

North East History

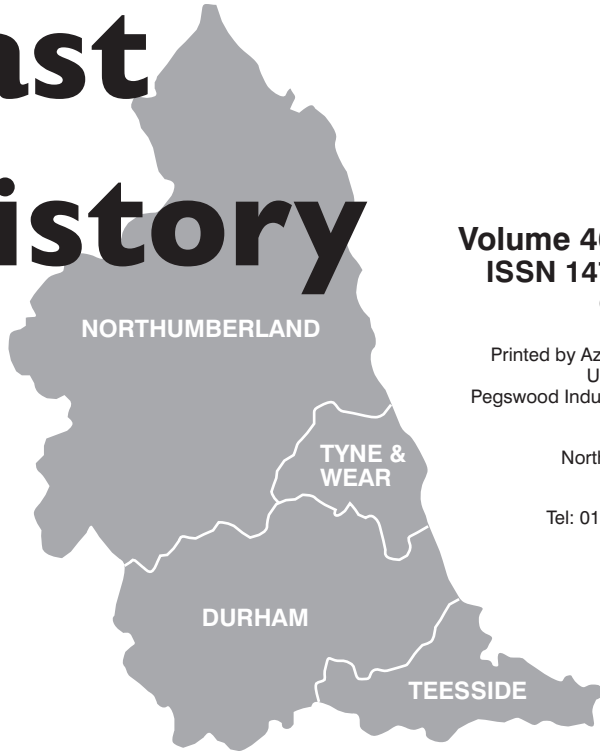
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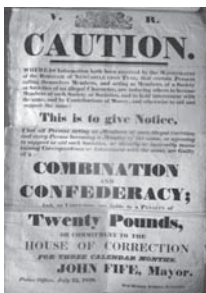
Society volunteers – making a difference!

Volunteers from the North East Labour History Society are working with Newcastle City Library to compile a comprehensive list of hundreds of fragile manuscripts collected by Thomas Wilson of Gateshead in the first half of the nineteenth century.



This work is on going, with volunteers meeting once a week during the period October to June. At present there are seven volunteers engaged in this long-term project, painstakingly writing or typing reference details for each individual item.

This project developed out of our successful Popular Politics Project, and we are adding to that database as we progress from one volume to another.



The North East Labour History Society is pleased to be helping Newcastle City Library in this work as it fulfills our core objectives whilst making it much easier for Newcastle Local Studies to increase public access to this invaluable Tyneside collection.



Note from the Editors

This year's edition of North East History welcomes a number of new contributors as well as some 'old friends', alongside the Sid Chaplin prize winning essay, appreciations of two people we have sadly lost as well as a wide ranging selection of book reviews. The contributions from a younger generation of labour historians and those associated with the ongoing Peoples' History project is particularly welcome and illustrates the continuing importance and vibrancy of the region's researchers and writers in the field. In this respect, it is also notable that some of our books are reviews of works by NELH Society members.

Of the longer essays in the journal, the first one by Molly Courtice is an extract from her Sid Chaplin prize-winning essay of last year, and is a detailed account of working class engagement in the region with the Boer War. She argues for a much more nuanced view of attitudes and draws on the local press in particular to highlight both support and, equally tellingly, opposition to the war that challenges established views of local jingoism. Heather Thompson explores in great detail the battles over education in Durham as Quakers, Catholics, and the established church sought to secure their own dominance in providing schools for working class children. She draws on correspondence preserved in the County archives to illustrate the often caustic (and sometimes humorous, to modern eyes) opinions and competing initiatives by the local clergy.

Stuart Howard's essay on trade unionism in Sunderland is a continuation of a theme he presented last year, whilst Robin Smith takes us back to the General Strike to explore the significance of railway workers to the dispute both regionally and nationally. His presentation of statistical evidence helps to provide a clear and objective picture of what is often clouded in mythology (from whichever political perspective). John Stirling's essay takes us into a 'cockney' invasion of the region as he details William Morris's visit

to speak to striking miners. He finds a different picture in the local press from Morris's own diary account of his 'day trip', whilst illustrating the importance of the socialist debate to an industrial dispute.

Our Secretary Brian Bennison provides a fascinating insight into Haltwhistle in the 1930s, an area whose mining history is as rich as anywhere in our region. Located on the north bank of the South Tyne, Haltwhistle was described in November 1934, as 'not strictly derelict but is so severely depressed as to come near to that conclusion'. Its residents could be forgiven for thinking that they had failed to receive sufficient recognition compared to other unemployment black spots, and Brian demonstrates both the nature of the town's economic problems and how their eventual alleviation was a result of international political developments as much as through any initiative on the part of national government.

Peter Livsey takes us back to a political age that today appears incredibly distant but as he clearly demonstrates, the ideas and aspirations of the Levellers and their representatives here in the north-east, were as valid almost 200 years later when working men once again demanded meaningful electoral reform in the guise of Chartism. The story of Joshua Wetwang and the Northumberland Horse is one of a principled and eloquent stand for democratic issues that are still relevant today.

Peter Brabban's photographs have appeared in previous issues of North East History and this time they serve to illustrate the changing character of Newcastle in the mid-1960s. The availability of good quality affordable housing is another issue dominating today's political headlines, and Peter reminds us that the debate about housing tenure and affordability is nothing new.

Two years ago we launched the People's History of the North East project as a means of sustaining the interest of volunteers and Society members in an on-going research programme. We failed to secure grant funding to employ a regional co-ordinator but various groups throughout the region decided to develop shared interests and practical project activities in any case, and the results of these initiatives are now resulting in some first class resources.

One such resource is the wonderful booklet produced by Kath Connolly and Maria Goulding, in partnership with the Co-operative membership and employees of the Co-operative Wholesale Society here in the north east. The story of how former employees were brought together in common purpose to celebrate and record for posterity the work experiences of CWS employees is provided by Kath and Maria, and details of the book are provided for anyone who doesn't already have a copy.

Maureen Dickson, Mike Greatbatch, Janet Medcalf, and Judith McSwaine are all volunteers who meet most Friday mornings at Newcastle City Library (with occasional visits to Tyne & Wear Archives at Discovery Museum) to investigate the wealth of archive material at Newcastle Local Studies. The group came together through the People's History of the North East project and whilst their initial research themes were women's lives and health service provision before the NHS, they inevitably extended into other, associated topics and issues. Thus, Maureen's essay comparing the households of those who owned capital, and those who didn't, derived from her discovery that Fairless Harrison lived within a short distance of his tannery on Stepney Bank but the qualitative difference between the two locations was like two different worlds. Harrison's workers lacked their employer's financial resources, and had little choice but to live in some of Newcastle's most overcrowded tenements close to their place of work.

Mike, Janet and Judith all focus on aspects of health provision, a topical issue in an election year, and their essays provide a useful reminder of the pitfalls of health services dependent on personal wealth, political influence, and self-employed physicians and other medical professionals. Anyone reading Mike's essay will soon recognise the cultural and historical origins of some of today's most strident political rhetoric, and Janet's survey of midwifery services highlights the importance of Government legislation in raising standards and extending essential support and expertise to all sections of society. Judith's essay, whilst illustrating the close connection between those in power and the asylum 'industry' in nineteenth century Newcastle, also provides 'part-2' of the saga of radical activist Daniel Liddell, whom

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Judith first introduced us to in North East History 44 (2013). All these essays have taken longer than anticipated to bear fruit, and we are grateful to Elaine Pope, the fifth member of the research group, who has provided on-going support whilst developing her own research interests. Newcastle City Library will no doubt continue to profit from lunchtime meetings in their splendid café.

Mike Greatbatch

John Stirling

Sue Ward

Notes on Contributors

Brian Bennison is currently Secretary of the NELHS. He taught for decades at the former Newcastle Polytechnic and has published on local history and social history in various books and journals. For a few years he was simultaneously the President of the Literary & Philosophical Society and chairman of a leek club.

Peter Brabban was one of the first NHS babies born in Consett, Co. Durham. Leaving school at 15, he has had two distinct careers. Firstly, as a photographer he worked in both commercial (fashion and portraiture) and documentary photography for the labour movement and for Oxfam. He has worked in Zaire (DC Congo), Zimbabwe, the Rwandan refugee camps and lastly in Cambodia. After studying History at Sunderland Polytechnic he began a second career as a campaigner working for War on Want, Oxfam, Age Concern and the National Trust. He is retired and lives in Newcastle.

Michael Chaplin is a playwright, screenwriter and author of various books of non-fiction. His father and mother, Sid and Rene Chaplin, were lifelong friends of Norman Cornish.

Kath Connolly is a volunteer with the People's History of the North East project and was until May 2015 an elected member of the Durham Area Committee of the Co-operative Group.

Molly Courtice was the winner of the 2014 Sid Chaplin Memorial Prize. Originally from rural Northumberland, Molly went to the University of Leeds and graduated with a First Class History Degree in 2013. She is currently working for a homeless charity in London. Her essay is based on a chapter from her final year dissertation.

Maureen Dickson was born in Washington, County Durham and her first career was in local government where she worked for 15 years. After a break to bring up her family, she returned to work as a research administrator at Northumbria University. Latterly, she worked for Your Homes Newcastle, the arms length management organisation set up by Newcastle City Council. She is now retired and lives in Newcastle.

Glen Lyndon Dodds was born and bred in Salisbury, Rhodesia, but now lives in Sunderland. In addition to contributing articles to academic journals and popular magazines, he is also the author of several books on local and military history.

Maria Goulding is a volunteer with the People's History of the North East project. She was previously a school teacher and lecturer in Education at the Universities of Liverpool, Durham and York.

Mike Greatbatch is a Fellow of the Association for Heritage Interpretation and has over thirty years experience of working with communities to document and celebrate local heritage. Mike worked for thirteen years in the Lower Ouseburn and the history of this area continues to be his main research interest.

Stuart Howard is an economic and social historian specialising in Labour and Regional History at the University of Sunderland. He was instrumental in the creation of The North East England Mining Archive and Research Center (NEEMARC) at the University.

Peter Livsey was a Senior Education Inspector for Durham LEA. Since retirement he has written several articles on local history, including three previously for North East History. These have been the outcomes of projects launched by the North East Labour History Society.

Judith McSwaine was born and brought up on Tyneside. After two redundancies, Judith retired from paid work in adult and community education. She joined the Popular Politics Project in 2012 and is involved in The People's History of the North East Project.

Janet Medcalf was born in Cardiff but came to Newcastle upon Tyne in 1971. She graduated in History before joining the Civil Service where she latterly specialised in professional training and education. Now retired, she has joined the local history researchers attached to the North East Labour History Society.

Robin Smith taught industrial relations at Durham and Northumbria universities, after spells as research officer for a trade union and as a journalist on labour matters. He still works occasionally as an arbitrator for ACAS. His interest in railways stems from his boyhood in a house overlooking Lancashire's oldest line, the Bolton & Leigh (1828).

John Stirling has been involved in trade union education in the North East for over thirty years. He is currently a part-time tutor at Newcastle University and Ruskin College and a member of UNITE Community.

A 'home-bird with wanderlust', **Heather Thompson** grew up in Castleside, County Durham. After graduating from the University of North Wales, she joined the diplomatic service and trained intensively in Japanese. She completed postings in London, Japan and Southern Africa before returning to the North East to undertake a Masters Degree in Local History at the University of Teesside.

How to Submit an Article to the Journal

The North East Labour History Society is committed to making our journal reflect the diverse range of historical experiences of working people in the North East region.

We aim to reflect all communities and groupings in the North East and would encourage contributions from those who live and work in them, those who research them and those who write about them. We want to hear from individuals, community organisations, local history societies, students and teachers and all who have something to say about our region.

If you have a research interest that could form the basis of a written article and would like to discuss this, please contact our Secretary or the Editors – contact details are on page 246.

If you have an existing article that you would like to submit for publication, we can send you a set of guidelines to ensure that the article and its endnotes are presented in a format that is appropriate to our journal's style.

The Society holds limited numbers of back issue of the North East History journal, and details of how to obtain copies can be found on the Society's website: <http://nelh.net/>

A searchable index of articles and reports can also be found at our website: <http://nelh.net/>



‘Facing the frenzied and shrieking mob’: Examining working-class perceptions of Empire in North-East England through opposition to the South African War, 1899-1902¹

Molly Courtice

Introduction

On Thursday 17th May 1900, Frances Elizabeth Kelly and her fiancé, Jim, rushed to the *Newcastle Chronicle’s* office. Joining thousands of others, they were there to celebrate the relief of Mafeking. It was a false alarm; the crowd dispersed and trudged off, disappointed. At ten the following evening, however, rockets and sirens were set off at the same office. ‘Never were such scenes, such enthusiasm’ as flags and bunting covered the streets, days off work taken, shops closed, patriotic songs sung, red, white and blue worn and processions taken.² All classes, it seemed, celebrated in unity. Mafeking had been relieved.

Scenes like these have inspired extensive exploration in British historiography of how enthusiastic the British population really were about the government’s imperial agenda during the South African War, 1899 – 1902, when outbursts of apparent imperialistic fervour suggest widespread support for Empire. This period, when focus on Empire



Street decorated to celebrate Mafeking Day, May 1900, Morpeth, Canon McCleod of Mitford Collection, Northumberland Archives, NRO 0876/186.

peaked, has been used by historians as a useful timeframe for a ‘test of empire’, because perceptions of Empire and nation were almost certainly changing, both in nature and extent.³ ‘[T]he war straddled two centuries,’ asserts Darwin, ‘one (for Britain) of imperial growth, the other (as it proved) of imperial decline’, representing ‘the last hurrah of unreflecting jingoism, and the first sign of imperial disillusion’.⁴

From the 1870s, Western expansionist policies saw increased competition between European powers scrambling for territory to establish their own vast political empires, particularly in Africa and Asia.

This new, more aggressive phase of colonial expansionism, in the name of 'safeguarding' national interests, became known as 'New Imperialism'. The growing expectations of the widening electorate meant the British government knew that these new policies had to appeal to its citizens, and campaigns were initiated in all areas of public life to engrain imperial sentiment in the minds of the people. 'Jingoism', a term first used in a British music hall song in 1878 to describe the popular imperialism of the period, emerged, referring to the arousal of public emotions and extreme patriotic sentiment. The Boer War occurred at a time when both New Imperialism and Jingoism were rampant.

Before 1960, historians tended to provide a top-down perspective of imperialism, concentrating mainly on the views of policy-makers rather than the masses.⁵ This view has since been questioned, with increasing focus upon variations in perceptions between social classes, particularly of the overlooked working-class. The importance of examining the contact of ordinary Victorian and Edwardian citizens with Empire to create a realistic impression of how much it really did feature in their lives has been recognised. Some theorists, from contemporaries like Hobson to historians such as MacKenzie, have maintained that Empire did indeed resonate in the lives of ordinary people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, attributing this to the popular culture and propaganda that was fuelled and shaped by higher classes.⁶ MacKenzie has argued that imperialism was 'an ideological cluster that infused every organ of British life'.⁷ However, an assumed working-class backing for imperialism has been questioned, Krebs, for example, arguing that imperial presence in popular culture did not necessarily influence the working-classes much.⁸ Price, Porter and Pelling support this, instead attributing the 'jingoism' to the lower middle-classes.⁹

These reassessments are connected to the controversy surrounding the extent to which the Boer War represented a watershed in popular attitudes to imperialism and Empire. As the war progressed people became more disillusioned with the notion of the British Empire and anti-war sentiment or even apathy gained increasing prominence.¹⁰ Porter

claims that criticism of Empire existed even before this, so that episodes of mass support were essentially superficial and largely unimportant to the daily lives of working-class people.¹¹ Nationalist sentiments that did exist among the working-class, according to Blanch and Hoggart, were rooted in their 'moment by moment approach to life', which cannot be compared to middle-class patriotism.¹²

One problem confronting historians, and a reason for disagreements surrounding working-class perception of Empire during this period, is the paucity of direct primary sources. Upper and middle-class perceptions of Empire can be deciphered from newspapers, memoirs, letters, diaries and official documents, but working-class perception has to be based on more indirect evidence. This presents difficulties when drawing any final conclusions and most sources examined can only ever be suggestive. To achieve the most accuracy in their interpretations, scholars have focused on particular areas of working-class life. Pelling identified five significant phenomena: music halls, army recruitment, popular demonstrations during the war, and the Unionist election victories of 1895 and 1900.¹³ All hold ambiguities. Additionally, the reliability of using various organisations to examine working-class opinion has also been questioned. While Porter looks to the labour movement, Price argues that this merely grants a bird's eye view, maintaining instead that institutions such as working-men's clubs are more valuable, and despite conceding that the institutional approach has limitations, argues this is inevitable when using such indirect sources.¹⁴ It is also necessary to define who the working-class actually were, since referring to 'British society' as a whole is problematic because it obscures the country's enormous social, political and cultural heterogeneity.¹⁵ To clarify, the 'working-class' in North East England referred to in this article includes both skilled and unskilled manual workers.

Much of the scholarship developed in the last fifty years addressing working-class perceptions of Empire has been nationwide or London-centric, while many of the relatively small number of local studies deal

with all classes. The few examining working-class perceptions at local level have tended to focus on the Khaki Election, popular culture or working-class associations, all of which are important, but there is a need to draw together a new combination of areas influencing working-class opinion within the distinctive culture of North East England to produce a more rounded conclusion. How far an examination of working-class attitudes to Empire in one region reflects common views elsewhere is open to question, but it is likely to illustrate the importance of locality.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries North East England was rapidly expanding. In 1901, the population of Newcastle was just below 250,000, a 20 per cent increase on the previous decade. Similarly, in the second half of the nineteenth century Northumberland's population virtually doubled, expanding from 304,000 in 1851 to 603,000 in 1901.¹⁶ The region's economic health and social conditions were principally dependent on five industries: shipbuilding and ship repair, seafaring, and an armaments industry, all fuelled by the Great Northern Coalfield – which 'absorbed the bulk of the labour force' in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Because of this, Pelling's assumption that 'in North-East England, seafaring and shipbuilding combined with a military tradition make for strong support for the war' is often accepted.¹⁸ To automatically assume support for Empire, however, is to overlook the region's strongly rooted and vibrant radical political culture in which the working-class played a prominent part.¹⁹

Knox describes the region as 'dominated with very masculine types of work, creating a masculine culture. This, combined with a strong sense of regional identity and fierce pride in the region's economic achievements, produced a highly regional outlook', creating a potent mix of men who were eager to display their masculinity.²⁰ Because masculine culture predominated, with an inevitable bias in the sources available, the findings here are more reflective of male attitudes than female.

In its full form, the study from which this article has been extracted closely examined three key areas: volunteering for the military and

fundraising for the war; the role of the provincial press; and opposition to the war. Not only could these elements be looked at in a local rather than national context, they also demonstrate a degree of choice about people's participation, whereas aspects of popular culture such as cigarette cards and poster campaigns may have been encountered by chance.

The article below is concerned with just one of these areas: the existence of pro-Boer and anti-war groups in North East England, covering those involved, their motivations, and the opposition's impact.

'Protest against this mad and bloody and expensive imperialism'²¹

Working-class support for Empire has been assumed in part by both contemporaries and historians because of a lack of evidence of their involvement in any form of organised opposition to the Boer War. Not only was a consistent anti-war press campaign absent, but there was also no unified body to mobilise and rally people against the war. Stedman Jones sees the limited opposition amongst the working-class as evidence that the failure of Chartism meant that 'working people ceased to believe that they could shape society in their own image', capitalism having become an 'immovable horizon'.²² This, Kiernan argues, brought self-absorption and political apathy to the class 'from which it has never really fully recovered'.²³ On the other hand, mob-like jingoistic reactions to the expression of any anti-war sentiments have been cited as evidence of working-class approval for imperialism. However, Price claims that this argument is only superficially convincing, because those leading the mob against anti-war campaigners were middle-class.²⁴ He points to the distinction between a crowd spontaneously celebrating Mafeking and the systematic, organised jingoism displayed at peace meetings.²⁵ Indeed whereas only a minority joined formal opposition to the Boer War in North East England, this did not necessarily equate to support for Empire, and anti-imperial sentiment was evident in many levels of society, including the working-class. The apparent support for imperialist

policies was often contingent on local issues rather than on a deep-rooted commitment towards Empire, so that as support for the war dwindled, personal considerations came to the fore.

Two national bodies emerged to organise opposition, the South African Conciliation Committee (SACC) and the Stop the War Committee (STWC). Davey argues that both were aimed at the middle class as that was where the power was, the SACC consisting mainly of intellectuals and radical Liberals, while the STWC, led by the prominent Northumberland-born journalist W. T. Stead, was more religiously inspired.²⁶ Neither was able to win mass support, due to their lack of unity and poor organisation. Call draws attention to the 'highly individualistic' nature of opposition in general, whereby 'some Pro-Boers said Empire was bad, but others urged an idealistic Empire'.²⁷ In addition, Liberals were split upon this and other foreign policy issues. The differing motivations of anti-war campaigners can also be seen locally, so that while anti-war sentiment did exist, there was no single unifying voice.

Four key anti-war figures can be identified in the North East, symbolising these different positions. SACC member Robert Spence Watson, a Quaker who was prominent in the Liberal Party both locally and nationally, opposed the war as irrational and unfair. Thomas Burt, an opponent of imperialism since the 1870s, had worked as a miner from the age of ten, and became the first working-class MP, representing the Liberals for the town of Morpeth, Northumberland, from 1874 until 1918. He was closely involved with miners' unions both in Northumberland and nationally. Another former Northumberland miner and trades unionist, Charles Fenwick, was the Liberal-Labour Member of Parliament for the Wansbeck Division and mainly attacked government for its anti-Christian South African policy. Lastly, George Kitchin, Dean of Durham Cathedral, was a very high profile figure who staunchly opposed war as being irreligious and immoral. These different forms of opposition worked together but some may have gained greater support from the working-class.

To assume that the working-class were easily indoctrinated by jingoist ideas is simplistic and naïve. Although most popular newspapers, both regionally and nationally, supported Empire and war, anti-war newspapers did exist, particularly in the provinces, presenting opportunities to engage with other opinions. In the North East, the *Newcastle Leader* (Weekly and Daily), and the *Northern Echo* in Darlington took this position. Additionally, it must be remembered that, as Jones states, even readers of pro-imperialist newspapers were 'capable of remaining critical of the new medium while engaging with it'.²⁸ This is demonstrated in letters printed in the different papers. The *Newcastle Chronicle*, for instance, printed letters contesting their support for the war, such as one on 9th December 1899: 'Sir - for many years, my family and I have been regular readers of your paper and enjoyed it, but our feelings have changed since the commencement of this disastrous war...[Opposition letters should be printed] in the hope of opening the eyes of imbecile Britannia to this gold-brokers' war'.²⁹

Gauging how far such letters were representative of wider working-class opinions is difficult, but they do show the variety of opinion encountered by the readership. Motivations behind opposition to the Boer War can be split into two broad categories: religious and moral; and anti-capitalist and prioritising domestic concerns over imperial. Both categories will be examined separately to measure which seemed to have a stronger appeal to working people in North East England.

Call states that churches have often been seen to act as society's moral conscience although evidence of religious opposition to the war, especially in the Church of England, is associated more with individuals than the church itself.³⁰ Dean Kitchin's anti-war stance proved controversial and inflammatory. In November 1899 he refused to use prayers for wartime recommended by the church in his services in Durham cathedral and his sermon in January 1900 took as its text, 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good'.³¹ He condemned the 'drunken revels' and 'greedy newspapers', stating that the whole temper of the times

was so unchristian that it appalled him.³² M.P. Charles Fenwick echoed these sentiments in 1901: 'Why should we, as lovers of our common Christianity, as lovers of our own race and common humanity, lend ourselves in any sense or any degree to the brutal and barbarous war which was going in South Africa?'.³³ The Reverend Arthur Harvie, in a letter to the *Leader*, criticised a clergyman who, at a banquet in their honour, urged departing yeomanry to remember they were 'Christian gentleman' representing a 'Christian nation'.³⁴ 'To murder one's brethren is not to practice the teaching of Jesus,' he argued, citing the burning of farmhouses and ejection of innocent women and children from their homes, adding, 'war never was and never can be anything but anti-Christian', words which attracted many letters of support.³⁵

Spence Watson also drew upon moral values when addressing a peace meeting, claiming that they, the English, should recognise that 'the Boers were doing exactly what we should have done in their places, if what our historians told us of the English spirit was true', obviously trying to stir sympathetic attitudes in his audience.³⁶ Evidence that such arguments had at least some resonance with working-class readers is shown in a letter to the *Leader* printed on 10th October 1899 from an English miner in the South African republic about the threatened conflict: '[I]t makes me sick, it does really, and my full sympathy goes with the Boer'.³⁷ Over time these religious objections grew amongst all classes, but may have appealed more consistently to the observant Christianity of the middle-class. The 1851 Religious Census found a dominant apathy towards religion among the labouring class which only increased throughout the late nineteenth century. Moreover, male working-class commitment to traditional and national so-called moral responsibilities may not have been as developed as in the middle-classes because their inclusion in the electorate had been so recently achieved. The workers' concerns lay more close to home in social and domestic issues that affected them directly.

Opposition to war and the Empire based upon anti-capitalism appears to have been more in tune with working-class opinion. For the

working-class, states Call, 'generally speaking, attitudes revolved around questions of whether imperialism meant high employment from greater trade, or unfair competition from foreign labour'.³⁸ This certainly seems to have been true for workers in North East England, with many letters published based on this line of argument. In September 1899, Frank McKay of South Shields, a former worker at Clara Vale Colliery in County Durham, attacked 'aristocratic and Jingo policy' in a letter to the *Leader*, while one from Ted Good of Newcastle entitled 'A Working Man's Views' called jingo politicians and journalists 'tools in the hands of capitalists', encouraging 'every true patriot' to 'enter his protest against this mad and bloody and expensive imperialism'.³⁹ Empire-building would be the downfall of British industry, he continued, supporting the idea that domestic concerns were of prime importance to the working man and showing an awareness of press indoctrination.⁴⁰ The war 'will probably cost the nation £50,000,000 (which in the long run has to be sweated out by the working man)', argued another worker correspondent, further illustrating concern for the economic impact of imperialism.⁴¹ This concern was not confined to their own interests; a motion passed by members of the Marsden Lodge of Durham Miners' Association in October 1899 stated 'that in the opinion of this meeting, the aggressive policy by the government towards the Transvaal republic [...] is unwarranted in principle, persecuting in policy, and in practice will be the darkest blot on the pages of English history', describing it as 'solely the work of avaricious capitalists, whose only desire is to make money, even at the sacrifice of the lives of their countrymen and the hard-earned money of the British tax-payer'.⁴² The *Leader* reported the airing of grievances at the annual miners' picnic and demonstration in July 1901 on Newcastle Town Moor.⁴³ The increased taxation on coal that was harming industry was attributed to 'militarism, in all its forms, [which] has been the greatest enemy of political enfranchisement and industrial expansion'.⁴⁴ This is clear evidence of working-class anti-war feeling, amongst a group with a strong community identity and shared history of struggle. To argue that

the working-class were not exposed to other views, or simply not able to view the jingoism that surrounded them critically, is patently false.

‘The man in the street is for war’⁴⁵

Any opposition that existed, however, was minimal in comparison to the overwhelming expressions of patriotism and nationalism, as demonstrated by disruptions at public peace meetings. The anti-war *Leader* stated on 23rd September 1899, before war broke out, that ‘there is, we believe, a really burning desire among a large part of the population, and the working classes especially, to be provided with some means of making known their real sentiments on the Transvaal question’, proposing a peace meeting.⁴⁶ The events that followed suggested that ‘their real sentiments’ were the opposite. The meeting was to be chaired and addressed by key local anti-war men Fenwick, Spence-Watson and Burt. The *Chronicle* reported that ‘great interest was taken in the promised gathering... so the people came in thousands to the Town Hall’.⁴⁷ The postponement of the meeting until the following week brought ‘great disappointment - not, evidently, because the people had lost the opportunity of “protesting” against war, but because they were not to be allowed to express the opposite opinion on the other side’. Despite its cancellation, the estimated crowd of 2000 sang patriotic songs and ‘somebody had a Union Jack, and every time this was waved there was lusty cheering’, in ‘a scene of animation and enthusiasm not often witnessed’. When a self-appointed pro-war speaker asked for a show of support there rose a ‘perfect sea of hands’, while ‘so few were the hands that were here and there held up [against], that a mighty cheer at once burst from the crowd’.⁴⁸ This incident strengthens the argument that the working-class responded enthusiastically to imperialism during the Boer War. Indeed, anti-war campaigner Spence Watson himself commented that ‘the working man greatly disappointed’ due to their apparent untamed eagerness for war.⁴⁹

Despite this, while these examples of jingoism may seem to illustrate working-class support, on further examination, a more complex situation

THE TRANSVAAL.

— A MEETING
TO
PROTEST AGAINST WAR
WILL BE HELD IN THE
TOWN HALL, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE,
ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5.

Chair to be taken at 7.30 p.m. by
THOMAS BURT, Esq., M.P.

who will be Supported by

Dr. Spence Watson.	Mr. John Coward, J.P.
Sir John Swinburne, Bart.	(Durham).
Mr. Charles Fenwick, M.P.	Rev. B. Gwynlan Hughes.
Dr. Michael Clark.	Count. C. C. Elliott.
Mr. John Havensack, J.P.	Mr. William Macanaba,
Ald. W. D. Stephens, J.P.	County Ald. Cury,
Mr. J. Cameron Swan, J.P.	Mr. Thomas Bell
Count. Hugh Mackon, J.P.	Rev. Donald Fraser
Mr. T. Parsbury, J.P.	Rev. Arthur Harvey.
Mr. Richard Westford, J.P.	Rev. William Glover.
Mr. William Angus, J.P.	Rev. A. E. Owen Jones.
Mr. John Puckinson, J.P.	Mr. J. P. Wilson.
Count. N. Temperley, J.P.	Mr. Robert Felson.
Count. Thomas Cairns.	Mr. R. G. Race.
Mr. Robert Knight, J.E.	Mr. J. Knox Loyal (Peepay).
Mr. J. H. Buckingham, J.P.	Mr. Charles Watson.
Mr. Aaron Watson, J.P.	Mr. John Burn.
Mr. Hugh Boyie.	Mr. Albert Tarn.
Mr. David Richardson.	Rev. T. Edwards Thompson.
Mr. George Cameron.	and others
Rev. Arthur T. Galsbery.	Mr. John Patterson
Rev. Canon Moore Edie, M.A.	(St. Anthony's)
Mr. W. T. Martin.	Mr. Hunter Blair.
Dr. Vickerman Rochester.	Mr. Alfred Howson.
Mr. James Stuart.	Rev. James Jack.
Mr. E. L. Beckingham, B.Sc.	Mr. Walter Kennedy.
Mr. Ralph Young.	Mr. A. Murray
Mr. J. E. Miller.	Mr. R. J. Ancheson.
Mr. George Mathwin.	Rev. Alfred Soothill.
Mr. W. J. Noble.	Mr. Malcolm Quin.
Mr. George Luckley, J.P.	Mr. T. G. Reed.
Mr. C. D. Hill.	Rev. J. C. Street.
Mr. Charles Carter.	Capt. Lowrie.
Mr. T. H. Catzeade.	Mr. G. E. Macarthy.
Mr. J. K. Alexander.	Mr. D. A. Holdsworth.
Mr. J. H. Muir.	Mr. H. J. Moscrop.
Mr. Andrew Dickson.	Mr. W. R. Heatley.
Mr. W. Goodie Davies.	Mr. E. R. Newbiggin.
Mr. H. Wilson.	Rev. W. Hussey Griffith.
Mr. John Whitburn.	Mr. Henry Duke.
Mr. T. Carrick Watson.	

All who are in sympathy with the object of the meeting are urged to be present. Communications on the subject of the meeting to be addressed to

W. J. NOBLE.

Notice of Anti-War Meeting, Newcastle Daily Leader, 5th October, 1899, p.1.

Courtesy of Newcastle Libraries and Information Service.

to outrun its sense of fair play'.⁵² The fact that the pro-war press conceded that the crowd had gone too far suggests an awareness that capricious emotions lay beneath.

is revealed. Crowds became carried away, regarding the peace meetings as entertainment rather than sources of information or a means of challenging the speakers' views. When the proposed meeting actually took place, the pro-war *Chronicle* reported that, while the event was ticket-holder only, 'at a quarter to 7 the crowd forced the doors at the back of the hall and broke in', disrupting the meeting so much that the speakers could not be heard.⁵⁰ 'Mr Fenwick good-humouredly stuck to his position for about an hour', it continued, but 'the continuous uproar made it impossible to hear his remarks', adding 'for a time things looked decidedly threatening' referring to an attempt to violently storm the platform.⁵¹ Similarly, although the *Newcastle Journal* commented that the meeting was 'an insult to the patriots of Newcastle', it acknowledged that 'the audience made the mistake of allowing its patriotic enthusiasm

The *Leader* went even further in questioning the reasons behind the events, describing the low quality of crowds - 'scruffy, ignorant people' - accusing many of drunkenness, whilst commending the patience of the speakers. Mr Fenwick 'faced the frenzied and shrieking mob in the middle of the hall. Roars and catcalls and childish buffoonery flowed past him unheeded'.⁵³ Overall, 'the man in the street is for war. He does not know why; he cares even less than he knows. And such a meeting as that which was held last night was an altogether admirable opportunity of letting off superfluous steam, and proving to his own nebulous and confused conscience that he is a lover of his country'.⁵⁴ While this condemnation of jingoism may have been exaggerated due to the newspaper's anti-war position, it nevertheless reveals the animalistic nature of a mob becoming carried away, but whose behaviour may not reflect their actual perceptions of Empire. Burt's biographer admitted that 'the temper of the time, unfortunately, was not that of perfect sanity...it was pandemonium rather than a meeting of civilised men'.⁵⁵ The crowd's fickleness is reflected in the fact that the meeting is reported to have dispersed completely when the last train to the coast left at 11.25 pm and the bar had given its last orders.⁵⁶

Shallow jingoism can also be inferred from the response to Dean Kitchin's controversial sermon. Unfounded rumours circulated that he had attacked soldiers fighting in the Transvaal as 'the scum of gin palaces', provoking a furious reaction.⁵⁷ '[A]ll patriotic Britons' were called to attend a prayer meeting at Durham Town Hall where it was believed (erroneously) that Kitchin would be present. Huge numbers turned up and the meeting went ahead amidst chants of 'Where's the Dean?' However, the collection for the Durham War Fund 'brought from the pockets of the audience, which could not have numbered less than 2000, the grand sum of £4. 4s. 6d which works out to about a halfpenny per head'.⁵⁸ While a numerous and vocal body of North East citizens were keen to appear ultra-patriotic, their commitment was not as deep as might be assumed.

‘A convenient nickname’⁵⁹

To attribute mindless jingoism solely to the working class is one-dimensional. Opposition to war was demonised through public outlets, helping to shape people’s reactions. Exposure to anti-war and anti-imperial opinions was overwhelmed by the presentation of any anti-imperialist sentiment as unpatriotic and even irreligious. Writing letters to newspapers could be done anonymously, sheltering behind a pseudonym, whereas openly displaying anti-war feelings at meetings could be risky. Call states that ‘since the audience chose to attend [meetings], the undecided faction who might benefit from the arguments chose not to attend. Violence at English meetings exacerbated this tendency as many average citizens avoided trouble spots’.⁶⁰ Opponents of war and imperialism might have gained broader support had they not been so readily denounced, any opposition being branded ‘Pro-Boer’, immediately suggesting lack of patriotism and alliance with the enemy, and used as a ‘convenient nickname’ for Burt and local opponents of the war.⁶¹ Kitchin was particularly heavily criticised and his views on morality questioned. On 29th December 1900, the *Newcastle Weekly Courant* accused him of belonging to the ‘pessimistic school’, negative about ‘not only our conduct in the South African war, but also of our moral condition generally as a nation’.⁶² Similarly, Justice Grantham attacked Kitchin’s sermon, ‘Overcome evil with good’, in the local press, arguing that ‘it had been a proud thing during the past few weeks to see how a spirit of patriotism had fired the nation... yet the Dean of Durham from the pulpit of Durham cathedral had chosen to slander our country, to throw vile aspersion and falsehoods on brave men who in the spirit of true Christianity were leaving father, mother, wife and children, ready to shed their blood, if need be their lives’.⁶³ Kitchin’s own religious arguments were thus turned against him.

It can instead be argued that the actual ringleaders in the jingoism evident at opposition meetings were middle-class. For instance, students from the College of Medicine supposedly led the chants of ‘We Want

War!' at the October 1899 Peace Meeting in Newcastle.⁶⁴ Similarly, S. C. Cronright-Schreiner, a South African anti-war campaigner invited to address a meeting in Gateshead, accused 'public men' – councillors, magistrates – of firing off 'speeches of a bellicose nature' to inflame a mob to prevent him speaking. 'Roughs' had been bribed with drinks and a 'strong musical band engaged' to lead a large procession (with 'students... in evidence, as usual') to attack Bensham Grove, home of Spence Watson. One stone crashed through a bedroom window; it was later polished and dubbed the 'Free Speech' stone.⁶⁵ Thus, it cannot be assumed that only working-class protestors were involved, with many being egged on by 'public men' able to hold 'aloof from the consequences of their actions'.⁶⁶

Historians have used the results of the Khaki Election in 1900 to demonstrate the lack of opposition and extrapolate support for the Boer War.⁶⁷ While this is a subject that requires more research, it is worth mentioning to substantiate the argument that the working-class were not as concerned about Empire as has been assumed. Hirshfield has claimed that the Khaki election 'suggested little positive response by voters to the arguments of the Pro-Boers'.⁶⁸ At first glance, this appears true in North East England. MPs Burt and Fenwick were both staunchly anti-war and Burt's majority fell from 2169 in 1895 to 410. Mr Fenwick's also dropped considerably. Burt acknowledged in his Monthly Circular to Northumberland miners in September 1900 that his opposition to war played a large part in the drastic decline in support.⁶⁹ However, Burt's retention of his seat can also be attributed to his core support of miners, who remained loyal to him and thus less affected by 'war fever' and imperialism when voting. Burt stated that 'I am perfectly convinced that in the Wansbeck Division and in Morpeth the great majority of the miners voted for Mr. Fenwick and for me, and very few voted against us. Morpeth is very erroneously supposed to be almost entirely a mining constituency. The miners certainly constitute a large portion of the electorate. But relatively to the rest of the population, the proportion of miners is year by year decreasing'.⁷⁰ Miners, it would seem, who

comprised a large section of the area's working class, continued voting for Burt and Fenwick, apparently putting domestic issues first, leaving other, possibly middle-class voters, to be swayed by imperialism. As Call states, 'close examinations of the election returns on a regional level indicate, if anything, the importance of local concerns'.⁷¹

Conclusion

Overall, opposition usually provoked hostile reactions from the masses, suggesting unwavering support for Empire at this time. Indeed, Hirst has commented that, on the whole, when examining reaction to Quaker peace campaigns, their work even during the First World War met with 'a less hostile reception than in the days of the Boer War'.⁷² However, fervent imperial sentiment was not sustained throughout the conflict, with the rallying of support through newspapers, fundraising and volunteering waning, allowing opposition to gain greater strength. This is shown by comparing the response to the 1899 peace meeting with one held in Gateshead in July 1901, addressed by Emily Hobhouse, who was campaigning against the appalling conditions in the British concentration camps for Boer women and children. The Leader reported that, despite fears, only two disturbances occurred, thus demonstrating how much had changed over the war period.⁷³ Meanwhile, a meeting of the pro-war South Africa Association in the Town Hall was only two-thirds full, with 'a mere twelve persons in the gallery'.⁷⁴

Additionally, in the long-term, the Pro-Boers seemed to benefit. According to Hirschfield, the 'Liberal victory in 1906 was seen both in South Africa and England as the triumph of the Pro-Boers', as many Pro-Boer MPs gained seats, showing how opinions changed dramatically as short-term imperialist fervour declined.⁷⁵ Thus, while approval of imperialism was on the whole high during the Boer War, long-term support for Empire was uncertain. The true extent of opposition and its prominence within working-class minds cannot be fully known, but what can be seen is that when war-fever diminished, the public were quick

to replace imperial sentiment with local concerns. Contrary to popular belief, opposition, albeit unorganised and minority-based, did exist and the strand of this appealing most to the working-class was built upon anti-capitalist sentiments, lending weight to the argument that local concerns, particular to their class, guided their opinions and behaviour. It would be simplistic, of course, to suggest that the trends that this article has explored were true for every inhabitant of the North East, and it may be valuable to extend the study of locality further by looking at variations in experiences between urban and rural working people, or differences between genders.

However, an informed speculation based upon opposition in this local case study has demonstrated that support for Empire was temporarily generated in the North East in this period. The imperial culture that prevailed, however, was not long lasting, but ebbed and flowed with the passing of time. Working-class support for war, and by implication, Empire, dwindled as the war progressed, made evident in the *Newcastle Journal's* statement at the end of the war that 'the country and the empire have passed through a severe ordeal-reminding us only too forcibly of the price of our Imperial position, and the terms on which we hold it'.⁷⁶ Britain's international prestige had been threatened, with the Boer War witnessing a surge of support preceding a dramatic downturn in opinion, supporting the argument that it represented a turning-point for attitudes to Empire.

The imperialist culture that arose around the Boer War was shaped from below as well as above, with local factors playing a key role, as seen in the reasons for or against opposition. This could be interpreted as the great reach of Empire, which both consciously and unconsciously penetrated everyday lives throughout Great Britain, fostering a local patriotism when it was needed. However, while this local patriotism may have been made visible by its combined relationship with the imperialism of the time, it did not owe its emergence to imperialism. Although war helped to arouse and centralise pro-imperial emotions, these were not far reaching or pervasive.

While not absent-minded imperialists as Porter has suggested, then, the working-class of North East England were *locally*-minded imperialists.⁷⁷ Imperialist values and emotions certainly affected them at key moments of Empire, but tangible inducements engrained in the identities of people, such as localism, were able to bring into play a sense of interrelated loyalties between region and nation. Together with the short-lived sensationalism and excitement identified with Empire, support for the imperial cause was held together momentarily, at least.

Notes

- ¹ This is an extract from the winning essay for the Sid Chaplin Prize in 2014, *'The Streets Everywhere Are Alive With Bunting': The Working-Class Perception of Empire in North-East England during the South African War, 1899–1902*, which was itself an edited version of the author's final year undergraduate dissertation for the School of History, University of Leeds (submitted 2013).
- ² Diary of Frances Elizabeth Kelly, 1899-1915, Tyne and Wear Archives DX441/1/4, 18th May 1900, p. 42.
- ³ S. Dubow, 'The New Age of Imperialism: Britain and South African Perspectives', in *Europe and its Empires: from Rome to the European Union*, ed. by Mary Harris and Csaba Lévai (Pisa : Plus-Pisa University Press, 2008), pp. 1–16 (p. 6).
- ⁴ J. Darwin, 'Afterword: The Imprint of the War', in *The Impact of the South African War*, ed. by D. Omissi and A. S. Thompson (Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2001), pp. 289–392 (p. 289).
- ⁵ For an example of this approach see R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians : the official mind of imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961).
- ⁶ J. A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: Grant Richards, 1901); J. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
- ⁷ MacKenzie, p. 7.
- ⁸ P. Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- ⁹ H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1979); B. Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists: Empire, society and culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); R. Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working-Class: working-class reactions and attitudes to the Boer*

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- 10 Pelling, p. 100.
- 11 Porter, p.311.
- 12 M. Blanch, 'Nation, Empire and the Birmingham Working Class 1899–1914 (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975), p. 386; R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working-class life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 99.
- 13 Pelling, p. 87.
- 14 Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists; Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class*, pp.3-4
- 15 Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 24.
- 16 N. McCord, North-East England: *The Region's Development 1760–1960* (London: Batsford Academic, 1979), p. 159.
- 17 E. Knox, "Keep Your Feet Still, Geordie Hinny". Women and Work on Tyneside', in *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, ed. by Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 92–112 (p. 92).
- 18 Pelling, p. 93.
- 19 For more on this see Colls and Lancaster.
- 20 Knox, p.92.
- 21 'A Working Man's Views', *Newcastle Daily Leader*, Letters Section, 3rd October 1899, p. 8.
- 22 R. Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', in *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1973), pp.460-508 (p. 499).
- 23 V. Kiernan, 'Working class and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Rebels and Their Causes: essays in honour of A. L. Morton* ed. by M. Cornforth (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), pp. 123–140 (p. 125).
- 24 Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class*, p. 12.
- 25 As above, pp. 170–172.
- 26 A. Davey, *The British Pro-Boers, 1877–1902* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1978), pp. 121–126.
- 27 S. Call, 'Voices Crying in the Wilderness: a comparison of pro-Boers and anti-imperialists 1899–1902' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Lincoln (Nebraska), 1991), <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a239399.pdf>>, [Accessed 08/03/2013], p. 45.
- 28 A. Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, power and the public in nineteenth-century England* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), p. 97.

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- 29 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, Letters Section, 9th December 1899.
30 Call, pp. 37–38.
31 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 29th November 1899, p. 4.
32 ‘A Strong Indictment’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 23rd January 1900, p. 8.
33 ‘Speeches at Miners’ Gala’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 15th July 1901, p. 8.
34 ‘Religion and War’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, Letters Section, 8th February 1901, p. 8.
35 As above.
36 ‘Peace Meeting at Newcastle’, *Northern Echo*, 4th December 1900.
37 ‘The Franchise Demands’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, Letters Section, 10th October
1899, p. 5.
38 Call, p. 50.
39 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, Letters Section, 28th September 1899, p. 8;
‘A Working Man’s Views’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, Letters Section, 3rd October
1899, p. 8.
40 As above.
41 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 23rd December 1899.
42 ‘Strong Resolution by Durham Miners’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 3rd October 1899,
p. 5.
43 ‘The Miners’ Demonstration’, *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 13th July 1901, p. 4.
44 As above.
45 *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12th October 1899.
46 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 23rd September 1899, p. 4.
47 ‘Newcastle Peace Meeting Off’, *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 7th October 1899.
48 All quotations, as above.
49 Robert Spence Watson quoted in P. Corder, *The Life of Robert Spence Watson*
(London: Headley Brothers, 1914), p. 280.
50 ‘A Stormy Peace Meeting in Newcastle’, *Evening Chronicle*, 12th October 1899.
51 As above.
52 *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12th October 1899.
53 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 12th October 1899, pp. 4–5.
54 As above.
55 A. Watson, *A Great Labour Leader – Being a Life of the Right Hon. Thomas Burt, MP*
(London: Brown, Langham and Co., Limited, 1908), pp. 197–199.
56 *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 12th October 1899.
57 ‘Prayer and Humiliation: Meeting at Durham. Extraordinary Scenes’, *Newcastle*

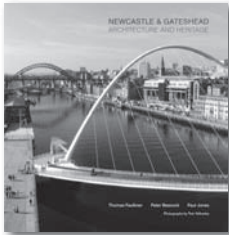
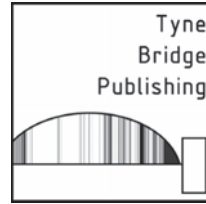
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- Daily Leader*, 23rd January 1900, p. 4.
- 58 As above.
- 59 Watson, p. 196.
- 60 Call, p. 66.
- 61 Watson, p. 196.
- 62 *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 29th December 1900.
- 63 'Justice Grantham on the War', *Northern Echo*, 27th January 1900.
- 64 Watson, p. 198.
- 65 S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Land of Free Speech* (London, New Age Press, 1906) pp. 145–157.
- 66 As above, p.145.
- 67 See, for example, M. Furlonger, 'Imperialism, South Africa and Newcastle Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century' (unpublished MA dissertation, Sunderland Polytechnic, 1980).
- 68 C. Hirshfield, 'The Legacy of Dissent: Boer War Opposition and the Shaping of British South African Policy, 1899-1909', *War & Society*, 6 (1988), pp. 11–39 (p. 20).
- 69 Northumberland Archives, Northumberland Miners' Minutes: Thomas Burt Monthly Circular September 1900 'Morpeth and Wansbeck Elections' (NRO 6057).
- 70 As above.
- 71 Call, p. 118.
- 72 M. E. Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War: An account of their peace principles and practice* (London, Swarthmore Press, 1923), p.503.
- 72 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 22nd July 1901.
- 73 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 23rd July 1901.
- 74 Hirshfield, p. 26.
- 75 *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 7th June 1902, p. 4.
- 76 Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*.

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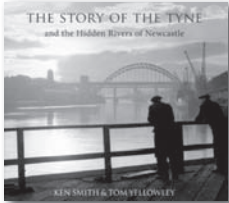
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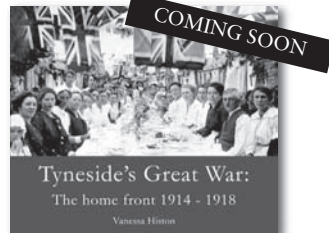
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Health Provision for the Working Poor The Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary, 1835-1852

Mike Greatbatch

On 22nd May 1835, the principal gentlemen of the Township of Byker met at the local chapel to discuss the merits of establishing an institution for providing 'the sick of the working community, and of the lower classes generally' with the means of obtaining access to medicines and medical treatment. It was agreed that a dispensary, conducted on the self-supporting plan, should be adopted as the best option for freeing 'the honest, able, and industrious man from being exposed to the humiliating feeling that he is indebted to the charity of others for relief in sickness'. It was also anticipated that such a plan would 'operate extensively in promoting and spreading a provident and independent spirit amongst the laboring population'.¹

Despite its short history, the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary illustrates much about the prevailing attitude of the economically successful towards the working poor in the 1830s, attitudes that continue to influence welfare policy today.

Self-Help versus Poor Relief

That poverty was widespread throughout the nineteenth century was widely recognized as a fact of life by contemporaries. The crucial issue was

not poverty per se, but pauperism, the latter being a condition allegedly brought about by the moral weakness of the individual.

All workers might face the onset of poverty but through hard work, independence, sobriety and savings, the industrious worker could rise out of poverty or even avoid it all together. Those that failed to display the necessary strength of character, the necessary *self-help*, would become paupers, the destitute poor dependent on charity and poor relief, the system of outdoor and indoor relief administered by the parish overseers under the provisions of the Poor Law.

The principle of poor relief was first established in 1601, during the reign of Elizabeth. Each parish became legally responsible for raising money to fund 'the necessary relief of the lame impotent old blind and such other among them being poor and not able to work and also for the putting out of such children to be apprentices'.²

This system was to be supervised by the magistrates and administered by the parish vestry, whose members nominated the overseers of the poor from amongst the ratepayers of the parish. Membership of the vestry was originally open to all parishioners but as the economy of even rural parishes became increasingly capitalist in nature, there was a growing demand to take control of poverty out of the hands of the poor.

The concept of a Select Vestry, limited to the more 'substantial householders', was enshrined in the so-called Sturges Bourne Acts, which introduced the election of vestry members by ratepayers only, and used a sliding scale to give those who paid the most additional votes, up to six votes for those assessed at more than £150 per annum. Furthermore, the 1819 amendment to the 1818 Parish Vestries Act extended the vote to joint stock companies and non-resident ratepayers.³

These changes were especially pertinent to the Township of Byker, where the bulk of the population were non-ratepayers, and most of those that did pay rates did so based on an assessment of their commercial property.

Byker Township

The Settlement Act of 1662 stated that in northern counties like Northumberland, the administrative unit for poor law purposes should henceforth be the township. Byker Township was formed from that part of the manor of Byker remaining after the western half was absorbed within the town of Newcastle in 1549. This resulted in a township of 850 acres stretching from Sandyford in the northwest to St. Anthony's in the southeast.⁴

When John Coulson, Byker's Perpetual Overseer of the Poor, referred to the 'peculiar distorted construction of this Township' at a Vestry Meeting held on 4th October 1822, he was referring to a feature more disconcerting to those present than mere geography. Byker, said Coulson, was 'a plebian township' comprised 'almost exclusively of the lowest classes of Society', with 'about 80 rate-payers, to 3,920 non-rate-payers!'⁵

Coulson was a spirit merchant living in a large stone-built house 'pleasantly situated at Byker Lane'. At a meeting held in May 1816, Coulson made his point even clearer, remarking that:

'The population of this Township is 3029 and the whole number of rated inhabitants only 97. There are 710 families and not more effective inhabitants paying rate than 94 or 95. If they were all off work, then 94 must keep 614 families!'⁶

Industry had begun locating along the banks of the Ouseburn and the north shore of the Tyne during the 1700s, and by the 1820s these industrial settlements were drawing labourers and their families into Byker at ever increasing numbers, as Coulson's figures for 1816 and 1822 demonstrate. Gone were the days when Byker provided a country retreat, though Byker Hill and Byker Village in the centre of the township continued to support genteel living well into the 1860s, albeit in fewer numbers.

Ouseburn and Byker Bank, together with St. Peter's, Dent's Hole and St. Anthony's were rapidly developing into the township's most populated

districts. Here 'an immense number of mean cottages' housed the industrial workforce for the potteries, glass-works, rope-works, shipyards, flax and fertilizer works that made up Byker's burgeoning economy.⁷

Whilst the occupants of these cottages were exempt from the poor rate, the owners of the dwellings were not, often being the same persons as those who owned the factories and work-shops in which Byker's poor found work. The overwhelming dominance of industrial capitalism soon becomes apparent when looking through the township's rate assessment records. For example, when the 'rate for the relief of the poor' was set on 2nd February 1829, of the sixteen properties assessed at over £100, one was a local landowner (Edward Grace), four were farms, two were collieries (Heaton and Tyne Main), and the rest were potteries (three), glass-works (three), shipbuilding (one), lead (one) and flax spinning (one).⁸

Not only did the owners of these properties secure the maximum six votes allowed for electing members to the Select Vestry, they also exercised the same number of votes in the election of the *overseers* - those officials of the vestry whose job it was to oversee the allocation of poor relief and carry out investigations into local need.

Members of the Select Vestry, Byker, 1834

Name	Property	Rent Value (£)
Thomas Fell	Pottery	250
John Middleton	Houses and shop	11
John Beckington	Flour Mill	64
Thomas Thompson	House, Flint Mill, and Pottery	159
Joseph Wilkinson	Houses (x2), shop, stable, and land	24
Robert Winship	House and shop	12
John Nesham	Public House	8

William Crawford	House and garden	9
John Ridley	Farm, house, and Alkali Works	177
John Thirlwell	Farms x 2	381
Thomas Gray	Public House	8
David Hobkirk	House	9
Henry Elliott	Flint Mill	54
Thomas Clarke	Flax Mill	200
John Mackie	House	6
Thomas Ridley	Bottle Works	110
Source: Byker Township Vestry Minute Book, 28 th March 1834, TWAS, 183/600; Byker Township Rate Assessment Book, 1833-34, TWAS, 183/579		

One of the longest serving overseers was John Henderson Carins, first appointed in May 1830 and thereafter both overseer and secretary to the Select Vestry. Carins would later serve as the Registrar of Births and Deaths for the Byker Registration District, on behalf of the newly created Newcastle upon Tyne Poor Law Union, which replaced the old system of poor relief administration in Newcastle in 1836. Thus Carins was one of those new professional public servants who were to administer and record the provision of welfare and associated expenditure under the Poor Law system.⁹

Provision for the Sick

Under the Old Poor Law, anyone unable to work due to illness could apply for temporary relief in lieu of wages or to receive assistance in gaining admission to an appropriate medical facility. When Jane Sokel became ill with typhus fever it was agreed in March 1831 that she 'be got into the Fever Hospital'. The Fever Hospital (at the House of Recovery) was of course in Newcastle, not Byker, and anyone needing to be admitted could receive help with the cost of transport. Thus, when George Anderson of

Byker Bar was admitted to Newcastle's Infirmary in the summer of 1832, it was agreed to pay John Newsham for conveying him there.¹⁰

Doctor's fees were also sometimes paid. A Dr. Foss was paid £2. 6s. 'in part of his charge' for attending to George Harrison, a pauper, in January 1833. In July 1834, it was agreed to pay Dr. Lammas' bill of £1. 14s. 6d. 'for attending Isabella Bird'.¹¹

In situations where someone was unable to work it appears that Carins had considerable influence in determining the outcome of their request for relief. In February 1833, it was agreed that Carins should visit Jonathon Rogerson at his home at Byker Old Engine. Rogerson had 'been 5 months out of work from ill health' and Carins was to 'enquire into this case and give such relief as he may consider necessary'. The following month it was agreed that Rogerson was to continue receiving relief 'as Mr. Carins may seem proper for a short time until he gets his health'.¹²

When Ann Hall applied on behalf of her husband Thomas, unable to work from the loss of his eye, it was agreed that he be given 2s. a week 'and Mr. Carins to visit him'. In September 1834, it was agreed that Margaret Moor and her five children should receive 3s. 'temporary relief' to cover the time that her husband was consigned to the Infirmary following a severe accident. When her husband was discharged from the Infirmary, it was further agreed that Margaret receive 2s. additional relief.¹³

The minutes of the Select Vestry suggest that situations such as these could be resolved on a regular basis without too much difficulty. However, the same cannot be said for those instances of acute distress caused by an outbreak of contagious disease.

In October 1822, a meeting was held to discuss the prevalence of typhus fever and the expediency of the overseers in sending afflicted persons to Newcastle's Fever Hospital. The issue at hand was not so much the policy, because Byker had no equivalent facility, but the cost. At 2s 6d per person, per day, the cost of so many requiring admission to the Hospital produced a huge demand on the funds of the parish, and consequently it was 'resolved unanimously that from the inadequacy of the Fund for the

Poor, that the overseers be requested to decline' such payments.¹⁴

When cholera struck Newcastle in the winter of 1831-32 it was reported that it lingered longest in the riverside settlements, including Dent's Hole, though by the end of January it was reported that it had eased considerably in Byker. Whilst this undoubtedly increased demands on poor relief, there is no evidence that the Vestry refused requests for assistance.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Byker's location beyond the Newcastle town boundary certainly restricted access to hospitals and other medical aid. The Infirmary at the Forth and the Dispensary in Low Friar Chare, were both well to the west, and the rules governing home visits by physicians employed by the Dispensary prevented any such visits east of the Shields Road bridge on the Ouseburn, precisely where most of Byker's industrial workers were housed.¹⁶

Consequently, when the leading rate payers of Byker Township met on the evening of Friday 22nd May 1835 to discuss the proposed dispensary, it was agreed that the 'great and increasing population of the Township of Byker, the almost total exclusion of its inhabitants, in consequence of distance, from the benefits of the Medical Charities in Newcastle' and 'the general sickness which have recently visited this neighbourhood' were sufficient reasons to justify the cost and effort involved in establishing the new institution.

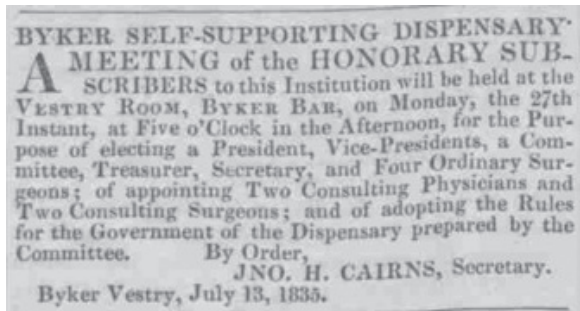
This initial cost and effort would be borne by persons such as those attending the meeting, the industrialists, merchants and other men of capital who owned and controlled the local Byker economy. Thus it was recorded:

'That the Overseers and Select Vestry of the Township having enquired into the mode of conducting a Self-Supporting Dispensary, and having ascertained that very many of the Owners of Property, Manufacturers, and other persons connected with the Township, are ready to assist in the formation of one.'¹⁷

Establishment of the Dispensary, 1835

A further meeting held on 30th May 1835 ended with the adoption of a set of rules prepared by a Provisional Committee made up of the local overseers and other gentlemen with John Carins acting as secretary. Carins served as Secretary of the Dispensary until 1840, when the post passed to Alexander Carins, possibly his son. Alexander is recorded as an Assistant Overseer in both the 1841 and 1851 census.¹⁸

On 27th July 1835, local industrialist Robert Plummer was elected Treasurer of the new dispensary at a meeting held at the Vestry Room at Byker Bar. This meeting was advertised on behalf of the Honorary Subscribers, those gentlemen of property who were to become the institution's Governors and financial subscribers, and is generally regarded as the date that the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary was founded as an independent charity, as it was the occasion that its governing body, surgeons and physicians were elected, and a set of written rules adopted for its administration.¹⁹



Newcastle Journal, 25th July 1835, p. 1.

Courtesy of Newcastle Libraries & Information Services.

Although the initial cost of supporting the new dispensary would be funded through charitable donations, the institution's long term viability would be sustained by three distinct financial sources - charitable donations (Honorary Subscribers), payments by the overseers of the poor, and the

so-called 'free class' subscribers of tradesmen and working poor paying a weekly subscription up to a maximum of 3d per week for married men with children.²⁰

This unique feature is cited as the first of the 'inducements' that form the rules of the dispensary adopted on its foundation, namely:

'To encourage a provident and independent spirit amongst the working classes, by allowing such of them as support themselves without parochial assistance to become subscribers, under the denomination of "Free Class."²¹

Thus, access to the dispensary and its services was not 'free' in the sense of free from charges, but instead only those free from the condition of pauperism would be eligible for treatment. This feature set the new dispensary apart from other medical charities in Newcastle at this time, which continued to operate under a patronage system based on donations from wealthy residents.²²

Nevertheless, the Dispensary was a big improvement in health provision, especially in its commitment to procure medical and surgical attendance for 'married women, being free members, during their confinement', to provide medicines and attendance for paupers and those unable to afford the Free Class subscriptions, 'under certain conditions' with the relevant overseers being subscribers, and to allow a choice in the medical officers available and provide medical attendance at patients own home 'in cases where severe illness renders them unable to attend at the Dispensary'.²³

Whilst the honorary subscribers funded core costs (eg. premises), the Free Class subscribers and the overseers funded the cost of drugs and the medics. A number of Free Class members would be appointed to collect subscriptions and admit new Free Class subscribers, and in return they would qualify to serve on the committee.

The medical staff would consist of two consulting physicians, two consulting surgeons, and up to six ordinary surgeons, all elected by ballot

at the governors' annual meeting. All surgeons had to have a diploma from one of the medical colleges (London, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow) or have an established practice in Newcastle. Two rooms were rented at Byker Bar to serve as premises for the new institution.

Boom and Bust

The Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary was opened for the reception of patients at 10.00am on 1st September 1835. By 1st May 1836, 472 Free Class members had been admitted and 322 persons had received medical treatment, of which 269 had been cured, nine had died, eleven had been dismissed, and 33 remained on the surgeons' books. Fifty-two children had been vaccinated without charge, of which 31 were non-subscribers.²⁴

So great was the demand, that new premises were sought, and the Dispensary moved into a house on Byker Bank rented from Sir Matthew White Ridley, one of Byker's leading landowners and President of the Dispensary's board of governors. An apothecary, Edward Robson, could now be appointed as the resident medical officer. The number of visits to the Dispensary by the surgeons was 280 but, significantly, most visits by surgeons were to patients at their own homes; no less than 852 home visits during the first eight months. A list of the diseases treated includes forty-seven cases of fever, of which fifteen were for scarlet fever. Inflammation of the air passages (30 cases), diarrhea (27), constipation (22), and indigestion (18) were the other commonly recurring ailments, in a district where heavy industry competed for space with over-crowded tenements and cottages.²⁵

A similar pattern is obvious from the second Annual Report's list of diseases treated in the twelve months to 1st May 1837. Whilst influenza tops the list with 106 cases treated, the number of patients suffering from diarrhea (60), constipation (46), catarrh (42), inflammation of air passages (32), fever (33), and indigestion (27) remain persistently high.²⁶ All these ailments reflect the enduring character of the area, where poor diet, poor air and poor water quality contributed to what one sanitary inquiry almost twenty years later described as 'the wretched state of Byker and St. Peter's'.²⁷

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*The following is a List of the Diseases treated by the Surgeons,
from 1st May, 1836, to 1st May, 1837.*

<i>Disease.</i>	<i>No. of Cases.</i>	<i>Disease.</i>	<i>No. of Cases.</i>	<i>Disease.</i>	<i>No. of Cases.</i>
Abscess,	6	Fever (Remittent),	2	Indigestion,	27
Amenorrhœa,	1	Headache,	4	Influenza,	108
Apoplexy,	2	Heart, Diseases of		Leucorrhœa,	3
Asthma,	2	the,	1	Lumbago,	8
Bruises and Sprains,	12	" Palpitation of		Measles,	8
Burns and Scalds,	6	the,	1	Menorrhagia,	4
Casualties,	9	Hooping Cough,	5	Palsy,	1
Catarrh,	42	Hydrocephalus,	1	Piles,	4
Chicken Pox,	1	Hysteria,	8	Plethora,	1
Cholera,	4	Inflammation of the		Rheumatism,	22
Colic,	1	Air Passages,	32	Rupture,	1
Constipation,	46	" Bowels,	3	Sciatica,	2
Consumption (Pul-		" Eyes,	17	Scrofula,	6
monary),	3	" Knee Joint,	4	Small Pox,	3
Dentition,	3	" Lungs and		Tumours,	6
Diarrhœa,	60	Pleura,	10	Ulcers,	8
Dropsy,	1	" Liver,	5	Vertigo,	4
Dysentery,	1	" Periosteum,	1	Vomiting,	2
Dysuria,	1	" Peritoneum,	1	Waterbrash,	4
Eruptive Diseases		" Prostrate		Worms,	28
and Boils,	20	Gland,	1	Wounds,	9
Epilepsy,	1	" Tonsils and		Midwifery Cases,	9
Excoriations,	3	Throat,	11		
Fever (Continued),	31				

*Extract from the Second Annual Report, 1836-37.
Courtesy of Newcastle Libraries & Information Services.*

The number of persons treated in its second year doubled to 621, and two years later (1838-39) the number was 723.²⁸ This level of demand could only be sustained by regular financial contributions but even in its inaugural year the treasurer (Robert Plummer) noted with concern that the amount received from Free Class subscribers was less than anticipated and in arrears from the start, owing to 'the irregularity of payment on the part of many who have entered their names in the books, and have not continued their subscriptions'.²⁹

Thus, appeals to the public and the largess of the honorary subscribers would have to support the charity if Free Class members failed to increase their contributions. As early as 1839, the governors were advised that 'the honorary fund was not sufficient for the purposes of the establishment, and if not soon improved, the institution must go down'. Two years later, the *Courant* reported that 'we regret to state that the funds of the Byker

Self-Supporting Dispensary are in a very depressed state at present, so much so, as to prevent the committee from answering all the claims that are made upon this very useful charity'.³⁰

In September 1844, a Special General Meeting was called at the Guildhall to consider the state of the finances, which now recorded a debt of £337. 7s. 1d. on the honorary fund and £70. arrears in subscriptions. It was noted that the annual admission of patients was on average 675, and the number of new Free Class members just 140.³¹

By the end of the decade, the number of persons in need of medical treatment in All Saints and Byker was so great that a new institution, the Newcastle Eastern Free Dispensary, was established opposite St. Ann's Church to provide treatment free of charge to 'destitute diseased persons'. Operational by March 1849, its founders believed that this would not interfere with the dispensary in Byker, 'admission to which being confined to workmen subscribing to its funds'.³²

In February 1852, it was reported that Alderman Lowrey had appealed to the Corporation to help finance the new Eastern Dispensary, and at a Council meeting held on 17th March the Finance Committee's recommendation of an annual subscription of £5. 5s was approved. Within twelve months, the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary ceased to be listed as a medical charity; news reports of its failing finances having petered out in the mid-1840s. Byker's experiment in self-funded medical provision for the working poor was over.³³

Conclusion

The New Poor Law of 1834 had enshrined in law the notion that society could distinguish between the 'honest, able, and industrious man' and the improvident pauper, and the notion that new institutions for the poor could be self-supporting attracted considerable national favour. Similar self-supporting dispensaries were established or proposed at this time in Oxford, Belfast, Brighton, and Derby, and they too appear to have experienced similar challenges to those faced in Byker.³⁴

Byker however, had a number of issues that effectively undermined the self-supporting model from the start. Its population of industrial poor included few skilled workers, shopkeepers or tradesmen, with most men (and many women) employed in unskilled labouring work, in factories and work-shops supplying manufactured goods for export from the Tyne. Any downturn in trade, as happened from the early 1840s, produced widespread insecurity of income as workers faced under-employment as a precursor to unemployment.³⁵

At its meeting of 28th December 1835, the Byker Select Vestry had agreed to subscribe two guineas to the Honorary Fund and five guineas to the Free Class Fund, and resolved that 'from this date all sick paupers belonging to the Township shall be placed under the care of the dispensary'. What the Select Vestry members failed to predict was that those paupers would significantly increase in number as the jobs of the potential Free Class subscribers eroded away in the face of economic slump, thereby plunging their 'honest, able, and industrious man' into pauperism.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- ¹ *Newcastle Journal*, 30th May 1835, p. 1.
- ² Michael E. Rose, *The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914*. Second Edition (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 9-11. Bryan Keith-Lucas, *The Unreformed Local Government System* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp.137 and 165. The relevant Act of Parliament is 43 Elizabeth I c2 (Poor Law).
- ³ Keith-Lucas, pp. 98-99.
- ⁴ Eneas Mackenzie, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1827), pp. 319-321.
- ⁵ Byker Township Vestry Minute Book (Minute Book), 4th October 1822, TWAS, 183/600.

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- 6 Byker Township Rate Assessment Book (Assessment Book), 6th May 1816, TWAS, 183/578. The exclamation marks are in the original recorded comments, in both documents.
- 7 Mike Greatbatch, 'Politics in the Piggery; Chartism in the Ouseburn, 1838-1848', *North East History* 44: (2013). The reference to 'mean cottages' is from a c1829 handbill; *Seymour Bell Portfolio* 4, item 6, Newcastle Local Studies.
- 8 Assessment Book, 2nd February 1829.
- 9 Carins' salary was £65 per annum; Minute Book, meeting held 2nd May 1831. Note that Carins is sometimes spelled *Cairns* in newspaper reports and directories.
- 10 Minute Book, meeting held 7th March 1831 (Jane Sokel) and meeting held 6th August 1832 (George Anderson).
- 11 Minute Book, meetings held 7th January 1833 and 14th July 1834.
- 12 Minute Book, meetings held 4th February and 4th March 1833.
- 13 Minute Book, meetings held 3rd June 1833 (Ann Hall) and 29th September and 3rd November 1834 (Margaret Moor).
- 14 Minute Book, meeting held 4th October 1822.
- 15 *Newcastle Courant*, 14th January, p. 4, and 21st January 1832, p. 4.
- 16 'Account of the Newcastle Dispensary for the 60th Year (1837)', *Local Tracts* Volume D51, Newcastle Local Studies. This ruling was still in place in the 1850s; see 'Account of the Newcastle Dispensary for the 74th Year (1851)', *Local Tracts* Volume 239, Literary and Philosophical Society.
- 17 *Newcastle Journal*, 30th May 1835, p. 1.
- 18 Alexander Carins is living on Byker Bank on the night of the 1841 census and appears to be a lodger of Margaret Daggit, to whom the Vestry paid an annual rent for the use of her premises as the Vestry Meeting Room (at Byker Bar). In 1851 he is living at Catterick Buildings, on the Shields turnpike road, and is recorded as a widower with two young boys, both born at Byker Bar. 1841 *Census*, HO 107/820/1 and 1851 *Census*, HO 107. 2408.
- 19 *Newcastle Journal* and *Newcastle Courant*, 25th July 1835, p. 1 (both). Plummer later became chairman of the new (1836) Newcastle Poor Law Union.
- 20 Free Class Subscribers - 'small tradesmen, working persons, servants, labourers and their wives and children, not receiving parish relief, and who are unable to pay for medical advice in the usual manner.' Their subscription was 1d per week for each person over the age of fourteen, and ½d per week for each child under that age up to two children with no additional charge for additional children in the same family. 'Rules of the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary', *Thomas Wilson Collection* Volume 5 Part 1, Item 1072, Newcastle Local Studies.
- 21 As above, Inducement 1.
- 22 The Newcastle Infirmary (founded 1751) and Newcastle Dispensary (1778) were both enlarged in the early nineteenth century but continued to operate under a patronage system, relying on donations from wealthy residents. The Lying-in Hospital in Rosemary Lane and the Charity for Poor Married Women (founded

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- 1760), both relied on sermons and concerts for charitable donations.
- 23 Rules of the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary.
- 24 First Annual Report of the State of the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary (1836),
Thomas Wilson Collection, Volume 5 Part 1, Item 1072, Newcastle Local Studies. It
does not say what the vaccination was for.
- 25 First Annual Report, as above. The record of diseases is on page 6.
- 26 Second Annual Report of the State of the Byker Self-Supporting Dispensary
(1837), *Thomas Wilson Collection*, Volume 6, Item 1380, Newcastle Local Studies.
- 27 Report of the 'Commission of Enquiry into the Sanitary Condition of the Town of
Newcastle', evidence presented on Tuesday 24th January 1854, *Newcastle Courant*,
27th January 1854.
- 28 Second Annual Report, and *Newcastle Courant*, 24th May 1839.
- 29 First Annual Report.
- 30 *Newcastle Courant*, 24th May 1839, p. 4 and 6th August 1841, p. 4.
- 31 *Newcastle Journal*, 14th September 1844, p. 2 and 19th October 1844, p. 3.
- 32 *Newcastle Journal*, 27th January 1849, p. 3 and 17th March 1849, p. 1.
- 33 *Newcastle Courant*, 6th February 1852, p. 3 and 19th March 1852, p. 7. The Byker
Dispensary and its officials cease to be recorded in local trade directories from 1853
onwards.
- 34 For example, see reports in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 30th May 1835, p. 3; *The Belfast
News-Letter*, 27th October 1835, p. 4; *Brighton Patriot and South of England Free
Press*, 23rd May 1837, p. 1; *The Derby Mercury*, 15th November 1837, p. 3. The
Brighton Provident & Self-Supporting Dispensary reported a serious reduction in
the balance of the honorary fund in its second year of operation, *Brighton Patriot*,
5th February 1839, p. 3.
- 35 'Condition of the Unemployed Workmen in Newcastle'; *Newcastle Courant*, 17th
June 1842, p. 7.



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The Long Road to Mass Education: Religious Rivalry in County Durham, 1800-1850

Heather Thompson

We live in an era which recognises and enshrines in international law the rights of the child. Among these rights is the right to universal, state-paid education. Nevertheless, hundreds of millions of children in the developing world today are denied this right, as were untold millions of children in England and Wales until relatively recently. At the dawn of the 19th century, schooling was largely the preserve of the privileged but by 1900 all children – of all faiths, and of all social classes, including the poorest - were not only entitled to attend school, but compelled by law to do so. This article examines some of the drivers of this massive societal shift and attempts to gauge the effects on communities. It focuses on the provision of schooling by religious groups in County Durham in the first half of the 19th Century, providing something of the back-story for the ultimate introduction of compulsory education in England and Wales.

In 1870, the Elementary Education Act introduced a national framework for the provision of elementary education to all children aged five to thirteen in England and Wales. The so-called ‘Forster’s Education Act’ decisively and somewhat controversially brought education under government control, wresting it from religious groups who had a vested interest in providing schooling according their own differing creeds. As

early as 1811, the Brougham report had proposed such a national, unified system of elementary education on non-denominational lines.¹ The sixty year delay in implementation was due primarily to resistance by, and competition between, religious groups who battled each other for control of the hearts and minds of the people, and of the school system.² The 'scramble for education' was at its height between 1800 and 1850, and a greater share of aggression has usually been attributed to the Anglican Church rather than to other denominations whose positions were primarily defensive.³ This was inevitable - the Anglican Church had historically monopolised education for the lower orders – where it was provided at all – and had most to lose.

During the 1700s the Anglican Church had lost thousands of working class followers to Nonconformity, especially Methodism which drew its leaders from within the ranks of the working class, encouraged self-improvement among its followers and initiated a large-scale programme for teaching children the three 'R's' (reading, (w)riting and 'rithmetic) through Sunday Schools. The Sunday School movement was massively successful.⁴ By 1800 virtually all denominations provided Sunday Schools, giving ordinary people access to at least the basics of education. Previously, provision had been severely limited and invariably Anglican, so the children of Dissenting parents were forced to 'endure instruction under an alien creed', where they could access it at all.⁵

At the end of the turbulent 18th century, mass education was increasingly seen as a potential solution to many social problems such as poverty, crime and vagrancy. It was also viewed as a counter-revolutionary force, a means of exerting social control on a potentially rebellious population. Demand, and public support, for mass education were increasing and the development of the monitorial system of education by the Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, in 1808 in part helped to increase supply. The so-called 'Lancastrian' method permitted the teaching of much larger numbers of children than previously possible by the employment in schools of one or more teachers, supported by advanced pupils who in turn taught other

children. The Lancastrian system provided the basis for the newly formed British and Foreign Schools Society to establish a national schooling initiative - on non-denominational lines – for the children of Dissenters.⁶ These became known as ‘British schools’. Threatened on a new front, the Anglican Church responded in 1811 with the introduction of Dr Andrew Bell’s ‘Madras’ system which was followed in Anglican ‘National schools’.⁷

At this time, the scramble for education was essentially a struggle between the two main Protestant camps, Anglican and Non-conformist, Church and Chapel who saw in education the means of defending or extending their own power bases. However, despite the religious upheavals of the preceding centuries, Catholicism continued in England and Wales. Native Roman Catholics continued as a significant minority, especially in localities where a surviving Catholic gentry could support a priest, and offer protection in the face of the punitive laws which denied Roman Catholics the same rights as Protestants. By 1800 these penal laws were gradually being repealed, a process culminating in the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. Finally able to openly practice their faith, Roman Catholics also moved into the arena of education, although later than the other religious groups.

Against this complex historical and contextual background, it can be difficult to understand how communities experienced the new opportunities to access schooling, and the religious groups which provided it. What effects – positive or negative - did religious rivalry in education have on ordinary people? What did the ‘scramble for education’ by religious groups mean for them? Some answers to these questions have been posited in a recent study, undertaken through the University of Teesside, which examines in some detail the experiences of two County Durham communities where Anglican Schooling initiatives were undertaken in this period: the Barrington Schools initiative in Weardale in 1819 and the establishment of Reverend Temple Chevallier’s school in Esh Village in 1835.⁸

The Barrington Schools Initiative of Weardale, 1819

In 1800, Bishop Shute Barrington was the leading cleric of the Anglican Church within the Diocese of Durham, which roughly covered the counties of Durham and Northumberland. All Anglican livings in this area fell under his control, and – as the principle landowner of Weardale and owner of all of its mineral rights – his interests in this district were particularly strong. Among his Weardale tenants were the Beaumont Lead Company at Westgate – reputedly the largest lead mining company in the world at this time – who paid him rent. The Beaumont Company, and their competitors, the (Quaker) London Lead Company at Nenthead, just over the Durham/Cumbria border and beyond the Bishop’s jurisdiction, paid the Bishop tithes of 10 per cent on the value of ore raised.⁹ The labour of the people of Weardale, who worked the mines, therefore greatly contributed to the tremendous wealth of the Durham Diocese. This conferred upon the Bishop an obligation to provide for their needs and in 1819 he embarked upon the Barrington schools initiative, building four new schools at Stanhope, Heathery Cleugh, Boltsburn and Wearhead and taking over and improving three existing schools at Westgate, Eastgate and St John’s Chapel. Because the schools were of course run according to Anglican doctrine and so secured Anglican influence in the area, the Bishop’s motives have usually been interpreted as strategic rather than philanthropic, intended to pre-empt the imminent establishment of schools in Weardale – on non-denominational lines - by the Quaker Company.

The need for new Weardale schools was identified in the 1818 Parliamentary Report of the Select Committee on Education of the Poor. This was a ‘domesday survey’ of education undertaken across every parish of England and Wales. The report found that one Anglican charitable school and six private schools in Wolsingham were ‘sufficient means of education’ for the poor. But further up the dale in the more extensive Parish of Stanhope, where the lead-mining population was concentrated, four charitable schools and ten private venture schools were ‘grossly

insufficient' for the needs of the 6,000 or so inhabitants. No mention is made in the 1818 Report of the denominations of the existing Weardale schools, though at least two were supported by the Lord Crewe Charity and closely associated with the Church of England. The schoolmaster at Westgate, a Mr Race, was a dissenter, though his specific denomination is unknown, and he taught according to the Lancastrian system favoured by dissenters.¹⁰

The London Lead Company were also well aware of the need for schooling in Weardale, and by the time the Parliamentary report was published, their own proposed schools for the children of their workmen at Nenthead and Middleton in Teesdale were already in the planning stage, and completed by 1819. Although they operated on non-denominational lines, the Quaker Company's schoolbooks were almost identical to those used by the Anglican National Schools, and in deference to the Bishop of Durham's considerable interest in the area, they required their company Schoolmasters to be members of the Church of England, 'a remarkable concession', especially since they were not beholden to the Bishop as tenants.¹¹ Children were required to attend public worship twice every Sunday (though the choice of place of worship was left to the parents). In addition to financing their own schools, the London Lead Company contributed £400 to the Bishop's Anglican schools initiative, in 'warm approbation of the Bishop of Durham's very benevolent design'.¹²

The final version of the Barrington Schools regulations, published in June 1820, gave the Anglican Church strict authority over the Barrington schools, ensured that lessons would be conducted on the Anglican 'Madras' system and children would learn the Anglican Catechism. However, concessions were made to allow children of every denomination to attend, and (under Rule 20) children of employees of the Quaker Company (who were likely to be dissenters) were exempted from mandatory church attendance, so at first glance it seems that the Anglican hierarchy reciprocated the goodwill shown by the Quaker Company.

On careful inspection of the available sources however, it becomes clear

that there were significant tensions between the Anglicans and Dissenters over the new schools. The original version of the Barrington School regulations, printed in Stanhope on 21st June 1820 differed crucially from the final version in that Rule 20 did **not** exempt the children of employees of the Quaker Company from mandatory attendance at church.¹³ It stated simply ‘that the Children who are instructed in these Schools be required to attend the CHURCH *twice every Sunday, where they have an opportunity to do so*’. Furthermore, Rule 9 dictated that the *Church Catechism* be taught and Rule 19 stipulated that ‘children of EVERY DENOMINATION be admitted to these schools...on conforming to the Rules’ (all capitals and italics in original). The combined effect of these three rules would make submission to the teaching of Anglican doctrine a condition of attendance – no concession at all to the overwhelming numbers of Nonconformists living in Weardale, and far less liberal than the principles of the Quaker Company in their schools.

Other original documents show that Rule 20 was amended due to pressure from the Quaker Company.¹⁴ On 9 November 1819, the Reverend George Newby of Witton-le-Wear wrote as Bishop Barrington’s representative in Weardale, to the Quaker Company. Enclosing an amended copy of the Barrington Schools regulations, he informed them of the Bishop’s proposed personal endowment of £2,000 for ‘*the benefit of all succeeding generations of Weardale miners*’. He also stated that:

As the endowment and clause for dissenters’ children (the sine qua non of the lead company) are arranged agreeably to our own sentiments I ...assert that his Lordship has conceded more than I should have done under similar circumstances.¹⁵

The tone of the letter suggests that Rev. Newby was piqued that the power of the Quaker Company was sufficient to force the Bishop’s climb-down. The presence of the Quaker Company, combined with the large numbers of Nonconformist residents of Weardale – mainly Methodists but also

Presbyterians and Baptists – made Dissent an appreciable counter-force to unbridled Anglicanism here.

Competition between the denominations continued. Rev. Newby reported the progress of the new Barrington schools to Bishop Barrington in highly competitive terms:

My Lord ... the Lead (Quaker) Company directors breakfast with me next Sunday and attend divine service. Their infant establishments at Nenthead and Middleton are doing well and I trust, in the course of a short time, to be able to report to your Lordship that the Barrington schools in this dale are not a whit behind them...

His letter goes on:

...Race, the Master at Westgate, has relinquished his situation, but the committee has not been able to pay him the stipulated sum (viz £60) which I shall be happy to receive your Lordship's orders to discharge – as it will be the means of removing any unpleasant impression that may be likely to arise from displacing a Dissenter.¹⁶

The Barrington Schools were clearly locally contentious and needed sensitive handling. This was borne out when Reverend Luke Yarker, President of the newly-formed Barrington Schools Committee, found himself in hot water when the draft school regulations were prematurely leaked:

..Mr Newby...informs me that the printing of the Schools' Regulations...has met with the Bishop's disapprobation... He also hints at an intended change in the regulations in consequence of the disapproval of the [Quaker] Lead Company... 'any change in the regulations at present,

however advantageous ... would cause disapprobation and dislike...instilling suspicions and raising a ferment, which would not be allayed.¹⁷

The establishment of the Barrington schools on a permanent footing, the ousting of dissenting teachers and the replacement of the Lancastrian with the Madras teaching method clearly show that the Bishop was imposing Anglican influence on this vitally important – and solidly Nonconformist - economic region. In doing so, he finally fulfilled Anglican obligations to the community of Weardale that had for generations been neglected; for at least fifty years, the people of Weardale, who suffered extreme though intermittent poverty, had begged unsuccessfully in a series of petitions for schooling for their children.¹⁸

All this suggests that the Anglican Church was the most aggressive of the denominations active in Weardale at this time, though an intriguing reference by Mr Yarker may call this into question if more substantial evidence comes to light. He refers to the Quaker Company's own draft school regulations which had also, apparently, been leaked:

The publicity, by whose means I know not, which was given some time ago to a set of regulations drawn up I believe by Mr Stag, has been productive of much mischief in this Dale, which I am afraid it will take some time to cure. The people are very strong in their prejudices and particularities.¹⁹

Joseph Stagg was the architect of the Quaker Company's schooling initiatives and was revered by the local lead-miners for his efforts to progress their welfare. To date, scholarship has not identified the Quaker Company schools as being locally controversial, except among the Anglican clergy. Either way however, it seems from the evidence considered that in this period religious rivalry in education was more prevalent in Weardale, and social tensions ran higher, than has previously been understood.

Reverend Temple Chevallier's Village School in Esh, 1835

Religious rivalry in education in Weardale in the early 1800s was confined to the Protestant denominations, since Catholicism is believed to have been virtually extinct in Weardale by this time.²⁰ In the neighbouring parish of Lanchester however, a pocket of Catholicism had persisted for generations in the small rural village of Esh, living and worshipping under the protection of the local Roman Catholic gentry, the Smith family. Here, the Anglican and Catholic priests and the adherents of their respective faiths lived 'cheek by jowl' with each other.

The religious mix in Esh was different to Weardale. Approximately half of the population was Catholic, and the remainder Anglican Protestant. Esh was also unusual because the Catholic presence was galvanised by its close proximity to several important Catholic sites. Leading Catholic clergy were based not ten miles distant at Crook Hall near Consett and at Pontop Hall near Dipton. Both had provided refuge to the Catholic priests who fled Douai College during the French Revolution of 1789. They stayed for some twenty years until land and sufficient funds could be raised from the Catholic gentry to build Ushaw College – in Esh – in 1808. Ushaw College would remain for 200 years the chief Catholic Seminary in the North and of international importance for the training of the Catholic priesthood to undertake missionary work worldwide. By far a minority group in national terms then, Catholics in Esh at least equalled Protestants in number, and represented an older, more doctrinally opposed enemy of the Anglican Church than it faced in the Protestant Non-Conformists of Weardale. As poor as the Catholic inhabitants of Esh were, they represented the rank and file of a religious hierarchy which extended to the Pope himself, paralleling the Anglican Church's own ecclesiastical structure through the Diocesan, to the monarch, as Head of the Established Church.

In terms of schooling provision also, Esh was unusual. The 1818 Parliamentary Report of the Select Committee on Education of the Poor found that across the whole parish of Lanchester, an estimated total

population of 4,600 was served by three 'endowed' charitable schools, ten private schools and three Sunday Schools. One of these charitable schools, supported with £20 per year by Sir Edward Smith, was a school situated in Esh Village, 'for teaching 20 girls professing the Catholic faith'. There is no evidence of an Anglican school in Esh at this time, reversing the usual position of the Anglican school being the only school in any given community. This situation was to be overturned however in 1835 when the Reverend Temple Chevallier, newly appointed as the Anglican incumbent to Esh by Bishop Van Mildert, successor to Bishop Barrington, set up a new village school in direct opposition to that of Sir Edward Smith.

Reverend Chevallier was not local to the North East. He was born in Suffolk and was ordained at Cambridge where he became Professor of Divinity, and in 1835 he was appointed Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at the newly established Durham University. During his thirty or so years at Esh, Rev. Chevallier maintained a regular correspondence with his friend and fellow theologian, Rev. George Elwes Corrie, in which can be traced the effect of Rev. Chevallier's new school on the community. In 1839, Chevallier wrote:

I find myself, as it were, a yard arm with the Roman Catholics in my parish. There has yet been no communication between myself and the people at the College there [Ushaw]; and I am on good terms with many of the poorer Catholics. But I find some of them are doing what they can to thwart my proceedings ...for building a school house close to the Church yard. But I think I shall be too much for them here – I stole a march upon them, the week before last, by getting a stove put up in the Church while the R. C. Chapel is quite cold, to the great annoyance of some of the flock.²¹

Rev. Chevallier's letters show him to be fully (not to say gleefully) aware that his actions would dismay and provoke the local Catholic clergy. In

another letter to Corrie in November 1835 informing him of the recent death of Bishop Van Mildert, who was to have made up the subscriptions for Chevallier's new school, he explicitly declares his intention to use the school as a means of waging war against Catholicism:

the Papists try to bother me out from building a school which I am now about, but I hope to succeed nevertheless... I would not scruple to ask [you for financial support] in aid of a plan for fighting the Pope in his own domain: but I have no doubt I can raise funds enough in the immediate neighbourhood. My parish is quite an exemplification of the evil influence of Popery on the temporal condition as well as the spiritual welfare of people.²²

He recognised that the Catholic priests were attempting retaliation, and in the atmosphere of increasing suspicion, the possibility that even innocent activities might be misinterpreted:

...I am brought in contact with obstacles which do not much trouble parish priests in England: to wit, Roman Catholics with their exquisite delusions and unscrupulous ways of winning over people to their creed....But there is one instrument of conversion which I cannot retort upon... The R C priest has a field close by his chapel, which he opens for cricket-playing immediately after the morning service. At heart it is so applied.

I was about to remonstrate with him... when to my horror, on passing my own church yard I ... found my own principle scholars playing marbles! I have held my peace (underlining in original).²³

The presence of Nonconformity in Esh, and the possible scale of it at this time, is not clear, but both Chevallier and Corrie display through their correspondence as much distrust and dislike of Dissent as of 'Popery', feelings they express in extreme terms. They equate 'the cloven hoof of Dissent' with evil, and consider it just as pernicious, subversive and destructive as Catholicism for 'unsettling the minds of the people'.²⁴ At one point, Chevallier describes having 'fell in lately with a book... a peculiar version of the N T circulated among the Wesleyan Methodists with notes by Wesley... adorned with his effigies, and five sleek faces of some of his followers' (underlining in original). Corrie requested a copy, because 'the Wesleyans are such worthy imitators of Ignatius Loyola that they are quite likely to suppress such ...Jesuitry... in case a fuss is made about it'.²⁵

This distrust – amounting to paranoia - made Chevallier resistant to attempts at inter-denominational cooperation. In June 1838 he described to Corrie the establishment of a Northern Asylum for the Blind, Deaf and Dumb in Newcastle, describing how divisions emerged on its Committee over whether the religious services it provided should be of all denominations, or – as insisted by the Anglicans – the preserve only of the Established Church.²⁶ The Asylum Committee (including the Roman Catholic Chair) ultimately deferred to the Anglican proposal but subsequent disputes between the various Nonconformist groups caused the Church of England to withdraw altogether, illustrating how – as Non-Anglican groups were increasing in strength - the position of the denominations became more intransigent as the century progressed.

To understand from a Catholic perspective the effect of Rev. Chevallier's religious zeal on the community of Esh, we are fortunate that the letter book of the Catholic priest Rev. John Smith, Vicar Apostolic of Northern District, survives. Smith was born at the Brooms, a Catholic Parish located between Crook Hall and Pontop Hall, only eight miles or so from Esh. Local in origin, Smith would have been well-connected with the Catholic communities in the area from childhood. In December 1835, he wrote to a Miss Taylor:

Poor Mr Fletcher has unexpectedly got into some unpleasant Business. For many years our neighbouring Parsons have been most quiet and friendly with Catholics but a few months ago a Mr Chevallier was presented to the Incumbency of Esh and is quite an Ultra-Zealot which has shown in different ways but latterly in commencing a School in opposition to Sir Edward's and solicited scholars and subscriptions all over the neighbourhood in which he has been so successful as to take away all the Protestants from the Mistress and threatens to take off by a Master some of the more advanced Catholics. 2 or 3 weeks ago he exhibited plans and specifications for building of a large handsome School House upon the Waste near the Church. Mr F thought he ought not to submit without some attempt to oppose his Career and instead of the Mistress has arranged a superior Catholic Master from Sedgefield. How this Master's £50 a year is to be made up (as Sir Edward's to the Mistress is only £20) is not yet known – I suppose we must all contribute.²⁷

Rev. Smith's letter is significant because it shows that the denominational rivalry which emerged in Esh with the arrival of Rev. Chevallier was unexpected and unwelcome in a community where traditionally Anglicans and Catholics had lived side by side harmoniously. This supports the view of Mr Leo Gooch, a prominent local Catholic historian, that in County Durham, in general, a high degree of social integration and acceptance of Catholics was the norm, even before their emancipation in 1829.²⁸

The Catholic gentry of Esh responded to Rev. Chevallier's 'poaching' by improving the quality of their own education provision. Here the initiative was taken not initially by the Catholic clergy but by the Catholic gentry, protecting the poorer followers of the faith as they had done for centuries. The very close-knit relationships of the Catholic community, the inevitable result of surviving centuries as a persecuted minority, is

evidenced here. The Catholic priest of course played his part, warning and admonishing the Catholics of Esh of the dangers of Anglicanism. We know this because Rev. Chevallier documents it in another letter to Corrie, dated October 1838:

...the R C priest, has lately been denouncing me in no measured terms...telling his flock that if they put their souls into my hands they will all go to (a place unfit to name to polite ears). The head and front of my offending was my having given some assistance to the corporeal wants of a poor R. C. lad in my parish, who was dying of consumption, and soon after was taken out of the reach of all disputes, religious or otherwise. The denouncement was accompanied with an exhortation that none of them should receive any aid from me.

I have reason to think that many of the R. Catholics thought that 'Mr Glassbrook went over far' feeling that it was a strong measure to shut them out from the readiest, if not the only, means of relief which they have in any distress. I do not find any difference in the kindness with which the poor receive me.²⁹

This letter gives us a clear if fleeting glimpse into the lives of the ordinary people of Esh at this time, showing their desperate need and vulnerability, which Rev. Chevallier himself acknowledges. It also shows that although they wanted to have their physical and spiritual needs met, they perhaps cared little and understood less, about the doctrinal differences which were so important to their priests. In a community like Esh different religious groups were not closely, but *intimately*, inter-twined. Intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants was commonplace, and traditionally such communities followed informal rules over religion, where daughters

of the marriage might be brought up in the Catholic faith and sons in the Protestant, or vice versa. It is likely in Esh that as well as being surrounded by neighbours of both denominations, many nuclear families and the extended families of virtually everyone, would be of mixed faith. The increasing insistence by priests that the community divided itself along denominational lines could only cause bewilderment and discomfort for ordinary people.

In conclusion, the evidence from Weardale and Esh shows religious rivalry between all denominations, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Protestant Nonconformist in County Durham between 1800 and 1850. The degree of rivalry varied according to many factors, such as the economic importance of Weardale or in response to specific triggers - such as Rev. Chevallier's plan to build a new school at Esh - which upset the prevailing social and religious dynamics. These 'flare-ups' of competition were not necessarily typical though - in Weardale we also see instances of inter-denominational cooperation over schooling between the Quaker Company and the Barrington Schools Committee, and before the arrival of Rev. Chevallier, the Anglican parsons had historically lived quietly alongside Catholics.

We have seen that there were negative implications of religious rivalry, particularly in the emergence or escalation of social tensions. In Esh particularly, ordinary people must have felt the pressures of divided loyalties as new denominational identities were forged where previously none had existed, or where distinctions had been blurred. Both localities also show that although some preference might have existed among parents to send their children to schools aligned to their own faiths, the overriding concern was to have their material needs met, regardless who provided for them. The development of competition in provision of education worked to the advantage of the poor, who - often after generations of struggle - were finally able to access schooling for their children. Competition also stimulated improvements in the quality of teaching and sometimes permitted parents the luxury of choice of school according to their own

religious principles.

Forster's Education Act and the provision of education for all young children was a long way off, but the educational developments of the first half of the 19th century represented a giant leap forward in education provision for millions of poor people across the country, people such as my own Weardale forebears, whose efforts to secure education for their children were 'often defeated by poverty, but never surrendered.'³⁰

Notes:

- ¹ John Hurt, *Education in Evolution: Church, State, Society and Popular Education, 1800-1870* (London: Hart-Davis, 1971).
- ² E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 2nd edn (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969).
- ³ Peter Searby and Anne Digby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: MacMillan, 1981).
- ⁴ Thomas Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1976).
- ⁵ Searby and Digby, P. 14.
- ⁶ The 'British and Foreign School Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion'.
- ⁷ 'National Schools' is the abbreviated name of schools established or run by the Anglican 'National Society for Promoting Religious Education'
- ⁸ Heather Thompson, *The impact of religion on community education in the Diocese of Durham 1800-1850: A comparative study of Weardale and Esh* (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Teesside, September 2012).
- ⁹ 'The Governor's company for the smelting down of lead by pit coal' was locally and interchangeably referred to as the 'Quaker Company' or the 'London Lead Company'. In this article it will be referred to as the Quaker Company.
- ¹⁰ Letter from Rev Newby to Bishop Barrington, 22 Aug 1820 (Durham County Record Office, henceforth DCRO), EP/ST 11/108, and: Report, author unknown, 23 Feb 1819 (DCRO, EP/ST 11/61).
- ¹¹ J. L. Dobson, 'Charitable Education in the Weardale District of County Durham, 1700-1830', *Durham Research Review*, 6 (Sept 1955), p. 50.
- ¹² Minute Book of the London Lead Company: North East Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, Entry 18, 19 January 1819 (NRO 3410 LLC/ 2: Charity Commissioners' Report (1837) pp. 775-776.

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- 13 DCRO, EP/ST 11/65 (i).
- 14 DCRO, EP/ST 11.
- 15 Rev. Newby to Mr Stagg, 9 November 1819 (DCRO, EP/ST 11/107).
- 16 Rev. Newby to Bishop Barrington, 22 Aug 1820 (DCRO, EP/ST 11/108).
- 17 Letter from Mr Yarker to Rev. Durell, 23 August 1820 (DCRO, EP/86 11/66).
- 18 C J Hunt, *The Lead Mines of the Northern Pennines in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970).
- 19 Mr Yarker to Rev. Durell, 23 August 1820 (DCRO, EP/86 11/66).
- 20 L. Gooch, L. Read, J. Terney, C Vickers, 'Catholicism in Weardale', *Durham County Local History Society Bulletin*, 1984.
- 21 Chevallier to Corrie, 21 Nov 1839 (Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections (DUL, ASC): GB033/ Add 837/ 9).
- 22 Chevallier to Corrie, 24 Feb 1836 (DUL, ASC: GB033/ Add 837/11).
- 23 Chevallier to Corrie, 6 June 1836 (DUL, ASC: GB033/ Add 837/13).
- 24 Corrie to Chevallier, 6 June 1836 (DUL, ASC: GB033/ Add 837/14).
- 25 Corrie to Chevallier, 28 Nov 1835 (DUL, ASC: GB033/Add 837/10).
- 26 Chevallier to Corrie, 29 Jun 1838 (DUL, ASC: GB033/Add 837/33).
- 27 Rev. John Smith to Miss Taylor, Dec 1835, (Ushaw College UC/P12/20c).
- 28 Leo Gooch, 'Papist Head-Hunting in County Durham 1705-1851', *Durham County Local History Society Bulletin*, 50 (May 1993) p. 36.
- 29 Chevallier to Corrie, 17 Oct 1838 (DUL, ASC: GB033/Add 837/34).
- 30 Dobson, p. 46.

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Levellers in the North East Joshua Wetwang and the Northumberland Horse, 1648

Peter Livsey

On the night of 30th June – 1st July 1648 hundreds of Royalist cavalymen slept in the string of villages west and north-west of Rothbury, Northumberland. They had ridden south from Berwick and east from the forces around Carlisle, both towns seized by them, with Scots' connivance, two months before. They were gathering men and horses to join the Scots army that was about to cross the border into the northwest of England, to help the English Royalists in the Second Civil War. However, unknown to them, Colonel Robert Lilburne was leading a force of the Parliamentary Army through the darkness from Chollerford towards them. By the following morning, with five Royalists killed and only one of their own troopers wounded, the Parliamentarians had captured fifty-nine senior officers and captains, 300 troopers and 600 horses and hurried them away to Morpeth. The spearhead of this successful operation was Lilburne's own veteran Horse regiment, sent over from the Parliamentary forces in front of Carlisle. But with them rode two regiments of newly raised Horse, one from Durham and one from Northumberland.¹

The Northumberland Horse had been recruited since spring by Colonel George Fenwick of Brinkburn, from a county which had been overwhelmingly Royalist in the First Civil War. He himself had only returned in 1645 from founding a new Puritan colony in America. He was a close friend and ally of

Sir Arthur Hesilrige, the leading politician and soldier who had come north early in 1648, as Governor of Newcastle, to fill the power vacuum in the north east.² The Northumberland Horse were not involved in the decisive defeat of the Scots and English Royalists in and south of Preston at the end of August. Instead, they patrolled Northumberland and, under Major John Mayer, they forced supplies through to the small garrison on Holy Island, isolated for weeks by Royalist forces from Berwick. When the victorious Lieutenant-General Cromwell came north in September they supported his move into Scotland. The divided Scots were quickly brought to terms and the main army returned south to the siege of Pontefract. Fenwick's Horse remained as the only cavalry force north of the Tyne, in support of the garrisons of Newcastle, Holy Island and Berwick.³

It was in this context that they made their contribution to the debate raging about what settlement should follow the Parliamentary Army's double victory. This was a resumption of the crisis of the summer and autumn of 1647. A shifting majority of Parliament had wanted a swift and relatively generous settlement with the King and the rapid disbandment of the Army. A minority of MPs and the Army Generals wanted more guarantees of the King's future behaviour. They also opposed a compulsory Presbyterian church settlement. A group of political radicals, centred on London, wanted more extensive reform, rather than a mere shift of power within the elite.⁴ They were, as their leaders were still insisting, 'commonly (though unjustly) styled Levellers'.⁵ Their *Agreement of the People* attracted wide support in London and among the soldiers and junior officers of the Army. It combined demands for fair treatment of the soldiers with demands for the reduction of the King's power; a two-year term for Parliament; equal constituencies; and religious toleration. At one point the Generals were compelled to allow the election of agents by the various regiments, who joined the Army's General Council to debate political reform at Putney.

Eventually, the Generals became alarmed and moved to end the participation of the agents. Some regiments refused to obey orders but

were overawed by the Generals at a series of parades. One private soldier was shot immediately by firing squad in front of his comrades and other soldiers received corporal punishment later. Officers who had supported them were cashiered. Restored to discipline, the Army was able to impose its will on Parliament. Negotiations with the King were broken off. As a second civil war loomed, the Generals sought reconciliation with both the Army radicals and with the Parliamentary majority. However, with the victory of autumn 1648, the old questions were raised again.

On the one hand Parliament reopened negotiations with the King. On the other, the Levellers relaunched their campaign for political reform. On September 11th 1648 they issued a Large Petition that was signed by thousands of Londoners. It demanded a thoroughgoing political and legal settlement. When the Army Generals sought the support of their regiments for their continuing political role, the Levellers used the opportunity to gain support for their programme too.

Whereas the Levellers' September petition had been to Parliament, the representations from the various regiments and garrisons were sent to the Lord General Fairfax at Windsor. From early October to end of December more than thirty petitions were received, over half of which supported the Leveller position.⁶

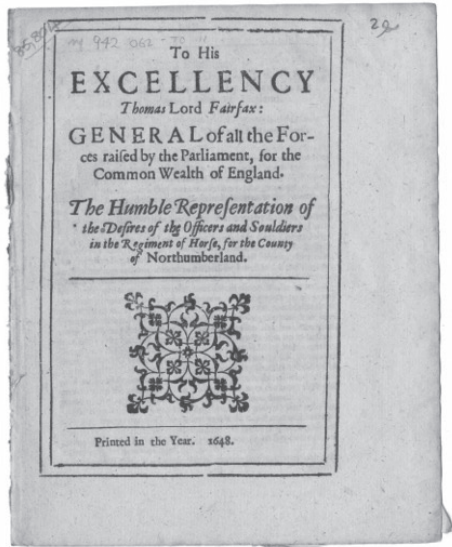
In the north east the regiments generally confined themselves to demanding the King's trial, usually citing examples from the Bible. A petition from the officers and soldiers garrisoning Newcastle, Tynemouth, Holy Island and Hartlepool stated that the punishment of 'other instruments and incendiaries' was of little purpose if 'the grand Delinquent is untouched'. They noted that the prophet Samuel had not hesitated to hew to pieces the defeated King Agag.⁷ Overton's Regiment of Foot, in process of moving through Newcastle to form the new garrison of Berwick, demanded justice for the blood shed. There should be no further negotiations with the King, 'knowing that many whoredoms and witchcrafts of Jezebel hindered the peace of Israel'. They also urged serious consideration of the petitions of the 'well-affected' - those who supported the Army's cause.⁸

The Northumberland Horse's petition went much farther and was cast in secular, rather than biblical language. It can claim to be 'the ablest and widest in its scope of the many that came from the Army in support of the Levellers' Large Petition of 11 September'.⁹

The humble Representation of the Desires of the Officers and Soldiers in the Regiment of Horse for the County of Northumberland was careful to make the point that Fairfax was the commander of all Parliament's forces, including new-raised regiments such as themselves, as well as the original New Model Army formed in the First Civil War. It was signed by thirteen of the officers and soldiers, 'in behalf of the Regiment'.¹⁰

This did not include the Colonel, George Fenwick, or the Major, John Mayer. The list was headed by a junior officer, Joshua Wetwang. He was the eldest son of a long established, but declining, gentry family whose lands lay in the township of Dunstan. They also had a small estate in Newton-by-the-sea. Even in Dunstan itself, although they lived in the Hall, the Wetwangs were a minority landowner, the rest being held by Lord Grey of Wark and the Craster family from the neighbouring township.¹¹

The petitioners claimed in their preamble that 'the people of this nation, both by Nature, and as they are Englishmen, are a Freeborn Generation; but by conquest and captivity under William the...Duke of



Title page of the Northumberland Horse's petition. Courtesy of the Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Normandy's Bastard, they were made slaves'. This theory of the 'Norman Yoke' was a key argument of the London Levellers, but they no longer felt the need to detail it in their petitions, preferring to hold Parliament to its own declarations. The Northumberland Horse spelled out how oppression had been established and maintained. The elected Commons were subjected to Lords appointed by the King, and to his own veto. His clergy preached Divine Right. The present king had launched 'a cruel and bloody war upon the nation' to maintain this system. The Northumberland Horse had engaged with Lord General Fairfax, 'under the Authority of Parliament' to free themselves and all the people from oppression. They had expected that when God gave them victory Parliament would 'set this Commonwealth at Freedom' and bring their destroyers to justice, 'without respect of persons'. Instead its leaders were negotiating with the King on terms that would include his power of veto over Parliament's own actions. In doing this the Parliamentary leaders themselves had rejected the people's petitions and increased their oppressions. Only the Army could prevent the re-imposition of the Norman yoke. They urged Fairfax to consider seriously their desires in order to make the people 'safe and free'.

They made thirty-eight proposals, which fall into five broad groups. One was an attempt to deal with the immediate consequences of the Civil Wars. The soldiers themselves wanted their arrears and provision for regular pay to come from confiscated royalist lands and revenues rather than taxation. They wanted the money to come directly to the Army. They wanted Parliament's officials and Committees to give account of monies previously raised. Henceforward no-one was to be pressed to serve in the Army. They also wanted provision made for limbless ex-soldiers and military widows and orphans. They wanted indemnity for all their actions in both Civil Wars against the King. Those wrongfully imprisoned were to be compensated, as were those imprisoned arbitrarily by Parliament itself, particularly the Leveller leader, John Lilburne, originally from County Durham. There was to be an inquiry into the

killing of the Army's most senior Leveller sympathiser, Colonel Thomas Rainsborough, at Doncaster the previous month, apparently by a Royalist raiding party from Pontefract. Parliament should be purged of those who had tried to disband the Army and settle with the King in the autumn of 1647. The leaders of the Royalist forces should face justice. In particular, the King should be 'brought to a fair trial, to make him answer for all the innocent blood that hath been spilt in the land'. This went beyond the September Petition.

The second group of proposals dealt with the form of government that should follow the end of the wars. Here again they went beyond the September petition to propose what amounted to a constitutional convention. It would draw up a 'solemn contract...betwixt the People and their Representors, to be unalterable forever'. Each regiment of the Army and each County would elect Deputies or Trustees to serve for two months and then be replaced until the task was completed. They stressed that the members of this Council should not be intimidated 'by threats and frowns of any superior officer', and no-one was to have a veto. This was a clear reference to the way elected soldier 'agitators' had eventually been sidelined in the Putney Debates of summer 1647.

The principles to guide the Council were carefully set down. Parliamentary constituencies were to be distributed equally throughout the counties according to population. Parliaments were to be elected on a fixed day every two years. Supporters of the King's rebellion or enemies of the new Constitution could neither vote nor be candidates for office. The September Petition had still envisaged a role for Lords and monarch but the Horse proposed that only elected representatives were to sit in Parliament. Laws would be in the name of the Commons only. There would be no power of veto. The Officers of the Commonwealth were not to be drawn from the members of Parliament, were to be elected for a limited term and were to be held to account for their stewardship. The present Parliament should dissolve itself, but the Army should not disband 'till the accomplishment of this Work'.

A third group of proposals was for a religious settlement. There was to be a public ministry, although provided for by some means other than tithes. However, no person would have power to compel people in matters of conscience, 'though of several opinions and practices (not being destructive to the state)'. The Levellers in general went beyond the Army leadership in seeking tolerance for all, not excluding Catholics and Jews.

A fourth group of proposals was for legal reform. Laws were to be few, plain and in English. They were to be reduced to a single volume, to be kept in the parish church and periodically read out in public. Accused persons should be tried within a month. All should be equal before the law. There should be 'no more trudging up to Westminster' for trial of suits, but they were to be settled at the level of the Hundred, as the preamble claimed was the case before the Conquest.

A fifth group of proposals, for social reform, went beyond most other petitions, and reflected strongly the particular concerns of the northernmost counties. All monopolies on sea or land were to be abolished. This presumably included the control of the Newcastle Corporation over the coal trade. There should be no sales taxes, or any other than the traditional subsidy, a property tax. The September Petition urged provision 'to keep people from begging and beggary, in so fruitful a Nation'. The Northumberland Horse wanted to build workhouses for 'beggars, vagabonds and idle persons'. Prisoners in gaols were to be protected from cruelty and extortion, and be properly lodged and fed. Their gaolers were to be properly paid.

They included the long-standing Leveller demand that enclosed common land should be put back to its proper use, for the communal good. To this they added a further demand to reverse the destruction of ancient land tenures in Northumberland and Cumberland, 'by several Earls and Lords of late times'. This seems to refer to the substitution of cash payments for the obligation to appear in arms if there were some threat to the Borders.¹² The Horse blamed this for reducing smallholders to working as 'hinds' (labourers), full or part-time, to meet the payments.

This gave them no opportunity to improve their lot through 'learning or trades'. Another proposal was for the State to establish a coastal fishing industry.

Their proposal for the solemn contract came last, enabling them to conclude their Representation in ringing terms - 'For these things we declare, and with our swords in our hands, as we are soldiers we challenge them as the price and purchase of our blood...and as we are English men we do claim them as our own inheritance and birthright'.

The Army leadership presented a *Remonstrance* to Parliament on 20th November which demanded the King's trial; annual or biennial Parliaments; an equal distribution of seats; the exclusion of Royalists from voting; and a contract or agreement that would control future Parliaments, but to be drawn up by the present Parliament, rather than a special council. When Parliament rejected it, the Army purged the House of more than half its members. By the end of the year the King had been brought to Windsor and the Army leadership in London was debating the process of his trial.

Early in 1649 Charles was tried and executed; the Lords were abolished; and England declared a Commonwealth or Free State.¹³ However, this was as far as the Generals and Rump Parliament were prepared to go. A group of junior officers was able to present a new and detailed *Agreement of the People*, a constitutional framework which included a list of new constituencies and a proposal for householder suffrage, but no action was taken on it. Spring brought further Leveller mutinies, but only in a few regiments in the south west. These were ruthlessly crushed by the generals with more soldiers shot, or cashiered without arrears of pay.¹⁴

The Levellers were finished. Electoral reform would not begin, and then very gradually, until 1832. Some elements of the Leveller programme formed part of the Chartist demands, and, again gradually, have passed into law. The process of concentrating land and great wealth in ever fewer hands has not halted. There is still a monarchy, a House of Lords and no written constitution.

In 1649 the Army generally obeyed its generals and concentrated on preparations for the expedition to put down the Irish rebellion. The troops of Major Mayer and Captain Joshua Wetwang were among those named to go, but were retained for action in the northern counties against the raiders known as moss-troopers.¹⁵ Wetwang inherited the family estate in Dunstan and under the Commonwealth built a new pew in the parish church at Embleton. After the Restoration it was declared to be un-authorised by the Anglican church authorities, especially as the family now rarely used it. The space was given to Colonel John Salkeld of Rock. He was one of those Royalist officers whom the Northumberland Horse had helped to capture on that summer night in 1648, when hopes for change were so high. Joshua's son sold up in Dunstan shortly after.¹⁶

Notes

- ¹ P. R. Hill and J. M. Watkinson, *Major Sanderson's War* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2008), pp. 50-59.
- ² George Fenwick, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Vol. 19 (OUP, 2004), pp. 325-6.
- ³ P. R. Hill and J. M. Watkinson, *Cromwell Hath the Honour but...* (London: Frontline, 2012), pp. 105-116.
- ⁴ H. N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (London: Cresset, 1961), Chapters XII – XVIII.
- ⁵ Brailsford, p. 523.
- ⁶ Ian Gentles, *The New Model Army* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), Chapters 6 – 9.
- ⁷ *Two petitions presented to his excellency the Lord Fairfax: the one by the officers and soldiers of the garrisons of Newcastle, Tinnmouth, Hartlepoole, Holy-Isle*, BRAD 942.62 TWO-2, Newcastle University Library Special Collections.
- ⁸ *A remonstrance or declaration of the Army. ...and a petition of Colo-nel Overton's regiment now in Newcastle*, BRAD 942.62 REM-2, Newcastle University Library Special Collections.
- ⁹ Brailsford, p. 447.
- ¹⁰ *To his Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax: General of all the Forces raised by the Parliament, for the Common Wealth of England. The Humble Representation of the Desires of the Officers and Souldiers of the Regiment of Horse, for Northumberland*, RB 942.062 TOH, Newcastle University Library Special Collections.
- ¹¹ Northumberland County History Committee, *A History of Northumberland* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1895) Volume II, pp. 188 -191.

- ¹² Brailsford, p. 448.
¹³ *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, edited by S. R. Gardiner, (OUP, 1962), pp. 384-388.
¹⁴ Gentles, Chapters 9-10.
¹⁵ Charles Firth and Godfrey Davies, *The Regimental History of Cromwell's Army*, Volume 2 (OUP 1940), p. 231.
¹⁶ *A History of Northumberland*, Volume II, pp. 143-44.



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The General Strike: Was it Undermined by Volunteers?

Robin Smith

The General Strike of 1926 was the most important British industrial conflict of the 20th century. Its true causes and character have been debated ever since. Was it a conventional dispute aiming ‘to secure for the miners a decent standard of life’, as the Trade Union Congress claimed in practically every edition of *The British Worker*? Or was it an attack on the parliamentary constitution by using industrial power to challenge Government policy, an ‘organised attempt to starve the British nation’, as it was portrayed by Government in *The British Gazette*?¹

After ten momentous days the General Council of the TUC called it off, to the apparent astonishment and frustration of many of the strikers. Speaking shortly before the end of the strike, John Bromley, General Secretary of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) whose members had been pretty solidly on strike, declared that ‘if the strike was not called off thousands of trains would be running... It would be a debacle: we cannot go on’. J. H. Thomas, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), whose members were almost as solid, went further. Obviously stung by allegations of betrayal, he wrote some months later in January 1927:

The criticism is – why did we not go on? We could not go

on...there was a wonderful train service on all lines of the Kingdom within a short while of the strike being called.²

On the fiftieth anniversary of the strike, William Muckle – jailed as the ring-leader of the so-called ‘Cramlington train-wreckers’ - reminisced about events that day, and claimed that the striking miners were not intent on violence, just on stopping ‘blackleg coal trains’. Had ‘middle class plus-four train crews’ not attempted to break the strike, the ‘incident with the Flying Scotsman would never have occurred’.³

Thus the idea was born of a trade union establishment that let down its members by caving into pressure from Government, a pressure in part arising from volunteers from a different social class from trade unionists which dented the strike’s effectiveness. It is the purpose of this article to test the evidence for this still widely-held belief.

The Causes of the Strike

The aim of the General Strike was that unions deemed to have the capacity to influence Government should assist the miners in their plight. Problems over pay and conditions in the coal industry had been largely unresolved over the previous six years. In April 1921, a miners’ strike had collapsed after other unions in transport and the railways, nominally in alliance with the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), failed to support them. Four years later, in April 1925 the Government decided on a return to the Gold Standard, a move which revalued sterling upwards and made exports more expensive. The world traded price of coal had already been falling for some years; there was a glut of coal, partly attributable to falling demand and partly as a result of the restoration of French, Belgian and German coalfields that had been devastated during the Great War. Largely in response to these factors, the coal owners gave notice on 30th June 1925 that they wanted to withdraw from the national agreement and slash miners’ pay and conditions. Immediately the TUC, attempting to regain some of the lost unity, intervened with Government and secured a temporary

subsidy to maintain miners' pay. In return a Royal Commission under Lord Samuel was established to examine the underlying issues. This was described by the *Daily Herald* as 'Red Friday', a relatively successful day for union intervention in contrast with 'Black Friday' that had witnessed the collapse of trade union unity in 1921.⁴

As the expiration date of the subsidy to the coal owners rapidly approached in 1926, Samuel produced the Commission's report. It rejected the idea of longer hours for miners, arguing that this would only add to stockpiles of coal. It found that reducing wages was only a temporary solution for an industry in dire need of a thorough reorganisation, but it rejected nationalisation, a long-standing aim of the MFGB. It concluded the Government subsidy should end by 30th April. Neither employers nor union showed any enthusiasm for the Commission's findings. The employers were certainly not keen on reorganisation, and announced that unless the MFGB accepted a huge 13 per cent cut in wages and an increase of 15 minutes on the working day, miners would be locked out from the end of April.

Miners' leaders, recognising the possibility of an unfavourable outcome throughout the preceding months, had been campaigning for support from other unions as in the previous year. While the TUC General Council was keen to offer some support, it was not united on offering support that involved an actual general strike. The former Prime Minister and now Labour Leader of the Opposition, Ramsay MacDonald, had continually expressed serious reservations about the political way in which a strike would inevitably be characterised, as opposed to more usual and acceptable behind-the-scenes pressure on Government for a change in direction. MacDonald's strongest ally on the Council was J. H. Thomas, who argued against a strike as a way of resolving the miners' problems.⁵ In addition to any constitutional concerns, Thomas was almost certainly reflecting the fact that railwaymen had probably the most to lose by striking: their seniority systems, company pension schemes and guaranteed week marked them out as aristocrats of the labour market. An act of altruism on behalf of the miners might put all these benefits at risk.

However, on 1st May these points were decisively outvoted, the General Council opting for the persuasive arguments of the MFGB General Secretary, A. J. Cook, the outstanding orator of the time. A strike was set for two days later. MacDonald confided his view of this decision and his contempt for what he perceived as Cook's rabble-rousing to his diary. His entry for 2nd May reads:

It looks as if there is to be a General Strike tomorrow to save Mr Cook's face...The election of this fool looks as though it would be the most calamitous thing that ever happened for the T. U. movement.⁶

Pre-strike Preparation

In the years since the end of the war, successive British governments had not been idle in anticipating the possibility of major industrial unrest. The Bolshevik Revolution had concentrated the minds of Western leaders on the possibility that any social and industrial unrest might in certain conditions be the spark that ignited a flame leading to revolutionary conflagration. The years immediately after the Great War witnessed high levels of industrial unrest.

Prime Minister David Lloyd George had addressed a meeting of Railway Executives on 24th September 1919 to stiffen their collective backbone against a threatened strike. He explained that the Government was working to undermine its effectiveness in order to maintain supplies. During the strike, six thousand servicemen and 2,500 military lorries were deployed to convey essential services, particularly food stuffs. He also asked the bosses to improvise services by the use of alternative 'blackleg' labour. By the end of the week's strike, there was relatively little backlog of supplies. Thus for the first time in the ninety years since main line railways had become established, an emergency alternative to rail had been shown to be viable, at least in the short term.

Later in the year the Prime Minister summoned the TUC General

Council to 10 Downing Street to discuss the threatened miners' strike. Robert Smillie, then President of the Scottish Miners, recollected this encounter. Lloyd George reportedly said:

Have you weighed the consequences? If you carry out your threat you will defeat us. But if you do so, the strike will be in defiance of the country's wishes and its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis. For if a force arises in a state that is stronger than the state, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state.

Smillie added: 'From that moment we were beaten, and we knew it'.⁷

Two important markers of policy were laid down that would become most pertinent to events in 1926. The first was the active encouragement of alternative 'blackleg' labour. The second was the powerful argument that general strikes were not simply about changes in wages and conditions, but were potentially an assault on the nation's political constitution. It naturally followed from this perspective that they had to be resisted at practically any cost.

An unofficial body – the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) – was set up with the tacit support of Government leaders to encourage employer resistance in any emergence. For instance, manufacturers with considerable lengths of private sidings were asked to provide weekend training facilities to those interested in learning about railway operating procedures. Others with heavy road vehicles were asked to identify which might come in handy for the movement of goods.⁸

Stanley Baldwin had become Prime Minister in October 1924, at the head of a Conservative administration and on the back of a landslide victory with a 203 seat majority over the rest of the House. According to A. J. P. Taylor, Baldwin was by nature a consensus-seeker capable of identifying short-term solutions to difficult problems, and this had been

his method of dealing with TUC pressure in the coal crisis of 1925 that led to 'Red Friday'. However, there was little scope for utilising the same tactic in 1926 once the Samuel Commission had recommended the ending of subsidies. Moreover, there were ministers determined that Baldwin's tendency for compromise must now be repressed. Taylor identifies three in particular: Lord Birkenhead (Secretary of State for India), William Joynson-Hicks (Home Secretary) and Winston Churchill (Chancellor of the Exchequer). Churchill in particular was seen by Taylor as:

the leader of those who wanted a fight, just as he had been the most aggressive minister against the workers when Home Secretary [before the War].⁹

Taylor here is referring to the Tonypandy riots of November 1910, which prompted Churchill to order a detachment of Hussars to be used against striking miners.

The Civil Commissioners

Government preparations for a civil emergency had first been put in place in 1922 under the provisions of the 1920 Emergency Powers Act. England and Wales were divided into ten districts. Ten Civil Commissioners were appointed from among a cadre of leading politicians. The Northern commissioner, responsible for Northumberland, County Durham and parts of North Yorkshire was initially John Moore-Brabazon, but he was transferred just before the strike to cover the London docks. His replacement at short notice was Kingsley Wood who had worked for Neville Chamberlain as Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Health. Commissioners were responsible for liaising with local authorities to maintain vital services, and to recruit volunteers. Volunteers were requested as special constables, and for railways and food transport and the running of gas, water and electricity undertakings.¹⁰

In contrast, the TUC barely planned at all. The unions did not advance

their cause in calling out the print workers: the voice of the Labour supporting *Daily Herald* was silenced. The *Manchester Guardian* noted:

The decision of the TUC to call out the printers and to silence the press seems to us a singularly misguided policy... To put the press out of action gives a most dangerous power to the Government, which by its control of broadcasting will enjoy a complete monopoly in the distribution of news and views.¹¹

This prophecy proved largely correct. From the beginning, Churchill edited a professionally-produced daily paper, the *British Gazette*. The unions responded with the *British Worker*, also daily, once Churchill's paper had appeared, but there were distribution problems so it was not always available.

The Volunteers

Actual numbers of volunteers are hard to determine. The OMS claimed a register of 'over 5,000', the vast majority of whom were car and lorry drivers, and power station workers.¹² In practice a major destination for volunteers was the railways; if there was to be a complete standstill of industry it would be through the stoppage of trains. The two companies in the north of England – the London, Midland & Scottish (LMS) on the west and the London & North Eastern (LNER) in the east – enrolled recruits directly, though as Table 1 shows, the majority were not used.

Table 1: Number of Enrolled and Used Volunteers in the LMS & LNER¹³

	Enrolled	Actually Used	% Enrolled Used
LMS	21,807	7,663	35.1
LNER*	10,716	2,402	22.4

*LNER numbers only available for Scottish & Kings Cross areas

north east history

There were of course several attractions to being accepted as a railway volunteer. They were paid (though there were a few lofty refusals). Existing staff received a supplement to their normal wages. They were fed and housed when required, and even escorted between home and work when their role as blacklegs attracted unwanted attention from strikers. Some formal training was provided in certain roles, but at best it was probably rudimentary. Most learned their jobs by following others.

Volunteering has had a long history in Britain stretching back to the beginnings of the 19th century. The Great War had witnessed its most recent flowering, not just recruits to Kitchener's army but also women demanding and then receiving a role in nursing and ancillary services. But while volunteering had flourished in times of national crisis, there had been no precedent for deploying them as replacements for striking labour.



The archetypal example of the volunteer wearing Oxford bags and Fair Isle sweater. The location of the signal box is unknown. Entitled "Undergraduate". Copyright www.allposters.com with permission.

Yet from the evidence of their use on the railways, it is possible to identify seven sources of volunteers:

- Existing staff seconded from non-essential roles to operating activities
- Retired staff
- Former railway employees
- Others with related experiences such as engineering, working with boilers or steam traction vehicles, or as sappers during the war
- Conscripted Services personnel
- The unemployed
- Others keen to assist the perceived national cause, often from the universities, leading schools or City companies.

It is this last category, perhaps the “true amateurs”, whose image has so inflamed trade unionists through the ages. In addition, in writing the official history of the National Union of Railwaymen, Philip Bagwell found several references in the union files to branches alerting companies to the fact that some ex-railwaymen working as volunteers had been previously dismissed for allegations of theft.

Evidence in support of this classification can be found in the record compiled by the Controller of the LNER’s Scottish Area locomotive sheds. He collated reports from individual shed masters both of the past experience of volunteers and the work that was allocated to them, as shown in Table 2.¹⁴

Table 2: Experience & Tasks of Volunteers in the LNER's Scottish Sheds

Experience Prior to Volunteering Occupation	Number	Tasks Allocated	Number
Retired railwaymen	8	Supervisors	3
Clerks & White Collar	27	Drivers	30
Miners	2	Firemen	128
Brewers	2	Coalmen	22
Seamen	2	Lighters	13
Armed Forces	12	Cleaners	9
Engineers	23	Shed Labourers	5
Work with steam, boilers	27	Miscellaneous	8
Labourers	24		
Students	32		
Unemployed	17		

The columns in Table 2 are not intended to balance. The Controller reported that 47 individuals had not stated their prior experience, or if they had it simply not been written down at shed level.

The Impact on the Railways

Volunteers were certainly needed, because the railway unions were solidly behind the strike call. Table 3 shows strikers as a percentage of all employees, including management, professional, technical and clerical grades, so we can be certain that operating grades were at least around 95 per cent. Table 3 also shows that on the last full day of the strike, there had been very little drifting back to work.

Table 3: Number of Strikers on the LMS & LNER Day 2 and Day 10¹⁵

Company	Normal Staff	On Strike 5 th May	On Strike 13 th May
LMS	267,000	215, 634	209,068
		(80.8%)	(78.3%)
LNER	190,000	167,000	161,430
		(87.8%)	(85.0%)

Day one – Tuesday 4th May – showed virtual paralysis of the North’s major rail centres. In Newcastle, no passenger trains ran. From Darlington two trains ran to Saltburn via Middlesbrough. In Carlisle there was one afternoon arrival from Glasgow via Dumfries that stayed an hour before returning.¹⁶ Had this comprehensive reduction in services been repeated on each day that first week at most of the rail centres, then in all probability the Government’s position would have crumbled shortly after the weekend. The Commissioners would have scarcely been able to guarantee food supplies.

However, things improved as management gradually began to utilise the volunteers at their disposal. To facilitate services manned by volunteers, their plans had identified which signal boxes could be switched out and which could be manned, and that no trains would run ‘in the dark hours’, roughly 10 p.m. to 5.30 a.m. Single track and more remote branches were closed for the duration. These measures concentrated services between major centres. By Day 2, Newcastle and Carlisle were again connected, as were Darlington and Newcastle. Carlisle had services to Leeds and Bradford. On Day 3 a train left Newcastle for Kings Cross, and the first train from Euston reached Carlisle (taking nine and a half hours to do so). There were also some local suburban trains operating.

Table 4 explores the impact of volunteers on the volume of services over the whole course of the General Strike by contrasting the first and last full days.¹⁷

	LNER		LNER	
Service	5 th May	13 th May	5 th May	13 th May
Passenger	423	1,575	281	1,161
% of normal	3.8	14.2	3.4	14.2
Goods	23	165	6	171
% of normal	0.1	3.4	0.05	3.7

The increasing sight and sound of these mainly passenger trains over the ten days would surely have been frustrating for many strikers and their supporters. Indeed, Will Lawther, confined in Durham jail together with Harry Bolton for a minor affray outside a pub, recalled becoming more and more agitated at the distant sound of trains rumbling over the viaduct.¹⁸ But however pleased the railway companies and the Civil Commissioners might have been with this outturn, it hardly constituted a service comparable to that normally delivered.

However, there were several lighter moments arising from the volunteers' performance that were gleefully reported in strike-supporting publications. For example the crew of a York to Leeds stopping train were congratulating themselves for their excellent run as far as Copmanthorpe, until looking round they discovered they had failed to couple the engine to the carriage set.¹⁹ And in an incident that could have happily graced a Will Hay film, a willing volunteer public school man was sent from Paddington with a large grease can to lubricate points on the down line. Nothing was heard of him for three days until a telegram arrived from Swindon asked if he could return by train to get more grease.²⁰

There were as we might expect a number of accidents attributed to volunteers in various capacities, sadly including five fatal accidents. Three involved a single volunteer, but the remaining two involved passengers.

The first killed one passenger at Bishops Stortford station when a goods train collided with a stationary passenger train. The second occurred in a tunnel on the approach to Waverley when a passenger train from Berwick ran into a rake of trucks that were being switched inside the tunnel from the up to the down line. Three passengers were killed. The initial impact was compounded by an explosion of gas from severed pipes inside the tunnel. The Railway Inspector concluded in his report that 'mistakes and errors of judgement' by three volunteers – two signalmen and a driver - directly caused the collision. Ironically the driver in his normal working life was the Assistant Works Manager at the LNER's major Cowlairs locomotive and rolling stock works.²¹

Violence

The most problematic aspect of volunteering was the risk of violence from strikers stoning trains or placing obstacles on the track or barricading level crossings. But violence was the exception in an otherwise peaceful strike. This was no anarchist or left-wing revolution. Most commenters agreed it was a very British affair. Ellen Wilkinson commented a few years later, 'British revolutions are conducted by British churchwardens'.²² A. J. P. Taylor calls it 'class war in polite form'.²³

Unsurprisingly, most of the reported violence occurred in mining districts. Records show that the Northern Region was one of the most disturbed, a third of all cases alleging violence in English counties being in Durham alone. 103 cases were brought under the Emergency Regulations in Northumberland. Some strikers felt that the arrival on the Tyne on 8 May of two destroyers and a submarine was provocation: it led to a complete breakdown in the fragile relations between Local Action Committees and Kingsley Wood over the movement of supplies from the docks.²⁴

The most dramatic event in the north occurred with the derailment of the Flying Scotsman London-bound train near Cramlington, an incident well-documented by Margaret Hutcherson, whose grandfather was involved. A section of rail had been removed by a group of miners who wished to stop

coal trains, resulting in the locomotive rolling over and the three leading carriages concertina-ing across the track. No-one was killed, but several passengers were cut with flying glass or injured by luggage cascading from racks. In Parliament on 2nd June the Home Secretary was asked if he would offer a reward 'to facilitate the arrest of the Cramlington train wreckers', but declined to do so. Nine miners were eventually charged, and eight found guilty and sentenced to penal servitude at Maidstone jail.²⁵



The derailment of the Flying Scotsman train 10.00 am from Edinburgh to London on Monday 10th May 1926. The locomotive, named Merry Hampton after a Derby winner, is an early example of a Gresley A3 Pacific. It was repaired and continued in service on the East Coast Main Line until 1962. Copyright National Railway Museum with acknowledgements

The End of the Strike

It was a massive surprise to the strikers – though not to those watching political developments in London – when the TUC decided on 11th May to call off the general strike from the following day. On Saturday 8th May the Prime Minister had broadcast on the wireless, intimating that moves

were afoot and the strike was weakening. He promised 'fairness and justice for all in the nation's interest'. Feelers were put out to establish on what conditions the miners might settle, in which J. H. Thomas and Ramsay McDonald played a conspicuous part. It was made clear that if nothing happened, the Government would toughen up its resistance to the strikers, and more would be made of violent disorder to underline the Government's duty to restore order.

By 11th May the General Council was urging the miners to accept an offer to return to the negotiating table. Most realised that there was little of substance in it for the miners, but some union leaders believed they were in serious danger of losing control as more local groups turned to disorder. The miners recognised how little was actually on offer, and so refused, but the General Council ordered the strike to end.

The TUC's first public statement in the *British Worker*, under the headline 'The Terms of Peace: Miners ensured a Square Deal' stated:

The General Strike is over... (The General Council) having reached the conclusion, after a number of conversations with Sir Herbert Samuel that a satisfactory basis of settlement exists in the mining industry.²⁶

Pelling calls the headline 'misleading'.²⁷ Sir Herbert Samuel had contacted Thomas on 6th May to ask if he could act as a mediator, and the Council accepted him in this role. But the TUC must have recognised that while he was genuinely working in this capacity, Samuel did not have the last word on the matter.

Conclusions

The reality was that the unions had lost the wider propaganda war. The constant discussion of the constitutional aspects of the strike began to trouble many of the leaders, and terrified the front bench of the Labour opposition which at this point included Thomas. This was the message

sustained continuously in the newspapers and magazines beyond the flagship *British Gazette*. It was reinforced by stories of people from a wide range of social classes 'doing their bit' to help the nation's supplies and services get by in a major emergency. Volunteer blacklegs thus played a part in structuring a particular interpretation of events. It was not as if the railway service was adequate to a point where it could be described as 'wonderful'. Indeed evidence shows that the strike was generally holding solid; more workers were keen to join from other industries, and there was only marginal drifting back. It is therefore a myth to claim the strike was crumbling at the point at which it was called off.

Yet a majority of the General Council reached the view that to terminate the strike with as much dignity as possible was the only realistic goal. The most plausible explanation is that several unions were facing financial ruin had the strike drifted on a further week. They were making payments to their members on strike, and funds were rapidly dwindling. Thomas's union, the NUR, began the strike with cash assets of over £2m, but in the 10 strike days it had spent over £1.5m. ASLEF was in an even more precarious position.²⁸ What applied to the railway unions also applied to other industries. Yet it can truly be said that the strikers were largely altruistic – they asked nothing for themselves, but wanted to pressure Government to do something for the miners. But for many unions it was altruism that came with a price tag that could not be exceeded.

Railway workers had materially more to lose than most other trade unionists. Although the railway unions negotiated a phased return to work after the weekend of the 15th and 16th, employers took a hard line with strikers. Five months after the strike, there were still 200,000 railmen on a 3-day week, and 45,000 strikers were never re-engaged.²⁹ For years afterwards, railway employees alleged they had been denied promotion by managements that could not forget their 'disloyal' role in 1926. The two concessions wrung from the companies were that employees who had been on strike would be taken on when conditions allowed, but that volunteers would not be appointed in place of their members. The companies argued

in public that no binding commitments had been given about future employment to volunteers.

Rehiring was slow. The miners continued their strike for a further seven months, and manufacturing trade was sluggish, so freight traffic receipts plummeted throughout the remainder of the year. Passenger traffic also dropped as many commuters decided that tram and bus were suitable alternatives and long distant travel continued to decrease in the uncertain economic climate. There is also evidence that companies took advantage of the aftermath to rationalise work by closing smaller depots and shops. The guaranteed week was not restored until April 1927.



The volunteers received a 'campaign medal' at the end of the 1926 strike. This one was issued by the LMS.

They bare a close resemblance to medals issued to the families of the fallen during the two world wars.

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So what happened to the volunteers? Many would have happily returned to their normal jobs or colleges having spent an exhilarating few days, with some having achieved their boyhood dreams of working on a real steam engine. But those who might have wished for something more tangible from their commitment may not have been over-enamoured with the 'Campaign Medal' that was their only consolation. The Prime Minister offered a pledge that:

Every man who had done his duty by the country and has remained at work or has returned to work during the present crisis will be protected by the State from loss of trade union, superannuation allowances or pension.³⁰

This was a shot across the bows of the railway companies who might have been pressured by the unions to discriminate against those employees who had volunteered to engage in work that would have been done by strikers.

Government revenge came in the shape of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act, which outlawed general and most sympathetic strikes. It pushed union law back to the position before 1906.

Aneurin Bevan summed up the impact of the strike thus:

The defeat of the miners ended a phase, and from then on the pendulum swung sharply to political action. It seemed to us that we must try to regain in Parliament what we had lost on the industrial battlefield.³¹

In short the unions had played all their cards at their disposal but could not trump the Government's hand. The General Strike was therefore a seminal lesson for the unions who have never again adopted this strategy.

Notes

- ¹ Bound copies of the *British Gazette* and the *British Worker* are available in Tyne and Wear Archives. Winston Churchill commandeered the presses of the *Morning Post* to produce the *Gazette*, whose circulation exceeded that of the *Worker*. However, Page Arnot points out that 'neither...covered more than a tiny fraction of the circulation of the daily press'. Information for most people came from the BBC. (R. Page Arnot, *The Miners Vol. 2: Years of Struggle* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1953) p. 435).
- ² Thomas and Bromley quotations are cited by P.S. Bagwell, in *The Railwaymen: History of the NUR* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1963), Vol. 1 p.478.
- ³ W. Muckle, 'Cramlington', originally an essay in *Labour Monthly*, October 1976, (Newcastle: North East Group for the Study of Labour History), pps. 12-13.
- ⁴ Main sources for the background to the strike: Bagwell, as above; A. Mason, *The*

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- General Strike in the North East* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1970); Page Arnot as above; J. Symonds, *The General Strike* (London: Readers Union; The Cresset Press, 1959); A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-45* (Oxford: OUP 1965).
- 5 J. H. Thomas, known as Jimmy, was elected General Secretary of the NUR in 1917 while already MP for Derby and continued to serve in both roles.
- 6 J.R. MacDonald Diary, 2nd May 1926, cited in www.spartacus-educational.com/TUgeneral.htm
- 7 K.O. Morgan, 'Number 10 under Lloyd George 1916-22' <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2012/05/01/number-10-under-lloyd-george-1916-1922/>
- 8 G. S. Phillips, *The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict* London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1978.
- 9 Taylor, p. 244.
- 10 H. Gault 'Newcastle and the General Strike', *The Historian* (Journal of the Historical Association), 123 (Autumn 2014) pps. 12-15.
- 11 *Manchester Guardian*, Editorial Comment, 5th May 1926 (a single-page printed sheet). It also reported that in the absence of news from the TUC a pro-Government source of news emanating from the *Daily Dispatch* was available on a large screen called the "Mutagraph" in Piccadilly Gardens which attracted large crowds mainly of strikers. Cited in <https://radicalmanchester.wordpress.com>.
- 12 Phillips, p. 134.
- 13 Crompton G.W. "Some good men, some doubtful men...": The Role of Railway Volunteers in the General Strike' *Journal of Transport History*, Vol. 9 No. 2 (Sept 1988) p. 128.
- 14 LNER Scottish Area, Locomotive Running Superintendent's Office Cowairs (Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh (SRO BR/LNE8/779/2); Crompton p.134.
- 15 Crompton, p.129.
- 16 Figures for Newcastle from the *British Worker* 6th May 1926; for Carlisle, *Cumberland News* (Strike edition, 7th May 1926) available in Cumbria Archives; for Darlington, Mason, p.79.
- 17 Crompton, p.129. It should be noted that the proportion of trains run on the last full day of the strike was considerably higher on the Great Western and Southern Railways (19.2%, as against 14.2% on the LMS and LNER).
- 18 Sir Will Lawther in conversation with the author, March 1973.
- 19 Crompton, p.143.
- 20 Bagwell, p. 478.
- 21 Report by Col. J.W. Pringle, Railway Inspector, cited by Crompton pps. 140-1.
- 22 E. Wilkinson, *Clash* (London: Virago 1989; 1st edn 1929), p. 9.
- 23 Taylor, p. 245.
- 24 Gault, p.14.
- 25 M. Hutcherson, *Let No Wheels Turn: The Wrecking of the Flying Scotsman* (Washington, Tyne & Wear: TUPS Books, 2006).

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- 26 *British Worker*, 13th May 1926.
27 H. A. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971)
p.177.
28 Bagwell, p. 495.
29 C. R. Potts, *The GWR and the General Strike* (Oxford: Oakwood Press,1996) p. 106
30 Rt. Hon. Stanley Baldwin, House of Commons, HoC Deb 13th May 1926, volume
195 cc 1042-59.
31 Aneurin Bevan, cited by R. J. Cootes, *The General Strike* (London: Longmans 1964)
p. 77.



Volunteers and some management personnel at Hartlepool aboard a tank engine suitable for shunting or local operations. Copyright Hartlepool Museum Service with acknowledgements.

Striking Miners and the Cockney Socialists

John Stirling

Just then some men from London
came down our men to teach;
that between us and our leaders
they wider made the breach.
They didn't bring a coin to help
to aid us in our cause;
but yet some chose to greet them
with thunders of applause¹

Introduction

In 1887 the miners of Northumberland were locked in a bitter dispute over a proposed wage reduction that attracted the attention of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Socialist League (SL), and visits to the North East by their leaders. This was an important time for both socialist groups, with the SDF less than five years old and the SL having established itself in 1885 after it split from the former. Key issues then, as now for socialists, were their policies towards and engagement with the trade unions as the most significant expressions of the organised working class.

In what follows I will focus particularly on the Socialist League's intervention in the dispute, including William Morris's trip to address the miners, and seek to locate that within the complexities of the mining

union and the dispute itself. Williamson and Owen have each addressed some of the issues covered here.² However, I have sought to focus on the SL (Owen concentrates on the SDF) and use the pages of the SL newspaper, *Commonweal*, Morris's socialist diary and a wider engagement with the local press, to give a more nuanced perspective but also to engage with their questions on the impact of the socialists on the Northumberland miners. It is with them and their union that I begin as they shape the expectations of what the 'cockney socialists' might have achieved.³

The Miners of Northumberland and Their Union

It would be impossible to ignore miners in nineteenth century Britain and particularly hard in the North East of England. As well as providing the motive power for the industrial revolution, they were also the bedrock of the organised working class and, as such, an important location for socialist propaganda. Miners' solidarity came from both the common conditions of their harsh working lives and the fact that they lived together in communities gathered around local pits. Coal mining employment relations had been characterised in the North by longstanding struggles against systems of bonded labour and dependency on employers for homes, as well as work, and these had underpinned early trade union struggles. There were competing and dividing pressures on miners that stemmed from the different geological conditions in which they worked, the different types of coal they produced and the markets (domestic or export) that they served. Each of these commonalities and differences play out at times of industrial disputes in nineteenth century mining. Strikes are commonly characterised by high degrees of solidarity related to common conditions and local communities but also to differences in propensities to reach agreements with different coal owners. All of this leads to almost inevitable political disagreements.

The Northumberland miners had a fierce local pride and self-reliance. Such 'localism' was characterised by their short-lived organisational unity with the Durham miners immediately before setting up their own

Northumberland Miners Mutual Confident Association in 1864, and their marked reluctance to join a national association until 1907 when they became part of the Miners Federation of Great Britain. As the name might imply, the Northumberland union had significant 'friendly society' origins and had a subscription level to support sick or injured members, as well as the funds necessary to pay a £500 annual wage to local mining M.P, Thomas Burt. Moreover, Benson argues, that 'the miners of Northumberland and Durham were the best paid in the country' in the years leading up to the dispute, and Welbourne concurs at least with the perception.⁴ The Newcastle Chronicle published comparative wage figures per shift which showed Northumberland miners at 5s 2d (seven hours); South Wales at 4s 4d (nine hours) and Hamilton in Scotland at 3s 6d (ten hours).⁵ Benson suggests that their 'comparatively' high wages were also supplemented by housing or equivalent rent allowances and a 'unique system' of accident and injury support.⁶

This industrial strength and relative prosperity was attributed by the miners themselves, or more particularly their leadership, to the power of conciliation and arbitration as a means of settling disputes. Thomas Burt, the most prominent of the union leaders and General Secretary since 1865, recorded in his autobiography that: 'since the union began, some 46 years ago we had but two general strikes [i.e.across the Northumberland coalfields], the first in 1879 of about nine weeks duration, the second in 1887, a stubborn fight of seventeen weeks'.⁷ Burt attributed this low level of industrial action to the establishment of a joint conciliation board from 1872 and, equally, to his own attitude: 'I had myself, from the beginning of my Secretaryship, strongly advocated conciliation and arbitration'.⁸ The miners of the region had strongly supported Burt and had paid his Parliamentary salary when he was elected in 1874 for the Morpeth constituency.

Burt effectively sat as a Liberal in parliament and was as much inclined to see wages as an effect of the market for coal as he was to attribute it to the efforts of conciliation. At the time of the dispute, miners' wages

in Northumberland were fixed by a sliding scale reviewed annually and subject to market conditions.⁹

In sum, the key issues facing the socialists in relation to the Northumberland miners were, firstly, the strength of the membership and the consequent relative prosperity of the union at the beginning of the strike. Secondly, the supposed years of industrial peace founded on conciliation, although Burt's assertion about 'general strikes' leaves aside regular wage disputes and local flare ups in individual collieries. Thirdly, the strong localism of the union, support for the leadership and pride in one of the first working class MPs. While each of these were tested during the dispute they must shape our expectations of what the socialists might achieve and whether or not this was indeed 'fertile ground' for their agitation.

The Dispute

The dispute in Northumberland lasted for 17 weeks and has been called both a strike and a lock-out. To a large extent this terminological difference does not affect the argument here (or the miners' solidarity) but it emerges from the coal owners' decision to take back men who would work on the new terms (those who would not were therefore locked out) and the union's votes which focussed on acceptance or rejection of the employers' offer at the County level alongside votes not to work at the new rates in individual pit ballots. As Burt himself refers to it as a strike in his autobiography I will use that term here.

The cause and context of the strike can be straightforwardly stated but its course was much less clear cut. 1886 had not been a good year in the Northumberland coal industry, with some mines closing, jobs being lost and threats by some of the owners to remove housing allowances. Coal prices were also falling and miners' wages were fixed to the sliding scale which related pay to those prices. On 4 December 1886, the coal owners demanded a wage cut of 15 per cent in the annual review. By the time of the dispute in January 1887 the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* reported that there were 21,994 underground workers in Northumberland and 13,144

full union members, and that that there was a strong vote against the cuts in pay with '80 votes representing 20 collieries' in opposition.¹⁰

By 10 January 1887 the talks had broken down and the coal owners had served notice to end the agreement. It is clear that some negotiations had gone on and by 14 January the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* reported that

‘judging by the conversation of the men the possibility of a stoppage is very great. Many of them, indeed, go as far as to say that the committee in offering a reduction of ten per cent, exceeded the bounds of reason and should have by no means gone so far’.

The dispute was to turn on the revised employers' offer of a 12.5% pay cut.

The pit votes recorded by the same newspaper shows the divisions between collieries and even within them. For example, South Benwell was recorded as prepared to continue working whilst New Hartley called for the utmost resistance. Delaval was recorded one day as in favour of arbitration and yet by 19 January there was a 'large majority' in favour of the strike and a vote of censure on the Committee.¹¹ These differences continued well in to the strike; for example, the *Morpeth Herald* reported that a meeting in Ashington resolved for arbitration but a similar resolution in Dudley 'was negatived by a large majority'.¹² What is clear, however, is the broader and continuing solidarity of the miners, with the same newspaper recording four months into the strike a meeting of 8,000 men which 'strongly advises every miner in Northumberland to stand fast to his manhood until an honourable settlement was come to'.¹³

In February, Welbourne records, all the officers of the union resigned. 'The step, a last desperate defence against internal dissension, brought the malcontents to their senses. If they disliked the policy of Burt and his friends they had no alternative policy to suggest'.¹⁴ The socialists had, of course just such alternatives for the 'malcontents' and the divisions between some of the membership and the union leadership was a

continuing feature of the dispute, with the Wages Committee resigning in April but being later reinstated.

Alongside the debates in the union the local press was reporting widely on the distress of the miners, their families and others out of work because of the dispute. The list of relief funds, collections and activities demonstrates widespread support for the miners with soup kitchens set up at a number of locations across the county, town wide door-to-door collections, stores issuing tickets for goods and local tradesmen making all sorts of donations ranging from forty stone of potatoes and forty-five pounds of beef to twelve large loaves of bread. Concerts and fund raising events were held and appeals were made to miners in other parts of the country with Welbourne recording that 'Durham sent a heavy grant from its general fund and imposed a strike levy'.¹⁵

Tate's poem quoted above neatly summarises the situation facing the arriving 'socialist missionaries'. The breach between 'us and our leaders' and the need for 'coin' to help, but it is the 'thunders of applause' that we now turn to examine, and in particular, the role of the SL and its leader's engagement with the dispute.

The Socialist League

The SL had been established in 1885 when it split from the SDF and from the outset, its approach was concerned with socialist education and agitation rather than large scale organising. Its approach to trade unions was that they were embedded in a capitalist employment relationship that could, at best, ameliorate working conditions but never be the agency for revolutionary change. In an early SL *Address to Trades' Unions*, Belfort Bax argues that trade unions 'have reached their zenith and have ... achieved all they are capable of under present conditions' He argues, a little vaguely, that their future function could only be in 'consolidating and federating' to 'constitute themselves the nucleus of a socialist commonwealth'.¹⁶ In relation to strikes Thompson quotes what he describes as 'the League's standard strike leaflet of 1886:

‘you are now on strike for higher wages or against a reduction in your already small wage. Now, if this strike is but to accomplish this object and nothing more, it will be useless as a means of permanently bettering your condition, and a waste of time and energy’.¹⁷

Not an easy message to deliver to the striking Northumberland miners.

William Morris was the major figure in the SL although Eleanor Marx was also a member and there were links with Frederick Engels as well. In 1882, before joining the SDF, and in addressing an Art School prize giving, Morris was quite clear about strikes:

‘I have taken note of many strikes and ... with many of these I have heartily sympathised: but when the day comes that there is a serious strike of workmen against the poisoning the air with smoke or the waters with filth, I shall think that art is getting on indeed’.¹⁸

Art and indeed socialism. Even if he did not use that word in that context, he saw the two as inextricably linked.

Morris was also a businessman and factory owner which made him an employer of labour. He appears to have been largely indifferent to union membership at both his factory in Merton or at his small private printing press, although in both cases a union branch was established. Merton also had an SL branch and Thomas Binning, the trade union Father of the Chapel at the Kelmscott Press was one of the small number of active trade unionists in the League.

In effect, both the League and its leader were indicating their sympathy for strikers but with little support for trade unions or their then leaders, as the vehicles for either art or socialism. However, Bax was entirely wrong about trade unions passing their zenith; the UK was embarking on a period of rapid unionisation and major strikes in the London docks and elsewhere, as well as that in the Northumberland coalfields.

The League Goes North

The SDF and the SL each sent propagandists to report the strike for their respective newspapers and to agitate amongst the miners for socialism. John Mahon of the League arrived in March and became the key activist of the two, although *Commonweal* had been reporting the strike consistently from 8 January. The coverage steadily grew and by 26 February it noted that 'several meetings have been addressed by him [Mahon] and he has found a ready acceptance of our doctrines by the men'. By 19 March, Mahon was reporting regularly and recording lists of meetings with 'our smallest meetings among the miners number 400-500 and we often have audiences of 1500 -2000'.

Mahon also, as might be expected given the SL's stance, began reporting the dissatisfaction with the leadership of Burt who effectively opposed the strike. He wrote in *Commonweal* that:

there is only too much reason to fear that the labour leaders are not unwilling that the strike should fail. This may seem a hard thing to say but the evidence is strongly in favour of it I feel sure the old system and organisation and the old lines of the movement will be radically altered.¹⁹

The local press were also noting the influence of the socialists and on 7 March the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* gave considerable space to Mahon to make the case for socialism and the SL. He wrote that 'the Socialist League puts forward no palliative or half-way measures ... it aims at the complete overthrow of the propertied classes'. Mahon was also making clear the League's views on trade unionism and Thomas Burt. The *Chronicle's* report of a meeting stated that Mahon

had not a word to say against Burt as a man... but he would say that Mr Burt's principles and ideas and the ideas and plans of those working with him would never achieve very much for the working classes.²⁰

The newspaper with its radical tradition gave wide coverage to the socialists, but there are also regular reports of meetings with SL involvement in other newspapers. The *Morpeth Herald* reported that Mahon did have a word or two on Mr Burt 'as a man' who was in Parliament and 'bothering about somewhere': that is, wandering about with seemingly little interest in the dispute.²¹ In the same edition there was a long report on 'an exciting debate on socialism in Bedlington' in which Mahon featured. The article claimed that the Northumberland mining villages had 'been laid siege to' and that the socialist 'doctrines ... have to a considerable extent been accepted', with little opposition. It went on to report the debate between Mahon, the Rev. Mr. Short 'the popular curate' and Dr. Jas Trotter 'the radical physician', chaired by Jack Williams (SDF) 'the notorious socialist demagogue of London'. The undoubted success of the SL and the SDF in convening meetings and finding a sympathetic audience at this stage of the strike sets the scene for the visits of both Henry Hyndman of the SDF and William Morris of the League on Easter Monday 1887. However, Mahon was also recording, days before Morris arrives, his fears that the miners were losing, although their solidarity throughout the dispute was unquestioned.²²

This then, was the situation when Morris arrived on the train for a hastily arranged visit, following a series of well-attended SL meetings in Scotland. The strike was holding firm and there was widespread support for the miners in the face of a proposed wage cut which was already leading to considerable hardship and with the union fearing that the strike pay could not last. Regular attempts by the union leadership and local worthies to push for arbitration were being resisted by coal owners working together and determined to cut wages.²³ Socialist propaganda was widespread at public meetings and the League was clearly at the forefront of the campaigning.

Morris on the March: Those in Favour and Those Against

The demonstration took place on Easter Monday, 11 April 1887. It was a long day for Morris and those who went with him all the way. They began in Blyth where the gathering was addressed by Morris and

Mahon before moving on to Horton where the meeting was due to start at 2.00 pm and was, Mahon suggested, within comfortable walking distance of local mining communities who crowded the field well before the meeting began. 'The division from Dudley and Annitsford, with its banner and band, was the first to arrive; and twenty minutes later the Blyth contingent, which was also preceded by a banner and band'. Morris and Mahon spoke again as did Hyndman of the SDF. By the evening the speakers had moved on to the banks of the Tyne at Ryton Willows which was a regular location for miners to relax and join an Easter funfair 'with swings and merry-go-rounds'. The meetings had an air of celebration as participants enjoyed Easter and brought their families, although the crowds listening to the speakers were mainly men, Mahon noticed, there were 'several women, who appeared to take no less interest in the proceedings than their husbands and brothers'.²⁴

Morris himself recorded in his socialist diary that for the first meeting they 'had a considerable crowd' and that 'the day was bright and sunny, the bright blue sea forming a strange border to the misery of the land'.²⁵ He marched through various gatherings in Northumberland on to Newcastle and ate at the railway station where he met Joseph Cowen whose Newcastle Chronicle was to give such a good account of Morris's speech. Catching the train to Ryton Willows by the Tyne Morris recorded that:

It is a pretty place and the evening was lovely ... we had a very fair meeting there of most attentive persons, though I guess I tried their patience as I got 'lecturey' and being excited went on and on till I had gone on too long.²⁶

The *Morpeth Herald* provides a contrasting view, at least of the start of the march in Blyth:

Shortly after 12 o'clock two or three energetic persons were seen to process themselves into the market place, Waterloo, with a trolley which was used as a platform, then a crowd soon gathered round numbering

about a couple of hundred, many of which came out of curiosity, and the number gradually swelled to about 400. The first speaker was Mr Morris, who is endowed with considerable literary talent but his speechifying was anything but effective.²⁷

The march and meetings attracted serious newspaper coverage, most of it relying on the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* account which Morris himself clipped and kept in his socialist diary.²⁸ However, in assessing the impact of the day and the socialists more generally, it is clear that other local newspapers were out to challenge the socialists' reputations and their right to speak on behalf of the miners. In doing so they played on what we would now call the 'north south divide' and the backgrounds of Morris and Hyndman as labour leaders.

The conservative *Newcastle Courant* was virulent in its condemnation under their headline 'Cockney Socialists On Their Holiday'. It suggested that 'it was cowardly, cruel and mischievous for the London socialists to come down to the North on Easter Monday, and, taking advantage of the state of enforced idleness and semi-starvation among the miners to deliver inflammatory harangues'. It reported Morris as regarding a capitalist as a 'legalised thief' and ironically turned the quote back on him by saying 'we do not know whether in carrying out his business in London he adopts a different course'. It concluded by saying that 'Mr Morris may be a very good poet and not a bad paper-hanger, but both he and Mr Hyndman should apply the advice they give to capitalists and stick to a useful trade.'²⁹

The *Shields Daily Gazette* picked up the theme in remarkably similar terms, describing Morris as

a poet [at least fifth of the leading poets of the day], a wallpaper hanger and – a legalised thief ... he has up to this time made no proposals that his workmen shall go shares in the profits of his business.³⁰

Morris had to respond regularly to this challenge, and in doing so argued both the general point that profit sharing would not change capitalism and the particular one that, in his case he did share part of his profit, and that his regular day workers got 'more than the market price of their labour'.³¹ Nevertheless, the assault on the characters of the cockneys and of Morris the businessman was not without effect.

The Work Goes On

However, by 28 March one correspondent to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* was arguing that 'to the surprise of most people the spirit of resistance has become stronger' and suggests two causes for this determination, one of which was 'the socialist agitation in the district'. There can be little doubt that the socialists had a significant impact at the time of the strike. Mahon regularly continued to record meetings and by the 9 April edition of *Commonweal* he was arguing that 'the socialist propaganda has gone on better than ever. Two meetings every day and all the halls crowded with people. We now find organised opposition but this proves the efficacy of the work we have done'. Similarly, Tom Mann, who had been sent by the SDF, arriving in May (after Morris had spoken in April) and staying throughout 1887 recorded that he had no trouble in finding those wanting to hear about socialism:

Every Sunday evening I addressed large audiences at the Cattle market, Newcastle; every Wednesday I also had a meeting in Newcastle. On Sunday mornings I addressed meetings on the Quay Side and on other days of the week in some mining town in Northumberland or Durham.³²

The socialists continued their campaigning and there is evidence of a surge of organisational activity in the period immediately following the strike. Morris took his own experience of the trip to a Hyde Park demonstration in support of the miners where he spoke of men being

‘filched out of the miserable pittance they already received ... for spending their time in the bowels of the earth’.³³ Mahon, meanwhile, stayed on in Northumberland and reported that ‘on Saturday April 30th the representatives of about a thousand miners met at Blyth and formed the North of England Socialist Federation’ whilst noting further meetings in Ashington and North Seaton.³⁴ By 26 May, Mahon was recording in *Commonweal* that the Federation is: ‘a solid labour organisation, chiefly miners, at present consisting of twelve branches and over 1200 enrolled members’.³⁵ He continued to send dispatches after the end of the strike in May and there is some evidence of SL activity in branches in North and South Shields in particular with the 11 June edition of *Commonweal* recording, ‘Meetings every Sunday Quay Side and Market Place. Branch meetings every Thursday night at the ‘General Gordon’.

To What Effect?

Morris recorded in his diary that ‘there is no doubt of the success (which may be temporary) which we have made in these northern mining districts’.³⁶ It is to the words in brackets in the previous sentence that we return in this conclusion.

Thompson, Torr, Welbourne and Williamson all argue that the long term impact of the socialist agitation in the North was strictly limited. Thompson chronicles its disintegration alongside the SL itself and notes how the North East branches were working without political leadership or experience and that orders for *Commonweal* gradually petered out.³⁷ Torr records a similar experience for the SDF: ‘except for the unemployed in the engineering centres, Newcastle, Jarrow, and Gateshead, the SDF branches were dwindling rapidly away; those formed in the mining villages during the strike faded out when the men went back to work’.³⁸ Welbourne reported a very different meeting to Morris’s at a miners’ gala after the dispute where ‘Burt was received by the usual cheers’ but another leader, Fynes, who had opposed the strike was shouted down: ‘his doctrine of arbitration seemed to the men an outworn creed’.³⁹ Finally,

Williamson is clear in arguing that ‘there is no convincing evidence of their [socialist] presence having had direct and lasting effect, and certainly not in the immediate aftermath of the strike’.⁴⁰

Whilst it would be difficult to disagree fundamentally with these conclusions there are important caveats to be made in two senses. Firstly, what could we have expected the socialists to have achieved in the context of the dispute itself and secondly how might we measure ‘impact’?

At first sight, strikes such as the one in Northumberland appear to offer enormous opportunities for socialists to propagandise. However, there were a series of constraints on the socialists. The perception of them as outsiders from London was an important one played on not only by the hostile media but at local meetings. For example, Satre argues of Burt that he ‘was an effective speaker, he possessed a heavy Northumbrian accent’ and the *Morpeth Herald* records how he addressed a closed (a significant contrast to the open socialist platforms) meeting of miners in Ashington which was ‘harmonious throughout [and has] borne good fruit’ in turning the men towards seeking to reach an agreement.⁴¹ The local ‘pitmatic’ dialect clearly won against the alien accents of the London based socialists.

Class differences were also evident particularly in relation to Hyndman and Morris. At the anecdotal level, even their appearance may have jarred if Hyndman’s recollection of selling a socialist newspaper was accurate: ‘Morris in his soft hat and blue suit, Champion, Frost and Joynes in the morning garments of the well-to-do, several working men comrades, and I myself wearing the new frock-coat in which [George Bernard] Shaw said I was born’.⁴²

Commenting on this himself Morris said: ‘it is a great drawback that I can’t talk to them roughly and unaffectedly This great class gulf lies between us’.⁴³ Finally, the socialists had to face the long tradition of good trade union organisation that had used arbitration and negotiation to win disputes in the past. Arguing the opposite may have been appropriate in the short term but the miners relied on their organisation and solidarity

in the long term and it had been successful in gaining relatively high wages. The unorganised and unskilled workers were to prove a much more fertile context for socialists in, for example, the London dock strike of 1889.

It is possible to measure impact organisationally but far less so in relation to individuals' 'radicalisation'. Organisationally, Owen's 're-narrating' of the dispute shows how the ideological divides between the SDF and the SL nationally were far less important on the ground where platforms were commonly shared and the focus was on building the case for socialism rather than an individual party.⁴⁴ Indeed, as he points out, the North of England Socialist Federation also adopted 'helping trade unionism' as one of its four founding principles – a shift from the SL's 'purism' in this respect. The SL branch and meeting activity in North Shields continues to feature in *Commonweal* well after the strike was over, but Thompson says that while it was represented at the SL 1887 annual conference it had gone by 1888.⁴⁵ What cannot be measured is the impact on those individuals who went to a meeting, listened to a debate, heard Morris speak or bought a Socialist League pamphlet. McCarthy, in a perhaps over-romanticised quote, says that 'Harold Laski, visiting Northumberland miners in the Great Slump of the 1930s, found copies of [Morris's] *A Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere* 'in house after house', even when most of the furniture had been sold'.⁴⁶ Education, especially Socialist education as the aim of the SL, was often a slow process waiting to bear fruit in, perhaps, family traditions and stories or to burst out again the next time a strike occurs.

Notes

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- 12 *Morpeth Herald* 10th March 1887.
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- 14 Welbourne, p. 238.
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- 22 *Commonweal* 26th March 1887.
- 23 Welbourne, p. 238.
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- 25 Boos, p. 53.
- 26 Boos, p. 55.
- 27 *Morpeth Herald* 16th April 1887 p. 6.
- 28 *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 12th April 1887.
- 29 *Newcastle Courant* 14th April 1887 p.4.
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37 Thompson, op. cit, p. 478.
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*The last remaining structures from the Harrison family tannery at the top of Stepney Bank, shortly before their demolition in Summer 2013, and the Tanners Arms public house, still standing at the very top of the Bank, though the pub sign no longer features a tanner dressing a hide, sadly.
Reproduced courtesy of Mike Greatbatch.*



Housing Density in South Jesmond and Stepney, Newcastle upon Tyne

A comparative study based on the 1891 and 1901 Census' through the example of the Harrison family and their tannery workers

Maureen Dickson

When the Harrison family moved in the 1860s from their long-standing home at 24 Ridley Villas to the more peaceful environs of 21 St. Mary's Terrace in the rapidly growing suburb of Jesmond, they not only acquired a more desirable residence but also achieved that physical separation of work and domestic life that so many of Newcastle's manufacturers sought from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Ridley Villas had been within a short walking distance of their tannery on Stepney Bank, and if the wind blew from the south east they undoubtedly would have experienced the all too familiar odour of this notoriously noxious trade. St. Mary's Place, however, and Jesmond Road, where Fairless Harrison moved to in the 1880s, were amongst Jesmond's most salubrious residential districts, and sufficiently remote from Stepney Bank to seem like another world for those fortunate to live there.

South Jesmond and Stepney - two different worlds within a relatively short distance of each other. This study uses the 1891 and 1901 census' to compare the types of housing, household size and occupations within

South Jesmond and Stepney. The study was limited because of the time available, and I have therefore focused my study on three streets in South Jesmond but taken a different approach to Stepney where I have used the example of Harrison's tannery workers to compare the living conditions with those of South Jesmond.

South Jesmond

The majority of development that shaped South Jesmond was predominantly residential and took place between 1858 and 1898. Between 1863 and 1875, James Archbold Pears Archbold (nephew of James Archbold of Gallowgate and Fenham) constructed the section of Osborne Road between Jesmond Road and Clayton Road, Portland Terrace, Hutton Terrace, Percy Terrace, Osborne Terrace, Akenside Terrace and the villas on Clayton Road.¹ Although not part of this study, I found it interesting to discover how land in Jesmond was apportioned and how Pears Archbold inherited the land and how some of the inherited land was sold off by his trustees when he was an infant.

On a visit to Tyne and Wear Archives, I located building plans for the new houses which were to be built in Akenside Terrace.² Finding these plans gave me a starting point and I decided to use Akenside Terrace, Portland Terrace and Sandyford Road as the focus for the South Jesmond census study. Local maps reveal that these streets are within walking distance of Stepney, just a short distance to the south.³

The plans indicated that the houses to be built in Akenside Terrace were substantial with gardens at the front and back of the properties and with large kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms. On 23rd October 1868, advertisements for properties for sale and to let in Akenside Terrace appeared in the *Newcastle Courant* illustrating the generous and attractive accommodation that was available.⁴

THREE NEW DWELLING HOUSES.
TO BE SOLD, THREE NEW DWELLING HOUSES, Nos. 6, 7 and 8, Akenside Terrace, openly and pleasantly situated on the Jesmond Road, Newcastle, and Three Minutes' Walk from the Jesmond Station, on the Blyth and Tyne Railway, each containing Six Rooms, Kitchen, Scullery, Cellar, Attics, Bath Room, Large Yard, with every Convenience, and amply Fitted up with Gas, with Spacious Front and Back Gardens.

These commodious and genteel Family Residences have been well and substantially Built, and Finished in the best Manner, and form a capital Investment for Purchasers.

Apply to Mr JOHN SIMPSON, No. 1, Higham Place, Newcastle-on-Tyne. ||530

TO LET.
THREE NEW DWELLING HOUSES, Nos. 4, 9 and 10, Akenside Terrace, openly and pleasantly situated on the Jesmond Road, Newcastle, and Three Minutes' Walk from the Jesmond Station, on the Blyth and Tyno Railway, each containing Six Rooms, Kitchen, Scullery, Cellar, Attics, Bath Room, large Yard, with every Convenience, and amply Fitted up with Gas, with Spacious Front and Back Gardens.

Apply to Mr JOHN SIMPSON, No. 1, Higham Place, Newcastle-on-Tyne. [529

Newcastle Courant, 23rd October 1868, p. 4.

Courtesy of Newcastle Libraries & Information Services.

As well as providing information about occupations, the census returns for 1891 and 1901 provided information about living conditions as the enumerators recorded the number of rooms if less than five. In two of the streets studied in South Jesmond (Akenside and Portland Terraces) there were no dwellings recorded as having less than five rooms. However, this was not replicated in Sandyford Road.

Akenside Terrace

Built north of Jesmond Road as a terrace of substantial villas, the 1891 census records that Nos. 3 – 16 Akenside Terrace were all inhabited on the day of the census with the exception of No 2 which was recorded as uninhabited. With the exception of one household, all households employed one or more servants. Occupations recorded were either professional, managerial or administrative and included solicitors, merchants, engineers, accountants and commercial travellers. There were three households where the head of the household was living on their own means, two of whom were widows, the third recorded as single and living with her brother and sister who were also living on their own means.⁵

By 1901 there had been changes in the occupants of the properties, although there was little change in the range of occupations. Only four occupants were recorded in both census returns.⁶

Address	Name	Occupation
3 Akenside Terrace	William Harle	Solicitor
10 Akenside Terrace	Elizabeth Redhead	Living on own means
Hazelwood Villa	Jordan Evans	Brewer's Agent
Clayton East Lodge	Arthur Gulston	Marine Superintendant Engineer

Portland Terrace

These Victorian terraces were located on the south side of Jesmond Road and the 1891 census recorded all properties as inhabited with the exception of No 19. The returns reveal a mix of occupations although still on the professional/managerial/administrative axis and with the exception of two households, all employed servants. However, there were also some professions that were more artistic; for example, a teacher of music and a sculptor. There were three occupants living on their own means and two dwelling houses included boarders: medical students, engineers and a retired member of the Royal Navy.⁷

Changes in the occupants had occurred by 1901 with in-coming occupations remaining much the same.⁸ Two occupants were recorded in both census returns:

Address	Name	Occupation
5 Portland Terrace	John D. Annan	House Agent
18 Portland Terrace	Selina T. East	Teacher of Music

Sandyford Road

Thomas Oliver's map of 1844 shows two principal routes through the area, one of which is Sandyford Road, the southern boundary of South Jesmond and not too distant from Stepney.⁹ Sandyford Road had a mix of villas and terraced houses. One of the significant villas in the area was Villa Reale (now Sandyford Park) which I discovered had been owned by Robert Harrison before being sold to Dr. Gibb.¹⁰

The terraced houses were on a smaller scale to those in Portland and Akenside Terraces. Some of the terraced dwellings provided two roomed accommodation. For example, two rooms in 75 Sandyford Road were occupied by a William Murdie (coachman), his wife, son and two boarders; and two rooms in 109 Sandyford Road, occupied by John Bathgate (shoemaker) and his wife.¹¹ This was in contrast to dwelling houses further along Sandyford Road where Fairless Harrison lived at Conyers House and which was described in 1893 as a large building.¹² The electoral register revealed that some of the properties were used as shops, an example being No 73 Sandyford Road, described as shop and room.¹³

The census returns for Sandyford Road record that the major occupations of the head of the households were tradesmen, including cabinet-maker and master boot maker, in addition to a coppersmith, chimney sweep, coachman, and a tanner. There was only one occupant being recorded as living on her own means and five households recorded as engaging servants, with Fairless Harrison, the tanner, recorded as employing three servants.¹⁴

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By 1901 the occupation axis remained the same and although there was a change in the occupants there were eight occupants being recorded in both census returns:¹⁵

Address	Name	Occupation
69 Sandyford Road	Mary Haymer	Dressmaker
77 Sandyford Road	Thomas Kent	Watchmaker
87 Sandyford Road	George Thomas Moat	Coachman
99 Sandyford Road	Eliza Isabella Marshall	Living on own means
109 Sandyford Road	Christopher Hall	Coach painter
115 Sandyford Road	Jane Gibson	Dressmaker
121 Sandyford Road	John Turnbull	Butcher
133 Sandyford Road	Angelo Rizzie	Jeweller and Fancy Goods Merchant

Stepney

When I visited Tyne and Wear Archives and discovered the Akenside Terrace plans, I also found plans for a proposed development of two blocks of houses in Stepney Road to be constructed 1886/1887. The plans showed that each dwelling house contained two flats and each flat had originally one room and a small scullery, although the plans were later altered and the room divided into a bedroom and a living room. The first floor accommodation was accessed by an external stair-case and there was a yard to each dwelling house which contained a coal shed and water closet.¹⁶

However, these plans are not typical of working class housing in Stepney at this time. The fact that they are flats and the yards contain water closets is illustrative of the huge improvements brought about by the by-laws imposed by Newcastle Corporation on builders of new working class housing from the 1870s onwards, the period when many of the classic Tyneside flats were built in Byker and Heaton.¹⁷

The most cursory study of the census records for the Stepney area quickly reveals the degree to which this area was characterised by overcrowding, and when you look at old maps for the area, you soon realise that the dwellings listed in the 1891 and 1901 census' are those illustrated on Thomas Oliver's survey of 1830, with some dating from as early as John Wood's map of 1827.

One of the largest industrial premises in Stepney was the tannery. Up to the mid-1830s, there was a tannery on the north side of what later became called Stepney Bank. This was Charles Jefferson's tannery but by 1834 Robert Harrison had opened a tannery that later developed on a large site on the south side of Stepney Bank.¹⁸ Harrison had previously had a glue-works and tannery at Low Friar Street, in the town centre, but his tannery at Stepney was much bigger, and by 1861 he is recorded as employing fifty men.¹⁹ Robert's eldest son Fairless inherited the business, and together with his son, also called Robert, they continued the business on Stepney Bank, which is recorded in local trade directories until 1931.

It was not very easy to identify those families who worked in the tannery. While some workers did record themselves as tanners or record their skills (for example, patent leather dresser) or seniority (Foreman) others who may have worked at the tannery could have described themselves as labourers.²⁰

What was clear of course was that living conditions were not as comfortable for the tannery workers as for the tannery owners. While the Harrisons' were able to employ servants and live in a house with more than five rooms, tannery workers didn't have that luxury. For example in nearby Union Street the 1891 census records tannery workers and their families living in three rooms (ten people); two rooms (six people); and two rooms (seven people).²¹

Similar densities of population are recorded in Stepney Street and Stepney Bank. This might not have been so bad if the buildings they occupied were spacious and well ventilated and provided with clean water and flush toilets. However, as Stepney Street and Stepney Bank were both

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built prior to 1830, by 1890 the area was renowned for its gross overcrowding, poor health and crime. Even those who could be classed as skilled workers (for example, Patent Leather Dressers) occupied dwellings that would eventually be condemned as slums.²²

Some of the tannery workers recorded in the 1891 and 1901 census are:

Year	Name	Address	Number of rooms	Number in household	Occupation
1891	Robert Huntley	Union Terrace	2	10	Tanner
	Richard Huntley				Tanner
	George Ostell	Union Street	2	7	Tanner
	George Wright	Union Street	2	6	Tanner
	Edward Carr	Bermondsey Street	2	4	Tanner
	William Milburn	Stepney Street	2	9	Tanner
	George Nash	Stepney Street (Tanner)	3	4	Foreman at Tannery
	John Postelthwaite Robert Postelthwaite Roger Postelthwaite	Brown Jug Yard	2	4	Tanner
	Frederick Harris	Brown Jug Yard	1	4	Patent Leather Dresser
	James Daly	Brown Jug Yard	2	3	Patent Leather Dresser
	John Jobling	Brown Jug Yard	2	5	Patent Leather Dresser
1901	George Ostell	Union Street	2	7	Tanner
	George Wright	Union Street	2	6	Tanner

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	John Postelthwaite	Brown Jug Yard	2	2	Tanner in leather works
	Robert Postelthwaite	Brown Jug Yard	1	3	Leather Jappanner
	Frederick Harris	Brown Jug Yard	1	5	Leather Jappanner
	James Daly	Brown Jug Yard	2	4	Patent Leather Dresser
	John Jobling	Brown Jug Yard	2	3	Leather Dresser

Photographs taken in the 1930s illustrate the poor quality of this slum property, and suggest something of the tannery workers' living conditions.



*The Brown Jug Yard tenement, Stepney Bank, in 1935.
Courtesy of Newcastle Libraries & Information Services*

Another example of the conditions that people living in Stepney had to endure can be found in the Newcastle Council Minutes of 1890. A report entitled 'Alleged Nuisance at Stepney Bank', recorded the experience of Alderman Potter as he walked across Byker Bridge and found the smell 'so strong that it almost took away his appetite for dinner'. The source of this noxious smell was Harrison's tannery.²³

What is interesting is the continuity of occupants at Stepney between 1891 and 1901, indicating how some families lived in the area from one generation to another. Whereas in Jesmond there were fewer occupants recorded at the same address in both census, the examples above show that there was little movement for those employed in the tannery. Even though Robert Postelthwaite had left his parental home, he was still living within the Brown Jug Yard.

Conclusion

Unlike the bulk of their workforce, the Harrisons were able to move to better homes as their economic fortunes improved. By 1901 Fairless had moved to Windsor Crescent in Jesmond, and Robert Harrison (his son) was living at 26 Osborne Terrace, although by 1911 Robert had moved into his father's house at 6 Windsor Crescent, Fairless having died in 1903.

One thing that has emerged is the disparity in the density of occupants. In 1901 there were fourteen commodious dwelling houses and nine villas in Akenside Terrace occupied by a total of 106 people, of whom thirty-three were living-in domestic servants. In Stepney Bank (including Back Stepney Bank, the Ship Inn, and the Brown Jug Yard) there were forty-one dwellings in which 120 people were living, of whom sixty-one lived in the Brown Jug Yard, a multi-occupancy tenement of twenty dwellings each consisting of just two rooms or a single room. Typically, each household was occupying one, two or three rooms with the exception of the Ship Inn which had four rooms, reflecting how living conditions in Stepney were so uncomfortable. Above the Brown Jug Yard, Stepney Bank is recorded as Stepney Street, and here lived another eighty-three people on the night

of the 1901 census, making a total of 203 residents between the Tanner's Arms at the top, and the Ship Inn at the bottom.

This is not an exhaustive study of Harrison's employees in 1891 and 1901, partly because of the limited number of streets surveyed; a wider geographic area might have identified more workers. Also, the nature of the unskilled labour meant that many workers might simply have recorded themselves as labourers with no work-place identity.²⁴

Interestingly, some of Harrison's employees were recorded in the *Newcastle Courant*. On 7th October 1887, the *Courant* reported the death of George Baker of 34 Sarah Street aged sixty years, who had been employed for thirty-four years by R & F Harrison, Stepney Tanneries. On 28th December 1895 the death of James McGillivray of 24 Chester Street was also reported; McGillivray had been employed for thirty-two years by R & F Harrison, Stepney Tanneries.²⁵

These were both long serving employees, no doubt valued by their employer and possibly perceived as 'respectable' working class, those whom employers like Harrisons' may have rewarded through steady employment and an opportunity to acquire a position and status within their work environment that others failed to secure. Sarah Street and Chester Street were both part of Shieldfield and so, like the Harrison family they too were able to escape the dreary tenements and polluted atmosphere of their fellow workers residing in Stepney.

Acknowledgements

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A Ship and a Bottle: Trade Unionism in the Shipbuilding and Glass Industries in Sunderland during the Nineteenth Century

Stuart Howard

During the nineteenth century, Sunderland's industrial base rested on two of the region's primary industries, coal and shipbuilding, and two of its secondary industries, glass and ceramics. It is hardly surprising therefore that trade unionism made a mark on the town. In 1892 Durham had a total of 114,810 trade unionists, 11.21% of the county's population, a similar proportion to its neighbour Northumberland, making these two north-east counties by far the most unionised in the country.

Shipbuilding

Trade unionism within shipbuilding has a long and complex history.¹ This reflects technological change, from construction in wood to iron and, later, steel, and craft and skill demarcations between sections of the workforce. The constructors of wooden vessels, shipwrights, saw themselves as artisans and valued their control of the labour process. As aristocrats of the labour force they headed a hierarchy which included other skilled trades such as joiner, sawyer, blacksmith, caulker, and driller, as well as various grades of labourer such as the 'holder-up'. Consistent with their artisan status,

shipwrights were paid by time, not piece.

Iron shipbuilders possessed a completely different set of skills from shipwrights, and for this reason the two industries ran in parallel. The iron shipbuilder was essentially an engineer, and engineering skills such as boiler-making, engine-building, fitting, plating, riveting, as well as various less skilled labouring tasks, were demarcated in iron shipyards. Only caulkers, who in engineering belonged to the boiler-making trade, straddled both wood and iron construction. Iron shipbuilders were paid by the piece rather than by time, and in this sense, as in others, iron shipbuilders belonged more to the modern world of skilled labour than to the artisanal world of the shipwright.

Trade unionism among shipbuilders mirrored the organisation of the trade. Thus, the wooden shipbuilders, where they were unionised, had their own unions by trade, with the shipwrights leading the field. Iron shipbuilders, when organised, belonged to engineering unions, particularly the United Society of Boiler Makers and Ironship Builders (USBMIB), founded in 1834 as the Society of Friendly Boilermakers, which changed its name in 1852, and, to a lesser extent the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), formed in 1851. Other trades frequently organised their own associations. This sectionalisation of tradesmen and trade unionism created a complex labour situation of craft rivalry in shipyards; iron shipbuilders referred to their counterparts as 'our wooden enemies', and demarcation disputes between trades were commonplace.

Trade unionism in wooden construction among shipwrights was, until the 1880s, organised locally, at first by yard and district, later by port. On the Wear, it seems probable that local societies existed at Sunderland, Monkwearmouth, Bishopwearmouth and Hylton, before the first port-based 'permanent' society emerged in 1846. This lasted until 1907, although a national union of shipwrights had been established in 1882. The longevity of the shipwrights' union on the Wear reflects the importance of the port as a wooden shipbuilder and repairer; indeed the Wear was the last of the region's three great rivers to move from wood to predominantly iron construction.

Trade unionism among iron shipbuilders was for skilled trades, largely through national organisations, in particular the Boilermakers and ASE, although some trades formed local unions. From the 1870s there were attempts to unionise non-skilled labour. Trade unionism, however, was not universal, but this did not mean that labour could not act in association, as proved in the nine-hour movement of 1871.

Shipwrights

Five years after the formation of the Wear Shipwrights' Benevolent Society (WSBS) in 1846, the 1851 census return showed 1,372 shipwrights over the age of 20 living in Sunderland, and 653 under 20 years. Membership of the society was variously shown as 1,389 and 1,186 at that time.² Thus we may take it that the 'aristocrats' of the wooden yards were relatively numerous and very well-organised by mid-century.

The organisation of the shipwrights' society was strictly regulated, and democratic. The 1860 rule book was very specific:

That the society shall be properly and strictly governed by one code of laws, and actuated by one spirit of fraternity, and for convenience shall be divided into separate branches, to suit local circumstances, each branch having a local secretary, auditors and two stewards, to conduct the business. And that the stewards be chosen every three months, leaving one of the old stewards in office to give instruction to the new.³

There were eight branches: Sunderland No.1 and 2, Bishopwearmouth, Ballast Hills, Deptford, Southwick, Monkwearmouth No.1 and No. 2. A general committee composed of delegates from the branches met every Tuesday in Sunderland, and every Wednesday in Monkwearmouth, non-attendance attracting a fine of 6d. Indeed as the rule book shows, discipline was kept by a variety of fines covering a wide range of 'offences', from failing to pay society fees to taking on piece work. In this and other circumstances,

sickness for example, members also had their membership 'card marked', a practice which is still reflected in local parlance.⁴

The objectives of the society forbade any interference in, or discussion of, religion or politics, but broadly followed the pattern of artisanal societies in the late 18th century. These provided benefits for sickness, death, unemployment and other losses, and crucially, acted to influence wages by controlling entry, and to retain control of the work process for skilled labour.⁵ Thus, for example, on the death of a member, his wife or dependant received £10; if a member were injured and unable to carry on his trade he received £30; or if he were shipwrecked 'allowed £1 towards purchasing tools'.⁶ Bye-laws controlled entry and demarcation of work, for example insisting that 'all apprentices must be initiated in the society book on entering a shipbuilding yard', and that 'no labourer be allowed to carry any prepared material, make stages, lay or assist to lay ways or any other shipwright's work'.⁷ Despite the fact that there was no national organisation until the 1880s, shipwrights were clearly in contact with their counterparts in other ports, and had local rules to prevent 'blacklegging' in time of strikes, or the inflation of the labour supply by the 'tramping' of journeymen. Thus rule 12 of the Wear shipwrights' society stated that 'all members of this society who may be desirous of obtaining employment in any other port or place, must apply to the general secretary, and inquire into the state of the port and place'.⁸

Despite the fact that WSBS was a benevolent society, it did organise and conduct strikes. This was hardly a new phenomenon on the Wear, since there had been industrial action by shipwrights before 1846, though few accounts survive of early nineteenth century disputes.⁹ However, there is a record of the conduct of a dispute in 1824, when Wear shipbuilders informed Sunderland's acting magistrates that

we have reason to believe that the introduction of strangers will be resisted by the resident shipwrights.... [thus] we beg

leave to suggest the propriety of some military force being ordered into the town prior to our bringing strangers here.

The next day the magistrates wrote to Sir John Byng, commander in the army:

There have for several weeks past differences existed between the shipbuilders and their workmen which have led to the conviction and commitment to prison of several of the shipwrights... These measures however do not appear to be likely to induce the shipwrights to return to work, in consequence of which the shipbuilding business on the Wear is almost at stand... The shipwrights we estimate to amount to about 500, and we beg leave, Sir, to request you will have the goodness to order to Sunderland a competent number of military to assist the civil power in case of emergency.¹⁰

In shipbuilding as in coal-mining, the development of the British economy, fluctuations in trade and Britain's growing global power, played important parts in conditioning industrial relations and industrial action. The 1850s proved to be a particularly troubled decade for shipbuilding on the Wear. It began with a 21-week strike at Hylton over the winter of 1851-2, when shipwrights attempted to preserve customary practice in the yards. The employers had tried to break with tradition by imposing more uniform conditions across Sunderland, and asserting their freedom to employ whom they chose, in this case as borers, rather than time-served society men approved by the Hylton shipwrights. After failed arbitration in December and fruitless negotiations in March, the shipwrights returned to work defeated in early April. By June they were working under the general rules of the Wear.¹¹ The Hylton dispute is of some significance since it illustrates the general struggle for control of the labour process, an important feature of this period of maturing industrial capitalism. Custom

frequently become the object of industrial conflict and a centrepiece of trade unionism activism.¹²

The immediate effect of the Crimean War (1854-6) was to drive up wages to 6s. a day for shipwrights on the Wear. The Wear employers posted notice that from October 1854 daily wages would be reduced to 5s., and refused arbitration. There followed a ten-week strike in which 800 men, estimated at half the workforce, struck. James Laing and other lesser Wear-based employers, acting in concert as an employers' association, conceded defeat in early December.¹³

A consequence of the poor industrial relations on the Wear was a very early attempt at industrial conciliation – the idea of which is to pre-empt disputes, rather than try to arbitrate after a dispute has begun – by way of a formal institution, a joint conciliation board. Employers and workers met in the Lyceum theatre, Bishopwearmouth, in January 1853, 'to consider whether a better understanding between masters and men could not be established'. The meeting decided to create

.. a committee of reference, composed of shipbuilders and shipwrights, with a chairman mutually elected, to which any questions of dispute, either between an individual master and his men or the whole body of builders and shipwrights respectively, be referred, with a view to their amicable adjustment.¹⁴

During early February the remit and administration of the board was agreed. A joint court of reference and arbitration was to be established with nine members from each side. All disputes relating to proposed changes in conditions would be referred to this court, the decision of which was final. Proceedings were to be open to all concerned, each yard being represented by two men. The meetings would be civil, with 'no expression of approbation or disapprobation... allowed from representatives'. Each side appointed a secretary to keep a record of the court and arrange meetings, with expenses of these services shared.¹⁵

The board operated until November 1854, when it became a casualty of the ten-week Wear strike. Before and during this dispute, the masters refused arbitration by the court, because they felt that wages were subject to the laws of supply and demand and therefore not appropriate for arbitration. A shipwright argued in a local newspaper that ‘all questions between masters and men are affected by supply and demand’ and concluded that ‘were the men refusing to arbitrate on such grounds, I would at once conclude that it was a paltry evasion, to conceal the fact that they durst not trust their case before such a tribunal’.¹⁶ However the inconsistency in the shipbuilders’ approach to industrial relations reflects as much the inchoate, incoherent and often contradictory grasp of emergent liberal market economics in industry among employers, as it does their insincerity. Many shipbuilders broke ranks and paid the market rate during the dispute. Capital and labour both had to learn the ‘rules of the game’ of market-based industrial capitalism. Skilled workers in the ‘new model’ unions, such as the Wear shipwrights, developed an enthusiasm for conciliation in parallel with accepting the tenets of economic liberalism. This ideological shift had been clear from a joint statement by masters and men at their inaugural meeting at the Lyceum: ‘the interests of the employer and the employed are combined and cannot be separated without disadvantage to both parties’.¹⁷

Iron Shipbuilders

During the final quarter of the nineteenth century, iron shipbuilding and marine engineering rapidly expanded, and those employed in the Sunderland shipbuilding trade grew from 4,737 in 1881 to 9,178 in 1911, making it Sunderland’s most important employer.¹⁸

When the Sunderland branch of the boilermakers’ union, USBISB, was formed in 1858, branches were already established on the Tyne and Tees.¹⁹ The late development on the Wear reflects the strength of wooden shipbuilding on the river and the permeation and influence of USBISB among general engineers who were concentrated on the Tyne and the Tees. In Sunderland, the union’s members were marine engineers and

iron shipbuilders. By 1872 there were 963 of them, divided between four branches.²⁰ In the engineering, metal-working and shipbuilding trades, the boilermakers' union was, during the second half of the nineteenth century, 'incomparably the strongest'.²¹ A rival society, largely made up of marine engineers, was the ASE, numerically less of a force than the boilermakers' union, with fewer than 300 members in Sunderland in 1869, and only 451 in the wake of the nine-hour movement in 1872.²²

The structure and objects of the iron shipbuilders' unions did not mirror those of the shipwrights. Skilled engineering workers' unions were nationally organised with a local branch structure. Thus members enjoyed the strength of a national institution, but lacked the control over policy of the member of a local union. Iron shipbuilding brought many more unskilled labourers into the trade. Indeed iron shipbuilding was seen as 'unskilled labour's opportunity' by one shipwright who was analysing the causes of distress among his skilled brethren.²³ Unskilled men, who were often paid by the skilled men, rewarded by the hour rather than the piece, and excluded from skilled unions, did not share the same interests as skilled labour and were frequently in conflict with them. Where they could, they formed their own unions. Organised on a local level and without the resources of the national unions, many failed. But one reasonably successful combination was the Amalgamated League of Shipyard Workers and Labourers formed in 1875. The union was led by James Lynch, organised regionally, with a branch in Sunderland, and received support from Sunderland Trades' Council. Action was taken by this union in a dispute with Doxford, Austin and Hunter in 1877 but by 1885 the union had failed.²⁴

Although the iron shipbuilders' unions were more demarcated than those of the shipwrights, this did not mean that labour in the iron yards could not act in concert. Early in 1871 a 'short time' committee was established on the Wear to lobby for the nine-hour day. This was led by Andrew Gourley, an ASE activist, although most support for the movement came from non-society men. During March 1871 a meeting rejected any increase

in wages over a reduction in hours. Circulars advertising the committee were distributed around the yards and engine shops.²⁵ A further meeting at the Theatre Royal, chaired by the future liberal activist and Sunderland MP Samuel Storey, is reported to have attracted 800 people. There it was argued that 'the movement rested upon social and moral grounds', and was denied that the committee was a society – in other words, a trade union. Spoor, an engineman, put down a resolution 'steadfastly refus[ing] any compromise in the shape of an increase in wages'.²⁶ The employers rejected these proposals. Subsequently 2,000 workers attended an open-air meeting, leaving the yards and shops almost deserted. Further mass meetings attracted crowds of up to 1,000 workers.²⁷ Summonses were issued against some men by their employers under the Master and Servant Act, but cases were adjourned by magistrates, pending a settlement.²⁸ Interestingly, the ASE leadership in London condemned its Sunderland branch members for participating in – indeed, leading – the strike, and when they intervened to negotiate with the employers a return to work, this was rejected by the local leadership. The men returned on 5 May on a nine-hour day.²⁹ Such incidents are a reminder that trade unionism often had local and informal roots. The success of the nine-hour movement on the Wear was an important factor in the formation of the Nine Hours' League on the Tyne, and the momentous strike that followed.³⁰

During 1883 a major stoppage of engineers began in Sunderland yards and shops that would last almost two years. The dispute turned principally on the appointment, age and limitation of apprentices, focusing again upon the issue of how far capital and labour controlled the labour process. The men's demands to limit the use of apprentices to two for every five journeymen, and for an increase of 2s. a week, were rejected by the engineering employers. In June 1883 and 1,400 workers withdrew their labour.³¹ A central committee was set up to conduct the strike. The strikers were by no means all society men – probably a little under half were not – but a strike fund was established and strike pay of 6s. a man, and 6d. for each child, was paid to non-society men.³² Labourers, however, found

themselves in distress, since they had no society of their own to protect them, and they were dependent upon the engineers, who paid them, being at work. As one impoverished shipyard labourer pointed out, 'the poor labourers can only live as long as they get work'.³³

Many looked for work elsewhere in the region, but employers had learned the rules of the game in conducting such disputes in 1871, and combined to restrict opportunities to the strikers. From September, men from outside the region were brought to Sunderland by the employers.³⁴ The strike committee attempted to staunch the flow by sending deputations to other engineering centres, such as one to meet the Birmingham Trades Council in February 1884 to plead for restraint.³⁵ A weekly record of 'strangers' was also kept by the committee and published in the local press.³⁶ In October, the strikers diluted their demands to a rise of 2s., the abolition of the character note, or employer's reference, and mutual regulation of apprenticeships.³⁷ This was rejected. The local press, which had advocated arbitration as early as June 1883, and the ASE both concluded that the employers' objective was to purge trade unionism from the town.³⁸ Financial support was received from the ASE and fellow workers in other ports, but the cost of supporting the strike was unsustainable. A return to work was ordered by the ASE in May 1885.³⁹

The glass industry

By the mid nineteenth century, the Sunderland glass industry had evolved from an artisanal trade to a mass production operation, largely producing bottles and sheet window glass. The *raison d'être* of Wearside glass lay in the availability of cheap coal, raw materials, and transport. 'Small coals' deemed unsuitable for export or iron production were used by glass manufacturers. Competitive transport costs were also linked to the coal trade, since finished goods could be packed among the coals in the holds of colliers and transported to the metropolis or elsewhere, while vessels returning from the east coast trade were loaded with raw materials for glass, sand and clay, as ballast. The prosperity of the glass industry was also bound up with

tariff reform and foreign competition. In the period after 1845 the industry prospered in the wake of excise reform, reaching a peak during the 1850s and 1860s. However, from the mid 1870s, European competition, which had grown following the abolition of duty on imported goods in 1857, was keenly felt by Wearside glass manufacturers, who were reduced to a rump by the close of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

Labour relations in the industry were severely strained by the challenges of foreign competition and the 1870s became a period of industrial turbulence. The workers' grievances were in response to wage cuts imposed by British glass manufacturers as a means to match competitors.⁴¹ The Wear glassworks of James Hartley & Co., which produced sheet glass and was one of Sunderland's largest employers with 700 men in the 1860s, suffered, like others in the town, from 'a mania for striking' during the early 1870s, and was locked in a series of bitter industrial struggles during the 1880s, until its demise in the early 1890s.⁴²

During the early 1870s, Hartley's workers were organised by the Sheet Glassmakers' Association, established in St Helens in 1870. By 1874 there was a branch in Sunderland, but the organisation was damaged by trade depression and effectively dead by 1879.⁴³ Later the town was to become a centre for trade union activism within the sheet glass industry, when Hartley's workers joined the Knights of Labour (KoL) in 1884. KoL was an American trade union organisation which was influenced by the language and ritual of freemasonry, but had the Owenite aspiration to be a general union of all workers. The Knights were organised into branches called Local Assemblies (LA), comprising both mixed and single occupational groups. One of these, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, branch LA 300, was a national union of American window glass workers.⁴⁴ The LA 300 Knights were concerned about high levels of immigration to America by European sheet glass workers, which threatened their job security and excellent wages and conditions. LA 300 therefore attempted to organise the European skilled sheet glass workers. In 1880 they sent a delegation to Europe which had most success in Belgium. In 1884, at a conference in Charleroi attended

by the president and secretary of LA 300, the Universal Federation of Glass Workers was formed. Soon afterwards the first convention of the UFGW was held in St Helens (Lancs.), home of the giant glass maker Pilkington. In attendance at this important gathering were delegates from Hartley's Sunderland works.

The influence of the Sunderland men must have been considerable, for later that year a Local Assembly of British Window Glass Workers, LA 3,504, was established, with four branches or 'preceptories', one each for the four English window glass manufacturers, with headquarters at Sunderland.⁴⁵ The enthusiasm for the federation on Wearside was influenced by funds received by Sunderland sheet glass workers from 'brother' Italian, Belgian and American window glass workers during a dispute in 1884.⁴⁶ In 1889 the Belgian secretary of the UFGW found 300 Belgian francs in support of a strike at Hartley's, and prevented the firm from employing Belgian 'blackleg' labour. However, by this time the industry was in crisis. Membership of LA 3,504 had stood at 750 in 1885, but this later declined to about 300. The Sunderland branch had only 100 members in 1891, many of whom were then unemployed, remaining so a year later.⁴⁷ Hartley's closed in the early 1890s and the factory was demolished by 1896.

Hartley's unionised sheet glass workers were skilled men, and interestingly the KoL Sunderland branch did not have unskilled members.⁴⁸ In fact the glass industry was deeply sectionalised, and its various trades and parts tended to take industrial action independently. Thus we find glasshouse labourers conducting their own strike in 1871.⁴⁹ During the 1880s the movement known as 'new unionism', made up of unskilled labour unions, reached the regional glass industry in the form of the Glass Bottle Makers' Society. Disputes among bottle makers on the Wear were frequent, bitter and protracted during the early 1880s, symptomatic of the intense pressure created by foreign competition. When a serious dispute began in 1882, the Sunderland Daily Echo estimated the value of the local branch of the Glass Bottle Makers Society to be £1,900, about £4 15s. a man, and advised arbitration to prevent a 'prolonged crisis'.⁵⁰ The strike

lasted until May 1883, when the technologically advanced Ayres Quay Bottle Co. conceded to the union's demands, followed by other, but not all, bottle manufacturers.⁵¹ Less resilient bottle makers failed in the wake of this dispute, with the closure of William Kirk & Co. of Ayres Quay, Walker Featherstonhaugh of Deptford, and Fenwicks of Bishopwearmouth.⁵²

Conclusion

The history of trade unionism in Sunderland in all of its manifestations points, in a particular example, to the slow awakening and adaption of labour to new circumstances in general. The establishment of trade institutions pointed to a recognition of sectional interest that had within it the potential to point to a wider class awareness as the ideology of the Knights of Labour demonstrated. Despite the fact that trade unions remained divided by trade, the notion of congress had by the 1860s propelled organised labour into national life. The formation of the Labour Representation Committee by the TUC in 1900 gave it the potential to govern and led to a level of working class participation and representation in politics that dwarfs that of the twenty first century. In this 'forward march of labour' that hot bed of trade unionism, north east England and not least Sunderland, played a significant role.

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The Jarrow of the West? Haltwhistle in the 1930s¹

Brian Bennison

'I have heard travellers say that it caused them real pain to pass through Haltwhistle and see so much desperate unemployment'.²

In the summer of 1937 the Duke of Kent paid a two-day visit to the North East, a tour of unemployment black-spots which the Newcastle press treated in a celebratory fashion. From the moment His Highness – 'hatless, dressed in a grey suit and brown suede shoes'³ – left Alnwick Castle, every stop on the royal cavalcade was presented as some kind of triumph, with crowds coming out to cheer and schoolchildren lining up to sing. The excursion to Durham's training centres and unemployed clubs, where he chatted to 'pitmen who were becoming expert poultry breeders, tomato and strawberry growers and cobblers'⁴, was heralded by the *Evening Chronicle* as 'A Great Day for the Workless'⁵.

Newspapers covered the Duke's brief stay in a jaunty manner with no obvious inkling of discontent, except for a paragraph tucked away in the *Newcastle Journal*, and a similar one in the *Hexham Courant*, which related the remarks made to the Duke by a recently elected district councillor for Haltwhistle. Mrs Hilda Smith, wife of the owner of the town's paintworks and president of the Haltwhistle Social Services Women's Branch, had only received her invitation to be presented to His Highness at 9.15 am

on the morning of the reception, but she made it to Annitsford for 11 am. Smith approached the Duke saying ‘We all hear of Jarrow and Durham, and rightly so, but nobody hears of Haltwhistle. Nothing is done. I plead for Haltwhistle’.⁶ The Duke shook hands and said he would remember the name.

Mrs Smith’s plea expressed the resentment felt by many Haltwhistle residents about a perceived failure by the authorities to acknowledge the extent of the town’s plight and the lack of any meaningful measures to ameliorate it. What was the background to Mrs Smith’s assertion and how valid was it?

Haltwhistle sits on the north bank of the river South Tyne, some thirty-seven miles from Newcastle and twenty-one miles from Carlisle. It is a stop on the Newcastle to Carlisle railway and until 1976 was also the junction for the Alston Branch. The coming of the railways transformed Haltwhistle from an agricultural market town with woollen mills, a large brickworks and a brewery into what could be called a mining village.⁷ The census of 1881 showed almost half of Haltwhistle’s employed males ‘working with minerals’ and by 1909 the Medical Officer of Health described the town as being made up ‘predominantly of the mining classes’.⁸ In 1930 there was some work in agriculture and at the old varnish factory, but it was the town’s colliery and other mines in the neighbourhood that employed the bulk of the male population.

Mrs Smith’s reference to Jarrow invoked the spectre of large-scale unemployment and its attendant distress, but how close was Haltwhistle’s situation to that of Jarrow and other places blighted by unemployment? If we consider a bald statistical snapshot of unemployment in the worst hit North East towns after the damaging years of the early 1930s (Table 1), Haltwhistle looks to have the unenviable honour of topping the charts, with nearly three out of five of Haltwhistle men out of work. Indeed, a couple of years earlier, the Haltwhistle Branch Employment Office had calculated that almost four out of five of the town’s men were unemployed.

Table 1. Percentage of Insured Workers Unemployed and the Percentage of those Unemployed for More than Twelve Months in Some North East Towns, June 1934.⁹

Town	% Unemployed	% Unemployed More Than 1 Year
Haltwhistle	57.3	70.4
Jarrow	56.8	58.5
Bishop Auckland	50.4	80.0
Sildon	47.5	81.7
Hartlepool	44.5	42.3
Sunderland	41.0	47.2

Yet, bad as Haltwhistle's position was, there are grounds for arguing that the claim of an equivalence with Jarrow was misplaced. Firstly, the published unemployment rate for Jarrow underestimated the town's true rate because of the inclusion of Hebburn, with relatively smaller unemployment, in the overall percentage. Secondly, it could be claimed that it was the absolute numbers of those without jobs that determined the seriousness of the problem, a point stressed by government spokesmen on the occasions when Haltwhistle's MP sought help and remedial action by claiming Jarrow as the precedent. In December 1936, for example, D. Clifton Brown, cited official figures to proclaim Haltwhistle's position to be far worse than Jarrow's and asked the minister to 'bear in mind that Haltwhistle has gone in for no spectacular methods of publicity, and will he see that there is no preferential treatment?'. But Brown must realise, said the minister, 'that the percentage is not the only thing: there is also the question of numbers'.¹⁰ The unemployment rate shown for Haltwhistle in Table 1 represented 779 men idle (at its peak, unemployment had topped 1,100) whereas Jarrow had over 6,000 out of work. Another if not too fanciful way of distinguishing between Haltwhistle and Jarrow would be to speculate that the quality of unemployed life in rural Northumberland was marginally less unpleasant than on industrial Tyneside. Passing time on the South Tyne may have been

healthier, with perhaps the opportunity to supplement an otherwise basic diet for free and even the chance of obtaining some casual seasonal work.

Whether or not Haltwhistle could legitimately be compared with Jarrow and other notorious black-spots, the fact remained that it had a serious unemployment problem. How did this come about? The town's dependency on coal mining and the second column in Table 1, points to some dislocation in that industry a year or two earlier. Table 2 shows the employment levels in collieries in or near to Haltwhistle at three points in the 1930s. Although numbers employed at mines are obtained from official, annual listings, some care must be exercised: what we have are snapshots of a colliery's workforce at one point in a twelve-month period and it is clear from local press reports that temporary closures of pits and shortened working weeks contributed to a significant amount of under-employment. Nonetheless, the listings give an indication of the relative numbers of men attached to each colliery and allows us to track changes in mining jobs.

Table 2. Coal Mining Jobs at Collieries in Haltwhistle and Within a Five-mile Radius, 1930-1938¹¹

Colliery	1930	1932	1938
Barcombe	34	35	32
Lambley	75	86	82
Plenmeller	337	-	-
South Tyne	538	-	-
Midgeholme	30	50	190
Blenkinsopp	-	49	-
Melkridge			42
Ventners Hall			53
Featherstone			15
Others	39	34	36
<hr/>			
Total	1053	254	449

The dramatic rise in unemployment in Haltwhistle in the first years of the decade was principally due to two pit closures. Table 2 reveals a net loss of 799 jobs, affecting three-quarters of miners, between the beginning of 1930 and the end of 1932. Overall 880 jobs were lost, but an expansion of the workforces at two collieries and the re-opening of another mine meant 81 jobs had also been generated. Haltwhistle's distress was almost entirely due to the end of mining at the South Tyne Colliery in September 1931 and Plenmeller Colliery's closure in May 1932, a shedding of 875 jobs in nine months.¹² The sudden demise of the two mines is emphasised by a geological survey published in 1931 which felt able to say that 'coal was being exploited on a considerable scale at South Tyne and Plenmeller'.¹³ The South Tyne Colliery was in the town itself and we can assume that Plenmeller Colliery's workforce was largely Haltwhistle-based, since Plenmeller parish had only thirty-six houses in 1931, the colliery was only three miles from Haltwhistle and a rail halt had been built at Plenmeller Colliery in 1919 to transport miners from Haltwhistle. Table 2 also shows that despite the job losses elsewhere, there was some consolation in the increases at the Naworth Colliery Co. pits in and around Midgeholme. Blenkinsopp Colliery's positive effect on job numbers, resulting from its 1931 re-opening after its 1928 closure, was not to last, as the mine closed again in 1935. The owner had made an unsuccessful plea for government help with de-watering the pit, saying the he would be able to 'employ fifty men in months' with a suitable pump.¹⁴



Plenmeller Colliery

Clearly, Haltwhistle had a case for special attention and there was some recognition of this from the authorities when it was included in the area of 'West Cumberland and Haltwhistle' for the 'Investigations into Industrial Conditions in Certain Depressed Areas'. Haltwhistle, however, was grafted on to a problem area where the focus of attention lay some distance away on conditions in Workington and Maryport. The apparent anomaly of a Northumberland town treated as a part of Cumberland was the result of the Haltwhistle employment exchange coming under the North West administrative division. As time went on, councillors and townsfolk increasingly viewed this acknowledgement of Haltwhistle as a distressed area as an afterthought.

The Ministry of Labour concluded in November 1934 that the town was 'not strictly derelict but is so severely depressed as to come near to that conclusion'.¹⁵ It was noted that its working concerns were all small scale and held out little prospect of enlargement and it was suggested, rather weakly, that hope may lie in the development of brickmaking.¹⁶ The Ministry of Labour's preferred measures for dealing with areas of high unemployment were to encourage initiatives that adopted a longer term view, for proposals that would lead to an expansion of existing industries and the introduction of new ones, a transfer to other areas of surplus labour and the training and transfer of juveniles unable to find work, and a programme of land settlement and afforestation. Within this grand framework, Haltwhistle did not offer much potential and had to make do with small amounts of government assistance. The second report of the Commissioners for Special Areas¹⁷ in early 1936 showed that a grant for a 'work of public utility' - £8,960 for a sewage scheme - had been awarded to Haltwhistle and £95 had been given to Haltwhistle Co-operative Poultry & Allotment Association to assist with the clearance and extension of a drainage culvert.¹⁸ Also in 1936, it was announced that increased expenditure was to be directed to Territorial Army camps and that summer would see a 'concentration of troops at Haltwhistle in order to benefit an area suffering from trade depression'.¹⁹ As far as industrial transfer schemes were concerned, few people took advantage:

between July 1932 and May 1934, with unemployment at its most severe, only sixteen men moved away, mainly to Ashington.²⁰ Similarly, there were some who toyed with the idea of land settlement, although nothing appears to have materialised.²¹ Enticing new industries into the district proved a non-starter and local officials and the constituency MP quickly came to the view that the Special Areas policy, far from helping Haltwhistle, worked against it. The town's location meant it started with a comparative disadvantage and government policy served to make it even less attractive: the Team Valley project was cited in the House of Commons as an example of how Haltwhistle was made even less competitive in the scramble to lure new industry.

When the employment situation in Haltwhistle improved, it did so because of an international situation that created more demand for coal and a market for specialist paints. When the Area Commissioner for Special Areas visited Haltwhistle in late 1936 he was told by local representatives that there was a good deal of coal north of the town and re-introducing mining would go some way to mopping up the jobless. As if to demonstrate this, in 1937 three haulage contractors and a co-operative society employee saw some promise in exploiting a coal seam at an old drift on isolated moorland seven miles north of Haltwhistle. Helped by the newly-formed Haltwhistle Improvement Association, the partnership secured a grant from the Nuffield Trust to begin the first task of constructing a two-mile road across the fells to what would become Ventners Hall Colliery. A new undertaking at Melkridge was recruiting miners and this colliery, along with Ventners Hall, Midgeholme and Lambley, employed over 350 men on the outbreak of war and smaller pits in the area contributed another 90 jobs.

The impending war also meant expansion for the Hadrian Paintworks. The Smith & Walton varnish-making business began to grow in the early 1930s and a new factory was developed on a bigger site. Extra labour was taken on initially to chip mortar off old reclaimed bricks before construction began. As building was nearing completion the proprietors, in an ironic

twist, went to Jarrow in 1935 and spent £800 on fittings for their new offices from the Olympic, a steamship bought by Sir John Jarvis and passed on to a Jarrow shipyard to break up and create employment. In 1937 Smith & Walton began making paints specifically for battleships which found a ready market on the Tyne, on the Clyde and at Barrow. Further coatings were formulated to meet the needs of war.²² When hostilities began, Kilfrost, a firm manufacturing de-icing chemicals of vital importance to the RAF, operated out of laboratories in Euston and a factory close by. Susceptible to air raids, Kilfrost sought a new site with rail and road links, clean air and away from enemy attacks. They moved to Haltwhistle where, for once, the town's isolated position worked in its favour. The Ministry of Supply also re-opened the old Plenmeller Colliery's railway sidings and used the site as an explosives depot.



Notes

- ¹ Writing two decades afterwards, the *Haltwhistle Echo* (20th July 1951) said that events of the early 1930s 'made Haltwhistle the Jarrow of the West'.
- ² *Hexham Courant*, 23rd July 1932.
- ³ *Evening Chronicle*, 12th July 1937.
- ⁴ *Evening Chronicle*, 13th July 1937.
- ⁵ As above.
- ⁶ *Newcastle Journal*, 13th July 1937.
- ⁷ Haltwhistle was soon displaying some classic features of a mining community, with schools and chapels supported by coal and colliery-owners, a flourishing co-operative society and a mechanics' institute.
- ⁸ *Hexham Courant*, 17th April 1909.
- ⁹ Based upon Ministry of Labour, *Reports of Investigations into the Industrial Conditions in Certain Depressed Areas*, Cmd. 4728 (1934) pp. 12, 116-7.

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- 10 *House of Commons Debates*, 3rd December 1936, vol 318 cc1412-3.
- 11 Board of Trade, Mines Department, *List of Mines in Great Britain & Ireland* (1930, 1932 & 1938).
- 12 Plenmeller Colliery almost closed in 1925 when it hit liquidity problems. After local co-operative society officials failed to persuade the Co-operative Wholesale Society to take on the mine (the CWS employed 850 miners at Shillbottle), a receiver was appointed and continued to operate the colliery until the Greenhead & District Coal Co. Ltd was formed to purchase the business.
- 13 F. M. Trotter and S. E. Hollingsworth, *Memoirs of the Geological Survey. The Geology of Brampton & District* (1931), p. 73.
- 14 *Tynedale Mirror*, 24th January 1935.
- 15 Ministry of Labour (1934), p. 12. When the Area Commissioner visited the town in 1936 he was 'glad to see Haltwhistle not looking so derelict as so many villages he had seen in County Durham'; *Hexham Courant*, 5th December 1936.
- 16 There had once been brick and sanitary-ware factories in the area. To re-introduce brick-making would be to manufacture a bulky, low value product. This would have required a large local demand to have a meaningful impact on unemployment levels, but with little building going on in the neighbourhood, transport costs would have made it hard to compete in a wider market. Prohibitive freightage had already been a factor in the recent closures of some collieries along the South Tyne.
- 17 The term 'Depressed Areas' had been replaced by the more sensitive 'Special Areas'.
- 18 Minister of Labour, *Second Report of the Commissioners for the Special Areas (England & Wales)* Cmd. 5090 (1936) pp. 107 & 113.
- 19 *The Times*, 27th March 1936.
- 20 Ministry of Labour (1936), Appendix IV p.60. Nine families were assisted under a Household Removal Scheme.
- 21 As above, p. 62, said that 'some men at Haltwhistle' had shown an interest in a group holding and some had been undergoing training on Land Association estates in Hampshire and Essex. However, the report also admitted that no formal programme of land settlement had been possible and securing suitable land had proved very difficult.
- 22 These included black-out, camouflage, reflex, anti-glint and luminous paints.

SCHEME
FOR ERECTING
Improved Dwelling Houses
FOR THE
WORKING CLASSES.

Much has been published and said of late respecting the Abodes of the Working Classes, which are admitted to be generally of a character confessedly injurious to health and pernicious to morals. Respectable and industrious Artizans have repeatedly declared that they are able and willing to pay for better accommodation if it was offered to them on reasonable terms; but the fact is, that small, self-contained houses, are not provided for them. There is reason to believe that such houses might be erected for their accommodation, on the most approved sanitary principles, which would yield a good rate of interest on the capital invested, and give the County Franchise to the Owners.

Since public attention has been directed to the subject of Improved Dwellings for the Working Classes, it has been ascertained that such houses should be erected in rows of two floors; each house to have a separate entrance, and all the Apartments on a floor, to consist of a Kitchen, Two Bed Rooms, Scullery, Pantry, Coal Cellar, Water Closet, and Dust Bin; and to be well lighted, drained, ventilated, and supplied with water. Such Houses for the Working Classes would add greatly to their comfort and happiness, and to the health of their Families.

A Plot of Ground, situate between Lax's Buildings and Todds Nook Farm House, bounded by the road leading to the Barracks, and fronting the Leazes, has been secured on advantageous terms for the erection of Improved Dwelling Houses for the Working Classes. It is proposed to raise the sum required for erecting such houses in that healthy locality in shares of £10, which will give the industrious classes an opportunity of investing small sums safely and profitably. No copartnership need be formed, nor any mutual obligation undertaken. The price of a share may be paid at once or by instalments. The Shareholders not to be allowed to call up the principal sum advanced by them, but they may transfer their shares to a third party with the consent of the Committee of Management.

As soon as shares to the amount of £1,000 are taken up, a Meeting of the Shareholders will be held, when they will complete the purchase of the ground, select a plan on which the houses shall be built, receive estimates for their erection, appoint a committee of management, and adopt all measures necessary for accomplishing their object. Should the shareholders prefer to build without delay, they can have money on reasonable terms, to be repaid by instalments.

Persons desirous of becoming Shareholders will receive all information by applying to Mr. DANIEL LIDDELL, 38, Carlisle-street, Newcastle; and for the convenience of persons who are engaged during the day, Mr. Liddell will attend at his house every Evening during the ensuing week from 8 till 10 o'clock.

Newcastle, June 13, 1850.

Gateshead: Printed at the Observer Steam Press, by W. DOUGLAS.

The debate about the quality of housing for working families has a long history. This document dates from June 1850 and highlights a scheme near Todds Nook and the Barracks in Newcastle, promoted by the radical activist Daniel Liddell, the subject of Judith McSwain's essay on page 163. Reproduced courtesy of Newcastle Libraries and Information Services.

At home in Tyneside in 1966

Peter Brabban

One of the 'great crusades' of post war (1939-45) Britain and a significant driver in the modernization of Britain was in providing good housing for working people. In the North East the need for better housing was acute. The 1951 census showed that in Tyneside and Sunderland 42% of the occupied dwellings had three rooms or less, that 42% had no fixed bath and 19% had no exclusive use of a lavatory. In the Durham coalfields the picture was no better; 40% of dwellings with three rooms or less, 54% with no fixed bath and 26% without a lavatory.¹ In Newcastle in 1950 a champion for new housing emerged in the shape of T. Dan Smith, who in his election address for the Walker Ward in the 1950 local elections declared 'I am deeply conscious of the appalling housing conditions which exist in the city and am far from satisfied that anything of note is being done to alleviate these conditions'.²

The changing face of housing in Newcastle during the next decade and a half was intimately connected to the, sometimes controversial, career of T. Dan Smith. When the Labour Party took control of Newcastle City Council in 1958 Smith was appointed as the Chairman of the Housing Committee and began his campaign to create the 'Brasilia of the North'. He was a passionate advocate for the potential of town planning and saw it as a means of improving the lives of ordinary people. In 1959 he was given the opportunity to enact this passion when he was appointed Leader of the City Council. He set about creating Britain's first free standing Planning

Department, harnessing all the key departments in the Council to drive forward the regeneration of the City. By 1966 Smith had relinquished his leadership role in the city's regeneration. In March of 1966 he resigned as a city councillor; instead he was putting his considerable energies into his new role as Chairman of the Northern Economic Planning Council. Never the less the first products of his campaign for regeneration were plain to see in the west end of the city with the Cruddas Park redevelopment. The eight high-rise blocks of flats not only altered the skyline of the city, but also changed the nature of the communities of the West End. In later years the flats were to become the focus for complaints about the quality of the buildings and the cramped conditions in which flat dwellers lived. In 1966 they were seen as a blessed escape from the city's slums, even so, some of the problems highlighted in later years were beginning to emerge.

The Corporation replied with a radical and ambitious 5-year plan for housing in the City (Housing – A Review of the Current Problems and Policies). The plan marked a sea change in housing policy with a move away from a quantity approach to one of quality of life. The Council decided to 'make the social satisfaction of tenants and house-owners the principal aim of its housing policy'. Other, more specific, aims were also part of the plan including the building of 10,000 houses before 1972, that these houses should be larger than those previously built, that there should be priority in housing for the targeted areas of Elswick, Benwell, Kinross Drive (Kenton), Byker, Heaton and the Rochester Estate in Walker. The Council acknowledged that to meet these ambitious targets they would need to use overspill housing schemes such as that at Killingworth. Revitalisation of housing would also take place in Benwell, Elswick and Sandyford. In a far sighted move the Council placed great emphasis on community involvement in redevelopment and even proposed 'community organisers and group workers – to assist the social development of areas like Elswick and Scotswood Road'. This example of 1960's radicalism was years ahead of the government who in 1969 established the Community Development Programme (CDP) and established Community Development Projects at

Benwell and Walker. The radical analysis of poverty and the actions they took soon made the CDPs an uncomfortable fit for the government. The housing plan even cast an eye on the immigrant community, proposing a co-ordinating committee to 'speed the process of social integration'; the precursor of the Community Relations Council.³

Within days of the plan being published the City Planning Officer, Mr Wilfred Burns, announced that the Corporation would cease building multi-storey flats. He told a press conference that 'we would have been making a serious mistake if we had gone on much longer We are not clearing any more areas just for tall blocks of flats'.⁴ The reason he gave for this decision was because tall blocks of flats were only economic for smaller living units and that in future they would not be building one or two roomed homes. This announcement was followed within weeks by a decision to take up the option of 'overspill' housing of 1,500 homes in Killingworth New Town. The 'deck access housing' in Killingworth was described by Roy Gazzard, Director of Development for Killingworth as 'Multi storey blocks laid on their sides'.

The idea of new towns was not a new one. Letchworth in Hertfordshire had been built in the 1930s and the first homes in Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe had been opened in 1948 but in the 1960s the new town phenomena gathered pace. Newcastle's satellite new towns of Killingworth and Cramlington were just starting to get off the ground. Killingworth in 1966 had only 62 houses completed and Moira Rutherford, columnist with the *Evening Chronicle* in her series on new towns described the township, 'with its flat open spaces, mud, pit heap background, and only the odd new building'. She went on to say that 'Killingworth has no shops, clubs, clinics, not even many houses, but somehow it radiates more promise, more excitement Perhaps it is the huge sophisticated mass of the new Norgas House, headquarters of Northern Gas, is the dominating factor that makes Killingworth look so hopeful'.⁵

She was not so generous to Cramlington, which she described as 'scarcely off the fairly bleak ground...Bowling alleys, swimming pools,

community centres and even new schools are so nebulous and far off that they are usually discounted in family discussions on moving in'. She puts forward the view that Cramlington's main function is that of a dormitory for people working in Tyneside or Northumberland: 'In March 1966 you need a good imagination not to boggle at the town image. The reality of Cramlington is a well established Northumberland rural village with a new growth on the outskirts'.⁶

In the twenty-first century Cramlington is much more than this. But not all new housing was slum clearance or overspill. On 6th April the first houses of the prestige housing estate at Cheviot View, Kenton were opened by Lady Georgina Coleridge the editorial Director of Homes and Gardens; the estate would, within two years, contain 120 houses and five blocks of flats. Lady Coleridge was complimentary about the housing and of the changing face of the North East saying, 'I myself am amazed at the difference in the North East since I was here some years ago. The depressed area image of the North East is disappearing'. More controversially she went on, 'What is obviously needed is more high quality executive homes to go hand in hand with the new prosperity'.⁷

Not everyone was comfortable with this view. During a debate in the Council about the 'luxury' Kenton Bar Estate Councillor Dr Cyril Lipman declared that 'This scheme is for the rich type of person' and that a house buyer, under the co-ownership scheme would need to be earning a minimum salary of £30 per week (weekly average in 1966 was less than £20) because the houses cost £4000; 'I would be more pleased if this scheme were for houses of £2,500' he added. Councillor John Cox went on to argue that 'It is the people who cannot afford a £2,500 house we should look after'.⁸

This debate, and the co-ownership scheme, underlined the dilemma faced by councillors in providing good social housing in the face of a growing trend towards private house ownership. An increasing number of young couples in the 1960s aspired to owning their own home. Dominic Sandbrook states that: 'Between 1950 and 1970 nearly six million new

houses were built across the nation, and home ownership almost doubled, from 27% to 50% of all households.⁹ In the North East this figure was much lower with only 36% of owner/occupied households. While the five-year plan saw little growth in private ownership because of the lack of building land in the city, on the fringes and outside of the city private housing developments were springing up everywhere.

For some people, especially the older generation, the rate of development in Newcastle was quite dizzying and destabilising and they hankered for the old neighbourhoods and community relationships. Their point of view was championed by the Evening Chronicle, in an article on 10th March 1966 under a headline declaring, 'Exiles on new estates still go back to Benwell'. They describe 'the daily exodus from the estates at Newbiggin Hall, Westerhope, Kenton, North Fenham and Cruddas Park' to the shops and pubs of Benwell by those who had been moved out of the area, declaring that 'many of the (ex) residents of Benwell still look upon the ruined streets as their 'real' home'. The article quotes a Mrs Doreen Hind as saying 'I prefer coming here. I meet old neighbours with whom I would have normally lost touch. If it was possible I wish I could have still lived in Benwell'.¹⁰

With its abandonment of high rise development and the introduction of community workers Newcastle Corporation was at the forefront of councils throughout Britain and was in tune with the spirit of the '60s.

Addendum

In August 1966 the author, along with two friends Jack Coates and George English undertook a three-day project to document Newcastle using photographs. The photographs accompanying this article are part of that project.

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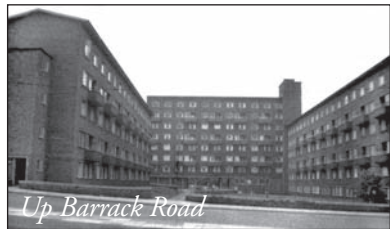
Advert in the Newcastle Journal, March 1966

Notes

- 1 David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury Publications, 2007), p. 593.
- 2 Kynaston, p. 508.
- 3 All quotations are from the report in the *Evening Chronicle*, 15th January 1966, p. 3.
- 4 *Evening Chronicle*, 17th January 1966, p. 1.
- 5 Moira Rutherford, *Evening Chronicle*, 9th March 1966, p. 6.
- 6 Rutherford, *Evening Chronicle*, 8th March 1966, p. 6.
- 7 *Evening Chronicle*, 6th April 1966, p. 3.
- 8 *Evening Chronicle*, 3rd March 1966.
- 9 *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus 2006), p. 192.
- 10 *Evening Chronicle*, 10th March 1966.

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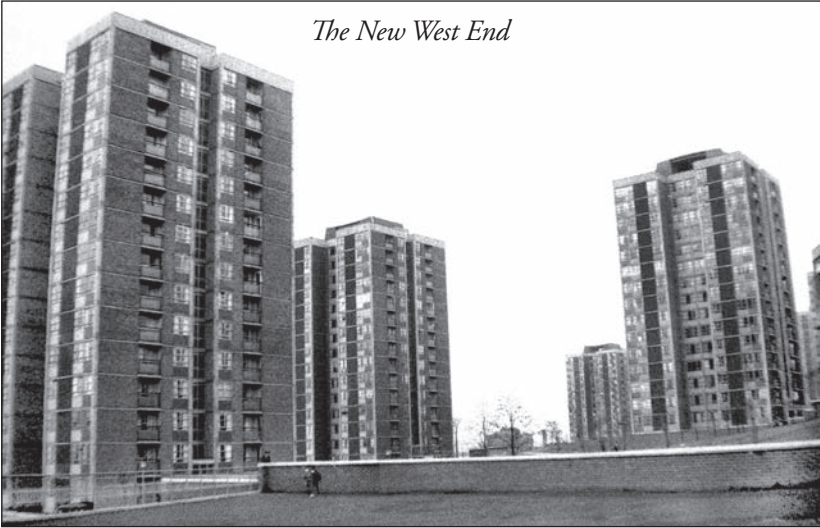
The 'Old' West End



*The process of
demolition*



The New West End



Newcastle's Asylums and the case of Daniel Liddell

Judith McSwaine

In 2013, as part of the Popular Politics Project, I researched Daniel Liddell, a radical activist and education advocate, born in South Lanark on 25th August 1801.¹ It was possible to account for twenty years (1833-53) of his life up to 21st January 1853 when he presented a donation of £5 from The Right Honourable Lady Noel Byron to the Juvenile Crime Reform Association.² His disappearance after 1853 from the Newcastle social and political scene was a puzzle. In November 2014 John Charlton's searches at Northumberland County Record Office (Woodhorn), on a totally different subject, unearthed letters which added more to Daniel's story. In this essay I will discuss what the letters revealed about Daniel and the influential people he was able to call upon at a difficult time. I will then summarise what I found out about Daniel's doctor, the physician at the town's pauper Lunatic Asylum, its history and administration and the close association between Newcastle's political and medical elites.

The letters - correspondence between J B Blackett, MP and Daniel Liddell, Donald Mackintosh MD and Sir George Grey

The series of letters discovered in the Blackett (Wylam) collection at Northumberland Archives included one written on 24th January 1853 by D Mackintosh, MD, to the recently elected MP for Newcastle.³ It

explained Daniel Liddell's disappearance from Newcastle 'in consequence of disappointments', and that he was intending 'to leave Newcastle on Thursday first' and emigrate to Australia.⁴ A Committee of Gentlemen, formed by Dr Mackintosh, were canvassing friends of the Liberal cause to pay Daniel's expenses and Blackett was being asked to join them, which he did, his contribution of £2 being later acknowledged in a letter of thanks from Mackintosh written on 1st February 1853.

However, Mackintosh wrote a second letter in reply to Blackett, on 27 January - a 'hurried note', sections of which are indecipherable - in which he offers a very different description of the 'man of the town', the political activist and teacher I had imagined. He describes Daniel as a disappointed man who had 'wrought long and diligently for an ungrateful public', who had been struggling for a long time, who had been 'suppressed, neglected ... demented', 'distressed' and 'badly off for necessities'. Worse still, Dr Mackintosh had stepped in to prevent Daniel being 'incarcerated'. To avoid this fate, Mackintosh has suggested a new life in the New World, and reports that Daniel will board *The Eagle* sailing from Liverpool on 10th February 1853 with money (£100, a considerable sum, equivalent to £8,500 when converted to today's values) and letters of introduction secured by the Committee.⁵

Blackett received a letter from Daniel himself on 26th February, almost one month after Mackintosh's appeal and some weeks after his hoped-for departure for Australia.⁶ Daniel was confident enough in this letter to ask Blackett to wait 'upon Sir George Grey at your earliest convenience' to 'explain my object in going to Australia' and secure an 'introduction to some official gentlemen in Sydney' from him. He talks about his involvement in the 1852 election campaign and his role in enabling Liberal supporters to qualify for voting rights in both Newcastle and North Northumberland, where Sir George Grey failed to get elected (although in January 1853 he gained the Morpeth seat when the sitting MP stood down in his favour).⁷

Daniel's final persuasive flourish is to list the prominent figures who have already indicated their support for him: '

It is gratifying to me to be able to state that Sir Charles Trevelyan, Sir [Chas] Monk, Mr A A Monck and other gentlemen ... wrote me very kind letters, some of these gentlemen enclosing introductions to friends in Australia ...'

There is a hint in Daniel's letter that it is his activism that has worn him down: 'some of my friends desire me to take no part in any philanthropic or benevolent object'. Nevertheless, even before he has started on his journey, he is already thinking about how he wants 'to be usefully and profitably employed in Australia' and will not 'remain long indifferent to what is taking place there'. The Chaplain of the Gaol at Durham, he says, has already asked him to make arrangements for the emigration of 'repentant prisoners' if funds can be raised.

Daniel was rewarded with a letter of introduction - Sir George Grey confirmed this in a letter to Blackett dated 5th March 1853.⁸

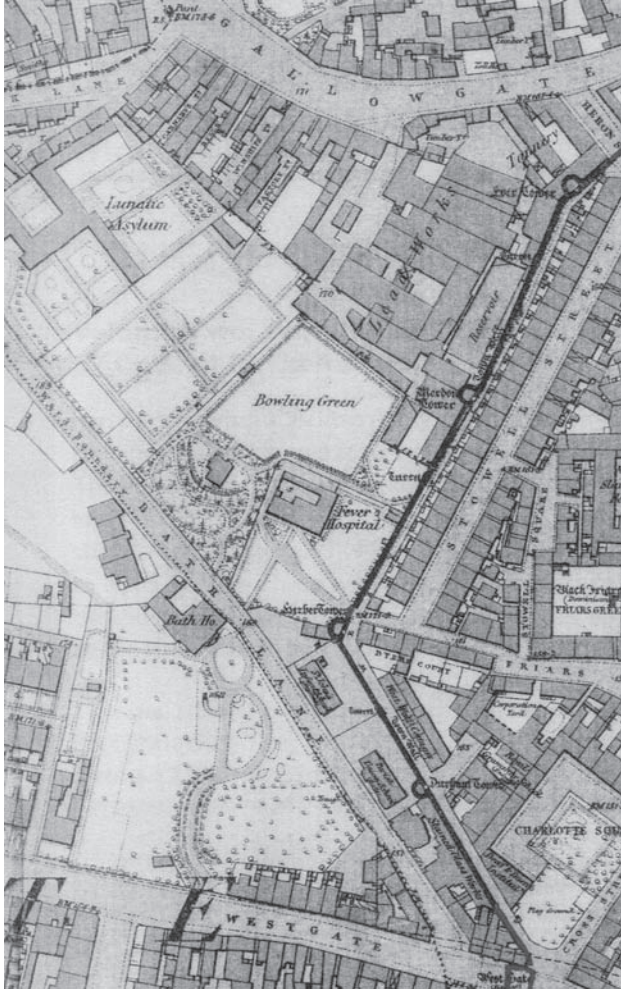
These letters give contrasting impressions of Daniel Liddell. Mackintosh's letters describe a man struggling with disappointment and mental fragility. In contrast, Daniel's letter shows him relishing a new challenge, although he is leaving the place that has been his home for at least twenty years. Significantly, he has an impressive network of highly influential people to help him avoid his *fate*.

Dr Mackintosh

The earliest reference to Dr Mackintosh I found was in an on-line newspaper search, in a report of a meeting of the Temperance Society in Newcastle's Music Hall on Boxing Day 1832 which Mackintosh attended with his friend, W. C. Trevelyan of Wallington.⁹ Mackintosh, aged twenty-one, addressed the meeting, giving a social and medical perspective on intemperance. He would build up other good connections through his professional life as a doctor of mental diseases with the medical elite of the town. Dr Mackintosh's name appeared in a report in *The Lancet* six years later, which described him as the medical superintendent at Bath

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Lane Lunatic Asylum (also called Newcastle Lunatic Asylum at Warden's Close).¹⁰



The Lunatic Asylum at the north end of Bath Lane, as it appears in the 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey (1859). Reproduced courtesy of Newcastle Libraries and Information Service.

By 1841, the census records him as the only medically trained person at the Bath Lane asylum, suggesting his position was an important one. In the 1851 census, only two years before writing letters about Daniel Liddell, Donald McIntosh (aged 39) a Scot, is described, as 'Head' at *Dr Smith's Asylum*, Bath Lane, and MD to Newcastle Lunatic Asylum. The census shows that around the time he was treating Daniel he had charge of sixty-six patients aged from seventeen to eighty-six years and was assisted by eight attendants, a gardener, a cook, three housemaids and a kitchen maid. The male patients Daniel risked joining were working class in the main (labourers, loggers, a plumber, a stone mason, a miner), although there were some with middle class occupations: a clergyman, a clerk, a lieutenant and a land surveyor. All the female patients had working class occupations: servant, housekeeper, charwoman, dressmaker, though there was one actress among them. Four patients were recorded as blind, deaf, deaf and dumb.¹¹

In addition to treating patients, Mackintosh was lecturer in mental diseases at the Newcastle upon Tyne School of Medicine and Surgery. This position brought him into contact with leading figures in the administration of the town. He taught alongside Dennis Embleton, T. E. Headlam, Edward Charlton, Samuel Fenwick, Thomas Humble, among others.¹² In 1859, along with some of the medical lecturers named above, Mackintosh was awarded MD (by Diploma) by Durham University in recognition of 'services to their various chairs', and in a gesture to 'more closely unite the College to the University'.¹³ Earlier that year at a Burns Centenary Supper at the Town Hall, he is reported as sitting alongside Sir John Fife, who occupied the chair, and George Ridley MP.¹⁴

The significance of personal connections is illustrated in the account of the County Bench which appeared in the *Newcastle Courant* when Mackintosh was granted permission to open his own lunatic asylum in Dinsdale Park (formerly the Dinsdale Hotel). His successful application was supported by a member of the bench, who

had had the pleasure of Dr Mackintosh's acquaintance

for several years, and a gentlemen well qualified to give an opinion had assured him that he was a very fit and proper person to be entrusted with the care of insane persons.¹⁵

Finding Doctor Mackintosh's name associated with a Lunatic Asylum was a shock and explains why he regarded Daniel's fate as so precarious. Mackintosh was very well placed to understand what lay ahead for an impoverished individual like Daniel Liddell.

Provision, Control and Funding of Lunatic Asylums in Newcastle

The history of lunatic asylums in Newcastle is not straightforward. The Common Council records indicate an expansion of public facilities in 1767, when a new hospital, The Pauper Hospital for Lunatics of Newcastle, Northumberland and Durham was opened at Warden's Close to house thirty patients.¹⁶ This decision had put the incumbent physician, Dr John Hall, at odds with the Common Council when the latter rejected his ideas of accommodating private and Poor Law 'residents' in the same building, albeit on different floors. The Council may have considered Hall to have been pursuing self interest, or even attempting to profit from public money, on the other hand, he could have wanted to ensure the same rules applied to paying and pauper patients.¹⁷ The outcome was that in 1776 Dr Hall opened a new 'House for Genteel or opulent lunatics' one mile from Newcastle. Registered as a Private Madhouse, it catered only for those who could afford to pay with no paupers admitted.¹⁸

Conditions in the Pauper asylum deteriorated. By 1817, a local enquiry was held, prompted by the government following national scandals, but no action taken. At the heart of the crisis was a growing population in the town which had only one place 'of relief for the overcrowded Poor Houses of the area'.¹⁹ In 1822, a Dr Glenton replaced the Physician in Charge for the previous twenty-one years. Matters did not improve and by 1824, another Committee of Inquiry found that funding the asylum on a subscription basis had failed. It had become a private business but the

conditions were very poor – chains, iron bars, dungeon-like.²⁰ Conditions in private asylums were equally concerning. In 1837 Paget, the Proprietor of Belle Grove Asylum, was found in a state of intoxication and unfit to perform the Duty of Medical Attendant. The JP Visitors, who included T. E. Headlam and Sir J. Fife, investigated the incident.²¹ Paget did not have his licence removed. Instead it was given jointly to Paget and a James Alexander MD, who had formerly been in partnership with him and who had some pecuniary interest in the asylum.²² The outcome appears to benefit the proprietor, a member of the medical profession, at the expense of the inmates.

The close association between the medical elites and the political elites in the administration of asylums is made clear in the way licences were granted and Visitors appointed. The Care and Treatment of Insane Persons in England Act (1842) gave powers to the Aldermen of the town to grant licences and appoint Visitors to asylums. Following the pattern set by earlier Acts, the Visitors were charged with inspecting the premises and the care of the inmates. The *Newcastle Courant* carried a notice in October 1842 listing those involved in this process. Again we see T E Headlam and Sir John Fife among those issuing licences for both the private and public asylums. The JPs who granted the licences were also those that served as Visitors, responsible for supervising these licences. When Mackintosh himself sought the tenancy of Bath Lane lunatic asylum in September 1852, the matter was referred to the Town Council Finance Committee.²³ T. E. Headlam MD, a lecturer at the College of Medicine alongside Dr Mackintosh, was still a member of the Town Council and a Visitor to the Asylum.

These overlapping networks of medical and civic power had the potential to control how asylums were run. Yet, despite the medical men having influence in the Town Council they seem not to have provided the push needed to improve things. During the 1850s, the time when Daniel risked being incarcerated, some of Newcastle's pauper lunatics had to be accommodated in asylums outside the city. The Newcastle Board of

Guardians was asked by Mr Kent of Gateshead Lunatic asylum in 1855 to increase payment per patient from 9s to 11s per week. In 1856 more patients were dispersed to Durham County Asylum in Sedgefield and Dunston Lodge Asylum. When Northumberland Pauper Asylum opened in 1859 it took patients from Durham, Bensham, Gateshead Fell, Dunston Lodge and Gateshead.²⁴ Lunatics, it seems, could find themselves in institutions throughout the region. In 1861 there were still forty-nine pauper lunatics in male and female lunatic wards in the Workhouse.²⁵ The situation became so bad that Newcastle Corporation was reduced to renting the Bensham Asylum in 1865 which in turn soon become overcrowded, the patients again dispersed to Dunston Lodge. It would be another eight years before the new Lunatic Asylum at Coxlodge would open in July 1869 to receive 159 patients.²⁶

It has been suggested that the town was famous for charitable foundations and hospitals and had good health practitioners on the Council.²⁷ Some medical men played an active part in promoting Newcastle, for example, Dr Headlam had been responsible for bringing a meeting of the prestigious British Association for the Advancement of Science to Newcastle in 1838. A report of this event, published in the *Lancet*, declared Newcastle to be one of **the** towns of the empire, deserving of more national attention for its 'elegance, wealth and science'.²⁸ While the development of Newcastle went on apace, the state of public health in Newcastle was perilous and this at a time when key political figures in Newcastle were from the medical world.²⁹ Aldermen Dr Headlam and Sir J. Fife, so closely involved in the establishment of the town's medical school where Mackintosh lectured in 'mental diseases', did not get involved in public health agitation and, it seems, did not see the need for better facilities in the town for pauper lunatics.³⁰ Daniel Liddell was fortunate in having a network of support to help him secure an alternative to the poor facilities overseen by the medical Aldermen in which his Doctor worked.

Emigration during the Gold Rush – a good prescription for Daniel Liddell?

The final thread of my research related to Daniel's emigration to Australia. Given Dr Mackintosh's assessment I was curious about how Daniel would cope with what would be a testing adventure for the most robust of travellers. His journey took place during Australia's Gold Rush, shortly after Edward Hammond Hargraves had struck gold in New South Wales in February 1851. 'By the end of the year ships were on the way bringing hopefuls from Britain, many Cornish, Scots and Irish among them'.³¹ In 1852 alone, 370,000 immigrants swelled the population of Australia, which doubled in the decade.³² Prospecting communities were made up of Chinese, Europeans and Americans. Those from the British Isles were escaping the Irish Famine and Highland clearances, sometimes assisted by emigration societies. Sir Charles Trevelyan, a subscriber to Daniel's cause, had co-founded the Highland and Islands Emigration Society in 1851. Just before the discovery of gold, child emigration had been legalised by Parliament and Poor Law Guardians began to fund child emigration. (The last children to be forced to emigrate from Britain left for Australia in 1970).³³

The port of Liverpool was a point of departure for large numbers of British migrants, as well as Scandinavians, Russians and Poles who arrived by train from Hull.³⁴ The pages of the *Liverpool Mercury* during this period give a sense of the frenzy of activity that Daniel would encounter. There were adverts for clothing, boots, and all kinds of equipment that emigrés would need for Australia. The *Liverpool Mercury* on 18th February 1853 ran twenty adverts for passage to Australia, New Zealand and Canada, each shipping line emphasising its best features. The Eagle Line (the company mentioned by Mackintosh) boasts surgeons on board and the 'extraordinary' speed of the vessel. The presence of a doctor on board would have been comforting to travellers facing the three to four month voyage, riding out storms and risking diseases like cholera and typhus. I hope the funds gathered up by Dr Mackintosh and his Committee were sufficient to keep Daniel out of

steerage, where the bulk of his fellow migrants shared poorly ventilated, dormitory-like accommodation. A better berth would have eaten into his resources; passage home from Melbourne started at twenty guineas - 'First Saloon by arrangement' according to Melbourne publication, *The Age*, in April 1858.³⁵ His funds may also have had to secure a room in a respectable hotel away from the quays for several days; sometimes passengers waited up to ten days for their berth. The alternative would have been a crowded lodging house or worse. On 18th March 1853, the Birkenhead Depot was preparing for a further thousand passengers to join the eight hundred who had failed to get a berth. The new depot was described with pride in the local paper: it had a chapel, a fever ward, a lying-in ward and a reading room where male emigrants met.³⁶ Daniel's final challenge would have been to avoid the confidence tricksters or 'runners' who would harass and steal the luggage of luckless migrants waiting to embark from the seething docks.

I could not find Daniel on passenger lists to Australia but another on-line search brought up the *Police Gazette* for Vide, New South Wales: a D Liddell of 40 George Street was mentioned in connection with the loss of a notebook in 1878. I remain hopeful that more substantial evidence of Daniel's successful emigration will emerge in time.³⁷

Conclusion

The letters in Northumberland Archives provide an explanation for Daniel Liddell's disappearance from Newcastle life in the 1850s. It was satisfying to find that his hard work in the town for liberal causes provided him with a network of support at a time of great difficulty and distress. His case study shows how much an individual, without family support, needed social capital to avoid dependence on the Poor Law, which could mean facing life in the Workhouse or the Pauper Lunatic Asylum. Dr Mackintosh's anxiety to propel Daniel towards a new life was rooted in his professional experience. He practiced at a time when pauper lunatics were very poorly served, despite having significant medical figures involved in the provision

and administration of public and private asylums through the Corporation. The overlapping of the political and medical élites in Newcastle did not provide a push towards public health improvements, though Newcastle did eventually get a purpose built asylum. Until that time it was down to personal and professional networks to provide assistance to individuals in times of trouble. Not everyone would have the social capital of Mr Liddell whose flight to the New World would indeed be a huge personal challenge.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Mike Greatbatch and John Charlton.

Daniel Liddell's Political & Professional Connections, 1852/53

Name	Profession	Politics	Comments
Daniel Liddell	Teacher	Educationalist Humane treatment of children, the blind and the deaf; Franchise reform and voter registration Agent of Anti Corn Law League Poor Law accountability and audit	Active in Newcastle political circles
Donald Mackintosh MD	Physician		Specialist in the treatment of the mentally ill. Superintendent of Bath Lane Asylum

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Thomas Emerson Headlam	Physician (Infirmary)	Mayor of Newcastle 1837 & 1845 Uncle of Liberal MP for Newcastle	Eminent physician and local politician, President of the Lit & Phil for five years, President of the British Association for Advancement of Science (1837) Visitor (overseer) of Bath Lane Asylum
J B Blackett		Liberal MP for Newcastle	
Sir George Grey	Aristocrat (Fallodon)	Liberal MP for Morpeth	Nephew of Earl Grey
Sir Charles Trevelyan	Aristocrat (Wallington)	Liberal	Co-founder of the Highland & Islands Emigration Society
Sir Charles Monck	Aristocrat (Belsay)	Liberal	
A A Monck			
Sir John Fife	Physician	Liberal Mayor (1838 & 1834) and chief magistrate during Chartist agitation; knighted in 1840 for breaking Chartist movement in Newcastle	Founded the Eye Hospital (1822) and pioneer in medical teaching; head of the Medical School. Vice-President of British Association for Advancement of Science (1837). Visitor (overseer) of Bath Lane Asylum

Notes

- 1 Judith McSwaine, 'Daniel Liddell', *North East History* 44: (2013), pp. 81-85. See also www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk. Place of birth Pettinain, South Lanarkshire.
- 2 *Newcastle Courant*, 21st January 1853.
- 3 Blackett (Wylam) MSS (Northumberland Archives ZBK/C/1/B/3/9/121/129/130). The other elected MP for Newcastle was T. E. Headlam, nephew of Dr T. E. Headlam.
- 4 Blackett (Wylam) MSS (ZBK/C/1/B/3/9/129).
- 5 For this calculation, see <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> accessed 12th February 2014.
- 6 Blackett (Wylam) MSS (ZBK/C/1/B/3/9/121).
- 7 Sir George Grey's extended family connections linked him to the Whig political aristocracy. Charles, second Earl Grey, the prime minister who carried the Reform Act, was his uncle; his sister Jane married Francis Baring, Baron Northbrook; Charles Grey, Queen Victoria's private secretary, and Henry George, third Earl Grey, the leader of the Whigs in the House of Lords, were his cousins. He was elected as a Whig MP for Devonport, and appointed under-secretary for the colonies in Melbourne's government. He inherited the Fallodon estate from his uncle Sir Henry George Grey and stood for North Northumberland in 1847 and won against a protectionist. This was the seat he lost in 1852 to a Percy family candidate.
- 8 Blackett (Wylam) MSS (ZBK/C/1/B/3/9/129).
- 9 *Newcastle Courant*, 29th December 1832.
- 10 *The Lancet*, Vol. 1 (1839), p. 642.
- 11 1851 Census (HO 107. 2406).
- 12 *Newcastle Courant*, 25th July 1851.
- 13 *Newcastle Courant*, 7th October 1859.
- 14 *Newcastle Courant*, 29th January 1859.
- 15 *Newcastle Courant*, 12th January 1855.
- 16 J. Le Gassicke, 'The Early History of the Asylums of Newcastle upon Tyne', *New Medical Journal* Vol XXXI, No 1 (1969), pp. 36-41.
- 17 Le Gassicke, p. 39. Dr Hall's rules for Pauper Hospitals had been adopted by Manchester Lunatic Hospital a year earlier.
- 18 Le Gassicke, p. 38
- 19 Le Gassicke, p. 39
- 20 As above.
- 21 *Newcastle Courant*, 22nd October 1836.
- 22 Visit Reports – Belle Grove 1833-1845 (Twas MD.NC/94/2).
- 23 *Newcastle Courant*, 24th September, 1852
- 24 *An Administrative History of St Nicholas' Hospital*, (Twas HO.SN).
- 25 *Newcastle Courant*, 12th April 1861.
- 26 *An Administrative History of St Nicholas' Hospital*, TwAS HO.SN.

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- 27 J. Smith, 'Public Health 1850-80', in *Essays in Tyneside Labour History*, ed. by N. McCord, (Newcastle: Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic, Department of Humanities, 1977).
- 28 *The Lancet*, Vol. 2 (1838), p. 842.
- 29 Smith, p.26
- 30 As above.
- 31 Richard Cavendish, 'The Australian Gold Rush Begins', *History Today*, Vol. 51 (2001).
- 32 <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-gold-rush> accessed 18 Aug 2014.
- 33 *Emigration to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa*, National Museums Liverpool, Maritime Archives & Library Information Sheet 12 (MMM/DOCS/LR/16.2.04/Rev JW/10.08); and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Humphreys accessed 17 Aug 2014.
- 34 *Emigration to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa*, as above.
- 35 *The Age*, 6th April 1858.
- 36 *Liverpool Mercury*, 18th March 1853.
- 37 If he did join the throng of gold diggers he may have become involved with the Ballarat Reform League which, in November 1854 published a Charter containing 'passionate demands for more people in the colony of Victoria to have greater involvement in making laws in Victoria, such as having the right to votes, and to stand for parliament. The charter also stated that the administration of the goldfields and the colony's police service and justice system needed to be improved', a cause Daniel would have found it very difficult to be 'indifferent to'; Blackett (Wylam) MSS, (ZBK/C/1/B/3/9/121).

A History of Midwifery in Newcastle upon Tyne

Janet Medcalf

The day that *homo sapiens* walked upright on this world, the female of the species had a problem. Henceforth, most women were going to need help to deliver their offspring and so there emerged the second oldest profession in the world, midwifery.

Who became midwives? Initially, we can assume that they would have been relatives, experienced in childbirth, or women who emerged in local communities with a skill in helping other women.

In this essay I consider the overall development of midwifery specifically in Newcastle, as well as more generally in England. The records for Newcastle upon Tyne become more informative from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and the core of this essay looks at the development of the profession in the city from that time up to the 1950's. However, by setting out the context of midwifery in the earlier period, it increases our understanding of how midwifery developed in our society.

Early Development

According to David Harley, in the early modern period (1400–1800), midwives effectively remained a 'mute' group within society, as the majority of those undertaking this role worked informally, were unlicensed and, therefore, mostly unrecorded.¹

Society in this period was still essentially agrarian and city communities still small and close-knit. Some midwives attended births on an occasional basis as a form of neighbourly support or to give family assistance, whilst others (but probably not many) worked steadily at their occupation for the greater part of their lives and earned a regular income from it.²

As Harley explains, in England during this period midwives straddled two spheres – helping women in the birthing process and supervising events in, and sometimes out, of the delivery chamber. These requirements arose as a result of the role of the Church in supervising and licensing of midwives, and the demands of the Parish and County courts. The oath required by the Church in return for a licence imposed a wide range of duties on midwives but not all midwives sought licensing, either because of lack of experience, informal practice, cost, or because of the infrequency with which their skills were called upon. However, all midwives were expected to bring infants to the parish church for baptism and to recover unborn children from dead mothers to ensure baptism.

Church-licensed midwives were expected by society to have a recognised level of moral integrity and religious conformity as these attributes were seen as vital in ensuring their ability to testify in court as ‘expert witnesses’. Harley describes the extent of their role at this time as encompassing the questioning of mothers on the identity of fathers of bastard children; confirmation of pregnancy where ante-nuptial fornication was suspected; and acting as witnesses in rape trials and those of infanticide.³

Whatever the role of the midwife during this period, practices remained crude and Keith Thomas cites one midwife (unnamed) in 1687 who claimed that two-thirds of all contemporary abortions, stillbirths and deaths in child-bed were attributed to the lack of care and skill displayed by her colleagues.⁴

Newcastle upon Tyne

In the north east of England, industrialisation brought about the growing urbanisation of the population, which was accompanied by appalling living

standards for the average Newcastle citizen. Disease and overcrowding through the 'chares' grouped around the river Tyne were described by MacKenzie in his 1827 'History of Newcastle upon Tyne' as 'the most crowded with buildings of any part in his majesty's dominions'.⁵ The diets of the poor were limited and industrial processes dangerous and toxic. Derek Tacchi considers that, although we do not have formal records to rely on, we should assume that maternal, neonatal and infant mortality in the city must have been astronomical.⁶

Things in Newcastle improved in the eighteenth century and in 1760 significant changes in obstetric care began, culminating in the opening of the first Lying-In Hospital. However, by the early part of the eighteenth century the 'man-midwives' or surgeon/accoucheurs, were starting to encroach on the work of midwives. Men had earlier developed instruments to assist in difficult cases of childbirth but the use of these instruments themselves had led to increased risks of infection and deaths. Nevertheless, they signalled a significant advance in technique. In the meantime, there had been little by way of advances in training for midwives.⁷

By 1760, those with money in Newcastle were already seeking out the services of surgeon/accoucheurs, despite the risks. The term 'accoucheur' was applied to the early emerging 'man-midwives' and is derived from the French *accouchement*, meaning 'childbirth'. Meanwhile, the majority of women continued to be attended by untrained and unqualified midwives or 'handywomen' who often combined delivering babies with laying out the dead.

Around the same time Lying-In Hospitals were being established in major English cities, the first being in London in 1749. In the autumn of 1760 a successful public subscription was commenced for the establishment of a Lying-In Hospital in Newcastle for poor married women. This hospital was also to provide instruction in midwifery for 'properly recommended women'. In a letter to the *Newcastle Journal* in August 1760, a mother from Sunderland offered money to the public appeal, stating 'yet how high a sphere so ever ladies move in, as it cannot exempt them from the dreadful

agonies of childbirth, they must suppose how much more intolerable they would seem, unaccompanied with conveniences, helps and comfortable absolutely necessary for such a precarious state'.⁹

The first Matron Midwife at the Lying-in Hospital was Mrs Sarah Hudson, a widow. We know little more about her. The requirement was for all Matrons to live in at the hospital and this practice continued until 1958. The original hospital premises were situated in Rosemary Lane, adjacent to St John's churchyard, at the bottom end of Westgate Road. Dr Blythman Adamson was appointed surgeon/accoucheur to the hospital, together with Dr John Rotherham (physician) and Dr Ralph Stoddart as surgeon.¹⁰

A further appeal was launched in 1761 for public subscriptions to establish a 'Charity for the Relief of Poor Women Lying-In at Their Own Houses' to cover the Newcastle and Gateshead area. In that year the midwives recorded as attached to the Lying-In hospital were named as Mrs Storey, Mrs Lawrison, Mrs Kell, Mrs Cook, Mrs Wilkinson, Mrs Moore, Mrs Turner, Mrs Tanner, Mrs Taylor, Mrs Key, Mrs Bell, Mrs Sommerville, and Mrs Leighton. We know little about these women except that they may have been practising for some time before appointment, as the charity stated it only appointed midwives of 'good character with suitable qualifications plus references from surgeons who had given them training'.¹¹

These women were not the only ones providing midwife services, as the official records fail to identify the plethora of untrained 'handywomen' who carried on the role of midwife in their local area – David Harley's 'mute' group.

Newcastle living conditions for the poor during these times remained predominantly wretched. Detailed accounts of births in overcrowded conditions are not available for this early period but anecdotal accounts handed down through family members do exist for a later period. Ann Jameson's time as a registered midwife in the Battlefield area in the early twentieth century has been documented by her great-great grand-daughter. Family members recall that 'some homes were so small and overcrowded that there was no place to lay a stillborn baby, which was often laid on

top of a gas cooker or on a bread board'.¹² The 1891 census for Lime Street shows that the 118 children living there outstripped the 112 adult residents, which would constitute a substantial workload for any midwife in one street in Newcastle.¹³



Ann Jameson in her distinctive uniform, after her registration as a midwife under the Midwives Act of 1902. Copyright Anne Brooks.

In the early nineteenth demand for midwife services and support was soon shown to be high, and both Lying-In charities were undoubtedly successful. The Lying-In at Home fund was oversubscribed in 1819 and by 1850 the average costs per patient lying-in at home had reached 14s 5d. In 1858, for financial reasons, the Lying-In at Home charity amalgamated with the Lying-In Hospital and became The Newcastle upon Tyne Maternity Hospital and Outdoor Charity for Poor Women. That charity endured for the next 98 years.¹⁴

For the period 1760–1825, 3,450 patients were admitted to the Lying-In hospital, of whom twenty-two died. However, the hospital only dealt with one-third of the number of women who were attended in their homes. In total, between 1761 and 1826 some 8,739 women were attended by the charities.¹⁵

In 1838 the incidence of maternal mortality was recorded for the first time, and was found to be in excess of 6 per 1,000 live births. Almost a century later in 1929, matters had barely changed, with maternal mortality at 5.85 per 1,000 live births, the highest it had been since 1895. This was mainly due to death by puerperal sepsis, firmly associated with poor housing, overcrowding and poverty. In the end there was no improvement in these figures until after 1936. In 1937 Newcastle recorded seventeen deaths of undelivered mothers at its maternity hospital.

Between 1902 and 1912 the Maternity Hospital attended, on average, 230 in-patients and 1,102 out-door patients each year. The figures for 1921 were 1,102 in-patients and 1,096 out-door patients, all attended to in a period of an increased birth rate. These figures mark the trend towards increased hospital confinement.¹⁶

The Midwives Act

In 1902 the first Midwives Act received royal assent and after 1910 it became an offence for anyone other than a doctor or (certified) registered midwife to attend a parturient woman. The effects of the Act in Newcastle were to give support to the newly appointed Professor of Midwifery,

Rankin Lyle, at Newcastle Medical Schools and his work with the Lying-In Hospital, now established at a purpose-built site in New Bridge Street, and to recognise the hospital for midwifery training.

In 1906 Miss Elsa Renaud, a certified midwife, was appointed to the post of Supervisor of Midwives for the Newcastle upon Tyne Maternity Hospital. Midwifery was still a hard profession; there were still few of them relative to the size of the population, the nature of their work (given the state of medicine and existing social conditions among the poor) could be demanding and often distressing, along with the fact that they were required to work through day and night. At the time of Miss Renaud's appointment records show that there were sixty-seven qualified midwives resident in Newcastle, of whom forty-five had notified the authorities of their intention to practise. This does not necessarily reflect the true picture on the ground as the records also record that only eighteen of these forty-five midwives attended 30% of the routine births, making an average of 140 deliveries per annum for this group.¹⁷

Things were not always straightforward. In his book on the New Bridge Street Lying-In hospital, Roger Burgess recorded the recollection of Mrs Gladys Watson of Wallsend who had a friend who was a midwife in the early 1920s. She stated that when the uniformed, professionally trained midwives started attending home deliveries in the Melbourne and Gibson Street area of Shieldfield, the neighbours who had traditionally helped with confinements (the handywomen), objected strongly to being done out of a job and 'tinpanned' the nurses noisily down the street'.¹⁸

When she was appointed Supervisor of Midwives, Miss Renaud, was a single, professionally trained woman; no longer was the profession the preserve of the experienced married or widowed midwife who had earlier held the senior ground. Furthermore, from the early/mid-eighteenth century, the intervention and popularity of the 'man-midwives' amongst the rich and elites, combined with the development of obstetric and gynaecological training in the medical schools, had subordinated the previously ascendant role of the midwife in the birth process to that of the professional obstetrician/gynaecologist.

Conclusion

Derek Tacchi, in his book on childbirth in Newcastle, cited the exceptional midwives that he could recall during his obstetric work in the 1930s and 1940s. They included Miss Mansell, Miss Pringle, Miss Bradley, Miss Ferlie and above all, Miss Tannahill, an Ulsterwoman who was Senior Midwife for twenty-five years until her retirement in 1958. It was she who organised the move of the Maternity Hospital from Jubilee Road to what became the Princess Mary Maternity Hospital on the Great North Road in 1939, and was the last midwife to live in at the hospital.¹⁹

At the end of the day it was not simply midwives, obstetricians and paediatricians who ensured that babies and their mothers survived in greater numbers into contemporary times. It was as much to do with improved sanitation, the arrival of antibiotics, slum clearance, better housing, diet, education, access to free health services and advances in medical science.

Today, the city's maternity services are centred on the new Leazes Wing at the RVI and it is fitting to note that the stone that sat above the door at the first Rosemary Lane Lying-In hospital is set in the front structure of the new unit and its inscription reads, 'Licenced For The Public Reception Of Pregnant Women, Pursuant to an Act of Parliament Passed in The 13th Year of the Reign Of George III'. Whist we cannot name and describe all the midwives who plied their skills in Newcastle through the centuries, we can certainly thank them.

Note

This essay is an edited version of a longer essay charting the history of midwifery in Newcastle, and particularly from the eighteenth century onwards. I present this as something of a 'taster' study and hope that readers will find that there are many aspects of the work of midwives within local communities which could form the basis of further study. My intention is to carry on my own researches into local midwives, with a view to produce another essay at some point in the future.

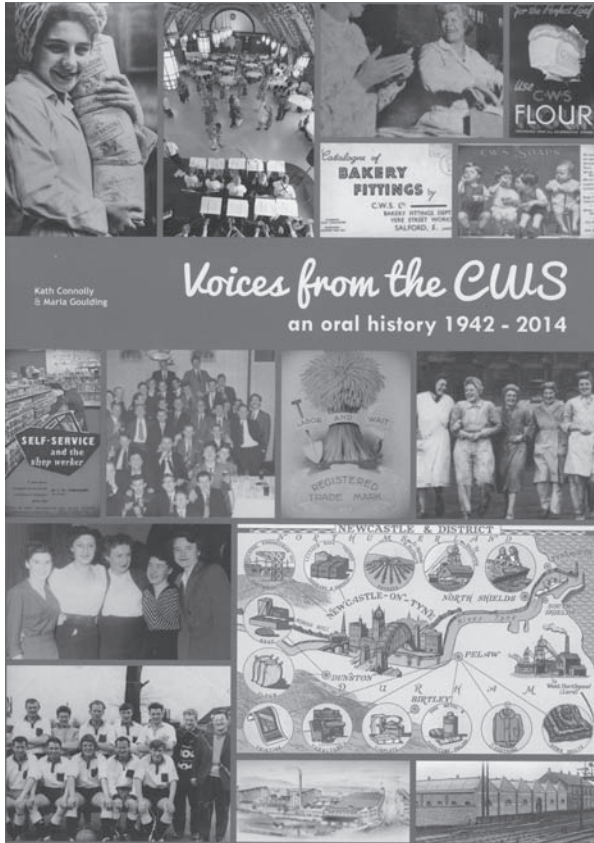
Acknowledgements

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Notes

- ¹ David Harley, 'Provincial Midwives in England: Lancashire and Cheshire, 1660-1760', *The Art of Midwifery – Early Modern Midwives in Europe*, ed. by Hilary Marland (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Press, 1994), p. 27.
- ² Hilary Marland, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Midwifery – Early Modern Midwives in Europe*, ed. by Hilary Marland (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Press, 1994) p. 2.
- ³ Harley, pp. 35–39.
- ⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin Books, 1973, repr. 1991), p. 15.
- ⁵ Eneas McKenzie, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town & County of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle 1827); referenced in Julie Elizabeth Hughes, 'An Investigation into the Lying-In Hospital 1760–1772'. (Unpublished thesis, Sunderland University, available in Newcastle upon Tyne City Archive Ref: L/4226) chapter 3.
- ⁶ Derek Tacchi, *Childbirth in Newcastle upon Tyne, 1760–1990* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bewick Press, 1994), p. 7.
- ⁷ Tacchi, p. 8.
- ⁸ Tacchi, p. 131.
- ⁹ *The Newcastle Journal*, 30th August to 6th September 1760, cited in Hughes, chapter 3.
- ¹⁰ Tacchi, p. 8.
- ¹¹ Tacchi, p. 132.
- ¹² Anne Jameson Brooks, 'A Battlefield Midwife', in *Ouseburn Heritage Issue 5* (2000), ed. Mike Greatbatch, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Ouseburn Partnership, 2000).
- ¹³ As above.
- ¹⁴ Tacchi, pp. 132–133.
- ¹⁵ Tacchi, p. 11.
- ¹⁶ Tacchi, pp. 134–135.
- ¹⁷ Tacchi, p. 133.
- ¹⁸ Roger Burgess, *Babies and Broadcasting. The Story of 54 New Bridge Street, Newcastle upon Tyne 1826-1994* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Robson Brown Advertising, 1994), p. 10.
- ¹⁹ Tacchi, p. 135.

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Voices from the CWS is an A4 size 24-page booklet showcasing the lives and experiences of CWS employees (past and present) interviewed over a period of two years in order to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the CWS in the North East of England. Illustrated throughout with archive images (some supplied by project participants) it provides an invaluable memorial to all those that contributed towards this great industry in our region.

*Copies of the booklet are available for £5.00 (including postage) from:
1 Exeter Close, Great Lumley, Chester le Street, Co. Durham DH3 4LJ.
Please make cheques payable to North East Labour History.*

An Oral History of the CWS

Kath Connolly and Maria Goulding

The first Co-operative Society on the Rochdale model in the North East was established in Blaydon in 1858. Sunderland followed in 1859 and Newcastle in 1860. Within 12 years there were eighty registered Co-operative Societies in the region set up in the main by working men: miners, quarrymen, railway workers, carpenters and fitters using skills they had gained from their involvement in their trade unions and chapels.

However, the Societies' stores met with much opposition from local tradespeople and there were widespread problems in securing supply and quality at the right price. By the 1860s a federation of the Societies came together in Manchester to form the North of England Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and became their own suppliers: 'From humble origins, the CWS grew to one of Britain's largest businesses... pioneering modern retailing and distribution on a national scale expanding into factory production and financial services, and establishing a supply network that stretched across the world'.¹

By 1871 the first North Eastern CWS depot was established in St Nicholas Buildings, Newcastle. Rapid expansion prompted moves to Pudding Chare, Waterloo Street and adjoining streets and then in 1899 to a fine new building comprising offices and warehousing in West Blandford Street (now home to the Discovery Museum and Tyne and Wear Archive). From there a network of showrooms, workshops and warehouses were opened across Newcastle. With ample capital for expansion, CWS factories

and flour mills were built across Tyneside and the North East and the CWS became one of the area's largest employers.²

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the CWS in 2013, three Area Committees of the Co-operative Group funded an oral history project of the workers in the offices at Blandford Street, Associated Co-operative Creameries at Blaydon, the factories at Pelaw and the Tinsplate Works at Birtley. The purpose of the research was to archive their stories, produce a celebration booklet for the people whom we interviewed and to develop the skills of the project members. The following CWS offices and factories featured in the oral history project:

Pelaw-on-Tyne	Drugs and Dry Saltery - Patent medicines, packaging dry produce Shirt factory Tailoring and Kersey - workwear Cabinet Works and Leather goods Quilting Printing and Book Binding
Associated Co-operative Creameries ACC	Milk and milk products distribution centre
Birtley Tinsplates	Manufacture of tin products for use in the distribution of CWS products (and elsewhere) e.g. Milk churns, paint, polish biscuit, loaf tins, pit bottles
Blandford Street	Wholesale showrooms, warehouses and offices serving the Co-op societies in the North East

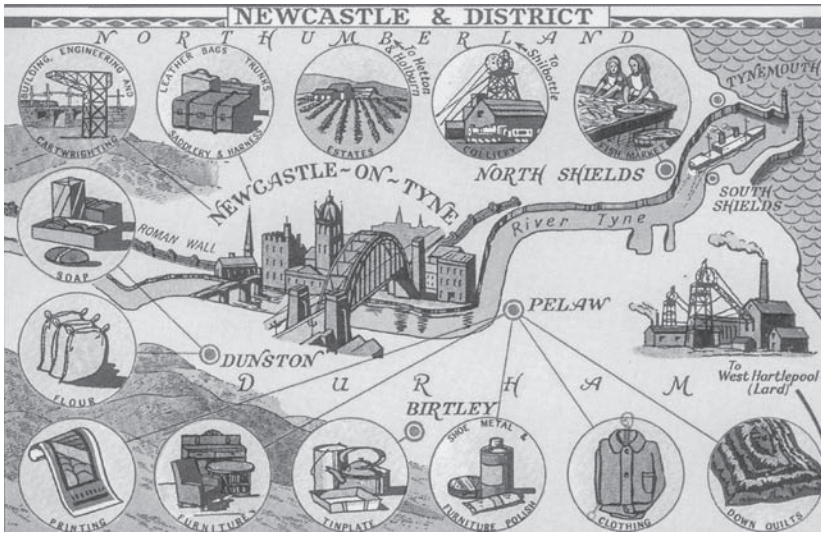
Methodology

We wanted as much authentic detail as possible from those who had worked for the CWS in the second part of the twentieth century. By choosing to conduct oral interviews around common questions, we aimed to uncover

a wide range of experiences and to capture the voices of the individuals. The sample was opportunistic. We met some people at a tea dance in Blandford Street and friends and Co-op contacts led us to interview former CWS employees in their own homes, at a sheltered housing scheme in Pleasant Place, Birtley, and the Community Centre and Library at Pelaw. During a training session the interviewers devised a set of broad common questions and prompts which would ensure a measure of comparability but allow us to probe interesting leads should they arise. Once the interviews were recorded, each interviewer made summary notes, since we felt that full transcripts, although desirable, would be unmanageable. For accurate quotes we were able to go back to the original recordings.

In all, 35 people (28 women and 7 men) including a funeral director, an accountant, a sewing machinist, a clerk, a comptometer operator, a book binder, a book binder's assistant, a tailor, a chemist, a tinsmith, a manager, a machine operator, a canteen assistant, a quality controller, a metal worker and employees of some societies were interviewed by nine interviewers. This gave us a good idea of the scope of the CWS enterprise and the range of skills which were used in the workplaces.

To analyse the oral histories, we picked out emergent themes. At first we identified isolated quotes for each theme but felt that this lost the individuals behind the stories. Therefore in preparation for the celebration booklet we chose a smaller number of cases for each theme and included biographical information for each person. This enabled us to use a single individual's story as representative of a group, and to pick out stories of particular interest, for example Olive Peacock being sent out in the snow to find a job, Allan Jackson's description of the scientific processes in the manufacture of products, and Jim Carroll's comments about the unions. We had some very interesting quotes, for example an affair at the tinplates, older men taking advantage of younger girls, a girl with an unwanted pregnancy, another with VD, but we felt these would not be appropriate for inclusion in the booklet, since the people in question may still be alive.



*The CWS in the North East, 1930s.
Reproduced courtesy of National Co-operative Archive.*

Voices from the CWS

In the stories we listened to, we found patterns in childhood experience, getting work, women's lives and working conditions. We interviewed people who had started working during the second war, through the fifties and sixties and some were still working for the CWS this century. This gave us an insight into a time when the lives of working people, and in particular working women, were very different from today. In some ways people's lives have improved but there have also been losses along the way.

Getting work

Post war, at a time of full employment, there was good steady work in the CWS factories, warehouses and offices and for many, especially if you lived in Pelaw on Tyne, it was an obvious choice of a job. You left school on Friday and started work on Monday. Many of our interviewees from Pelaw and Birtley lived close to the factory. This cut down transport costs and

also meant that our interviewees would be working with friends and family from their neighbourhood. It was not the job itself that they expected to find interesting and enjoyable but the fact that they would be sharing their days with people they knew and with whom they felt at home. Looking through contemporary eyes, it seems strange that Teresa rejected the offer of a job with the 'Ministry' at Longbenton in favour of factory work: 'when I worked out the wages and bus fares I would have been worse off'.³

Young people were important to the family finances – with very few exceptions they 'tipped up' their wages to their mother and were given pocket money in return. For young women this was spent on going to the pictures, local dances, nylon stockings and clothes. This was in marked contrast to Anne who started at Pelaw printing in the seventies; she had a summer holiday before she started work and was allowed to keep most of her pay for herself.

Those working at Blandford Street and the Co-op Bank came from a wider geographical area and were prepared to travel to access more skilled work with higher wages. Norma who worked in the bank at Blandford Street said: 'The Co-op went round the schools looking for intelligent pupils with decent qualifications and potential who were not staying on'. On reflection she said: 'Although I would have liked to continue with my education...I had to start earning my living and contribute to the family finances'. Norma described this as 'the working class ethos'.

Life at work

Working life in the CWS involved a wide range of experience, with some jobs offering great variety and interest as well as many which were repetitive and humdrum. Work was also strongly gendered, with jobs for the boys and jobs for the girls. Besides giving the technical details, it was our female interviewees who told us more about the jokes, singing and celebrations that enlivened the day-to-day routine. With so many CWS workplaces close to each other and rooted in strong communities, numerous sporting and cultural activities were organised at a local and national level, for

example, football, cricket and netball teams, choirs and dramatic societies. This gave the workers the opportunity to have fun, develop their talents, and meet and compete with other employees. Jim remembered the CWS Pelaw football team made up of lads from all of the factories. They were very successful and reached the final of the Co-op Cup three years running: 'When we played the glassworks in Manchester we were shown around the works to see how things were made and entertainment was laid on after the match and all expenses were paid'. Joe was also involved in sports: 'It helped make us feel that we were an important part of the business. Your work was your life'. The CWS looked after its employees and in return they had a sense of loyalty and commitment to the organisation.

Wages, unions and Industrial relations

In stark contrast to today when union membership has declined and employees' rights are much diminished, as part of the wider Labour Movement, the Co-op saw it as the right and duty of every worker, including management, to belong to its appropriate trade union. Keith observed: 'You had to be in the union to get the job. If you lost your union card then the job went too. There were few industrial disputes at Pelaw, the Father of the Chapel displayed common sense and disputes were settled by discussion. Up to a point they worked with the management, remembering it was their primary responsibility to represent their members'. Throughout the seventies, against a background of considerable national industrial unrest, Jim was proud to say: 'In the thirty-eight years I was manager in the shirt factory we didn't have one strike, no walk outs or a single industrial tribunal'

We found little evidence of disputes other than those around Time and Motion. Eileen remembered only one dispute in her time at the tinplates: 'They were trying to introduce piecework and I found myself being paid less for working more'.

Women's work and Lives

Looking back, it is hard to believe that even in the late sixties women

gave up work when they got married or when they became pregnant. Margaret recalled that in the fifties: 'The CWS didn't believe in married women working. Indeed when I got married I had to write to ask if I could keep my job - I needed permission to stay on'. There was an economic as well as cultural consideration here, since the women were part of the Co-op pension scheme and on leaving the job were able to withdraw their pension contributions to pay for weddings and/or setting up a home. Later in the sixties, Jim remembered many girls regarding this as a payout and described it as an understandable mistake. By the late 1980s/early 1990s legislation prevented employees from withdrawing their pension for all other than those who had not worked longer than two years: 'This caused major problems, as women sensed they had leave before two years to claim their pension fund'. As working patterns changed, however, women with families were encouraged to return to work. Mothers, like single parent Teresa, had to rely on the support of their mothers for childcare: 'I worked a twilight shift to fit in with my children and school - mother worked day shift and looked after my children so that I could work in the evening. In later years the quilting factory offered more flexible hours than standard day shift to attract older women workers'.

It was the young men who were offered apprenticeships, the chance to learn a skill and ultimately earn higher wages. Those women who remained single were able to become supervisors in the offices or forewomen in the factories, looking after teams of younger women. These women had some power and authority but their jobs were not classified as skilled and that set them at an economic disadvantage. The young women in the offices recalled that they were treated as if they were in school, and given very little opportunity to think for themselves or take responsibility.

In reply to the question about differences in the way men and women were 'treated' the most common response was in terms of politeness and courtesy. Only one person, a woman who had been a comptometer operator, recognised that we were asking about career opportunities and reward with her response: 'Well, the wages were different'. She was also

perceptive about the differences in opportunity within the male workforce: 'There was a vast difference between the labourers and those who had done apprenticeships - the skilled workers'.

There was clearly a widespread acceptance of differences in expectations and opportunities for young men and women, but also an acceptance of a hierarchy within the workforce in terms of skills, pay and development opportunities.

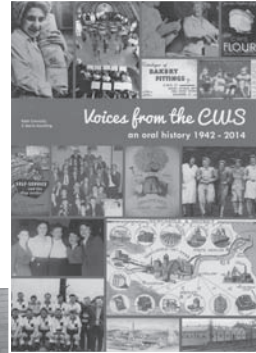
Afterword

The above analysis gives some insight into the lived experiences of men and women working for an organisation in which work, family, community and social life inevitably overlapped. Some workers had very restricted opportunities but particularly in Pelaw there was a sense of community cohesion developed through their shared experience. There is little left now to suggest that Pelaw was once such an important Co-op town, but some traces of community spirit were still evident when we came to recruit interviewees at coffee mornings in Hertfordshire House and Pelaw library. People were keen to talk about their memories but most underestimated the significance of their personal contributions.

When the celebration booklet was launched, the participants were delighted to see their stories and pictures in print. Keith wrote: 'The number of attendees is testament to how important the CWS was to the local economy. It was also a great place to learn a trade'. On a more personal level, Anne wrote: 'It's a lovely thing to do - writing a book when in living memory'. For the interviewees and the writers, other outcomes were achieved. We were touched by the trust which developed between all of those involved. As we found out more we developed our skills in asking questions, probing responses and interpreting people's accounts. It was only in the lengthy process of analysis that we realised there were other big themes ripe for exploration. If this pair of feminists were doing this project again we would want to ask much more about women's lives. We would want to probe attitudes to marriage, birth control, family life and money

and how these impacted on work at a time of massive social and cultural change. But that is another project.

*Launch of Voices from the CWS at Pelaw,
23rd March 2015.
Peter Brabban photography.*



Notes

- ¹ J. F. Wilson, A. Webster, and R. Vorberg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2013), from back cover summary.
- ² A. Potts, *From Acorn to Oak: Co-operation on Tyneside 1858-1909*. Northern Area Co-operative Member Education Group, (Newcastle, 1993), un-paged.
- ³ All quotations are taken from project notes and the project celebration booklet: Kath Connolly and Maria Goulding, *Voices from the CWS, an oral history 1942-2014*, (Newcastle: North East Labour History Society, 2015).



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We fully support the North East Labour
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success within the Labour Movement

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Norman Cornish: An Appreciation

Michael Chaplin

In the year 1933, when Norman Cornish was fourteen, growing up in Spennymoor, two things of significance happened to him. He was a bright boy, had passed the exam for grammar school, but deep in the middle of the Depression his family needed another wage. So at fourteen he went to work at Dean and Chapter Colliery in nearby Ferryhill, a pit with such a poor safety record that it was known locally as ‘the Butcher’s Shop’. When he signed his indenture, the watching official murmured, ‘You’ve just signed your death warrant, son’. Happily, this prediction proved to be inaccurate.

Around the same time he joined a sketching club at the Spennymoor Settlement, the charitable institute bringing education and art to miners and their families. Norman had already won a prize of a halfpenny for drawing an old lady’s boot – he was four - but under expert guidance his talent flowered and he began painting the life around him: the pit, the streets of his town, the faces of its people, and he was still doing the same thing seventy-five years later. He never lived anywhere other than Spennymoor; he rarely painted anywhere else. It gave him all he needed; it was in the best sense ‘the narrow world’ of Norman Cornish.

At Dean and Chapter he met the originator of that phrase, another young man with a dream of becoming an artist, the novelist-to-be, my father Sid Chaplin. They became friends, as did Sarah Cornish and my mother Rene. Thus I grew up with Norman, not just because I saw a lot of him, but because I looked at his pictures my parents had bought or

been given. Actually I lived with these paintings, day after day, year after year, passing them countless times, so their shapes imprinted themselves on my subconscious and their meaning seeped into my head and heart. I especially remember a sequence of pictures that marched up the staircase of our house like a procession of miners' lodge banners at the Durham Gala. Each of these pictures told a story.

First was a quintessential Cornish image. A back lane, a windy Monday, rows of washing blowing on lines, children playing. You look at this picture with its economy and movement and instinctively know what's going to happen next: a football will soon muddy a sheet and a woman in an apron will come running.

Then there was a Big Meeting picture, impressionistic, with tiny splashes of colour, and two images that Norman returned to time and again: a figure underground, wielding a pick in a thin seam, the pitted muscular torso twisted to gain maximum purchase; and a bar scene featuring the broad back of a drinker, stubby fingers curved around a glass and below, his whippet, waiting, eyes imploring. Finally, crowning the ascent, a strange picture that fascinated me: a pithead gantry in the background, stark and foreboding, in front hunched figures climbing iron steps towards it. As a boy this struck me as a vision of Calvary, but I never mentioned it to anyone - it seemed too fanciful a notion. When I first clapped my eyes on the work of Stanley Spencer, an epiphany sang in my head: if Christ could walk the lanes of Cookham, then surely he could ride the cage at Dean and Chapter too, and pit people could find redemption, of a kind.

Spennymoor was essentially a Victorian invention, springing up in the years after Tudhoe Ironworks was opened in 1853. Shafts were sunk round about to feed the furnaces with coal: Whitworth, Page Bank, Tudhoe, Westerton, Newfield, and eventually the pit where Norman Cornish was to spend the bulk of his mining life, the Dean and Chapter. Railway lines were laid, chapels built, the odd school, and long terraces to house miners and their families, drawn from the four corners of Britain by the prospect of work. They included the Cornish family, and it was here in the shadow

of the town hall clock that Norman was born shortly after the end of the First World War. He spent his entire life there, and painted its life from his teens into his late 80's, returning obsessively to the same images decades after they had passed from view.

Not so long ago, I visited Norman and Sarah and after a fine lunch, was given a tour of the artist's studio, lined with books and LPs, paintings and drawings stacked against the walls, a work-in-progress on the easel, the faint smell of oil paint in the air. After Norman had given a vigorous rendition of the Peasants' Thanksgiving Dance in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, he spoke of the changing physical and spiritual landscape around him. He told me my dad once said that Spennymoor was the ugliest place he knew. Norman thought this was unfair, but 'if it was ugly, it had plenty of character'. Now, he thought, it was ugly no more, but had lost much of that character. Now it had roundabouts, supermarkets, pedestrian walkways, and was beginning to look like everywhere else. It was clear that the loss of the ever-changing shapes of the pit-heaps grieved him especially. 'I sometime wonder whether someone's trying to obliterate my life'. Pause. 'But they can't – cos it's all up here'. And tapped his forehead vigorously with a long, bony forefinger. 'All I have to do is shut my eyes, and I can see it all, down to every last detail'.

Norman was an iconoclast, and sometimes a cheerfully disputacious one, in another way. The easiest way to upset him was to suggest he was a 'Pitman Painter'. He did not wish to belong to any 'movement', and despite the near proximity of other gifted painters drawn to record the same world, men like Tom McGuinness and Robert Heslop, he tended to keep himself to himself, artistically speaking. In the 1960s and 70s he was tempted beyond the precincts of his home town, to Newcastle for instance, and at the prompting of Tyne Tees Television, to the lanes of Montmartre, but apart from one striking portrait of a slab-faced Newcastle United fan wearing a black and white scarf, the results were largely uninspiring. Clearly his heart wasn't in it: he couldn't wait to get back home.

Norman's constantly reworked portrait of Spennymoor life in its heyday

established his reputation in the 50s and 60s, allowed him to leave the pit in 1966 - to his relief, as for such a tall man, coal-winning was a daily agony – and sustained it as an old man when his work reached new audiences (via exhibitions at the University of Northumbria Gallery and King's Place, London, curated by Mara-Helen Wood), among them the children of pitmen, who began to understand mining life, not because they'd lived it, but because they absorbed its nuances from his art, and so connected with what made them what they are. His immense body of work constitutes a powerful, often tender record of the Durham coalfield, a lost world reflected in the set of a cap, an arthritic hand clutching dominoes, a dumpy old lady's broken umbrella in the rain, the loneliness that hangs on the sloping shoulders of the pitmen trudging down Norman's mythic pit road from Spennymoor to the Butcher's Shop.

The irony of course is he was still painting this world long after the pits themselves had gone, wiped clean from the landscape. But it would be wrong to think everything of that old pit culture has gone. Not long after Norman's death last summer, I returned to Spennymoor after some years, looking for something, I'm not sure what. I made a surprising discovery, that maybe the car has diminished the vigorous street life that was such a feature of Norman's work – and the cold of an early-closing day didn't help - but it was still there, if you looked for it. An old man in stout shoes and tweed cap struggled with a recalcitrant dog. A lady in a russet brown headscarf humped two full shopping bags and leaned into the wind. A man carrying lengths of dowling under his arm greeted an acquaintance, his voice booming through the steamed-up window of the café where I sat: 'Are you all right?' A toddler ran to a man - his grandad? - who swept him up in the air and swung him around. In the gathering twilight, a lad in wraparound sunglasses swaggered past, one hand in pocket, the other carrying three large loaves of sliced white bread. Half an hour later, he came back, heading the other way, possibly uncertain of his destination. And behind me, underneath the prints of old pastoral scenes, two men discussed their ailments. 'And I was that bad, I didn't get me puff back for weeks.' As

they left, his friend called ‘Ta-ra, chick’ to the respectable middle-aged lady behind the counter. They donned their caps. And somehow it didn’t seem to matter that they were of the transatlantic baseball variety.

The longer I spent in the town, the more I glimpsed quintessential Cornish images. I took a walk where the railway lines once snaked southwards, the outline of Auckland Castle etched against a distant hill. Rooks hung in the air, a cat skulked in the willow scrub by the path, half a dozen piebald ponies grazed in a field. There were football pitches, with kids playing, fighting, laughing; and immaculate allotments fenced with discarded garage doors. In one, a row of fat cabbages waited to be lifted by an elderly man, who straightened suddenly, putting a hand to the small of his back. As he saw me, a total stranger, he waved and called out, ‘How do!’

And I wished Norman was there with his sketchbook. Of course that wasn’t to be, but I hope that sometime another gifted iconoclast might come along to paint the Spennymoor of the 21st century. She or he would certainly inherit the richest of traditions...

north east history

Norman Dennis A Notable Wearsider, Academic and Labour Activist

Glen Lyndon Dodds

On 2 July 1970 an editorial in the *Sunderland Echo* declared: ‘Seldom has any local issue so dominated the correspondence and news columns of this newspaper as have the proposals and counter-proposals for the revitalization of Millfield during the past few years’.

The paper was referring to the Millfield clearance saga, which witnessed a vigorous campaign by a local residents’ association to save the area from large-scale demolition planned by Sunderland Council.

One of the key players in the fight to save Millfield, a closely-knit, respectable working-class neighbourhood where most of the dwellings were Sunderland Cottages erected in the late 19th century, was Norman Dennis, a sociology lecturer at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Norman, a friendly down-to-earth man whose dominant attributes included integrity and courage, was the son of a Sunderland tram driver and was born on 16 August 1929. He came into the world at 29 Booth Street, Millfield, and both of his parents were born in the same district.

Nonetheless, during the 1930s the family lived in rented tenements in various parts of Sunderland and briefly resided in a council house at Grangetown on the southern outskirts of the town.

On Monday, 4 September 1939-the day after Britain declared war on Germany-Norman became a pupil at Cowan Terrace Senior Elementary School. The following Sunday, though, witnessed the departure of several thousand Wearside youngsters (it was feared that Sunderland's shipyards would be targeted by the Luftwaffe) and Norman became an evacuee. He was billeted at Leasingthorne near Bishop Auckland, where he stayed with a friendly coalmining family.

By the close of the year, Norman had returned to Wearside - as was true of most of Sunderland's evacuees - partly because no air raids had so far materialised. Consequently, in the spring of 1940 - by which time a programme of reopening schools that had closed at the start of hostilities was well underway - he became a pupil at Fulwell Senior Elementary Boys' School, where he remained until July of that year.

Norman Dennis subsequently attended Bede Collegiate Boys' School, an esteemed seat of learning (founded in 1890 by Sunderland School Board as a 'higher grade' school) which, since 1929, had been located in impressive purpose-built premises on Durham Road. His contemporaries at the school included Charles Slater, who later became a lawyer and the dominant figure on Sunderland Council, and Len Harper, who likewise became a prominent town councillor. They nicknamed Norman, 'Bunty' Dennis.

In 1948 Norman won entrance to Corpus Christi, Oxford. However, he chose to attend the London School of Economics instead, partly because its Socialist ethos accorded with his own political beliefs: he had joined the Labour League of Youth two years earlier.

Before studying at the LSE, from July 1948 to October 1949, Dennis performed his National Service with the RAF. Thereafter, he shone at the LSE and was awarded the Hobhouse Memorial Prize as the best graduate of the year 1951-2, gaining a First Class Honours B.Sc. Econ.

Various academic appointments ensued. For example, in 1960-1 he went to America as a Fellow of the Centre for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, California. He was accompanied by his wife Audrey (whom he had married at St Columba's Church, Southwick,

in 1954) and young daughter, Julia, who was born in 1958 in the Midlands.

By 1964 Norman was back in his hometown and resident at 10 Rosslyn Terrace in Millfield, where his family was augmented by the birth of a son, John. Norman was a senior research associate of the University of Durham at this time, but in 1966 he became a lecturer at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, to which he customarily rode on his bicycle.

As noted above, he subsequently became involved in the campaign to save Millfield from a programme of demolition (approved by the Corporation in May 1965) that planned to sweep away most of the area's Victorian dwellings by 1970. He served as the secretary of the Millfield Residents' Association formed in November 1967. It was set up as a result of a meeting called by a local clergyman Jim Taylor, the redoubtable Vicar of St Mark's, a church built in the early 1870s. For a variety of reasons, the association's campaign proved a success. As Dennis recorded, Sunderland Council 'was forced by public pressure to devise for the first time a scheme which allowed householders to take advantage of borrowing power granted to the Corporation by the central government for mortgage loans for the purpose of house purchase and improvement.' Consequently, as grants were made piecemeal, 'there was a slow but eventually steep rise in morale and extensive improvements proceeded apace'.¹

Of members of the local press during the Millfield dispute, Norman recalled that Millfielders 'couldn't have asked for more insight or integrity from anyone than was shown by the journalists of the *Sunderland Echo*, especially Carol Robertson, who reported both sides of the case'.²

In May 1971, with the campaign to save Millfield still underway, Norman Dennis became a Labour councillor for Millfield ward. At the time the council was under Conservative control for the first and only occasion in the post-war era, a state of affairs that lasted from 1967 to 1972. Dennis stayed on the council until May 1974, and was referred to as 'Bunty' by his fellow Labour councillors led by Charles Slater. Characteristically, in his new role Norman did not simply follow the party line. This did not endear him to all his colleagues and neither, states

Bob Hudson, did 'his insistence on conducting all negotiations through writing rather than closed door discussions. For Dennis, transparency of action constituted the legacy of history, and he wanted everything to be "on the record"'.³

Of Dennis' period on the council, Brian Dodds (who became a Labour councillor in 1970) comments that Norman and several of his colleagues, including Bob Hudson who also represented Millfield ward, 'were instrumental in stopping the demolition [of Millfield] and also starting co-operative housing schemes in Hendon and elsewhere'.⁴

Shortly after Norman's days as a councillor came to an end, he moved with his family to 26 Westcliffe Road (little more than a stone's throw from the Sunderland seafront) and stayed there until the early 1980s when he moved to 3 Thompson Road.

Dennis already had several published works to his credit, and 1988 witnessed the publication of *English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R.H. Tawney*, which he co-wrote with Professor A.H. Halsey of the University of Oxford. The book reflected Norman's view that the Labour Party had moved away from its traditional values and that a return to its original ethos was required.

In 1996 Norman Dennis retired after teaching for thirty years at Newcastle University, where he had become Reader in Social Studies. Universities further afield had offered him professorships, but he had turned them down for he did not wish to leave Sunderland.

In 2000, Dennis moved with his wife to a brand new home at Hamilton Court, North Haven, a residence from which they could enjoy views of Sunderland Marina.

His retirement was far from idle. In the same year that he settled at North Haven, he was appointed Director of Community Studies for the think-tank, Civitas, a post he held until his final illness. He also undertook research both at home and abroad. Among other things, he studied the impact of the 'Zero Tolerance' approach to policing spearheaded on Teesside by Ray Mallon of the Cleveland Police and did

research on crime and policing in France, Germany and the United States. His last published book (which appeared in 2005 and was co-written with George Erdos), was *Cultures and Crimes: Policing in Four Nations*.

A central facet of Dennis' published work-*Families Without Fatherhood* (co-written with George Erdos and published in 1992) is an example- is that the moral decay of society, and particularly the undermining of the traditional family unit, has resulted in rising levels of criminality and disorderly conduct. His views, which he supported with a wealth of data, elicited an unfavourable response in some quarters and he was subjected to abuse. Indeed, on one occasion his work was derided as 'Bollocks' on the front-page of *The Guardian*. In contrast, much of what he said struck a chord with right-wing politicians and thus, ironically, Dennis - a lifelong Socialist - was 'transformed from an icon of the activist left to the academic darling of the right'.⁵

During his retirement, Norman (who had a good command of French and German) derived pleasure from studying Spanish. For several years, until his health failed, he attended twice-weekly lessons from a Bolivian-born Spanish tutor at Southwick.

Dennis cycled to the lessons-a round trip of about three miles-for he was very keen on physical exercise. In August 1991, for example, he had walked from Koblenz to Aachen and around 2007 he undertook an arduous trek in the Pyrenees. Running on Roker Beach near his home and swimming in the sea, even in very cold weather, were also pastimes that appealed to him.

Moreover, even though his energy was waning, at the General Election of May 2010 he distributed leaflets and canvassed on behalf of the local Labour candidate. Of Dennis, Carol Robertson observed in a letter to a national newspaper that 'despite all his intellectual achievements and learned works', Norman 'prided himself on being a foot soldier for the Labour Party, and worked for the party wherever he found himself'.⁶

In July 2010 Dennis was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukaemia. In late August, after undergoing treatment in hospital, he was

in a cheerful mood when visited by the author one afternoon at his home. He discussed his life and career and political views. He also lamented the hedonistic, anything goes state of society, and talked about his family to whom he was devoted.

During the visit, Dennis disappeared for a while before returning with some of his own books. While fondly paging through *People and Planning: the sociology of housing in Sunderland* (published in 1970), whose chapters include accounts of the growth of Sunderland and slum clearance in the 1930s, he drew attention to the diagrams. He recalled how many hours of painstaking work they had entailed, and wryly observed that with modern technology undertaking such a task would be far less time-consuming.

Sadly, Norman's health subsequently deteriorated and he died in his sleep at home late on Saturday 13 November 2010. His funeral was held at Sunderland Crematorium on Friday, 26 November, when the city was carpeted by fresh snow, the early stages of what would prove an unusually prolonged cold spell.

The funeral was followed by a memorial service at St Andrew's Church, Roker. Among those present were Chris Mullin (who held the parliamentary seat of Sunderland South in the years 1987-2010), Professor Bob Hudson and the former *Echo* reporter, Carol Robertson.

In St Andrew's, a magnificent Edwardian church aptly described as 'the Cathedral of the Arts and Crafts Movement', heartfelt eulogies were delivered by David Green (the head of Civitas) and the former policeman, Ray Mallon, the Mayor of Middlesbrough. A particularly moving event occurred towards the close of the service when Norman's 14-year-old granddaughter, Sarah Hodkinson, beautifully sang a solo performance of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow.'

As mourners left the church, snow was falling heavily and they were thus enveloped by unusually large snowflakes. This rendered the admirable service - a fitting tribute to one of Sunderland's finest sons - even more memorable.

This article is mostly based on information that I received from Norman Dennis and members of his family. I also wish to thank Brian Dodds and Bob Hudson for additional information.

A list of books by Norman Dennis:

Coal is Our Life: a sociological study of a Yorkshire mining town (with Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughtor), (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1956).

Stress and Release in an Urban Estate: a study in action research (with John Spencer and Joy Tuxford), (London: Tavistock Publications, 1964).

People and Planning: the sociology of housing in Sunderland, (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

Public Participation and Planner's Blight, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R.H. Tawney (with A.H. Halsey), (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988).

Families Without Fatherhood (with George Erdos), (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1992).

Rising Crime and the Dismembered Family: How Conformist Intellectuals Have Campaigned Against Common Sense, (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1993).

The Invention of Permanent Poverty, (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1997).

Racist Murder and Pressure Group Politics: the Macpherson Report and the Police (with George Erdos and Ahmed Al-Shahi), (London: Civitas, 2000).

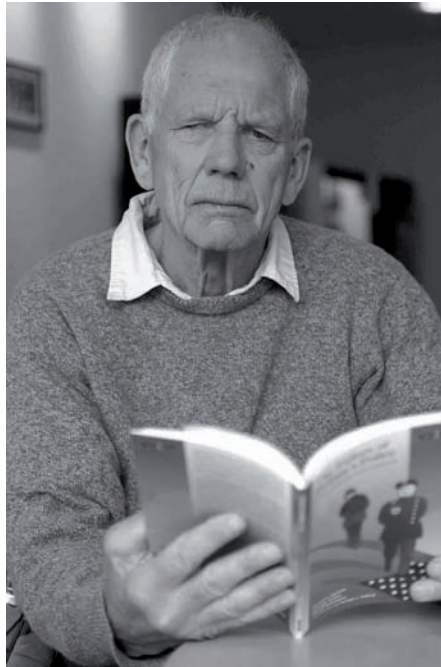
The Uncertain Trumpet: a History of Church of England School Education, (London: Civitas, 2001).

The Failure of Britain's Police: London and New York compared (co-written with George Erdos and David Robinson), (London: Civitas, 2003).

Cultures and Crimes: Policing in Four Nations (with George Erdos), (London: Civitas, 2005).

Notes

- ¹ N. Dennis, *Public Participation and Planner's Blight*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 213.
- ² N. Dennis, *The sensational versus the trivialising press*, (Civitas Blog, 6 January 2005).
- ³ Professor B. Hudson, e-mail to author, 28 December 2010. Bob served alongside Norman (whom he admired) on Sunderland Council in the early 1970s.
- ⁴ B. Dodds, e-mail to author, 7 February 2011.
- ⁵ Professor B. Hudson, 'Norman Dennis, obituary', *The Guardian*, 29 November 2010, p. 38.
- ⁶ C. Robertson, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2010, p. 33.



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North East Labour History Society



Reviews - Secretary's Report -
Constitution and Membership Form -
The Sid Chaplin Labour History Trophy

Reviews

Max Adams, *The King in the North: the Life and Times of Oswald of Northumbria*, (Head of Zeus 2014), 449pp. ISBN 9781781854204, £9.99 pbk.

This history of part of Dark Age Britain is mainly concerned with the geographical area that our NELH examines and discusses for the working people of a much later era. 'Northumbria' was an Anglo-Saxon kingdom which existed from the seventh to the ninth century when the Vikings overwhelmed it. The name is still in use today, but rather inaccurately, for the original 'Northumbria' stretched from the Humber, as the name indicates, to the Forth. What is referred to nowadays as 'Northumbria', was then known as Bernicia, or rather as its southern part. The rest of Northumbria, now Yorkshire, was named Deira.

The volume is certainly very readable and quite good at sorting out for the reader the very complex family rivalries and relationships among the elites of what is now southern Scotland and northern England and Wales, and these are very complicated indeed. In that area, leaving aside Ulster and the Isle of Man, there were no fewer than five kingdoms, and more when the parts of Northumbria were ruled separately as they often were. These tribal aristocracies fought each other, killed each other in battle, assassinated each other and made warfare and murder their profession – though that did not prevent them from also conducting elaborate dynastic diplomacy and even marrying each other. The Northumbrian kings as well as being ethnically Germanic, were also partly British (Welsh), partly Scottish (Irish) and partly Pictish in descent.

In reality the idea is almost certainly mythical of a fifth century Anglo-Saxon invasion in great numbers, exterminating the native Britons and

driving the remnant into Wales. Though written and archaeological evidence is thin, modern genetic science suggests that the Anglo Saxons involved were a conquering elite of warriors who imposed their power and later language on the native peasant Romano-British population. Ethnic origin was not of great importance, religion and allegiance, forced or voluntary, to a particular warlord were the significant considerations.

Oswald of Bernicia, the centrepiece of this account, lived in the earlier part of the seventh century and was one of the more successful of these killers, though he was eventually himself slain in battle. He was later canonised as a saint, and there were also religious issues around his reign. Many of the Anglo-Saxons adhered to their ancestral paganism, including the religiously tolerant Penda, king of Mercia in the midlands, one of the less unattractive of the bloodthirsty warlords and also Oswald's nemesis.

However Christianity was the coming thing, and Oswald was energetic in promoting it in Northumbria, for it provided a very useful ideological and organisational support to the rulers. Christianity in Britain at the time was itself conflicted and divided along three separate fault lines. In the first place there was, inherited from the time of the Roman empire, the surviving Christian practice among the British population, about which little is known and was not of great importance. Instead the principal contenders were the other two versions. On the one hand there was the monastic-based Christianity coming from the north associated with the Scots (Irish) invaders, their kingdom of Dal Riata in modern Argyll, and their maxi-saint, Columba, who combined an intense Christian consciousness with the charisma of a pagan magus. This faith had made considerable advance among the northern English, partly through Oswald's influence.

Both the above versions had developed largely out of contact with the other main contender, the western Christian church based in Rome, which had come to dominate that area of Europe, and had also begun to penetrate and establish itself in the southern part of Britain and so was the Celtic church's great rival. There was no immense theological gap between the rival versions, the main bone of contention, apart from ownership of land,

its produce and its workforce, was over how to calculate the date of Easter, which was less trivial than it might seem, for if members of a family or community adhered to the different versions, some might be engaged in Easter feasting while others were still observing the Lenten fast.

Adams's volume is chiefly an account of these monarchical warlords and their priestly advisers. As he puts it himself, 'Here are the makings of a particularly knotty and melodramatic Dark Age soap opera' (p.280). What does not feature much in his account of this melodrama is the working population which created the resources, agricultural and craftwork (there was no coinage), that the aristocrats and the monks extracted and applied to their own purposes. Apart from warfare and prayer, the secular elites also acted as enforcers of law and custom; the monks as creators of considerable artworks such as the Lindisfarne Gospels or Bede's historical writings. They also sometimes comforted individuals in distress, mostly elite ones but occasionally peasants as well.

To be fair, the written sources of the time have very little to say about the situation of the ordinary people and archaeology is not very helpful either in this instance. However a general picture does emerge, such as represented in the recreation of an Anglo-Saxon village at Bede's World in Jarrow. The mass of the population was subjected to varying degrees of unfreedom. Outright slavery was quite common among the Anglo-Saxons, if not on the same scale as Greek or Roman societies, but generally speaking some level of serfdom was the standard, the agricultural producers, the ceorls, from which, significantly, the word 'churlish' is derived, owed varying levels of stuff such as grain, beasts, fish and honey to their lords as well as personal services, possibly including military ones if they were young and male. In addition however, if the sources are to be believed there existed also a considerable population of outcast beggars, and they get mentioned there, more than other lowly classes, as being objects of religious or royal charity.

From a social viewpoint the most interesting section of Adams's book is the glossary at the end, which discusses class distinctions, by explaining the meaning of the various ranks. There is no doubt that Adams is indeed

a very able historian, and the volume is certainly informational regarding the elite relationships of the seventh century. It is aimed at audiences of all classes who enjoy the Wolf Hall television series (including myself), and written as a riveting adventure story – certainly commendable if you like that sort of thing.

Willie Thompson

Paula Bartley, *Ellen Wilkinson from Red Suffragist to Government Minister* (Pluto Press 2014) 168pp. ISBN: 9780745332376, £12.99, pbk.
Matt Perry, *Red Ellen Wilkinson, Her Ideas, Movements and World* (Manchester University Press 2014 hbk 368pp. and 2015 pbk 424 pp.) ISBN: 9780719087202, £75.00, hbk and ISBN: 9780719097447, £24.99 pbk.

One of the first women to be elected to parliament in 1924 when she was the only woman on the Labour benches, Ellen Wilkinson is remembered, in the North East at least, primarily for her leadership of the Jarrow Unemployed March in 1936. The rest of her career, in its time spectacular and pioneering, is now largely unknown or forgotten, so the publication of two new biographies is to be warmly welcomed. Both are by academic historians but have different approaches. Paula Bartley's relatively brief book focuses primarily on Wilkinson's ideological motivation. Matt Perry's is a much more substantial work and derives from his research in Continental archives into Wilkinson's international role. It includes new information and a broad perspective which enables him to achieve a balanced final assessment.

Both authors recognise the drive, determination and range of achievements of an unhealthy child born into a poor family in Manchester in 1891. How did she strike out of that environment, win her way to a good degree in History at Manchester University before the First World

War, avoid the expected teaching career, launch a successful political career, engage in European and world events, become a government minister and prolific journalist and author of two political novels? Ellen's personal papers were destroyed by her brother two days after her death but the books demonstrate that there is much other evidence to draw on. She even appeared regularly in cartoons, as the press enjoyed her striking fashions, short skirts and short cropped red hair and she was fortunate that her private life (with several lovers) did not receive the public attention that befalls celebrities today.

Both of her biographers explore the lasting effects upon her of her father's dedicated Methodism and commitment to the education of his four children who at the same time had to work hard to fund and support their studies. Bartley's account deals chronologically with the most significant developments in Wilkinson's life, while Perry's thematic approach examines the influence on an idealistic young woman of the radical movements of her time from women's suffrage and Fabianism to Communism and Socialism. He also highlights her internationalism through his discussion of her passionate and active support of the anti-Nazis and anti-Fascists in Germany and Spain and as an anti-imperialist who visited India in support of Ghandi and independence.

The theoretical aspects of her commitments are well worth analysis. It seems clear, and understandable, that she should sometimes appear to compromise her principles, faced with the practicalities and opportunities of office. The first instance of this was her acceptance that she had to leave the Communist Party, of which she had been one of the first members, in order to stand as a trade union and Labour candidate for Middlesbrough East in 1924. She had managed to be a member of both parties for the previous four years. She accepted the necessity to make similar compromises throughout the rest of her life but consistently declared her commitment to revolutionary socialism as an ideal.

During a period of political polarisation in Britain and its Empire and in Europe, it is hardly surprising that facing imminent crises in 1939, the

need to accept war against fascism meant abandoning pacifism. As Perry concludes: 'Shaped by changes in contemporary thought, events and her networks of acquaintances, Wilkinson's socialism underwent twists, subtle drifts and contradictory developments ... (it) joined, or collaborated with, or was influenced by different socialist organisations, parties and informal groupings, sometimes several simultaneously...(This) means that until the last six years of her life it would be wrong to view her as a figure of mainstream Labourism', (p.56). Essentially, Bartley agrees: 'Red Ellen remained throughout her life a socialist and a feminist, but these were negotiated terms not fixed ... Ellen wanted results and her politics became increasingly pragmatic'.

Her first experience of government was in Churchill's coalition war cabinet, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Herbert Morrison; Home Secretary. When Labour won the election in July 1945 Attlee appointed her as Minister of Education. The only woman in a cabinet of twenty, she was facing the challenge of revolutionising an education system in a bankrupt country. Whether or not she was a wise choice and whether she was wise to accept the position is debated by many. The expectation was that she would implement RAB Butler's 1944 Education Act. Although there is no evidence that she had given serious consideration to educational reform before her appointment, her own success via a local Grammar school provided a model for her. The same process would be made available to all children via a grading examination and a tripartite system was introduced providing for Grammar, Secondary Modern, or Technical, secondary education. This measure was much criticised by the left of the party which had hoped for a comprehensive system that had to wait for over thirty more years. However, unquestionably, a major achievement of her office was to fight for, and find the money to pay for, the extra teachers and schools needed to cover the raising of the school-leaving age to fifteen.

By this time Ellen Wilkinson, though only fifty-six, was exhausted and dispirited with her own permanent health problems and the ceaseless criticism from her colleagues. She died as a result of emphysema, acute

bronchitis, pneumonia, exacerbated by barbiturate poisoning, judged by the coroner to be accidental death.

Paula Bartley's lively biography concludes with a politically charged attempt to place Ellen Wilkinson in today's context which might challenge some readers. Matt Perry, with the careful judgement based on his exploration of the widest range of sources, sees the uncertainty around her death, a persistent argument as to whether or not her overdose was 'accidental' or deliberate. 'Life and death have their mysteries. In a sense it is apt to end on uncertainty, as this epitomises how Wilkinson's enigmatic and remarkable life has fed into the legend of Red Ellen.' How satisfactory that his search 'uncovered a more original and complex thinker than was previously appreciated'. Would that more of our written history was concluded so judiciously.

In a final comment on the two texts I would commend both depending on the reader's interest and purposes. While Perry's must now be recognised as the most thorough authoritative work on Wilkinson, Bartley provides a spirited and interesting introduction to the remarkable and pioneering life of one of Britain's first women politicians, outstanding feminist and socialist. Bartley's book also contains eight well-chosen illustrations, almost totally lacking in the expensive Manchester University Press production. Perhaps the paperback edition of Matt Perry's biography due to be published soon will remedy this omission. There are so many telling pictures available.

Maureen Callcott

Alastair Bonnett and Keith Armstrong, eds, *Thomas Spence-the Poor Man's Revolutionary* (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2014) 195pp. ISBN 978- 0- 9570005- 9-9, £15.00, pbk.

This type of publication presents problems for the reviewer. Not only is it a compilation of articles by a number of hands but four of these articles

are revised versions of material that has already appeared in print in other contexts. In a commendable effort to commemorate the bicentenary of Spence's death the editors start from the original text of the lecture delivered by the 25-year old radical to the Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1775 which enshrined the basic principle that underpinned much of his subsequent writing: 'Property in Land Every One's Right'.

A useful chapter by Rachel Hammersley locates the contemporary inspiration of Spence's ideas in the debates over common rights on the Town Moor and a contested Newcastle election that mobilised the town's artisans and had echoes of the Wilkes controversy. But Hammersley also points to the similarities and possible connections between some of Spence's ideas and those of the 17th century political theorist James Harrington. At the centre of Spence's proposals was the devolution of power and property to what were essentially democratically operated parish councils. He saw the extension over the centuries of the rights of private property in land as the source of the most of the evils and corruption evident in 18th century government and society. The dissemination of these ideas was much assisted during Spence's lifetime by his removal to London as a journalist, bookseller and vendor of coins and medals. The outbreak of revolution in France, like that in the American colonies, raised crucial questions about the rights of human beings in society.

Jon Mee's chapter on Spence's relations with the London Corresponding Society shows him working with a group of predominantly artisan radicals who believed that change could be brought about by raising awareness of these issues through the distribution of pamphlets and broadsheets to those normally without access to them, what Edmund Burke had referred to as the 'Swinish multitude'; hence the title of Spence's most famous periodical 'A Pennyworth of Pig's meat' later shortened to 'Pig's Meat'. But as the context of the debates on the means to achieve social and economic reform changed and the French model became discredited it became clear that reform would not be achieved by the political education of the 'swinish multitude'. Wartime scarcity and industrial mechanisation became more

potent incentives to revolt than rational debate. Spence was probably saved from transportation, lengthy imprisonment or even worse by the very extravagance of his style and the variety of his activities, some of which are touched on by the contributors. The minting of metal tokens to his own designs, the composition of ballads expressing revolutionary sentiments, set to popular patriotic tunes of the day, the espousal of the rights of women and of infants. As the century progressed his more utopian ideas based on an agrarian parish economy became less relevant but were echoed in the Chartist land schemes.

There is much of interest in the individual pieces, but despite the editors' best efforts, for this reviewer in the final analysis, apart from the laudable desire to remind readers of some aspects of Spence's work on the occasion of his bicentenary, the study lacks coherent focus.

Win Stokes

Jonathan Bush, *'Papists' and Prejudice: Popular Anti-Catholicism and Anglo-Irish Conflict in the North East of England, 1845-70* (Newcastle Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2013) 274pp ISBN (13) 978-1-4438-4672-1, £44. hbk.

This is a study that calls into question the widely held view of the North East's heritage of religious tolerance. The strength of religious dissent, and the radical political and liberal traditions of the region, were believed to have kept at bay the hostility and intolerance to the Irish and Roman Catholicism endemic elsewhere in Victorian Britain. Bush argues that it is over simplistic to suppose that in a period of sectarian hostility driven by social factors and religious prejudice and motivated by church zealots and political expediency the North East could remain totally immune. He adduces evidence to the contrary drawing upon newspapers both local and religious, and on a range of other sources.

There was, he contends, an underlying continuation of the polemical conflict of the Reformation, an adherence to the belief, held even by the Dissenting churches, in a national identity based on the Protestant religion. This exasperated the ultramontane Roman Catholic Irish immigrants who were a major part of the region's industrial expansion, who brought with them a strong adherence to their Church. In the North East in particular, the influence of the Church of England was felt to be declining while Dissenting churches and the Catholic Church were growing in strength. This had political implications for the Anglicans with their claims to be a State church. Matters were brought to a head by the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850 and the introduction of territorial bishoprics. Bush shows that this was characterised as an act of 'Papal Aggression' and details the responses: political agitation, the Dissenters' mixed attitude the 'Anglican' petition to the Queen, alongside that of the Catholic community.

Yet the reinstatement of the Catholic hierarchy was the culmination of measures introduced by a Conservative government to give greater religious equality to Catholics such as the increase in the Maynooth college endowment and an Education grant for Catholic schools in England. Two thirds of the Catholics in England in the early 1850s were Irish immigrants of whom only a small proportion were enfranchised but there was an existing Catholic lobby in parliament and in the North East which voted Conservative in a region which was predominantly Liberal /Dissenter. Bush examines how the various issues played out, the mechanics of agitation employed and the shifts to acquire electoral support.

The Liberal position was also influenced by external factors. There was considerable interest in England, in the struggle of Italian patriots to free their country from both foreign and Papal state influence and this had particular resonance in the North East, especially in Newcastle, where it had the support of the radical newspaper proprietor Joseph Cowen who was instrumental in bringing Garibaldi to Tyneside. Bush's study demonstrates the religious dimension of the Italian struggle. This support for the Risorgimento was seen as threatening 'the Papal State' and therefore the

Pope and this increased anti-Catholic sentiments, but also created a hostile reaction from the Catholic community, given obligatory endorsements by the Catholic clergy.

Although the growth of the Catholic community and its religious outward signs, churches and schools passed off with little comment from Protestants, the fear of proselytising on both sides held potential for conflict. But the nature of religious violence, often initiated by the Irish themselves, was, Bush claims, primarily a reaction to the attacks on their faith rather than a reaction to anti-Irish prejudice on the part of the English.

There seem to have been some underlying anti-immigrant attitudes which underscored the religious bigotry and socio-economic fears but these were rare in comparison to 1860's newspaper hysteria about a growing Fenian threat, which saw Orange Lodge and 'green' Irish clashes. Orange Lodges, secret Protestant Irish organisation, had been formed particularly on Tyneside and in certain Durham mining villages, as a result of migration from Northern Irish protestant communities. The established Irish Catholics were not prepared to be passive victims and they also formed secret societies, emphatically disowned by their Church. The clashes were rare and dictated by time and place but they did take place.

The study did not, nor did it intend to, suggest that the North East experienced anti-Catholic culture on the same scale as its excesses elsewhere, it had as its main contention, the need for a reassessment of this period in the North East's history. One serious criticism is a lack of an adequate consideration of the socio economic factors determining attitudes on both sides. As it stands it opens up a debate on the North East as a tolerant culture besides breaking new ground not necessarily covered in broader studies.

John Creeby

David Clark, *Voices from Labour's Past – Ordinary People Extraordinary Lives* (Lensdale Publishing 2015) 198 pp. ISBN 978-0-9575891-1-7, £14.95 pbk.

Author David Clark has successfully combined an active political career with the study of Labour History. He was Labour MP for Colne Valley 1970-74 and South Shields 1979-2001. Since then he has served as a Labour peer in the House of Lords. His main interest in Labour History has been the study of rank and file figures. His most substantial work *Colne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism* was published in 1983 and it remains one of the best accounts of a constituency making the transition from Liberalism to Labour. He has also published a biography of Socialist maverick Victor Grayson plus histories of the South Shields and Westmorland Constituency Labour Parties. In the 1960s and 70s he recorded interviews with thirty Labour pioneers, people who had played a part in building up the Labour Party in its earliest years, and from these he has chosen eight to be the subject of biographical sketches. If David had not acted when he did much of this material would have been lost as Labour's 'old guard' died off.

The first of the Labour pioneers to be covered by David is William Watson. He was born in West Cumberland in 1887, the son of a quarryman and he followed his father into quarrying. In 1910 he moved to Canada in search of a better life. He got a job in the coalmines and became involved in left wing politics and trade union activities. In 1915, following his involvement in an unsuccessful strike, he returned to his old job in Cumberland. He became active in the quarrymen's union and joined the ILP. As a member of the ILP he campaigned against the war and faced much local hostility. In 1918, after the Labour Party's adoption of a new constitution, Watson became a founder member of the Workington Divisional Labour Party and so began a lifelong period of service in local government. When interviewed, then in his nineties, he was asked if all the effort had been worthwhile; he was in no doubt that it had been.

The second of the pioneers was Frank Parrott, born in 1890 in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, the son of a warehouse foreman. His

father was a keen Liberal and a practising Methodist. Frank passed the required examination to become a teacher and his first teaching post was in London where he heard speakers such as Keir Hardie, George Bernard Shaw and Ramsay MacDonald. In 1913 he moved to a teaching post in Bedford and became active in the St John's Ambulance Brigade. He also joined the ILP and voiced his opposition to the war which brought about dismissal from his teaching job. When called up for military service he volunteered to serve in the Friends' Ambulance Service and although he was a Methodist and not a Quaker the rules were bent to allow him in. He was posted to York military hospital and married one of the nurses there. He continued to support the ILP and after the war secured a teaching post at a Methodist boarding school, then moved on to a headship at a school in Kirkby Stephen. His 'advanced' views did not go down with everyone but his participation in local affairs won many people over. In the 1920s he left the Methodist Church and joined the Society of Friends. He continued to work for the Labour Party and was elected to the parish council in 1927 followed by appointment to the magistrates' bench. Frank recognised the evils of fascism and although now a Quaker he came to accept that force would be needed to defeat it. He did what he could to help Jewish refugees in the 1930s and provided a home for one throughout the Second World War. Labour's victory in 1945 gave him immense satisfaction and he was delighted with what it achieved. He died in 1986.

Teresa or 'Tess' Nally (née Mullen) was born in 1895 at Shrevington near Wigan into a mining family. She went on to become a member of a Labour dynasty. Her husband Tom became leader of Manchester City Council, her son Will was elected Labour MP for Bilston, and her twin daughters, Alice and Winifred, were both active in the Labour Party. The Mullens were a Catholic family but in her teens Tess rejected her religion. In particular she disagreed with the Church's attitude to contraception and she became a strong campaigner in support of birth control. She married Tom Nally in 1914 thereby becoming a miner's wife. As such her entry describes the hardships suffered by the mining community in the 1920s and 30s and charts her family's activities in the Labour movement.

Willie Brook and Gladstone Mathers were both textile workers. Willie was born in Longwood, near Huddersfield, in 1895. His father was a textiles worker and the family were Baptists. When Willie was called up for military service in 1916 he registered as a conscientious objector and David Clark, wisely, allows Willie several pages to describe in his own words the treatment meted out to him as a CO. After the war he became an active member of the Labour Party. Gladstone Mathers was born in Skelmanthorpe in 1883. His father was a textiles worker and a devout Methodist. Gladstone joined the ILP and registered as a CO during the First World War and, again, there is much detail on how COs were treated, not only by the state but also by members of the general public. After the war he had difficulty in finding work and became active in the Labour Party.

John Beaumont was born in 1888 in the village of Hepworth in the Yorkshire Pennines the son of a textiles worker. He had several jobs after leaving school and joined the ILP at the age of fifteen. When war broke out he became a conscientious objector and served a spell in prison. After the war he became a self employed poultry farmer and ran a village shop. Not being answerable to an employer enabled him to devote much of his time and energy to Labour politics.

The last two of David Clark's Labour pioneers will be remembered by the NELHS. They were Connie Lewcock and Margaret Gibb who attended several Society meetings to listen and to reminisce.

Connie Lewcock (née Ellis) was born in 1894 in Horncastle, Lincolnshire. Her father owned a draper's shop but he died when Connie was only four years old and her mother then married a local Methodist minister. Connie attended a local grammar school and became a supporter of women's suffrage. At the age of seventeen she was appointed to a teaching post at Esh Winning in County Durham. Here she continued her work as a suffragette and joined the ILP. Becoming more radical in her views she set fire to Durham railway station and planned to blow up Durham Cathedral with explosives provided by Will Lawther a future President of the National Union of Mineworkers. She opposed participation in the First World War and in 1918 married Will Lewcock, a former miner, a conscientious objector and a fellow member of

the ILP. Will served as a Labour Party agent in the 1920s and 30s and in 1932 he was appointed the party's Northern Regional Organiser. He retired in 1955 and served on Newcastle City Council until his death in 1960. Connie followed him on the City Council and held several senior positions. She died in 1980 a much loved figure in the area.

Margaret Gibb (née Harrison) was born in 1892. Her father was an agent for a timber company and he died when Margaret was only eighteen months. She and her mother then moved in with family relatives in Dunston. Margaret attended a local grammar school and she did teacher training at St Hilda's Training College at Durham. After college she taught at a school in Crookhill. Margaret was interested in politics from an early age and attended many political meetings as a teenager. She strongly opposed the First World War on pacifist grounds. She joined the ILP in 1919 followed by membership of a newly formed women's section in the Labour Party. As an activist she was a founder member of the Durham Women's Labour Advisory Council which became an influential body in local politics. Margaret married Tom Gibb, a Labour Party agent, in 1923. Tom died in 1927 and two years later Margaret was appointed the Labour Party's Northern Regional Organiser and she played a major role in building up the women's sections in North East England. David Clark, rightly, devotes quite a bit of space to what is an under researched area in Labour History. Margaret retired in 1957 to Cambo in Northumberland and died in 1984. She remained a Labour Party activist to the very end of her long life.

This account of the lives of so-called 'ordinary people' never degenerates into antiquarianism. The voices speak against a historical background provided by David Clark with some solid analysis of Labour's early years, in particular the transition from Liberalism to Socialism. At the end of their lives all the pioneers believed that their efforts had been worthwhile. The Labour Government of 1945-51 ushered in thirty years of full employment, rising living standards and a welfare state. This was no mean achievement.

Archie Potts

Les Turnbull *A Celebration of our Mining Heritage: A Souvenir Publication to Commemorate the Bicentenary of the Disaster at Heaton Main Colliery in 1815*. (Chapman Research Publishing in conjunction with the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers and the Heaton History Group) 92pp. ISBN 978-0-9561248-2-1 2015, £15 pbk

Like Les Turnbull's previous 2012 publication 'Railways before George Stephenson', this book is the product of assiduous research, much of it based in the still under used and under appreciated material housed in Neville Hall, the historic headquarters of the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers.

The Heaton flooding, like the earlier Felling explosion, was one of an increasing number of mining disasters that drew public attention to the disastrous consequences of introducing new technology to increase productivity without paying corresponding attention to the safety of the workforce. The adverse publicity following the Felling explosion led to the development of the safety lamp but at Heaton the assumption that improved pumping equipment that would enable the safe development of a new deeper sinking alongside an earlier flooded one does not seem to have led to any comparable move.

Turnbull supplies a back history of the colliery and its flooding problems and a detailed description of the disaster culled from the contemporary viewers' accounts, now accessible and well indexed at the Institute. He does not seem to have been aware of the existence of Matthias Dunn's Viewbook covering the years 1816 – 24, housed at Beamish museum but with a copy in Newcastle Central Library. As early as 1810 Dunn had become Buddle's assistant rather than apprentice and, as a fully fledged viewer under Buddle's wing, at the start of his independent career in 1816, he had the task of the final clearing of the grisly remains from the Heaton disaster. This and involvement with the tests on the Davy lamp seem to have propelled him into his subsequent career as a campaigner for mining safety and ultimately

the first Mines Inspector.

Turnbull continues the story of the colliery until its closure in 1852 but also considers the subsequent development and growth of the community that surrounded it and the changing employment patterns which emerged. For much of the late 19th and 20th centuries Heaton was synonymous with railway marshalling yards but there is a coal mining coda when, post second world war, Heaton became part of a revamped scheme based on the newly equipped Rising Sun colliery north of Wallsend which was briefly productive. However, in the end, water and geology defeated even 20th century technology and the whole complex was closed in April 1969.

There is a great deal of well researched information in this book but it is unreferenced which detracts from its usefulness as a source for further enquiry. There is also a certain lack of system in the order in which the various aspects of the story are tackled. However it is a worthy commemorative publication that will surely satisfy the generous subscribers from Heaton Local History Group and other local residents who enabled it to be produced.

Win Stokes

Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise & Fall of the Working Class* (John Murray, 2015) 502pp. ISBN 978-1-84854-882-4, £10.99 pbk.

Most books have their best bits and the best bit of this impressive sweep across the past hundred years of British social history, is chapter 10. Facetiously titled, 'the golden age of the grammar school' this chapter pertinently captures this book's recurring theme: the perfidiousness of the sharp-elbowed middle classes and the enduring blind faith the British people have in the patrician beneficence of the Establishment. The author, Selina Todd, who attended a comprehensive school in Newcastle upon Tyne, makes clear in this well-crafted historical account that the true story of the working class has been missing in most history books of the twentieth century. Moreover, the working class have been periodically deceived, not just by

their obvious class enemies but also by those who contrive to be advocates for them. Chapter 10 should probably be re-titled: 'educational apartheid and the warehousing of a generation'. For within this chapter the reader discovers that the post-war Attlee government, despite its unprecedented radical reformist zeal, in reality set low horizons for the working class, particularly when it came to their education.

With its landslide majority and a clear mandate to confront the vested interests of the rich, the incoming Labour government of 1945 boldly legislated to remedy the chronic excesses of unfettered capitalism. Yet, it surprisingly lost its political will when it came to taking on the might of the educational establishment. 'Red Ellen' Wilkinson, as Secretary of State for Education, stuttered to say she wanted to close down public schools; instead she implemented the soon-to-be reviled Eleven Plus. Selina Todd skilfully reveals through the stories told by the generation who took the Eleven Plus test and failed it, how the experience not only condemned them to feel a lifetime of shame but also legitimised a system of injustice and inequality.

The concocted results from the Eleven Plus reinforced endemic class prejudices: most children of the working class are born 'thick' and no amount of education could change this. This fixed view of human nature scandalously ensured that scarce and highly prized educational resources were brazenly directed towards the middle classes. As Selina Todd's respondents show, even the few lucky working class children who escaped their class by gaining a 'golden ticket' to a place in a grammar school often felt estranged by the experience. The great majority of children, however, failed the eleven plus and were destined to experience a stultifying secondary modern curriculum, one designed to educate a future workforce to a minimal level, such that: 'coal was mined and fields were ploughed'. What Selina Todd exposes in this chapter, which is the crux of the whole book, is that the Labour government never intended to radically transform society; the Eleven Plus was a clear sign of its latent intent to move away from the socialist tradition of universalism, towards an ideology of meritocratic individualism. Reluctantly and belatedly, Comprehensive schools were implemented in a

piecemeal and localised manner, mostly in response to the groundswell of public opinion against the inherent elitism of grammar schools.

The current (media driven) nostalgia for a return to grammar schools of the 1950s and 60s is associated with an idealised past when people knew their place and stoically yet stylishly submitted to their circumstances. It was also the period when the working class began to metamorphose into 'the people'. Selina Todd describes how, in a wonderfully ironic moment of collective amnesia, the Establishment and the media forgot how, in the pre-war years, they had pejoratively depicted the working class as the great unwashed, uncouth, militant and undeserving of welfare benefits. In the post war years they became reinvented as the salt of the earth, idiosyncratic, clever and sexy. Most importantly, they were viewed as meritocratic.

Except of course, as Selina Todd shows, this was never the case. In the period when 'we never had it so good', affluence brought about improvements in the life styles of working class people but in relative terms their life chances remained thwarted. It is poignant that at the same time as the working class were perceived as trendy and heroic, working class solidarity was increasingly viewed as archaic. Instead, self-determined and clever individuals (and their families) were encouraged to break with their class traditions and pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. This was part of an ideological shift that laid the foundations for a break with the post-war political consensus, allowing the state to withdraw from its redistributive commitments. The outcome of all this, as Todd describes in the last section of her book, titled 'the dispossessed' was a decisive swing back to the politics of the pre-war years. Those who were clever and entrepreneurial were encouraged to get rich but those who failed could only feel shame.

Overall, this book astutely balances the intertwined juncture between structure and agency. Like E P Thompson's classic study *The Making of the English Working Class*, Selina Todd is keen to explore the real lives of participants, particularly women, to show us how the working class had (and still have) agency. To paraphrase Marx: people make their own history but under circumstances not of their own choosing. The stories in this book

are about people making history, not as a passive and docile audience but as active participants. Throughout this collection of personal accounts and interviews, Selina Todd has carefully woven together stories of resilience and determination as well as defiance and rebellion. Although never explicitly explained or analysed in this book, the class structure and the capitalist system against which these people rebelled, is ever present. The role of the media in sustaining the hegemony of the upper and middle classes is also a recurring theme.

However, the real sub-text to this book is the role of the middle classes. Although they never get to tell their story, it is their stark individualism that this book lays bare. The mass observation surveys during the Second World War describe the working class as the quiet heroes of the home front, while more prosperous residents were seen as selfish and unpatriotic. The middle class complained about their uppity servants and the temerity of workers who go on strike, yet successfully dodged their own civic duties during the war years with a deftness of footwork which would be much admired by today's tax avoiders.

Throughout this book, Selina Todd is keen to foreground the experience of working class women, particularly their role as campaigners. She opportunistically utilises the story 'Spend, Spend, Spend' of the Pools' winner, Viv Nicholson to illustrate both the radically changing circumstances of women's lives and to challenge the myth of working class mobility. However, Viv's high profile story, from rags to riches and back to rags again, is an awkward inclusion and becomes a clumsy metaphor for the rise and fall of the working class. It diverts the attention of the reader away from the real circumstances of most ordinary men and women, who collectively struggled to make a living throughout the last century.

The blurb on the dust jacket is disingenuous in proclaiming this book's uniqueness. It is definitely not the *first* time the story of the dispossessed working class of Britain has been told but it would be true to say that this book comes at the *right* time. In recent decades, many academics, historians and writers of a post-modern bent have ceased to see social class

as significant; it drowned in the sea of identity politics and cultural studies. However, since the collapse of the global financial markets in 2008 and the quantum redistribution of wealth to the very rich, class is firmly back on the agenda. Although we have never had in Britain an equivalent novel as seminal as Steinbeck's *The Grapes Of Wrath*, Selina Todd's book is refreshingly insightful, bringing to the reader's attention the muted voices of the working class, so often hard to hear over the vulgar din of the media, who relentlessly insist that class is dead.

Patrick Candon

Hugh Shankland, *Out Of Italy: The Story Of Italians in North East England* (Troubador Publishing, 2014) 329pp. ISBN 978-1783063-765, £12.95 pbk.

'I was in the DLI along with Tony Sacco of Langley Moor and Manzuotto, the terrazzo worker from Gateshead. When I was wounded and transferred to hospital in Pompei the stretcher bearer was a Bianco from Hartlepool. Then in Naples I bumped into Jock Tricchi from Ryton'. So says Private Ivo Maggiore, Durham Light Infantry, born in Sunderland and quoted in Shankland's book. His father and brother, being Italian-born, were both interned as enemy aliens in 1940.

This book is the story of Italian settlement in the North East from the Romans with their multinational army of occupation to the present day. Along the way the author describes how: Italian military engineers built the Elizabethan ramparts of Berwick; Swiss-Italian stuccoists decorated Seaton Delaval Hall in the early eighteenth century; a small colony of barometer and looking glass makers established themselves in Newcastle in the 1840s, and mosaic and terrazzo workers were commissioned to pave and decorate churches and town halls in the region from 1875.

He also describes the enthusiastic support in the North East for the

cause of Italian unification and when Garibaldi visited in 1864 he was greeted by his great friend Joseph Cowen as 'one of the noblest men the world ever knew'. Ironic then that the new governing class that came to power after unification kept Italy backward and impoverished leading to the mass emigration of fourteen million citizens between 1876 and 1915. A small fraction of these found their way to the North East of England in the late nineteenth century as street musicians and entertainers eventually becoming ice cream makers and sellers. The son of one immigrant, Antonio Marcantonio in Newcastle decided to sell his ice cream under the name of 'Mark Toney'.

Indeed, by the 1930s there were 300 family ice cream businesses in the industrial towns, mining villages and coastal resorts of the region with names such as Rossi, Jaconelli, Notarianni, Fella, Gallone, Citrone and Minchella. In the Ice Cream Alliance they formed what the author describes as 'a little Italian society'. This tightly knit community, 'La famiglia è famiglia', (family is family) was vulnerable to Mussolini's patriotic slogans. Italian supporters of fascism had a presence in all the major cities including Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Carlisle promoting the views of 'L'Italia nostra', the embassy backed official newspaper of the Italian government. As the author explains: 'The new faith stood for nothing more controversial than nation, hard work and family values (of the good old patriarchal sort), what reason was there to be anti?'. Fascism won their 'general acceptance if not necessarily deep politicisation'.

Even so, they held an annual banquet at the County Hotel in Newcastle displaying the Italian national flag along with the banner of the Newcastle fascio with portraits of Italy's king and queen flanking that of the Duce. With significant contributions from the North East the Italian community in Britain raised today's equivalent of £2 million as 'our retort to sanctions' imposed after the invasion of Abyssinia. It seems that the warnings of the lone voice of Giuseppe Zari, a vigorous anti-fascist in Newcastle, fell on deaf ears. Weardale had its own 'Blackshirts' football team but tellingly as war approached Italian applications for British citizenship soared.

When Italy joined the conflict in June 1940, 200 Italians were arrested in the North East, the authorities pursuing a blanket detention policy in respect of any Italian citizens who had been here for less than forty years. Fourteen deportees from the North East were drowned when a German U boat sank the 'Andorra Star' off the north west of Ireland on 2nd July en route to Canada, the youngest was nineteen year old Luigi Bertoia from Middlesbrough. There was no expression of regret by the British government despite the loss of over 700 lives.

Today, Donnini House in Easington Colliery and Donnini Place in Gilesgate bear tribute to Dennis Donnini from Easington who won a posthumous VC fighting with the Royal Scots Fusiliers in Italy in January 1945, 'a bit of a scrapper' and 'always smiling' his family said. The youngest serviceman to win the VC in the Second World War, he too was nineteen.

Post-war it took a long time for hostility towards the 'Eyties' to subside so much so that the Risi family changed their name to Rice and drew the curtains at meal times to avoid being seen in the outlandish act of eating 'worms'. In time the arrival of new immigrants provided an alternative target for prejudice. By 1971 a labour shortage had drawn 100,000 Italian migrants to Britain but attempts to employ them in two pits in County Durham met with fierce resistance. The Durham Miners Association General Secretary, Sam Watson pleaded for their inclusion but gave up in exasperation, 'It is particularly those who prate most about the brotherhood of men who act contrariwise. All men are brothers sounds very hollow on the lips of those who add - except Italians in the mining industry'.

Some migrants found their way into the steel industry in Middlesbrough and the first Italian restaurant on Teesside was started in 1969 by Giuseppe Arceri, who worked at Dorman Long. He didn't think much of the dull, stodgy British food of the time. However, his initiative had been preceded in 1963 by the opening of the 'Dante' restaurant in Low Fell, the move from steak and chips to pollo valdostana had begun. The 'La Capanella' pizzeria opened in Shakespeare Street in Newcastle in 1972 and the Italian food explosion (or at least the anglicised version of it) then took off on a massive scale.

Hugh's book is comprehensive in its coverage of the Italian impact on the region and wonderfully detailed in its research revealing an intriguing economic, social and political dimension to the history of the North East.

David Connolly

David Temple, *Boldon Colliery a Proud Heritage*. (Boldon Colliery Miners' Community Banner Group, 2014) 152pp £12 pbk.

Boldon Colliery was first sunk by the Harton Coal Company in 1866 and closed in 1982. Its banner was paraded at the first Durham Miners Gala to be held on the Durham racecourse in 1872. A new banner was dedicated at the 125th gala in 2009 and this book was written to celebrate the event.

David Temple has written an accessible and colourful account of the history of the colliery and also the social and political setting of the community which was bound to it. The book has everything, murders, political unrest, militants, labour heroes, and traitors, gun battles, ghosts, aeroplane disasters, medical emergencies: something for everyone in fact. It starts with the strike of 1832 and the public execution and gibbeting of William Jobling a miner found guilty of the murder of a magistrate. The judge said it was a warning of 'what happens when men combine together'.

The Boldon men were not deterred and the book is largely an account of their struggle for their rights by combining together. They were quickly prominent in the debates and wrangles of the new Durham Miners Association and its conflicts with the coal owners. The miners were subject to all of the vicissitudes of anarchic capitalism with booms and slumps being managed in the classical way. So during the Franco Prussian War the closure of coal fields raised demand for Durham coal and wages rose, but the Alsace coal fields soon reopened, demand fell and the owners wanted reductions.

We are taken, initially, through a series of strikes and lockouts from 1879 to 1892 culminating in the National Lockout in 1893. These are bitter

disputes, blacklegs are mercilessly harassed and sometimes responded with firearms. The disputes usually lead to defeat for the miners, and allowing strikers to scavenge coal from waste heaps was seen as an act of generosity! It is easy to see why the men associated their plight with the capitalist system and the more radical of them turned to socialist solutions. During these disputes the men, particularly those working in the larger eastern pits, were consistently more radical than their union officials and made loud complaints about their conciliatory positions.

There is an interesting account of the 1893 election when the Boldon men put forward a Labour candidate Dillon Lewis against the sitting Liberal MP, the shipyard owner Sir Charles Palmer who was strongly supported by the Jarrow Trades Council, which contained many of his employees. Their first choice had been William Sprow of the Seaman's Union who had led strikes in Portsmouth and made militant speeches to the miners, but he had to withdraw. Sadly Lewis was heavily defeated; the Boldon men were ahead of their time.

The story moves into the twentieth century and uses the stories of Jack Lawson who entered the pit in 1894 at the age of twelve and Sam Watson who joined in 1912 at the age of fourteen. Both were to become important champions of working men's rights. Lawson was an MP and minister in all Labour administrations up-to and including the Attlee government in 1945. He was famously one of the few labour candidates who retained his seat in the terrible National Government election of 1931. Sam Watson was elected agent of the DMA in 1936, in succession to Peter Lee, and retired as General Secretary in 1962. The Boldon men were still as militant as ever, even voting to strike in 1943 in solidarity with a member who was gaoled for absenteeism.

The postwar period was a changing time for coal. The 1960s saw competition from cheap oil resulting in reorganisation of the industry and the closure of collieries. The 1970s brought a brief respite but the onslaught returned and culminated in the national strike in 1984. Nevertheless this period was generally a good time for Boldon colliery with improved technology and better facilities. Managed capitalism and nationalisation was certainly

better than the anarchic capitalism of earlier periods. The narrative of this period is enriched by personal accounts giving us an insight into working in the pit, the battles of the strikes and the work of women's support groups

If you are interested in working class political history, work experiences and community solidarity you should read this book. It is a "proud heritage" indeed.

*Obtainable from Durham Miners Association, Miners' Hall, Flass Street
Durham DH1 4BE*

Bob Harrison

Willie Thompson, ***Work, Sex, and Power: The Forces that Shaped Our History***, (Pluto Press, 2015) 288 pp, ISBN-10: 0745333400, £15 pbk.

Willie Thompson's title neatly summarises his view of the forces propelling human history forward. More than that, *Work, Sex and Power* tries to offer a thumbnail history of the universe and the place of human history within it. Quite a task in under three hundred pages you might think. Such ambition also makes it a difficult book to summarise and review, dealing with many matters beyond my expertise. The big bang, formation of matter, the age of our solar system, the likelihood of life elsewhere in the universe set the scene for an elaboration of natural, and then human, history. This might seem an intellectual conceit but a serious proposition underpins the book's scale. To understand human history is to appreciate a wider material process. In terms of universal and evolutionary time, our history is precarious, contingent and brief. Such an approach affords us insights into what makes us human. Crucially, the growth of the brain, consciousness, language mark out our line of hominins from our genetic cousins the chimpanzee and bonobo. Work - the need to fashion collectively from nature the wherewithal for survival - underpinned human history. Culture developed amongst the hunting and foraging groups of humans that migrated expansively from their origins in

Africa. This process had two major thresholds: the first the emergence of settled agriculture (the Neolithic revolution about 10,000 years ago) and with it ultimately the city as well as class hierarchy to allow an elite of rulers, priest and the military to live by the labours of others; secondly, the emergence of capitalism transformed the globe leaving even the most technological sophisticated empires like China behind by the late eighteenth century. Sex was also a universal feature of human life. Human brain size and its postnatal development meant an unusually long period of infantile dependency. Nursing burdened women and this resulted in a sexual division of labour in even otherwise non-hierarchical human societies.

This division provided the basis of gender differentiation, sexual inequality and oppression that was universally, accepted as the natural way of the world, and inscribed into religious belief. The subordination of women became more extreme with the emergence of more uneven societies. This was tied up with property relations with the widespread practices of dowry. In empires of the Bronze Age, powerful men enslaved women in harems, staffing them with eunuchs to ensure exclusive sexual access. Thompson illustrates how sexual practices were subject to cultural variations based upon environmental pressures to either restrict population or more usually in the pre-modern context of high death rates to encourage fertility. Sexuality, Thompson observes, dominates cultural practices as well. Clothing that accentuates or hides sexual attributes are universal, as is gender distinction through dress codes. Thompson surveys the practices of marriage and divorce, sex and love, pregnancy and contraception and same-sex relations (purged within monotheisms in their puritan emphasis upon procreation over recreational sex). Power, the third of Thompson's threads of the human tapestry, is connected to the other two. The elites of the citified states based on settled agricultural used their separation from direct production to turn technologies (writing, metallurgy, weaponry) to their advantage in relation to the subordinate social classes as well as their rivals. With such power emerged patterns of ruling with monarchies (endorsed by the gods) and empires. The settled empires clashed with one another and faced the challenge of nomadic

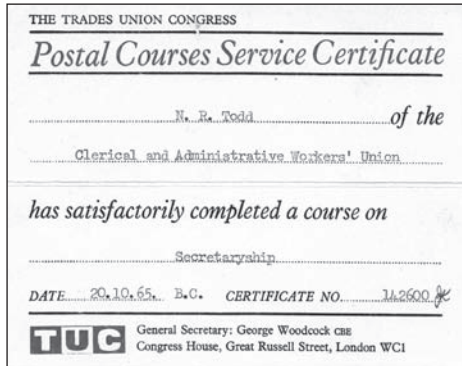
pastoralists. Power allowed the exploitation of the labouring poor, both the peasantry and the artisanry, and this took four basic forms: tribute, slavery, serfdom and wage labour (with debt often acting as an instrument in rendering the individual into a more subordinate economic status). Thompson then outlines the long power-driven trajectory of human history through various forms of state ideology or 'imagined communities' (monotheisms playing a particularly influential role) to modern nationalism.

Under industrial capitalism, power is elevated to a new terrifying level with the threat of unimaginable suffering and destruction through war, environmental catastrophe and modern genocide. Thompson's macro-scale also allows us to pause for the necessary humility in the face of our dubious self-congratulation about human superiority and progress as well as the prospects of self-induced environment, military and economic crises. At the moment, the need to shake the complacency of our world is obvious and this book does that but I did feel that it was a little too pessimistic. Revolutions were doomed to defeat. The law of unintended consequences has repeatedly sabotaged human endeavor. Walter Benjamin's adage that every document of civilisation is also a document of barbarism is a motif of the book, but Benjamin also enjoined the historian to fan the flames of hope in the past so that even history's victors cannot rest easily with their spoils. Thompson recognizes this himself concluding that the emancipatory agenda of socialism (the social critique of class society) that emerged in the Nineteenth Century still lies within human reach. I would recommend anyone to invest their time and money in this impressive book to get a sense of proportion about our place in the universe.

Matt Perry

Robert Turnbull, *Left for the Rising Sun, Right for Swan Hunter: The Plebs League in the North East of England 1908-1926*. (Five Leaves Publications, Nottingham, 2014), 81pp. ISBN 978-19-10170076, £6.99 pbk.

My entry into adult education was as a student on a National Council of Labour Colleges correspondence course in 'Secretaryship' offered through my union. It was a terrific programme, both for its structure and clarity and for the supportive role of the tutor whom I never met. I still use many of the acquired skills, including how to convene a meeting, take minutes and construct an agenda. As a Councillor, I always carry a small notebook in which I jot down key items of case work (the hallmark of a good branch secretary according to the course!). When I finished in 1965, my certificate of successful completion was issued via the TUC that had absorbed the NCLC.



By then I was getting well into Workers' Educational Association evening class and weekend and summer schools. It was a sometimes daunting, often fascinating framework of education that I'd never anticipated. Intellectually challenging, unlimited in its boundaries and full of generally friendly people, passionate about their learning, it was a route to Ruskin College for two years and life changing for someone from a secondary modern school with little expectations. I owed it all to the open minded generosity of the trade union movement and the institutions that it sustained. For me, that was independent working class education.

Would my assessment have been considered ideologically sound by the founders of the Labour College movement, the Marxist miners who form the subject of Rob Turnbull's important book on the Plebs League in the North East? I doubt it, really, and they would have a point. But as Rob notes, the

Plebs League can be seen as a product of a particular, early twentieth century revolutionary moment in time, almost a 'what if' of labour history.

In recovering the Plebs League in the North East from no doubt frustratingly incomplete records, Rob focuses our minds on fundamental questions – who and what is adult education for, who shapes its content and methods of delivery, what is the link between adult learning, equality and social transformation? The answers are in a state of becoming with directions of travel, like much in left wing politics currently, a work in progress.

It used to be clearer, perhaps? At Ruskin in the late 1960s, we were told there had been a survey of ex-Ruskin students that found those who had been on the Left when they entered the College had moved to the Right, and vice versa. I never actually saw the survey – did it exist? – but it justified Ruskin's liberal claim to challenge the foundations of your assumptions.

The question remains, though, whether there can be a link between exposure to adult learning and the adoption of definite political outlooks? For the Plebs League, and the Labour College tradition, the answer was certain. The aim was to create informed socialists with a firm grasp of class and Marxism. It was something seen as different from a Ruskin and a WEA, irredeemably mired in filling the workers' minds with ideas of social collaboration. Actually, testing these long-promoted generalisations could still make a worthwhile research project as, sadly, we don't know enough about the impacts made by the actual teaching and learning methods of either the Labour Colleges or the WEA prior to 1939, despite Jonathan Rose's epic book *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (London, 2001).

What evidence exists can be inconclusive. The young Will Lawther, ultra-militant leader of the Plebs League in the North East, morphed into the older, Sir William Lawther, a pillar of the Right-wing Labour establishment. Yet Nye Bevan, Labour College student in the 1920s, went on to set up the NHS and launch a major housing programme in the midst of post-war austerity. Similarly, Hugh Gaitskell, turned into a left wing socialist in the Nottingham coalfield in 1926 as a result of his job as a WEA tutor-organiser, gave the WEA the cold shoulder during the Atlee Government. Meanwhile, WEA

tutors, fresh from educating soldiers on why they should vote for a new world, organised courses arguing that workers' control should be an essential underpinning of Labour's nationalisations. Adult education was probably not the only contributor to these outcomes.

And here's a heresy. Were apparently stark ideological differences between the WEA and the Plebs League overstated to pitch competing cases for trade union funding among the Durham and Northumberland miners? The WEA in the North East, often in the Plebs League's gun sights, certainly had tutors committed to capitalist economics, provoking many a fine row within the Association. Yet it was the WEA that pushed aside barriers to education for North Eastern working women during the First World War, becoming virtually a women's organisation due to its close links with the Women's Labour League, Co-operative Women's Guilds and the female suffrage movements. It was a WEA activist, Ethel Williams, who fronted Newcastle's famous 'stop the war' public meeting in July 1917 as a response to revolution in Russia.

And it was a WEA tutor, Mrs. Caldwell Brown, who Arthur Appleton, in his autobiography of working class life between the wars, recalled as pacing about the weekly Sunderland economics class in 1938 with 'a closed fist held against the top of her head [as] she read out the Communist Manifesto slowly and lovingly.' (*When the Leaf was Green*, Sunderland, 1993, p.135) Because of its non-prescriptive culture, it was the WEA that gave birth to the Ashington pitmen painters in the 1930s.

Finally, how about an irritating 'what if' thesis? What if the independent Marxism of the NCLC, acting co-operatively with the radical elements of the WEA, had forged a common purpose with the intellectual ferment of the New Left after 1956? And what if they'd all joined up with the technical unions that were growing rapidly in the contemporary 'white hot heat' of scientific revolution, collectively grasping the educational possibilities of emerging microelectronics? Some food there for imagination!

Rob's book ought to start a debate. It's much needed.

Nigel Todd

Jenny Uglow, *In These Times: Living in Britain in the Napoleonic Wars*, (Faber 2014), 740 pp. ISBN 9780571269532, £11.95, pbk.

Terror plots, panic stories, attacks on radicals, demonized foreigners, bank crises, beggars on the street. Welcome to Britain during the twenty years war with France, the first time an overseas war struck into the heart of communities and individual families. In the first place this reflected the fact that a million soldiers and sailors were mobilized and that limbless and blind men could be seen on the roads and lanes. Then because it lasted almost two decades fathers, sons and even grandsons from the same families saw action. However it was perhaps just as important that the enemy had support in the British population. The press was full of stories of subversion and hyperbolic threats from the French. Tom Paine was especially execrated. Patriotic workers carried his name in nails on their boot soles to grind him into the dust with each pace. Connecting with the new fashion for hot air balloon ascents Napoleon was allegedly building a bridge across the channel from an aerial survey and Robespierre was actually a Durham man, Robert Spier, who had changed his name.

Jenny Uglow's very long book enhances any understanding most of us might have of this war. She has conducted formidable research the length and breadth of Britain and unearthed diaries, journals, biographies and letters which will be new to even scholars of this period as well as using better known material from newspapers, magazines and works of art. She employs the material with great deftness seeming to enter the personal space of the individual. Anyone who keeps a diary will recognise the freedom the scribbler has when they write for themselves rather than a public audience. If you admire Jane Austen you might be surprised that she confided to her sister of battle casualties, "How horrible it is to have so many people killed!-And what a blessing that one cares for none of them!"

It is inevitable that a method that relies on the words of individuals and their personal joys and trials would be biased towards the middle and upper classes for they are the folk who left their writings. Of course as is well known many

working people were literate in that period, especially skilled urban workers but little of their written work has survived. The writer is well aware of this problem and she has compensated by creating several portraits of working life from cotton spinners to paupers. She writes with great empathy as those will know who have read her earlier biography of Thomas Bewick, *Nature's Engraver*.

There is a strong bias towards the domestic scene which reflects the fact that so many of her subjects are female but perhaps also that she turns a woman's eye upon certain subjects which a male historian might give less attention to. Her remarks on fashion are very interesting showing how war impinged on dress codes for men as well as women. Officers for example became obsessed by the opportunity to design uniforms down to the trimmings and arrangement of buttons.

Despite the detailed coverage of broadly domestic matters economic and political ones are not given short shrift. She is brilliant on describing the development of financial institutions and their interface with the government in serving the war economy. There's a great portrait of part of London near the modern Euston Station where astute business types set up premises to collect and supply the needs of army and navy making great fortunes in the process. They fed on the burgeoning factory system of the north but also on armies of hand workers male, female and children of both genders. They all inhabit these pages. And so do the rebels; the strikers, machine breakers and resisters of the press gangs. *The Newcastle Courant* reported that, "the sailors of this port dismissed the press gang from North Shields with the highest marks of contempt; with their jackets reversed. They were conducted by a numerous mob to Chirton Bar, and who on parting, gave them three cheers, but vowing that, should they ever attempt to enter Shields, they should be torn from limb to limb."

Neither does she neglect the critical matter of the growth and role of empire in the Caribbean, India and South Africa.

In These Times is a very fine book which will endure. It is most highly recommended.

John Charlton, April 2015

Secretary's Report

In the past year the Society has flourished in terms of its activities and events, but still operates on a relatively weak financial basis. The Society's commitment to maintaining the size and high-quality of its annual Journal, which is very well-received and sustains the reputation of the Society, puts considerable pressure on the Society's finances. With this in mind, changes were introduced into the Society's programme designed to reduce running costs and raise funds.

The First Tuesdays continued to offer a wide range of interesting speakers and topics, but with the added bonus of being more than cost effective. The change to a more attractive venue, without a booking fee, and the introduction of a raffle, means the meetings now make a positive contribution to the Society's bank balance. Increased attendances suggest that the membership appreciate the more conducive surroundings. Meanwhile, the tradition of three formal lectures per year was becoming problematic: I found it difficult to recruit speakers on the fixed dates, numbers were low despite the calibre of the speakers, and each lecture was expensive to mount. It was decided to suspend the lecture programme and look towards more informal social gatherings that would find favour with members and raise money. The two such events held this year proved popular and strengthened the finances.

I am more than aware as I write this report that it would be a pretty hollow piece of work without the efforts of many others; there would be nothing to report. I thank the members of the Committee for their support and wise counsel, and express my gratitude to those agreeing to participate in the First Tuesdays. As you read this you will know what an excellent job the Journal editors have done and I speak for all contributors when I pay tribute to the efficient and good humoured way they went about their task. Special thanks must also go to those members beavering away on the various strands under the People's History umbrella. Their endeavours not only result in First Tuesday presentations and Journal articles, they have

recently built collaborations with outside organisations and have helped raise the profile of the Society.

Almost last, but not least, I must thank all members for their ongoing support of the Society. However, I end with an appeal to non-members. There is a significant disparity between the size of my email database and the list of paid-up members. If you are reading this as someone interested in what goes on in the North East Labour History Society, please think about joining.

Brian Bennison

Officers:

President:	Archie Potts
Vice President:	Maureen Callcott
Chair:	John Creaby
Vice Chair:	Kath Connolly
Treasurer:	Mike Cleghorn
Secretary:	Brian Bennison
Journal Editors:	Mike Greatbatch and John Stirling

Committee Members:

Peter Brabban (Newcastle)	Ben Sellers (Durham)
John Charlton (Newcastle)	John Stirling (Morpeth)
Mike Greatbatch (Newcastle)	Wyn Stokes (Tynemouth)
Lynda Mackenzie (Newcastle)	Rob Turnbull (Hexham)
Paul Mayne (Newcastle)	Don Watson (North Shields)
Liz O'Donnell (Morpeth)	

How to contact the Society

Brian Bennison
27 Ivy Road
Gosforth
Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 1DB

Constitution of The North East Labour History Society

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 at 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.

Dissolution

- a. If the members resolve to dissolve the Society the members of the Committee will remain in office as such and will be responsible for winding up the affairs of the Society.

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- b. The Committee shall collect in all the assets of the Society and pay or provide for payment of all the liabilities of the Society.
- c. The Committee shall apply any remaining assets or money of the Society:
 - i. directly for the objects of the Society;
 - ii. by transfer to any other society having the same or similar to the objects of the Society;
- d. In no circumstances shall the net assets of the Society be paid to or distributed among the members of the Society.

Officers and committee:

The business of the Society shall be conducted by a Committee composed of 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.

The Sid Chaplin Labour History Trophy



Past winners

1988	Kit Pearce	2005	Craig Armstrong
1989	Elaine Knox	2006	Elspeth Gould
1990	Sylvia Clark	2007	Candice Brockwell
1991	Martin Searles	2008	Ruth Blower
1992	David Ridley	2009	Rob Doherty
1993	Pauline Lynn	2010	David Reed
1994	Kathleen Smith	2011	Deborah Smith
1996	Reg Brown	2012	James English
1997	Angela Goldsmith	2013	Aidan Harper
2000	Robert Hope	2014	Molly Courtice
2004	Craig Turnbull		

The author Sid Chaplin was a founder member of the Society and his Memorial Trophy is awarded each year to the winner of a labour history essay competition. The aim of the competition is to foster the interest in North East labour history under the following conditions:

1. The Trophy will be awarded for the best essay submitted on any aspect of the history of labour in the North East. The essay should show some knowledge and use of original sources. It should be word- processed and not more than 10,000 words in length.

2. The competition will be open to anyone who is not employed full-time as a professional teacher or writer of history.

3. An Adjudication Panel, drawn from the Society, will judge the essays and the Adjudicators' decision will be final in all matters affecting the award of the Trophy.

4. All entries must be submitted to the Secretary of the Society and received not later than 30th June each year.

The results will be published in the Society's Journal. The Trophy is a miner's lamp with the name of each winner inscribed on it. Winners may keep the Trophy for one year. The winner also receives a £50 book token.

North East Labour History Society

The annual subscription is £15.00, although in cases of low income and hardship the Society will accept a reduced rate of £7.50.

I would like to join the society.

Please tick whichever is appropriate:

institutions £25

individual £15

Annual subscription includes a copy of the Journal.

Name

Address

.....

.....

Email:.....

Please make cheques payable to:

North East Labour History

or use **Standing Order Mandate** on next page.

Please send cheque or standing order mandate with this form to:

Mike Cleghorn (Treasurer),

17 Woodbine Avenue

Gosforth

Newcastle on Tyne NE3 4EV

north east labour history society
Standing Order Mandate

(Please return to the Treasurer, NELHS, 17 Woodbine Ave., Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 4EU)

To The ManagerBank
Address.....
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Please pay the following beneficiary in accordance with the following details:

BENEFICIARY	North East Labour History
BENEFICIARY'S BANK	Unity Trust Bank Plc
BRANCH TITLE	Birmingham
SORT CODE	08-60-01
ACCOUNT NO.	58254950
AMOUNT IN FIGURES	£15.00
AMOUNT IN WORDS	Fifteen pounds only
DATE OF FIRST PAYMENT AND FREQUENCY	1 st October 2015 and thereafter every year on 1 st October until you receive further notice from me in writing.

ACCOUNT TO BE DEBITED
ACCOUNT NO.

Please debit my account accordingly. Please also cancel any previous standing order or direct debit in favour of the above beneficiary.

Signature:

Date:

Note: The Bank will not undertake to

- 1) make any reference to Value Added Tax or other indeterminate element
- 2) advise payer's address to beneficiary
- 3) advise beneficiary of inability to pay
- 4) request beneficiary's banker to advise beneficiary of receipt

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North East History Volume 46

- **Opposition to the South African War, 1899-1902**
- **Levellers in the North East, 1648**
- **The General Strike – undermined by volunteers?**
- **Health Provision for Byker's Working Poor, 1835-1852**
- **William Morris and striking miners, 1880s**
- **Haltwhistle in the 1930s**
- **An Oral History of the CWS**
- **Norman Cornish and Norman Dennis – an appreciation**

The front cover image is reproduced courtesy of Co-operatives UK



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 Supporters are welcome to contribute to discussions

Journal of the North East Labour History Society

<http://nelh.org/>