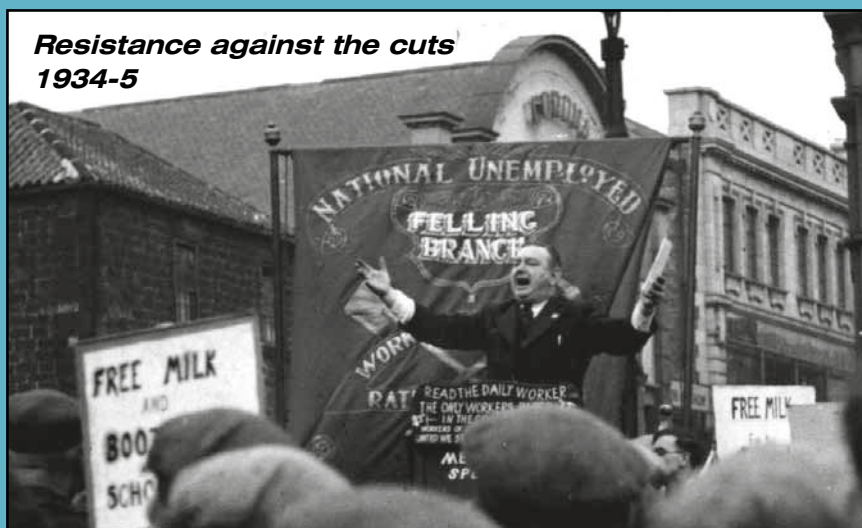


# north east history

**Volume 42 2011**



**Ray Challinor: historian and political activist**

**The Meadowell Riots 1991**

**Horace Green: trade unionist and Communist**

**Life in the shipyards and on the railways**

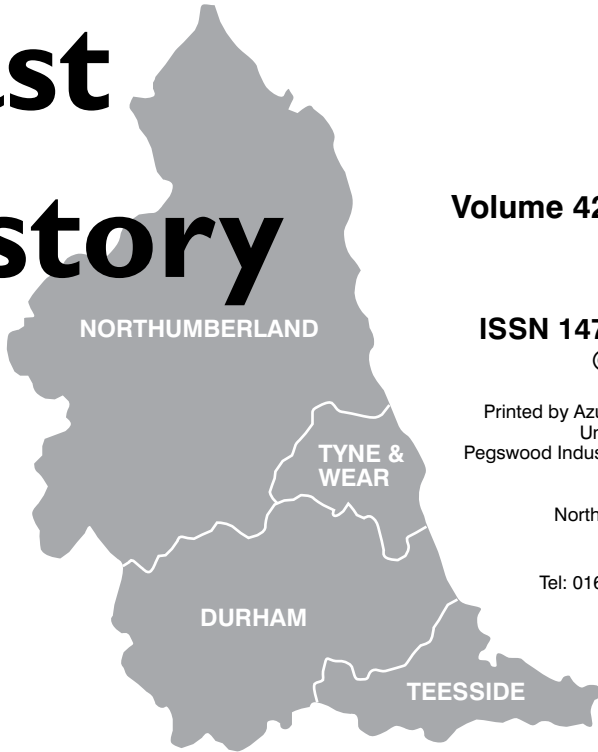
**The birth of Easington colliery**

**journal of the north east labour history society**



*north east history*

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**Volume 42 2011**

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John Prescott with Hunter Davies, *Prezza – My story pulling no punches*. Headline Review/Hachette UK 2008. (Archie Potts)

Peter Mandelson, *The Third Man*. Harper Press, 2010. (Archie Potts)

Tony Blair, *A Journey*, Hutchinson, 2010. (Archie Potts)

Gordon Brown, *Beyond the Crash: Overcoming the first crisis of globalisation*. Simon & Schuster, 2010. (Archie Potts)

Joan Allen, Alan Campbell & John McIlroy eds. *Histories of Labour: National & International Perspectives*. Merlin: Pontypool, 2010. (Janette Martin)

Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840*. Beviary Stuff Publications, 2010. (John Charlton)

Willie Thompson, *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes, Liberalism, Conservatism, Communism, Fascism, 1914-91*. Pluto Press, 2011. (Ben Sellars)

Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change World: Marx & Marxism 1840-2011*. Little, Brown, 2011. (Willie Thompson)

Jonathan Brown ed., *The Right to Learn: the WEA in the North of England, 1910-2010*. London: Workers' Educational Association, 2010

Dick Keys & Ken Smith, *Armstrong's River Empire – Tyne Shipyards that Supplied the World*. Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2010. (Steve Manchee)

Anthony Burton, *Tracing your Shipbuilding Ancestors, a Guide for Family Historians*. Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2010. (Paul Mayne)

Laura Mitchison & Lawrence Pontin, *Working Lives of the Thames Gateway*. Eastside Community Heritage, 2011. (John Charlton)

Adam Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: the biography*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. (Willie Thompson)

Peter Crookston, *The Pitmen's Requiem*. Northumbria Press, 2010. (John Charlton)

Geoff Laws, *A Cartoonist's Chronicle*. Tyne Publishing 2010. (Stuart Howard)

## EDITORIAL

This year's *North East History* carries a bigger percentage of articles about individuals rather than institutions or specific events. We make no apology for starting with two about Raymond Challinor who died at the start of 2011. He was both an active participant in many campaigns as well as a noted and influential chronicler of some key people, organisations and moments in past labour history. His passing is a real loss: articles by John Charlton and Don Watson record some of Ray's achievements.

Later in this issue there is a study of the life and times of Horace Green. The relationship between long-term struggle for a new society – socialism – and trade unionism with its battles over 'bread-and-butter' issues in the here and now is a complex one, fraught with possible tensions. In Horace's case, it was perhaps even more complicated for he was both a leading trade union official in the region and a senior member of the Communist Party, an organisation viewed, of course, in a rather hostile light by the 'establishment' of the labour movement. At the same time, Horace's political stance raises questions about the very nature of the socialist alternative, not least given his basic loyalty to the then USSR. Horace's story takes in some important battles in the region, not least the dispute at Coles Cranes in Sunderland. But it also covers ones further afield, notably the (in)famous fight at Grunwicks in outer London.

We feature three recollections in which individuals look back primarily at their experiences of the world of work (or, let us be exact, employment, since there is more to 'work' than its paid variety). Archie Pott's piece about his time in the railway industry is very relevant given the disastrous mismanagement of Britain's train system, a price we are very much still paying today. The trains still run of course but shipbuilding in Britain and especially the North-East has suffered fatal body blows. Arthur Scott's recollections touch upon many aspects of that industry and its subsequent fate.

Ron Curran's piece follows on from an interview published in last year's *North East History*. His piece focuses more on that educational

opportunities created by the labour movement, ones outside the formal state system, for working class people. Here is an appropriate place to note that this issue also carries a special report on one such body, the Workers Education Association, by recently retired local organiser Nigel Todd, 2011 being the WEA's centennial year in the North East.

The summer of 2011 witnessed the return of serious street disorders to Britain, primarily in London but spreading to cities like Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool. One might view them as 'yob rule', in other words straightforward criminality, or a symptom of deeper social ills, not least a breakdown of family structures and social controls in certain quarters, or the result of bad policing or a side-effect of both general inequality and, more specifically, of the cutbacks being made by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government...

Whatever factor or combination of different factors might be blamed, the events were certainly serious and indeed some of the strongest condemnation came from ordinary working people in the communities affected. Some insight into what happened might be gained by comparison with similar occurrences in the past. One such was the outbreak of serious rioting on the North Tyneside Meadowell Estate in 1991. David Reed tells the story of those disorders.

The connections between the 2011 wave of violence and government cutbacks might be debated. But there can be no doubting that the slashing of public expenditure is hitting some of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of our society disproportionately harder. Of course such 'austerity' programmes are nothing new and some of the most severe were experienced during the early 1930s in Britain. Don Watson looks at the cutbacks then and the fight back against them. Don successfully establishes that resistance was not futile. Certainly it is dangerous to draw 'lessons' from history but there may well be valuable lessons in the story he relates.

The importance of educational opportunities has been noted above. This issue also features an appreciation of one individual, Dick Copland, who made great efforts to make the ideal of then new comprehensive

school system work in practice. As Roger Lane observes, Dick's efforts at Ryhope on the south side of Sunderland were sometimes controversial. Yet we should duly note what he tried to do to ensure that the mass of ordinary school children did not get second best, as had happened under the secondary modern system.

In last year's volume, a 'stop press' item noted the birth of the 'Popular Politics Project'. John Charlton, who conceived and developed this 'child', reports that the infant is in fine fettle and showing much promise. It is not the only piece of good news we report. At a time when independent bookshops have almost become an extinct species, we are particularly pleased also note the opening of the People's Bookshop in Durham. We wish Ben Sellars, a stalwart of the North East Labour History Society, every success with his initiative.

As usual, various books are reviewed towards the end of the Journal. The review of Chris Foote Wood's study of T. Dan Smith, promised in the last edition, has, however, been held over so it can be reviewed alongside a forthcoming work on the same subject. But a wide variety of books are featured so readers should find something to match their personal interests.

Like most voluntary bodies, the North East Labour History Society has to keep a very sharp eye on its finances. So we have attempted what hopefully is not an impossibility: a reduction in the printing costs of this journal and an improvement in its design. Feedback will therefore be even more useful than usual

**Sandy Irvine**, on behalf of Editorial team:

John Charlton, John Creaby, Sandy Irvine (2011 editor), Lewis Mates, Marie-Therese & Paul Mayne, Ben Sellars, Win Stokes, Willie Thompson (reviews editor) and Don Watson (acting society secretary).

## CONTRIBUTORS

**John Charlton** is an inveterate researcher and writer, his recent subjects ranging from the slave trade in the NE to the grassroots socialist movement in the area in more recent years. He has been a lifelong political activist as well as a leading figure in the labour history movement, not least the recently launched Popular Politics Project.

**Don Watson** is a regular contributor to this journal and has played an invaluable role in the North East Labour History Society. His interests are broad-ranging and, in these pages alone, he has chronicled many overlooked people and events in local history. He works in local government.

**David Reed** is from Chester-le-Street, County Durham. He graduated in History from Newcastle University in 2010 and is currently pursuing a Masters degree there in International Multimedia Journalism.

**John Creaby** has been a labour movement activist since his teens. He became a full time trade union official in 1965 and was Regional Secretary of APEX for 28 years serving on many TUC regional, national and European committees. He has been particularly involved in the Anti Apartheid and CND movements as well as bodies promoting racial equality.

**Harry Barnes** was born at Easington Colliery in 1936. He has been a railway clerk, a national serviceman in Iraq, a full-time adult student at Ruskin College and Hull University, a Sheffield University Extramural Department tutor mainly with trade unionists, and Labour MP for North East Derbyshire. He is now retired and lives in his former constituency.

**Ron Curran**, a former colliery electrician from North Shields, was for many years an official of NUPE and a political activist. Part one of his autobiographical piece was published in the 2010 volume of the journal.

**Archie Potts** was a founding member of the North East Labour History Society in 1968. He taught at Newcastle Polytechnic. He has been a regular contributor to North East History. A recent book was a biography of the Gateshead MP, Konni Zilliacus.

**Arthur Scott** was a union activist from his earliest days in a Sunderland shipyard. Shifting from the engineers to the draughtsmen as a youngster he finished his career as the North East District Organiser of TASS. He remains an active member of the North East Labour History Society

**Roger Lane** is a semi-retired teacher who has spent a lifetime working in secondary schools in Washington. He's proud to be a member of the NUT and Woodcraft Folk.

### Acknowledgments

Thanks to BBC *Look North* and BBC Tyne website team ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/in\\_pictures/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/tyne/in_pictures/)) for the pictures used in the article on the Meadowell riots. We are also grateful to the Durham County Record Office, who kindly waived their reproduction fees, for permission to use the images that illustrate the article on Easington Colliery. Alec Ponton gave invaluable help with the layout.

# RAYMOND CHALLINOR 1929-2011

## John Charlton

*north east history*

Ray Challinor who died in January this year was one of the driving forces of the North East Labour History Society from his arrival in the north east in 1971 to the mid-1990s when he and the Society ran out of steam, as it seemed at the time. It was not clear to anyone then that his health was gradually failing. In the early years of the last decade he suffered a stroke whilst undergoing surgery. He recovered to the point where his remarkable memory for the labour movement's history remained a resource for travelling researchers anxious to catch those memories on tape. He remained publically stoical, good humoured and welcoming to visitors to his and Mabel's home in Whitley Bay till Christmas 2007 when a serious fall took him into hospital and finally to a care home in Wallsend where his decline accelerated till his death.

The local labour history society was only one activity in a life of enormous vigour. He was one of the leading British historians working in the Marxist paradigm and probably the best of his generation who had never embraced the Communist Party. Although he worked amicably with most CP and former CP scholars he never shirked from openly criticising where he felt their Stalinist pasts had blemished their work. In this he could be quite unreasonable and when prompted could cite disputes which had occurred thirty or forty years before. It should not be thought that he was an angry or bitter person. More commonly he could forget a political row and carry on with a friendship as if the quarrel had never occurred. He was a friend to many and especially to young comrades who came to his door for help with a project. They would share a laugh, leave with some fresh ideas on how to proceed, an armful of books and a full stomach, the latter provided by Mabel for his culinary skills were sometimes undermined by his kitchen chaos.

### Childhood

Raymond's contentious streak may have had roots located deep in childhood. He was aware early of antagonisms between his mother and father which catastrophically ended in separation and the farming of him out to live with an

aunt when he was just 10. He learnt that his paternal grandparents had also split up after bitter rows. Further complications for the family were produced as war approached since his maternal grandmother was German. She ran a cycle and engineering shop in Crewe. Much stress was caused by local bigots who argued that Germans should not be allowed to own shops in town. Of course those late thirties days were stressful for everyone but as well as being at the centre of family crises Raymond was engaging with political issues even as a small child. Both parents were activists who took him out with them or left him to his own devices. His father was right wing Labour and Secretary of his party branch throughout the thirties though his orthodox views did not stop him believing in direct action. Ray remembered his Dad (Bert) heckling Mosley at a fascist meeting in Hanley Town Hall provoking violent responses from the Nazi honour guard. He was not above pulling loudspeaker leads out at Tory Rallies and recalled him once asking a friend to drop his trousers in a pub to show a hollowed out part of his bum where he'd been hit by shrapnel in the trenches. This was used as a pretty down to earth anti-war message for his young son. It seems strange behaviour for a Headmaster. In 1917 when only 15, he ran away, falsified his age, joined the Royal Flying Corps, actually flew over France in 1918 and married a German woman. He was a reckless man given to heavy drinking and gambling though remarkably succeeding in holding down his teaching jobs.

### Socialist influences

Ray's mother (Gertrude) was more left wing and a political thinker. She joined the ILP and was also an activist opposing the fascists and collecting money and Medical supplies for the Republicans in Spain. In 1939 they gave refuge to a Jewish Czech socialist. However, unlike his father, she was keen to educate herself and those around her. She was Secretary of the Longton WEA Branch. It was at such meetings, that he met lecturers such as R H Tawney, Richard Crossman and Emrys Hughes. Another episode was cited by Ray in his development as a social critic. Poor working class parents living nearby his home lost all six of their young sons in a terrible drowning accident. One boy fell into an industrial pond and his brothers were drowned trying to save each other. News of the ghastly

episode churned up the district for months. However, apart from a report of the funeral, the local press completely ignored it. For Raymond this underlined their contempt for working class lives unless they were murderers, he remarked. He was proud that his very first appearance in print was in a list of mourners at the funeral: 'Raymond Corrick Challinor, 16 years of age.' Ray said that where most of his friends followed the fortunes of Stanley Matthews and Stoke City football team the daily diet in the Challinor household was 'politics, for breakfast, dinner and supper.'

Ray was born in the Potteries in 1929. For the period, the 1930s, his parents were fairly affluent. As socialists they were sharp observers of the cruel hardships suffered by the communities in which they worked and conducted their political activism. Both mother and father had left their Methodist roots behind and were agnostic. So it was in this environment that Ray was reared. He did not feel he was obliged to hold the same views as his parents but believed that the exciting, liberal and challenging context of his early life made it likely that he would. He was certainly witness to eccentricity and difference which may explain his intense interest as a historian in figures in the movement who had been little noticed, unconventional or both: John S Clarke, W P Roberts and F A Ridley. Often left alone he became a voracious reader and collector of books and pamphlets. His interests were broad. Like his father he knew his Dickens and Shakespeare and he enthused over the works of the American socialist realists: Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, J T Farrell and Saul Bellow. Before he went to University his knowledge of world history was considerable but his greatest enthusiasm was for radical and socialist politics. His appetite for the doings of the most obscure sects and breakaways was insatiable as his vast library of books, newspapers and documents testified.

In his words, he was 'shell shocked' by his parents' separation. He was 11 and in the first year at Crewe Grammar School. He was summarily shipped off to boarding school, the George Fox Quaker School at Lancaster. We can't know what personal anguish he suffered but the school turned out to be a positive experience. Pupils were actually encouraged to take part in local politics and in 1942 he got involved in the celebrated Lancaster by-Election. As it was war-time

there could have been no contest as the official Labour Party did not stand but the ILP put up the pacifist Fenner Brockway against the Tory, diplomat and spy, Sir Fitzroy McLean. The election meetings were very angry affairs. The local press dubbed the ILP 'friends of Hitler.' ILP members were beaten up by Communists who were urging support for the Tory. Fearing open dissent the Government had had troops billeted at Lancaster Castle when the old Clydeside MP, Jimmy Maxton came to Lancaster. Ray remembers little of what Maxton said, but was aware of him chain smoking his way through his speech and telling him if he had to choose between tobacco and food he'd choose the former. It was during that election campaign that Ray visited Preston seeing the bullet holes in a wall at the rear of a bookshop where Chartists had been fired on during the great strike of 1842.

### Into Politics

His first political allegiance was to the ILP. Alongside the trade unions it was the founding political constituent of the Labour Party. The ILP had broken with the LP in 1932. By the Second World War it was reduced to a tiny faction-ridden membership with a small Parliamentary representation which was to disappear entirely by defection to the LP in 1947. A well remembered event was the Summer School of 1946 which he attended with his mother, a delegate from Crewe. There he shared a room with the Spanish Civil War veteran, John McNair and a pint (he said) with luminaries like Maxton (who died that summer), Campbell Stephen, F A Ridley and the young T Dan Smith. Ridley he considered to be the *lost* Marxist theoretician though it might be thought Ridley lost himself as he apparently contributed nothing to the movement in thought or action in the last forty years of his life.

By 1946 the ILP was riven by factions. Small Trotskyist Groups vied for position within it, the largest of which the Revolutionary Communist Party attracted the 18 year old Ray Challinor. The RCP had some credibility as its members had been active in the celebrated Tyneside apprentices' strike of 1944. But like the ILP the RCP was a field of factions. Ray appeared to have become a formal member whilst living in the south east of England during his National



Service. He had registered as a conscientious objector choosing the land rather than the mines as an alternative to carrying a gun. Ray said he worked on 19 different market gardens in Essex, Norfolk and Sunbury on Thames in two years, leaving a trail of destruction everywhere. He noted that this was not conscious agricultural sabotage but his own incompetence in matters horticultural.

He went back to the Potteries to a job on a local newspaper. During this period the RCP had finally fractured at least three ways. One group, ruled autocratically by Gerry Healy would morph into the Socialist Labour League. Another led by Ted Grant, burying itself in the Labour Party, would eventually be known as the Militant Group. Ray was drawn to the group formed round Tony Cliff named the Socialist Review Group, later the International Socialists (IS) and from the 1970s the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In these early days he struck up a life-long friendship with the future Labour MP, Stan Newens from Essex, a fellow conscientious objector, who had chosen the Staffordshire pits for his National Service.

### What's in a name?

There were several differences between the groups but the issue which fomented fracture was the nature of the Soviet Union. As a teenager Ray had already decided that orthodox Trotskyism had it wrong; Russia was no kind of workers' state. In the ILP magazine, *Left* Ray wrote an article entitled 'State Capitalism-A New Order.' In clear, readable prose he laid out the case that, 'it is criminal to call Russia socialist. This harms not only the cause of the Russian worker but also that of Revolutionary Socialism. The only thing to do is to tell the truth about Russia and to show it has nothing in common with Socialism.' He was just 18. In the same month, in much greater detail, Tony Cliff's substantial work, *The Nature of Stalinist Russia* was published in the RCP's internal bulletin. These works were paving the way for the formation of the Socialist Review Group which started with just 33 member in the Autumn of 1950. Ray was on the Editorial Committee of a new paper, *Socialist Review* a task he undertook for several years contributing many articles himself.

Of course there was much more going on in his life. In 1952 he met Mabel

Brough in the Labour League of Youth. They were married in 1957, a relationship which lasted over 50 years to his death. They had one son, Russell, born in 1962 who was also to become a political and trade union activist. In 1952 Ray started a four year degree at the new University College of North Staffs at Keele. He was involved with CND and the Committee of 100, attending the first Aldermaston March in 1958. He was active in his local Labour Party and for a brief time

a local councillor and Parliamentary candidate. This occasioned a dispute with Tony Cliff and the SR Group. The Group's strategy was to work in the Labour Party as a platform for ideas though not as formal entrists like the Militant Tendency (RSL). The feeling was that seeking council and parliamentary seats was likely to lead to compromises for revolutionary socialists. In Ray's case there was no problem. His unrelenting critique of the Labour Party leaders in print and debate, never ceased. Indeed his 'deviation' ended soon, after his abuse of John Golding the future MP for Newcastle under Lyme ended in fisticuffs. His parliamentary career was



still-born when he was selected then quickly deselected for Nantwich. His anti-Labour leadership diatribes were too much for the functionaries at Transport House.

Raymond's relationship with the IS and the SWP was always contentious. In debates from the sixties to the eighties he was often on the opposite side to Tony Cliff. His many talents were usually devoted to opposition to the group leadership. He belonged to a small number of comrades who found party discipline irksome. Like his friend Peter Sedgwick he could act with fury in a

dispute and just leave the organisation. He never joined another political group. He could never lose sight of his role as a founding member. It was as if the group belonged to him, so, right up to the end of his life he wanted to identify with it. In 2003 at the time of the great anti-War demonstration he discussed formally re-joining but that was after his long last illness had begun.

### Supporting workers' struggles

In or out of the party he was an activist. In the early 'sixties after a period as a school teacher in Crewe he got a lecturing job at Wigan Mining College later moving on to Harris College, Preston, then Bolton College of Technology. The family moved to Wigan. Whilst at Preston in 1965 he was at the centre of support for the strikers at Courthaulds. The intervention was typical of Ray. He was in Preston visiting a travel agent at lunch time one day when he saw a group of Indian workers walking, down the street led by a very large man. This was ex-Indian policeman Amrit Choudery, a chemical engineer working on the line at Courtaulds nylon spinning factory. Raymond accosted them. They told him they had walked out of the factory when their section had apparently had their work doubled and their wage increased-by only 10/- from £18 a week. He told them they should have a picket line to prevent scabs going in to work. When he arrived next morning he duly found the men outside the factory but sitting on the ground away from the gate. He persuaded them to form a picket line and ask other workers not to cross it. Most white workers respected the picket line. He assembled a phantom strike committee. He had to advise not holding meetings when he learned that the workers from different parts of the sub-continent would stand together on a picket line but would not sit in a room together!

In 1971 Raymond was appointed a lecturer in history at Newcastle Polytechnic and the family moved to Whitley Bay. A founding member in 1968 of the national Society for the Study of Labour History he joined the North East Society developing intellectual and personal friendships with a remarkable group of historians including Archie Potts, Joe Clarke, Terry MacDermott, Ted Allen, Maureen Callcott and Norman McCord. Together they produced the Bulletin (later North East History) which involved researching, writing, typing

on wax stencils, running off on a duplicator, collating, stapling and posting a lively committed publication which survived and prospered. (See Don Watson's article in this volume).

### Researcher and writer

His arrival in the north east was to mark the fruition of his publications in book form. In the two decades which followed six full length studies appeared. This did not arrest the flow of articles historical and polemical. The first two books came from research undertaken in Lancashire, one collaboratively with his colleague Brian Ripley and published just before coming to the north east. This was *A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists* which was the product of the discovery of a hitherto unknown 'Pitmen's Strike Collection' in Wigan Public Library. Here they charted the struggles of men like Martin Jude and Ben Embleton, the Durham pitmen, to organise a union in the enormously hostile environment of 1844. The next was *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners* which was published by Frank Graham, the Spanish Civil War veteran, in Newcastle. This book was also submitted to Lancaster University for which he was awarded a Doctorate in 1974.

In change of key came his most controversial book, *The Origins of British Bolshevism*. It is a meticulously researched study. The activities of the tiny sects in the period before the outbreak of the First World War are recounted in intricate detail. He shows his sharp eye for errors and missed chances drawing on his own experience in small groups vying for an audience. It was the final chapters which created a stir on publication in 1977. Tony Cliff was in the middle of his four volume study of Lenin, seen by him as a guide to action in a period of rising class struggle. The IS Group had become the SWP. Ray had dissented. In his book he challenged an orthodoxy arguing that in 1920 Lenin had misjudged the situation in Britain, making a wrong choice in supporting the British Socialist Party over the syndicalist and more libertarian Socialist Labour Party as the carrier of Bolshevik strategy and tactics in Britain. In 2011 it seems an arcane dispute. It does illustrate two of Raymond's essential characteristics; his wicked delight in sparking discord and his determination to relate his historical enquiry to contemporary contexts.

This latter point is seen strongly in *A Radical Attorney in Victorian England* largely researched and written during the Thatcher years. It is a biography of William Prowting Roberts the courageous defender of Chartists hounded by the 'justice' system. The parallels with the fate of miners in the mid-eighties are obvious. Roberts began his adult life as a comfortable middle class Tory lawyer. He became outraged by the abuses of power he witnessed in dealing with dissent. He turned radical in the 1840s. He was sent to prison twice for his pains and deserted even by his friends, ending his life in penury. Reclaiming his story from the archives was Ray's mission pursued with relentless energy for nearly two decades from 'discovering' him in earlier research.

There were also two smaller projects running alongside the Chartism research. Another marginalised figure was the left wing scots socialist MP John S Clarke who had worked in circuses as a lion tamer. This exotic combination appealed to Ray. As with Roberts, rescuing an almost forgotten dissenter of principle supplied a strong motive. This was the first of series of books published by Bewick Press, the little publishing house he founded in the late 'eighties with Archie Potts and Mabel. His final book was *The Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, a witty and revealing series of essays on the Second World War. This was part of what had started as a major book. He believed that despite an Everest of books it was a territory massively under researched. Again he was on a rescue mission to chart the activities of dissenters of which he argued there were thousands buried under the weight of patriotic narratives, deceit and plain lies. One essay attempts to recover the story of George Armstrong, a Wallsend sailor hanged as a traitor, a tragic victim of deliberate misinformation and cover up. Another looks at the ignorance and incompetence of the politicians and service chiefs at the start of the war. He wrote of Dunkirk and Singapore, 'It was as if His Majesty's Forces were under the command of General Oliver Hardy and Field Marshall Stanley Laurel.'

In a review in *New Society* of *The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners*, Ralph Samuel, who could have said this of himself, wrote, 'Raymond Challinor is a devoted historian. He has a fine knack of rescuing vanished organisations from oblivion (he might have added 'and people' JC). His accounts of strategy and

tactics are convincing and unforced. He lets his facts speak for themselves, and the reader is free to put his own construction on them.'

## North East politics

Raymond arrived in the north east in a period of rising industrial conflict. Postmen, dockers, building workers and miners were on picket lines and on the streets. Ray involved himself in many support activities racing around the region menacing the public with his erratic driving. Characteristically he would turn round from the driving seat to address rear passengers with, "There are three points to be made..." On two campaigns he placed his special stamp. The first was supporting Eddie Milne, the deselected MP for Blyth in his battle against the official Labour candidate, John Ryman. Ray threw himself into this campaign with gusto and was threatened with slander actions by the Labour agent, whose bluff was called. Indeed Ryman was himself forced to resign when subjected to a corruption investigation. Next he took on the Northumbria Constabulary in trying to call them to account for the death in their custody of Liddle Towers, a night club bouncer. His campaign was taken up by the local media and Dr Challinor became briefly a minor celebrity. His lack of fear for authority was marked here when he had a slanging match in Newcastle Central station with the then Chief Constable, Stanley Bailey. One outcome was that other people fetched up on his doorstep when they became victims of injustice.

It is very sad that Raymond's active political and intellectual life was interrupted, slowed down and halted in the way it was. Until quite near the end he was aware and deeply frustrated by his diminished powers. His repeated, rather wan plea, was, 'someone should look at this.' His curiosity was undimmed. One of his last public political confrontations took place in the front row of the Tyneside Cinema. Chance had placed him in the next seat to Frank Graham, one of last surviving members of the International Brigade in Spain. The film was Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*. The old friends locked horns. Ray would say, with Marx, 'to leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality.' It is not a bad epitaph for Raymond.'



Above, Ray with Len Edmonson in 1993, and, to the left, an advert for a talk by Ray during his tour of the USA in 1998.

History Department Brown Bag Lunch Lecture

Wednesday, April 26, 2000, at Noon

**Raymond Challinor**  
speaking on

**"FEAR AND TREMBLING  
AMONG THE LABOUR  
LEADERSHIP:  
WAITING FOR THE 1945  
ELECTION RESULTS"**

Raymond Challinor has been a socialist activist and scholar for over 50 years. He is the author of *The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists*, *The Origins of British Bolshevism*, and *A Radical Lawyer in Victorian England: W.P. Roberts and the Struggle for Workers' Rights*. His most recent book is *The Struggle for Hearts and Minds: Essays on the Second World War*.

History Department Lounge (3P11 Posvar Hall)  
All are welcome.

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## RAY CHALLINOR & NORTH EAST HISTORY

### Don Watson

Ray Challinor was an early member and former President of the North East Labour History Society, and for over twenty years he was a regular supplier of articles, reviews, appreciations and interviews to our annual publication. The titles can be found in the Journal Index page of the Society website. Ray did of course play many other roles in the Society such as giving talks, participating in and running meetings, and organising conferences. This went alongside providing a constant source of advice, encouragement and resources for students and researchers. It is his written contributions though that will provide a formal record. This aspect of his contribution to labour history will not have received the wide attention that was paid to his books and so it may be useful to reflect on it here.

At least three of his books with a national focus – *The Origins of British Bolshevism*; *The Miners' Union: A Trades Union in the Age of Chartism*, and *W.P. Roberts: The Miners' Attorney* – used and supplied material on the North East and Chartism, local revolutionary politics before and during World War One, and the development of miners' organisations. His essays on Chartism, Owenism and the origins of Co-operation in the North East appeared in the early 1980s. They make up a necessarily brief but stimulating account of Chartism and the early socialists, of whom the best known are the Owenites, as well as the Co-operative retail trading ventures that sprang up in this region. These were an example of Chartist principles in action and represent a pre-history of the Co-operative Movement that mushroomed later in the century.

Early nineteenth century Tyneside radicalism, Ray contended, 'possessed remarkable richness and diversity'. These articles brought this out, often by rescuing forgotten figures: Mrs. Chapplesmith, lecturer on 'The Causes of Misery in Married Life', and Mrs. Martin, the open-air orator whose challenges to the local clergy to debate led to a fracas in Shields; George Binns and James

Williams, imprisoned Chartists, later socialist booksellers in Sunderland, later still successful businessmen and councillors.

Ray was interested in the culture of these movements. Both Chartists and Owenites believed that 'Knowledge is Power' and it was this that lay behind the lecture courses, journals and reading rooms they promoted. By 1841 Newcastle had thirteen booksellers, most of whom had Chartist sympathies, and the Chartist reading room in Nunn Street with its associated meeting room and lending library. He drew out how 'merely the hurly-burly of branch meetings encouraged members to learn how to marshal arguments and think more clearly', and how the production of leaflets, reports and letters encouraged effective writing skills. Similarly organising meetings and selling literature 'led to the acquisition of skills that could later be employed in other forms of business activity'.

These observations about how the routine activities of a working-class movement can develop reservoirs of talent through their educational value is, I think, the view of someone who has witnessed it through his own engagement with such a movement. Ray traced how the unwittingly educational consequences of involvement in Chartism could promote social mobility during a key phase in the growth of British industrial capitalism; equally though, 'almost every leader of the Miners' Association, the first trade union for miners in Britain, had their initial training in Chartist organisations'. In these ways he showed the value of tracing how ideas and experiences in the radical traditions change and carried on through different phases of development.

In reviews such as those of *The Legend of Red Clydeside* Ray broadens the actual themes under discussion by comparing the North East labour experience with Clydeside and South Wales, the other key regions for mining, shipbuilding and engineering. Similarly his review of *Newcastle and District Trades Council: A History* included a contrast between the roles played by Liverpool Trades Council as compared to Newcastle; in these reviews his point was to discuss why, as he put it, 'the class struggle was pursued more vigorously' elsewhere. In some respects he was anticipating the current emphasis on comparative labour histories by stressing the wider context of the local experience. His short pieces sometimes bring to bear a knowledge of labour history derived from his own experience.

Few other reviewers of John McNair's *Spanish Diary*, for example, would have known that the booklet was in fact a chapter from McNair's autobiography which, because McNair had been 'too charitable to political opponents' the ILP had refused to publish, fearing that it would create a false picture of its politics.

There is often, again even in short contributions, clear sight of his individual slant. His reviews show his relish for those he called the 'gloriously eccentric characters' in labour history such as Guy Aldred ('who appeared to have been so proud of being a bastard, publishing his birth certificate to prove it') and an eye not just for significant incidents but the bizarre ones too. The Special Branch man puffing on his pipe, unaware that the box he was sitting on in the Glasgow SLP office contained explosives bound for the IRA; George Orwell literally dodging bullets in Barcelona just to cross the road to buy cigarettes. Or John S. Clark, the Jarrow-born socialist who tamed lions and cured Lenin's dog. Similarly, he knew the value of humour when dealing with the enemy: the chairman of the magistrates who found an obscure law to ban Robert Owen from speaking in Newcastle in 1843, a banker, 'was a strict upholder of the law until financial irregularities led to his bank's closure and his own unscheduled departure from the area'. Reading some history can be an experience similar to jogging through treacle but this is never the case with Ray's work. His political life involved decades of writing for political publications and this honed an effective and absorbing style. He seemed to know too that history writing is a form of storytelling and so the value of entertainment in the narrative should not be forgotten. This also just reflected his own sense of fun and approach to life.

He was always interested in dissidents, activists who were outside the received traditions. It is almost as if he examined labour history for kindred spirits with whom he could identify. He wrote about Jimmy Stewart, the Tyneside Scot who pioneered Socialist Sunday Schools in the region before the First World War, and produced *The Young Rebel*; Ray traced their influence on the schoolchildren's strikes in this region and elsewhere in England in 1911. Jimmy Stewart continued to provide unofficial political education until he died in obscurity in Wallsend. In 1975 a contingent of his former students, who included two MPs and several Labour councillors, organised a headstone for him. Jack Parks

was another, the former Northumberland miner whom Ray interviewed. Parks had had years of Labour Party activism but before that had been one of the pioneers of syndicalism in the coalfields before the First World War, involved in the local version of the shop stewards' movement, a gaoled agitator and a dissident Communist. Another was Claude Robinson, imprisoned First World War resister and socialist, later the headmaster of Jarrow Grammar School who helped to organise the famous March. Robinson was for years a scourge, not, as Ray put it, of Labour's 'loony left' but of its 'rancid right' on Durham County Council, which he believed was starving the schools in the county of resources. None of these people, now, are likely to be known outside their own local circles but Ray was able to use their biographies to illuminate the national issues and events their lives responded to.

His short pieces can also reveal clues about his own approach to the left. Writing about John McNair he admits that under his term as General Secretary the ILP lacked the intellectual clarity and cutting power of its opponents, but few, if any, were expelled; McNair's 'genius for discovering amicable compromises did help to provide members with a profound feeling of fellowship'. Ray had experienced this 'profound feeling of fellowship' for himself as a young man in the ILP and it was probably the benchmark he used with the organisations he became involved in afterwards. I suspect that, for him, none of them really measured up.

This affection for the ILP could explain the tone of one of his last pieces in 1994, when he was one of several contributors to perspectives on T. Dan Smith. Under the title, 'The Youthful Revolutionary' Ray traced T. Dan's evolution, or a version of it, through the ILP, opposition to the war, the RCP and eventually the Labour Party. Along the way he briefly sketches local left opposition to the government during the Second World War, one of his keen interests. Unfortunately we are offered no thoughts on why someone with such a political background, one of course that Ray shared, should go off the rails in such a spectacular way.

A Bulletin reviewer said of one of Ray's works that 'it is an introductory sketch for a more fascinating book yet to be written'. This is true of several of

Ray's contributions to our publication. Here are just some examples, topics which (to my knowledge at least) have yet to be comprehensively examined. Do we know enough about early Tyneside radicalism? Another thread is the history of the ILP in the region and an evaluation of its role and influence. There is no doubt a great deal more to be traced about popular discontent and opposition during the Second World War. Another too is trades unionism and radical politics on Tyneside immediately before and during the First World War. Ideally this would include its 'counter-cultural' aspects such as the Socialist Sunday Schools, Newcastle People's Theatre and the Gateshead Little Theatre, and the Clarion Clubs. Has the Newcastle Socialist Society, which played an active role from at the First World War to the late 30s, been properly researched?

In his companion appreciation John Charlton recalls how Ray often used to say about an idea, 'Someone ought to follow this up'. It would be both fitting and valuable if some of these themes, outlined by him in our Journal, were properly pursued by labour historians of the North East.

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*A familiar slogan? Graffiti in Meadowell in 1991.*



# THE MEADOWELL RIOTS OF 1991

David Reed

The Meadowell estate in North Shields erupted into riot on 9 September 1991. The riot was sparked by the road deaths of two young car thieves, Dale Robson and Colin Atkins, the previous night. The deaths were falsely believed to be caused by an aggressive police pursuit and triggered the angry young men of the estate to take part in a night of burning, looting and general destruction of the area. Like numerous riots, the disturbances in Meadowell spread, reaching the West End of Newcastle, another area recognised for its poverty. Consequently, the streets of Scotswood and Elswick burned on 11 and 12 September. Twelve years of a Conservative Government and the policies of Thatcherism provided the backdrop for the Meadowell riot in which, social deprivation, unemployment, and criminality created the label of 'sink estate'.

Above all, a cloud of hopelessness and despair constantly loomed, as a lack of opportunities and prospects embittered the residents, and eventually came to a head. Meadowell was blighted from the beginning of its history. It began life in 1932 as 'The Ridges', 1800 mixed dwellings built for slum clearance and, inevitably, a certain class of people. When it was renamed Meadowell in the 1960s, this did nothing to remove the undesirable, burdensome label firmly fixed to the area. In this study I aim to show how the stigma attached, coupled with deep socio-economic problems, fuelled the actions of the rioters and led to the subsequent wide-ranging interpretations and opinions from the media.

Crowd and riot theories throughout history can be utilised to explain modern urban riots. In 1896, the social psychologist Gustave Le Bon stated that 'a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation' where a once 'cultivated individual' becomes 'a barbarian' adopting the collective mind.<sup>1</sup> More approvingly, in *The Crowd in History* George Rudé claimed that the individual 'faces in the crowd' possessed clear objectives of justice and fairness. For example, Rudé stated that widespread destruction of machinery during the Swing riots of 1830 was triggered by

*north east history*

the rise of capitalism. Similarly, in *Primitive Rebels*, Hobsbawm argued that 'the classical mob did not merely riot as a protest, but because it expected to achieve something by its riot'.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of Rudé and Hobsbawm, the Meadowell riot can be seen as attempts by those living on the estate to display their wretched conditions and possibly to influence policies of regeneration. In the early 1990s, Dennis and Erdos, self-proclaimed ethical socialists, believed that a breakdown in traditional family structures caused deviance, stating 'the riot areas were characterised just as much by the ... deficiency of stable families as they were by ... excess of the long-term unemployed'.<sup>3</sup> However, from a more sympathetic angle, Gerry Mooney noted that 'the result of urban differentiation and segregation' where the 'close proximity of rich and poor areas' had become 'a source of tension and disorder'.<sup>4</sup> As a result, crime had become a tool for the have-nots to emulate the haves. The unfavourable reputation of the riot areas alongside the composition of the rioters, largely young, working class and male, led to the negative stereotyping by sections of the press and Government. Stanley Cohen has identified such a process



*Burned out shops on the Meadowell Estate*

as a moral panic where 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' as the media presented those involved as 'folk devils'.<sup>5</sup>

In focusing upon the criminality of the estate and the hooligan aspects of that night, certain sections of the press and Conservatives failed to acknowledge the underlying complex social and economic problems which fuelled the flames of the riot. This study will take an analytical approach towards the press and government representation of the Meadowell and West End riots. Therefore, it will be necessary to delve into the origins of the unrest to determine whether such representations were justified. The roots of the chaos were more complicated than young hooligans partaking in mindless criminality for immediate excitement. Overall, my aim is to show that a press portrayal of a moral breakdown within the estates was unjustified. Their existence as areas of mass socio-economic problems, alongside a distinct lack of opportunities and outside attention, heightened anger and stimulated the backlash.

### The moral pillars' reaction to the riots

*'Some people's attitude was to build a wall round it and throw raw meat over it.'*<sup>6</sup>

Following the riots in Meadowell and the West End of Newcastle, certain sections of the press focused upon the damage and criminality, exaggerating the dramatic elements. It is necessary first to state the facts surrounding the effects of the riots so that the degree of press hysteria can be assessed. The Meadowell riot lasted one night, and burning and looting were the sole activities. In the aftermath, thirty-seven people were arrested, yet no-one was killed or injured. Therefore, a strong reaction by the press coupled with responses from prominent MPs and clergy members generated a moral panic.

Cohen has said that reporting during a moral panic features exaggeration and distortion. This may include phrases such as 'riot, orgy of destruction, battle, attack, siege ... and screaming mob' to provoke a response from the general public and the authorities.<sup>7</sup> In 1991 the press

tapped into an underlying concern that crime emanating from council estates was a legitimate threat to social order. Accordingly, the riots were represented in the local Evening Chronicle, with headlines such as 'For God's sake stop,' 'Enemies of the people,' and 'Night of terror'.<sup>8</sup> Describing events 'like a scene from the Bronx' gave the disturbances a certain dramatic and international flair.<sup>9</sup> The depiction of 'hundreds of rampaging youths' agrees with Le Bon's interpretation of rioters as mindless savages and supports the theory that working class youth are the media's primary targets when labelling folk devils.<sup>10</sup> In the Journal, a novice reporter described it as 'the most frightening experience of my career'.<sup>11</sup> The sub-headline, 'Crowds of youths appeared from the shadows ... I was warned I could be lynched', gave the impression of cold-hearted murderers, in scenes reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>12</sup> However, to put events in perspective, no-one was reported as being seriously injured or attacked on a night where pure destruction was the focal concern. The reporter's embellishments are exposed when he states 'I twice went back to the riot area', making it very difficult to believe he truly feared for his life.<sup>13</sup> Appropriately, the press also referred to events as 'an orgy of destruction',<sup>14</sup> mirroring headlines from the moral panic of the Mods and Rockers at Clacton. This shows how the moral panic regarding the 'wild ones'<sup>15</sup> has become a British tradition and is an integral technique utilised by the tabloid press to generate sales and influence opinion.

The media furore was also responsible for attaching further stigma to Meadowell. Cohen stated that the symbolic power of words and images during a moral panic can cause the reader to form stereotypes. During the riots, Meadowell was distastefully referred to in headlines as 'Meadow Hell'<sup>16</sup> and 'Joyride death estate'.<sup>17</sup> This served to paint Meadowell as an estate solely comprised of criminals and undesirables. In effect, the word itself triggered images of ram raiders, joy riders and lawlessness. Labelling their home as 'hell' effectively stripped away the dignity of respectable residents and contributed to the feeling of isolation. For instance, community worker and resident Molly Woodhouse told the Guardian,



'I'm sick of hearing the word scum, it's what they call you if you come from Meadowell'.<sup>18</sup> Howard Becker has explained in his labelling theory that deviance is a consequence of the negative criminal label applied to a person.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the actions of the 'outsiders' of Meadowell can be traced back to the deviant label's application that had existed since the estate's conception as an area of slum clearance in the 1930s.

The *Daily Mail*, the leading moral crusaders of the press, attempted to explain the actions of the rioters. Fulfilling Cohen's theory that right-wing commentators uphold the moral barricades during a moral panic, came the diagnosis that young people from council estates, were morally bankrupt. One cause of car-crime and rioting was a lack of parental control, the *Daily Mail* reported; 'Boys in our inner cities have been reared too softly in recent years'.<sup>20</sup> From a traditional standpoint the journalist argued that sport, National Service and traditional parental discipline were the remedies for these 'crazed young men'.<sup>21</sup> This echoes the work of sociologists Dennis and Erdos, who argued that in the 1990s the moral definition of employment had changed from that of the 1930s. Fatherlessness and a breakdown in family life had destroyed the expectation that a young man must prepare himself for employment. Instead, it became acceptable, and was even encouraged, for young men to turn to crime.<sup>22</sup> They also claimed that, in contrast to the 1930s, deprivation was no excuse for crime as the Metro system and the Royal Quays development were adequate routes to employment.<sup>23</sup> The *Daily Mail* went as far as declaring a state of anomie in society linked to the rioting. This included the damning analysis that 'our society is sick. It is going nowhere and that is because the lack of moral restraint ... has uncovered the badness in people's hearts'.<sup>24</sup> Again, it is interesting to see the extent to which these commentaries fit into Cohen's framework of the moral panic. Using reporting from the Clacton disturbances, Cohen displayed how delinquency was portrayed as a disease from headlines such as 'A society sick with repressed violence,' and 'There is something rotten in the state of Britain'.<sup>25</sup>

Figures of authority attacked the rioters in the media, increasing the sense of moral panic. Prime Minister John Major, and Sir Stanley Bailey, Chief Constable of Northumbria Police, both assumed an authoritarian stance towards those responsible. Major was quoted as saying 'I believe the police did a magnificent job. This sort of behaviour just cannot be tolerated and will not be tolerated'. This therefore shows how in the eyes of the government, the riots lacked a legitimate cause. Bailey referred to the youths involved as 'uncaring, stupid, ignorant and criminal', widening the gulf of morality further between law abiding citizens and those involved. He also commented that 'these people are not going to win the day'.<sup>26</sup> These claims allude to a civil war in British society and heighten the sense of panic presented to the readership. Through polarised symbols and images of the rioters and police, the press were able to convey the two forces as 'the Hoodlums and the Real Heroes'.<sup>27</sup>

The press also reported severe condemnation and revulsion from Conservative Home Secretary Kenneth Baker, and the Reverend George Curry of Elswick. Baker denounced those involved as 'violent young hooligans,' which 'should not be excused but roundly condemned'.<sup>28</sup> Through outright disapproval, the government rejected the socio-economic problems which fuelled the discontent and instead blamed it on a rising hooligan culture. The Reverend George Curry argued in the *Daily Mail* that social degradation had occurred, meaning that the youths in question had an 'unacceptable moral code',<sup>29</sup> and the events displayed 'an outbreak of wickedness'.<sup>30</sup> Curry argued that 'there was deprivation in the 1930s but people then didn't live in fear of riots'.<sup>31</sup> In reality, the poverty of the 1930s did lead to disturbances. For instance, in May 1939 in Jarrow, which was famous for its crusade against unemployment, a pub brawl escalated into 'the Jarrow riot' following police heavy-handedness.<sup>32</sup> 1932 was also a year of rioting with clashes between police and the unemployed masses in Birkenhead, Belfast and North Shields due to cuts in unemployment benefit.<sup>33</sup> The notion of deprivation as an 'excuse for evil' was developed further by Curry as he stated, that the houses of

the unemployed 'are stuffed full of gadgets', with people 'spending £30 getting blind drunk in town'.<sup>34</sup> This supports Cohen's view that the older generation viewed the causes of disorder as youngsters with too much disposable income wreaking havoc.

Overall, the moral condemnation of Meadowell enhanced the label of 'problem estate', and tarred all young residents with the same brush. Such reputations isolated the respectable and law-abiding citizens further from the general population who were presented the image of Meadowell as an area rife with 'scum'. Campbell aptly stated that 'in the nineties estates came to mean crime'.<sup>35</sup> As result, the press focussed upon the criminality of the deprived. Writing in 1989, the sociologist Charles Murray supported the theory of a moral breakdown within deprived areas like Meadowell due to the rapid growth of the British 'underclass'. Rejecting the values of mainstream society, the 'underclass' could be identified by illegitimacy, crime and their recognition of unemployment as an accepted lifestyle.<sup>36</sup> In a commentary similar to that of a moral panic, Murray used the language of disease and contamination to explain the phenomenon. However, these narrow portrayals have been criticised, for example, by Jacques who defended the 15% of the population shut out of society on sink estates.<sup>37</sup> Claiming that uprisings on estates were a result of isolation and exclusion, he responded to their image as folk devils by saying that 'The language of authoritarian nostalgia is designed to demonise and marginalise these groups and discipline the rest of us'.<sup>38</sup> In this way, estates like Meadowell were easy targets to brandish as the epitome of society's ills. The very same method was also extremely effective at diverting attention away from the severe socio-economic problems that influenced such severe actions.

### Forgotten places made their voices heard

*'It was 10 or maybe 15 years ago that it started to deteriorate. The docks and the factories were closing down, I started seeing the rot set in amongst the kids. Then the mentally ill were getting shoved out of the hospitals, the cuts started in the Social Security ... People were using any means to be able to live to get*

*their daily bread. The shoplifting, the aggression, the anger. I have never seen anything like it'.<sup>39</sup>*

The argument can be made that the riots were triggered by resentment towards neglect inflicted on the areas. As such, there existed a sense of entitlement to the privileges of wider society. Certainly Meadowell had become a forgotten and deprived place; one police manager described it as 'a boil on the bum of the organisation. Nobody was prepared to take penicillin or go to the doctor about it'.<sup>40</sup> Its label as a 'boil' was accurate as mass unemployment, poverty, crime, and lack of policing led to its decay. The sociologist Mooney has argued that 'riots are often a legitimate response to oppression and the ordering of the city in particular ways which privilege certain groups and marginalises others'.<sup>41</sup> The following will show the reasons that the marginalised people of Meadowell and the West End made their presence known through riot.

Firstly, it is necessary to assess the economic and employment situation in the UK as whole in 1991. As previously stated, the riots took place during a period of Conservative government, beginning in 1979. The society to which Margaret Thatcher gave birth was built around an enterprise culture and the undermining of the Welfare State. Heavy industry was severely cut back, and policy was geared towards personal gain and responsibilities. Consequently, in September 1991, at the time of the riots, unemployment was at its highest since 1988 with 2,460,000 people, 8.7% of the workforce unemployed.<sup>42</sup> Between 1979 and 1991, the incomes of the poorest deciles fell by 17% whereas the incomes of the top deciles rose by almost two-thirds. This meant that by 1992, a quarter of the population was defined as poor.<sup>43</sup> An increased gulf between the rich and poor inevitably enhanced social tension. Essentially, the people of council estates such as Meadowell became relatively deprived in comparison to the more affluent and integrated sections of society. Runciman argued that the contrast in wealth between closely located sections of society can lead to those worse off feeling morally obligated to obtain such rewards.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, social inequality fosters deviance amongst the deprived.

The theory of relative deprivation can be applied to the chosen areas due to the extent of their social and economic problems. Meadowell's problems were certainly not proportionate to the region or the country as a whole. The estate experienced the highest long term unemployment in the North East, with a quarter of young men up to the age of 24 unemployed.<sup>45</sup> Some estimated that unemployment on the estate was as high as 86%.<sup>46</sup> The fortunes of the West End of Newcastle also mirrored Meadowell as unemployment quadrupled between 1986 and 1991.<sup>47</sup> This picture of a generation largely excluded from the employment process reinforces the argument that the riots were a result of angry young men asserting their dominance and self-worth through destruction. As the doors to employment appeared locked, they reacted with fury towards outside society. The hopeless situation in Meadowell meant that children were being born into a life of poverty and despair where their male role models were largely unemployed or involved in criminality. For example, on the estate, every one of the primary school's 252 children received clothing grants and three-quarters received free school meals.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the West End of Newcastle had the worst health and mortality rates in the poorest, sickest city in the country.<sup>49</sup> The problems that blighted their everyday lives were seen as a moral injustice, leading to the increased mentality that the estate had been intentionally abandoned as a sink for society's problems.

In 1988 the majority of those moving into the Meadowell estate were single people, and most of these were allocated housing due to homelessness.<sup>50</sup> As a result Barke and Turnbull have argued that the people transferring in were 'problematic' in the eyes of both housing professionals and existing residents.<sup>51</sup> The process of housing such deprived and alienated individuals in one area led to Michael Heseltine's damning verdict that local authorities had created a 'sink', or dumping ground for undesirables. South Meadowell became the worst area in North Tyneside after the Right to Buy scheme began in 1980. Not one house had been sold on the estate by 1990, due to a combination of low

incomes, unemployment and the sense that the estate was not worthy of putting down roots.<sup>52</sup> The basis of the area's negative label lay in the rising crime rates, when vandalism and theft peaked in 1991 prior to the riot.<sup>53</sup> This occurred due to a lack of a police presence. In the Community Development Report following the riots, Dr Tony Gibson wrote how local police were withdrawn 'in favour of a reactive, "fire-fighting response" to the steady increase in crime ... they stayed at base until the alarm was sounded'.<sup>54</sup> Due to such conditions, crime had become a legitimate means of earning, as displayed by the father of deceased joy rider Dale Robson who distinctly stressed that his son was not a joyrider, but a professional car thief.<sup>55</sup>

Meadowell had evolved into a 'frontier town', where at times there came joy at being somebody within your own community, yet more often despair at experiencing a lack of self-worth and isolation.<sup>56</sup> The feelings of exclusion and alienation resonating throughout Meadowell were heightened with the construction of the Royal Quays business and Leisure Park in 1990. New roads and business premises were built in close proximity, yet no-one from the estate was employed in the construction or the new enterprises. Steve Byers, the Labour deputy leader of North Tyneside, had requested a reservation of jobs on the project for local residents but was unsuccessful. Resentment festered on the estate as the youth lacked work prospects and the mounting numbers of unemployed were amassing a collection of 'buried skills'. Dennis and Erdos argued that deprivation on the estate was a myth as Royal Quays was only 500 metres away.<sup>57</sup> However, it is clear that no matter how geographically close new opportunities are, to make progress those that feel excluded from society need to be drawn into the process. Martin Wainwright from the Guardian covered the riots and spent time with the people of the estate during the troubles. He has since stated 'there was neglect and a feeling of resentment in the area. When Royal Quays was being built on the other side of the road it exacerbated the feeling that they weren't getting their fair share of opportunities, which was understandable'.<sup>58</sup>

Such employment would have drastically changed the fortunes of many families, yet their rejection from the process confirmed a total refusal by the government to assist. In fact, it took a year after the riots for there to be a breakthrough at Royal Quays when eleven people became employed there.<sup>59</sup> Ironically, in this way the destruction did foster progress and confirmed that drastic changes needed to be made.

Under Thatcher, the shipbuilding industry in the North East was shattered at the same time as two Vickers factories closed down in the West End of Newcastle. The workforce was reduced from 20,000 to just 3,000,<sup>60</sup> contributing to the area's mass unemployment. Writing in the *Guardian*, Jeremy Beecham, leader of Newcastle City Council (and now Lord Beecham), argued that unemployment and a lack of local funding bred the 'anger of the outsiders looking in', and attempts at instant gratification by any means.<sup>61</sup> In an interview he repudiated the claim by Michael Heseltine that the incompetence of local authorities had created a 'sink estate'.<sup>62</sup> He claimed that the social and economic problems, such as third-generation unemployment, ran deep. He also maintained that the council was doing its best to cope with poll tax capping and limited funding. Furthermore, he rejected the notion of a moral panic, saying that Newcastle was not like Beirut, as only a few buildings were burned out by a minority. He also told how the media representation distressed the majority of residents, for whom the area's negative label hindered recovery and regeneration. Instead it encouraged flight and plummeting house prices. He repeated complaints of 'we never get a good story, it's always about crime or murder or things going wrong', contributing to the locals' feelings of being shunned as deviant outsiders by the general population.<sup>63</sup>

However, many sections of the media took a sympathetic stance and shed light upon the origins of unrest and lives of people at the riot epicentres. They rejected the 'folk devil' image and the argument was made that extreme conditions had bred desperate actions. For example, the *Guardian*, gave importance to the growth of frustration. They described

Meadowell as a 'third world on Tyneside' in which despair meant 'kids leave school to a hopeless future ... they kick out at anything'.<sup>64</sup> Instead of focussing solely upon the criminality, journalists described how a lack of local funding and disillusionment amongst youth were the key warning signs. Michael Heseltine's City Challenge programme of £85 million had been denied to Meadowell despite it being 'one of the most deprived communities in the country'.<sup>65</sup> This abandonment of North Tyneside was also raised in the House of Lords where it was revealed that Westminster was ranked 8th in the league-table of government grants to local authorities, yet North Tyneside unjustly was 150th.<sup>66</sup> The local authority had the uphill task of providing assistance with limited funding to a crumbling community. In the media there were also commentators sympathetic to the plight of residents. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, attacked by the aforementioned right-wing commentators, argued that 'human wrongdoing is inextricably linked to social deprivation, poverty, poor housing and illiteracy'.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, he believed that questions should not be asked about the morality of the rioters, but about the steps needed to end social injustices in deprived areas. Sociology lecturer Dr David Hobbs adapted the labelling theory to Meadowell stating that when people regard themselves as 'outsiders' to normal society they will act accordingly and look to ways of 'making it', often through crime.<sup>68</sup>

Ultimately the riots were an alternative to despair, and estate crime was the product of deprived sections succumbing to materialistic temptation, brandished by the media and nearby affluent areas. Through rioting, attention could be drawn to the impoverishment and would have to be addressed by politicians. This provides a legitimate purpose, reflecting the classical mob of Hobsbawm which 'did not merely riot as a protest, but because it expected to achieve something by its riot'.<sup>69</sup> The interpretation that the riot was a strategy to gain help and recognition was backed up by Meadowell resident of 38 years, Joan Bell, who claimed that 'they want to be recognised and get something done ... the council and everybody else ... just let them know that we do exist'.<sup>70</sup> As the press delved into some of the more empathetic

*Police night patrol*

stories involving life on the estates, in contrast the 'folk devil' portrayal, it allowed a focus on the respectable and community-minded individuals in these areas, which will be explored in the next chapter.

### Despair versus determination in the community

*'I've never know anything like the community spirit here, never had so many friends or such closeness anywhere'.<sup>71</sup>*

The hopeless situation on the estates proved that 'when words fail, sticks and bottles are thrown'.<sup>72</sup> This chapter will explore the community efforts in Meadowell and the persistent self-help attempts to revive the estate, both before and after the disturbances, through employment, training, leisure and housing schemes. Martin Wainwright of the Guardian commented that despite Meadowell's blighted reputation there existed 'a core of really good community-minded people working with feeble resources ... in the old days they would have been stalwarts of the Labour party'.<sup>73</sup> Their perseverance in drawing attention to Meadowell's crisis before the riot is evident in a letter written by the Cedarwood Women's Writing Group to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, urging her to live a year on the estate to empathise with their circumstances.<sup>74</sup> Overall, there existed a tenacious desire to instil hope, both before and after the riot.

The outpouring of despair by women of the estate emerged within the Cedarwood Women's Writing Group established by the author Kitty Fitzgerald. This led to the creation of *Mixed Feelings*, a collection of women's poems which provided an insight into their everyday life and emotions. For instance, the notion that Meadowell was ignored as

'problem estate' is confirmed within a poem that describes how 'I touch the anger in my soul, I smell the heat in the air, I feel as if no-one cares'.<sup>75</sup> This conveys an overwhelming hopelessness and bitterness that residents were simply shunned as burdens to wider society. Resentment towards their own misfortunes and lack of opportunities are presented in the poem 'Laughter' with 'we see others laughing, out shopping, spending money, they look happy, when you're skint, laughter has to be forced out, like old nails from a wall'.<sup>76</sup> Whilst they grudgingly viewed the affluence and satisfaction that enriched the lives of many 'outsiders', residents felt a degree of entitlement to the same opportunities and bitterness towards their situation. At the same time, the gloom and anguish of their writing confirmed and strengthened their solidarity. 'We're all in the same boat here, So we can share anger, But let a stranger come, And it can turn to Anger, When they're preaching, What they can't understand'.<sup>77</sup> This suspicion of 'outsiders' is comprehensible considering the media criticism. Furthermore, such a juxtaposition between residents and 'strangers' confirms Barke and Turnbull's theory that the estate existed as a 'frontier town' where an 'us vs. them' mentality strengthened inner bonds.<sup>78</sup>

The most important cultural representation of Meadowell was Amber Films' *Dream On*, filmed on the estate before the riot using actors and residents. Fitzgerald noted that 'I don't think we could have filmed as successfully as we did if people hadn't had some sort of belief that we were not there to portray them as the scum of the earth'.<sup>79</sup> The essence of the film-making was to display the everyday lives and struggles of the women, particularly the problems they faced from men. The message of the story was of women's survival against a backdrop of male oppression; throughout, 'I will survive' by Gloria Gaynor was played at key moments. The men in the film are mostly shown as controlling and abusive and all but one have a negative impact on the women's lives through violence, domination and even molestation. In contrast women are shown as mentally strong and loyal to each other. Peggy, the matriarch of the community was the voice of reason, asking: 'Why aim for the gutter

when you can reach the stars?’<sup>80</sup> Additionally, some women are seen as politically active when going door to door rallying support for the Anti Poll Tax demonstration. Pre-riot, the press provided a positive review of the project calling it a ‘Well of Inspiration’, which contrasted starkly with headlines of ‘Meadow Hell’ just one month later.<sup>81</sup> Campbell commented on the success of the message, saying that it ‘revealed what the riots did not: what people had to put up with, or rather what women had to put up with from men’.<sup>82</sup>

In the late eighties and early nineties, a small group of women from Meadowell became leading figures in community regeneration. In a renaissance of militant self-help, they created a Credit Union, a food co-op, a mental health centre and groups for senior citizens and Mums and toddlers.<sup>83</sup> This provided evidence that Meadowell refused to die, and drove towards revival, despite ‘sitting on a powder keg’.<sup>84</sup> Recognising the estate’s potential for a violent uprising, the women of the Collingwood Working Group alongside Dr Tony Gibson of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation compiled a report to stimulate regeneration.

In March 1991, *A New Heart for Meadowell*, was published.<sup>85</sup> The fundamental aims were to give the estate a new image and heart by restoring buildings, involving the youth in the community, increasing employment and establishing a permanent police presence. Buried skills, the report said, were the main hindrance to progress; many professional people now living in Meadowell, who had had good jobs all their lives, were out of work. They included woodworkers, computer programmers and landscape gardeners, a wealth of wasted talent. The report proposed to capitalise on this through training schemes, working with ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ to gain new skills and pass existing ones on to each other. Despite determined efforts from the Collingwood Working Group actively to destroy the area’s negative label, a lack of support from above following the riot hindered progression. As the council closed the youth centre and withdrew support for a residents’ rights centre, frustrations mounted and order was abandoned.

According to Gibson, ‘The shock of the riots woke everyone up’.<sup>86</sup> This led to the new community report, *Danger: Opportunity*, as residents again worked with Tony Gibson and the Neighbourhood Initiatives foundations. However, as a consequence of the panic, this time the project received more positive backing gaining collaborations from the council, City Challenge and charities. The neglect of the estate was realised as the Deputy Leader of the Council admitted that ‘if we’d acted along the lines of *A New Heart for Meadowell* last spring, we’d have saved ourselves a lot of trouble’.<sup>87</sup>

Encompassing most of the ideas of *A New Heart*, the new report placed emphasis on the residents’ active involvement in decision making. It stressed that they must ‘have a do as well as a say’,<sup>88</sup> recognising that when such estates are ‘at the mercy of outsiders’ intervention, the frustration and the danger increase’.<sup>89</sup> To lay solid foundations, the report proposed a five-year plan in which to implement training, housing, offices, and a crèche. The model community proposed was highly idealistic, yet displayed the sheer willingness of residents to eradicate their burdensome reputation and restore promise to the area.

With such proposals to reinvigorate the estate and enhance its fortunes, the Collingwood Working Group certainly did not fit the stereotypical Meadowell dweller of the criminal and benefit-dependent. These strong, often downtrodden, community-minded personalities were aptly represented by Amber films. Prior to the riot, the sheer avoidance of any effort to tackle Meadowell’s mounting crisis by local authorities and the government, including the slashing of community spending, meant that plans of self-improvement had to be provided by desperate residents with the Community reports. Echoing this situation, Campbell argued that ‘Meadowell had two magnetic fields – community solidarity and crime. By pulling away from the former, the state and the political system abandoned Meadowell to the latter’.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

From 1991 – 95, twenty-eight disturbances occurred on council estates in Britain. These estates were neither high-rise nor in the worst physical condition, yet they all had been built for slum clearance and had a high concentration of young people.<sup>91</sup> Meadowell falls into this category, and its reputation of former slum inhabitants, crime and poverty helped fuel disconnection. As the young, unemployed, social exiles became severed from the ideals and opportunities of wider society, they enacted their self-fulfilling criminal role through crime and destruction.

Within the reporting of the disturbances, there existed two strands of opinion concerning the root causes. Those that presented the riots as a moral panic argued that they occurred due to a culture of criminality amongst the 'underclass' typical of council estates. Conversely, publications that were empathetic to life in the riot areas portrayed events as a desperate cry for attention by those who felt like third-class citizens. In essence, the riots were born out of deep frustrations that the residents in question, were simply being 'left to rot'. The disproportionate concentration of unemployment, poverty, crime and withdrawal of resources created an ongoing cycle of inequalities. The exclusion from opportunities such as the Royal Quays also fostered an extreme lack of confidence. A New Heart for Meadowell highlighted this issue as a major influence behind unemployment and the function of crime as a legitimate career. The wounds of these estates ran deep, and caused the disaffected to mass together and rise up to achieve recognition and socio-economic assistance.

Fifteen years later in 2006, the BBC revisited Meadowell to discover if changes had been made. The exterior appearance of the estate certainly seemed to have been improved and modernised. Yet in terms of attitudes and lifestyles, reporter Chris Jackson discerned a divide between those with hope and those without.<sup>92</sup> Since 1991, £66 million has been spent on regeneration including the building of four hundred new homes, yet two-thirds of the residents are still unemployed.<sup>93</sup> The Community

Initiative reports, A New Heart and Danger: Opportunity, have shown the importance, in the regeneration of an area, of residents' activity to instil a community spirit and of active employment. Many residents claim that the name Meadowell still carries stigma and restricts opportunities. For instance, their address can influence job interviews in which employers reject 'Meadowell scum'.<sup>94</sup> The stigma attached by wider society and sections of the media to estates like Meadowell raises the question of whether an area can truly break from its detrimental label to access equal opportunities and social assistance. Without rejecting this label it is extremely difficult to prevent the emergence of 'lost generations', and future tensions erupting into violent declarations of fury and injustice. Effectively, within Meadowell and Tyneside, their desertion by wider society had reached breaking point, creating a situation in which the embittered, the impoverished, and the outcast simply had nothing to lose and everything to gain through their destructive acts.

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### Economics

Imagine the impact  
On the dismal science of economics  
If, in standard text books,  
Wherever we saw the word “market”  
We substituted the, admittedly rather cumbersome phrase,  
“A small collection of extremely highly paid men”

Nigel Mellor

This poem and those later in the journal are by Nigel Mellor who produces weekly pithy little verses commenting on news events.  
His site is: <http://nigelswriting.blogspot.com/>

## RESISTING BENEFITS CUTS 1934-1935

### Don Watson

In August 1931 Labour Prime Minister James Ramsey MacDonald made a unique response to Britain's economic crisis: he and some Cabinet colleagues formed a coalition with the Tories. This resulting 'National Government' embarked on a series of crisis measures to reduce public spending, with the worst consequences being felt by unemployed workers and their families.

Unemployment benefit for adults was reduced by 10%, the Anomalies Act removed large numbers of married women from the unemployment register even when they had paid National Insurance contributions. Unemployment benefit would expire after six months; any further claims were classed as 'transitional payments' and subject to a household Means Test carried out by the local Poor Law Authority. These authorities, the Public Assistance Committees, had to examine the household circumstances of each claimant and then decide whether any benefit was to be paid. This be in line with their existing, often lower, scales for uninsured people. Means Testing had most impact where long-term unemployment was highest, areas such as the North East of England, Scotland and South Wales, where the staple industries were in sharp decline. As Charles Webster has summarised:

‘Applicants for benefits needed to cut their way through a jungle of bureaucratic obstacles...those benefits barely warded off starvation, and they inevitably condemned recipients to a humiliating privation’<sup>1</sup>

These measures were introduced just before the crisis General Election in 1931, at which Labour was famously punished by the electorate for what was seen as going over to the Tories. The National Government was Conservative dominated and now virtually had a free hand in Parliament.

There was of course a political reaction. The Means Test reinvigorated the National Unemployment Workers Movement and through this

membership of the Communist Party, even in the North East where it had slumped since the end of the miners' lock-out in 1926.<sup>2</sup> The NUWM combined claims and benefits advice – the government did not provide any information about entitlements until 1939 – with local and national campaigning against the Means Test. In addition several of the Public Assistance Committees, who were elected and generally included councillors, ignored Treasury restrictions and tried to pay the maximum benefits they could. As a result those in County Durham for example were removed by the Government and replaced by appointed commissioners.

The Unemployment Assistance Act was put forward in November 1933 for implementation by 1935. This proposed to maintain the cuts to unemployment benefits imposed as an emergency measure in 1931. Part II proposed that the benefits system would be administered by local Unemployment Assistance Boards independent of local PACs, whom the government thought were inclined to waste money by paying the maximum on a benefits scale. For the first time since the introduction of the original Poor Law a century earlier the administration of long-term unemployment support was taken away from locally elected bodies and entrusted to a quango. The UABs would determine new transitional payments scales too. Further, to keep their benefits long-term unemployed men could be required to participate in Ministry of Labour work camps (immediately dubbed 'slave camps' by the NUWM) to carry out manual work at pocket-money rates.

This article outlines three broad components of the resistance to the Bill in the North East: the National Hunger March to London in 1934; the campaign by groups of doctors and others around the health consequences of poverty incomes; and finally the agitation on the streets at the start of 1935 when the realities of the Act struck home.

### The National Hunger March to London

The response of the NUWM leadership to the draft Bill was to organise another nation-wide Hunger March to London, the first section setting off

from Scotland on January 22nd 1934. All the different contingents were planned to reach London for a major rally in Hyde Park on February 25<sup>th</sup>, so that they would be in London as the Bill was being debated. This was to be followed by deputations to Parliament and further demonstrations.<sup>3</sup>

The march aims included scrapping the Unemployment Bill, the Means Test and the 'slave camps'; restoring the 10% cut and increasing benefits, a 40-hour week and public works at union rates to combat unemployment.

<sup>4</sup> The NUWM was a Communist Party initiative and its leading local

and national activists were almost invariably Party members. This meant that the national Hunger Marches had additional political agenda items besides the immediate demands of the March. As always the message was the socialist alternative to the capitalist organisation of society. By 1934 another objective was unity in action with the Independent Labour Party, in marked contrast to the 1932 March when the ILP had, along with the TUC and the Labour Party leadership, been denounced as part of the capitalist machine. During those next two years Hitler had achieved power and the international Communist line had shifted in response to the rise of fascism, calling now for united action; the CPGB and the ILP were calling for united action too against the National Government. The NUWM sought and achieved support from three M.Ps – Maxton and McGovern for the ILP and Aneurin Bevan for Labour – for the march and the Unity Congress which was to be held in London during its conclusion.

Unity with the ILP was certainly achieved in the North East. In Gateshead, for example, where the ILP had been involved in unemployed



struggles since 1920, 'One of the largest demonstrations ever seen in Felling Square' gathered to send off the local section of the Tyneside contingent. In what must have been a visually striking event they set off through Gateshead in a torchlight procession led by the ILP band, and a Gateshead ILP councillor marched with them down as far as Yorkshire.<sup>5</sup>

This was the fifth national Hunger March to London since the 1920s and seventeen different contingents of marchers from every corner of Britain took part. The Tyneside group assembled in Newcastle, then marched down through County Durham (being joined by the Teesside contingent at Darlington), and proceeded through Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridge and Essex to London. There were around 120 from Tyneside, south Northumberland and Teesside. Another contingent from Cumbria joined up with the Scottish marchers in Carlisle and came south by a different route. Participants were recruited by the NUWM branches, clothing donated by Co-op Societies and funds from six Durham miners' lodges.<sup>6</sup>

As was the case with the 1932 and 1936 marches, there was a separate but parallel Women's Section. In 1934 nearly 50 marchers assembled in Derby and then marched down through Derbyshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire. They did not join with the men because the national march organisers did not want to risk the sort of publicity a hostile press could have given to mixed contingents. One of the leaders of the women's section was Mrs. Chater from Gateshead, who, along with husband Alf, had been active in the Gateshead unemployed movement for some time. She had taken part in the 1932 march during which she had been introduced to public speaking. Mrs. Chater told the *Daily Worker* that when she had first got involved some friends had said her place was at home, but they had gradually been won round, and that 'it was only through struggle that working class people gain anything' <sup>7</sup>

The leadership of the Labour Party and the TUC maintained their policy not supporting marches by 'non-affiliated bodies', and this meant discouraging trades councils and labour Party branches from organising

accommodation, food and collections for the marchers along the route. Nevertheless, again as with other Hunger Marches, there were many examples of local branches ignoring this guidance. Where they did not ignore it there were examples too of church groups, Co-op Societies and the ILP coming forward to help.<sup>8</sup> Overnight and rest stops were an opportunity for public meetings about the march and about politics, as John Longstaff from Teesside recalled:

'The political aspect came in wherever we stopped, whether it was in a village or a town or anywhere. One of the leaders would always get up and try and get as many people from the town or the village to come and listen to the arguments that the unemployed were using to get work and it was then that those men, experienced men, would be given the political reasons as to why we were marching. They were explaining what capitalism meant, what socialism meant...'<sup>9</sup>

He remembered very positive responses along the route too:

'On arriving at any town or village all the marchers' heads would be held up high with everyone marching in step...My main memory of the march was when we arrived at some small town to find the local people, with tears in their eyes, cheering at the sight of us for our plight was also their plight...Even in Grantham, despite the fact that Mrs Thatcher came from there, the people in that town met us and took some of the men in to sleep in their homes. Others were taken into chapels and churches and given accommodation by the churches whatever it may be, whether it was Catholic, Protestant, Methodist or what. Our reception with the people was excellent. I carried around with me a little tin box to try and get some pennies put in and it was difficult to get pennies put in these tin boxes because the people in nearly all the towns had no money, it was as simple as that.'<sup>10</sup>

The North East group were supported by the University Socialist Society during their stop in Cambridge. This support, as the Blyth correspondent on the march put it, ‘must have been disconcerting to the ruling class’, coming as it did from ‘one of the twin strongholds of British imperialist teaching’. <sup>11</sup> It must also have been a sociologically interesting encounter. John Longstaff, though, recalled an incident involving right-wing students that has not been mentioned in other accounts of the march:

‘This time we did meet some trouble but it was some students in the University...about 30 of them.. they’d thrown things at us, pieces of wood, eggs, tomatoes and such like. Well, some of the lads just got their sticks and they chased them and, if they got them, they would have got more than a bloody egg on their face.’ <sup>12</sup>

Once they were in the suburbs of London each contingent was co-ordinated to join together into a single final procession into Hyde Park on February 25th, where they were greeted by a 100,000 strong crowd organised by the London labour movement. John Longstaff recalled the biggest crowd he had ever seen, but as a teenager who had never left Stockton before, he found the locals bewildering:

‘More and still more people had joined the marchers. These marchers were, I was told, from the East End of London. I could not understand what they were shouting or even talking about, it was like a foreign language; no doubt they also had great difficulty in understanding our north east accents’.

The response was, he recalled, class determined, as he discovered during one of the post-march demonstrations:

‘Away we went, passing through the City of London, where some better dressed men started shouting at us -”Bloody Reds, you all want shooting.” Others were shouting, “Go to Russia where you came from.” And they

were frightened of us in those days, a few unarmed ill clad, badly clothed and half starving men, they were frightened of us – for what?’ <sup>13</sup>

The Unity Congress took place and attracted 1,000 delegates. The North East contingent met the Northern Group of M.Ps at the House of Commons, Government representatives having refused to meet them, and the Newcastle Journal reported that the meeting had strengthened the M.Ps’ determination to lobby for the restoration of the 10% cuts. The paper regretted, of course, ‘this unfortunate exploitation of the workless by the Communists’. <sup>14</sup>

### **Poverty and the Public Health in the North East**

This agitation coincided with controversies between local doctors, public health specialists and the Government about the impact of low incomes and health. This became part of the context in which reactions to the Government measures took place.

In November 1933, the same month in which the Unemployment Act was introduced, the British Medical Association published a Report by its Committee on Nutrition. This demonstrated, essentially, that the benefits paid to unemployed people were too low to ensure an adequate diet for their families. Its author was Dr. McGonigle, the Medical Officer of Health for Stockton whose own local research on the subject (Poverty and the Public Health) was eventually brought together as one of the first Left Book Club publications in 1936. The BMA report was seized on by the labour movement as a campaign tool and formed a continuous battleground with the Ministry of Health, who rejected its findings. The North East featured in March 1934 when Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald initiated a survey into malnutrition amongst the unemployed on Tyneside, and specifically Newcastle, Gateshead and Jarrow. This was done quickly and reported in May that the nutritional status of the unemployed was low, but this had always been the case, that the incidence of rickets and tuberculosis was high, but it always had been high, and had not been affected by unemployment; in fact ‘there

was no evidence of a deterioration in the health of the unemployed or their families'. The survey was condemned as superficial by campaigning doctors and compared unfavourably with local research, based on a thorough study of cases and not quick examinations, and which was telling a different story.<sup>15</sup>

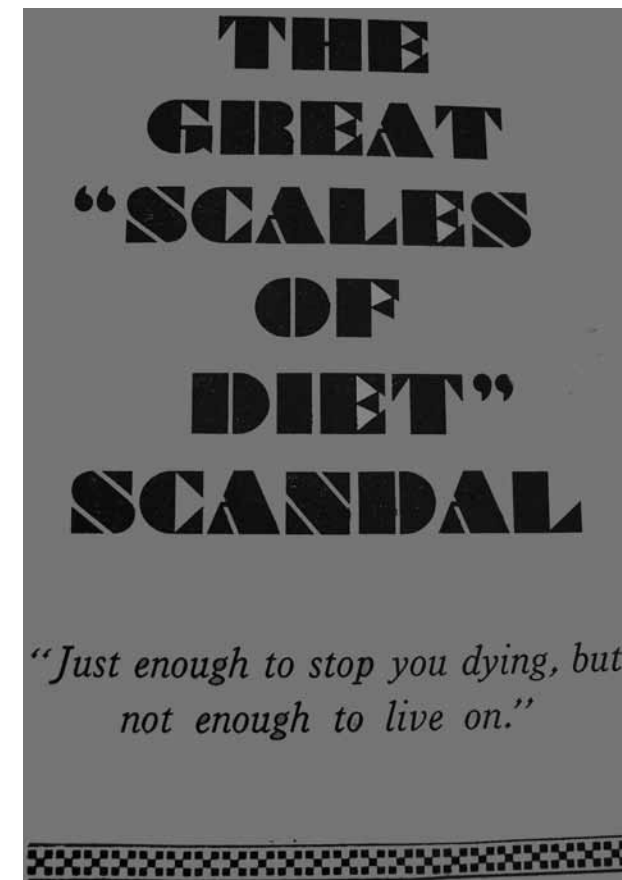
A well-known example at the time was the work carried out by Dr. J.C. Spence. This research compared the height, weight and health of 125 working class children (of whom 103 were from unemployed families) with a similar number of children of professional people. Examinations for comparison included blood tests and X-rays, and height and weight were compared to the average recorded in Newcastle child health clinics. Spence found that over a third of the working class children were below the average for height and weight, were unhealthy and appeared malnourished. The conclusion was that, 'Even if we allow for the all too frequent self-sacrifice of the mother of the family...it is still certain that in many of our poorer homes child and adult alike have an inadequate diet'. A pamphlet version of his work was published by the Newcastle Co-operative Society.<sup>16</sup>

Inside Parliament and Whitehall there was also the well-informed lobbying by the independent feminist M.P. Eleanor Rathbone. She argued that the government's desire to cut costs and by-pass local authorities would prevent the reasonable maintenance of unemployed people and that the health of their children in particular would suffer. At a meeting in the House of Commons in February 1934, coincidentally when the Hunger Marchers were arriving in London, she set up the cross-party Children's Minimum Campaign Committee. Its objective was to establish the principle that relief scales should ensure that children would not be deprived of food and necessities because of their parents' low income.<sup>17</sup>

Thus a diverse collection of lobby groups, made up of doctors, scientists and political activists kept up pressure on the Government over its neglect of nutrition. Their evidence was used by the NUWM in its Manifesto of the National March and Congress in 1934, and North East

branches made use of their Medical Officer of Health Annual Reports for campaigning too. Those clergy in the region with parishes blighted by unemployment also added their voices to the demand to restore the 10% cuts of 1931.<sup>18</sup>

A growing consensus was building which went further than the traditional labour movement and the left, and its potential to embarrass the Government over its record on nutrition added to the pressure to give some ground over benefits scales.



*NUWM  
pamphlet on  
benefits*

### Concessions, Protest, Concessions

On Budget Day April 1934, two months after the Hunger March had arrived in London, the Government announced that the cuts of 1931 in the standard rates of unemployment benefit were to be restored, and a modest increase in the allowances for children granted. This 'u-turn' was hailed as a victory by the NUWM; indeed its historian has noted that Government concessions followed each of the national Hunger Marches, and this cannot be a coincidence.<sup>19</sup> Eleanor Rathbone too claimed this as a success her own lobbying work. However in January 1935 Part 2 of the Act was implemented and the realities of the new benefits scales devised by the UABs became clear.

Len Edmondson was an engineering worker from Gateshead who was twenty years old at this time, and unemployed for almost a year. He was an ILP member active in the NUWM. He remembered some of the effects of the new scales:

‘I clearly recall at that time the case of two brothers who were unemployed and living together in a house – probably the house in which their late parents had lived. They were each in receipt of 15/3d per week unemployment benefit but, under the new regulations, they were classed as “man and wife” and given 23/3d between them’.<sup>20</sup>

Many, many people were much worse off under the new UAB rates and action soon followed. The NUWM in the North East had a well-established system of open air speakers and public meetings in the ‘speakers’ corners’ of each town: the Bigg Market, Windmill Hills in Gateshead, the West Park in Sunderland, the Market Places in South Shields and Blyth, Harbour View in North Shields. In 1934 and 1935 Frank Graham was active in the NUWM in Sunderland and he recalled some of the political culture of the time:

‘...we had a lot of people who were extremely good speakers. And particularly at the open air rallies they could put across a case clearly and in a popular way that moved

people....Of course in those days you had to be a good speaker because you could always have faced heckling and if you couldn't put a case over in an open air meeting the audience would disappear anyway...but it was no problem to any orator in those days – and there were literally, I can think of at least six – a dozen – people on Tyneside who were absolutely first class orators, who were superior to practically any Labour Party or Conservative member of parliament today. And they knew what they were talking about, they were – because you see an unemployed agitator was a full time politician in a way, because that was the main thing he did – he had no work to do’.<sup>21</sup>

Len Edmondson explained how local demonstrations of the unemployed were organised:

‘The organisers of the demonstrations had no funds so they could not publicise the intended marches by posters or leaflets, and the press and the radio did not give any publicity to intended marches or demonstrations in those days. The whole of the organising had to be done by chalking the streets, calling upon everyone to assemble at a particular place and line up for a march against the dole cuts or to demand employment. Sometimes to announce the demonstrations a few men would go into the streets, ring a bell, and when the people came out they announced that a march was to be held and called upon everyone to join in’.<sup>22</sup>

In January 1935 the NUWM in Felling and Gateshead organised a mass rally against the Act. Len Edmondson recalled the demonstration and its leader, the Communist Jim Ancrum, and also what they achieved:

‘...they had a chap called Jim Ancrum from the Felling who had a powerful voice. He was speaking on this new Act which had been introduced. There had been a lot said in the press that many were going to get an increase. Jimmy

Ancrum who had a terrific voice and a great crowd around him and he said "Well we'll see where these increases are." He says "I've got an increase here from the Felling. He was in receipt of thirty-one shillings a week. He has got a decrease down to six and a tanner a week. Twenty-five and sixpence a week reduction!" He said. "And, he said, "I've got a lot more here in my pocket with reductions ranging from five shillings up to a pound!" And he announced that they were going to have a mass march from the Felling and they wanted all the Gateshead people to join in at the end of Sunderland Road where Felling meets Gateshead. March to the Unemployment Assistance Board which used to be just a bit further over on Windmill Hills. I think he marched about six thousand from the Felling alone and all the Gateshead people joined in and all the unemployed that saw it. People were joining in on the pavements and all over. Well it was estimated that there were twelve to fifteen thousand people assembled outside the Unemployment Assistance Board offices and the Unemployed Workers Movement at the Felling, through Jimmy Ancrum, had made arrangements first of all for the manager to receive a delegation. A short meeting was held therefore outside the offices and Jimmy Ancrum had mentioned that he had made arrangements with the management for to receive a delegation, four or five going in and had arranged for a speaker to keep the meeting going while they were in. That was the Gateshead NUWM Secretary, John Henderson. They went in and he said he knew the manager because the manager used to be at the Felling in some position....

'He reported that they had been treated with courtesy when they went in and they put the case to the management for the withdrawal of the 1934 Act, the complete withdrawal.

They couldn't ask the manager to send a telegram demanding the withdrawal he would have got the sack. What they asked him to do was to send a factual telegram, a statement that there was about twelve to fifteen thousand unemployed assembled outside his office demanding the withdrawal of this 1934, so called Unemployment Assistance Act. And he gave an undertaking that he would do it immediately. That was the way that the Unemployment Workers Movement operated in those days. Always marching to a particular place and always asking the manager or someone like that to send a factual statement. You couldn't get them to send one demanding the withdrawal. But they would send a factual statement down to the Prime Minister.'

This was not the only action in Gateshead. Len Edmondson continues the story:

'...and then on the Friday night of that same week, Oliver Stanley the minister who had introduced this bill was speaking in the City Hall allegedly to explain the meaning of this bill as though the unemployed didn't know it. The unemployed assembled in the Bigg Market for a meeting and it was announced to elect a delegation to meet to get into the City Hall and meet the minister....When we got up to the City Hall the delegation couldn't get in. It was admission by ticket only. So there was an appeal made to the unemployed there who had tickets. Well, I don't know how they got tickets but they got the tickets for the delegation and the delegation went in. One policeman came and he said that we couldn't remain on the road outside like this. So we decided to march round and round the City Hall and keep moving. An Inspector came over and he was much more civil, accommodating and pleasant with it and he said "look if you just remain there on the other side of the road

so that the traffic can get by it will be all right for us, the easier it will be for you the easier it will be for us". And so we were able to remain there.'

'Well we got a report afterwards that the delegation got in. Then Oliver Stanley was speaking and they marched straight down the City Hall. I think there were about twelve on the delegation, lined themselves up in front of the platform, raised their clenched fists and declared "In the name of the unemployed of Tyneside we demand the withdrawal of this bill!" There was a move to get them away from the front but not a move to get them thrown out of the Hall. A large number of the unemployed had managed to get in and there would have been eruptions if the police or the stewards had attempted to get them out of the hall. When they came out we marched through the town to the Bigg Market to receive a report of all the activity that had taken place.'<sup>23</sup>

Estimates of the numbers involved in Gateshead were prone to exaggeration at the time. The NUWM leader Wal Hannington's summaries of the local agitations state that '... in Tyneside, 30,000 marched on the streets'. The *Daily Worker*, apparently in consultation with Gateshead activists, reported that between 20-30,000 had participated, and presumably this was the source of Hannington's figure. Jim Ancrum, the leader of the NUWM march, wrote in his local paper that fifteen thousand had taken part; this figure was not challenged by local people in the paper and Len Edmondson's recollection of the number is along the same lines. However his memoir reminds us too that we should also take account of the numbers who supported demonstrations more passively from the pavement or who did not march but joined the outdoor meetings. This would increase the numbers of participants quite considerably. Although the scale of the protest on the streets cannot be ascertained exactly there is no doubt that the Gateshead demonstrations were the biggest the town had seen for many years.<sup>24</sup>

Gateshead had the biggest but certainly not the only demonstration in the region against the new scales. In Sunderland, in the last week in January, the NUWM organised a rally in the West Park attended by 1,000 people. A week later, the NUWM chaired a meeting addressed by speakers from different shipyard unions, Ryhope and Wearmouth Durham Miners' Association Lodges, Sunderland ILP and the CP. The meeting called on the T.U.C. to organise a one day general strike against the Bill, and agreed to mandate their members who were on public bodies to 'refuse to implement parts of the Act relating to work camps'.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of January 1935, the NUWM organised a demonstration at the Tynemouth Borough Council Chamber in North Shields, complete with placards of 'Down with this baby-starving government' and 'Workers of the World Unite!' In 1932 an NUWM anti-Means Test march in the town had resulted in violent clashes with the police that had lingered on for hours, and subsequently the arrest and imprisonment of the North Shields NUWM leadership. Now the antagonists were lined up again, and the newspaper report communicates a tension between them that is almost tangible. Police reinforcements were called in and a confrontation was narrowly averted when they attempted to prevent the crowd of 3,000 from marching up and down outside the town hall during a Council meeting. The comments made by Tynemouth Borough councillors during this meeting illustrate how feelings about the Act were running high among local authorities. The Council, which was not controlled by Labour, agreed to 'protest against the hardships that were arising in the borough under the administration of the UAB scales, and suggest that the regulation be quashed'; this resolution to be forwarded to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Labour, and the local Members of Parliament. One councillor expressed alarm at the cuts being made, and another was convinced that the town was going to suffer. They rejected the idea of 'lax administration' on their part over the benefit scales they had previously been responsible for implementing.<sup>26</sup>



Jarrow Labour Party organised a demonstration in the town against the Act in February, and the 500 people it attracted doubled to 1,000 for a public meeting in a cinema. Here the local Conservative M.P. tried to defend government policy but the audience reaction was such that the police had to escort him from the building. In Blyth, at the end of January, the Council received a deputation following an NUWM rally, condemned the UAB scales and agreed to join a deputation to the Ministry of Labour.<sup>27</sup>

All this was, it must be stressed, part of a national movement. In fact the agitations in the North East were on a much smaller scale than in other areas of high unemployment. Riots occurred in Sheffield and Merthyr. In South Wales as a whole an unprecedented mobilisation involving political parties, churches, chapels and shopkeepers as well as the unemployed themselves came together. Demonstrators there were numbered in the hundreds of thousands, the product of an altogether different trades union and political culture, one which called too for a one-day general strike.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless the extent of the protest in the North East, where militancy was not a byword, shows the depth of anger.

### Conclusion: A Partial Victory

On 5<sup>th</sup> February 1935 the Minister of Labour, as Wal Hannington put it, 'had to bow before this mighty storm': he announced in the House of Commons that applicants for transitional payments would now get either their original scale or the UAB one, whichever was higher, and arrears would be paid to those who had seen their benefit reduced. The movement kept up the pressure to ensure that all this was actually implemented and arrears paid without any delay. In Blyth for example around 200 demonstrators assembled in the Market Place and marched to form a rally outside the PAC offices, 'where their numbers were doubled by onlookers'. A deputation from the NUWM successfully met officials who agreed to process arrears quickly.<sup>29</sup>

The months of agitation had definitely achieved a result. Wal Hannington and the activists of the NUWM hailed this as a vindication

for their campaigning; Len Edmondson in old age spoke for NUWM veterans when he described the government retreat of February 1935 as 'a victory for the organised working class'.<sup>30</sup> Also, consider the opinion of a medical historian writing about the British income and nutrition campaigns of the 1930s in *The International Journal of Epidemiology*:

'All the arguments of the campaigning groups and the concerned politicians, doctors and scientists, appeared to have fallen on deaf ears. However, after the UAB came into operation in January 1935, their scales were quickly defeated, not by science-based lobbying, but by protest meetings, marches and riots, after many claimants found that their unemployment assistance was substantially less than the Transitional Benefit they had received previously.'<sup>31</sup>

The M.Ps, UAB managers and local councillors would have been in no doubt about the effects of the cuts and the depth of public anger about them. As was done in Felling, Gateshead, Blyth and Tynemouth they would have communicated this to the government. Significant too was the loss at this time of two safe Conservative seats in by-elections; with a General Election due later in 1935 this loss would have helped to focus the Government's mind.

Nevertheless the victory was partial. The Means Test remained, as did the 'slave camps' and the local Unemployment Assistance Boards. Government-funded employment schemes continued to be minimal. Moreover the suspension of the new scales was not permanent; new draft rates were to be published in 1936. However the unemployed movement and those who campaigned around their issues could go forward with more confidence. They knew that resistance was not futile.

### Notes

- 1 Charles Webster, 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment During the Depression' Past and Present 105 (November 1985) p.227-8. On the Means Test see Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann: Britain in the Nineteen Thirties (London 1973)

- 2 Andrew Thorpe, 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1920-1945' *Historical Journal* 3 (2000) p.777-800.
- 3 Peter Kingsford: *The Hunger Marchers in Britain 1920-1940* (London 1982); Richard Croucher: *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: A History of the National Unemployed Workers Movement* (London 1987)
- 4 Manifesto of the National March and Congress (1934, Working Class Movement Library, Salford)
- 5 Heslop's Local Advertiser 16th February 1934 (Gateshead Local Studies Library); Daily Worker 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1934; Len Edmondson, interview with Ray Challinor 1986 (Beamish Museum Sound Archive)
- 6 Kingsford: *The Hunger Marchers* p. 184
- 7 Daily Worker 17<sup>th</sup> February, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1934
- 8 Rugby Advertiser 2<sup>nd</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February 1934
- 9 John Longstaff, recorded interview with Duncan Longstaff 2003. I am grateful to Duncan for sharing this material with me.
- 10 John Longstaff, interview with Duncan Longstaff
- 11 Blyth News 26<sup>th</sup> February 1934
- 12 John Longstaff, interview with Duncan Longstaff
- 13 John Longstaff, interview with Duncan Longstaff
- 14 Newcastle Journal 1<sup>st</sup> March 1934
- 15 David F. Smith: 'The Context and Outcome of Nutrition Campaigning in 1934' *International Journal of Epidemiology* 32 (2003); *Malnutrition Among the Unemployed, Tyneside, Survey March 1935* (National Archives MOH 79/332 p.19-20); *Committee Against Malnutrition Bulletin* 9 (July 1935) (Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine Library, London)
- 16 J.C. Spence: *Investigation into the Health and Nutrition of Certain Children of Newcastle upon Tyne Between the Ages of One and Five Years* (Newcastle upon Tyne Co-operative Printing Press 1934). See also the Newcastle Dispensary Annual Reports for 1931-34 (Tyne and Wear Archives HO.ND/3/1-33)
- 17 Susan Pedersen: *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Yale 2004 p.234-7); Newcastle Journal 16<sup>th</sup> February 1934
- 18 Newcastle Journal 21<sup>st</sup> February 1934
- 19 Croucher, *We Refuse* p.206
- 20 Len Edmondson, 'Labour and the labour camps' in Keith Armstrong and Huw Beynon (eds): *Hello, Are You Working? Memories of the Thirties in the North East of England* (Whitley Bay 1977 p.68)
- 21 Frank Graham, interview with Jim McGurn 1986 ( Beamish Museum Sound Archive ref 2007.29)
- 22 Len Edmondson, interview with Karen Grunzweil 1999 (Beamish Museum Sound Archive ref 1999.9)
- 23 Len Edmondson, interview with Karen Grunzweil; Newcastle Journal 9<sup>th</sup> February 1935

- 24 Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936* (London 1979 p.312. First published 1936); also his *Ten Lean Years: An Examination of the Record of the National Government in the Field of Unemployment* (Wakefield 1978 p.136. First published 1940); Daily Worker 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February 1935; Heslop's Local Advertiser 15<sup>th</sup> February 1935
- 25 Sunderland Echo 26<sup>th</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1935
- 26 Shields News 31<sup>st</sup> January 1935
- 27 Shields Gazette 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1935; Minutes of Blyth Town Council General Purposes Committee 29<sup>th</sup> January 1935 (Northumberland County Record Office NRO 00880/60)
- 28 Stephanie Ward, 'The Means Test and the Unemployed in South Wales and the North East of England 1931-1939' *Labour History Review* 1 (April 2008)
- 29 Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles* p.313; Blyth News 14<sup>th</sup> February 1935
- 30 Len Edmondson, interview with Ray Challinor 1986 (Beamish Museum Sound Archive)
- 31 David F. Smith: 'The Context and Outcome of Nutrition Campaigning in 1934' p.501



## SOCIALISM: MORE THAN ECONOMICS, A WAY OF LIFE

**HORACE  
GREEN**

**1907–1995**

**John Creaby**

The influence of the Communist Party (CP) in the post-war North East has been much debated, in terms of the political and industrial impact of individual Party Members. One person who played a significant role in the area was Horace Green, the CP's full-time Northern District Secretary of the Party, from 1951 to 1982. He was described in a local newspaper article as 'sincere, dedicated and modest. He lived by his principles'.<sup>1</sup> Details of his early life can be drawn from his own unfinished notes to 1951, and an interview and discussion with the author in 1975.<sup>2</sup>

Born into a political family in a small South Yorkshire pit village just outside Bradford in March 1907, Horace Green had happy memories of his childhood. His parents, labour movement activists, took a keen interest in their four children. His father's boot repair shop, an essential

service for pitmen and their families, had become the hub of the village with locals coming with their problems for advice. This gave Horace an early awareness of the social struggle. This awareness was given value at the local Socialist Sunday School. Here he was taught the morals and principles of socialism for a young person's point of view. Alongside 'the folk tunes and songs of the day, they also sang the socialist anthems, alongside the games and rambles'. Of course, the new Soviet Union was seen as the 'birth of a Workers' state', a rallying call to the 'workers of the world'. This experience was to have a lasting effect on Horace.

His early employment gave him a clear understanding of the struggle of working people. He left school at the age of fourteen, and started down the pit as a pony driver. Leaving home early each morning, he would walk the four miles to the pit to start work at 6.00 a.m. As in most working class families, his father asked him, 'have you got your union card?', and he obtained this on his first pay-day. After working for only one month, he was on strike for three months, in the 1921 mining lock-out and strike. At this tender age, he was to have a first-hand involvement in the struggle between capital and labour. The employers had terminated the miners' contracts, and were offering new ones involving a substantial cut in wages. With only the miners on strike, the dispute ended on the employers' terms. After three years he left the pit, due to family commitments, and went to live with his grandparents in Bradford. Having got a job in the boot and shoe trade, he transferred his union membership to the shop workers' union NUDAW (later USDAW). Through the union, he met members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Trades Council. He was to stay in Bradford for nine years, working in his grandfather's cobbling shop.

### **Independent Labour Party**

Bradford was a centre of socialism, the birthplace of the ILP. His grandfather, a self-educated man, active in the ILP, encouraged him to read and study. Inevitably, he joined the ILP. There, he was greatly

influenced by the civil servant Frank Betts (father of Barbara Castle), who was the editor of the *Bradford Pioneer*, a socialist journal published under the auspices of the Bradford Trades Council and the ILP. The Trades Council connection allowed Betts to work covertly with the ILP, and in all probability he was a member. Not only did he develop Horace's political outlook, but he also gave him a lasting interest in the arts, especially poetry. Horace became very effective in organising and agitation, and was a major speaker at Conferences of the ILP Guild of Youth. He was elected to its National Executive. At this stage of his political development he did not see the Communist Party progressing Marxism in Britain. In a speech to the 1933 Conference, he said: 'The CP is dominated by the Russian Party, although it is true that there are common revolutionary tasks. Anyone who thinks the YCL [Young Communist League] can be changed from within are either fools or knaves'.<sup>3</sup>

He did, however, work closely with the YCL. Eventually, he was elected the Guild's National Secretary, a position he held for several years. His contemporaries on its National Executive included Vic Feather, a fellow USDAW and Trades Council member from Bradford (TUC General Secretary, 1969-73) and Ted Fletcher from Birmingham (MP for Darlington, 1964-83). He was to meet Fletcher again in 1951 in Newcastle. It was in the Guild too that he first met Nora, whom he was to marry in the early 1930s. This was to be a lifetime loving relationship, but also equally a political partnership. She had joined the Guild at the age of sixteen and had a similar socialist family background - ILP parents, Socialist Sunday School, a grandmother who was a suffragette. She was active in her union, the Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers. The local Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) sections played an important part in Horace's and Nora's educational development. However, they did not remain in the ILP, because of a 'disagreement with their policy', and especially by the 'continuous display of anti-Soviet outlook prevalent in the ILP, particularly shown by [a] number of leading ILPers'.<sup>4</sup>

By 1935 the couple had returned to South Yorkshire. Still very active in his union and Trades Council, Horace had joined the local Labour Party. The local Trades Council and Labour Party had called for a joint approach to the Unemployed Action Committees, the anti-fascist movement and particularly, after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the committees supporting the Spanish Government and the International Brigade. The TUC and Labour nationally, however, 'had instructed local Trades Councils and parties to give no support to the unemployed marchers, particularly the Communist-led National Unemployed Workers' Movement' (NUWM). Nevertheless Horace, along with others, was actively supporting the NUWM. Furthermore, the National Council of Labour (a joint Labour Party/TUC body) had, 'to its everlasting shame', supported the Conservative-controlled National Government's policy of non-intervention in Spain. Horace and Nora supported United Action for Intervention, and he became the Secretary of the local Aid for Spain campaign. He had also become secretary of a large local Left Book Club Branch. This organisation, set up by left-wing publisher Gollancz, with whom he was to have a long friendship, operated a sale and loan system for Left Books, and branches held meetings to discuss issues raised by authors.

### Joining the Communist Party

Now disenchanted with the Labour Party, Horace found a greater affinity with Communist Party of Great Britain activists. Debating and discussing the classic Marxist and communist texts, he was now a regular *Daily Worker* reader. The indecisiveness and often capitulation of the right-wing Labour and trade union leaderships led him to reconsider his political perspective, having overcome his earlier reservations particularly regarding democratic centralism. He joined the CP in 1937.<sup>5</sup> Soon acknowledged as a foremost CP activist in Yorkshire, in 1943 he accepted the full-time position of Yorkshire District Organiser. His role, under the District Secretary, was to liaise with the trade unions, working with their shop stewards, organisation and campaigns.

There were of course many difficulties in wartime in carrying out this role. Having moved back to Bradford, he transferred his membership to the union catering for trade union and political staff, the Clerical & Administrative Workers Union (CAWU). As the delegate from the Bradford Branch of the CAWU, he returned to Bradford Trades Council. However, his time as a delegate was cut short. His union, like many others in the late 1940s, established a Rule requiring Communists and members of other organisations which were 'proscribed' by the TUC, Labour Party and the union to declare this in internal elections. The Rule also forbade their nomination as delegates to outside bodies such as Trades Councils. Despite this, Horace stayed active in his union and supported the Trades Council's activities, attending meetings as a visitor. Progressives in the union knew the Rule as the 'obnoxious Rule 13'. Horace was to have a fundamental role in having it negated in the clerks' union, but that is much later in his story, and in a different region, the North East. In 1939, he supported Harry Pollitt, who stood down as General Secretary of the CP over differences with the Central Committee over his support for the Second World War. Horace took part in the war effort as a part-time fireman. In 1941, when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, the CP line changed to support for the war. There was no difficulty locally, as everyone was aware of his personal stance against fascism. As a Trades Council 'visitor', he had gained valuable experience on joint union committees, political and community bodies.

So in 1951 he was 'persuaded to take up the position of CP District Secretary in the Northern Area'.<sup>6</sup> When questioned about his family situation, since he was now married with a nine-year-old daughter, he replied: 'Fortunately my wife is also a Communist, and a good comrade, hence full-time work for the Party creates no domestic problems, and I get considerable strengthening in it, from interest and encouragement at home.' As regards any national ambition he stated: 'At 43, I have got beyond the years of youth when one has the ambitions to become a Lenin or a Pollitt.' He was, he said, happy to be active at a local level!<sup>7</sup>

In order to take up his new position, Horace, with Nora and his daughter Anne, moved to Newcastle. His daughter recalled that:

'My mum and I and the dog came up in the furniture van and were deposited on the Tyne Bridge. Furniture stored, we had to stay with Dave Atkinson, a local trades union leader and CP member. After a matter of days my dad went off to the Soviet Union on a fraternal visit. Money was tight, wages were low and often no wages at all. So to find somewhere to live was difficult to say the least. We were able to buy a beautiful terraced flat in Ashfield Terrace, off Elswick Road with help, a loan, from a well-off Harley Street doctor, a CP member, who refused any repayment.'<sup>8</sup>

The family soon fitted into the working class community of Newcastle's West End, dominated by the great Vickers factory. In no time at all, Horace's neighbours knew him as an able advocate to the Tory Newcastle Council, or the Benefits Offices or on issues around the rents of privately-let housing. They were soon to embrace the whole history, culture and working class community of the North East. With little money, they supplemented their income at first by taking in students. After they left, Nora took up employment as a conductor with Newcastle Corporation Buses and, of course, membership of the TGWU. Horace never forgot that he was only able to carry out his role in the labour movement because of Nora's lifelong support, since his wages were not only low but sometimes non-existent.

### **Anti-racism**

In 1970, due to the deteriorating environment and the compulsory purchase of their house by the Council, Horace and Nora moved to Ryton, where his family now lived. The CP office at the People's Bookshop, however, was in the West End of Newcastle, so that he never lost contact with that community. It was here that he built up an identity with North East culture. Horace also understood the dynamics of the communities within the community. His advocacy had brought him into contact in

the late 1960s with the burgeoning minority ethnic communities, and had given him awareness of the overt colour bar and race discrimination, and of an establishment that appeared either to condone or at the least to do nothing about these. He supported the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), and in 1968 helped to organise the first anti-racist march in Newcastle, a reaction to the infamous racist speech of Enoch Powell MP. Participation in Newcastle's Immigrant Liaison Committee, a welfare-oriented body, led to his involvement with its Community Relations Council (CRC), a body with government agency, local authority, business, trade union and faith communities support. He affiliated the CP District, and argued in his own union, CAWU, with the support of its officers, to have it affiliate also. This connection lasted through to the 1980s.

Chris Mullard, then a young left-wing black activist, had been appointed as the CRC's first full-time Organiser in 1968, and had immediate support from some on the left including Horace. As a leading member of CARD, Mullard was attempting to create a progression from the so-called 'harmony and assimilation' activity advocated by the national level funding agency and others, to asserting rights against racism. Labour movement activists like Horace were in full support of his vigorous and strategic approach. After coming up against many problems, Mullard was to resign in 1973, an incident covered in a previous edition of this journal.<sup>9</sup> He has recalled that:

'Horace was not only active in CARD and supportive of the CRC, but as a personal colleague and friend supported me with a tremendous amount of encouragement. In particular, I recall him offering financial help to CARD and the CRC, and on one or two occasions to me personally, when the Commission and indeed local authorities withdrew their grants. I remember, on another occasion, him offering quite a lot of strategic advice in terms of how to manage the political right on Tyneside - for at that time, you will probably recall, Arthur Grey (Conservative) was the Leader of the Council. Horace had a sound strategic mind that

sprung from quite a deep understanding of the interests and political chicanery of some of the more extremist (i.e. fascist) and 'revolutionary' groups on Tyneside. I can remember him telling me that what mattered was always the end result, and that one should organise on the principle of a negotiated outcome that did not undermine one's essential values and beliefs.'<sup>10</sup>

This period established the model for future race relations work in the mid-1970s through to the 1990s. With the activity of the racist National Front in 1976-7, and racist arguments being popularised in the media, such arguments were being heard openly at workplaces. Horace, with the support of the officers in his union (now APEX after a name-change in 1972), succeeded in persuading its Regional Executive to 'actively support in all ways possible' the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). This affected the membership's attitudes. Bob Murdoch, the draughtsmen's union steward at C. A. Parsons, has recalled that racist arguments occurred within the membership of unions, especially on the shop floor, but were 'less open among the clerical grades, where the union leadership was associated with a strong anti-racist position. Whether it was actually less, that's a different matter'.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, the ANL had support across unions, MPs, faith groups, political parties, and in fact from all sections of society.

Horace was able to work very easily in this full community environment. Neville Hancock, who became a member of the CP's Darlington branch in the early 1970s, considered that Horace's approach 'to working with other organisations was a genuinely sincere one'. He particularly remembered joining Horace in the 'many anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations, where he gained huge respect for his work'. Hancock further recalled 'attending the Marxist/Christian Dialogue Meetings with him in the Tanners Arms, where although no punches were pulled on either side, a joint statement was always agreed. I believe a great respect was gained for our (Marxist) viewpoint'. As Hancock acknowledged, 'Horace had a genuine commitment to meeting, head-on, individuals and organisations with Socialist arguments, however it never seemed confrontational'.<sup>12</sup>

**Local Communists**

This commitment to community politics and the broad approach were to be part of his own personal ideology, sometimes against opposition in the CP District Committee. Horace saw community action as a fundamental and crucial part of the class struggle. On arrival in the North East, he had found a small but committed membership in the CP branches. These included leading CP trade unionists, full time officials such as George Wiley (Woodworkers), Alec Baxter (Draughtsmen) and particularly Dave Atkinson (Post Office Workers) and rank and file leaders like John Oxberry of the miners and Les Allen and Ted Nicholson of the engineers' union, who helped him understand the local political scene. Regionally, the labour movement was strong in its industrial arm, but there was a mixed political situation. Most local authorities in the area were Labour-controlled, but not all. In particular, Newcastle City Council was under Tory control.<sup>13</sup> Although the Conservatives had won the 1951 General Election, Labour MPs had fared better in the North East. Horace was to build up links with these MPs over the years. He also gained respect and trust from Labour Party activists in the many labour movement campaigns. However, it was of course within the CP that his political discourse, analysis and activity took place.

He was now having to travel widely across a region including Cumbria. Hancock felt this was a reason they saw little of him at their branch on Teesside. 'He did however regularly visit comrades throughout the area, some in out of the way places on the North Yorkshire Moors, in the Dales and mining villages, partly to collect much needed funds'.

Horace's arguments at the CP District Committee were multifaceted, dealing with the politics of not only 'the Socialists, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxembourg, Gramsci and others but also other great theorists, economics and labour history', from the huge library of books that seemed to be in every room at his home. He loved debate and discussion. 'The CP District Committee meetings often seemed to resemble a battlefield with table-banging and shouting. But they all remained comrades'.<sup>14</sup> Horace

always had a steady hand to control the flow of debate. However, his tolerance of differing views seems to have changed in the latter years of his term of office as District Secretary, although he never lost his belief that the working class through its organisations would advance its own unity through alliances in the social and political spheres.

**Crisis in world communism**

Holding to his conviction in 'the Soviet Union as a workers' state in a period of long transition', he still felt that, in the words of the song he had learned at Socialist Sunday School as a child, 'Faint in the East, behold the dawn appears'. However, this was not an uncritical adulation. He accepted that there were massive crimes committed under Stalin and that false arguments had prevented the CP from coming to terms with the truth about these issues. He would still, however, argue often with others on the left, outside the CP, that:

'the Soviet Union was clearly not a bourgeois state, it was a workers' state. Although the ruling class was not the proletariat nor was it a workers' democracy, it was firmly at an intermediate state towards socialism and essential to the furtherance of socialism in the world'.<sup>15</sup>

He was District Secretary during the biggest crisis for the Communist Party in 1956, the Soviet Union's armed intervention in Hungary against a people's revolt demanding political changes. Although it had little effect within the CP in the North East, with its strong industrial base, elsewhere in the country the Hungarian crisis had a devastating effect on the CP. Locally, it put him on the spot with many non-CP left-wing individuals. As a Communist party functionary, intensely committed to his Party and democratic centralism, he attempted to explain the position of its leadership. He felt it was more complex then than now with retrospective information:

Hungary had suppressed socialism prior to the War and its fascist regime was part of the Axis, the Americans were active through Radio

Free Europe, the cold war at its height and amongst communists a fear of subversion by the west.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, he had supported internally the minority report questioning the Soviet intervention through his association with the CP History Group, finally however accepting Party discipline. It was, he accepted, a most difficult time, during which 'many good comrades left the Party'.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, alternative left opinions and analysis existed, both in and more particularly outside the CP. However, Horace never lost his love of the dialectic and therefore seemed to retain the friendship, trust, and respect that he had for other opinion and analysis on the left. Apart from the Anti-Nazi League and other anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations, Horace was present and active in all other progressive campaigns, such as CND, Anti-Apartheid and the various International Solidarity campaigns.

He was always keen to encourage young people to have an interest in politics and particularly socialism, in the late 1950s, under his guidance the District Committee assisted in restoring the North East YCL. The close and personal nature of Party membership was evident in the YCL. His daughter Anne joined when she was 15, in 1957, and a number of other CP members' children joined more or less at the same time. Lucy Nicholson, for example, joined at this time with her brother Albert. Her parents Ted and Grace, Party stalwarts, were close friends of the Greens. Lucy recollected that:

'When remembering Horace Green it is his voice I clearly recall. He belonged to that group of men who had survived war and had come to appreciate peace and all that it implied. The voice I hear in my head spoke in the language of logic, he could argue as a Marxist and make complete sense of universal truths. We were a mixed bag of social and physical types; engineers, electricians, panel beaters, secretaries, shop workers, students, sewing machinists, lecturers, and artists. Long hair and roll your own tobacco in tins marked you as a person of intellect. There was much sitting about sharing ideas and planning revolutions. Horace

appeared to be a noble soul amidst the group of us. We knew he was a man who had given up his daytime job to become a full-time worker for the party, and was highly respected among us. We were a little in awe of his knowledge and intellect, although a self-educated man, he was respected by members of the so-called 'intelligentsia' who would come and visit from the university'.

Socials and jumble sales seemed to be the way forward to paying for the revolution (and his wages). Although what manner of revolution we could have from the £15 made on a Saturday at the jumble sale, it was going to be a long wait. The socials would happen at Horace and Nora's house or at our house which was rather further out of town. As I recall and look back, they were quite innocent affairs, when you peeped into a room filled with men from the Party, it would just be a sea of green and beige as most men appeared to dress entirely from Greenwoods; their concession to being bold was donning a red tie.<sup>18</sup>

Joe Keith has recollected his first encounter with Horace in early 1970, when he was a young trade union activist:

'I had occasion to visit the People's Bookshop, the CP office in Westgate Road, Newcastle. After a discussion with Horace about the Party, political developments and my own industrial 'activity', as I was then working on the buildings, I decided to join the Party. This I remember was on a Thursday and Horace was putting together the Party 'periodicals' for posting to a wide variety of Party and non-Party people. But he took time to talk and listen.

After joining the CP, it was thanks to his encouragement that I was elected to the District Committee a position I held for many years. At his suggestion, my name was put forward by the Party to the Novosti Press Agency office in London, who produced *Soviet Weekly*, for the position of circulation representative for the Northern District and I held that position for five years.



During this period Horace introducing me to trade unionists, others on the left and, of course, various Party people throughout the Region. He was always helpful and supportive, especially after I became CP District Industrial Organiser and, eventually in the 1980s, District Secretary.<sup>19</sup>

Horace was also active in the 'change factors' within the CP of the mid-1970s. He became involved, both inside and outside the CP, with the critique of what was termed Eurocommunism. He nevertheless argued from a position of having read and discussed Gramsci, whose writings were used by this faction in the CP. These arguments often surfaced at the 'socials' at his home.

### Comrades

These, which in the past had been Party affairs, were now the place where friends of Nora and Horace came together to eat and drink, discuss, sing and have a good evening. Like Horace, they were non-sectarian. Among those attending were leading trade unionists, both rank and file members and full-time officials, Labour Party and of course CP activists, academics, and 'arty people' (as one shop steward put it) like Sid and René Chaplin, Frank Graham, and Alex and Paddy Glasgow. Interestingly, some of his non-political neighbours were also present. The discussions, if one could call them such, were always small groups, brief, impromptu and open. Anyway, on this occasion, he disputed the opinions of those in the Movement who contended that the need for change meant reducing the industrial and trade union 'power' in its organisations. He disagreed that the 'left trade union and political leadership' was out of touch with the real changes in working people's lives and attitudes.

Horace was, as we shall see later, deeply involved with trade union action, and its organisation and core values. These were difficult times; by the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the tensions both at national and local level between the so called 'neo-Gramscians' and the industrial organisation were deeply affecting the CP. Locally, this period was also a

time of reassessment of the form that support for the Soviet Union should take. Joe Keith has recalled that:

'During the latter part of Horace's term as District Secretary, he came under attack from the party "young comrades" who wanted changes. Needless to say, there will be many who will disagree with my evaluation of Horace and his removal as District Secretary. But in my opinion, while it was political it was not on distinct theory or practical terms. It had more to do with the arguments between "supporters right or wrong" of the Soviet Union and those who saw the 'British Road To Socialism' as the way forward. The latter group underestimated the "supporters of change" who over a given time had organised and built up a machine to oppose the past District policy position and remove Horace.



*Retirement party with Horace Green third from right.  
Author John Creaby can be seen third from left in the centre*

Despite what must have been a difficult period for him he kept his dignity and stood by his principles in his normal quiet manner. Although it must have been extremely hard and disappointing for him, he never lost his beliefs about the working class, its organisations, the Soviet Union or indeed how someone should face adversity.'

1982 Horace 'resigned', taking retirement. At the social evening held in his honour, as well as CP comrades there were Labour Party and trade union friends in attendance, particularly all the Regional Executive members and full-time officials of his own union. A number of aspects of Horace's life and times merit closer inspection

### Trade union struggle

Horace did not hold with the idea that the battle for socialism would be solely or simply fought out in terms of concepts, principles or, for that matter, left politics, although he did not minimise their importance. Just as important were the specific issues and struggles in the workplace. He had a long and strong commitment to the trade union movement. After arriving in the North East, he had transferred into the CAWU Branch in Newcastle, where a friendship developed with Arthur Blenkinsop (Labour MP for Newcastle East 1945-59, South Shields 1964-79). He also renewed his old ILP Guild of Youth comradeship with Ted Fletcher, his union's full-time official. Fletcher, a left-wing activist, had become a Newcastle Labour Councillor in 1952, and was to become MP for Darlington in 1964.

However, Horace also developed close associations in the broad trade union movement of the North East. Ted Nicholson introduced him to the leading activists of the growing shop stewards' movement, from which he developed a long friendship with its leading advocate, Jim Murray, the Vickers Convenor. Dave Atkinson, a highly respected trade union official, especially in the influential Newcastle and District Trades Council on which he was to serve for over 30 years, introduced him to the officers.

From this Horace developed an excellent working relationship with both full-time and rank and file representatives. He especially recognised the effectiveness of Trades Councils. His union branch even made a special request to the Head Office of CAWU for Horace to be allowed to be the delegate to the Trades Council, to no avail. However he did regularly attend, though not as a delegate as he remained disallowed by his union's Rule. It was here that he became associated with Don Edwards, an ETU Official who was Trades Council Secretary.

His role as District Secretary included reporting industrial matters to the *Daily Worker* (renamed in 1966 the *Morning Star*), the left-wing daily newspaper with a direct connection to the CP. Attending many picket lines, meeting the leading shop stewards and officials, he was a person they could trust to put their case in print. His home was the place for an overnight stop by official *Daily Star*/ *Morning Star* reporters, and often also visiting shop stewards from a strike elsewhere. He also reported successful 'non-dispute' negotiations as 'it is always a hardship for workers to strike'. This was total and unconditional support.

Often Horace would be called upon at the Trades Council to add to a request for support from a Strike Committee, as he had met the key members. As he was unable to be a delegate, his information was given 'in a personal capacity'. In 1973, in recognition of his commitment to the labour movement, he was awarded the Tom Aisbitt gold medal by Newcastle Trades Council. Named after a rank and file Trades Council activist and founder member of the CP, the award was given for 'meritorious service to trades unionism and the labour movement in the area'. For the most part it has been awarded to delegates to the Trades Council, but it was given to him as a 'regular most welcome visitor'.

Horace found it easy to settle into his own union, the Newcastle General Branch of the CAWU. The members who attended were 'mostly politically motivated with left-wing inclinations'. This, as has already been noted, was in a 'right-wing union'. Nevertheless this branch continuously supported left issues, though it was usually unsuccessful at shifting the

Union's policies! At his first meeting, the question of German rearmament was being discussed. A long-standing member of the branch, who had a mistrust of communists, remembered that 'Horace sat quietly at the back after being introduced by Ted [Fletcher]. When he did speak, he had a broad Yorkshire twang, but spoke sense about the rearmament issue. It wasn't a 'red' rant'.<sup>20</sup>

This was to be the first of many times that Horace would be shown to have a balanced view, but from a left perspective. From this time, members of his union branch were to have great respect for him, even though some disagreed with him, but not many and not very often! He was to become Branch Secretary, delegate to the Area Council, and delegate to the WEA. He was also elected to the Executive Committee, and in 1966 to the position of Area Treasurer. All this was achieved in spite of the discriminatory Rule. From the 1960s he was, within CAWU, to progress the same approach to rank and file action and negotiations as discussed above. However he was also recognised as a lay official of the union and this boosted the confidence of the members involved.

At the Northern Area election in 1974, Horace was elected over two others in a postal branch ballot to the National Executive Council (NEC). He was to retain this position, unopposed, until 1980, in spite of the infamous Rule 13, which meant that at two places on the ballot paper it had the words 'A member of the Communist Party of Great Britain'. He was the first CP member to be elected to the NEC, and was welcomed at his first meeting by other left and left-of-centre members. The right wing was beginning to be balanced. At the APEX National Conference that year, with Horace sitting on the platform, the contentious Rule 13 was removed.<sup>21</sup> Now Horace could influence the policy-making agenda, and use his national status to give even greater support to fellow members. Dennis Morgan, APEX Area Organiser recollected that:

'Horace was ever-present during strikes and demonstrations. I recall watching the ground freeze over at Annfield Plain, RHP ball bearing factory, with him chewing

only 'Fishermen's Friends' a kind of peppermint lozenge! It was two in the morning and we were all waiting to picket a single truck arriving from Newark. He was also an invaluable guide to who was who and those who could be relied upon, one way or the other, in the North East trades union movement. He was often (despite his revolutionary spirit) the calming mind when there was disarray, particularly when the Area was wrestling with its parlous finances. And of course ever supportive when we were 'in trouble' with the National Executive'.<sup>22</sup>

The union at national level had on occasions questioned the 'political and industrial approach of the Northern Area Officials'. Horace's support for trade unionists in the region is an unending list, but in his own union he felt two actions were significant - the Coles Cranes' occupation and the Grunwick strike.



*Horace Green (left) on Coles Crane march*

### Coles Cranes, Sunderland

In the early 1970s, there was a shift away from the usual strike action against redundancies or a hostile employer, to the occupation of workplaces. The one that caught the attention of everyone was the 'work in' at the UCS shipyard in Glasgow, but every region had companies where workers took this form of action, most lasting days or at most a few weeks. In the North East, Coles Cranes in Sunderland was the longest, at 13 weeks!

Coles Cranes was an old-established engineering company, with a workforce totally organised in their trades unions. It was bought out by Acrow, who made promises of no redundancies and honouring all agreements, but then reneged on these promises. In early January 1973, members voted for industrial action and decided to occupy the factory to the exclusion of the management. Horace, as a lay Area Executive member, attended most meetings with the members. The shop stewards of other unions also welcomed him. Faced with regular anti-occupation statements in the local press, the Committee agreed to publish a broadsheet outlining their case. To make a 'professional job of it', Horace introduced them to Jim Arnison, the *Morning Star's* respected Northern Correspondent, who was covering the dispute. Arnison put the Committee in touch with supportive reporters and photographers in Newcastle, who produced the newspaper-style copy. He also gave them the names of print union contacts at the Co-operative Press in Manchester, where eventually the broadsheet was produced 'at cost only'! Through his Branch, Horace also co-ordinated collections in APEX and other unions. The action was successful, with the redundancies rescinded and all agreements restored. By special invitation, he was requested to attend the Victory March and Mass Meeting in Sunderland in March 1973.

### Grunwick Strike, London 1976-78

The strike for union recognition at Grunwick, a small photographic processing company that used the Royal Mail for its receipt and return service was unique in many ways. The workers were overwhelmingly of

East African Asian and West Indian background, mainly women, not in a union and with little or no experience of trade unions. The working situation was so bad that 137 workers felt they had no alternative but to walk out. Horace played a significant role, both nationally on the NEC and locally, in supporting their struggle. He attended the picket on numerous occasions when in London on union business, and was well-known to the strike committee. During the period of the strike the North East was to be well represented on 'weekend flying picketing'. Horace would meet the APEX representatives and the 'solidarity contingents'. It was, however, the mass pickets by thousands of trades unionists that hit the headlines. It was now that the Special Patrol Group (SPG) of the police, set up for anti-terrorism, was used, with shades of what was to come in 1984-85. The violence of the police action astonished many of those attending the picket, most of whom had never been on any demonstration. One incident in which Horace was directly involved related to a TV cameraman filming the police action. He was arrested. Brian Matthews, an APEX Area Executive Member at the time, recalled:

'The police were keeping back the mass picket, allowing only a few pickets in front of the gate. This was not very effective as Grunwick was using a bus to bring in those still working. The police stated that if you stepped off the path into the road, you'd be arrested. Just then a BBC cameraman, looking for his reporter, stepped off the path and was subsequently arrested: camera and all! This was witnessed by Horace [Green], Trish [Renwick, Newcastle General], Paul Jones of Vickers Branch and myself. The reporter came along looking for his cameraman, and we showed him sitting on the police bus with other arrested pickets. We agreed to be his witnesses regarding the obstruction charge. Weeks later in London, all expenses paid, we were there in court as his witness called there by the BBC lawyers representing the cameraman, who was proven not guilty of any offence'.<sup>23</sup>

The strike, the political role of the media, the mass pickets, the severe police action, business and political backing for the management, the legal

morass, and how the strike was eventually lost, have all been well-debated and documented, and are a part of trade union history.<sup>24</sup> However, what Horace was clear about, and always cited with reference to the strike, was that although there were different opinions about the reasons for the strike being lost, regardless of ethnic background or culture, workers were united at the Grunwick picket.

### Retirement and APEX Gold Badge

Due to a Rule Amendment in 1980, NEC members over 65 years had to retire, and so Horace had to relinquish his seat. He was then given the highest award of the Union, the APEX Gold Badge, which was presented only to members who had given exceptional service at all levels of the union. In his acceptance speech, he began by saying:

‘I suppose I don’t have to say of which Party I am a member in this instance. No need to, never was! (Laughter)...Branches are the most important organ of the Area and the Union. My branch, Newcastle General Branch, plays a major role in our region, in the Trades Councils, in the Labour Party, in the Northern Area Council...all its officers are active young women holding positions in those bodies...I am proud of the Northern Area: not the biggest Area in the Union, but to me it’s the most important and by god we’ve done a job!’

He then referred to the many struggles of the membership against hostile and difficult employers and ‘latterly, government policies’. He concluded with thanks to his wife and family and ‘all comrades who have given me support’. His final point was that ‘I have always been, and I am still, proud to be a Bolshevik!’

There was a spontaneous standing ovation, which is not a usual occurrence at trade union conferences. It showed the heartfelt admiration for his service to the union and the movement by delegates from across Britain.

Horace remained Area Treasurer, never opposed for the position, until he resigned in 1983. His attendance at meetings began to decline and by

the mid-1980s had ceased. The illness that was to blight him until his death in 1995, Alzheimer’s, a cruel disease which gradually destroys the mind, taking away all memories and intellect, had begun to show. With his wife, he moved to Cumbria to be with their family.

Everyone who knew Horace Green recognised his honesty and forthright opinions which made him universally respected. He had an unwavering allegiance to, and belief in the working class. This led him to see that the Soviet model was inappropriate for advanced capitalist societies which had broad State formations and developed political and trade union organisations. This did not change his support for the Soviet Union, nor his firm belief that Britain needed a Communist Party. Belonging to a generation whose ideals arose from reading Paine, Defoe, Hazlitt, Swift, Morris, Blatchford, Huxley, Wells, Heine, alongside Marx, Engels and other Marxist polemics, he was as likely to discuss paintings or music as political theory or practice at a social gathering. His taste for culture was unpredictable and his love of poetry unrestricted. Few knew that he wrote poetry, under the pen name Crispin, and also a regular children’s column for the *Morning Star*. Another of his loves was history, of the local North East, Britain and the world, both past and contemporary. He read avidly, and was a member or associate of various History Societies, including the Communist Party History Group, the socialist history group History Workshop, and of course the North East Labour History Society. Many individuals in the North East have reason to remember him with gratitude and respect. As his daughter Anne said at his funeral, although he faced hostility for his political beliefs:

‘he could always win respect from people of all walks of life, political and religious persuasion. His belief in Communism was a sincere belief in a better world for future generations... A place where humanity was able to fulfil its true potential and all men and women would be equal.’

It is such as he who have made the labour movement! He had a fundamental faith in socialism as more than economics, a way of life.

## Notes

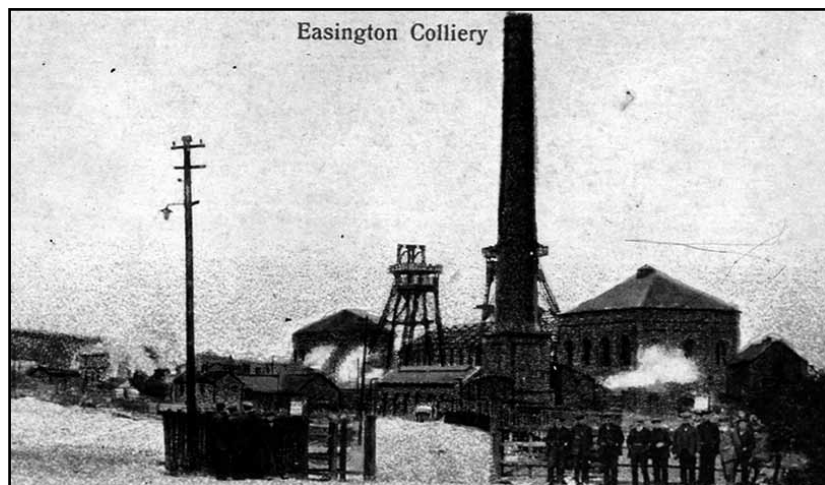
- 1 From the funeral oration, given by his daughter Ann Comb. (no further references)
- 2 From notes found in Horace Green's files
- 3 Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn, John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, Communist Party Biographical Project Database (Moscow Archives), Manchester University. (SRC Data Archive)
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 Green, unfinished notes, p3; Morgan, et al., p1.; see also Green's letter, 'Bradford ILP', in *History Workshop Journal* 10 (1980), pp 218-19.
- 6 Green, unfinished notes, SRC Data Archive, p3
- 7 Morgan et al., p1
- 8 Interview with Anne Comb, Horace's daughter, 8 March 2010.
- 9 Renton D., 'Chris Mullard and Black Radicalism 1968-73', *Journal of the North East Labour History Society* 36 (2005), 79-89.
- 10 Interview with Chris Mullard, 22 April 2010. Mullard became Newcastle CRC organizer in 1968 at the age of twenty-two. His book *Black Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973) written at the time of his resignation from the CRC in 1973, defined the differences between compromise integration and rights. He went on to have an academic career, publishing extensively on racism, the state, employment and society. Professor Mullard now leads a consultancy promoting diversity in all its aspects.
- 11 Quoted in D. Renton, *Colour Blind? Race and Migration in North East England Since 1945* (Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2007), p164
- 12 Private letter to author, August 2010. Neville Hancock followed on from Horace as CP District Secretary for a short period.
- 13 Newcastle City Council was won by Labour in 1945, and then the Conservatives in the early 1950s. Labour won it again in 1958, only to lose in 1967. It did not regain control until 1973, with Local Government reorganisation.
- 14 Hancock.
- 15 Discussion with author, 1975
- 16 *ibid*
- 17 Interview, 1975. Although I have no reference in my notes, I do recall that he was saddened that individuals like the Marxist historian Edward Thompson, a greatly-respected comrade of his in Yorkshire, had left the Party at this time.
- 18 Interview with Lucy (Nicholson) Falkenau, 2010.
- 19 Interview with Joe Keith, 2010. CP Northern District Secretary, 1984-91. Degree course in Government & Public Policy, a tutor to shop stewards for the TGWU, then a full-time officer ending up as Senior Regional Industrial Organiser until his retirement.
- 20 Discussion with author
- 21 Creaby J. *Geordie Clerks Unite!: A Centenary History of the Newcastle and Gateshead*

- Branch of the Clerk's Union. 1908 -2008*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: GMB/APEX Newcastle General Branch & Thompson Solicitors, 2009).
- 22 Interview with Dennis Morgan. APEX Northern Area Organiser 1972-89.
- 23 Note from Brian Matthews to author 1980.
- 24 See Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *The Clerks: A History of APEX, 1890-1989* (Oxford: Malthouse, 1997), and Jack Dromey and Graham Taylor, *Grunwick: The Workers' Story* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973).

# THE BIRTH OF EASINGTON COLLIERY

## Harry Barnes

The first attempt to dig for coal near the coast at Easington was in 1836, but it was abandoned when a bed of sand was hit.<sup>1</sup> It was not until 1899 that a fresh effort was made to sink a pit some 700 yards inland from the cliffs which lead to its rocky beach. The 1891 census shows that the area of almost two and a quarter square miles, which today makes up the territory of the Easington Colliery Parish, was then populated by only sixty-one people.<sup>2</sup> The resident workforce was made up of ten farmers, a paid agricultural labourer, a bricklayer and his daughter who was the bookkeeper at the brickworks, and two HM Coast Guards who originated from Cornwall and Devon. There were also a number of labourers, working for example as quarrymen, who travelled into the area from what became known as Easington Village, to differentiate it from the Colliery. At its peak in the early 1930s, the Colliery reached an estimated population of 10,000.<sup>3</sup> Yet the great bulk of these were crammed into one-third of what eventually became the designated Colliery Parish.



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The site chosen for sinking the pit fell roughly half-way between the coastal towns of Sunderland and Hartlepool, which are 16 miles apart. There was no direct land link between the two towns along the coast until a connecting railway line for heavy goods traffic was opened in 1905. So while Sunderland and Hartlepool enjoyed a road link through the Village area of Easington, two miles inland from the new pit, the initial small mining community found itself to be in a rather isolated spot. Not until 1912 did Easington Colliery's own passenger station come into operation, bringing with it direct links to a limited number of neighbouring collieries and to the two towns.<sup>4</sup> The rail link supplied the main outlet for the shipment of coal from the pit, especially to the nearby port at Seaham Harbour. Until it was built, the main access to neighbouring territory was along what was initially an ancient track called Seaside Lane. Travel from the area of the pit was uphill, by foot or, if lucky, by horse-driven cart. The lane ran from the beach, past the site of the pit and onward inland to Easington Village, a settlement which goes back to Anglo-Saxon times and which became a centre for the wider Easington District, when in 1903 new Council Offices were opened on its section of Seaside Lane.<sup>5</sup> The District Council had previously held its meetings in the Village's workhouse.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its poor communications, in geographical terms Easington's pit was being sunk in the vicinity of a wide range of established collieries. In 1899, no fewer than eight other pits existed within a direct distance of five miles. Some of these were combinations of linked mines, coke works and brickworks. They had all come into operation between 1833 and 1869.<sup>7</sup> Due to the growth of coal mining, the population of the wider Easington District expanded massively, from 3,857 in 1831 to 49,480 in 1901.<sup>8</sup> It became the District with the highest proportion of miners in its male population of any in County Durham.<sup>9</sup>

Travel to all the established neighbouring pits could initially only be obtained through Easington Village. The nearest accessible pits were those at Shotton and Murton Collieries just three miles away, but twice as far

to travel. Connections to the pits directly to the north in the Seaham area involved the use of lengthy circular routes. So while there were numbers of colliery areas close enough for miners to be recruited from, casual contact back with such areas was difficult though not impossible.

Then between 1900 and 1904, a mine was sunk only a mile and a half south of the Easington site at Horden Colliery. This neighbouring development was also starting from scratch with its own small pioneering community. Even when Horden pit was up and running, the early pathways between the two areas were difficult to use.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, although Dawdon pit was opened just over two miles north of the Easington site in 1907, the two colliery areas never acquired a direct road nor passenger rail link.<sup>11</sup> So initially Easington Colliery was blocked in by the sea to the east, poor communications to the south, and long circular routes to the north. The only feasible line of communication was westward to the Village.

### Easington community

The village had no coal mine of its own and differed in character from the mining communities from which most of Easington's early miners emerged. Nevertheless, it provided Colliery residents with their main lifeline. This included the use of Seaside Lane down to the Colliery by tradesmen from the Village and beyond. The facilities the Village provided were shown in the census returns for 1891.<sup>12</sup> 904 people were resident in the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Mary's, which covered the Village and its surrounding rural areas. There were butchers, dressmakers, a blacksmith, a policeman and a solicitor. There were also public houses, an elementary school, Anglican and Catholic Churches and a Wesleyan Chapel. However, although it was a picturesque area with a Village Green and a prominent twelfth-century Parish Church, the Village was less than idyllic. In addition to its workhouse for the destitute, a Rural District Report of 1899 revealed that 'almost the whole of the property in the Back Inn, Easington is in an insanitary condition and in one instance there is

a case of overcrowding where three adults and three children occupy one small upstairs room'.<sup>13</sup> A medical officer's report of 1901 gave details of insanitary conditions in eight cottages and a private house.<sup>14</sup> Another, in 1909, gave details of unacceptable conditions at Cardwell Terrace pointing out that 'the contents of privy middens have to be removed through the houses' and 'the backyard pavements are dilapidated'. For the wider Easington Rural District area it stated that there was an 'excessive infant mortality rate...chiefly due to diarrhoea'.<sup>15</sup> Drawing from the *Easington Past and Present* collection of the remembrances of people in the area who were born around 1900, Huw Beynon and Terry Austrin quote a woman as saying

'it was an agricultural village. Nothing else, you see. There would be a saddler, who would repair harnesses, and an old cobbler. Then there was a tailor, a butcher, a tinsmith - he used to make tins to bake your bread in, or cake tins or anything. He used to go round selling them to the different collieries...[making]...old-fashioned pit tin bottles'.<sup>16</sup>

Due to its initial slow growth, it took time for the Colliery area to develop equivalent facilities. On 16 March 1899 an agreement was signed between the Easington Coal Company and Joseph Green, an engineer from Ferryhill.<sup>17</sup> It provided for the latter to sink three pit shafts of between 300 and 500 yards as a means of gaining access to the rich coal seams which ran out under the bed of the North Sea from the coast at Easington.<sup>18</sup> Just four weeks later, an opening ceremony was held.<sup>19</sup> Sinking the pit began near a farm called Rise Bridge. On the opposite side to the farm and slightly more inland, two rows of terraced single-storey wooden huts were set up, placed near the pit site to cater for the first pit workers and their families. Huts were also constructed on the farmland for railway navvies, and for their foreman and his family. Railway workers were needed as rail lines and wagons were to be placed on the pit site and work would be required on the construction of the local section of the main railway line. Part of the railway line was constructed next to the





*Easington before (above) and after the colliery was opened*



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plans Durham 21,16 (2<sup>nd</sup>  
and 3<sup>rd</sup> editions*

farm itself. The local brickyard also operated in the vicinity, supplying material for buildings on the pit site such as the engine room.

### Working the mine

Details of the workforce on the site are revealed in the Census conducted on 31 March 1901, just two years after Miss Barwick, the daughter of the Chairman of the Easington Coal Company, had cut the first sod.<sup>20</sup> 229 people are shown as living in the appropriate enumeration area, of whom

ninety-three were employed. Seventy-two worked at the pit including thirty-eight sinkers, engineers, fitters, hewers and an errand boy. A cart man, Thomas Jameson, was killed on the site a few months later when he was run over by his tip wagon. Two sinkers, Robert Arthur and William Curry, had been the first fatalities in February 1900, less than a year after work started on the site. A large bucket which had also been their means of passage down the shaft was filled with stones and then crashed into them at the shaft bottom.<sup>21</sup> The first three killed at the pit were aged between twenty-two and twenty-six. In the pit's full 94-year life, from the start of its sinking, a total of 194 are recorded as being killed, including a seven-year-old boy Kenneth Musgrove, killed in 1929 following an accident when climbing up the pit heap from the sea shore. Eighty-one were killed in a major pit disaster in 1951.<sup>22</sup> Other than miners, eleven men worked as railway navvies, three as brickyard workers, and there was the farmer at Rise Bridge. This brings the total male workforce to eighty-seven. Only six females aged between fourteen and twenty are given job descriptions, two as dressmakers and the others as domestic workers. The male-female divide in paid employment would become a strong characteristic of the growth of the Colliery area. The youngest people recorded as being employed were John Bell the errand boy and Elizabeth Horricks, a housemaid, who were both fourteen. In 1900 the age for boys being able to work in coal mines had been raised from twelve to thirteen, while the school leaving age was raised from eleven to twelve in 1901.

The miners lived in thirty-six properties. In most cases they had enjoyed previous links with other areas of County Durham. Among those recorded as being heads of households, twenty-two were born in the County, while another ten had married local women and/or had children born in the area. Only four fell into a different category, yet three of these had been born in neighbouring counties. The only family with a more distant background was that of Thomas Bell who originated from Montgomeryshire where three of his four children were born. His wife came from Oxfordshire and their youngest son was born

in Flintshire. Bell was a pit sinker and the family took in four boarders who were also sinkers. In all, ten people lived in three rooms and it was Bell's two daughters who were the local dressmakers. The background of the Colliery's early inhabitants illustrates that the massive influx of people from far and wide seeking work in the Durham Coalfield had begun to pass its peak. The population of the County rose from 59,765 in 1801 to 419,782 in 1901, but then its growth lost momentum.<sup>23</sup> The descendants of the early settlers increasingly provided the new generation of mineworkers and miners' wives. The vast majority of local miners were the sons of Durham County miners who had themselves married local miners' daughters.<sup>24</sup> The birthplaces of the children of the Easington miners showed that many of their fathers had moved around the County in search of work. Thomas Green, for example, came from Stanhope, but his four children were born at Brancepeth, Oakenshaw, West Stanley and Bearpark, all settlements in the County.

This pattern of Durham miners populating Easington Colliery is also apparent in the following census of 1911.<sup>25</sup> Although there were telling exceptions, these should not be used to obscure the general rule. In the 142 terraced houses and huts where miners lived, all but ten entries for the heads of the households show previous connections with County Durham. 106 were born in the County and twenty-six others had wives and/or children born in the area, other than in Easington itself. The exceptions to the rule included three miners from Ireland, three from Staffordshire and one each from Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Northumberland. However, one miner and his wife with a son born in Durham had initially come from Russia and the family retained Russian citizenship, while another was an Austrian citizen whose wife came from the neighbouring Murton Colliery. Nevertheless, the great bulk of Easington's miners belonged to Durham County and had generally been on the move from pit to pit in the area, as is shown by the records of their children's birth places.

### Part of the union

In Easington Colliery's early years, the workforce was not large enough to warrant a separate Miners' Lodge, but we see the influence of the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) in the agreement signed by Joseph Green in 1898, laying down that 'the daily wage paid by the contractor to his Sinkers and other Workmen shall be subject to the same amount of rise and fall as may be settled by the Coal Owners and the Miners Association for the County of Durham'.<sup>26</sup>

The DMA was founded in 1869, and its influence in the Easington District is illustrated by the career of John Wilson who in the same year set up a local Lodge at Haswell, just four miles inland from the site where Easington's pit emerged. Although he was sacked for his Union activities at Haswell, he went on to become the first elected Agent of the DMA and its General Secretary from 1896 to 1915.<sup>27</sup> Haswell pit itself was closed in 1896. By the time a Lodge was finally established at Easington in 1911, 86% of the mineworkers in the Durham Coalfield were members of the DMA or of its allied bodies.<sup>28</sup>

The sinking of the pit at Easington slowed down soon after the initial burst of activity. Only fifteen extra workers were taken on at the pit in the year after the 1901 Census.<sup>29</sup> An inrush of water and sand in January 1902 choked the pumps and stopped the sinking of the pit, as 500 feet of water bearing limestone was discovered to be covering the local coal seams.<sup>30</sup> Efforts were made to overcome the problem, with various continental engineers contracted to use freezing techniques.<sup>31</sup> But then a sinker, Robert Atkinson, was drowned by an inrush of water in 1904, while other workers escaped. Atkinson's body was not discovered for a further three or four years.<sup>32</sup> The delays and expense placed the Easington Coal Company in financial difficulties. Operations ceased for a period in 1904, and the Company was effectively taken over by the Weardale Steel, Coal and Coke Company, although it continued to operate under its original name, and members of the Barwick family retained the Chairmanship until the mines were nationalised in 1947.<sup>33</sup>

### Local population

The halt in the growth of the Colliery area's population is illustrated by the local electoral register for 1905, which was compiled with a qualifying date of 31 July 1904.<sup>34</sup> There are, however, limits on using the register as a source. It underestimates the exact position. Only men who were 'qualifying householders' had the vote. Due to the form of property-ratepayer qualification in operation, it is estimated that nationally only 60% of the adult male population were entitled to registration rights.<sup>35</sup> On top of this, registration in the Easington Colliery area required a visit to the Council Offices at the Village, during what were often the pit's working hours, nor was a Miners' Lodge yet established to mobilise registration. The register lists only forty-three local male householders as having the vote, at a time when there would then have been two to three times as many houses in the area. Only thirteen householders are registered from the thirty Sinkers' Huts.

The register also shows that some progress had been made in building brick houses in the vicinity of the pit, with four rows of terraced houses being started next to the south side of Seaside Lane. Just twenty-six householders were registered to vote in this area, although when the four streets were eventually completed they would contain 104 houses. The Colliery Manager, William Bramwell Wilson, was also registered at Horden Dene, a house in its own grounds which was then set back 400 yards from the nearest Colliery houses. Later, when rows of miners' houses had filled in the 400 yard gap, Horden Dene was passed over to the Under-Manager and a new and larger house in its own grounds was built for the Colliery Manager a further 400 yards away at Dene Villa. Just one person was registered in a terraced row of Railway Cottages which were then being built in the vicinity of the eventual railway station. The thin nature of the population in this period is shown by Beynon and Austrin in a quotation from Bob ('Skipper') Allen of his memory of being an eight-year-old when he hitched a ride on a butcher's store cart from South Hetton to Easington Colliery. In travelling down Seaside Lane, he said,

'There wasn't a house. The only brickwork there was near the water works [built in 1898 *HB*]. Still we went down , all trees going down until we came to where the Diamond is now [a prominent public house built in 1912 and now closed *HB*] and that's where a makeshift road started. No houses anywhere mind. We went down to the Colliery... there were the streets of sinkers' huts. Five houses in Front Street South were up. That was in 1905.'<sup>36</sup>

Despite the stalled growth, the small population had started to build its own communal infrastructure. The Primitive Methodists had formed a society by 1903, meeting in supporters' homes. It was claimed that these meetings were overflowing, with those attending spilling up over the stairs and rousing 'the streets around with their singing'.<sup>37</sup> It was only once the technical problems which had hindered the sinking of the pit were being overcome, by 1909, that the Colliery's house building programme came back to the fore, in anticipation of the pit at last becoming productive. It was widely recognised that the 'new coal pit...being sunk at Easington... is likely to become one of the most important in the country'.<sup>38</sup> In July, Easington Rural District Council adopted fresh proposals for building twenty-eight terraced houses in what would become Fifth Street and within the next two years they approved over forty building projects. While some of these were for single properties, in March 1911 the plans covered a further 498 houses to be built in terraces by the Easington Coal Company, whose main contractor was Mr Herbert E. Pitt of Sunderland.<sup>39</sup>

The pit buzzer was blown for the first time in February 1910, the first working seams were reached in July, and the first coal was drawn in September.<sup>40</sup> The speed of subsequent growth is illustrated by the fact that a temporary corrugated building used to house the first elementary school experienced overcrowding in March and April 1911, with eleven children being refused admission and a second temporary building having to be opened. A mixed infant school had been in operation from 22 August 1910, initially accommodating 220 children. As the numbers

rose separate morning and afternoon sessions were put into operation. On 8 January the situation was relieved by having the boys placed in a separate temporary school building.<sup>41</sup>

The Easington Colliery Miners' Lodge made its first financial contribution of £67.1s.8d to the DMA in the first quarter of 1911.<sup>42</sup> Just two days after the quarter ended, the 1911 census was taken.<sup>43</sup> It provides a picture of Easington as it was commencing its take-off. At that



*Seaside Lane  
(future colliery  
main road,  
probably 1902)*

time the enumeration area shows 168 occupied dwellings, yet 151 newly constructed houses remained uninhabited and 113 additional homes were under construction. All but fourteen of the total of 432 properties were built for the Easington Coal Company as tied homes for their employees - although as we shall see, a few of those houses were at the time being used for other purposes. The only exceptions to the monopoly of the Coal Company were eight railway cottages, three farms, the Station Hotel (opened in 1904, eight years before the passenger station came in operation nearby), a hut on the sea beach occupied by a hermit and Stanley House. In the latter, Ellen Young ran a confectionery business and her husband Thomas worked as a locomotive driver. The name of their house reflects the fact that the family had moved from West Stanley, where four of their children had been born. Only two years earlier 168 miners

had been killed in a major disaster at West Stanley. The enumerator also found two bricklayers and a miner living in a cave on the beach.

### **Miners' housing**

The great bulk of newly-built Colliery houses were concentrated in an area near the pit situated immediately to the south of Seaside Lane. It was to become known locally as 'South', a term used by the above-quoted 'Skipper' Allen. Each house had a small backyard containing an earth closet and a coalhouse, but no gardens nor bathrooms. Plans dated 15 February 1911 for twenty-three typical terraced houses for Eleventh Street South show that the downstairs provided for a sitting room of eleven and three quarter feet by eleven feet, a kitchen fifteen by fourteen feet and a single-storey pantry, five by four feet, which jutted out into the yard and was placed seven feet from the earth closet.<sup>44</sup> The need for earth closets arose from the fact that the tender for a local sewage scheme had only been agreed by Easington Rural District on 15 December 1910.<sup>45</sup>

The comfort of such a home depended to a large extent on the size of the household. Although the average house contained six people, there were twelve properties containing between ten and fifteen people. Many others included young couples who had finally settled and would go on to raise what were then often large families. In South, ten rows of terraced Colliery houses were completed at the time of the census and two other rows were under construction. They normally had two downstairs rooms and two bedrooms, though in many crowded households downstairs accommodation doubled as sleeping space. The house in South closest to the pit was being used as a drawing office, while another was used as a lock-up. The more distant Eighth to Twelfth Streets were still unoccupied, some houses being only recently completed with others still under construction. The bottom house in Twelfth Street had been built to replace a disused powder magazine. Work was also starting on building streets between the backs of the rows of terraced houses.

The Housing Committee of Easington District Council provided a vivid description of the situation in a report on 19 December 1918, which stated that

‘three new collieries on the coast, Horden and Easington and Blackhall have fairly modern houses, but these do not possess a private bathroom with hot and cold water services. These houses are built in parallel streets with the minimum street widths, there are scarcely any gardens and too many houses are built per acre. In some cases thirty-five houses are crowded to the acre. There is no green space left, consequently the clothes must be dried in the street and the children play in the gutter. These three newest villages in the District leave much to be desired from the point of view of architecture and beauty.’<sup>46</sup>

When completed, a total of 318 houses were to be crammed into South, within exactly the above dimensions. Not one had a garden, although green fields which could have been used for expanded living space surrounded the pit in abundance. However, Easington’s relative attraction in the harsh conditions of the time was that it offered the prospect of continuing work at a long-life pit. It also offered new brick homes with an upstairs instead of the limestone rubble, and often more cramped, single-storey homes familiar to many. Given the time and opportunity, there was also access to denes and rural walkways leading to the sea cliffs and the beach. It may often have been a matter of Hobson’s choice, but many ended their previous lives as itinerant Durham mining families and settled down.

Outside South, in the 1911 Census the only dwellings in occupation which had links to the Coal Company were the original Sinkers’ Huts, four terrace houses at the beginning of a large development in Station Road, and the two houses in their own grounds for the Colliery Manager and Under-Manager. On the north side of Seaside Lane, a further fifty-five unoccupied terraced Colliery houses had been constructed, even closer to

the pit. This was the start of the housing development which would see the establishment of ‘North’. Houses here were being crammed together in the same pattern as in South. Eventually a similar development would also take place near the main railway line in an area which became known as ‘East’. Initially these streets were given numbers and not names and were otherwise designated by their geographical blocks. In North, for instance, with the eventual replacement of the Sinkers’ Huts sixteen of these numbered streets were eventually established. It was not until 1926 that they were all given individual names. The streets in North all started with the letter A, those in South with B and East with C.<sup>47</sup> Names such as Ascot Street, Byron Street, and Charles Street gave a flavour of less regimentation.

In 1911, some of the Colliery’s terraced houses were also being used temporarily to meet the growing communal needs of the area. A house in First Street South was used as a sub-post office by Robert Appleby whilst his assistant lodged with a nearby mining family. The headmaster of the local primary school, Frederic Harrison, lived in the same street with his wife. The local police constable and his family lived a few doors away, and they provided lodgings for the manager of a local grocer’s shop. The street they lived in was the most accessible one in South as it ran alongside the main thoroughfare, Seaside Lane. This social mix was, however, only a temporary arrangement.

End-houses were much sought after, since access to them was normally better than to others while roadways were being developed between streets. One was occupied by George Bloomfield, Easington Colliery’s first and recently appointed Lodge Secretary, also recently elected by the miners as their Checkweighman. He had only recently established his home in the top house of Sixth Street South, while the twenty houses below were unoccupied. His election to the trustworthy position of weight checker for the coal extracted, which determined the basis for many wage payments, might suggest his house had been obtained as a perk, but it should be noted that the property was held in the name of his stepfather. Ten people from their two families shared its cramped facilities.

### Work in the neighbourhood

In total, 310 people living locally were in employment. Only eighteen of these were female - a local assistant school teacher who was the daughter of the under-manager, the confectioner, a nurse living at the Station Hotel, two dressmakers, a cook, eleven domestic workers, and Margaret Briggs who ran 6 Railway Cottages as a boarding house (and would also be able to draw on the support of her four daughters aged fourteen to twenty-three). 257 male workers were directly employed at the pit. Fourteen others worked for contractors who were building property designated for the Easington Coal Company, nine were railway workers, four farm workers and the remainder fell into a variety of categories such as the local police constable mentioned earlier.

The shape of things to come in Easington was illustrated in the 1911 census by its buildings, other than those already mentioned. Central was, of course, the pit with its engine houses, workshops, store rooms, boiler houses and head gear, but the northern side of Seaside Lane just above the colliery houses was also developing into a major shopping area. In addition to the Haswell Co-op which had been opened the year before, eight other shops had been constructed, although their living areas were still unoccupied. The railway had two signalmen's cabins, while the new Miners' Lodge pressed for the establishment of a passenger station later in the year.<sup>48</sup> The total population of the enumeration area was 941, but in neighbouring enumeration areas another 143 adults and children were spread out in the wider surrounding territory which would gradually come to be absorbed into what people came to recognise as the Colliery area. This outer territory included sixteen dispersed farm houses, the homes of the two HM Coast Guards referred to earlier, and a cottage occupied by a fish hawk. Then there was the Thorpe Pumping Station, mentioned earlier by the young 'Skipper' Allen, which was known locally as the waterworks, a cement factory and a brand new row of privately-owned or rented terraced houses called Easington Street. These were not unlike Colliery houses in having no gardens, but they had the advantage

of being a single terraced street which was still in a rural setting, situated half a mile to the west of the pit houses, which were themselves clustered around the bottom end of Seaside Lane. Easington Street accommodated a doctor and others providing services for the new community.

### Growing into a community

At the time of the 1911 Census, Easington was moving to a stage where the nature of its colliery housing enclave was predetermined. It was also showing early signs of developing beyond this confined and crowded world. The characteristics of Durham mining communities were succinctly expressed in a BBC television documentary in 1974, when the presenter Norman Dennis pointed out that a typical colliery was 'a distinctive kind of community - the pit, the club, the union and the chapel'.<sup>49</sup> The Co-op could be added to this list. By 1911, Easington was on the verge of meeting all of these requirements. The pit was at last drawing coal; within a year a workingmen's club would open for membership; the Lodge was newly in operation; by 1913 the Methodists would start to move beyond house meetings, open-air meetings, and the use of school classrooms, into the first of their three chapels. A co-operative store had been opened even before the Lodge had affiliated to the DMA. All of these developments took place within a rapidly changing industrial and political context. As time developed and people settled, these factors would have a growing impact on Easington's development.

In 1908 the DMA affiliated permanently to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB). In 1909 the MFGB affiliated to the Labour Party. Following the two General Elections of 1910, miners were firmly established as the dominant Trade Union bloc inside the Parliamentary Labour Party. Indeed, Beatrice Webb described it as the 'Checkweighman's Party'.<sup>50</sup> In 1911 a national record was set for the total numbers of days lost in strikes. In 1912 the previous year's total was overtaken, aided by the first national strike which had ever occurred in the coal industry. The 1912 strike for a Minimum Wage brought the involvement of the

Easington Lodge into two national mining ballots and a standstill at the pit for five weeks.<sup>51</sup>

Before the strike, and just before he moved to Easington to become Lodge Secretary, George Bloomfield had an experience which helped to confirm his approach to industrial and political issues. Bloomfield was born at Browney near Durham in 1877, and became Compensation Secretary for the new Horden Lodge just to the south of Easington. The pit at Horden had moved into production in 1904, with a two-shift system coming into operation, but following the passing of the Eight Hour Act in 1908 the management decided to introduce a round the clock three-shift system, operative from 1 January 1910. The Act had been unpopular amongst Durham miners where previous agreements had often limited the time hewers spent on the coal face to six hours. The legislation was seen as giving the owners the initiative to move to eight hour shifts, claiming they had legal backing. In a household where a number of miners found themselves split up amongst all three shifts, home life would be strongly disrupted.

### **Into battle**

At the start of 1910 the miners at Horden went on unofficial strike over the issue, and rioting took place. A General Election was being held with a straight local contest between Liberal and Liberal Unionist Candidates. A Committee Room had its windows smashed and Hardwick House, the residence of the Chief Agent to Horden Collieries Ltd, was stoned.<sup>52</sup> George Bloomfield addressed a meeting of the striking miners and unsuccessfully attempted to steer them away from violence, but afterwards a club for workmen established by the Horden Company was attacked and completely destroyed. George Bloomfield and Frank Blackwell from Murton Colliery, which was also on strike, were walking up Ellison's Bank on the way out of Horden when they looked back to see smoke billowing from the Club.<sup>53</sup>

When George Bloomfield became Lodge Secretary at Easington shortly afterwards, he regularly led his members in industrial action,

but his abhorrence of violence also led him down the path of peaceful activity, and attempts at negotiated settlements. He went on to become a Methodist Lay Preacher, a Labour District and County Councillor, an Alderman, Constituency Labour Party Secretary, Ramsay MacDonald's Agent in the local constituency during the parliamentary election of 1929, and a Justice of the Peace. He persistently argued for the interests of those he represented and their families. However, just as he rejected violence in 1910 at Horden situated just immediately south of Easington, so he came to reject the revolutionary role of the Communist Party in a 1929 dispute at Dawdon Colliery just two miles north of Easington, an event fully described in an earlier edition of this journal by Stuart Howard.<sup>54</sup> The impact of the Dawdon situation upon events in Easington was also neutered by the poor physical communications between the areas outlined earlier.

Bloomfield helped to share and shape the early direction of Easington's trade union and political life. Not only did he throw his weight behind a range of official strikes, but he ran a number of unofficial disputes, including three stoppages in 1913.<sup>55</sup> However, while he could be tough against authority, he also displayed strong patriotism during the First World War with numbers of Easington miners around him joining the war effort first – and in a big rush – as volunteers, then later under conscription. Neither he nor his members showed any great sympathy for what seemed to be more distant syndicalist and Marxist ideas, which found some space at this stage in certain other Durham Mining Communities.<sup>56</sup> Instead they were generally supportive of mining solidarity to protect their well-being, whilst developing a commitment to the broad sweep of post-war Labour politics for the same purpose. In 1911 this was still a coming journey, which during Bloomfield's period as Lodge Secretary would see Sidney Webb, the pre-1931 Ramsay MacDonald, and Manny Shinwell emerging as their local Labour MPs. The foundations for this journey and for coming periods of industrial conflict had been laid during the tough years of the making of Easington Colliery.

## Acknowledgements

I have drawn fully on the archives of the Durham County Record Office, and have depended considerably upon the expertise and ready assistance of Liz Bregazzi, the County Archivist, and her staff. John Halstead, a former colleague and long-standing office holder in the Society for the Study of Labour History commented in valuable detail on an early draft. I am, of course, solely responsible for any shortcomings.

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- 2 1891 Census, Ecclesiastical Parish of St. Mary's in the Civil Parish of Easington, Durham County Record Office Microfilm M76/33 (National Archives). The Parish was not established until 1983, but the area it previously covered had operated as a District Council Ward for electoral purposes. I am grateful to Bill Day, Clerk of Easington Village Council, for supplying the information. See also S.I. 1983, No. 412, Durham County Record Office DC/AA/13.
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## AN EXTRA-MURAL EDUCATION

### Ron Curran

My first out-of-school education was through the Labour League of Youth. We affiliated to the NCLC (National Council of Labour Colleges) and later to the WEA (Workers Education Association) and invited speakers. These were usually pretty lively. Among the speakers were Dan Smith. A friend who accompanied him impressed us very much on a separate occasion. He spoke on the subject of "International Steel knows no barriers" and showed on a coloured map the grip that international steel had throughout the world in harbouring no ethics as to who they sold arms to, anywhere in the world.

He gave facts and figures indicating that British bayonets used by the Japanese killed British soldiers in the Second World War. He also said that Armstrong's Factory (armaments works at Elswick Newcastle) were being paid via Switzerland during the Second World War for selling arms abroad.

I attended week-end schools organised by the WEA on diverse subjects at the Rex Hotel Whitley Bay from economics to 'the origin of political parties in Britain' which was an eye opener. Another subject that caused an animated debate was Capitalism v Socialism.

I also attended week schools such as at Beatrice Webb House, Dorset on the subject of Nationalisation v Privatisation. I attended as a nominee from the Wallsend Women's Section. Other Week Schools were University College Oxford as a nominee from the Northumberland Colliery Mechanics Association. It was here that I met the young Michael McGahey for the first time and wrote my first poem of the event. I show this below:

## Oxford

The stately spires of Oxford with its great and oaken halls  
Its quadrangles and mansions with white and weathered walls  
The spacious grounds and gardens all splendid to behold  
But a shadow falls across its face if but the truth be told

This sanctity of privilege for sons of dukes and earls  
Is a relic of a bygone age when power was ruled by swords  
A centre of establishment which by tradition claims  
That Rank and Wealth and Heritage, society sustains

But we who sit and study in an atmosphere so fine  
About certain economics on the running of a mine  
Know that the price of coal is more than just a 'cost'  
Remember our ancestors and the blood that they have lost

No compensation for explosions or flooding down the mine  
When men and often children were lost for 'auld lang syne'  
Their families left penniless in poverty and in pain  
Our task at Oxford is to say - never, never, ever again!

(Ron Curran 1962)

I attended a one week school for miners at University College Oxford in 1962. At the end of the week we were each called upon to sing a song. Not able to sing a note, I volunteered to recite a verse I had written that week. This is the first poem I have ever written.

I attended another two week-schools in Oxford, one at St Helen's College and the other I am vague about. I also attended weekend schools in Newcastle and Durham. I have to say that I was sorry at the eventual

amalgamation between the WEA and NCLC in which the former swallowed the latter through the encouragement of the TUC. I felt that our political education was becoming diluted.

One last interesting week long school was organised by the National Coal Board at St Leonards near Brighton. It was actually a concentrated course on productivity and work study. As an avid opponent of work study especially underground, I still believe that the invitation to attend was meant to be a softening up of the opposition. It gave me a first class and first hand account of how to use the arguments against, which I did as soon as I returned to the pit.

In 1965 I applied for a (one year) bursary to Newbattle Abbey College, Dalkeith, Midlothian. I was accepted following an interview at the Station Hotel, York. I was accepted for the academic year 1966-67 and my subjects were Logic and Philosophy and Government and the British Constitution. I learned there the extent of my ignorance, although I believed that I had knowledge of Local Government having served a total of eight years on both a county borough council and a municipal borough council. When I asked the question, is the structure of Scottish Local Government not rather different to the structure of English LG I was told by the tutor I was there only to listen and learn. I enjoyed philosophy, Plato, Aristotle and Socrates and many others but found logic too mathematical and thought that applying commonsense made logic irrelevant. I was told, not so.

Later in the year I applied for a bursary to Ruskin College and went to the Edinburgh University Library in Chambers Street Edinburgh to do some research. I had chosen the subject: Can a One Party State be Democratic? And decided to study books relating to Fascism, Communism and Nazism in Italy, Russia, China, and Germany. Almost as I was finishing my time at Newbattle Abbey College I was asked to see the Warden in his room. He told me that he was very pleased that I had won a place at Ruskin. Mr. Hughes, Principal of Ruskin College had phoned and said that unusually he was offering a two year bursary on the

strength of my essay. Normally a second year is dependent upon results in the first year (reported by Mr. Charles Rigg, Warden of Newbattle).

I was at that time only months away from my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. I discussed the matter with Doreen and she stressed there was no way that she could maintain the home and three children on a bursary for another two years having struggled already for one year. And anyway, by the end of the course at Ruskin I would be almost 43yrs. Concurrent with the Ruskin application I had applied for a job in NUPE as a full time union officer. I was invited to an interview at Rothsay where NUPE were holding their annual national conference. It seemed to go well but I still had to meet the full executive at Brighton in May 1967. Doreen and I both believed I should take the chance on my next interview. I therefore asked Mr. Rigg to thank Mr. Hughes for his kind offer but must unfortunately say 'no thank you'.

### Even Further Education

I learned more about the Labour Party than I had ever done previously while researching for information for my first book which I hoped would be a biography of Pete Curran, who became MP for Jarrow in 1907, the first Labour MP in the North of England. I discovered that Curran had gone to London seeking work due to, it is believed, being blacked on the River Clyde where he had worked in an Ironworks. He began work in a similar capacity at Woolwich Arsenal, and joined the Gasworkers union. He contested in total five parliamentary constituencies for the Labour Party, became very active on the TUC becoming a member of their powerful General Purposes Committee.

I traced Curran in Scotland to all the societies that he joined as a young man, and followed him from the Irish Land League as a young man of about eighteen with which he became disenchanted with what he called their insular political outlook and he was persuaded to join the Scottish Land League by the then famous American "the great" Henry George. Later still he 'graduated' to the SDF, the Social Democratic Federation

These were some of the stepping stones of fragmented organisations in the absence of a single organisation with a powerful political voice marching towards a single goal, emancipation of the working class. I then traced Curran to London where he had now become an officer of the General Labourers and Gasworkers Union, as right hand man to Will Thorne General Secretary, who like himself had come from the grass roots of the movement. In following the life and times of Pete Curran I was aware that he was one of the hundreds of pioneers sacrificing their time, effort and sometimes their jobs in leading and teaching the workers that only by united effort could they obtain the goal that they desired. Curran in particular insisted that to gain their objectives they must be political and to that end he fought on behalf of the Independent Labour Party. I learned about The Massacre of Peterloo, and the Kennington Common slaughter of people peacefully demonstrating for the Charter of Rights. These were the Chartists.

It was at this stage of my studies that I wrote more poems on social emancipation and related subjects. I show below my poem on our socialist pioneers - the forgotten heroes.

### Forgotten Heroes

As the echoes of past ages and their heroes fade  
Even their memories obscure with the passing time  
New heroes now stand in their exalted place  
Following the footsteps that boldly led the way  
On dark and dangerous roads in more tempestuous climes

It was they who held the torch so that we could see  
The moss-bound stepping stones over which to pass  
To a better life; to where the heart and soul is free  
And poverty and hunger no longer feared  
And where men and women are of equal class

The greatest praise that our heroes ever claim - to fame  
In the great and hallowed halls of mankind's history  
Is that they worked for others and not for personal gain  
But their timeless message remains for all to know - who wish  
'Be ever vigilant against man's constant tide of greed and avarice'

Ron Curran , Sunday, 22nd July 2001  
(after writing the book *Labour's Forgotten Man*,  
a biography of Pete Curran MP for Jarrow 1907-1910 And Trade  
Union Leader)

I also visited the British Library, the Labour Party Headquarters in London, the Labour Museum in London and also the headquarters of the general Federation of Trade Unions, an organisation that Curran helped to create and became its first Chairman, a position he held for ten years until he died in 1910 at the age of 49 years. I also had the pleasure of visiting the 'home' of Edmund and Ruth Frow who in the late seventies when I visited lived in a wonderful home-made Labour History Museum. Banners hung from the front door and up the stairs to the toilet, filing cabinets stood in the lounge and even in the bathroom. It was a living commemoration of Labour History and I am honoured to have met Edmund and Ruth personally. I bought from them their book *The Half Time System in Education* and there was numerous statements of Pete Curran in the pages.

In Scotland of course I visited the Scottish national Library, the Edinburgh Library and also Register House. In Glasgow I visited the Mitchell Library and the Chapel where Curran was married. I had the great good fortune to meet and visit fairly frequently Edith Arloff, Pete Curran's only living child. I asked her about anything she could tell me about the family which she was happy to do, and so we collaborated on the book until she died in 1986. I have dedicated the book to her.

My view of the Labour Party is of an organisation created of the backs of thousands of pioneers who fought long and hard and sacrificed much for future generations, that they may enjoy a way of life that was only a dream at the time of their battles. The dream was realised with the election of a Labour Government in 1945 when "The commanding heights of the economy" as I believe Nye Bevan said, were nationalised over a three year period, coal, iron and steel, railways, road transport, electricity and gas. It was carried out when Britain was littered with bomb damaged buildings, smashed railways, hospitals and at a time when many thousands of men and women in the forces were being demobbed and now hoping to return to their previous employment. And by no means least, when Britain had an enormous national deficit. It was a situation that I am sure would have surely sent David Cameron and Nick Clegg on a year's gardener's holiday to the Scilly Isles.

My connection with Newbattle Abbey College did not end when I left. I became a governor in 1987 a position I held for 12 years. Following my retirement I wrote five books all on social history.<sup>1</sup> I also wrote a book of poems. Perhaps my school teacher was right after all when he said - "Will go far on this subject"? (English)

Finally, becoming president of the Scottish TUC in 1986/7 and chairman of the conference in 1987 allowed me to attack Margaret Thatcher's industrial murder of Britain's major industries and send a warning shot about the dangers of Chernobyl's nuclear plant explosion and the dangerous radiation fall-out over many parts of Europe including Britain.

I personally believe that my time in the Labour League of Youth provided me with a cause that has never diminished over the years which in simple terms is: 'To each according to their need and from each, according to their ability'. I also believe that the shop floor of the Labour (Movement) Party is in the workshops of Britain, where it originated. Likewise the Tories originated in the aristocracy from which its philosophy springs. I leave my last poem on the subject of politics for the Tories!

## Tory Butchers - Down The Ages

In their coats of many colours, Red, White and Blue - whatever,  
Progressive, Independent, or even moderately Moderate - never!  
Tory policies remain the same - a wolf by any other name,  
Conservative “values” are a sham, ancient mutton dressed up as lamb,  
Hoping to deceive and to deliver - tripe disguised as tender liver.

### Notes

- 1 'An Illustrated Celebration of the Industrial River Tyne - Its Ships and Men' 2006; 'King Coal, Wallsend Best' 2008; 'Voices from the Past - In the Life and Times of Pete Curran MP for Jarrow 1907-1910' 2009; 'The Bombing of a Town - North Shields'. 2009.

### Crisis Management

When bankers riot  
And investors  
Pull down the City of London  
We calm them with trillions

When youths riot  
And children  
Pull down the inner city  
We calm them with truncheons

Nigel Mellor

## RAILWAY MEMORIES

### Archie Potts

The London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) came into existence in January 1923 as a result of the Railways Act of 1921. This Act created four main line railway companies out of a merger of 120 railway companies struggling to survive in the harsh economic environment of the post-war years. There was the Great Western Railway (GWR) serving England and south Wales, the Southern Railway (SR) for southern England, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMSR) spanning the west route from London to Glasgow, and the LNER covering the east route from London to Scotland.

The 'steel spine' of the LNER was the London to Edinburgh main line passing through York and Newcastle. The LNER also serviced the Northumberland and Durham coalfield, carrying its coal which provided an important source of railway revenue. The LNER, together with the other three privately owned railway companies, survived until the nationalisation of Britain's railway system on 1 January 1948.

Except for a handful of railway buffs, the history of the LNER and the early years of nationalisation must appear remote, and there can be few people still alive who worked on the LNER. I am one of them and a few memories might be of interest here as a contribution to labour history.

I had just turned fifteen years of age when, in February 1947, I applied for the post of probationary clerk with the LNER. I was still attending school in Sunderland and received the headmaster's permission to take a day off in order to travel to the LNER's divisional headquarters in York to sit the railway entrance examination. I passed the examination and was called back to York to attend an interview. Another hurdle overcome, I was called to a final interview at the LNER's district head office in Newcastle, where I was told that I was being offered a post with the company and a

letter would follow telling me when and where I should report for duty. The letter duly arrived in early May 1947 informing me that I was to report to the station master at East Boldon station. The headmaster gave me permission to leave school before the end of term in order to take up the appointment. I left school on Friday and started work the next Monday morning. Thus I worked on the LNER for the last seven months of its existence. I became one of 22,836 white collar workers out of a total labour force of 195,100, of whom 8,538 were female staff employed as secretaries, clerks, telephonists and refreshment room personnel. [Statistics from Geoffrey Hughes, *LNER*, Ian Allen, London, 1986 pp. 147-8]

Railway staff then worked a 44 hour week and my first working days seemed very long, not least because there was little I could do but watch others at work. However I was soon given simple tasks and gradually got the hang of things. It was a case of being trained on the job. After a few months I was transferred to Newcastle parcels office assisting the claims clerk, then moved to general clerical duties at Fencehouses station on the Sunderland-Durham line. Finally, I was given a permanent appointment in the booking office at Sunderland station. I was working there when I reached the age of eighteen and was called up, as all males of that time were, to perform national service, in my case in the RAF.

There were three railway trade unions in the 1940s. The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) was an industrial union whose policy was to combine all railway workers in one union. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) represented the footplate workers, and the Railway Clerks' Association (RCA) – later to become the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) – covered the white collar staff. Although there was no formal closed shop on the railways trade union membership was almost one hundred per cent.

At an official level relations between the unions were bad. The NUR sought better pay for the lower paid workers, while ASLEF and the TSSA were more concerned with maintaining differentials for their members.

However at rank and file level there was a wonderful camaraderie among railway workers. For example, offices were then heated by open coal fires, and coal was in short supply in the post-war years. When the coal scuttle was empty the junior clerk would be sent to one of the steam locomotives waiting at a platform or standing in the goods yard and the fireman would fill the scuttle with coal from his tender. At the same time any railwayman was welcome to shelter in a warm railway office or porters' cabin, and a cup of tea was on offer if there was any in the pot.

I remember there was an excellent canteen for railway workers at Newcastle Central station, providing cheap and wholesome meals during a period of rationing and austerity. There was a check on people using the canteen: white collar staff had special passes and uniformed workers had badges. On smaller stations it was a case of bringing sandwiches to work or heating up pies.

Two interesting examples of corporate paternalism survived into the 1940s. The first was a railway institute located in Wellington Street, Gateshead, whose facilities were available to railway employees. The building contained a number of billiards and table tennis tables plus some dart boards, and there were stacks of folded card tables, presumably used for whist drives.

The same building also served as the venue for a number of evening classes run by the LNER, and continued by British Railways after nationalisation. The subjects on offer were: railway station work and accounts, railway signalling, and first aid. There were examinations at the end of each course and the award of a certificate to those who had passed. Attendance was voluntary but possession of one or more of the certificates could prove useful when applying for promotion to higher graded posts. There was a kitchen hatch in the building where a cup of tea and a digestive biscuit could be purchased at the termination of evening classes.

Secondly, the LNER ran a number of convalescent homes for railwaymen recovering from serious illnesses. These homes were financed

by voluntary donations of one penny per week deducted from the weekly pay of those who had signed the appropriate form. Those railwaymen who joined the scheme – and most employees did – were eligible to apply for a place at one of the homes. I never met anyone who had been in one of the convalescent homes and wonder what happened to them after nationalisation: were they sold off or absorbed into the newly created National Health Service? The railway institute in Wellington Street survives as a privately run social club called the Gateshead Railway Club and Institute.

Nationalisation did not alter things very much for the average railway worker: the railways had been run by the state during the war years so there was a measure of continuity in how they were managed. The nationalised railway industry was formed into a public corporation along the lines favoured by Herbert Morrison, and it adopted a traditional management structure. The NUR was keen on worker participation but there was not too much evidence of this after nationalisation. There were joint consultative committees at the larger stations but their impact was not very great. Under nationalisation the railways were expected to 'pay their way' with revenue covering costs. However Britain's rundown railway system soon found it difficult to compete against an expanding road sector, and the payment of compensation to the former shareholders was the financial responsibility of the newly nationalised industry. The railways were soon in the red: railwaymen's pay began to slip behind other occupations, nor was there money available for much needed capital investment.

On my return to railway employment, after completing national service, I was posted to Seaham goods station, where I worked as a weighbill clerk. There were several nationalised collieries in the Seaham area, formerly owned by the Londonderry family, and most of their coal was transported by rail. The number of wagons, their destinations, and the amounts of coal were recorded on weighbills and these were sent to the revenue accountant's office at Newcastle, where the transport costs

were calculated and the amounts debited to the National Coal Board's account. A large amount of hands-on clerical work was involved in this process which would now be performed by computers.

The Beeching Report of 1963 took the axe to Britain's railway network, but a gentle contraction of the industry had begun in the 1950s as some small stations and under-utilised branch lines were closed. There were no redundancies because they were not necessary. Young railwaymen, returning to the industry after completing their national service, read the signs and began to move to other occupations. It was a time of full employment and there were alternative openings offering higher pay and better prospects. In my own circle of acquaintances, some moved to jobs at the Ministry of Social Security complex at Longbenton, some to posts in local government, others entered teaching, and a couple I knew enlisted in the police. I left the railways to go to university as a mature student in 1956, and after graduation moved into teaching.

Distance lends enchantment, it is sometimes said, and it is often tempting to view the past through rose-coloured spectacles. The facts are that in the 1940s and early 50s pay on the railways was low, working conditions were poor, and everyone was aware that the industry was running down. Yet the camaraderie among the workforce remained strong and, looking back, this was a redeeming feature of those times.

# A SHIPYARD APPRENTICE'S LIFE

## Arthur Scott

I come from a place called Southwick, Sunderland, on the banks of the river Wear. There's a whacking great bridge called the Queen Alexandra bridge. Like most young folks you never think there was a time when it wasn't there. Another interesting thing about Southwick was that we had a colliery on our doorstep, one of the biggest deep mine collieries in Europe, right slap bang on the banks of the river. You could pick up a bit of coal and easily throw it in the river. The pit-shaft was within a mile of the centre of the Sunderland.

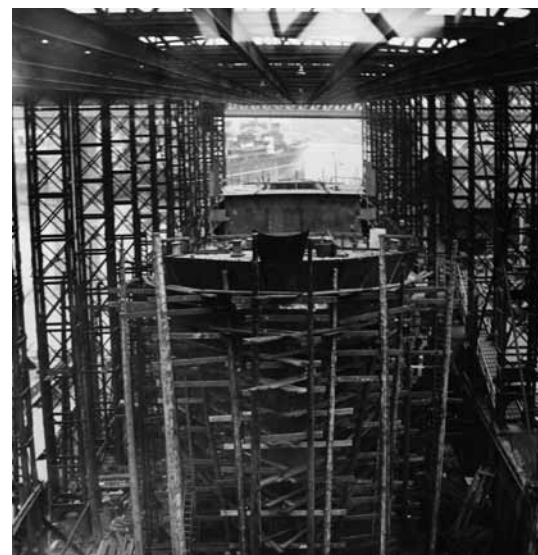
I come from a mixed marriage because my mother was from shipbuilding and my father was from the colliery. If you walked quarter of an hour from where I was brought up in Southwick, you were in the middle of colliery rows, a quarter of an hour in the other direction and you were next to the shipyard, on a bit of land I always thought was a bombsite. An area of land about  $\frac{1}{4}$  square mile was flattened. You could still see the street markings. You could see odd white pavement and doorsteps where someone had cleaned. I always thought that was a bombsite as I was born just before war broke out. Having been brought up in that climate there were a large number of areas pottered around that *were* bomb sites. Cleared and flattened. I'd actually walked to work at Austin and Pickersgill for months before the penny finally dropped that this flattened area that I was walking across wasn't a bomb site but was actually a place of terrible housing called Low Southwick, gutted before the war, deliberately.

In that quarter square mile at the other side of Southwick where I'd been brought up was an area of about two square mile of council housing built to cater for the folks who lived in Low Southwick. Just physically imagine the space and what the housing conditions had been for the folk

*north east history*

in that area. I dwell on that because at the same time there was a shipyard right on the bridge. It was called Austins and when I was looking at some old photographs I saw one dated 1921 and I looked at it and thought it was exactly the yard that I went into thirty years later. It hadn't changed in that time.

When I visited the Greenwich Maritime Museum I saw a large model of Dennys' shipyard. It looked exactly like the yard I went into. There were horse and carts on that model and it was dated eighteen eighty. The yard I went into in 1954 had barely changed. I also went into a yard that was about to modernise. In fact in the middle of the yard was a hill and on that hill was a house and garden. Someone lived there. On the other side of the hill was another shipyard. It was all part of the same organisation, but quite separate. So for about the first 18 months of my time in the yard I was coming up against things that my grandfather, who had also worked there many years earlier, had seen as a young man. I found this intriguing. Somebody in the mid fifties walks right into something that had been there in nineteen twenty something.



*Ship frame*



### Tools of the trade

Various 'little' items were important in that yard for building a ship. Take the humble hosepipe, for example. If you can think of three hundred yards of hosepipe with a bit of glass flask on filled with water. As you know water finds its own level. That's how they levelled the ark. Can you imagine somebody building that bridge and using this hosepipe to make sure of the level? That was the kind of thing that was elementary but very accurate and essential for building a ship. This was long before the days of fabrication where each part of the ship was built separately and erected separately. That main change was what they called derricks; a fixed crane arm. You had these down the side of the ship, instead of what were called framing poles but these were still in use. These derricks were fixed and rigid and in terms of health and safety they were an absolute nightmare. Today they would be banned. It meant that at some point as you went from one derrick to another whatever you were lifting was in mid air and being transferred.

Another interesting thing was the framing poles that I mentioned earlier. Because of the layout of the yard, the area under the bridge, about a quarter of the ship's berth, didn't have derricks so you had to have a framing pole and if you were 15 years old and big and daft you got the job of working in the squad that erected the framing pole. Let's try to describe one. These were something like a telegraph pole and about twice as thick with a rope round the top with a block and tackle. You actually physically hauled these things around. That was the way they were still building the ships.

One of my less favourable memories of that particular job of using framing poles, was that before we started work in the morning the young apprentice, or in my case the young labourer, got the job of walking down the berth with the line and throwing in on the end of the berth. At that time the sewers came out on the river beside the bridge. You knew when you were at work all right. You were welcomed in with your own individual aroma. That's the climate of that particular yard. Two slipways,

as old as you could get, an old blacksmiths' shop, an old joiners' shop, an old steel shop, an old foundry and certainly an old assembly. Welding was around, but there was still riveting. It's not surprising, not known to me at the time, that there were plans ahead to build a new yard. But I think I got an incredible insight, in more ways than one, into shipbuilding in the past.

### From school to work

I didn't start as an apprentice. Apprenticeships then were quite rigid. You started on your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and when you got to 21, no matter what you learned in between, no matter how good or bad or indifferent you were you were then considered a craftsman and that concept had a marked effect on me as time went on. Because I wasn't 16 I started as a labourer. On the way to work I had another discovery. Being in a town that had nine or ten shipyards, engineering works, and so on, round about 25 past 7 in the morning there was a cascade of hooters. When I was at school I thought it was to tell me to get up to go to school but it was actually five minutes to get into the yard. You could learn which was yours but they all went off almost simultaneously. Life was lived round these hooters. I knew exactly where I had to be to the inch, walking to work in the morning, to get in the gate by half past. There was no sophisticated method of timekeeping. When they shut the gates if you were in you were in and if you were out you were out. If it turned out you'd been late three times, I never worked out how they worked it out. On a Wednesday morning if you were late you might as well go home as they didn't let you in at all. Some poor bugger who was only late on a Wednesday got the same punishment as someone who had been late twice. The same thing happened on Fridays. It was a crude method of sorting out the problem.

Immediately you went inside the yard there was a building on the right hand side referred to as the market, and it was indeed a market. It was for platers and platers' labourers. You'd see the various gangers, senior platers, highly skilled blokes – I make this point now, I keep referring to

blokes and men because that was the world. There was no sign of women. It was the domain of men. It had been different earlier when the war was on. It is surprising the jobs women could do when there is a war on! Afterwards they had to give the jobs back to men.

My question was why is it called a market, but it soon became evident. There were the senior platers saying I'll take him, him and him. You got picked and if you were lucky you got picked by the one who was on the best job with the best bonus. That was the squad for that day. This was a big improvement on what had been the case. The name market had come from the other side of the gate. Fifty years earlier the market had been outside and if you didn't get picked you didn't have a job for that day. I talk about day because the day was what you were effectively employed by.

There was this little piece of a time warp in history but at the other side of the hill that I mentioned a new yard was being built, and ironically just beyond that was a super-dooper shed where the Navy was building mine sweepers. So within the space of 400-500 yards you had a shed building minesweepers with aluminium frames, mahogany hulls and the newest technology and the yard where I was working with frame poles as ancient as shipbuilding itself. The contrast was incredible. Equally incredible was the way things happened. If you worked in that shed you had beautiful bookcases of mahogany and light shelf brackets of aluminium! Enough said.

### **Shipwrights and shop stewards**

When I became 16 I was defined as an apprentice shipwright. There were effectively four different jobs for carpenters called shipwrights. The good carpenters, well trained and experienced had a brown overall, bit and brace and open jack. Then you had steel worker. They had blood running down their open jacket. They climbed all over the ship and frightened the life out of everybody. Then there were the loftsmen who worked in the mould loft, above the biggest area in the yard where they drew out,

screened out, the ship full size. The shipwright's job covered all three and another little animal called the liner off. That where the chalk came in. Although I'm blind as a bat I discovered I was good at putting paint lines on a ship which is anything but straight, contours and up and down. You have to throw the chalk line.

In the yard was the shop steward and without him you had absolutely no say at all in anything that happened. I was extremely fortunate in there was a shop steward called Dicky Miller and he was determined that apprenticeship was brought up to date and that it wasn't just a question of being a labourer or following somebody around and you were going to be taught something. He had that concept. He never quite achieved it while I worked there but it meant that he demanded things other than wages and overtime rates. He demanded that the young apprentices started to be given a reasonable crack of the whip and he demanded, it took him 4 years to get it, that young apprentices be given day release. Prior to that you went to night classes. He also, although he didn't dare admit it, or do anything about it, believed that there was something wrong with just serving time and becoming a craftsman. Certainly I discovered that there were folks in that yard, smashing talented folks who were doing labouring jobs (no offence to labourers) simply because they'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some had been in the services. They couldn't become apprentices or craftsmen. Yet there were apprentice colleagues of mine who would never be craftsmen without protectionism. Nevertheless the seed was planted as far as I was concerned and many years later I became a member of the Ship building Industry Training Board. The modules for training didn't follow that you had started at 16 and it didn't follow that it took 5 years to complete.

### **Apprenticeship**

So, I started as an apprentice after nine months as a labourer, learning about lifting and things. I amazed a secretary in the office when I moved all the filing cabinets from one office to another using what I learned. You

make the object take the weight and learned how to use what was there where they were going to send for removers, cranes and the like. Using levers was another thing. Some of them really didn't understand what they were doing. Because I went to night classes I also discovered that if you did your homework in chalk on the ship's bulkhead it frightened the gaffer to death. They were worried as hell that you might ask a question. Then I got some advice from one of the lads. 'When Fraser, the foreman comes along lift your rule out of your pocket as if you are about to measure something and look up as if you are about to ask a question, You won't see him for dust'. It was quite true.

Here I was down in the hold of the ship chalking things on, chalking curves and cambers, and getting a bit worried because I was working for the carpenters at the time. Not the shipwrights and certainly not the loftsmen. The carpenters had a marvellous tool, and this is mine, never got used very much, arguably the oldest tool there is apart from the stone and a piece of wood on it. Its an adze and if you look through history you'll find that tool appears from first time man started using tools. In shipbuilding if you were a carpenter that was the tool and if you couldn't handle one of them, or weren't big enough to handle one of them you were in trouble as the others would walk all over you, so although this wasn't well used it was good protection from the rest..

There was a rule in the shipyards that if a bit of wood was more than an inch and a quarter thick it was a carpenter's job, if it was less that that it was a joiner's job. An example the handrail of a ship was a carpenters job, the deck, although it's only for show these days, was the shipwright's. Easily defined. It got a bit awkward around the inch and a half, inch and a quarter but that was what it was. I found myself working in there with a carpenters in what they called the sawmill. I was working for Jack Brown, who was a hell of a craftsman. He spent all his time making cold frames and greenhouses. I asked him one day in a quiet moment, 'Mr Brown, what if anyone asks...' He said if anyone asks say the chief engineer on that ship down there is a keen gardener and he wants some cold frames

on the bridge. He was such a good craftsman he did all of the managers' and foremen's jobs. He was safe as houses; didn't get laid off often. The job he did do was hatch covers. At that time they were all wood. He got round that by having 2 apprentices working for him. He supervised. He told us what to do, but never lifted a finger. He also got the job of making the dowels to fill the holes when you laid a wooden deck. If you've ever been on a liner you'll see a nice line of round holes all along with the black tar, pitch as it was called. Then I got introduced to oakum. It was like old tarry rope you prised out, you rolled on your knee and actually caulked the deck. Another old tradition, at that time, and even now, on a wooden deck. They're not there to keep the water out, they're there just for show.

I mentioned these minesweepers being built in the shed. They were wood and they had to be caulked and, let me tell you, the first one launched was like a Jacuzzi. When it hit the water it was coming in from all angles. They had to pull it in because none of the shipwrights and carpenter had ever needed to caulk, except for show, on top of a steel deck. In the old days, when you got a bit of deck to caulk, the foreman would literally take names out of a hat that decided which bit of work you would get. If you had good fortune and you got a straight bit you were away, finished and off home, if you got a bit about a pipe or round a bend you were there for half a day. Bit of a lottery. But there wasn't the need to test the deck to see if it was watertight until the minesweepers.

### **Brewing tea**

Like most young fellows on the shipyards, one of the jobs, an absolute science, was the job making tea. Everybody in the shipyard knew you made tea but it was illegal. Next to the sawmill was the blacksmiths. The blacksmiths had a marvellous way of making tea. They had a long steel pipe with a bit of 6 inch metal piping at the end that you had to be a blacksmith to lift. You took it to a tap and somebody filled it up, two or three litres. You filled it up and put it in the furnace. The furnace was so hot that by the time you got the pipe in the furnace the water was boiling

and you took it out again. Then the pipe was swung round at arm's length and all these cans filled. Instant tea. Then you couldn't just put a lid on and say 'there mate, there's your tea'. You had to get one of these handles and put all the cans along and get old Hessian bag and cover them up. Everybody knew what they were but you weren't supposed to tell anyone. You had to walk along with this. The first time I got threatened with the sack, not the last time, I must have been happy, Sunderland must have got promotion. I was swinging the handle and the water was spilling, steam rising and it was obvious what was in there. I was called over by a chap called Drysdale given a tearing off a strip 'if that happens again you'll see the bonny side of the gate' and they could do that then. So this lad Drysdale was the first to threaten me with the sack, a pleasant irony because he became one of my oldest and dearest friends when I met him much later in the drawing office. But when you went on the ship they had all kinds of ways of making tea. They got welding rods, take the element off, bend them and strike them up, like the element of an electric kettle.



*Apprentice Awards Night, Austin & Pickersgill, 1957 (Arthur Scott (left),*

Instant tea but dangerous. You had to make sure you didn't electrocute yourself. Again nobody was allowed to make tea.

Then when I was on these minesweepers things got quite sophisticated. They got a gas boiler which must have held 10-20 litres of water. You went across with your can in your bag and filled it up then returned. Everybody knew what it was for. There was a little chap called Tommy, not the brightest chap. Nowadays you'd say he had learning difficulties, and he used some to get some terrible flak. He was in charge of the boiler and one day I nearly got the sack again, over tea. I'd been talking to Tommy about these crabs that I'd got. I'd got crabs from the breakwater beside the sea. He asked what I did with them and I'd told him its simple you get hold of them, spit in their eye, close them, put them in hot water and when they change colour they're cooked.' Anyway this day I took the tea over and I was called all sorts of names, parentage doubted, kicked from pillar to post, something wrong with the tea. So I went back to Tommy and asked what he'd done to the tea. Had he made it with dock water. He lifted the lid and he'd got 3 or 4 crabs in the boiler. So he'd worked out this was boiling water to use. So I went back and told them there were crabs in the boiler and I had to take the can for that.

### The safety man

Tommy had another job. He was Safety Man, at least he had the key to the cabinet where the bandages were. One this occasion I cut my hand and went along to Tommy. 'Tommy can you put something on this'. Oh aye and he started. By the time he'd finished winding round the hand, fingers were white because the blood had stopped. I got back to the ship and they said 'look what that silly bugger's done'. Picked up a chisel and cut it off. Then someone asked what would happen if Tommy did have an accident? Let's find out. Red lead, dab, dab .dab. Tommy was called 'we've got an accident'. Tommy fainted and fell into the dock. So we did have an accident and I nearly got the sack again. In those days you didn't drown in the dock you were poisoned. As apprentices, at lunchtime we used to

throw something in the dock to part the water, dive in and swim around. You had to wait for someone had to throw something else in so you could come out without being covered in muck.

The minesweeper. I don't know whether there was any distinction but Prince Charles ended up being captain of one. Don't know if he ever took it out of dock but he was supposed to. The government built about 42 of these minesweepers. I got an unusual insight as I was working on a ship with a wood hull, unheard of by then. They were made of aluminium and supposed not to be able to be detected by radar. By the third one they had a more efficient engine and it was lighter so they had to put lead in the keel box to make it up for stability. The thing that became more desirable than gold blocks in Sunderland was blocks of lead. Lead blocks were being handed over the deck and going out the other end. They must have bought about four times the amount of lead before they realised there was a rabbit somewhere.

They decided maybe this chap would be a better liner off and I went to work with the steel workers and it was not just a 5 year apprenticeship I'm talking six years, because I'd been a labourer nearly a year. Then I discovered what sort of a coward I was because even to this day going up on a pole and building staging frightened the life out of me. These chaps had the job of building the staging and lining it up with the pipes and things. It's a funny thing whenever you are in the front of a berth and the ship in front of you is surrounded by staging no matter how your mind tells you the ship isn't going anywhere when the wind blows you'd swear it moved. I never got used to it. The staging wasn't the light stuff like it is these days, it was nine by three planks and they overlapped with a drop. No matter how often you told yourself if you were walking backwards when you dropped that three inches you were convinced you'd fallen thirty feet. That happened to me one day when I was doing one of these paint lines because you had to cut them in and follow the pock marks, with a cold chisel. That was me pottering about with the liner offs. Then there was a short strike. There were always strikes in the yard.

### Striking times

The shipwrights always had a strike when the ship was about to be launched because they felt they'd got the upper hand. No sooner had the ship gone in and they got their extra pence an hour they would get their settlement but half of them would be paid off. Because the minute it went in they weren't needed. There was a gap before the next contract. There was almost a ritual and the logic was that we may be paid off but we'll come back on for an extra penny farthing an hour. I learned something for when I became a trade union officer and maximum disruption for minimum effort became order of the game. I wasn't having a situation where people got laid off straight after.

But one of these strikes, must have been a bit more serious as it lasted 3 or 4 weeks and the shipwrights, like the other crafts, didn't involve the apprentices in strikes but we were hanging about like lippy clouts. The foreman sent us up the loft to pick the offsets up. I asked is that an apprentice's job and was told you do as you're told. I went up to the loft, up all these stairs. First thing was 'what you doing here', in more Anglo Saxon, never 'good morning, can I help you? Bit more fraternal. 'What you doing here? Well go and pick them up'.

I should tell you that the loft was the holy of holies. It was made up of boards about the size of this table, all joined together with lines in, literally full scale the size of the ship, drawn in, faired up screened off. There was a fence all round the thing and it was about 1/3 size of a football field. You take the biggest shed in the yard, the platers' shed invariably and there it was, up top. You had to open a little gate and take your boots off. So I went and, there were two of us, I was busy striking a line across the bilge, and Baxter came out and he was a little less pleased this time and we were shoved out of the loft, fortunately via the steps. Anyway after the strike Dickey Miller comes along and swore at us, which was quite common in the yard. He didn't usually swear so it had twice as much effect as anybody else. Another thing I learned. What were you up to during the strike? He said. Nothing, I said, I checked it was an apprentice's job. Come with me

he says and I was frogmarched to the loft. Here we go again.

“Show us what you were about to do.” I was going to strike a line across there and pick the offsets up. “Did you know what you were doing?” “Aye I knew what I was doing.” “Oh, start up here on Monday morning.” So I found myself in the loft on the basis they didn’t realise they had a potential loftman working with the steel workers.

Before I go on I’ll tell you about the other occasion when I nearly started a strike. That was on the Launch Day. Across the river from Pickersgills was a yard called Shorts and, believe you me, this place really was in the dark ages. The family Short were short by name and short by nature, tiny folk. The managing director, Kenneth Douglas of Pickersgills, was a big strapping bloke and his daughter was also quite tall. There were the apprentices sitting on the staging, as we always were, watching the top hats, singing the long and the short and the tall and they were looking up and here were these two walking along. After the ceremony Dickey Miller came along and asked what the devil were you up to now, all that singing. Come along and see the gaffer. There was no personnel department. He says as we walked across the yard that I’d better work out what I was up to otherwise you’re up the yard, other side of the gate. You were taking the mickey out of the managing director and everybody knew it.

We gets to the door. “Right, explain yourself.” What was this long and the short of it? “Well, Mr Douglas it had nothing to do with any personal matter, Jim and I had just got our papers through and we’d been deferred again from National Service and we were celebrating, singing,” “You’ll get no promotion this side of the ocean”. “You’ve been deferred?” “Yes, aye I’ve got my papers through.” “Well I don’t believe you but it’s such an original idea, bugger off.” That was a fact. Coming out Dickey says to me ‘keep this up and you’ll get my job’.

### Training.

The stewards insisted that there had got to be proper training and they decided to bring back something, an award for the most meritorious

apprentice. This was the Billmeir award, and I ended up that year as most meritorious apprentice and got this cup. Dickey and the stewards got together and said we want to know why a yard apprentice can’t enter the drawing office. If we’ve got a lad here, ended up the most meritorious apprentice, why isn’t he allowed into that? So they said OK we’ll let him go in and assumed I’d end up with egg on my face.

The idea that anyone would start an apprenticeship as an engineering draughtsman in shipbuilding was unheard of. In engineering the draughtsmen go through the works but in the shipyards naval architect draughtsmen all started as that. When I went in I was confronted by a fellow called Gerald, Treasurer of the Union branch, who asked a simple question ‘would you like to explain to me why you’ve been allowed to come in here?’ They were annoyed that a fellow from the yard had been allowed in.

*Austin & Pickersgill  
drawing office, 1958  
(Arthur Scott, left,  
with Albert Amos)*



So I ended up in the drawing office and thank goodness they'd done away with drawing with pen and ink because I'd have made a right old mess of that. There were a squad of tracers, all women. In the main a tracer was somebody whose father was a foreman. It was a highly skilled job. They traced all the plans. That meant I could get away with a multitude of sins, it wasn't a question of craftsmanship it was a question of what you put on paper. It was a difficult time because the apprentice draughtsman didn't like the idea of a fellow from down the yard being allowed in.

### Office rules

At that time you had to go to work in a collar and tie or you got sent home so I tried tee shirts but they kept me. You had to seek permission to grow a beard and as you can see I've got it to this day. I was called in by Dickey Miller and told if you think we've gone to all this effort for you to sabotage it you're wrong, so get back there and sort it out. So I was under a trade union obligation to stay the course. If it hadn't been for the fellow who first attempted to sack me, Les Drysdale, I wouldn't have stayed the course because ironically he was alongside me in the drawing office.

But the apprentices in the Drawing Office, once you broke the ice, were as daft as everyone else and got up to all sorts of things. The Section Leader was a bit of a bar-steward, to use an expression, always made sure that he was at the door, nobody left before he did, grabbed his hat and was off. Well I didn't get the sack as they didn't know who'd done it but somebody nailed his hat to the post and he had two hats, one a sunshade, one a top. When it came to drawing, when it came to a window, bit of furniture they'd draw in a face, cobwebs, Kilroy and this sort of thing. And they'd go to the tracing office and come back with the faces and cobwebs and Kilroy drawn in.

Well I was still serving my time and I ended up being deferred yet again. The Company was notified that if someone was still doing formal education they could have a deferment beyond their 21st birthday. So I got a deferment beyond 18<sup>th</sup> May, my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, to 31<sup>st</sup> December

1960, and that was the most useful piece of paper I've ever had because in between that time National Service ended.

There I was finishing my National Certificates. There was a problem that before I went into the Drawing Office from the background I was on I had been doing craft courses. When I went into the Drawing Office it was naval architecture. The lads doing naval architecture were about two or three years in front of me, apart from this fellow Gerald who had been doing the same examination year after year, failing year after year. When I got awarded mine I publicly announced I could now answer Gerald's question that he asked me two and a half years ago. Why had I been allowed into the Drawing Office? The answer is because there's so many thick buggers like you they had to get someone like us.

### Pay point

Gerald was the Treasurer of the union as indeed the Branch Secretary Mick McGalagy had been in that office, because in those days when I went in the Drawing Office the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights that I was a member of insisted that I joined the appropriate Union, the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen. They insisted, so I ended up by joining and finished my time in the Drawing Office. It was in that period of time that I started to get more involved in the Union although there was still a rule that apprentices didn't get involved.

When I became 21, I went into see the Chief Draftsman, called Shepherd, and said to him that I wanted the union minimum rate, all out of ignorance mind you. He says what do you mean? So I said there's a minimum rate for draftsmen and I'm not working for less. You've got another job to go to. No I said, even though I had been offered a job as a junior manager at Mercantile Docks. I said 'That's got nothing to do with it. I'm not working for less than the rate even though I came in here from the yard.' 'Well we don't pay the rate but I'll go and see Douglas, the Managing Director'. Douglas must have said something because he knocks on the window and calls me in and says 'I've told you before we

don't pay the rate but we'll give you eleven pound three shillings'. Well the rate was eleven pounds, two and sixpence. So they weren't paying the rate.

When I went out the Branch Secretary asked how I got on so I told him that he hadn't given me the rate I'd got a tanner more. That went round like wildfire, they didn't believe me so come the end of the week, we were paid weekly then they said come on prove it. So I showed them and then all hell was let loose as the others were getting around the eleven pounds two and six and if I hadn't been under the protection of the shop stewards I think I'd have got the sack on that occasion.

Suddenly I found that people started saying that this fellow should be a shop steward and that was when I got involved and met the Managing Director, Kenneth Douglas, for the first time seriously. He was a bit of a hard nut, an old bloke, good at his job but he did a lot for that yard and he knew where the line was. He said, smoking his pipe, 'now look Arthur I was a CM'. (I'd better explain that in the draftsman's union there weren't shop stewards. That was below them they were corresponding members (CMs). A motion at Conference to get it changed to shop steward was heavily defeated. So he says now look Arthur I was a CM and gets out his old collection book, for the subs, and incidentally I was one of the three members of the drawing office that was paying the penny political, he says that's when I was a CM. I'll tell you something they'll lead you up the garden path, won't follow you, won't support you.

So I said well Mr Douglas, 'I'm not being disrespectful. I'm led to believe that you're a first class Managing Director but I'm a better CM than you were because I've got their support'. There was a pause and he and I got on like a house on fire after that even though we were on different sides of the fence. I'd a lot of time for that fellow. He was the bloke who actually realised that all the Liberty ships that had been built during the war were going to have to be replaced and they created the SD14 design in Sunderland, and produced about another twenty five.

So that was me. I mentioned that the rate I was getting was eleven pounds three shillings. The draftsman's union used to have a scale from

21 to 25 and 26 to 30; we played around with that for years, so you were a junior draftsman on that rate of pay. When I went in the Yard it was thirty two and sixpence, £1.65 in new money, and I was given a number, that I still use today. When you got paid your wages then it was in a little tin box, so you opened the box, counted your money and threw back the tin as you went out the gate, until someone decided they should get into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and they brought in a wage packet. Incidentally what they used to do of that 32/6 was take 2/6 pence off for tools etc. so I asked them to give me the money and I put it in the bank and in 1955 I got 11 pence interest which is more than if I'd left it in the shipyard.

It had perforated holes so you could count your change and count your pounds. Then they found that a lot of pay packets had a ten bob note short. The Chief Cashier discovered that a ten bob note could be removed using a pencil. It was a shop steward who said why don't you put a staple in?

This reminds me of the story of why you were always off on a Monday. The answer was I come in on Sunday and off on Monday 'cos you get double time on Sunday. The Company never thought of these things. I learned more about what union life was going to be about by being a draughtsman.

### Footnote

My ramble through a five year ship building apprenticeship in the shadow of antiquated methods should not hide the fact that Austin and Pickersgill became a world class modern shipyard in the 1960s.

(This article started life as a talk at First Tuesday, the NELHS's monthly meeting. It was transcribed by Val Duncan and edited by John Charlton.)



## APPRECIATION: DICK COPLAND (1927-2011)

Roger Lane

Dick started life in Bournemouth, moving to Birmingham to take a degree in Physics, in 1949, and to find a lifetime partner in Joyce. After working at Fettes College in Edinburgh he spent 5 years in industrial research, returning to teaching in 1957. Dick worked as head of science in a Scunthorpe secondary modern school before later moving to Egremont as a deputy head teacher of a purpose-built community school. He finally took on the headship of Ryhope Comprehensive in Sunderland, a flagship school for comprehensive education, where he remained from 1969 until the school closed in 1988.

Here Dick was able to use his knowledge, learning, skill and forward-thinking approach. (He had been an advisor to St. Kitts in their planning of comprehensive education) to run a genuinely comprehensive school. The school, under Dick's confident leadership, was at the forefront of innovations such as mixed ability teaching and abolishing corporal punishment. Dick was also innovative in adopting a consultative style of management and, for example, introduced such things as staff briefings – normal practice today but innovative in the early 70s.

Dick and the school faced significant challenges. Working in a school formed by the amalgamation of pre-existing grammar and comprehensive schools, it was necessary for Dick to adopt a completely fresh approach, and doubtless he was appointed partly because of his experience and vision. But Sunderland in the 1970s and 1980s was a rather traditional community and, even from those who might have been expected to support him, he was met by question after question and sometimes blank incomprehension: too many were happy to accept the comprehensive education ideal without understanding the concomitant changes and developments this implied.

If Dick was not already aware of the fact, he was to understand and live with the strong links between politics and education. Fortunately Dick had a very strong and determined character: he had chosen to live very close to the school, which meant that he and his family were almost permanently involved in what came to be a very rich life in and around the community with the school at its heart and it was hard to escape from the struggles and debate this produced.

Never a blind follower of party lines, Dick was innovative and creative: his book, *Lessons in Class*, well exemplifies how knowledgeable and intellectual was his approach to managing everyday difficulties from a very practical, almost scientific, approach.

In addition to education, Dick had a wide range of political interests as an activist in the peace movement, CND and Stop the War campaigns. He and Joyce learnt Esperanto, which enabled them to develop international links, travel and engage in wider debate. Within the NUT he continued to argue and campaign for comprehensive ideals and was very active in the campaign to create a single teaching union as well as acting as a delegate to the Trades Council.

He was a keen supporter of the National Health Service and campaigned to defend it. Community relations remained very important to him and for a while he was chair of Unity in Sunderland. Dick was a supporter of and active campaigner with TWFA for many years and was justly proud of the success the group had ensuring that far-right groups have not managed to gain electoral success in areas where they once felt they had real opportunities.

Even as his illness (he developed Parkinson's disease) began to take a real toll on his fitness, he continued to be active and to participate in a determined fashion in meetings, marches, campaigns and debate. For Dick none of these struggles or disagreements became personal. For him the important thing was winning the argument. The worst you might have heard him say of a political opponent was that 'they weren't very progressive'. And this was reciprocated; many, at his funeral, seemed

proud to assert that while they disagreed with him they had to say he was a lovely man they were pleased to have known.

Some of the arguments in which Dick was so closely involved throughout his teaching career seem to have effectively been won; with others the struggle is ongoing and he was well aware of the need to maintain our awareness and determination to win these debates. For him the struggle and the need for vigilance were truly lifelong.

Many folk have reason to thank Dick: not only those with whom he worked closely or who attended his school, but also anyone who has benefited from being taught or working in a school without corporal punishment, with progressive teaching methods and modern management styles.

A former pupil and union colleague described Dick as a man ahead of his time. In every sense he was a true progressive.

### Libya Mission Creep

look out for  
that subtle point  
when Just War  
becomes  
just war

Nigel Mellor

## REVIEWS

Alastair Campbell and Richard Stott, *The Blair Years – Extracts from the Alastair Campbell Diaries* (Hutchinson, 2007) 794pp, ISBN 13: 978-0091796297, £25.00, hbk.

John Prescott with Hunter Davies, *Prezza – My story pulling no punches* (Headline Review/ Hachette UK 2008) 416pp. ISBN 0091796296, £18.99, hbk.

Peter Mandelson, *The Third Man* (Harper Press, 2010) 566pp. ISBN 9780007395286 £25.00, hbk.

Tony Blair, *A Journey*, (Hutchinson, 2010) 624 pp. ISBN 009192555X, £25.00, hbk.

Gordon Brown, *Beyond the Crash: Overcoming the first crisis of globalisation* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), 336pp. ISBN 9780857202857 £20.00, hbk.

Books on New Labour are popping out like buns from a baker's oven. This is hardly surprising considering New Labour held power for thirteen years under the premierships of Blair and Brown. Love him or hate him Tony Blair won three consecutive general elections; he cannot be airbrushed out of the history of the Labour Party. However his electoral successes raise many questions, not least where does New Labour fit into that history, and where do Blair and Brown fit into the pantheon of Labour prime ministers? One diary and four autobiographies written by five members of New Labour's inner circle provide us with some useful evidence needed to answer those questions.

### Campbell

Alastair Campbell, New Labour's spinmeister, was the first out of the traps with the publication in 2007 of extracts from his diaries covering the years

1994-2003. The extracts contain detailed coverage of the inner workings of the Blair government. However they are selected extracts amounting to 350,000 words. In total Campbell's diaries consist of two million words so a lot has been left out of this volume. Campbell has said that he hopes to publish the unpublished material at a later date in volumes covering: the opposition years, Iraq, his disputes with the BBC, and the handover to Brown. This makes one wonder if some of the juiciest bits have been left out of this volume. The tensions between Blair and Brown have certainly been played down. Is the reader being shortchanged?

Campbell was a hardboiled journalist and he revelled in the role yet his admiration for Blair is the dominant theme of this volume of diaries. Blair was clearly something more than a brilliant communicator: he was a leader for the times and reaped the political rewards. The diaries make clear that New Labour was not the well-oiled machine it appeared to outsiders, and Campbell played a major role in presenting the Blair government in the best possible light. He was at the centre of the New Labour project and his unfiltered diaries should prove useful source material.

### **Prescott**

Close on the heels of Campbell's diaries came John Prescott's autobiography. Frankly, this book is a disappointment adding very little to Colin Brown's biography of Prescott. Here is the now familiar story of Prescott's birth in Prestatyn the son of a railway signalman, a north country boyhood, his employment as a steward on the Cunard liners and his activities in the National Union of Seamen, two years of study at Ruskin College followed by a degree course at Hull University, then election to Parliament in 1970 as the Member for Hull East. In 1994 he was elected Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, and although he sometimes grumbled at the transformation of the Labour Party into New Labour he went along with the changes becoming little more than a token working class figure in the New Labour team. His achievements as a minister were meagre. By the time he resigned as Deputy Leader in 2007 he had become a figure of fun.

He claims that his most important role in the Blair governments was acting as a conciliator between Blair and Brown. As he writes in his autobiography we shall probably never know the truth of what was said at the famous meeting between Blair and Brown in the Granita restaurant when, it was alleged, Blair agreed to step down at some point during Labour's second term in return for Gordon Brown not standing against him for the Labour leadership. Whatever, the fact is Brown believed that he had been cheated out of his rightful inheritance and this had baleful consequences for the New Labour governments.

### **Mandelson**

Peter Mandelson was the next to bring out an autobiography. He was probably the most influential figure in the creation of New Labour. Brought up in a 'Labour family' and a political activist from an early age he recognised that the Labour Party would have to undergo radical change if it was to return to power. He supported Neil Kinnock in his attempts to change the Labour Party in the 1980s, and threw his support behind Kinnock's successor John Smith. What the book makes clear is that Mandelson and his fellow modernisers Blair and Brown were deeply unhappy with the slow pace of change under Kinnock and Smith. Kinnock was reluctant to abandon the party's socialist core and Smith was seen as a 'one more heave' man.

The death of John Smith opened the way for Tony Blair, who had no roots in the Labour Party and was largely ignorant of its socialist ideals. He came to the leadership without any ideological baggage. As a smart lawyer he could soon master a brief and Mandelson (and later Campbell) prepared his briefs for him and, it must be said, Blair delivered these extremely well. Gordon Brown, who together with Mandelson and Blair formed the original New Labour trio, did have an affinity with the Labour Party and an affection for its often arcane ways. Brown had acted as a kind of patron to the young sprig Tony Blair when he was first elected to Parliament in 1983. Hence the bitter disappointment when Blair leaped

over him to secure the Labour leadership in 1994. Mandelson's support for Blair opened up a rift between Mandelson and Brown that lasted for fifteen years. The main merit of Mandelson's autobiography is its account of the tensions behind the scenes of the New Labour governments, most of these cleverly concealed at the time by Campbell's use of 'spin'.

Mandelson defends himself against the charge that he was 'New Labour's Machiavelli'. He explains that he had to manoeuvre to get the results he wanted and was often left to do the dirty work. All of this, of course, was done in the interests of the New Labour project. Like Campbell he admired Blair's talents and was loyal to the New Labour leader. Peter Mandelson's autobiography does not make him appear more likable but it does make one appreciate his superb political skills.

### **Blair**

Blair's autobiography closely followed Mandelson's into the bookshops and it turns out to be very different from those of previous Labour prime ministers. Certainly Blair writes in an attempt to justify the decisions he made but, then, all previous holders of the office have done this. It is only to be expected that they should act as their own counsels for the defence, and leave the historians to judge their actions. Blair is an able lawyer and he puts his case very well. In doing so, however, he reveals more of himself than former Labour prime ministers have done. Clement Attlee was characteristically laconic in his autobiography, Harold Wilson's volumes were packed with so much detail that it was sometimes difficult to see the wood for the trees, and James Callaghan's autobiography was a life plainly told. Blair reveals much more of the inner man.

Speaking in his own defence in the Bernie Ecclestone party donations scandal Blair said: 'I think most people who have dealt with me think that I am a pretty straight sort of guy'. I am sure that many people who voted New Labour in 1997 did think this. They saw Blair as a young and able leader who was in close touch with their lives and aspirations. They were wrong. For a man taking over the premiership his experience of life

was remarkably narrow: Fettes, Oxford University, Lincoln's Inn, and the House of Commons. Furthermore, Blair's autobiography reveals a man with, what can only be described as having a messianic complex, someone who believed he had been chosen by destiny to lead Britain and influence world events. This colossal self-confidence pervades his autobiography. In addition to his communication and political skills he enjoyed a good deal of luck. In ancient times it would have been said that the gods smiled on him.

Finally, the writing of memoirs usually comes at the end of an active life. This is not the case with Blair's autobiography. He makes it clear that he has not reached the end of his political career. He would have liked to have been President of the European Union but this was denied him. However he clearly expects other opportunities to open up for him. Meanwhile his role in the history of the Labour Party needs to be assessed and his autobiography should prove useful on this score.

### **Brown**

Gordon Brown's book could be called a fragment of autobiography because it is not a full set of memoirs but an account of his role in saving the world economy after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. Unlike the other New Labour memoirs there are no personal revelations and no attempt to settle old political scores. However, like Churchill in his wartime memoirs, Brown places himself at the centre of events. He presents himself as the man of the hour, and to be fair to Brown he deserves considerable credit for grasping the scale of the financial collapse and giving a lead on the need for the state to recapitalise the errant banks. He was also instrumental in persuading the G20 countries to meet in London in the spring of 2009 and agree a rescue package for the global economy. These events showed Brown at his best.

He is less convincing in his criticism of the policies of the banks over the previous decade. After all, he was Chancellor of the Exchequer during this period and had the power to rein in reckless lending and the payment

of extravagant bonuses. If he foresaw the coming crash, as he claims, he did little to avert it or prepare Britain to face it.

Brown's account is not an easy read but it is a reflective book by a serious-minded politician. Gordon Brown has yet to provide his own chronicle of the Blair years and this should prove interesting if he chooses to write it.

### History will judge?

In summing up this clutch of books it is apt to quote one of Tony Blair's favourite platitudes: 'History will judge'. And so it will. But what will that judgement be? My own view is that the Blair-Brown years represent a lost opportunity to transform Britain into a modern post-imperial state with a foreign policy to match the country's diminished position in the world. Clearly the New Labour Project enjoyed considerable electoral support, but this was not translated into a successful period of government. Some of the reasons for this failure are to be found in the pages of these books. They include: an overreliance on presentation or 'spin', a shallowness of vision, and disunity at the very heart of government.

Archie Potts

Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McIlroy (eds) *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Merlin: Pontypool, 2010) 399 pp. ISBN: 0850366879, £39, pbk.

In the foreword to *Histories of Labour* Eric Hobsbawm, a founding member of the Society for the Study of Labour History and one of Britain's most eminent historians, describes how British labour history was once the most globally influential in its field. According to Hobsbawm, labour history was a product of the intellectual ferment of the 1950s when older forms of Marxism were questioned. As such labour history was essentially an attempt to use historical reflection as a means of finding 'a way forward in left politics' (p.5). Labour history chimed with the times, it was hip

during the heady days of the 1960s when the working class novels, drama and music were similarly applauded. During the 1960s and 1970s history from the perspective of the people, not the ruling classes, was fashionable both inside and outside the academy. So much so that British Labour history produced innovative contributions to social and labour history that were globally significant. Many of the most influential historians of the period (Asa Briggs, John Saville, Eric Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, Royden Harrison etc) and the most interesting historical debates were in the arena of labour and social history. To take the most famous example, E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) raised the poor handloom weaver from the condescension of history and in doing so won over a generation of historians to the perspective of 'history from below'. In all this, as John McIlroy's chapter demonstrates, the Society for the Study of Labour History played an important role.

The growth of labour history was particularly influenced by the adult education where there was greater scope for the teaching of working-class history and a rising generation of students who benefitted from the post-war expansion of higher education. Adult learners were encouraged to explore the histories of work and working-class culture by regional branches of the Society of the Study of Labour History, including traditionally active branches such as the North East Labour History Society. *Histories of Labour*, which was commissioned to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Society, considers the impact of labour history since the 1960s to the present day. It is the first comprehensive book to consider labour history in a global framework detailing what has been achieved to date and scoping out future directions for study. There are chapters on Britain, Ireland, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Germany, India and Japan. Its contributors are experts in the labour history of particular countries and number amongst their rank leading academics in the field. Each country is treated as a case study with overviews of key trends, thinkers and books along with an analysis of the key debates there. Besides the more traditional remit of labour historiography new

conceptions of class, gender, ethnicity, culture, community and power are also considered. The discipline of labour history is also analyzed through the institutional context of labour history societies, historical associations and journals and via links with the contemporary labour movement.

I would recommend this book for postgraduate students searching for a theoretical framework for their theses or grappling with the key historiography of labour history. Indeed many influential debates within academic history in recent years began in the field of labour history (notably the post-modernist 'linguistic turn' and the challenges to a class-based analysis of history) For this reason *Histories of Labour* should be considered for adoption as a key text for undergraduate and postgraduate modules dealing with historiography generally as well as on courses more specifically concerned with labour and social history. I certainly would have liked to have read Joan Allen and Malcolm Chase's clear explanation of the 'linguistic turn' (pp. 72-5) when I started my doctorate.

This book will also be relevant to those interested in working-class political parties and organisations, to students of trade unionism, industrial conflict and to social scientists interested in social and political protest, the relations between employers and the state and post-structuralism more generally. Ironically, a book which by its very nature is historiographical (and thus at times theoretical) will have perhaps less appeal to the lay reader interested in the labour movement. This is a problem increasingly faced by the discipline as, in Britain at least, there is a danger that labour history is becoming more of the academy and less of the people. Yet this is a book that is worthy of a wide readership. Indeed to their credit the editors flag up this issue in the introductory chapter and promise to avoid the 'dogmatic explication of the laws of social development and the dour adumbration of historical inevitability' (p. 9). The contributors fulfil this promise, indeed one of the strengths of this book is its lively, topical style and avoidance of dogmatism.

As a recent conference held under the auspices of the Society for the Study of Labour History at the University of Huddersfield in November

2010 testifies, there is considerable interest in a 'labour history' within the current postgraduate population, particularly when it is presented in the broader context of gender, race, and cultural history. Perhaps as protest movements gain pace in this country and overseas (evidenced by the 'March for the Alternative' rally in London in March 2011 and internationally by uprisings across the Arab world in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) the study of protest movements and labour history will again be in vogue as contemporary politics stimulates interest in understanding and learning from past struggles for political change.

*Dr Janette Martin, University of Huddersfield*

Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Beviary Stuff Publications, 2010) 212pp. ISBN 978-0-9564827-5-4 £12.00, pbk.

Thomas Spence has become a well known Geordie. He has a blue plaque in Broad Chare on Newcastle Quayside. Twenty years of pressure, led by Keith Armstrong, upon the City Council was responsible for the point where, in 2009, ironically, a Lib-Dem Lord Mayor unveiled the object. One can imagine the snort of disbelief coming from the mouth of Spence at such an improbable happening. It is quite possible that sometime round 1788 he was physically run out of town. Even though the 1780s was a gentle decade for radicals compared to the one which followed, Tom had views on the legitimacy of private property which would have incensed the predecessors of Mr Arnold, the Lord Mayor. Much more radical than his celebrated and notorious contemporary Tom Paine he argued for 'a people's farm', land owned and run by the parish. He was a sort of communist before the word had entered the English language. There's evidence that from his teenage years he was a provocative young man who paraded the streets and bars of Newcastle freely mouthing subversion.

Driven out, or leaving of his own volition for London, it might be thought he sought the relative anonymity of the Great Wen. That was far

from the truth. London may have been the biggest city in the world at the time where it would be possible to hide, however *radical* London occupied a much smaller canvass geographically and culturally perhaps ten square miles from Paternoster Row to Clerkenwell Green and the southern part of Camden round St Pancras. The area teemed with radical booksellers, journalistic hacks, artists, down at heel attorneys, sympathetic publicans and a myriad of craft workshops peopled by artisans. This was the world of caricature and cartoon, satire of the great, pornography, deism, outlandish political theory, subversion and – not to be forgotten – government spies and informers. It was a world into which Spence perfectly fitted and in which he built a cult following and a political tendency, the Spenceites, which long survived his own death.

Malcolm Chase traces the story of Spence and the wider history of agrarian radicalism down to the Chartist period. The first edition, published in 1988, was a path-breaking book taking the reader into previously uncharted territory. In his introduction to the second edition he confessed to having underestimated the influence of Spence on the early radical movement, and then subsequently through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It is even possible that his view of public ownership in land has continuing currency in the world of global warming and assault upon the environment by multi-national corporations.

Keith Armstrong showed formidable determination to have Spence publicly recognised in his own country - for Keith, 'the Keyside,' ended with success. Twenty five years ago Malcolm Chase rescued him from undeserved obscurity. The new edition, with its thought provoking Preface, makes the fascinating story available to a new and wider readership at an affordable price.

*John Charlton*

Willie Thompson, *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes, Liberalism, Conservatism, Communism, Fascism, 1914-91* (Pluto Press, 2011) 256pp. ISBN 0745327112, £19.99, pbk.

As I was reading Willie Thompson's *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes* on the remote island of Coll in the Hebrides, I couldn't help thinking of my own dislocation from the majority of the big ideological narratives of the 'Short Twentieth Century' – a phrase coined by Eric Hobsbawm to describe the period between the start of the First World War in 1914 and the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1991. Of course, all historical knowledge is partial, but I think to a generation whose political consciousness developed in a world where the Cold War seemed headed in only one direction, the violence of that short century still seems incredible. As William Golding (quoted by Hobsbawm in his introduction) said: "I can't help thinking that this has been the most violent century in human history."

This book is essentially an introduction to the major political ideologies of the age: Liberalism, Conservatism, Communism and Fascism. However, I think it is more than that, because the author doesn't treat them as separate entities, but examines very skilfully the way those ideologies interlock, feed off each other and provide the basis for political and military conflict.

Willie Thompson was born in Edinburgh, brought up in Shetland, but spent much of his working life as a lecturer in Glasgow. Always combining his research interests with political activism, he was immersed in the culture of the left and the Communist Party in particular. In the last decade, since moving to the North East, he has been a central voice in the North East Labour History Society. He might even said to be the Society's resident theoretician, though I'm sure he would dispute that. However, he is one of those historians who, like Hobsbawm, writes from a 'bird's eye view'. His published works include a history of the Communist Party of Great Britain, various discussions of postmodernism and history, a book on Britain and its Empire and numerous histories of the Left. These are books that deal with huge movements and big ideas – they are ambitious and yet they remain highly accessible to the general reader too.

*Ideologies in the Age of Extremes* should ideally be read as a companion volume to Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century*. Indeed Thompson explicitly makes this link by framing his work within the same time-scales and broadly using Hobsbawm's definitions – the 'Age of Catastrophe 1914-45', the 'Golden Years' 1945-73' and 'Crisis 1973-91'. What this book does, however, is to draw out the ideological underpinnings of the events, movements and histories that Hobsbawm describes in detail. The precision with which Thompson deals with these ideologies will not be a surprise to readers of his other work, but that certainly helps to navigate some very complex historical waters. A picture is carefully built up of the political ideologies that informed the historical moment, from the great slaughter of World War One and the economic catastrophe that followed, through the rise and defeat of Fascism, the period of relative affluence in the West following the Second War, the beginning of the Cold War and the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Bloc. For students of Twentieth Century politics, this will be an invaluable introduction. For the well versed historians, here is a thoughtful commentary on the ideas that formed the 'Age of Extremes' and as such it is peppered with little gems, such as the description of Finland's AKS (Academic Karelia Society), whose obscure fascist ideology held that Finns were superior because of their mixed race (Russian and Swedish) as opposed to the prevailing fascist ideology which emphasised racial purity. Equally fascinating is the discussion of the development of neoconservatism and neoliberalism originally sparked by the writing and teaching of the American Leo Strauss. The term 'paleoconservative', describing the traditional conservative wing opposed to neoconservative ideology and personified by the likes of Pat Buchanan, has also been banked for use at a later date.

*Ideologies in the Age of Extremes* attempts to cover 77 years of turbulent history in just over 250 pages, whilst analysing the growth of concurrent ideologies, sometimes overlapping. This is an incredibly ambitious task which is both aided and limited by its broad sweep. It will have been

said that *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes* suffers from a Eurocentric vision and a resulting pessimism because of its cursory glance at, for example, the ideological movements in South America. I disagree. The book is not set out as a complete survey of the ideological trends of the twentieth century – what a task that would be! It follows Hobsbawm's lead and explores in depth the ideological roots of the movements and conflicts he describes. Of course, as such, there are gaps – the rise of Islamic radicalism is only mentioned in passing – hinted at in the discussions relating to Afghanistan. Although China's embrace of capitalism is discussed at some length, the opposition to US imperialism in South America, led by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, is not. No doubt this will frustrate some readers who want an upbeat ending to the 'Age of Extremes', I don't think that is either the purpose of the book or the role of the author in this case.

Willie Thompson's book will provide a very useful starting point for students of the last century, a stimulating read for those with a general interest in the ideologies that shaped that century and a thought provoking commentary for readers of Eric Hobsbawm. It is particularly important at this historical juncture that we reflect on the demise of the communist paradigm and understand the emergence of neoliberalism as it takes an aggressive form across the globe in the wake of yet more economic disasters. Even from my sleepy little hideaway in Coll, I could see the urgency of that.

*Ben Sellers*

Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840-2011* (Little, Brown, 2011) 455pp. ISBN 978-1-4087-0287-1, £25, hbk. The latest publication by the phenomenally productive Eric Hobsbawm, now in his mid-nineties, is centrally concerned with the history of Marxism and the movements established in its name that have flourished and faded in the course of the past century and a half.

The volume is not a connected narrative, but a series of essays published on various occasions since 1957. What is the more remarkable



is that they do not read like a disconnected collection, but trace a coherent line of development that provides an overall picture of the trials, tribulations, achievements and ultimate fate of Marxism as a theoretical outlook aiming to understand social reality and as a guide to the project of 'changing the world'. Hobsbawm being multilingual among all his other accomplishments wrote many of these essays in other European languages. These have all been translated and updated for this volume and there are in addition entirely new ones written specifically for it.

The principal theme taken up following a discussion of Marx and Engels's own politics and some key writings (such as the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Grundrisse*, though not *Capital*) is the centrality of Marxism and Marxist-inspired movements to world history from even before Marx's death until the last decades of the twentieth century. This covers Marxist-inspired parties (principally the German SPD) prior to 1914; the great division between Communists and Social Democrats after 1919 (previously the latter name had covered even the most revolutionary of Marxists); the Communist parties and the anti-fascist struggles of the thirties and forties; the importance of Gramsci; the rise of academic Marxism in the sixties; the decline of the Communist movement (including the weirdo 'Marxisms' of the 1970s); and finally a historical summary and summing-up of the history of labour and Marxism.

A couple of quotations will give some of the flavour of what Hobsbawm writes: he is an elegant stylist who knows how and when to be acerbic. On the subject of my other review in this number of *NEH*:

Professor Trevor-Roper ... was far from untypical of the tone of anti-Marxism in that discouraging decade [the 1950s]. He spent a good deal of space propounding the very implausible proposition that Marx made no original contribution to history except 'to sweep up ideas already advanced by other thinkers and annex them to a crude philosophical dogma... that he had been without significant influence on serious historians ...' (p.200).

And on contemporary realities: '...with the fall of the Berlin Wall capitalism could forget how to be frightened, and therefore lost interest in people unlikely to own shares' (p.413).

In the grim days of the early twenty-first century, with so many of the social advances that we used to take for granted now in the process of reversal and the planet threatened with environmental catastrophe, the very title of the book raises the disturbing question of whether consciously changing the world as a project of emancipation is feasible at all – but if it is, then Hobsbawm is in no doubt that Marxism and significant elements of the Communist heritage still have a great deal to contribute.

Willie Thompson

Jonathan Brown (ed.), *The Right to Learn: the WEA in the North of England, 1910-2010* (London: Workers' Educational Association, 2010) 132 pages, illustrated. ISBN 978-0-900823-89-3. £14.99

Histories of adult education are generally very worthy but seldom make for compelling reading. This book is a conspicuous exception: it is compelling but to describe it as worthy would be to miss its vibrant and self-critical qualities. I should, however, declare an interest. I knew several of the contributors to this lively collection in the 1980s, when I worked on Teesside for the adult education department of the University of Leeds. The Leeds 'extra-mural empire' extended right to the northern frontier of the historic Yorkshire; so, too, did the boundary of the Yorkshire Workers' Educational Association (WEA) with which I was expected to work closely. Maybe it was the distance between Middlesbrough and the Yorkshire District's heart in the former West Riding that coloured my view: but the North-East District always seemed more-vibrant, less-stuffy and not at all stifled by the dead hand of traditional approaches to adult learning. It positively fizzed with innovation, especially in its provision for women returning to education. Leeds unashamedly imitated its concept of 'New Opportunities for Women' (NOW), very successfully at its Middlesbrough centre. A supportive stream of ideas, shared publicity

opportunities, and in some instances tutors, sustained the Leeds initiative.

The first NOW course had begun in Newcastle in 1974, the starting point for a thoughtful and affectionate memoir by Eileen Aird in this book. From the start, NOW had quickly established itself as a key element within the North-East District's provision. Quite how key NOW had been I have only realised from reading Jonathan Brown's frank account here, 'WEA Northern District in Crisis, 1973-76'. This is a celebratory volume (and rightly so) but it is no hagiography. The editor's history of this turbulent period is a valuable counterpoint to the gentle and typically self-effacing memoir by the late Michael Standen, reprinted here from an earlier history of the District, published in the year of the national WEA centenary, 2003. The WEA nationally had regarded Standen's appointment in 1976 as Acting District Secretary 'with suspicion and hostility', explains Brown. Standen, however, had been semi-reluctantly propelled to the front of a genuinely grassroots movement to resuscitate the District, in the face both of potential bankruptcy and the threat of a 'Committee of Reconstruction' by the national WEA. Within a few years the North-East District had become one of the most effective and innovative in the country. It is good to see that process analysed here, and for this reason alone *The Right to Learn* deserves to be read not only by those with an interest in the history of adult education or voluntary movements, but by all with a concern for the contemporary history of the north-east.

This, though, is only one of the many merits of *The Right to Learn*. Nigel Todd contributes a wonderfully rich and skilfully contextualised account of the 'pre-history' and early years (to 1920) of the WEA in the region. Ian Roberts then takes the history forward. This places the crisis of the seventies in a broader context, underlining the District's achievement in weathering not only that storm but also the sustained turbulence that followed it from 1979. Tom Nesbit's 'Reflections on Trade Union Education' in the decade that followed bear further testimony to the challenges and achievements of the twentieth century's other 'low dishonest decade' (to adapt W. S. Auden's remark about the 'thirties').

This is a volume in the best History Workshop tradition and Nesbit's is one of several personal but invaluable memoirs that comprise the second half of the book, balancing out the more-conventional histories of the first. Many readers will turn first to 'An Approach to Art: the Birth of the Pitmen Painters', a memoir of the early years of the Ashington Group by none other than its tutor Robert Lyon, reprinted here for the first time since 1935. The late, great Sid Chaplin's memoirs of his early life down the pit and the redemptive power of his tutors, 'mural, extra-mural and informal', is another 'must-read' hitherto only available in an internal annual report from 1977. A further posthumous contribution by Vera Pickles reminds us that the District reaches over to West Cumberland, the tutor organiser for which she was appointed in 1938. Roger Till recalls life as a full-time literature tutor, 1950-76, while Ian Roberts and Freda Tallantyne contribute chapters devoted to Northumberland. Ruth Tanner's two contributions examine first, the impact of national legislation on WEA operations in the north-east and, second, the history of the Darlington branch. Victor Cadaxa describes the programme of international exchanges and overseas study visits (something else that left us awestruck south of the Tees). Finally, Liz Armstrong concludes with 'The Right to Learn Today', a short but passionate statement about how the District has reacted to the changing policy agenda since 2007.

Tradition is a rock of great strength in any educational endeavour. As the WEA North-East District faces its second century, *The Right to Learn* offers an insightful account of just what tradition means to it, but without any sense that it rests complacent. Traditions only truly live if those who uphold them also innovate. *The Right to Learn* shows that innovation has frequently been a keynote to the history of the WEA in the north-east. This is a history that deserves to be read, of a history that deserves to be celebrated.

*Malcolm Chase*

Dick Keys and Ken Smith, *Armstrong's River Empire – Tyne Shipyards that Supplied the World* (Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2010) 108pp. ISBN 978 1 85795 148 6, 108pp. £10 pbk.

My first experience of shipbuilding came when my wife and I moved into a small two-bedroom flat in Rochester Dwellings in Walker in 1970. At that time the Walker Naval Yard was busy with the noise of caulkers and welders filling the air.

The Low Walker Shipyard, which was next door to the Naval Yard was opened by Charles Mitchell in 1852 who then forged a pact with William Armstrong, the latter providing the guns from his Elswick works whilst Mitchell built the warships. This pact was formalised in 1882 with the formation of WG Armstrong, Mitchell and Co. Ltd. This booklet follows on from a previous Tyne Bridge Publishers booklet, *Emperor of Industry: Lord Armstrong of Cragside* in 2005

Both Armstrong and Mitchell were archetypal Victorians, engineers, manufacturers and philanthropists and they were responsible for arguably the greatest industrial complex on Tyneside in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But this booklet concentrates on the ships, their crews and their battles and this makes for a fascinating insight into a period when the company provided warships for a wide range of countries; including Japan, Russia and China. Often ensuing battles featured Tyneside built warships on both sides. There is a lot of fascinating photos, illustrations and 'launch cards' issued to official guests at launching ceremonies, the latter included measurements of the ship and armaments.

The booklet has some interesting details of the people involved in either building or crewing the ships, including a poignant picture of the headstones of three Chinese sailors in Elswick Cemetery in 1887 and Japanese sailors 'Togo's Heroes at St. James Park in April 1906' where they watched Newcastle beat Stoke City 5-0 and were applauded as heroes following their successful battle of Tsushima which saw the defeat of Russia in Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05.

A key date for the expansion of the Armstrong-Mitchell project

was the opening of the Swing Bridge in 1876, built by Armstrong and followed by the Tyne Commissioners dredging of the river west which enabled Armstrong to open a new shipyard at the Elswick site. In 1884 warship construction was transferred to the new Elswick yard, with Low Walker concentrating on merchant vessels.

Charles Mitchell died in 1895, but the company expanded to become WG Armstrong, Whitworth and Co. Ltd in 1897. Lord Armstrong died in 1900, but this didn't slacken the pace of the company. His Elswick Works employed 12,000 people in 1896 and this increased to 23,000 by 1906. Apart from warships the Low Walker yard also built steam yachts, initially the *George Robert* in 1856 and subsequently the *Northumbria* in 1866 for Sir George Robert Stephenson. The Low Walker yard built over 90 vessels for Russian owners; including the paddle tugs *Karacheff*, *Looga*, *Luban* and *Neva* for service on the Volga. In 1862 Charles Mitchell helped the Tsarist government build an iron shipbuilding yard in St. Petersburg, for which he was awarded the Order of Stanislaus.

A particularly dramatic incident occurred in 1894 when on August 8<sup>th</sup> Captain Wiggins together with a small flotilla of Low Walker built ships including two tugs, the *Pervoi* and *Vtora* together with the arctic steam yacht *Blencathra*, sailed some 500 miles up the Yenisei river. They reached their destination Lokovoi Protok without mishap. But the return journey in the wooden steamship *Stjernen* was disastrous. They reached the Kara Sea without incident but then hit a reef in dense fog off the Yamal Peninsula and Wiggins was forced to abandon ship. They were saved by the local Samoyed people who led them on a 32 day tramp across the frozen tundra before reaching Pustozersk on the Pechora River on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Eventually all 49 men finally reached Archangel, but not before one man had to have several toes amputated due to frostbite.

In the late 1890's Low Walker developed a reputation for building icebreakers, the first the *Saratovski Ledokol* being built in 1895 for service on the Volga. Even more ambitious was the construction of *Baikal* an

icebreaking train ferry for use on Lake Baikal. This was built between 1895 and 1898 then dismantled and shipped in pieces to St. Petersburg. From there all 3,000 tonnes in some 6,900 packages were transported by rail and river to Irkutsk on the western shore of Lake Baikal. There a team of Tyneside engineers led the reconstruction of the vessel, helped by a team of labourers who had been transported to Siberia for alleged crimes, including one mass murderer.

Not content with icebreakers the Low Walker yard also pioneered the building of oil tankers the first of which the *Massis* was built for the Caspian oil trade in 1882

The Elswick yard finally closed in 1918 with the launch of the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle and in 1927 Armstrong, Whitworth and Company amalgamated with Vickers to become Vickers-Armstrong Ltd. Finally the Low Walker yard closed in 1947 with the launch of the cargo vessel *Zarlan*.

This is a thoroughly well researched and fascinating account of two supreme Tyneside engineers who laid the foundation for arguably the most significant shipbuilding venture on the river Tyne

*Steve Manchee*

Anthony Burton, *Tracing your Shipbuilding Ancestors, a Guide for Family Historians* (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2010) 144pp. 18pp, ISBN 978-1848840966, £12.99, pbk.

The book title said it all; this is a genealogical guide aimed at family historians. It clearly signposts the family history researcher to where and what sources may prove useful to them in their endeavours. However, to describe the work as such is to underestimate it. This is also a condensed history of the shipbuilding industry from late medieval through to industrial decline in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, giving a useful context to the subject matter of the family historian researching forebears engaged in the shipbuilding industry.

Starting with the wooden ship, the book examines organisation, building techniques, technology, yard ownership and labour. It goes on to trace the development of the naval dockyard. In all this, unstated but implied, are the roots of an antipathy to change, which plagued the shipbuilding industry on both the labour and the capital sides of the industry. In this is cited the resistance to Marc Brunel's innovation in mechanisation of making blocks for ships' rigging. This is a theme in industrial disputes of shipbuilding; workers fearing loss of livelihood or status, and owners unwilling to invest or not fully aware of the necessary investment required in bringing the workforce into their confidence.

On mechanisation of shipbuilding, Burton takes the classic engineers' or technologists' line in that prototype leads to Mark I, which gives rise to Mark II – a Whiggish view but not necessarily unhelpful given the *raison d'être* of the book. There is in this approach little sense that technology is a cultural product, coming from and acting upon the culture in which it arises. One thing that did irritate is that power outputs of engines were given in accurate and chronologically correct units of horse power, without conversion to the modern SI unit of Watts (I still think in miles and can convert to old currency, but physics and engineering were always learned in the metre, kilogram, second – i.e. metric format.)

Overall this is a good book to start a family history search into shipbuilding ancestors, but of equal importance it is a useful introductory text for anyone setting out on a research project on the British shipbuilding industry. It gives a broad view of shipbuilding that will give the researcher an indication of where to start with a useful section of further reading and an extensive list of shipyard histories, organised alphabetically as an appendix to the text. What is to be hoped for, and this book does not set out to do, is a monograph that unites the technological, economic, social and cultural aspects of an industry - and this book will be a good starting text for such a project.

*Paul Mayne*

Laura Mitchison and Lawrence Pontin, *Working Lives of the Thames Gateway* (Eastside Community Heritage, 2011) £9.99.

In his Foreword to the book, the singer Billy Bragg writes, in support of Oral History, 'Who will tell them what it was like to unload the ships whose names appear in the ledgers of the East India Dock Company? Who will testify to the frightening heat of the furnaces that generated the millions of kilowatts of power that the London Electricity Board boasted of in their literature? Who will give us a taste of the stench and grime that was the everyday reality for thousands of workers in the industrial heart of southern England? Who will remember the words of the songs they composed to bring some humour to the workplace? So much treasure remains in the memories of those who worked along the Thames during its industrial period.' Substitute 'Tyne Commissioners,' 'North Eastern Electricity Board', along 'Tyne,' 'Wear' and 'Tees' and you have a recognisable case for Oral History in the north east region galvanised by a funded project.

In our region some of this has already been done and it is hoped that the current Popular Politics Project will achieve much more. It would do no harm at all to see this publication as a model for distilling in print form the oral history testimonies of working people. The stories are vivid capturing the vitality of workers' language; its descriptive power, its liveliness, its wry understanding of exploitation, its humour and occasional flashes of bitterness.

The book is edited with restraint allowing workers' voices to come to the fore whilst not neglecting the importance of intelligent contextualising. Finally it is attractively presented with numerous excellent photographs from both private hands and public archives.

*John Charlton.*

Adam Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: the biography* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) 598pp, ISBN 978-0-297-85214-8, £25.00, hbk.

Hugh Trevor-Roper was one of the most renowned and controversial

historians of the twentieth century. His career was spent mostly in Oxbridge, but his interest to us is that his roots were in the North East. His father was the local doctor in the Alnwick area and attended the Duke of Northumberland's family, having his private key to Alnwick castle grounds. The Trevor-Ropers themselves had aristocratic ancestors, though they had long declined from that status.

Some of his historical research, though a very minor part, involved the North East and greatly illuminated the practices of Thomas Sutton, founder of the famous Charterhouse public school, who in the later sixteenth century built his fortune by monopolising the Newcastle coal trade, and then enhanced it enormously by ruthless moneylending.

By the standards of most British academics Trevor-Roper, who was born in 1914, had a dramatic and stormy career. With his academic perspectives interrupted by the war, he joined the intelligence services where, being irrepressibly quarrelsome and refusing to defer to the stupidity of his superiors, they tried to have him framed and shot as a spy. He is, however, best known for two contrasting episodes, one early in his historical work, the other near its end. The first of these, while he was still in the military, brought him great success and acclaim when he was able to track down Hitler's will written on the eve of the tyrant's suicide, and subsequently produce the definitive account of Hitler's end, *The Last Days of Hitler*. In the second, in the early eighties, he was covered with discredit when he made the error of authenticating the fake Hitler diaries.

Without doubt Hugh Trevor-Roper was not at all a pleasant individual. The evidence which comes through from this biography – and Sisman is not unsympathetic – adds up to a formidable indictment. Snobbish and posturing, self-important, petty, hypocritical, arrogant, vindictive, lying, tax-evading; in the words of another historian, 'I find it difficult to decide whether T-R is a fundamentally nice person in the grip of a prose style in which it is impossible to be polite, or a fundamentally unpleasant person ... using rudeness as a disguise for nastiness'. (p.204). He enjoyed playing the *enfant terrible*, sometimes very childishly.

With qualities like those and the generally right-wing slant of his historical writing, it comes as no surprise that he was appreciated by Margaret Thatcher who not only consulted but ennobled him. Even so he found himself annoyed by her stridency, vanity and dogmatism, remarking to one colleague, 'is our dear Prime Minister going bananas'? Nor was she pleased when he corrected her historical ignorance.

In fact one of Trevor-Roper's more positive traits was his refusal to tolerate misleading and pompous rhetoric even from people with whom he tended to be in basic agreement politically or academically, such as the ultra-right 'Common Cause' in the late sixties; and he objected to the witch-hunt against Anthony Blunt in 1980. It was his right-wing reputation however which resulted in his election, in 1980, as the Master of Peterhouse, the smallest and oldest of Cambridge colleges, as well as the most grotesquely reactionary.

The Fellows who ran Peterhouse constituted a nest of ultra-right vipers (others kept their heads down) dominated by the sinister Maurice Cowling ('ludicrously reactionary' is Sisman's term), several of whose close acolytes were overt fascists. Distinguished Jewish visitors endured anti-Semitic sneers. Cowling was largely responsible for Trevor-Roper's appointment, though later came to regret it sorely. The reason was that Trevor-Roper turned out to be not nearly right-wing enough for Cowling and his caucus, whom he described as, 'papists, obscurantists ... lunatic mathematicians and contorted historians'. (p.460). Worse, he wanted to update the college, modernise its educational approach and eliminate abuses, with the result that his years there were ones of constant battle and intrigue. 'Why did we elect him if he isn't going to do what we want', one of his reactionary colleagues grumbled.

In 1974 Trevor-Roper, owing to his academic reputation, had been made a 'National Director' of Times Newspapers (not yet in Rupert Murdoch's clutches), and, despite reservations, continued in that role once Murdoch took over. His disaster over the Hitler diaries was largely a result of Murdoch railroading him into giving a positive answer, though

he had already started to have his doubts. Naturally his enemies on all sides rejoiced over his embarrassment.

Trevor-Roper wrote a great deal and he wrote very readably. His preferred form was the essay, and these formed the greater part of his output, many in collected volumes. In the area of historiography his energies were principally occupied in combating Marxist or historically materialist interpretations of the English Revolution, with his chief opponents in this regard being Christopher Hill and Lawrence Stone.

A great disappointment, to Trevor-Roper himself as well as his colleagues and admirers, was the fact that he never was able to produce the great work on the seventeenth century that was expected of him, constantly promised and as constantly deferred. Since he lacked neither the energy nor the expertise nor the insight (some of his observations were extremely penetrating) the probable conclusion is that his failure in this respect was due to his unwillingness to take seriously the interpretations of historians like Hill and Stone (though he respected Hobsbawm), without which it was impossible to get an overall grasp on the history of that century of revolution.

This is a volume well worth reading, a gripping view of one aspect of twentieth-century British historiography. Sisman covers the ground thoroughly and is very fair to his subject – recording his achievements and often giving him the benefit of the doubt, while not concealing his shortcomings. Whatever particular disagreements one might have – Sisman's grasp of Marxism, for example, is rather weak – Trevor-Roper is unlikely to need a future biographer.

*Willie Thompson*

**Peter Crookston, *The Pitmen's Requiem* (Northumbria Press, 2010) 192 pp. ISBN 0857160052, £11.99, hbk**

There's a bike ride I do along the line of the great coal seam which runs from north west Durham in a great arc across the Tyne near Swalwell and

Newburn, over to Kenton, Seghill and under the North Sea at Seaton Sluice. I ride bits of it on what I think of as an archaeological expedition to note the surviving remnants of the coal industry and its communities. There's George Stephenson's cottage at West Moor where he was the engineer in 1801. At Weetslade are the massive country park pit heap and 1950s industrial brick, utilitarian, pit head offices. On the way into Dudley there are little cottages spookily engraved 'Eventide' and Lorraine Terrace and the Clayton Arms named for the mine owners. In Burradon and Camperdown stands a symbolic underground truck with a bed of fresh flowers instead of coal on a tended green space and more cottages with the upbeat early fifties name of 'Festival Cottages'. At Backworth the miners' welfare stands in Georgian splendour surrounded by (the miners') golf course and cricket square and further on the impressive Co-op store, now a carpet sales room.

Occasionally I will stop and ask an old man in his garden, 'Where was the pithead?' I'll get ten minutes, or more, of vivid memories tumbling out of a lost world. 'I lost four relatives in the Hartley disaster in 1862,' said Mr North, weeding his border at Dudley. 'Their names are on the monument in Earsdon Church yard. They were just boys.'

In a way this is what Peter Crookston was doing, in a more structured manner, in researching his book, *The Pitmen's Requiem*. There are three 'subjects' in the book, Gresford, the pitmen's hymn, Robert Saint its composer and a remarkable range of living former members of the County Durham mining communities.

*Gresford* was written in the aftermath of the devastating disaster at Gresford Colliery, Wrexham, North Wales in 1934. 266 men died and only 11 bodies were ever recovered. Among the many ghastly things about this disaster include the appalling fact that the wage packets of the dead miners were docked quarter of a shift's pay for failure to complete the shift.

Robert Saint was a pitman from Hebburn, unemployed in 1934. He was a musician moved to write *Gresford*. From that moment it became the

miners' hymn played by colliery bands at miners' funerals, at the Annual Durham Miners' Gala and has become a regular part of brass band programmes throughout the world. Lee Hall used it in his acclaimed drama, *The Pitmen Painters*. This piece of music is the touchstone of the book running through it connecting people and events back as far as Tommy Hepburn and the strikes of the 1830s, the Easington disaster of 1951 down to the closure in 2008 of Ellington the last pit in the region and, perhaps, even beyond into the future through the continuing vitality of a Miner's Gala without working miners.

Saint was an eccentric figure. He did not return to the pits when trade revived in the late thirties. He wrote music and played saxophone in his own dance band. He served for four years as a bandsman with the Northumberland Fusiliers and was demobbed on medical grounds in 1939. He then worked for the National Equine Defence League. Known locally as 'the poor man's vet' he devoted most of his life to the welfare of animals from a fairground caravan, a shambling house in Hebburn and a farm in South Shields.

Like Saint, Peter Crookston was a Hebburn boy whose parents had been acquaintances of the composer through his dance hall performances. Peter became a journalist, locally and then on national newspapers. In the early years of the last decade he set out to discover more about the life of Robert Saint. It soon became a labour of love. He plunged into autobiography seeking out the connection between his late parents and Saint and soon found he was exploring the decline and demise of the Great Northern Coalfield.

Much of the story comes from the mouths of more than twenty people the author has interviewed from his earlier career (like Sid Chaplin) to those when he had the book in mind. Their testimony is woven together with passion and grace. It is deeply moving but never descends into sentimentality. It is most highly recommended.

*John Charlton.*

Geoff Laws, *A Cartoonist's Chronicle* (Tyne Publishing 2010) 120pp. ISBN 978 185795 201 8, £10, pbk

What a thing it is to be able to draw or paint. An alternative language that is able to touch notes unavailable to the writer or the speaker. The depiction of feeling and emotion, has often been most effectively achieved by images, and despite the fact that all art is loosely ideological, only the worst of it is dogmatic. Have a look at the work of the Durham pitman painters Tom McGuinness and Norman Cornish which depicts experience at the expense of theory – a terrible sin in some quarters, but by far the best representations and insights we have, in any medium, of living the mining life.

The work of Geoff Laws is the same but different. Geoff was the resident cartoonist on *The Journal*, *Evening Chronicle* and *Sunday Sun*, between 1974 -2009. Geoff's work demanded that he be reactive, that he catch and communicate the essence of people and situations in motion. This book then, which features much of Geoff's best work, tells us much about historical context, who was centre stage and how they appeared. There is no ideological cohesion here. Many of the cartoons relate to how national politics impacted upon the region. Strangely perhaps, Margaret Thatcher is an exception to this rule, it is largely New Labour who are depicted as having regional impact, Brown delivers cash to the North East, Blair tearing up 'The Case for the North', John Prescott with a bludgeon with the legend 'Regional Assembly' written on it. There are other regional preoccupations too, rock stars and footballers, all in their contexts all telling something that the pen had missed.

Geoff's book is also, in part, autobiography. We learn about his early life in Blyth, see some of his very early drawings and later teenage sketches; some of which would not look out of place in a McGuinness or Cornish sketch book, 'I was becoming more interested in the way people look and the way they wore their clothes' he writes. After a move to London in 1970 -74, Geoff moved back to Newcastle to witness, 'the destruction that began with T Dan Smith'; he was working for McAlpines, and left

because, 'I didn't approve of the short sighted demolition of Newcastle's historic buildings'. McAlpines loss was to be the region's gain, because in 1974 Geoff began work as Editorial Artist, for the *Newcastle Chronicle*.  
*Stuart Howard*

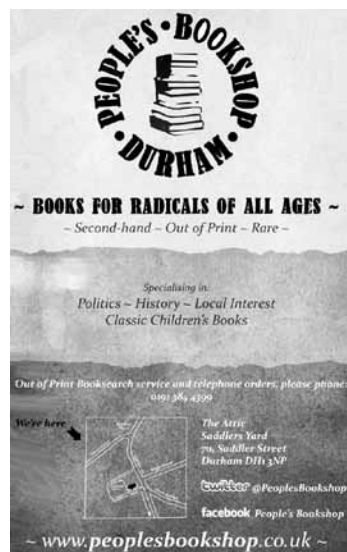
### Books Received

Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan (eds), *Varieties of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Radicalism in Context* (Ashgate, 2011) 260pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6905-0, £65, hbk.

Stephen Landells, *Rescues in the Surf: The story of the Shields lifeboats* (Tyne Bridge, 2010) 285pp. ISBN 978-1-857951-49-3, £12.99, pbk.



## ANOTHER WORLD IS PROBABLE



North East History Society member, Ben Sellars, reports on his new venture, the *People's Bookshop* in Durham

The first stage came with the discovery of a beautiful little space tucked away in Saddlers Yard. Now, after a lot of hard work, the rest of the pieces of the jigsaw were finally shoved into place and on Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> June the People's Bookshop opened to the public.

It is an independent, radical bookshop in the heart of Durham City. We will deal mainly in second hand books and will offer a range of alternative books,

specialising in radical and labour movement politics, history, local interest, poetry, sport and a smattering of children's books.

The aim is to create a more radical, community-orientated bookshop than that which is currently on offer. We believe that bookshops should reflect their communities and radical bookshops are an important part of the creation of a better world.

For more details about the *People's bookshop*, please visit our facebook page: [http://www.facebook.com/insights/?sk=po\\_206528372717351](http://www.facebook.com/insights/?sk=po_206528372717351) and of course, you can follow us on twitter: @PeoplesBookshop. Look out for the website coming soon at [www.peoplesbookshop.co.uk](http://www.peoplesbookshop.co.uk).

On our opening weekend, we will be open from 9.30 on the Saturday and 11.00 on the Sunday. It would be great to see you over that weekend or in the coming weeks.

Here are our normal opening hours:

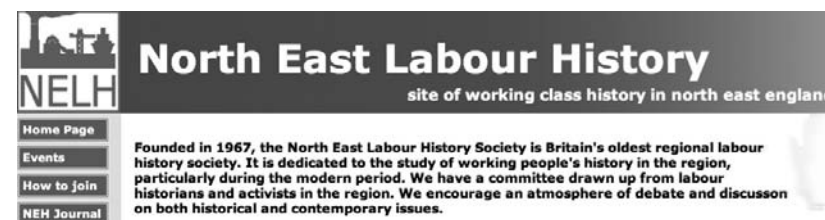
Thursday	9.30 - 17.30
Friday	9.30 - 17.30
Saturday	9.30 - 17.30
Sunday	11.00 - 16.00
[closed on other days]	

If you're in or around Durham, make sure you check us out. If you would like to go on our supporters list, please send me a quick email at [benhenrysellers@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:benhenrysellers@yahoo.co.uk). I'd also like to ask that you publicise the bookshop through your networks whenever possible.

I know a lot of people will love this venture, but it won't work unless people hear about it.

People's Bookshop

The Attic, Saddler's Yard, 70 Saddler Street, Durham, DH1 3NP



Take a look at the North East Labour History Society website  
@ <http://nelh.org/>

*The next round of public meetings is being planned. They will be at 7pm at the Lit & Phil, Westgate Road, Newcastle. The following dates have been chosen: Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011 with, in 2012, Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February; Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> April; Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> June; Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July; Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September. Speakers and topics will be announced on the above website.*

## At the back...

### SECRETARY'S REPORT 2010 – 2011

I took over this role at the 2010 AGM due to the illness of the previous Secretary Val Duncan. We wish Val all the best.

In 2010 the Society was part of a consortium that was awarded substantial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the North East Popular Politics Project. This is described elsewhere in the Journal. The Society is keen to involve the Project volunteers in our activities, and this has borne fruit in the larger audiences at some of our meetings.

At the 2010 AGM John Creaby spoke on *Am I Not A Worker Too?* This was an account, drawn from his own work, of the development of trades unionism among clerical workers in the region. John supported his research with anecdotes – often amusing, always telling – drawn from his own experience as a clerical workers' union official. The speaker at our last public meeting that year was the former M.P. for Newcastle Central, Jim Cousins. Jim retired at the 2010 election and gave critical and reflective observations on the Blair and Brown years, along with the banking crisis and the prospect of cuts and unemployment under the Coalition.

Speakers in 2011 included two stimulating sessions about Tyneside in the 1790s. The political and intellectual links between Thomas Spence, the Newcastle radical bookseller and philosopher of the eighteenth century, and the Chartist movement of the nineteenth century were explored by Malcolm Chase. John Charlton also dealt with the eighteenth century, with an account of how Tyneside played its part in the 'Age of Revolution'.

2011 is the centenary of the death of Robert Tressell, author of the socialist classic *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Dave Harker gave a talk (full of little-known or new information) about the life and work of Tressell himself, and used this to open a discussion about its relevance today.

T. Dan Smith was probably the most controversial figures in post-war North East labour history. Chris Foote-Wood, his biographer, argued that he was also a progressive visionary with genuine achievements to his credit.

The 'First Tuesday' meetings continue on the first Tuesday of each month at the Tyneside Irish Centre. These are an opportunity for people to present and discuss something that interests them in an informal setting. This can be work in progress, and idea to explore, themes from a working life and so on; they certainly aren't expected to be polished and completed work.

This year we have had sessions on early rank and file movements among Durham miners from Lewis Mates, and an account by Bill Lawrence of how the First World War settlement of Belgian refugees in Birtley interacted with the left at the time. Peter Livsey demonstrated how the arrest and trial of a baker in Newcastle in the 1790s illustrated the establishment response to the radical ideas and movements of the day. Rob Turnbull described how he intended to research the role of the Plebs League and the National Council of Labour Colleges in the North East. Mike Ebchester gave a progress report on his research into the early days of Health and Safety campaigns in the region. John Charlton led a discussion on whether the changed nature of work in the North East following the decline of the traditional industries has affected ideas about social class.

The 2010 AGM asked the Committee to examine the practicalities of finding another venue for its main meetings. This was in response to a complaint from a non-member with a disability that he was unable to attend meetings at the Lit & Phil because the building is not accessible. Committee members looked at a number of potential alternatives and the details for each one are available from me. Each was judged against the essential criteria of being fully accessible, central, large enough, flexible over bookings and costing no more than at present. This has proved to be difficult.

Some venues would only be bookable on one fixed night of the week, which would not be suitable for the Society because we need to be flexible

to meet the availability of speakers. Some had inferior facilities or were not fully accessible. Others were almost permanently booked with their own activities. Many were more expensive, a number costing twice as much as the Lit & Phil. The Society has no income other than that from subscriptions, collections and Journal sales so we could only afford to pay more for meetings unless we curtailed either the scale of the Journal and/or the number of meetings. Therefore there may not be a practical alternative. The Lit & Phil is acutely conscious of its access problems, and has applied for planning permission to begin to deal with them.

The Committee is keen to explore ways of making Society meetings more accessible, for example through the use of digital recording and our website. We would appreciate any ideas – and, more to the point, volunteers – to make this happen.

Both the NELHS and the Project have been represented at local events such as the Shildon Local History Fair, the Green Newcastle Festival and the Durham Miners' Gala. These can be good opportunities to showcase our work and recruit members, and we are grateful to everyone who gave some time to run the stalls. In addition a guided walk with a radical history theme was held in the centre of Newcastle; the interest this attracted was encouraging.

Finally my thanks to the Committee members who keep the show on the road in several different ways: organising First Tuesdays, providing refreshments at the AGM, keeping the books, chairing meetings and discussing future activities. Can I stress that we are an open Committee? If members have any suggestions or would like to do something please get in touch.

Don Watson,  
Secretary 2010/2011

## NORTH EAST LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY

### Officers and Committee

President:	Ray Challinor (1929-2011)
Vice Presidents:	Maureen Callcott, Archie Potts
Chair:	Paul Mayne
Vice Chair:	Sandy Irvine
Treasurer:	Mike Cleghorn
Secretary:	Val Duncan (pro-tem: Don Watson)
Journal Editor:	Sandy Irvine (Newcastle)

### Committee Members:

John Charlton (Newcastle)  
Kath Connolly (Chester le Street)  
Jenni Corner (Tynemouth)  
John Creaby (Chester le Street)  
Kevin Davies (Blyth)  
Val Duncan (Tynemouth)  
Tony Jeffs (Ryton)  
Lynda MacKenzie (Newcastle)  
Steve Manchee (Newcastle)  
Lewis Mates (Newcastle)  
Sarah Rennie (Newcastle)  
Ben Sellers (Durham)  
Win Stokes (Tynemouth)  
Willie Thompson (Sunderland)  
Nigel Todd (Newcastle)

## POPULAR POLITICS PROJECT REPORT

One morning recently when I turned up at the Northumberland Archives (Woodhorn) an archivist said, 'I have something you will really like.' She went 'back stage' and returned with what looked like a roll of cloth. She laid it out on a table and rolled out its content. What appeared was a large light blue silk banner with the words across the centre in handwritten gold lettering BEAUMONT FOR EVER! This was a political banner as used at hustings for the radical candidate in the Northumberland Election of 1826.

It appears to have come to the Archive, perhaps 40 years ago from a chest at Morpeth Town Hall. It is one of the oldest known surviving political banners anywhere and is in excellent condition. The emergence of such material is one of the really exciting moments experienced by the project volunteers. There have been several others including excellent photographs of women industrial workers in the First World War found at Gateshead Local Studies Library.

The project has now been active for six months at the time of writing. It has attracted over seventy volunteers from many walks of life and of different ages. Very few have backgrounds as history professionals. There are former librarians, teachers, social workers, civil servants, students, trade union organisers, an IT professional, a lawyer, a construction worker, a mid-wife and a nurse. By June we were working at eight bases in libraries and archives with more about to start.

There have been three large public talks so far and several more are planned. A few project members have given papers at the Society's 'First Tuesday' meetings and more will follow. 'First Tuesday' is indeed an opportunity to meet people from archive or library groups other than the one's own and a chance to raise any issues affecting the work of the Project.

There will opportunities for new people to get involved as long as the project runs and hopefully the research and writing will continue beyond

December 2012 and become a regular part of the activity of the North East Labour History Society.

John Charlton.

### The clouds\*

You laughed  
When I said that the verb  
To own  
Did not describe a natural state  
You smiled at my poor attempt to reason that  
Even though this ownership  
Was never questioned  
I could prove it wrong  
You listened, painfully,  
While I described  
The possibility that someone  
Would build a meter large enough to hold the air  
And send me bills  
For rent and standing charge  
And so much fuel adjusted cost  
Per breath  
And that armies would defend  
This meter  
And this man  
And you their right  
To deny me air.  
As I say, you listened, painfully.  
Since that time I've heard complaints  
That someone tried to steal the rain  
From Denver, Colorado  
The problem there it seems  
Is that no one knows who owns the clouds.

Nigel Mellor

\* For the anniversary of the death of Robert Tressell, author of 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'

## The Sid Chaplin Labour History Trophy



### Past winners

1988	Kit Pearce
1989	Elaine Knox
1990	Sylvia Clark
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	Elspeth Gould
2007	Candice Brockwell
2008	Ruth Blower
2009	Rob Doherty
2010	David Reed

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 30<sup>th</sup> 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 REPORT 2011: 100 AND NOT OUT!

*After 100 years in the North East, the Workers' Educational Association celebrated its centenary in 1910-11 by making history.*

On 29 October 2010 more than 200 members and friends of the WEA met for a centenary conference in the King's Hall at Newcastle University – the same hall and on the same calendar date that saw the founding of the WEA in the region. The speakers' platform, called together to reflect on 100 years and the future of adult education, also represented many of the same movements and institutions present on 29 October 1910.

Professor Paul Younger, a member of the North East Labour History Society in the past, spoke as Pro-Vice Chancellor of Newcastle University, castigating the present Government for its failure to understand Higher Education. Similarly, Kathy Taylor, National Vice President of the Universities and Colleges' Union, and a union activist at Northumberland College, called for support for a national demonstration against cuts in education as well as the Government's abolition of Educational Maintenance Allowances and imposition of steep rises in university tuition fees.

Melissa Benn drew attention to policies that will generate more inequalities in secondary education, and the NUT representative echoed those points. Russell Porteous, representing the Co-operative Movement, described the shared values of the WEA and Co-operators, welcoming a new national partnership agreement that would enable the two movements to work more closely together again.

In two notably moving speeches, Chi Onwurah, Labour MP for Newcastle Central, and Bishop Martin from the Newcastle Anglican Diocese, outlined how WEA adult education and adult educators had contributed to changing their lives.

Michael Crilly from the NUT, and treasurer of the Northern Region TUC, guided the celebration, pointing out that a Newcastle women's

suffrage banner adorning the platform, and on its first outing since before 1914, had been carried by one of the WEA's original tutors in the North East, Dr. Ethel Williams, Newcastle's first female GP.

Following the meeting, and a typically WEA afternoon tea, there was a huge attendance to see Tom Kelly's play, *Hungry Hearts and Heads*, commissioned for the centenary. The play told the story of two WEA pioneers from Stanley, Co. Durham, Hilda and Jack Trevena, and how they had helped to build the WEA and struggled to oppose the First World War. The play had toured several venues prior to its Newcastle performance.

Further highlights of the Centenary included the publication of a new history of the Association in the North East, *The Right to Learn: the WEA in the North of England, 1910-2010*. Compiled in the History Workshop tradition, the book brought together primary research and reprints of recollections of the WEA by, among others, Sid Chaplin and, in relation to the Ashington Pitmen painters, Robert Lyons.

And two WEA centenary banners were created. One, made by WEA staff and members on a felt art course, holds pride of place at Joseph Cowen House, the WEA Regional Office named after Joseph Cowen in another centenary gesture. The other banner, based on the model of miners' union banners, using Tuthills's banner cloth generously donated by the Durham Twelve Villages Group. Painted by Lotte and Hugh Shankland, the banner was paraded at the Durham Miners' Gala in July 2011 and took part in the dedication service at Durham Cathedral where it was applauded down the aisle.

Much more happened in the centenary, and not least a visit by the BBC's 'Any Questions' programme hosted by the WEA, but overall the 100<sup>th</sup> celebration was a good starting line for more substantial WEA achievements in the years ahead.

Nigel Todd, WEA North East Region

## LEARNING FOR LIFE !

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?

- ▶ Local – courses at locations across the North East
- ▶ Convenient – classroom, workplace and community-based courses with a friendly feel
- ▶ Courses for all – from arts and crafts to science and technology, there's something for everyone

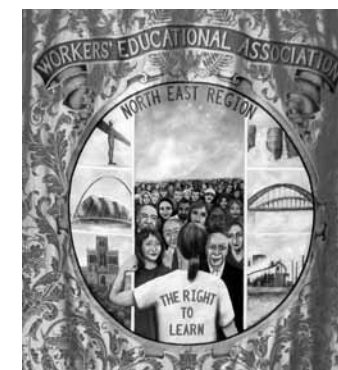
**Workers' Educational Association**



**Call** 0191 212 6100

**Fax** 0191 212 6101

**Web** [www.wea.org.uk](http://www.wea.org.uk)





# 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 AGM shall be held open to all members of the Society.

**Subscriptions:**

The annual subscription shall be determined by the AGM 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 AGM.

**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 AGM. 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 AGM and not subject to re-election. There shall be one or more Vice Presidents elected at the AGM 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, North East History. 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 AGM, and a motion outlining proposals for change must be submitted in writing to the Secretary at least 28 days before the date of AGM.

## 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

address .....

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Gateshead Local Government Branch

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

**Terry Edwards** (Branch Secretary)

**Dave Walkden** (Branch Chair)

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Email: [info@gatesheadunison.co.uk](mailto:info@gatesheadunison.co.uk)





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**Ray Challinor in full flow**



The north east labour history society holds regular meetings on a wide variety of subjects. The society welcomes new members. We have an increasingly busy web-site at [www.nelh.org](http://www.nelh.org) Supporters are welcome to contribute to discussions

**journal of the north east labour history society**

<http://nelh.org/>