

Lewis disputes the claims of some historians that these campaigns represented a de facto popular front. As regards the North East, at least, he can find no evidence that these campaigns, politically diverse though their participants could be, amounted to any political common purposes at the grassroots. Similarly there seems to be no evidence that their prominent activists, at least those receiving press coverage, moved politically to the left if they were not already there in the first place. He doubts the likelihood of campaigns that appear to have eschewed politics to politicise people. The CP in the region – although often the first organisation to agitate about Spain – was by no means the driving force behind them, because the labour movement grassroots (in some cases at least) was able to act on its own initiative in the absence of a national lead, and was nonchalant about working with Communists along the way. Lewis notes that this regional picture departs from the national one often given by some historians. The CP North East District put more energy into working in broad campaigns than it did into promoting itself, and thus failed to capitalise in terms of membership growth. Crucially, according to Lewis, by burying itself in campaigns with a non-political message the CP lost the chance to appeal to a rank and file movement prepared to contemplate more radical action.

Arguments and conclusions

In conclusion Lewis summarises his case that the popular front policy, adopted by a left 'awestruck by the Soviet achievement' and keen to 'support any policy that had its endorsement' goes some way to explaining why a coherent political movement against Non-Intervention, capable of challenging the labour leadership and government policy never emerged in Britain. That policy demanded a constitutionalist approach that precluded industrial direct action,

buried activists in essentially non-political campaigns that created a diversion from pressure to end Non-Intervention. It helped in fact to ensure the downfall of the Republic.

The popular front needs more debate than the book allows. 'Popular fronters' were not a homogeneous group. Lewis has a critique of the tactics of Stafford Cripps (about whom he has written before) but Cripps was not the whole story. GDH Cole for example did not see the popular front as an alliance, still less as a structure, but as an approach or attitude. In Cole's view the Labour and TUC leaderships were wary of mass mobilisations because they believed they would create opportunities for CP influence; apart from anything else this would alienate the 'middle England' voters Labour would need for a successful election. Earlier in the decade and well before the popular front was conceived they had taken the same position over action on the Means Test. It was also possible (as in the case of the feminist M.P. Eleanor Rathbone) to support the idea of an alliance with the USSR against Germany without supporting either the CP or the Soviet regime.

There is much more too that should be said about industrial direct action. Apart from the *Linaria* there were a number of merchant navy strikes, purely contractual disputes around sailing to Spain, which were similarly illegal under the Merchant Shipping Act. The left supported these and campaigned for the crews where it could point to a political dimension, such as dangers caused by the British failure to protect their ships from insurgent attack under Non-Intervention. An example is the case of the *Llandoverly Castle*, covered in the *Daily Worker* February 27th to June 7th 1937. However the Merchant Shipping Act (under which crews could be, and were, imprisoned or fined as well as losing livelihood and suffering victimisation) meant that the climax of these campaigns took place in court. The radical barrister D.N. Pritt (a legal adviser

in the *Linaria* case) noted in his autobiography that he had learned through experience that when it came to political cases only good arguments on points of law would work. That was the context of the *Linaria* dispute and its lengthy legal proceedings, which Robson would have been ill advised to use as a political platform. He had shown before that he wasn't afraid of legal consequences but was the same true for his colleagues?

Tom Buchanan (*The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*) briefly describes some short strikes and stoppages in support of arms for Spain that did take place in aircraft and engineering factories in the London area. These were in the final days of the Republic. How did they come to be organised? Were any of the circumstances relevant to the North East? Why there and not here? The most famous local example of political industrial action was the refusal of the Middlesbrough dockers to load the *Haruna Maru* with war material for Japan in 1938. Not only did the regional TGWU oppose this action they actually tried to organise strike-breakers. Similar successful actions took place in East London and Southampton. These episodes in the Aid China Movement show that both the CP and associated popular fronters could be willing to initiate or support industrial direct action to try to shift government policy. It seems a lapse in an otherwise thorough account for Lewis not to discuss these issues, rather than allude to the 'Hands Off Russia' campaign of 1919, given the centrality of direct action to the book's argument.

The Basque Children campaign was unique in that it was not intended to last longer than three months ('only for three months' was what the children were told at the Bilbao docks), and had it actually done so it would probably be not much more than a footnote in the histories of the period. But once the campaign split from the Catholics over the refusal to accede to Franco's demands (certainly an

objectively political act) it was going to be for the duration or longer. Nell Badsey, known as a Communist and faced with a conservative local labour movement and a middle-class campaign against the hostel, had to raise funds and support on a regular basis, and for a lot longer than three months. But alongside humanitarian appeals the children were associated with opposition to Non-Intervention through their involvement with labour movement meetings on the subject, and this generated some publicity. Lewis shows awareness of these issues and restrictions but still seems to argue that, due to the popular front approach, activists like her used their influence in campaigns to generate non-political messages.

The North East CP in 1939 had a self-criticism (and not for the first or last time in the history of the CPGB) that it put more energy into building broad campaigns than it did into building itself. The membership in this region certainly didn't grow as a result of its efforts around Spain. But to what extent is it legitimate for activists in broad campaigns to steer them away from their founding purpose? Could that lead to charges of manipulation? How far should a party use a campaign as a recruiting drive and can that be done without alienating others involved? Or should activists stay away from broad campaigns altogether and only work on behalf of their organisations, even if that means isolating themselves? His argument about the campaigns raises unanswered questions still relevant to political activism as a whole.

The book is often highly detailed, closely argued and mostly with an eye for the necessary nuances, although the continuity of the narrative can be uneven. It shows a generally thorough examination of the available material even if some of the deductions are open to debate. It will definitely be an invaluable resource and reference point for researchers of North East labour history of the 1930s. The style of the book is accessible but I think readers with prior

knowledge of the subject will appreciate it the most. Unfortunately the price of the book will largely confine it to university libraries and so I hope Lewis can persuade a publisher to issue a paperback edition.

Don Watson

Malcolm Chase, *Chartism – A New History* (Manchester University Press, 2007) ISBN 978 0 7190 6087 8 pbk & 9780719060861 hbk, 464pp, £18.99 & £60.00.

Those who attended our AGM this year will have had a foretaste of Malcolm Chase's new book on Chartism as the author had the audience in his thrall with his reflections on this important area of labour history. The book does not disappoint those expectations heightened by hearing Malcolm.

It is a book that defies convention. Firstly, there is no introduction. Instead, the reader finds him or herself in the midst of a rain-soaked meeting of up to 200,000 people on Glasgow Green at which Glasgow radicals welcomed a delegation of the Birmingham Political Union in May 1838. The significance of this meeting was that it fixed the demands of the People's Charter, adding three criteria to the petition of the Birmingham Political Union. It signalled the beginning of a remarkable mass movement that demanded universal male suffrage and annual parliaments. It was a movement that sustained itself over a decade or more and drew into its ranks hundreds of thousands of participants, and launched three monster petitions with over 3,000,000 signatories.

So why no introduction? Well, in my opinion, it is in keeping with the effort to write a narrative history of Chartism. An introduction would clutter the opening of the book with definitions, historiography and summaries. Instead, Malcolm gets

straight to the task of evoking this rich tale. He relies on a stunning wealth of empirical research to sustain the interest of the reader and the fascinating character of the subject matter. He unearthed new material including letters from Fergus O'Connor and his brother Frank who fought for Simon Bolivar. The comprehensiveness of his research and treatment contrasts sharply with the historiographical battlefield that Chartism has become. It was Chartism, let us remember, that witnessed the launching of the linguistic turn in British social history with Gareth Steadman Jones's essay on the language of class. Post-structuralist historians James Vernon and Patrick Joyce returned to Chartism for further elaborations of this approach. Malcolm eschews terminological discussion of these troubled debates judging, I assume, that they would alienate the wider reading public that, as the pioneers of British democracy, the Chartists deserve. Narrative of this type widens readership and it is important that well-researched labour history of this type sits alongside biographies of Churchill on the selves of W.H. Smiths, Borders or Blackwells. This is not to say that Malcolm is unaware of, or ignores, the debates. Instead, the book works on two levels: that of a compelling story and that of an implicit and subtler engagement with other historians trusting in the weight and comprehensiveness of empirical evidence to, for example, challenge the 'language of class' thesis.

Secondly, the book also innovates, interspersing the narrative history with biographical portraits. This humanizes Chartism showing the diversity of its participants and the complexity of how individuals interacted with the movement. We are introduced to: the grassroots village Chartists and Poor Law campaigners Abram and Elizabeth Hanson, black London-based Chartist leader William Cuffay, Church of Scotland Minister Patrick Brewster whose social gospel identified with the workers of Paisley, Welsh Chartist

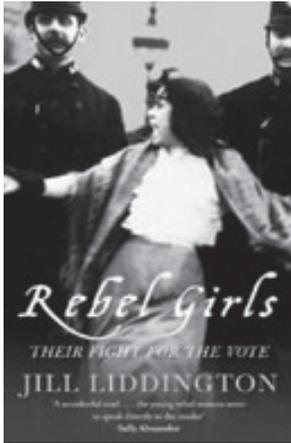
Thomas Powell victim of British injustice, ‘gentleman friend of the people’ Chartist poet John Watkins from Whitby, insurrectionist Samuel Holberry who suffered a martyr’s death from TB in York Castle, Spencean radical Elizabeth Neesom - married to Chartist leader Charles Neesom - a significant campaigner in her own right, Lancashire strike organiser Richard Pilling, and Ann Dawson who embroidered a needlework tribute to ‘The Charter and No Surrender’ part of the elusive semi (or fully) anonymous mass base of the movement.

Of course, there is an enormous literature on Chartism and to many of the readers of this journal, the episodes – the petitions of 1839, 1842, 1849, 1852, the Newport rising and other insurrectionary moves of 1839-40, the plug-drawing strike wave of 1842, and the mobilisation at Kennington Common in 1848 – will be familiar. Nevertheless, these events are told with a real verve, an evidentiary authority, a soundness of judgement and astonishingly, there is no history of Chartism of this scope. There is excellent coverage of the movement as a whole. This is not a study focused on a particular region disguised as a national history. There is plenty here to enthuse the local historian. It also has a sensitivity and nuanced understanding of gender in a movement ostensibly for male suffrage but that drew on significant activity and support from women.

Beautifully and engagingly written, this book serves as testimony to the vitality of labour history.

Matt Perry

Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (Virago 2006) ISBN 978 1 4408 168 4, £14.99 pbk



On March 20 1907, hundreds of suffragettes were prevented from entering the House of Commons by more than 500 constables. Among the 75 women arrested was 16-year-old Dora Thewlis, a mill-hand from Huddersfield. The following day, newspapers carried pictures labelled 'baby suffragette' showing her in clogs and shawl with her outstretched arms held by two policemen. It is to rescue women like Dora from obscurity that Jill Liddington has written this very

detailed yet readable book.

For many, like myself, school history gave very superficial coverage to the votes for women campaign, the only names highlighted being those of Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst along with Emily Wilding Davison; made famous by her death in June 1913 after running in front of the King's horse at Epsom. For us Jill's book is most welcome as it introduces a wide range of women and brings to life the tensions, divisions and disagreements between and within the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). It also makes brief mention of the Women's Freedom League (WFL) which one of the Rebel Girls, Alice Schofield-Coates, left the WSPU to join in 1907.

The book is divided into time segments covering the lives and work of various of the 'Rebel Girls' during years from 1903 to 1914. It begins with the founding of the WSPU in Manchester on 10th October 1903, when Adela Pankhurst was 18. Adela, the youngest

daughter of Richard and Emmeline has a central place in Jill's book, unlike many accounts of the suffrage campaigns. She felt that her work was not properly appreciated by her better known mother and sisters, especially as she devoted many years to deputising for her mother at suffrage meetings and to campaigning throughout Lancashire and Yorkshire until 1911 when ill health forced her to rest.

Jill's second 'Rebel Girl', Mary (Nellie) Gawthorpe from Leeds, was also forced to stop her organising work by illness but not until she had influenced many others. These included Molly Morris who became an organiser in Sheffield and Violet Key Jones who started helping the WSPU by distributing leaflets and chalking the pavement with meeting adverts. By 1911 she was organising in York and staging suffragette amateur theatricals and in 1913 she moved to Doncaster to set up a base there.

The majority of the Rebel Girls lived and worked in the Yorkshire and Lancashire textile industries possibly starting work at 10 years old. Although they were the first generation to benefit from compulsory schooling and most could read and write they rarely kept detailed records of their activities and thoughts. Such information has been painstakingly put together by Jill using their letters to papers, reports of demonstrations, meetings and court cases along with computerised census records. A great help was the minute book of the WSPU Huddersfield branch which records two years of meetings from May 1907 and also lists its members. All of the above serves to emphasise the factors that led to these women supporting the campaign for women's votes and also the difficulties they faced in doing so.

Alongside the development of the WSPU and the NUWSS is the growth of industries that led families such as that of Lavena Saltonstall to move from the Yorkshire villages to the rapidly growing towns. Trade unions were trying to organise in these industries and

the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was attempting to widen its support. The relationship between all of these groups is shown to be difficult as well as supportive.

As an obdurate Liberal government consistently refused to grant women the vote, although it proposed widening men's franchise, individual mavericks sprang into action, one such being Lillian Lenton. Lillian was inspired by hearing Mrs Pankhurst speak and as soon as she was 21 in Jan 1912 she started her window breaking and empty building burning campaigns. During the resulting spells in prison she refused food and was subjected to forced feeding. This damaged her windpipe and led to her swift release under the hastily introduced 'Cat and Mouse' Act. Lillian also assumed more than one identity and one of the illustrations in the book shows photographs taken secretly of the women while they were in prison. One of these, Leonora Cohen (who is not one of the eight 'Rebel Girls' but who became a suffragette due to the harshness and votelessness of her mother's life), was moved to throw an iron bar into a glass cabinet in the Tower of London Jewel House in 1913.

Such action was not to the liking of many Yorkshire women who joined the constitutional suffragists of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by the conciliatory Millicent Garrett Fawcett. Although they sympathised with the WSPU, especially those who faced prison and forced feeding, the suffragists adopted law-abiding tactics that appealed to women such as the genteel Florence Lockwood.

Just as the WSPU campaign was becoming increasingly militant and the NUWSS were using an election fighting fund to support Labour party candidates along came the First World War at which date the detailed stories end. However, the book does conclude with a summary of the lives of the women featured from

1918 and there are several appendices, one of which offers brief biographical details of over 60 women involved in the suffrage campaign. While the focus of the book is the eight “rebel girls”, born between 1881 and 1891, who joined the votes for women campaign from Yorkshire, the stories of several other women are just as important to the book’s narrative. Although one might ask whether the case studies in the book are typical and question their selection, perhaps this biographical information will encourage further research.

There is no doubt that Jill Liddington tells her story well and that her use of quotes from contemporary newspaper accounts and autobiographies gives added authenticity to her narrative. It was an interesting and involving read even at over 300 pages of small print.

Val Duncan

Robert Lee, *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield – Clergymen, Capitalists and Colliers* (Boydell in association with AHRB Centre for North East England History 2007) ISSN 1742-8254, £50 hbk

Dr Lee’s book, a part of the AHRB/NEEHI ‘Regions and Regional History Series’ is a well researched study whose starting and finishing dates are determined by industrial action rather than by Anglican church politics, but action on which the Church took a stance. The 1810 miners’ strike was partly mediated by the Rev. William Nesfield of Chester le Street but in 1926 the then Bishop of Durham Hensley Henson declared what became a General Strike to be ‘sinful’ and therefore beyond any possibility of clerical negotiation. This does not mean that relations between individual incumbents and their ‘involuntary’ parishioners had deteriorated

dramatically in the intervening years only that any attempt to missionise the Durham miner into the established church was doomed to failure.

The subtitle indicates that the author has recognised what might have been the central theme of the whole book but does not emerge sufficiently strongly as such, namely the inevitable conflict between the historical and doctrinal commitment of the Church of England to the maintenance of the social order as divinely ordained and its role as the spiritual arm of the political Establishment, as opposed to the egalitarianism of the organisations that provided the cultural framework of the Durham mining communities: chief among them a number of varieties of religious nonconformity, the miners' unions, the cooperative movement and a radical secularism that moved towards the I.L.P. or even Socialism.

Instead of exploring this underlying ideological conflict in more depth much of the book is taken up with a study of the limited success of the response of the diocesan authorities to the statistics of the 1851 religious census which had showed how precarious was the hold of the state church on these communities. But that response – the creation of new parishes and the recruitment of local ordinands with some understanding of the social and economic tensions inherent in an immigrant population could hardly change the miners' perception of the Church of England as a 'bosses' church' in thrall to the landed aristocracy and corporate capitalism.

The price of the volumes in this series is likely to condemn them to library shelves but for anyone with an interest in the many faceted culture of the Durham coalfield in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Dr Lee's richly documented book is well worth a browse.

Win Stokes



Alice in Sunderland

Bryan Talbot, *Alice in Sunderland – an Entertainment* (Jonathan Cape, 2007)
ISBN 97802240807-6-7, £16.99 hbk

Billed as ‘an entertainment’ it is difficult to work out what the potential readership for a book like this would be and equally difficult to know how to start to review it. Its graphic novel format is essentially that of a lavishly illustrated strip cartoon which combines collages of photographs and graphics with text. Starting as a celebration of the centenary of Sunderland’s Empire theatre in 2006 it moves from allusions to the history of the theatre and those who trod its boards via a disastrous 1970 musical extravaganza based on Lewis Carroll’s Alice books to a consideration of Carroll’s and the real Alice Liddell’s North Eastern connections.

From then on it is a sort of stream of consciousness meditation on virtually anything that can be related to either the history of Sunderland or that of the wider North East but returning every so often to Alice’s own life story and that of Lewis Carroll and bringing in a whole gallery of people and artefacts loosely connected with the town from the prehistoric to the contemporary. The reader unfamiliar with the author’s approach is left not knowing whether this, like Alice’s adventures in Wonderland, is supposed to have the hallucinatory quality of a dream, whether it is part of the author’s search for his own identity within the context of the community in which he lives or whether it has the underlying serious purpose of raising awareness of the complex cultural history of Sunderland through this unusual format – maybe a combination of all three.

The factual material in the book is well researched; there are lists of credits, acknowledgements and sources. There is much to delight the eye and engage the imagination. For those already acquainted with Bryan's previous work this will be a treat indeed, for others it could be a fascinating introduction to what can be done with graphics to evoke the 'feel' of a place and its history.

It could also provide an unusual and nostalgic gift for any exiled 'Mackem' – but watch the postage!

Win Stokes

Editor's note – interested readers can find on the web further reviews, along with illustrations of some of the graphics of this book. It has won several major awards

Bill Griffiths (compiler) ***Pitmatic: The Talk of the North East Coalfield*** (Northumbria University, 2007) ISBN 978-1-904794-25-7, £9.99 pbk

A Dictionary of North East Dialect (Northumbria University, 2005) ISBN 978-1-904794-16-5, £9.99 pbk

It is a beguiling but also somewhat melancholy experience to immerse yourself in the everyday language of your forefathers and find it almost totally unfamiliar.

Pitmatic, the subject of Bill Griffiths' final foray into the dialect of his adopted patch, had a short but intense life. It sprang up in the 19th century to give name to, and make sense of, the myriad processes, tools and technologies of the mining industry. First recorded in the 1870's, it flowered and flourished during the klondyke that changed the landscape of large parts of Durham and Northumberland, but as we now all know from any car journey from Shilbottle to Shildon, not for ever. The pitheads and heapsteads are long gone, the mounds of waste that surrounded them flattened

too, often only recognisable by the vigorous growths of willow scrub on their shallow slopes. The only physical manifestations of an industry that once employed close on 200,000 men are the telltale terraced pit rows that housed them and their families in dozens of settlements – and perhaps the paintings of the apparently ageless Norman Cornish.

But now we have this book – a particular insight into a way of life that was largely hidden from view and has now disappeared altogether. It is a sumptuous read, with a delight on every page.

The first thing to say about *Pitmatic* is that isn't a dictionary. Clearly Bill Griffiths felt he had a lot more to convey – and have fun with – than a list of words, however lengthy and detailed. His book therefore is a compendium of anecdotes, memories, stories, songs, poems and nuggets from printed sources, punctuated by the words themselves. In that the book's shape suggests the evolution of the language itself, which was drawn from numerous varied sources.

Many of those pioneers who made their living in the new industry of coal in the 17th and 18th centuries came from the surrounding countryside – among them rural labourers and lead miners from the upland dales. They included my grandmother's family, the Charltons, who migrated from the upper Wear valley down river to Shildon in the 1850's. Not surprisingly these people brought with them their own customs and language, sharply at odds with the more cultivated manners and speech of the metropolitan folk of Newcastle. Many of the words that came to be used in the new industry and its technology were in fact old 'rural' words with ancient roots – the Old Norse of the Vikings, the Old English of the Anglo-Saxons, and Norman French.

Thus 'inbye' and 'outbye', once used to denote directions inside a farm boundary, were adapted to indicate movement towards or away from the coal face; 'rammel' – from the old French

word 'ramaille' for branches – came to mean brushwood or rubbish and later, underground, worthless stone mixed with the coal; and 'braffen' – a lovely word – was a halter around a horse's neck which became a leather-pad for carrying anything on a shoulder. One could go on – and I'd like to – but the words themselves are suggestive enough: 'cavil', 'goaf', 'bogey', 'stook'. You can tell which have Latin roots and others more guttural northern European antecedents.

I was fascinated to note the words for different kinds of coal. Like Inuit words for snow, these are numerous, and many have an onomatopoeic quality, including 'brat' (a thin seam of coal with iron pyrites), 'dant' (soft sooty coal), 'glede' (coal in state of strong heat) and 'swad' (impure shaley coal). It is easy to imagine such words being spat out underground, in disappointment, even disgust.

Other words obviously came down from the Pennines with the lead-miners. I wonder whether 'buddle' – a verb meaning to wash waste from ore and lead – has anything to do with the surname of John of that ilk, legendary pioneer of mining engineering in the North East. (This is what happens when you start pondering words and their meaning, by the way – you start meandering up cul-de-sacs. Griffiths does it constantly, but the alleys are always worth the diversion.) Other words arrived from the Continent more recently than in a Viking longship. There are records of skilled miners from Germany and Bohemia being imported to the North country in the 15th and 16th centuries and it is perhaps to them that we owe such words as 'kibble' (old German for bucket – anything to do with Kibblesworth?), 'damp' (for gas, probably based on the German 'dampf' for steam) and perhaps most centrally, 'shaft', which may owe something to the Low German 'schacht'.

Of course there is a limit to investigation, even to the most indefatigable of etymologists. There are words whose origins are unknown and I like to think they simply sprang into meaning when

some miner blurted them out in a seam somewhere, to describe some hitherto nameless thing. Maybe that's just the dramatist talking. Certainly there are instances of divine, almost comedic, adaptation, as with 'tommy-hack' (from tomahawk) for a combined hammer and chisel tool.

Bill Griffiths brings order out of potential chaos by dividing his book into chapters focusing on different stages of the coal-winning process. Again the diversions are as fascinating as the main narrative drive. Strictly speaking, the reprinting of a kind of ballad recounting a bizarre, mythic incident in the 'Battle of Orgreave', during the last convulsive strike of the mid-80's, in which a pitman is chased into an empty supermarket by a mounted policeman may not quite earn its inclusion, but it is nevertheless a story which will stay with me for a long time.

The final chapter broadens the word search from the pit to its surrounding community and here the book begins to stray into the territory of its more general predecessor, *A Dictionary of North East English* which is a dictionary and a very fine one. Here are more familiar words, but many that are not. Some are familiar from their continued use by my mother and mother-in-law, which hints at the lasting value of Bill Griffiths' work. The other day, for instance, my wife's mother used the word 'femmer' to indicate weakness (more particularly, the fragility of something which wasn't strong enough for the task given to it – in the current jargon, not fit for purpose). Curiously, this word could describe my own feelings reading these two books, with their inevitable reflections on the current, apparently inexorably declining state of our regional dialects, but also my own unfitness to review them. As the first university graduate in my family, I suppose I was educated out of dialect, and certainly out of the pit, and my working life has been spent largely outside the North East. This

is a bare fact, but sometimes a cause of sadness, as I contemplate the gulf that's sprung up between my forefathers and myself, part of which is linguistic. This is one of the reasons why I and many other sons and daughters of the North-East should be profoundly grateful to the remarkable Bill Griffiths, poet, cook, ex-Hell's Angel, historian, lexicographer, citizen of Seaham and honoured incomer, for he has built a bridge between ourselves and our past and the people who inhabited it. This is a substantial achievement and a fitting memorial for any man.

Then again, perhaps we are not as linguistically lost as we think. The other day I was cycling with my grandson (along an old waggonway as it happens) and we reached a rough section of track. I shouted out a warning, "Careful, it's a bit cogley here!" I had to explain what I meant – that the riding was unsteady. As we rode on, I smiled, not just at this unconscious excavation of a long-forgotten word (where did *that* come from?), but also at the thought that I had just done that elemental thing – passed on a word, a special word, to the next generation...

Michael Chaplin

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Jane Bowen, ed., and Members of the Belford and District Local History Society, *Aspects of Belford* (Blackhall Publishers, 2008) £10.00 inc p&p.

Belford is a village of about twelve hundred inhabitants in north Northumberland just south of Berwick. Its first substantial growth was probably in the mid-18th century. Border wars were over, trade was growing as a national economy emerged and the wider area was in the forefront of agricultural innovation. The village became a busy watering hole for travellers along the Great North road and a market centre for the surrounding area. It may have peaked in importance just before the railway age when it reached over two and a half thousand inhabitants. Although it was to have a railway station, as a stopping-off spot its value declined, though visitors to Bambrugh and the nearby coast line may have helped local traders.

As a place to live and develop, it early on attracted the attention of the wealthy Newcastle merchant Abraham Dixon who bought Belford Hall and Estate. Dixon was typical of a stratum of town based merchants who used their acquired wealth from trade to attempt to ascend the social ladder. An important step was to acquire a country estate to lavish expenditure on it and to entertain the surrounding gentry and their families to impress, to build prestige and to participate in the marriage market for sons and daughters. The Dixons and their successors the Clarks (from a similar background) did all of this becoming leading figures in county society. They headed up the Militia, supported the Anglican clergy, held the Lord Lieutenancy and made appropriate donations to worthy charities.

This all worked perfectly well through the 18th and 19th Centuries but by the beginning of the twentieth century electoral change, falling agricultural prices and death duties during the First

World War took a great toll on such families. Properties were sold, divided and even left derelict. This history forms the back cloth to Gillian Lee's fascinating essay on Belford Hall, the Estate and its Owners.

Members of the local history collection of essays covering the Parish Church (Joan Wright), the Presbyterian School (Valerie Glass), the development of the processes of law and order (Jane Bowen and Janet Ward), Health and Welfare (Jane Bowen), village pubs (Ian Main) and the contribution to the Second World War (Colin Hunter). Each of the articles is impressively researched and illustrated. The local history society appears to have plumped for topics of special interest to their specific authors rather than attempt a comprehensive history. Inevitably this leaves gaps. It would have been interesting to chart developments in agriculture in general and farm labourers in particular since this group must have been the biggest occupational in the area. Similarly domestic service could prove a fruitful line of enquiry. However this is to carp a little. The writers display strong research and writing skills. They have made a strong contribution to Northumberland local history. They have not laid down their pens as an essay elsewhere in this journal (by Valerie Glass) proves. The editors would welcome further contributions. Meanwhile readers are encouraged to buy this interesting book.

John Charlton

Jacky Longstaff & Chris Wharton, *room: photographs & essays from the Town Moor, Newcastle upon Tyne*, Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2008, £12.99

Ask most people what they like most about Newcastle and you will probably get the answer, 'the Town Moor'. There is not much like it in any industrial city in Britain. A vast grassy area on the very edge of the town centre relatively safe from developers' greed is a true jewel for inhabitants and visitors. 'It's wor lungs' people say. Visitors often ask how it has survived. The answer that it is publicly owned with ancient 'freemen' grazing rights is only partly true. City councillors, the trustees of public ownership have played fast and loose with public property often enough. For example, they flogged off the excellent public transport system twenty years ago and no doubt they would like the Metro to drop into the pockets of the millionaires. There is more to it. The Moor is actually loved by the people and they have been ready to protest when it has been threatened. Two cases come to mind. In the 18th Century some town worthies tried to get it enclosed which would inevitably have led to selling it off in packages to the highest bidders. That certainly did happen to a chunk of the Castle Leazes corner and though the history is a bit hazy probably to the area to the right of the North Road going out of town. The first known popular resistance movement in the town stopped that attempt, which may have marked the birth of radical politics in town. The second case occurred in our own time, in the late nineties. Here the predators were masked by the largely working class (propertyless) fan base of Newcastle United FC. The club, with (as yet, still!) unrealised ambitions to match Barcelona's Nou Camp, let alone Old Trafford wanted to rebuild and relocate St James Park to the south west edge of the Moor. If successful we might have been attending the excitingly named Cameron Holdings Stadium following the

Reebok and the Emirates! Again, the protest was great, due to the enthusiastic organising ability of Dolly Potter and the 'No Business On The Moor' campaign.

Jacky Longstaff and Chris Wharton have produced a rather beautiful book extolling the virtues of the The Moor. The photographs are stunning. There are over fifty of them. Before looking at them you might wonder how there could be fifty different views of that space. Well there are, from wide angled landscapes to close-up bog plants, day and night, winter and summer, sunshine and rain. The text is excellent too. Chris Wharton explores the different uses the Moor has been put to: exciting political rallies, macabre hangings, early industry, army camps, horse racing and hoppings. In other essays he explores the landscape and its boundaries and finally its crossing points.

Like the Town Moor itself the book has a timeless quality which should ensure a very long book shop space. It would make a decent present for nostalgic Geordies in Auckland, Brisbane, Vancouver or even Manchester!

John Charlton.

Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, ***Communists and British Society 1920-1991***, (Rivers Oram Press, 2007) ISBN 145 85489 6, xii + 356pp, £14.99 pbk

This volume is the outcome of a major research project conducted by Kevin Morgan and his colleagues. It was based at Manchester University, though only Kevin Morgan of the three authors is employed there; one of the others lectures at Durham University. The project made use of the Communist Party archive deposited at the Labour History Museum in Manchester, but its main basis, marking it off from the usual kind of historical

research, is that it is a prosopographical study – ie it uses a wide range of biographical sources deriving from a very extensive series of interviews of former CPGB members following the party's disbandment in 1991.

The Communist Party of Great Britain (to give it its full title, though for a few years it called itself the British Communist Party or simply the Communist Party) was never very large – around 55,000 members at its peak during the Second World War and usually many fewer than that. It never had more than five MPs in all (only three of whom were elected specifically as communists) and none beyond 1950; it never after the twenties came near to controlling any local authority. Yet it had an influence on British life far out of proportion to its numbers; with its high membership turnover many thousands passed through it, and on anyone who remained in it any length of time it left a permanent mark. Since its disbandment seventeen years ago four overall historical accounts have been published plus biographical studies of some of its leaders as well as several books and numerous articles on particular aspects of its career.

Communism and British Society, despite its historical perspective is not however a narrative history of the CP. Its nearest precedent is Kenneth Newton's *Sociology of British Communism* published in 1969, which was a study in sociological terms of the party as it then was, though Newton was much impeded by the quantity of evidence available to him, for the party was not sympathetic to his project. This volume however is enormously more extensive, most impressive in scope and depth, as well as being very readably written and even sometimes ironic and witty – activists who frequently or recklessly landed in jail are described as being conviction politicians in more senses than one.

Methodology and approach

The book makes effective use of statistical analysis, but recognises its limitations and so combines this with accounts of individual figures, both famous and obscure, in relation to their party histories. The character of the Communist Party shifted markedly over time in terms of political outlook as well as the social composition of its members and what was expected of them, and so did the nature of these members' individual relationship to it.

The volume very evidently, as has been noted in other reviews, puts a lot of emphasis on generational relationships and conflicts and distinguishes several different cohorts of members who subsequently retained the attitudes prevailing in the party at the time of their joining, even if it had adopted different ones at a later date. For example, in the late twenties and early thirties it sought to be a party of dedicated activists, after 1935 it welcomed a broader range of members, so that in the great internal crisis of 1956 provoked by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the Soviets' crushing of the Hungarian revolution, very few existing members who had joined the party before 1933 left it; whereas a great many who joined after that date, having put up with the reversal of policies in the Cold War, the East European purge trials and the Stalin cult had finally had enough and resigned.

Among the latter was Raphael Samuel who later wrote a fascinating study of the early fifties London communist culture with which he was closely familiar, much appreciated by the authors and frequently mentioned throughout the book, which is dedicated to Samuel, though they gently offer corrections to his methodology. The book is divided into eight chapters, whose titles indicate the themes which are being explored – 'A party not like the others?' 'Communities of the faithful', 'Cults of leadership', 'True sons and daughters of the British working class', 'The alien eye: national and international identities', 'Trajectories and collisions'.

The Party's character

The method of approach works very successfully, and the general conclusions drawn on the basis of overall prosopographical information are very adequately integrated with individual life histories. The CPGB comes across as being far different from the monolithic body of rigidly disciplined, Moscow-controlled political robots it was often represented as being, but instead is shown to be a diverse community of individually-minded people 'held together by a common project', most with previous experience in the labour movement before joining the CP, but often at odds with each other and as a rule not shy about stating their differences; strongly attached to their leaders, especially Harry Pollitt, but never uncritically. That said, until 1968 the Soviet leaders always had the last word, with Stalin during his lifetime regarded in superhuman terms, and the party invariably expressed its agreement with the Soviet line. It might be worth noting in passing that on the evidence here North East communists seem to have had an unusually prominent role in the party's internal arguments.

There are a couple of trivial factual errors and occasional typos, but if there is any significant criticism to be made it would be that the balance of the volume leans very heavily towards the first half of the party's existence. What happened after 1956 is by no means neglected and some aspects of those later decades are discussed extensively, but overall the years before that great crisis are the ones which are concentrated upon.

This is a moderately lengthy volume, packed with information and very rigorously footnoted. A short review cannot really do it justice but it is safe to say that anyone interested in the British labour movement will benefit greatly from reading it.

Willie Thompson

Grigor McClelland (ed), ***Arthur McClelland: From Tyne to Tsar – a cargo steamer’s voyage in 1905*** (University of Sunderland Press, 2007) ISBN 978 1873757 21 5, £7.95 pbk

Arthur McClelland, a young grocery entrepreneur sailed as a passenger on the maiden voyage of the 6000 ton coal and grain bulk carrying steamer the SS *Salient*. The three month trip was a twenty first birthday present from the ship’s owner, a business partner of his father. He was signed on as an unpaid supernumerary purser with free food and bedding. On most ships a passenger in 1905 would have had restricted contacts with the crew, but Arthur was anxious to show that he was not a free-rider. During his trip he helped the crew complete the paintwork left unfinished by the shipbuilders, Short Brothers of Sunderland when she was delivered to the new owners, James Westoll Ltd also of Sunderland, just prior to the voyage.

But Arthur still lived and worked with the officers and not with the sailors who were housed in the fo’c’sle or forecandle, right up in the bow of the ship, segregated by five cargo carrying holds from the officers. He showed very little curiosity about the conditions of the rest of the crew and no real insights into their attitudes and way of life. This is a pity, as their union the 65,000 strong National Amalgamated Sailors and Firemen had shot to prominence when its leader, Havelock Wilson was elected in 1892 as one of the first three Labour MPs, representing Middlesborough. He owed his new status to the growing power of the general trades unions but the dependence of the new MPs on the Liberal Party caused him to drift far from his members who against his advice were to take part in the great strike wave of 1911. There is no flavour of discontent among the crew reported in any of the pages of the young Arthur’s diary in 1905.

Nevertheless, Arthur’s son Professor Grigor McClelland, now in his nineties, provides a commentary with a vast amount

of information for maritime historians with appendices and footnotes. What were long undisclosed family heirlooms, the diary and photo album from the voyage, are presented in a book that gives the reader a lot more than simply the record of a sea voyage, similar to thousands of journeys made at a time when the British merchant fleet dominated world trade and outweighed all the other fleets put together. However, there is a missed opportunity in the publication.

Apart from the technical and commercial information he gives us, Professor McClelland makes very little effort to add to the history of the times by placing the voyage in the dramatic context of the history of the year when it was written. 1905 was the year of the first Russian revolution and it would have loomed large, especially in the Black Sea ports that he visited. Out of those times and places that his father visited sprang the memorable and now almost iconic scenes of the massacre by the Tsar's troops of the protesting crowds on the Odessa steps made famous by Sergei Eisenstein's film of the mutiny aboard the Battleship Potemkin.

Although the book's title suggests the Tsar of Russia as a main feature of the diaries, in fact there is very little throughout the entire text from both McClellands on that doomed emperor. A three-line comment on the events of 1905 and a short footnote on the fate of the Tsar and family in 1918 is all that appears in the chapters that cover the month McClelland senior spent in Tsarist Russia. His camera was confiscated throughout his entire stay in Russia, a sure sign of a police state in action. To make up for the shortage of Russian scenes in his father's camera, his son adds not some archive photographs of Odessa, but some irrelevant scenes from another source depicting the wives of the Tsar's two imperial rivals, his English cousin King Edward VII and his German cousin Kaiser Wilhelm taken during their visits to Genoa on their royal

yachts. At this point, one wonders why the name Tsar appears in the title of the book. The sense of crisis at the time is seen but faintly in the diary, in the presence of armed Russian guards and checkpoints and in a very brief reference to the men and women dock workers who were boycotting new cargo handling machinery, but these are seen as almost a normal part of life in Russia and in general the picture presented is much like the postcards of provincial life in any European city before normality collapsed in the Great War. Such a historical portrait has its value, but it gives no clue as to why Russia, defeated by Japan in 1904, was soon to collapse into war and revolution. No doubt Grigor's editing reflects the deference to royalty that abounded in the Edwardian era but a photograph of the Odessa steps inserted into the text would have highlighted the dramatic events of that year.

To enhance the appeal of any book of travel or history is the task of the commissioning editors and a chance was lost with McClelland's century-old diary of the sea. The university publishers who placed the Tsar's identity into the book's title should have insisted upon some educational references to that emperor's catastrophic reign. What historical background there is to the story of the voyage from the Tyne to the Black Sea is only of direct relevance to the ship, its owners and the family grocery business. As such, this work may qualify as a maritime or business history or as an early example of tourism by cargo ship with some insights into the social mores of the times. The diary is nevertheless an authentic record of events on the journey and is much enhanced by the excellent photographs that the author took during the voyage, reproduced with great clarity. His visits ashore are very descriptive of the limited kind of social contacts he made on shore in the company of the captain. But too much of the additional information is placed in the footnotes, a method of presentation not to be recommended in an

historical travel book and which leaves the reader without any real insights into the atmosphere of the foreign ports the ship visited. If a scrapbook is to evoke memories of time and place it ought to be presented with a more stimulating commentary and a more vivid background to its history to make it compelling.

There was one historical event that would almost certainly have been discussed among the crew on the voyage, given that Arthur McClelland noted in his diary that politics was the subject of their conversations at times and that the ship was amply provided with political journals. Ten days before he signed on the SS *Salient*, the report of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Dogger Bank Incident of October 1904 was published. That event almost brought sections of the ruling classes of Tsarist Russia and Edwardian England into armed conflict with each other when the British Home Fleet was mobilised to confront the Tsarist Fleet that was en-route to the Far East to do battle against the Japanese fleet. The officers in command of the Russian fleet ordered the sinking of a Hull trawler and damaged several others that were peaceably fishing on the Dogger Bank, not far to the east of Sunderland. Two trawler skippers and a crew member were killed and others injured when the ill disciplined, untrained crews of the Russian battleships under the command of the most incompetent Admiral Rodjesvensky mistook the trawlers for Japanese torpedo boats. The report was plainly a whitewash and attributed no blame to the Russians even when they failed to report their mistake to the British authorities or to go to the aid of the damaged trawler fleet. The blatant way that the Commission, made up entirely of admirals from nations mostly sympathetic to Tsarist Russia, 'cast no aspersions on the Russian's military capacity or humanity', served only to enrage the British public, an anger that the Russians had to assuage by awarding the then huge sum of £60,000 to the Hull fishermen and their families.

A commentary on this event would not have been out of place in the otherwise useful and informative volume that Professor Grigor McClelland has produced. One wonders whether the voyage made such an impression on his father that he gave him the Russian equivalent of the very English name Gregory as a reminder of a sea-going memory that he obviously cherished.

Nick Howard

For an authoritative account of the events of 1904 and 1905 in Russia, 'The Russian Revolution of 1905', is recommended. Written by the late Pete Glatter it is subtitled 'Change Through Struggle' and appeared as a special edition of Revolutionary History, Vol 9 No 1 in Spring 2005. It can be obtained from Bookmarks, 1, Bloomsbury St, London WC1B 3QE. Tel 0207 637 1848

Joan Allen, ***Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside, 1829-1900***, Merlin Press, 2007, ISBN 9780850365849, £15.95

Joseph Cowen was the Radical giant of Tyneside politics for much of the period extending from 1860 to the mid 1880s. This episode opened with Cowen's acquisition of the sleepy *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* and its transformation into one of the most significant popular yet quality provincial newspapers – and most distinctive due its radicalism (it was one of the very few newspapers to support the Union during the American Civil War) – and ended with Cowen bowing out of politics as Newcastle's outspoken MP, a departure rooted in the dissipation of his brand of democratic Radicalism.

In between, Cowen's campaigns for political and trade union rights, his enduring and passionate advocacy of Irish Home Rule, and an internationalism that did not stop short of raising part of an 'international brigade' to fight for Garibaldi as well as smuggling

guns and even a clandestine warship for the Poles, were only part of an epic that etched itself into an advanced brand of Tyneside's and the North East's Radical identity.

Joan Allan, a historian well known to the North East Labour History Society and much respected in its ranks, has contributed valuable insights into Cowen's relationship with mid-Victorian Radicalism, and its uneasy relationship with the compromises and opportunism of the Liberal Party machine.

Taking the Cowen story back into the roots of Tyneside Radicalism in the late 18th Century, and charting both the continuities of that political strain across movements and generations, this book also identifies the broad context in which 'Cowenism' could flourish.

There is considerable and useful detail about incidents and connections, and particularly so in an outline of the political, social and economic culture that Cowen helped to shape as an underpinning of his political aim to extend the suffrage and bring the working classes into democracy as the dominant influence. The place of friendly societies, trade unions, reformed mechanics' institutions, and co-operatives as components of the new culture are well described, together with the huge and pervasive influence of the Irish presence in the North East. Cowen linked them all together as a powerful 'militant democracy'.

There are one or two areas that would merit further enquiry. Cowen was keen on theatre as a tool for raising political and social issues, and he built the Tyne Theatre and Opera House in 1867 as a vehicle to bring both drama to the masses as well as fun – Cowen's approach to social reform often involved tea parties and enjoyment. Temperance he may have been, but Puritan he was not! Dramatic he certainly was, but one of the constraints of academic publication is that this kind of characteristic can remain somewhat suppressed;

a pity since Joe's appeal and impact often rested upon his success in projecting enthusiasm. But Joan gives due weight to the nature of the leadership offered by Cowen. There were moments when it really was 'a question of leadership'.

Women receive good attention in the book, yet there is arguably more of a debate to be had about the part played by the activist Cowen women (mother and aunts) in influencing the young Joseph's life-long belief in equality, during an age that promoted female deference, than is acknowledged. Nevertheless, the compromises that Cowen made from time over women's equality are highlighted and set into the context of a very different world.

The publisher's blurb presents the book as 'the first full length study of Joseph Cowen'. That claim may be a little overblown – but this reviewer is biased having written a previous full length study! – but there is no doubt that Joan Allen's solid and deeply researched account will be recommended reading for many years to come.

Nigel Todd

Ian Roberts and Bellingham WEA, ***Telling Tales Out of School: A History of Education in North Tynedale and Redesdale from 1870-1944***, Northern Heritage Publishing, Price, £12.99. ISBN 978-0-9555406-2-2

Telling Tales Out of School is an unusual book these days. It is straight out of the WEA adult liberal education and History Workshop tradition – a real collective effort in primary research.

For three years, a WEA history course at Bellingham, a fairly remote part of Northumberland, researched school log books, inspectors' reports and other printed records, and above all the memories of people around them by utilising the techniques of

oral history. The aim was to uncover the history of the elementary schools of the North Tyne and Redesdale, and to discover how State education put down roots in remote areas.

And a rich treasure chest was revealed! This substantial book records the history of each school – including schools long forgotten – the working conditions of the teachers, the relationships with local communities, and the school lives of the children. One of the book's achievements is to construct a history of education that puts many present day concerns into historical perspective. And the questions are very familiar – discipline, standards, the state of school accommodation, lack of resources, the purposes of education.

Much of the account is a tribute to generations of dedicated teachers, professional inspectors who wanted the children to have the best, and to children and their families who got a lot out of education and saw it as something of real value. They did not always get it right but they all carried out their roles without a lot of support, often in isolated and uncomfortable circumstances, and they relied a good deal upon their own motivation.

Inevitably, there is a wealth of quirky human stories: a female teacher who could reach her school only on horseback (but was invited to live nearby so long as she shared a bed with the local farmer's family!), a teacher who supplemented his meagre income by turning his school into his private farm (until found out by an inspector), to give but two examples.

Above all, there were the children. Children who would sometimes prefer to chase along with the dogs of the local hunt rather than go to school, children who were complimented by an inspector but only because they looked cleaner than during his previous visit, and children who were told by inspectors that they needed to speak more clearly (in other words, give up their local dialect).

They could be a revolting lot, the countryside children. The book's cover is a striking colourful picture by Ralph Hedley entitled 'Barring Out'. It shows children preventing a headmaster from entering the school by keeping the door closed. This was an annual ritual in several rural areas, usually just before Christmas in rural Northumberland, reflecting some spirit of independence.

It's a very good read!

Nigel Todd

Dave Renton, ***Colour Blind? Race and Migration in North East England Since 1945***, University of Sunderland, 2007. Price £10.95 ISBN 978-873757-71-0

Colour Blind? – taking its title from one of Catherine Cookson's 1953 novel about the impossibility of love across the racial divide in South Shields – is an important book, but one which poses uncomfortable questions.

Dave Renton maps the history of immigration into the North East, largely as a product of patterns of labour migration and, to a degree, a result of political persecution. It's a long story that extends back at least into the early 19th Century, encompassing Welsh and Irish migrants, Europeans from many different places (including Jewish immigrants), Japanese, Chinese, Pakistani, Yemeni, Bangladeshi and Indian peoples, as well as many other groups.

Most of the focus is on post 1945 immigration and seeks to answer the question: 'Is the North East different?' The region did not share in the pro-Powell marches of the late 1960s, and much media and official comment, as well as received wisdom at all levels of North East society, has claimed that this is a more welcoming place. But thousands of whites took part in a race riot

at Middlesbrough in 1961, and there has been a constant strand of abuse, harassment, violence and, occasionally, even murder directed against black and Asian people. It's not unknown for occasional anti-Irish prejudices to emerge from time to time as well.

The experience of the North East has therefore been mixed. There have been efforts by local councils and other agencies to respond to the arrival of post-war immigrants, but have these been informed chiefly by a desire to manage a perceived problem? The dynamics of migrant groups have also been varied, not least where colour and a strong religious influence have defined incoming cultures. And it could be a heady mix as demonstrated by Chris Mullard's stormy period as head of the Newcastle Community Relations Council in the early 1970s, when there was a fierce collision between Mullard's determination to expose and challenge racism, the City Council's desire to deny the existence of a problem, and the ambivalence of ethnic community leaders anxious to escape from their own marginality by securing official acceptance.

Dave Renton has assembled statistical data on migration together with a good deal of commentary and anecdotal evidence. He has given a voice to numbers of people who came to live in the North East, and to those who have opposed racism through difficult moments. Through the book we learn of Ali Mohammed, one of the first Pakistanis to live in Newcastle, and who had worked for Billy Smart's circus. There is Nafees Chohan, 'the first documented Asian woman to settle in Middlesbrough' who arrived in 1949, and many others.

But there is a disquieting ending to the book. Renton argues that the main bulwarks against organised racism have been social attitudes generated by a strong labour movement, itself rooted in an industrial setting. It was this movement that saw off the Blackshirts in the 1930s, and stopped the National Front from making

headway in the early 1970s. Yet as the industrial roots whither, will that organisation and outlook diminish too? Currently, the labour movement in the region is vigorous in its opposition to racism, and has prevented the kind of electoral breakthrough achieved by the BNP in other regions. Union membership is proportionately higher in the North East than in other parts of the country, and from football to music there are powerful anti-racist commitments. But as the economy moves into a downturn, and disillusionment with conventional politics deepens, will this any longer be enough?

Nigel Todd

Ken & Jean Smith, *The Great Northern Miners*, Tyne Bridge Publications, 2008, £12.95.

In a brief review it is hard to do justice to such a fine historical account of the miners of the Northumberland and Durham Coalfields. It is, however, highly recommended to anyone interested in the lives of north east colliers. The book seems to cover just about every mine of consequence and some in considerable detail. It is very well illustrated with some wonderful photos, drawings, paintings and maps.

It also touches on the miners' fight for better and safer conditions, better pay and shorter working hours. There were strikes and demonstrations and fierce opposition from the mine owners backed by the police, militia and even troops. The introduction of blackleg labour from outside the region often meant failure for the strikers and a residue of terrible bitterness. A return to work in these conditions usually meant less pay and longer hours.

One of the great indignities forced on miners was the annual Bond which tied miners to pit and coal owners and even their (company) shops where the necessities of life were stocked. Some

of the great miners' strikes of the period had this form of slavery at the heart of the dispute. The Bond was eventually abolished in 1872 almost forty years after the abolition of colonial slavery.

Deaths at work over the centuries may only be guessed at but gas explosions were extremely common. In 1805 35 men died at Hebburn Colliery, in 1812, 91 at Felling Colliery, in 1815, 57 at Newbottle, in 1921, 52 at Wallsend, in 1835, 102 also at Wallsend, in 1830, 42 at Jarrow, in 1833 47 at Springwell, in 1839, 51 at South Shields, in 1844, 95 at Haswell. Gas was just one hazard. 75 men and boys died at Heaton Main colliery from drowning whilst the biggest loss of life in a single disaster occurred at New Hartley in 1862 when a cast iron beam fell down the only shaft, marooning almost two hundred men. Altogether 204 men and boys died. Many of the dead were as young as ten years of age. The serial deaths of children below ground are particularly shocking. These incidents were only a small proportion of the accidents. Deaths of 5 or 10 colliers at the same time were truly regular events and single deaths did not even reach the newspapers. It is arguable whether the word 'accident' is an accurate use of words since the frequency of disaster suggests they were entirely predictable. Is homicide too strong a word?

The authors give due attention to disaster but the book is much more than a record of tragedy. The miner's home, families, hobbies, unions and celebrations are also widely featured. There is a moving portrait of Tommy Hepburn, the union's courageous and, even heroic, leader during its infancy in the 1830's. Of great note are the recollections of individual survivors of the now disappeared industry.

Ken and Jean Smith have done an enormous service to the memory of the regions miners. It is a monument in print to stand alongside the many monuments which are scattered over the Great Northern Coalfield. Definitely a book worth buying!

Bernard Newbold, retired miner and colliery engineer.



Gateshead Local Government Branch

We fully support the North East Labour
History Group Journal and wish it continued
success within the Labour Movement

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AT THE BACK

Labour History Society Notebook

**North East Labour History
Society**

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Shields*).

Secretary's Report

In September I will complete five years as Secretary. I intend to pass the baton on largely because I think that is long enough for anyone to carry the responsibility without becoming stale. It is a good moment to review the work of the Society especially perhaps because this year is our fortieth anniversary (See Stuart Howard's piece). There is no doubt that we had passed through a difficult period. For a long time from its inception the society was rooted in an academic community but always with an eye on the labour movement beyond the colleges. The 1980's and 90's wrought important changes in both fields. Pressure from Government and accountants on Higher Education pushed the institutions further and further into vocational education. History as a subject was pushed down the list of priorities; labour history as a discipline was marginalised. At the same time Government was conducting a frontal assault upon Britain's industrial base. The north east of England suffered more than most as coal mining, ship building, heavy engineering and chemical production virtually disappeared from the landscape. It would have been surprising if a society dedicated to analysing, recording and celebrating labour movement history had flourished in this climate. Interest certainly declined. Meeting attendance fell away and the flow of articles from the colleges became a dribble.

The people who carried the Society and its journal through the period were well aware of the changes that were taking place and tried to adjust to them, not without opposition from established members. Bill Lancaster and Joan Allen need to be mentioned with gratitude in this regard for without them the society would almost certainly have disappeared. Five years ago they stood aside allowing

new people to try to revive the society's fortunes.

There has been modest success. We have been fortunate to tap into another vein, the recent burgeoning interest in 'history' as a leisure activity. History books get onto best seller lists, history programmes are part of television's staple material and local and family history societies enjoy great success. Our society fits this trend and does things which Local and Family history societies largely don't do. We can keep our founders' goals in mind but also take a broader view. Political, social and cultural themes with a radical edge can be explored and the local can be mixed with the national and international. No other body locally can provide this mix and whilst the journal should remain overwhelmingly local in content the society's activities should reflect the desires of members and supporters.

The Society seems to fill a gap for lots of people as soon as they hear about us. There is obviously a great demand for decent discussion which we hopefully offer! Our public meetings during the year were a great success. Following the AGM in September 2007, Malcolm Chase gave a sparkling account of Chartism based on his excellent book *Chartism: A New History*, published last year. In November we had our largest meeting in recent years when almost 120 people turned out to hear Jill Liddington talk on her new book *Rebel Girls*. Then in late February we had a most entertaining evening when our very own Marie-Thérèse and Paul Mayne swapped (verbal) blows on the merits of Ford Madox Brown! In April, on the 50th Anniversary of the first Aldermaston March we were thrown onto our own reserves by a traffic breakdown by our speaker on his way from Leeds. John Creaby stood in at five minutes notice giving a hilarious annotated rendition of several CND songs which was followed by a lot of audience participation. Finally in June we brought the meeting programme to an end with

Lewis Mates speaking round his new book, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Left*.

Our monthly meeting, *First Tuesday* continued to draw a good attendance, good food at The Cluny and a lively discussion. We had autobiographical sessions from shipyard engineers, Jimmy Warne and Jim McWilliams, the Newcastle Labour Party in the fifties, the life of an FE lecturer (Peter Latham), politics and the Cold War and the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, the latter raising the attractive idea of further discussions round important books. We are very much open to offers of topics and speakers.

We can't report an Annual May Day trip this year though we did have a successful town walk on the theme of Slavery. The new committee will be looking at a venue for a 2009 trip at its first meeting in the autumn.

Although we have a decent web-site we have not managed to introduce the new features we have promised. We will try again next year. The Committee functions pretty well with more people taking responsibility. It is a committee of volunteers and new members are welcome.

John Charlton

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1991	Martin Searles
1992	David Ridley
1993	Pauline Lynn
1994	Kathleen Smith
1996	Reg Brown
1997	Angela Goldsmith
2000	Robert Hope
2004	Craig Turnbull
2005	Craig Armstrong
2006	Elsbeth Gould
2007	Candice Brockwell

The author Sid Chaplin was a founder member of the Society and his Memorial Trophy is awarded each year to the winner of a labour history essay competition. The aim of the competition is to foster the interest in North East labour history under the following conditions:

1. The Trophy will be awarded for the best essay submitted on any aspect of the history of labour in the North East. The essay should show some knowledge and use of original sources. It should be word-processed and not more than 10,000 words in length.

2. The competition will be open to anyone who is not employed full-time as a professional teacher or writer of history.

3. An Adjudication Panel, drawn from the Society, will judge the essays and the Adjudicators' decision will be final in all matters affecting the award of the Trophy.

4. All entries must be submitted to the Secretary of the Society and received not later than 30th June each year. The results will be published in the Society's Journal.

The Trophy is a miner's lamp with the name of each winner inscribed on it. Winners may keep the Trophy for one year. The winner also receives a £50 book token.

The WEA - Imagination and Campaigning

North East History has kindly provided space for the Workers' Educational Association to outline annually its progress in the North East following a revitalisation of the movement three years ago. So, it's brilliant to be able to report real progress!

The WEA North East Region took some big steps forward in 2007-08. Firstly, we moved the Regional Office back to central Newcastle after a gap of several years, making our services more accessible to tutors and members. The Regional Office building at 21 Portland Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, is being transformed into a distinctive WEA base, reflecting our values via internal decor and the sustainable manner in which the building is being used.

During the coming year, we will alter the ground floor to create a high quality teaching and meeting space, intended as a centre for creativity and helping other organisations to develop their activities.

A highlight of the year was the storming success both in Newcastle and in London of Lee Hall's play, *The Pitmen Painters*, that presented the central role played by the WEA in the genesis of the Ashington Group of working class artists in the mid-1930s.

The WEA relationship with the wider labour movement also took on new forms during the year. A WEA collaboration with UNISON Northern Region, The Co-operative and the Open University in the North, produced a hugely attended regional conference on ways of tackling climate change in. Campaigning journalist, Mark Lynas, who writes regularly for the *New Statesman*, was one of the principal speakers, and among the ideas generated by the event was the election of environmental representatives in the workplace.

Our renewed partnership with The Co-operative reached new heights. Some courses were sponsored by Co-operative businesses – including funding for respite for carers so that they could attend a WEA ‘Community Health Matters’ course in North Tyneside – and The Co-operative Fund agreed substantial financial support for a project to build WEA membership as well as member participation in co-operatives across the Region. The new project, entitled *Without Boundaries*, will get under way in the autumn of 2008, and should open up new opportunities for democratic adult education.

Cultural change within the WEA in the North East has been a priority too. Plans were carried through to produce a more stimulating and radical education programme. Not only has the Bellingham WEA branch now produced a ground-breaking book on the emergence of State education in rural Northumberland – *Telling Tales Out of School* – but new features are being introduced into the overall programme. One highlight will be a joint WEA and Co-operative meeting commemorating the educational ideas of Robert Owen and their continuing relevance in an age of targets and tests.

We have moved strongly into campaigning mode, too. Our 2008 Spring Education Conference – titled *Would the Pitmen Painters be allowed today?* – attracted over 100 people from WEA and other adult learning backgrounds to engage with the Government’s consultation on ‘informal adult learning’. A petition of over 1400 signatures, collected by the North East Right to Learn Campaign, was presented at the conference to Nick Brown, MP, Minister for the North East, who was a keynote speaker, and who agreed to accept the petition only on condition that he could also sign it. And he did.

The WEA in the Region challenged academic ‘research’ that alleged children from working class backgrounds lacked the

intelligence to get into 'Oxbridge'. Although widely rejected in the academic world, these discriminatory and muddle-headed ideas still surface from time to time and sometimes influence policy.

Sadly, we said goodbye to Michael Standen (1937-2008), variously a WEA tutor organiser and Northern District Secretary for 40 years, who died suddenly. As one of the Region's most prominent poets, and a popular literature tutor, Michael will be greatly missed by those who had the good fortune to know him. We are presently considering a specific way of marking Michael's contribution to adult learning, but in any event we will generally celebrate his achievements by strengthening an imaginative and vibrant WEA in the Region.

Nigel Todd

Regional Director, Workers' Educational Association – North East Region

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With over one hundred years of experience in helping adults to learn, the WEA knows a thing or two about adult education. So if you're thinking about taking a course or returning to learning, why not think about the WEA?	 Learning for Life
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	Web www.wea.org.uk

Enthusiasms

The centenary of the birth of the great French philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir was celebrated by a conference in Newcastle at Northumbria University from June 13-15. Her influence on the twentieth century was profound, and her principal work, *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 is generally seen as the starting point of modern feminism (a new and improved English translation is due to appear soon).

The conference, consisting of a talks and discussion sessions was relatively modest in numbers, with somewhat over 40 participants, but highly informative and stimulating, covering various aspects of Beauvoir's life and work – philosophical, literary (she was the author of a famous autobiography as well as several novels), political and personal. She died in 1986.

Among those from all over the globe (including Australia) who attended and presented papers were Yolanda Patterson from the USA, founder of the international Simone de Beauvoir Society, who gave the keynote address; and Claudine Monteil who, as a young activist in 1968, met Beauvoir and became her personal friend.

The conference was accounted a great success. Anyone interested in knowing more about it or the Simone de Beauvoir Society should get in touch with me.

Willie Thompson

Constitution

Name:

The name of the Society shall be the North East Labour History Society.

Objects:

- a. To bring together those interested in labour history in North East England.
- b. To promote the study, teaching and research of labour history.
- c. To assist in the preservation of relevant records.
- d. To increase public knowledge and awareness of labour history.

Membership:

Membership shall be open to all those actively interested in the aims of the Society.

Annual General Meeting:

An Annual General Meeting shall be held open to all members of the Society.

Subscriptions:

The annual subscription shall be determined by the Annual General Meeting of the Society.

Finance:

All money raised by or on behalf of the Society shall be applied to further the above objects. An audited account shall be presented to the Annual General Meeting.

Officers and committee:

The business of the Society shall be conducted by a Committee composed of Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer plus six ordinary members. The Committee shall have the power to co-opt additional members. The Committee and Officers shall be elected at the Annual general Meeting. The Quorum for all Committee meetings shall be one third of its membership, including attendance of the Chair or Vice Chair. The Committee's agenda shall be drawn up by the Secretary in consultation with the Chair.

Honorary Officers:

There shall be a President elected at the Annual General Meeting and not subject to re-election.

There shall be one or more Vice Presidents elected at the Annual General meeting and not subject to re-election.

The President and Vice President(s) shall be ex officio members of the Committee with full voting rights.

Bulletin:

The Society shall publish an annual journal. The Committee shall appoint the Editor/s of the Bulletin.

The Editor/s shall report to the Committee on matters affecting the production of the Bulletin.

Changes to the Constitution:

Changes to the Constitution can only be made at the Annual General Meeting, and a motion outlining proposals for change must be submitted in writing to the Secretary at least 28 days before the date of the Annual General Meeting.

PUBLIC MEETINGS 2008-9

The Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 24th September

5.45 p.m. tea and biscuits

Lit & Phil

The AGM will start at 6.15 and will be followed by

Sheila Rowbotham

on

Reflections on 1968

•••

Wednesday 1st October

6.30 for 7 p.m.

Lit & Phil

David Renton

Colour Blind?

Race and Migration in North East England since 1945

This event is a book launch

•••

Tuesday 14th October

6 p.m.

Lit & Phil

John Charlton

The Slavery Business and North East England

This event is a book launch with Tyne Bridge Publishing

•••

Wednesday 25th February

7 p.m.

Lit & Phil

Chris Wharton & Jackie Longstaff

Photographs & Essays from the Town Moor

This event is a book launch

•••

Further public meetings are scheduled for 25th May & 11th June.

north east labour history society

I would like to join the society

rates

institutions £25

individual (including overseas) £15

concession £5 (student/retired/unemployed)

subscription includes journal

£2 p&p

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17 Woodbine Avenue
Gosforth
Newcastle on Tyne
NE3 4EV



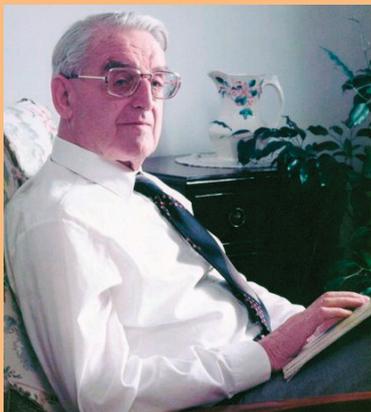
north east history

north east history volume 39

biography and appreciation



Doug Malloch
1918-2008



Don Edwards
1912-2005



John Toft



René & Sid Chaplin



This is the logo from our web site at: www.nelh.net. Visit it for news of activities. You will find an index of all volumes back to 1968.

north east labour history society