

North East History

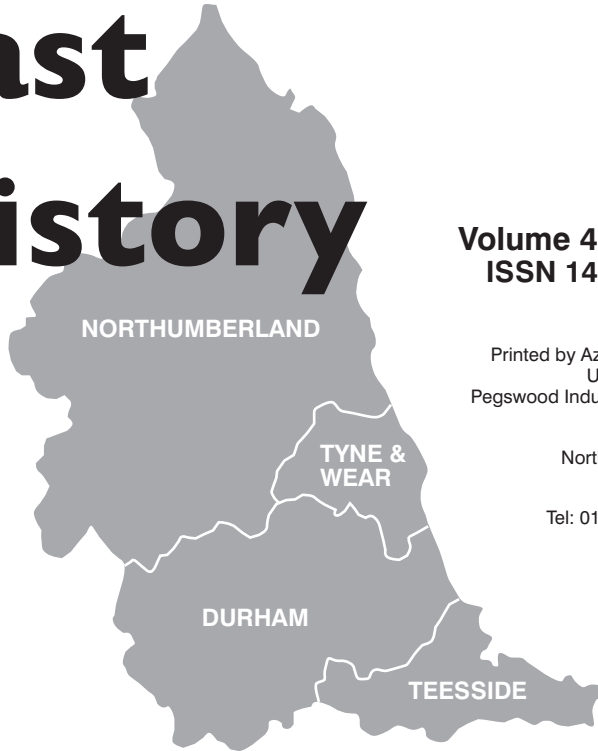
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Note from the Editors

Almost half of this year's journal articles are what might be termed 'oral history', in that they are written in the first person style and are based on the recollections and first-hand experiences of the authors. As our region's economy and employment pattern continues to change following what some people have called deindustrialization, it is essential that the histories of workers, trade unionists and Labour activists are recorded whilst the events they describe are still within living memory.

Our front cover image depicts a protest march carried out by students of Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1969. Its relevance lies in the presence of two students from our region, and their reflections of how Ruskin College opened up new worlds of experience and opportunities for them are part of our group of articles penned by former Ruskin students. Ruskin College was founded 1899 and from its inception it was part of a broader adult education movement with deep roots in the trade unions: exactly as our four contributors have. The Region has a long history of sending students to Ruskin, with miners making a particularly important contribution to its student community. Ruskin College is still with us today and still offering courses for trade union activists.

Education has been a crucial strand within radical and reformist tradition, and with the current Government's emphasis on Academy status for state-funded schools, it is good to see a discussion on the legacy of the 11-plus examination and the secondary moderns that it produced. At least two of your editors are products of a secondary modern school system (and seem to have done ok) but there is no denying that this system blighted the lives of a great many people from one generation to the next throughout our region. Peter Brabban and Patrick Candon's 'conversation' format lends itself well to this debate, and hopefully as their work progresses we will publish further articles on this important subject.

We start our journal with last year's winner of our Sid Chaplin Labour History Trophy. Adam Woolley's study of Anglo-Irish relations reveals the crucial role of established political figures in fostering good inter-ethnic relations, something increasingly relevant to politics and community relations in Britain today. As Woolley says in his conclusion: *'In Newcastle's Joseph Cowen MP, the Irish found their greatest advocate. In his tenure as MP for Newcastle (1874-1886) he tied the Irish cause to his brand of ultra-radicalism; unwaveringly opposing coercion, defending the actions of nationalists and championing Home Rule'*. By his personal example and leadership, Cowen thus prevented the anti-Irish and anti-Catholic xenophobia so prevalent elsewhere in Britain during these years.

With this year's centenary of the First World War dominated by events on the Somme, it is good that our journal contains two essays that focus on events closer to home, and in particular the contribution of north east women to society during those tumultuous years. Both essays highlight the activities of an individual, and both these individuals were daughters of middle class industrialist families whose upbringing suited them for a life of leadership in their chosen reformist role. Throughout our region there will be various community based projects commemorating the Great War and those who served, at home as well as overseas. One such project is *Fenham Remembers* and this too has brought to light the story of a young woman (Ruth Nicholson) for whom the war created an opportunity to demonstrate that women are easily the equal of any man and often significantly better. Details of Ruth are included in the form of an advertisement, which we hope will encourage greater interest and dissemination of similar stories.

Finally, a word of encouragement to all those currently engaged in, or thinking about, a labour history research project. Our journal depends on the submission of essay material and we welcome contributions from throughout the region. We encourage the use of endnotes, to help readers identify source material that authors have used in their research, and we hope that these detailed citations are of value to others, by revealing the wealth of archive material readily available, both on-line and in regional

archive collections. A set of guidelines is available to help potential authors in preparing and submitting an article to the journal, so please contact us if you have a story to share, be it a local study or a personal history that illustrates the importance of working people, their lives, conflicts, and campaigns.

Mike Greatbatch

John Stirling

Win Stokes

Sue Ward

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 188.

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 issues 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/>



Notes on Contributors

Brian Bennison served as 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 born in County Durham and attended Burnopfield Secondary Modern School. He worked as a photographer (commercial and documentary) and in the voluntary sector as a campaigns organiser for War on Want, Oxfam, Age Concern and the National Trust.

Patrick Candon has lived and worked in the North East of England for over thirty years. He spent over twenty years as a teacher of humanities and social sciences. Before he retired, he worked for ten years for Sunderland Local Authority as a school adviser for humanities and then as Senior Education Officer.

Ann Craven completed a degree in English Language and Literature at Newcastle University in 1972, after which she worked as a professional librarian for thirty-five years, mostly for North Tyneside Libraries in a variety of roles. From 2000 – 2010 she was a cataloguer in the Newcastle Lit & Phil Library. Her interest in Elizabeth Spence Watson was aroused while studying for a MA in North East History at Newcastle University. Following retirement, she maintains her interest in local history and libraries by volunteering at the Society of Newcastle Antiquaries library in the Great North Museum.

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.

Neil Griffin is a teacher, musician, activist and writer from Durham. As a teacher he has found himself in settings from mainstream comprehensives to high security prisons. As a musician and entertainer he performed with his band *The Wildon Brothers* on stages from the “Blood tub” workingmen’s club, Stockton upon Tees to the Royal Albert Hall in London. As a local politician he has served as a member of Arts Council England and as Mayor of Durham City, a role which brought vegetarian Neil to the attention of the nation’s media when the fur on the mayoral robes was replaced with fake fur and he became nicknamed the “Veggie Burgher” by the UK’s national press. After the success of *Martha’s Vineyard*, his first novel, Neil has given up teaching to write full time. His second novel, *The Church Across the Street*, was released in August 2013.

Keith Hodgson was brought up in Prudhoe and educated in Hexham, Leeds and University College, London. He worked as a union organiser for thirty-five years in the Northern Region, first for NUPE and then UNISON before retiring in 2014. He was active in many anti-privatisation campaigns, pay disputes and international project work in South Africa, Palestine, Cuba, Russia, Germany and Sierra Leone. He is currently involved in regional work for the WEA, Journey to Justice, and Friends of the Durham Miners Gala, having previously worked in establishing the Trade Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU), one of the first regional based research and education organisations supporting workers resisting de-industrialisation.

Phil Lenton was born in 1946 and was brought up living in a post-war prefab in Twickenham, then a three bedroomed council house in Feltham. Leaving school at sixteen when there was full employment and you could walk out of one job and straight into another, he went through several jobs until he settled as a Technical Officer for the National Coal Board Mining Research Centre at Isleworth. Here he joined the Association of Scientific Workers. After he married, Phil moved to Nottingham as a textile worker, before obtaining the post of Area Officer in the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) in Newcastle. After merger with COHSE and NALGO, he became Associate Regional Secretary in the Northern Region, then National Organiser. In 1994, he was seconded to work for the ANC in South Africa and in 1998 delivered a ship full of medical aid to Cuba, before retiring in 2000.

Elizabeth O'Donnell taught history in further and higher education in the North East for three decades before leaving to develop and promote community heritage projects, mostly for Northumberland Archives at Woodhorn. Her research interests are broad but primarily focus on women's involvement in social and political movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Archie Potts, who retired from Newcastle Polytechnic in 1988, is the author of several books and articles on working class history. He was a founder member of the Society for the Study of Labour History and served on its Executive Committee for several years. He is a member of the Socialist History Society and Labour Heritage, and is a regular contributor to their publications.

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.

Nigel Todd is a WEA and Co-operative activist, and a Newcastle Labour Councillor. He recently published an updated version of his book *Roses & Revolutionists: The Story of the Clousden Hill Free Communist and Co-operative Colony, 1894-1902*, (Five Leaves Publications, 2015).

Ruth Todd is a lifelong socialist and feminist. She is retired and lives in Newcastle.

Rob Turnbull is a graduate of Ruskin College Oxford and the University of Northumbria, and is currently reading for a post-graduate qualification in history at the University of Cardiff. He is the author of *Left for the Rising Sun, Right for Swan Hunter* and *The Plebs League in the North East of England 1908-1926*. (Five Leaves Publications, 2014). His next book will be published in 2017 by the Socialist History Society and is a biography of the Welsh labour leader and prominent syndicalist Noah Ablett.

Adam Woolley is from East Yorkshire and attended Northumbria University, graduating with a First in History in 2015. He is currently writing his Masters thesis examining the tenacity of ethnic loyalties among Newcastle's Irish in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. His journal essay is based on the final chapter of his undergraduate dissertation.

‘A Home Rule Hotbed’

An examination of Anglo-Irish relations in Newcastle upon Tyne, 1850-1890

Adam Woolley

Introduction

This essay is based on a chapter originally written as part of a study into Anglo-Irish relations in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.¹ The study as a whole set out to test what has become known as Roger Cooter’s ‘tolerant Tyneside thesis’ – the notion firstly that Anglo-Irish relations were limited in Victorian North East England, and secondly that this was because social, economic and political factors combined to make the host population more tolerant of the Irish. The study sought to test this thesis by examining three issues which in many areas provided flashpoints for Anglo-Irish confrontation – the Catholicism of the majority of the Irish, their competition for local jobs, and their nationalist politics.

The study found that, certainly in Newcastle’s case, Anglo-Irish relations were relatively amicable chiefly due to the strength of dissent in the city, its rapidly expanding and broadly based industrial economy, and its strong radial tradition. The chapter presented here examines the political experience of Newcastle’s Irish and the host reaction to it. It is perhaps the most important part of the original study as Newcastle’s political landscape was likely the most important factor in limiting Anglo-

Irish hostilities. Before we continue however, it is necessary to provide some context and introduce the national and regional historiography.

The traditional historiographical image of the Irish in Victorian Britain is of outcasts greeted with hostility by their hosts.² Such a picture was reflected in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley's *The Irish in the Victorian City* (1985).³ This volume, Swift acknowledges, 'sought to reflect the consensus on the subject by describing both the degree of demoralization and disadvantage experienced by Irish migrants.'⁴

However, since 1985, great strides and revisions have been made. Edited volumes such as Swift and Gilley's *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension*, and Donald MacRaild's *The Great Famine and Beyond*, have brought together local studies of Irish communities, small and large, across Britain.⁵ In doing so, they have shown that the experience of Britain's Irish was far from uniformly characterised by demoralization and disadvantage. These conclusions have also been reflected in the two recent single-volume studies on Britain's Irish.⁶

Despite these great strides, a highly significant Irish community has been largely neglected. Although the North East did see some pre-Famine Irish immigration it was not until after the Famine that the Irish began to arrive in significant numbers. As MacRaild comments, 'If cotton was "king" in the generations before 1850, coal, iron and ships most definitely shared the crown for a century thereafter.'⁷ The rapid expansion of these industries served to attract a large Irish contingent and by 1851 the North East had the fourth largest Irish-born concentration in England and Wales.⁸ Moreover, the region's Irish population remained high throughout this period, even expanding between 1851 and 1871.⁹ It seems surprising given the numerical significance of this Irish population that, as MacRaild notes, it remains 'one of the least known of all Britain's Irish communities'.¹⁰

Despite such a limited historiography, debate has opened up over one of the central facets of the study of the Irish in Britain, that is, the relations

between the Irish and their hosts. The ground-breaking work on Anglo-Irish relations in the North East was Roger Cooter's MA thesis, published in 2005 as *When Paddy Met Geordie: The Irish in County Durham and Newcastle 1840-1880*, a work from which this study took its inspiration.¹¹ Cooter's thesis, originally produced in 1972, was ahead of its time. As MacRaild comments, Cooter took an 'integrationist approach' when historians were still displaying Britain's Irish as a despised and victimised sub-stratum of society.¹² Cooter argues that in the North East, Anglo-Irish relations were relatively harmonious, so much so that the Irish were 'almost invisible'.¹³ This is an assertion that Frank Neal takes issue with in his article 'English-Irish conflict in the North East of England'. Neal presents evidence of numerous Anglo-Irish confrontations in the North East and therefore argues that we cannot conclude that 'inter-communal relationships...were free from friction at the level of the workplace, public house and street'.¹⁴

Space limitations meant that the original study could not examine Anglo-Irish relations across the whole of North East England, and therefore focussed instead on its chief urban centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Throughout this period, of all of the North East's urban centres, Newcastle had the largest Irish contingent and, excepting Gateshead, it had the largest proportion of Irish-born persons.¹⁵ While Neal is correct to assert that the Irish were not an 'invisible minority' in the North East, and while tensions were certainly present in Newcastle, this study found that tensions in the city were, in relative terms, remarkably limited. Indeed, it would seem that in Newcastle the Irish experienced a greater degree of tolerance than generally experienced in the North East. This is not to detract from Cooter's thesis as many of the forces, with exceptions, that served to limit animosity towards Newcastle's Irish were broadly at work in the region. However, this study suggested that many were exaggerated in the city, leading to a greater degree of tranquillity. Nowhere in the original study was this more evident than in examining Irish politics in the city, the local reaction to them and the extent to which their political voice was heard and represented.

‘A Home Rule Hotbed’¹⁶

‘I feel deeply the debt of gratitude every Irishman owes the constituency that speaks through the noble and great hearted Joseph Cowen... May your generous action, as sympathetic and justice-loving Englishmen at this crisis, never be forgotten by the Irish people’ (Letter from A. M. Sullivan to an anti-Coercion meeting held in Newcastle in 1881).¹⁷

After the Famine exodus of the late 1840s, the desperate economic situation of the bulk of Britain’s Irish meant survival took priority over politics. However, over the last four decades of the nineteenth century, as the economic position of Britain’s Irish population gradually improved, it steadily became more politicised.¹⁸ If this improving situation made political participation possible, it was the Fenian outrages of the late 1860s that served to awaken the Irish from their political slumber. However, this awakening provoked backlashes from the host population, bolstering sectarian tensions in many areas with large Irish contingents.

Fenianism grew out of the failed 1848 rising led by the Young Irelanders. Its aim was to militarily overthrow British power in Ireland.¹⁹ Throughout the 1860s Fenianism was increasingly discussed in Britain and when their activities hit British soil in late-1867, national hysteria set in. On 11 September, thirty armed Fenians effected the escape of two Fenian leaders imprisoned in Manchester and in the process killed a policeman.²⁰ On 13 December a second outrage took place in London. A botched attempt to free the Fenian Richard Bourke from Clerkenwell Gaol using explosives ended with twenty civilian deaths.²¹ These outrages provoked hysteria and a wave of anti-Irish sentiment. Newspapers across the nation condemned the Fenians and produced vast numbers of largely bogus reports of Fenian activity.²²

So what was the picture on Tyneside? The national panic was certainly seen to an extent in Newcastle. Indeed, in the aftermath of Clerkenwell, the *Times* reported that ‘the diabolical Fenian outrage in London...has caused very great excitement in Newcastle...and all classes

of the community have been loud in their expressions of abhorrence of the crime'.²³ Furthermore, numerous stories, likely largely false, of Fenian activity in the region were reported. In the aftermath of events in Manchester, the *Newcastle Courant* reported that there had been a sighting of Colonel Kelly, one of the escapees, in Durham, and shortly after it was reported in the *Newcastle Journal* that two Irishmen had been arrested in Newcastle on suspicion of being Kelly.²⁴ Furthermore, in October the *Courant* reported that a Fenian plot to seize the armoury at Berwick-upon-Tweed had been uncovered. Allegedly, a letter bearing Berwick's postmark, intended for a 'certain individual in Manchester' fell into the hands of the London police. This letter laid out the plan of attack and claimed that 'we will easily manage it in one night.' On hearing of the conspiracy, the authorities took measures to alleviate the threat.²⁵

Clearly it was felt by the Newcastle press that there was a genuine Fenian threat. That many among the local populace shared these fears was demonstrated when there was an explosion in Newcastle just five days after Clerkenwell. The authorities received intelligence that a large stock of nitroglycerine was being held at a central location. Although its owner could not be found, on consultation with Newcastle sheriff John Mawson, it was decided that it should be disposed of through an explosion on the Town Moor. However, the explosion went tragically wrong, killing seven including Mawson.²⁶ Although the *Times* reported that the incident 'cannot fairly be traced to Fenianism', it observed that in its direct aftermath, Newcastle had been sent into 'the wildest excitement' and 'the public mind cannot be dissuaded of the belief that the explosion has something to do with Fenianism'.²⁷ Evidently, when national hysteria over the Fenian threat was at fever pitch, Newcastle's press and people were not immune.

Yet, although the *Times* commented on the 'great excitement' among Newcastle's population in the aftermath of Clerkenwell, the same article observed that the town had remained 'remarkably peaceful' and that 'no demonstrations of any kind have taken place'.²⁸ Indeed, Newcastle saw no

Anglo-Irish clashes following the Fenian activities while William Murphy was using the backlash provoked by the outrages to whip up sectarian tensions and violence across the Midlands and North West England.²⁹ Clearly Newcastle saw a limited reaction. Furthermore any panic that was generated was brief. Locals quickly began to question stories of Fenian activity and even point the finger at the authorities for giving them credence. Just a month after the Fenian operation in Manchester, a Newcastle local complained that ‘...in the north-eastern districts we hear of no ‘movements’ of an alarming character except among the police’.³⁰ In Newcastle, any hysteria provoked by the outrages was relatively limited and dissipated quickly.

Reasons for this rather rational response include the strength of dissent in Newcastle which limited anti-Catholicism and the region’s booming economy and distinct industrial make-up which decreased competition for jobs. Both factors undermined the potential for sectarian tensions. However, a more significant determining factor was likely to have been the strength of radical liberalism; Liberal strength meant Tory weakness. In Liverpool the Tories had been in the ascendant since before the Famine influx and became all but invincible after it.³¹ As Tom Gallagher notes, ‘the Lancashire Liberals...could only watch helplessly the Tories play with consummate skill on working-class sensibilities’.³² The Conservatives consistently exploited anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiment, fuelling and prolonging it, for their electoral advantage and did so in the aftermath of the outrages. By contrast, Liberal dominance in Newcastle meant the Conservatives had no foothold from which to bolster Fenian hysteria and anti-Irish feeling.

However it was not just Tory absence that limited the reaction, Newcastle’s radical political landscape served to actively limit the response. The Radical Joseph Cowen, whose tenure as Newcastle’s MP (1874-1886) will be explored shortly, owned the widely-read *Newcastle Chronicle*. In the aftermath of the outrages, the *Chronicle* reported Fenian activity somewhat sympathetically. Although it condemned the actions

of the Fenians in Manchester, the condemnation was qualified by an examination of the Irish grievances inspiring them. In early October it argued that:

about two grievances no man in this age can be ignorant – the church and the land... Fenianism is no more than the sign and the fruit of existing wrongs... The condition of Ireland, say what we like of it, is a disgrace to English statesmanship.³³

Clearly radical promotion of civil liberty, agrarian reform and religious freedoms translated into some sympathy for the Fenian cause.³⁴ Such reports surely also engendered some sympathy in its wide working class readership. What is more, the *Chronicle* condemned reprisals against Newcastle's Irish. Just eleven days after Clerkenwell, the *Chronicle* scathingly replied to a letter which advocated the dismissal of the Irish workforce in England stating, 'There could not possibly be a more preposterous proposition... Ours is a district where Irishmen have hitherto conducted themselves with eminent propriety, and what they have done we believe they will continue to do'.³⁵ The influence of the *Chronicle* surely served to limit the local reaction to Fenianism.

Although the outrages did not draw the same response from the host population in Newcastle as elsewhere, they had the same impact on the Irish community, serving as a political awakening.³⁶ From 1873, with the foundation of the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain, Home Rulers attempted to draw support from Britain's Irish communities.³⁷ The fundamental role that Britain's Irish were envisaged to play is illustrated in Isaac Butt's words in 1873, reported in the *Nation*:

There were towns in England in which...the Irish vote was the majority. That was a great power... The first element of success was a just and righteous cause, and the next was that they would be able to command an overwhelming majority of Irish members and a powerful influence

in English representation, and if these elements were properly worked, they were sufficient to carry the cause.³⁸

Butt's expectation was that a coalition of Liberal MPs forced to court the vote of their Irish constituents, and Irish nationalist MPs, would be sufficient to secure Home Rule. However, in 1890, Charles Stewart Parnell stated that:

it is undoubtedly true that a very large portion of our strength in this country [Britain] is wasted and lost, owing to the neglect, and in some cases inability of those Irishmen who are entitled to vote to look after their vote and secure it.⁴⁰

Indeed, historian Alan O'Day has argued that at a national level the Irish vote never lived up to Butt's expectations.⁴¹

In Newcastle's case, this assessment does not hold true. This is partly because Newcastle had strong Irish nationalist leadership. For instance, Bernard McAnulty, described on his death as 'the life and soul of all the Irish political movements in the city' and still seen today by the city's Irish as 'the father of the Irish in Newcastle', was crucial to mobilising Newcastle's Irish.⁴² Furthermore, Tim Healy, who would go on to become one of the lead Home Rulers, played an instrumental role.⁴³ The success that these individuals and others had is shown by the fact that in this period politicians were forced to court Irish support.⁴⁴ Indeed, although the Irish in Newcastle generally voted Liberal, in 1874 the Tory Charles Hammond was elected. His unlikely success was largely due to his promises to the Irish community. Indeed, he would prove good to his word, being one of only ten English MPs to support Butt's 1874 Home Rule motion.⁴⁵

The high level of organisation amongst the Irish was not the only factor behind the political interests of Newcastle's Irish being relatively well looked after. A more significant factor again was Newcastle's long-standing

radical Liberal tradition. Although the largely Liberal North East was broadly responsive to the Irish cause, Eugenio Biagini has rightly singled out Newcastle as 'a Home Rule hotbed'.⁴⁶ The fact that it was a Home Rule hotbed had a great deal to do with it being a bastion of radicalism.⁴⁷ It was in Newcastle's incredibly popular radical Liberal MP Joseph Cowen that the region's Irish, indeed the nation's Irish, had their most articulate and dogged advocate. Cowen was an ultra-Radical and Keith Harris is right to argue that in Home Affairs he established his own distinct 'Newcastle school of Radicalism'.⁴⁸ Moreover, his influence extended beyond Britain. On his death in 1900, *Justice*, the Marxist Social Democratic Federation's mouthpiece, reported that 'revolutionists of all countries will join with us in mourning the death of Joseph Cowen...the sturdy champion of oppressed people everywhere'.⁴⁹ Foremost amongst such peoples for Cowen were the Irish. In 1885, he was one of just four Liberals whom Parnell exempted from his anti-Liberal, anti-Radical manifesto.⁵⁰ The reason for Cowen's exemption was that, as Joseph Keatling commented, 'his sympathy for Irish Tynesiders was extraordinary'.⁵¹ Cowen strongly advocated the release of Fenian prisoners.⁵² He supported the Land League and endorsed the National Land League of Great Britain whose first conference was held in Newcastle.⁵³ Most significantly, throughout the 1870s and until retiring from public life in 1886, despite it bringing him into collision with the Liberal caucus, he vehemently opposed coercion and championed Home Rule.⁵⁴

Since the Act of Union (1800), coercion, alongside limited concessions, had been the chief means used by Westminster to suppress Ireland's nationalist aspirations.⁵⁵ This would not change as Gladstone's government attempted to deal with increasing unrest as Parnell used the Land League to harness agrarian radicalism behind Home Rule.⁵⁶ Cowen strongly opposed coercion. Speaking in the House of Commons in 1881 against the then proposed Coercion Bill, Cowen highlighted the hypocrisy of the Liberals' use of coercion, asking the Liberals 'if the Conservatives had been in office and the Liberal Party had been on the

opposing benches...would not such a proposal as is now before them have been denounced with indignant eloquence as the natural outcome of tyrannical Tory rule?⁵⁷ He went on:

Let them [MPs] suppose that England had been conquered by France, as Ireland had been by England, and that for seven hundred years the history of this country under French rule had been a black record of crime, violence and opposition... Let them suppose there had been great and prolonged distress, deepening in some districts into famine; and the people in their desperation had been driven to regrettable excesses. Let them suppose further, that there was a parliament in Paris which contained some 550 Frenchmen and 100 Englishmen and that the parliament of Frenchmen not only suspended the constitutional liberties of the English people but the parliamentary liberties of the English representatives. What would they have said, and how would they have acted? I would not insult them by supposing that under such circumstances their opposition to such legislation would not have been as dogged and determined as the opposition of the Irishmen was to like legislation for their native lands.⁵⁸

In this speech Cowen articulated his moral opposition to a Bill that would attack the liberties of an Irish people fighting for greater freedoms. Furthermore, unlike other Radicals such as his fellow north-easterner Thomas Burt who opposed coercion but did not condone the obstructionist tactics of Irish MPs, Cowen strongly supported the Parnellites' efforts, involving a 41-hour filibuster, to disrupt the Bill's discussion and opposed their expulsion from the House.⁵⁹ Cowen would speak, albeit in vain, a further five times against the Bill and, in 1882, would be one of just two English MPs to oppose another Coercion Bill introduced in the aftermath of the Phoenix Park murders.⁶⁰

Joseph Cowen's feelings on coercion were mirrored in his constituency. Just three days after Cowen's initial speech opposing the 1881 Bill

a meeting was held at the Circus, Percy Street, whose purpose was 'to place on record a protest against Coercion'.⁶¹ The meeting was allegedly so popular that 'the immense auditorium of the Circus was crowded to repletion long before the hour set for the commencement of the proceedings, and that hundreds desirous of obtaining admission were disappointed'.⁶² The newspaper report claims that of the estimated four or five thousand people present, only around twenty spoke out in favour of coercion.⁶³ This does not seem wholly surprising given the meeting's purpose but nonetheless the figures are striking. Clearly Cowen's moral opposition to coercion was felt in his constituency.

As wholeheartedly as Cowen opposed coercion, he supported Home Rule. Cowen was one of the earliest Liberal and Radical MPs to support Home Rule and championed it until his retirement. Speaking at a pro-Home Rule rally in Birmingham on 17 June 1886, after Gladstone's Home Rule Bill had been defeated with the help of five of Birmingham's eight MPs, Cowen articulated the moral case for Home Rule, stating:

Behind emancipation, tithe reform, disestablishment, and the Land Acts, and deeper than them all, there is the intensified yearning of the Irish Celt for a national existence – for the free growth for his peculiarities of character, for a right to determine the methods and apply the power of his own life.⁶⁴

Ultimately, Cowen believed that behind all the reforms Westminster had been forced to concede due to popular discontent, was a feeling of Irish nationality distinct from Britain and, therefore, a desire for self-determination. He further argued that such a desire and the agitation it caused would never be destroyed by either coercion or concession and therefore 'if Ireland is ever to be won over to settled order and contentment...her honourable ambitions to administer her own affairs [must be] gratified'.⁶⁵ Essentially, the only thing that would satisfy nationalist sentiment and preserve the Union, as well as being morally

imperative, was granting Home Rule.⁶⁶

Again, such views were reflected more broadly in Newcastle. Surprisingly in 1872 even the conservative *Courant* bemoaned the condemnation of Home Rulers in the national press and displayed them as men motivated by 'candour, patriotism and sense'.⁶⁷ By January 1882, the Newcastle Debating Society had set up a mock parliament to discuss Home Rule. The member playing Secretary of State for the Colonies argued that there 'are important matters of municipal management which are brought from Ireland to Westminster at great cost, and which, along with other matters of self-government, might...be left to the Irish people'.⁶⁸ In the following weeks, many other MPs came to support this view.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the aftermath of Gladstone's announcement of his Home Rule Bill, a Bill which permanently split the Liberals, it was recorded in a letter from A. K. Durham, secretary of the Newcastle Liberal Association, to Cowen that a meeting of the Association had voted overwhelmingly (516 to 4) in favour of a Bill they considered a 'noble measure worthy of acceptance by the people of the United Kingdom'.⁷⁰ The strength of Newcastle's radical Liberal tradition plainly led to broad support for Home Rule.

This is not to say that there is evidence to suggest that Irish Nationalism was actively supported by Newcastle's working-class.⁷¹ However, a lack of active support is very different from the active resistance seen elsewhere. O'Day argues that the violent backlash against Home Rule that was seen in places such as Glasgow and Liverpool was a chief obstacle to mobilising the Irish vote.⁷² Newcastle did not see such a backlash largely because of popular allegiance to Cowenite radicalism which, as Joan Hugman has argued, took Home Rule as a central plank and intertwined Irish and radical interests until 'scarcely distinguishable'.⁷³ Cowen's popularity was such that he hardly needed the support of the Irish in elections. For those many that supported him, opposing Home Rule would have been impossible to reconcile with otherwise endorsing his principled radical politics.⁷⁴

Conclusion

In Victorian Newcastle, the Irish experienced a relatively large degree of political toleration. Although Newcastle was not immune from the anti-Irish hysteria provoked by the Fenian outrages, the local response was relatively limited and dissipated quickly because Tory weakness prevented them from fuelling anti-Irish feeling and because Newcastle's Cowenite radical press actively dampened anti-Irish hysteria. When Irish nationalism turned again to a largely constitutional approach, nationalist leaders hoped that Britain's Irish community would be successfully organised to help carry Home Rule through parliament. Although this hope was not realised nationally in this period, in Newcastle the vote was well organised by strong nationalist leaders.

However, strong leadership was not the only reason that Irish political interests were relatively well looked after. What was again most significant was Newcastle's radical Liberal tradition. Liberal politics were more broadly associated with the North East but were exaggerated in Newcastle. In Newcastle's Joseph Cowen MP, the Irish found their greatest advocate. In his tenure as MP for Newcastle (1874-1886) he tied the Irish cause to his brand of ultra-radicalism; unwaveringly opposing coercion, defending the actions of nationalists and championing Home Rule. Although there is little evidence of working-class support for Home Rule, Cowen's huge popularity prevented the active resistance to Home Rule seen elsewhere.

Notes

- ¹ This essay is an extract from my prize-winning dissertation entitled 'In no part of Great Britain were the relations...so friendly and intimate as on Tyneside: An examination of Anglo-Irish relations in Newcastle upon Tyne 1850-1890' (Northumbria University, 2015). The essay title is a quote from Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 59.
- ² Roger Swift, 'The Outcast Irish in the British Victorian City: Problems and Perspectives', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 99 (1987), pp. 264-276.
- ³ Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

- ⁴ Roger Swift, 'Historians and the Irish: Recent Writings on the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by Donald MacRaild (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 14.
- ⁵ Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939* (Savage, Maryland: Barnes & Noble Books, 1989); Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds.), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999); Donald MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).
- ⁶ Graham Davis, *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991); Donald MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- ⁷ MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora*, p. 55.
- ⁸ Frank Neal, 'English-Irish conflict in the North East of England' in *The Irish in the British Labour Market*, ed. by Patrick Buckland and John Belchem, (Liverpool: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1992), pp. 59-85.
- ⁹ Neal, p. 60.
- ¹⁰ MacRaild, *The Great Famine and Beyond*, p. 6.
- ¹¹ R.J. Cooter, 'The Irish in County Durham and Newcastle 1840-1880' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Durham, 1972). See also R.J. Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie: The Irish in County Durham and Newcastle 1840-1880* (Sunderland, Sunderland University Press, 2005).
- ¹² Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. ix.
- ¹³ As above, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ Neal, p. 61.
- ¹⁵ Neal, p. 61.
- ¹⁶ Biagini, p. 59.
- ¹⁷ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 29 January 1881, in TWAS, DF.COW/B/214.
- ¹⁸ Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 143-144.
- ¹⁹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 92-100.
- ²⁰ As above, p. 103.
- ²¹ As above, p. 104.
- ²² MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain*, p. 125.
- ²³ 'The Fenian Outrage', *The Times*, 17 December 1867, p. 10.
- ²⁴ 'The Fenian Movement', *Newcastle Courant*, 27 September 1867, p. 5. See also Neal 'English-Irish Conflict', p. 73.

- 25 'Fenian alarm at Berwick', *Newcastle Courant*, 11 October 1867, p. 2.
- 26 'The Explosion at Newcastle-On-Tyne', *The Times*, 21 December 1867, p. 9.
- 27 'The Terrible Explosion at Newcastle', *The Times*, 19 December 1867, p. 9.
See also 'Terrific Explosion at Newcastle', *The Times*, 18 December 1867, p. 9.
- 28 'The Fenian Outrage', *The Times*, 17 December 1867, p. 10.
- 29 MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora*, pp. 179-181.
- 30 *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 14 October 1867, p. 2.
- 31 Gallagher, 'The Tale of Two Cities: communal strife in Glasgow and Liverpool before 1914', in *The Irish in the Victorian City*, ed. by Swift and Gilley, p. 115.
- 32 As above, p. 116.
- 33 'Fenianism: Its cause and its cure', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 2 October 1867, cited in Joan Hugman, 'Joseph Cowen of Newcastle and radical liberalism' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Northumbria, 1993, p. 154).
- 34 Hugman, as above, p. 177.
- 35 'Irishmen in England', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 December 1867, p. 2.
- 36 Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 143-144.
- 37 Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (London: Phoenix, 2003), pp. 35-36.
- 38 Alan O'Day, 'The political organization of the Irish in Britain, 1867-90', in *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939*, ed. by Swift and Gilley, p. 185.
- 39 As above, pp. 184-185.
- 40 As above, p. 184.
- 41 As above, pp. 185-186.
- 42 *Newcastle Courant*, 15 September 1894, p. 4. See also Mike Kelly, 'No sign of Irish influx slowing down', *The Journal*, 24 December 2014, pp. 16-17.
- 43 Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 162.
- 44 MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora*, p. 131.
- 45 Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 163.
- 46 Biagini, p. 59.
- 47 As above, p. 54.
- 48 Keith Harris quoted in Nigel Todd, *The Militant Democracy: Joseph Cowen and Victorian Democracy* (Whitley Bay: Berwick Press, 1991), p. 2.
- 49 As above, p. 3.
- 50 Biagini, p. 52. See also Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 165.
- 51 Joseph Keatling quoted in Cooter, *When Paddy met Geordie*, p. 165.
- 52 Speech made by Joseph Cowen in the House of Commons on the release

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of the Fenian prisoners, 2 August 1876, in Tyne and Wear Archives, ref no. DFCOW/B/176.

53 Todd, p. 142.

54 As above, p. 144.

55 Patricia Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland: The Ulster Question in Britain to 1914* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 19-20.

56 Davis, pp. 204-206.

57 Speech given by Joseph Cowen in the House of Commons on the Irish Coercion Bill, 26 January 1881, in Tyne and Wear Archives, Ref no. DFCOW/B/211.

58 As above.

59 Todd, *The Militant Democracy*, p. 138.

60 Speeches made by Joseph Cowen in the House of Commons on the Irish Coercion Bill, in Tyne and Wear Archives Ref no. DFCOW/B. See also Todd, p.143.

61 *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 29 January 1881, in TWAS, DFCOW/B/214.

62 As above.

63 As above.

64 Speech by Joseph Cowen on the subject of Ireland, given in Birmingham, 17 June 1886, in Tyne and Wear Archives, Ref no. DFCOW/379.

65 'Mr Joseph Cowen MP on foreign affairs and home politics', *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 20 February 1885, p. 2.

66 Speech by Joseph Cowen in the House of Commons on Ireland, 7 June 1886, Ref no. DFCOW/B/377.

67 'The Home Rule Movement', *Newcastle Courant*, 12 January 1872, p. 5.

68 Biagini, p. 59.

69 As above.

70 Letter from A. K. Durham to Joseph Cowen on resolution on Ireland, 13 April 1886, in Tyne and Wear Archives, ref no. DFCOW/B/372.

71 Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 168-169.

72 O'Day, 'The political organization of the Irish in Britain', p. 186. See also MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora*, p. 182.

72 Hugman, pp. 175-176.

73 Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 166. See also Todd, p. 158.

The Cult of the Savoury Succulent. Competitive Leek Growing in East Northumberland, 1843-1913

Brian Bennison

Leek growing, according to the *Daily Herald* in January 1914, had become 'a regular cult'.¹ On the Northumberland coalfield at the height of 1913's leek show season, covering four weeks at the start of autumn, the *Morpeth Herald* carried reports of almost seventy competitions, over half of them at workingmen's clubs.² The cultivation of leeks for competition was by then well-established and continues to be routinely cited as a long-standing North East tradition.³ Yet this unlikely vehicle for keen rivalry, so exceptional when considered alongside the inherently competitive pastimes of organised sport and the likes of billiards and whippet racing, has failed to attract the close attention of the historian.

Two publications mention the emergence of leek growing but say little more than it had found favour by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴ Only Metcalfe, in his study of leisure in Victorian East Northumberland offers an outline of its development, albeit in one paragraph.⁵ Metcalfe's brief summary points to leek competitions originating as initiatives by innkeepers in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, with the growth of annual shows associated with leek clubs a phenomenon of the late 1880s, given a further boost by the spread of workingmen's clubs in the early part of the

twentieth century. What follows is an attempt to put some flesh on these bare bones by examining competitive leek growing in the same district and over the same period as in Metcalfe's wider work on recreation.

Origins

When the hobby of showing leeks first began is difficult to pin down. That it all started in the middle of the nineteenth century amongst miners has become the conventional wisdom when passing reference is made to its origins.⁶ An assertion, occasionally repeated, that it all began in 1846 has proved impossible to verify.⁷ In the very south of Northumberland in 1843 a leek show under the auspices of the Haddrick's Mill Floral Society claimed the distinction of being 'the largest meeting ever held in the North of England for showing the vegetable', with the prize for the best six leeks going to a stand weighing 7lb 7 oz.⁸ The event was certainly a stand-alone leek show, but not in the form that became familiar. Firstly, the show was held towards the end of December, whereas the practice soon became one of holding competitions only slightly later in the gardening year than the traditional flower and vegetable shows, usually in September or the first weeks of October. Secondly, the criteria for deciding competitions at that time was weight, rather than cubic capacity within a restricted length.⁹ There is little evidence of other shows devoted only to the leek until one at the *Gardeners' Hotel*, Bedlington, in 1852.¹⁰ However, by the end of the decade they were becoming more common.

The Role of Landlords

Shows were promoted by landlords of licensed premises, who offered a handful of cash prizes and charged an entrance fee, typically a shilling. Sometimes an additional prize was awarded for the best single leek or the heaviest leek. Presumably such enterprise was prompted by the licensee's belief that entry fees and enhanced sales at the bar would help him realise a profit. Leek shows were often stretched over two or three days and attracted many visitors in addition to the actual participants.¹¹

Table 1 lists some competitions that took place between 1858 and 1863. These were open to all comers, as were others held in the district during this period.¹²

Table 1. Some Leek Shows held in East Northumberland 1858-63

Show	Year	Class	First Prize
<i>Blue Bell</i> , West Cramlington	1858	4 leeks	£1
<i>Dudley Hotel</i> , Dudley Colliery	1858	4 leeks	£1
<i>Fox & Hounds</i> , Cramlington	1859	4 leeks	£1. 5s.
<i>Bridge Inn</i> , Annitsford	1859	4 leeks	£1
<i>Jolly Anglers</i> , Hartford Bridge	1862	3 leeks	£0. 15s.
<i>Fountain Inn</i> , Bedlington	1863	3 leeks	£0. 10s.
<i>Grey Horse</i> , Camperdown	1863	3 leeks	£1
<i>Gardners' Arms</i> , Bedlington	1863	3 leeks	£0. 12s. 6d
<i>Albion Inn</i> , Shankhouse	1863	3 leeks	£1. 1s.
Source: <i>Morpeth Herald</i> , various dates, 2 October 1858 to 21 November 1863.			

On the admittedly limited evidence of Table 1, it appears that the original class of four leeks was being displaced by the less exacting three to a stand, possibly to attract more entries, though money prizes remained the chief enticement for would-be exhibitors. In 1861 the single prize at Cramlington Station was advertised as ‘a good pig’, but the landlord then had second thoughts and split the nominal value of the pig (25 shillings) into three cash prizes.¹³

Leek competitions continued to be promoted by licensees and between 1866 and 1876 shows were inaugurated, for example, in public houses at Bedlington Station, Choppington Station, Blyth, Clifton, Annitsford, Bedlington, North Blyth, Crofton, Guide Post and Cowpen Quay.

Although the mining districts of the North East would become the undisputed centre of leek growing, shows were also taking place at the same time, if not on the same scale, in other parts of the United Kingdom.¹⁴ By the mid 1880s many more events had been added to the East Northumberland leek show calendar. At the *Fountain Inn*, Bedlington, for instance, at a show ‘confined to cottagers’, nineteen stands competed for six prizes added to by the landlord’s donation of 30 shillings and another’s gift of five stones of potatoes.¹⁵

The Emergence of Leek Clubs

Whilst the growth of landlord-organised shows continued, combining open entry with cash prizes, a few steps were being taken to set up leek clubs. In 1858 a society was formed in Morpeth with the intention of ‘holding an annual exhibition of leeks’.¹⁶ At a show staged by the Barrington Leek Society at the *Alma Inn*, Bedlington, in 1862, twenty-four members competed in pairs for the modest prize of a jug of brown ale. The bonus, however, was a supper prepared by the hostess of the inn, whose ‘abilities in the cooking department were well displayed in the viands set up for mastication’.¹⁷ In 1872 a meeting was called at the *Masons’ Arms*, Bedlington, with the intention of forming a society to set up a Great Central Leek Show. A committee was formed of ‘seven practical leek growers’ and the membership book was open to anyone paying a subscription of six pence per month.¹⁸ The first show had nineteen participants competing for a first prize of 10 shillings down to a fifth prize of a florin.

The 1880s became the decade during which leek clubs gradually surfaced, their distinguishing features being a membership, sometimes restricted in size or by a geographical qualification, and a regular subscription which funded the prizes. At first, leek clubs evolved along existing public house lines and complemented the growing number of open shows. By the end of the decade the *Newcastle Courant* could speak of ‘every village having a leek show’, whilst another newspaper’s colourful judgement was that ‘the growing of leeks has never been so popular since the days when

Nero used to feed on the savoury succulent'.¹⁹ Quite why the growing and showing of leeks had begun to take up such a central position in the lives of miners is not an easy question to answer, though the notion that gardening in fresh air was a satisfying antidote to a subterranean working life crops up occasionally. A pair of sociologists recognised that a more complex explanation was likely and suggested, amongst other things, that leek growing offered 'a quiet and relaxing release from a crowded family home' and 'entry into an all-male peer group', which met, of course, on licensed premises.²⁰

The Impact of Social Clubs

It is tempting to suggest that by the early 1890s legislation on allotments was beginning to have some impact on the extent of leek growing, but this is unlikely.²¹ It was the growth of the workingmen's social club movement that significantly influenced the expansion of the hobby. Workmen's clubs took a hold in the mining communities of East Northumberland such that by 1906 a large and flourishing Northumberland branch of the CIU (Clubs & Institute Union) had been formed. Licensing statistics for 1908 revealed Bedlingtonshire to have the largest number of clubs per head of population in the county and in 1914 three-fifths of Ashington's adult males were thought to be affiliated to the CIU through the area's clubs.²² With their working practices based on mutuality, their experience of running and catering for events, and their spacious accommodation, workmen's clubs were ideal hosts for leek clubs and leek shows. Table 2 identifies some of the leek clubs formed at social clubs in two decades around the turn of the century.

Table 2. Some Leeks Clubs formed within Workingmen's Social Clubs, 1893-1911

Club	Date of First Show
<i>Bedlington Station S C</i>	1893
<i>West End S C, Ashington</i>	1902
<i>Ashington & District W S C</i>	1902
<i>Mortimer Street S C, Ashington</i>	1902
<i>Bedlington S C</i>	1904
<i>Hartford & Shankhouse W S C</i>	1904
<i>Radcliffe Colliery W S C</i>	1904
<i>Newbiggin, North Seaton & District S C</i>	1904
<i>Seaton Burn & District W S C</i>	1906
<i>Cosmopolitan S C, Ashington</i>	1906
<i>Newsham S C</i>	1906
<i>Pegswood W S C</i>	1907
<i>Morpeth S C</i>	1908
<i>Stakeford S C</i>	1909
<i>Ashington & Ellington S C</i>	1911
Source: <i>Morpeth Herald</i> , various dates, 14 October 1893 to 17 October 1911.	

Prizes

A feature of most leek clubs was that everyone got prizes. The levies on members were generally used to buy goods across a range of values which were handed out in order of merit. Organisers bought items which were of practical value and notices of shows often stressed the utility of the available prizes. 'Valuable' and 'useful' were two words invariably used in tandem, sometimes supplemented by 'ornamental', 'good', 'substantial' or 'well-chosen'.²³

The first show of the Portland Leek Club of Ashington promised each prize would be 'some useful article for the household' and the *Black*

Diamond Club at Newsham offered prizes ‘which can, in the course of household duties, be called into requisition’.²⁴ That prizes were usually a gift for the home, rather than for the male winner, perhaps helped justify the amount of time the man of the household spent away from the home tending to his leeks. The aggregate value of prizes awarded was largely dependent on the size of membership and level of subscriptions.

Table 3 is compiled from the records of thirty-eight of the shows published in the *Morpeth Herald* over an eleven year period. The higher amounts spent on prizes tended to occur later in the period and belong to leek clubs connected to workingmen’s social clubs. The club distributing £50 worth of prizes, for example, was the *Mortimer Street Social Club* of Ashington.²⁵

Table 3: The Aggregate Value of Prizes awarded by Some Leek Clubs, 1896-1906

Total value of Prizes (£)	Number of Clubs
10 –19	5
20	9
25-29	5
30	9
35	1
40	8
50	1
Source: <i>Morpeth Herald</i> , various dates, 26 March 1896 to 13 October 1906.	

Despite clubs declaring that they were handing out a whole compendium of different prizes, they chose from a pretty limited range when it came to the top ones. Club committees, whilst looking for practicality when selecting prizes, were also expressing a view as to what they considered desirable and would improve a pitman’s home, and may have been guided

also by the fact that they were put on public display for the admiration of visitors.

A sample of twenty-five detailed listings in the local press from 1892 to 1908 reveals clocks to be the most popular reward for a top three placing.²⁶ Timepieces, be they white marble, black marble, eight-day, hanging, Viennese or Swiss, made up over half of first prizes. Almost as popular was tableware in the form of breakfast sets, tea sets, dinner sets and teapots (in a few cases, electro-plated or even silver). The only item of furniture that was considered worthy of presentation by club committees to their most successful members was the armchair or rocking chair.²⁷ In more than a few clubs the top three prizes included brass fenders, brass ornaments, cruets and blankets. The possibility that a regular winner would accumulate a collection of identical items was perhaps mitigated by the way club committees stressed that most or all of the prizes had been purchased locally, usually at a nearby Co-operative store, which meant, as one report put it, that prizes came with the 'advantageous condition' of being exchangeable.²⁸ The type of top prizes presented also ensured that, if the worst came to the worst, they could be conveniently pawned.²⁹

Now and again, a more distinctive first prize was given. At the 1908 North Broomhill show it was a mirror with a painting of Warkworth Castle and at the *Travellers' Rest*, Bedlington, the winner in 1904 received a glazed garden frame. Occasionally an annual trophy or medal was also presented to the winner.³⁰ More variety was in evidence amongst the awards for a show's also-rans: 39th place at an Annistford show, for instance, secured a shirt, and coming eleventh at the *Bebside Social Club* earned a pair of pit shoes. Prizes for competitors in last place included a coal box, a muffler, a jelly dish, a bag of potatoes, one pound of tobacco and a water pan and syringe.³¹

But this was not the whole story with regard to prizes. The prizes chosen by club committees were augmented by 'specials', extra prizes donated by individuals, local businesses and tradesmen. Sometimes such special prizes went only to the higher placed competitors; sometimes all entrants got an

additional reward. The butchering trade was responsible for many donated prizes: hams, tongues and shoulders of mutton were given as specials, and the victor at a show at Seaton Delaval earned himself a Melton Mowbray pie weighing ten pounds. At five other shows the special prizes for coming first were a piano stool, a meershaum pipe, a cycle lamp, five stones of best flour and a canary. The man with the best leek at a 1911 show won 'three months free shaving at the local tonsorial artists'.³² By 1913 one leek club was offering a silver watch for the best leek shown by a lady.

The most useful of prizes, of course, was cash and open shows with cash prizes persisted into the twentieth century. For instance, the landlord of the *Old Ship* at Newbiggin charged six pence per entrant in 1900 and paid out a top prize of 30 shillings, in an echo of a show forty years earlier. Similarly, a new show launched at the Chevington Institute in 1913 had five prizes, the biggest of which was 30 shillings. Some leek clubs carried on awarding cash prizes: the *Asterley Arms* club, Seaton Sluice, for instance, offered prizes from 12s 6d to a shilling in 1911.

A handful of the workingmen's clubs also gave out winnings in the form of money. A leek show for members of the *Newbiggin, North Seaton & District Social Club* in 1903 gave out thirteen modest amounts, leaving twenty members unplaced. In 1913 the *Scotland Gate & District Social Club* was running an open show with cash prizes, the *Dudley & District Workmen's Social Club* distributed £45 in cash along with fifteen special prizes, and the prizes at the *Universal Social Club* of Blyth went from 30 shillings for first place to 15 shillings for fifth. A year later the *Annitsford United Irish Club* decided that because of short time working at the pits its prize fund of £45 would be used for cash prizes rather than the usual practice of purchasing goods.³³

Entry Numbers

From newspaper accounts of competitions taking place in East Northumberland in 1913 it is possible to identify the number of competitors at thirty-five shows. Well over half the shows had forty or

more stands. The three biggest shows, with sixty-six, fifty-six and fifty-four exhibitors, were at social clubs, as were nine of the leading dozen shows. The number of entries at club shows, rather than open shows, was determined by membership lists, of which the most popular size would appear to be forty or fifty persons.³⁴

While it may be the case that a majority of those living in a mining settlement took a close interest in leek growing, they did so only as interested observers and supporters of their local show. It would be wrong to imply, as some parochial histories do, that anything other than a minority of pitmen took part in competitions. The entrants at shows represented a very small proportion of those engaged in the mining industry. Moreover, the aggregate entry figures for all shows probably exceeded the total number of different exhibitors as enthusiastic growers may have participated in more than one show, and there is anecdotal evidence that open shows drew in entrants not only from the same village but from neighbouring communities.³⁵ There is also some suggestion that growers chased the grander prizes with their best exhibits. In 1908 the organisers of the *Newsham Social Club* show complained that some club members demonstrated a lack of loyalty, taking their superior specimens to shows with better prizes.³⁶

Part of Community Life

As the first world war approached, generalisations about leek shows in the coalfield of Northumberland, such as ‘the chief attraction in many of our colliery villages’ and ‘a hobby in our colliery villages that claims many adherents’, were testimony to the position of prominence they had risen to in little over fifty years.³⁷ Showing leeks was now a serious business which demanded the devotion of much leisure time. Competition was intense and though ‘marked by good natured chaff’,³⁸ there were mutterings about possible sabotage as leek growing became firmly embedded in the cultural landscape of the coalfield.³⁹ One hundred and twenty years after the first trickle of leek shows appeared, they were still said to have ‘a place

in the scheme of things, just like weddings, funerals and christenings' and 'the high point of community life and co-operation'.⁴⁰

Notes

- ¹ *Daily Herald*, 31 January 1914, p. 10.
- ² See *Morpeth Herald*, 26 September 1913 – 17 October 1913.
- ³ Competitive leek growing has also inspired works of popular culture in which poetic licence trumps historic accuracy. See, for example, Paul Mann, *The Leek Club* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2012), described as 'a boozy, brawling and bawdy tale of life in a northeast coal mining town' and Ed Pickford's song *Death at the Leek Show*, <http://ed-pickford.co.uk/deathattheleekshow.html>, accessed 19 May 2016.
- ⁴ R. Vickery, *Garlands, Conkers and Mother-die: British and Irish Plant-lore* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 169 says that 'competitive leek growing has been popular in north-east England since the 1880s' and D. J. Rowe, 'The North-east' in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Vol 1, Regions and Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 415-479, says that 'leeks were widely grown for eating and showing in the nineteenth century'.
- ⁵ A. Metcalfe, *Leisure and Recreation in a Victorian Mining Community. The Social Economy of Leisure in North-East England, 1820-1914* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 48-49
- ⁶ See for example, N. Taylor, *Memories of the Northumberland Coalfield* (Newbury: Countryside Books, 2009), p. 29. Similarly, the *Newcastle Journal*, 14 August 2008, p. 4, has competitive leek growing 'going back 150 years'.
- ⁷ For example, A. Waite, *Growing and Exhibiting the Pot Leek* (Published by author, 1981), p.1, states that 'the first recorded show devoted entirely to the leek was in 1846' and the *Evening Chronicle* 15 September 2014, p. 18, says 'the first recorded show was in Swarland in 1846'.
- ⁸ *Newcastle Journal*, 23 December 1843, p. 4. The report refers to the annual leek show in a manner that suggests it had been held previously.
- ⁹ It soon became the convention to judge leeks on the basis of the cubic capacity of the white barrel, after also taking into account any blemishes or imperfections. However, the length of the measurable white part of the leek, the blanch, was subject to a restriction (more often than not 6 inches, but sometimes shorter depending upon individual club rules). The aim was to grow a leek which met the designated maximum length of blanch from the base to the separation point of the leaf and with the greatest circumference. Leeks grown for entry in this category were known as pot leeks. Some clubs required three such leeks to an entry, others specified two. Shows also had classes for blanch leeks, where the object was to show a leek with the longest blanch, again subject to quality considerations. The

pot leek class attracted the largest entries, offered the greater prizes, created intense competition and became synonymous with the leek show.

10 Leek shows were also emerging in County Durham. For example, there was a show at Winlaton Mill in 1851 and the *Marquis of Cornwallis* at South Shields held its 16th annual show in 1869; *Newcastle Guardian & Tyne Mercury*, 15 November 1851, p. 5, and *Shields Daily Gazette*, 16 October 1869, p. 1.

11 Reports of shows often referred to the large number of visitors. For example, a show at the *Barrington & Choppington Workingmen's Club* was reported to have been 'completely besieged over the weekend by visitors from a distance', *Morpeth Herald*, 28 September 1908, p. 3.

12 For example, shows were also taking place at hostelrys in Dudley, Morpeth, Seaton Burn, Scotland Gate, Stannington, Annitsford and Bedlington.

13 *Morpeth Herald*, 28 September 1861, p. 4.

14 See, for example, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 September 1855, p. 9; *Bolton Chronicle*, 15 November 1862, p. 5; *Belfast Newsletter*, 21 January 1864, p. 3; *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 4 October 1867, p. 10, and *Southern Reporter*, 12 December 1867, p. 2.

15 *Morpeth Herald*, 23 October 1886, p. 3. There seems to have been a preference in Bedlington for restricting entries to those from the locality. In 1886 the *Wheatsheaf Inn's* leek show was for residents of Bedlington, Sleekburn and Barrington only, and a few years later the so-called 'open show' at the *Gardeners Arms* was open only to those from Bedlington and Bedlington Colliery.

16 *Morpeth Herald*, 6 November 1858, p. 4.

17 *Morpeth Herald*, 8 November 1862, p. 5.

18 *Morpeth Herald*, 20 January 1872, p. 5.

19 *Newcastle Courant*, 31 August 1889, and *Morpeth Herald*, 7 October 1899, p. 3.

20 G. Payne and B. Williamson, 'Communal Leeks', *New Society*, 18 September 1969, pp. 445-447.

21 The *Allotment and Cottage Garden Compensation for Crops Act* 1887 introduced an obligation for local authorities to create allotments where there was a demand. There was some reluctance among councils to comply with the spirit of the Act and a stronger *Small Holdings and Allotment Act* 1907 placed a greater responsibility on local authorities.

22 Ashington enjoys legendary status in the history of social clubs. The town had around sixteen at the beginning of the first world war and double that number by the 1930s.

23 See, for example, *Morpeth Herald*, 22 October 1892 to 17 October 1913.

24 *Morpeth Herald*, 21 October 1899, p. 5, and 24 September 1904, p. 3.

25 In 1907 the Portland Leek Club of Blyth awarded prizes to the value of £57.

26 *Morpeth Herald*, various dates, 24 September 1892 to 10 October 1908.

27 Big items of furniture were popular prizes in the 1950s and 1960s. One story, now a folk tale, oft repeated and ascribed to various clubs in the region down the years (see, for example, the *Northern Echo*, 31 December 2008), tells of the consternation

at one show when the top prize was discovered to be a diving suit, the committee member responsible for prizes being unfamiliar with the term 'divan suite'.

Morpeth Herald, 21 October 1899, p. 5.

I am grateful to Peter Brabban for drawing this to my attention.

The winner at the Portland Leek Club, Ashington, got to grace his mantelpiece for a year with a silver cup donated by the distillers John Dewar & Sons of Perth.

See *Morpeth Herald*, 13 October 1888 to 10 October 1908, for various examples.

Morpeth Herald, 20th October 1911, p. 2.

There were two special prizes of a set of china and a pair of boots, both donated.

There may well be a slight shortfall at club shows between membership and the number of entries. For instance, two shows had entries of forty-nine and another two of forty-eight, which could well mean one or two of the membership failing to enter a stand.

For example, the success of an open show at the *Northumberland Arms*, Allotment, in 1913 was put down to the special prizes which attracted 'a large number of leek growers from all parts of the county', *Morpeth Herald*, 3 October 1913, p. 3.

Morpeth Herald, 26 September 1908, p. 3.

Morpeth Herald, 22 September 1911, p. 2, and 19 September 1913, p. 11.

Morpeth Herald, 19 October 1907, p. 4.

Morpeth Herald 25, October 1912, p. 10, spoke of 'nocturnal pilfering' and the same newspaper on 16 May 1913, p. 5, reported a 'box of extra fine leeks intended for exhibition purposes found wantonly destroyed' on a Cowpen Square allotment.

B. Williamson, 'The Leek' in D. Bulmer, *Mining and Social Change. Durham in the Twentieth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 83-89.

‘In the thick of help of every description’. Welfare Work and Women’s Rights in Newcastle upon Tyne during the Great War ¹

Elizabeth O’Donnell

At the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914, countless organisations, mostly headed and staffed by middle and upper class women, were established throughout Britain to assuage the hardship and social problems caused by war. This essay, using research into the life of Newcastle Quaker Teresa Merz, a suffragist and voluntary social worker, provides a small glimpse into the remarkable scope of women’s activities in the North East in this period, from the provision of day nurseries and lodging houses for women workers, to the appointment of women police officers and support for the wives of enemy aliens.

In March 1915, the press secretary of Sunderland’s Women’s Suffrage Societies, writing in the *Daily Echo* of the imminent appointment of women police officers in the town, cautioned suffragists

to comport themselves discreetly, and above all, not to boast; but they may be pardoned when they reflect that their campaign for the vote, wrong or right, successful or not as far as its main object goes, has at least taught the world at large many things about women’s capacities and aptitudes which it had never before realised.²

Her warning modifies the popular assumption that the campaign for women's suffrage was entirely suspended for the duration of the Great War in favour of endorsing the war effort. Recent research has shown that the reality was actually more complex and nuanced.³ While it is true that the leadership and many supporters of both the non-militant and militant wings rallied to their country's call with patriotic zeal, the movement was divided. A substantial group worked actively for peace; moreover, far from deferring their political and social campaigns, members of both wings continued to advocate 'women's rights', using opportunities thrown up in wartime to endorse their claim to political equality.

The *Sunderland Daily Echo*, founded in 1873 to promote Radical views, provided a platform for local suffrage campaigners, with a regular column disseminating information about women's entry into new types of paid work and keeping the issue of women's rights alive. The 'Franchise Question', equal pay and access to proper training were all addressed. At the height of the conflict, the writer even dared to consider whether women deserved more leisure, to develop their own intellects and find personal fulfilment, asking, 'are we all being Martha so long and so vigorously that the part of Mary seems to need apology?'⁴

It can be argued that much of Teresa's work did not directly challenge preconceived ideas about gender roles, and even that the limited 'victory' of the enfranchisement of women over thirty in 1918 was a matter of political expediency rather than a reward for their war service, since the pre-war gender order was soon restored. Nevertheless, the war provided 'an opportunity for many women to forge a new relationship with their nation-state', laying the foundations for future gains.⁵

'A gift for philanthropy': The social work of Teresa Merz

Teresa, born in 1879, was the third child of John Theodore Merz, industrialist and philosopher, and Alice Mary Richardson, a sixth-generation member of the largest and most influential Quaker dynasty in the region. Teresa's father was born in Manchester in 1840 to German parents, but grew up

and was educated on the continent, before returning to Britain to work in chemical manufacturing, where he soon became acquainted with the family of his wife-to-be. Strong social, cultural and economic ties between Germany and Britain existed before the Great War, with Germans comprising one of the largest migrant populations.⁶ The Richardson family appear to have had especially strong links with Germany, with two of Alice's siblings - shipbuilder John Wigham and sister Ellen – also taking German spouses. Amongst other enterprises, Merz was a co-founder of the Newcastle Electric Supply Company with Alice's brother-in-law, Robert Spence Watson, Gateshead lawyer and leading political reformer. The two friends also collaborated closely to expand higher education in Newcastle.



Teresa Merz as a girl. Reproduced by permission of Ben Beck

After a piecemeal education from governesses at home, a brief spell in a local day school and a few courses at Armstrong College in Newcastle, Teresa's essay on early Whig politicians, 'The Junto', won the Gladstone Prize in 1903, helping to persuade her parents to allow her to spend a year at Newnham College in Cambridge. She was to study philosophy, Ancient Greek history and economics, the latter because she hoped it would help her work among the poor. 'She has a gift for philanthropy – does it with zest and love and great tact', wrote her mother.⁷

After her year at Newnham, twenty-six year old Teresa obeyed her parents' insistence that she return home as agreed, and there she applied herself to voluntary social work. In this, she was following the 'Liberal Quaker imperative to social action', but she can also be identified as one of an important generational cohort of (usually) single middle-class women, whose independent means enabled them to undertake the unpaid public work which made a crucial contribution to the development of social welfare in this period.⁸ As secretary of the local Charity Organisation Society (COS), Teresa undertook casework with poor families and helped to distribute relief in times of industrial difficulty, 'becoming', wrote Alice, 'more and more a public person, giving lectures to Guild of Help and other workers on Guardians committees'.⁹ Although unremunerated, it would be unfair to dismiss her as a 'Lady Bountiful'. Logan argues against the 'largely false dichotomy' assumed to have existed between 'professional' and 'amateur' work in this period.¹⁰ Like many of her contemporaries, Teresa adopted a professional approach to her work and kept abreast of new initiatives, for example by attending national conferences.

Teresa's social work and family networks led her to associate with leading women's rights activists in the area. Her mother's sister, Elizabeth Spence Watson, had been campaigning for women's suffrage for decades; another aunt, Anna Deborah Richardson, who died before Teresa's birth, had assisted Emily Davies in establishing the first women's college at Cambridge in 1869. In June 1911, Teresa travelled to London to march in the 40,000 strong Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession with local

suffragist Dr Mabel Campbell.¹¹ The belief that the vote was merely a tool in the wider battle for social reform, rather than an end in itself, was forcibly made by Teresa in a lecture advocating cheap lodging houses for working girls, whose inadequate income exposed them to the danger of sexual exploitation. Low wages, sweated labour, trafficking in girls and violence against women would only be effectively addressed, she argued, through their enfranchisement:

Women are citizens of this country. Their health, happiness and convenience should be as important as that of any other section of society. Everywhere we see public money poured out like drains for objects in which men are interested; while reforms of first necessity for the well being of women are denied. Women earn less than men; their need is greater, their dangers of homelessness are more terrible.... we must win our right to a voice in the councils of our country... Surely there is no denying the fact that with political power, women could tackle these problems which concern their sisters in a much more effective way.¹²

Shortly before giving this lecture in 1912, Teresa had opened Hope House, a lodging house for women and girls in Newcastle which provided eleven cheap clean beds, self-catering facilities, hot baths and a room to socialise in, for a few pence a night.

‘I don’t know what the town would do without her!’: Welfare work in wartime¹³

When war broke out the North-East Federation of Suffrage Societies ‘loyally carried out’ the pledge by the NUWSS to devote the services of its full-time organisers to the relief of distress.¹⁴ Even opponents of the war could throw themselves behind this appeal. An early priority was to ‘keep the work girls of our town from the pinch of starvation’ - the milliners, dressmakers, laundresses, servants etc, who had lost their work through

‘misguided patriotism’, as affluent women cut back on ‘luxury’ expenditure and volunteered their services to knit and sew comforts for the troops.¹⁵

The well-to-do will serve their country better if, instead of taking bread out of the mouths of workers whose places they would assume, they used their means to provide employment... no voluntary work can be justified by which a paid worker is ousted or excluded from employment,

wrote the country’s foremost female campaigners for social justice, including Mrs Fawcett and Margaret Llewellyn Davies, in a letter to the press.¹⁶ Local suffrage organisers established ‘Work for Women’ employment bureaux and set up workshops to teach new skills like machine knitting and toy making. Hope House, the lodging house on Newcastle’s Oxford Street founded by Teresa, accommodated a small workroom to dress dolls in the Allied armies’ uniforms, to sell in Fenwicks’ store that Christmas:

Thomas Atkins is there with all his little pockets and leather trousers; Piou-Piou in the crimson trousers that the Germans know so well, and his poor brother from Belgium; also a gorgeous Zouave is shortly to be joined by a Highlander and a Cossack.¹⁷

On the eve of the Great War, thirty-five year old Teresa held an impressive portfolio of welfare work, both organisational (she sat on at least twelve committees for different bodies and was Honorary Secretary of the COS) and practical, as a case worker. It is not surprising, then, that the Lord Mayor sought her help in establishing the local war relief fund. The lack of official organisation at the start of the war for paying allowances to the families of those on active service left many in dire straits, but Teresa also wanted to help a different, less popular, group in need. In December 1914 she appealed for funds to relieve the distressed families of interned enemy aliens.¹⁸ A woman married to a foreign national automatically assumed her

husband's nationality, even if she was widowed or separated. The same rule applied to German women married to Englishmen living in Germany. The German government was expected to provide welfare to British-born wives of German internees in Britain, paid through the American Embassy, an arrangement reciprocated by the British government to support German-born wives of British subjects in Germany. At the end of November 1914, this arrangement was terminated, causing serious hardship.¹⁹ The Treasury channelled money to Boards of Guardians towards the wives' support but at only half the previous rate, so Teresa began dealing with applications for aid at the COS offices on Pilgrim Street.

As the daughter of a man of German parentage, Teresa risked provoking jingoistic hostility. Because her father was born in Manchester, however, he was entitled to British nationality, despite having spent most of his childhood and early adulthood in Germany. Having their German family labelled as the enemy was undoubtedly painful - '[f]eeling in England against Germany very bitter and unrighteous', wrote Alice. '[E]veryone is weighted with sorrow and anxiety' – but they appear to have been spared the period's virulent anti-Hun attacks.²⁰ Teresa's oldest brother, Charles, was even appointed Director of Experiments on the Board of Invention and Research at the Admiralty in January 1918; when he was accused of being of 'pure German extraction' in Parliament, the government reassured the House that both his parents were 'natural-born British subjects'.²¹

Teresa's plea, in her COS capacity, on behalf of enemy aliens' families, did stir up opposition. 'Thousands of our own countrywomen and children are in the greatest need, and yet a society, presumably started and maintained for the help of the English poor, comes forward with a suggestion like this!' wrote 'Pro Patria', while 'Fairplay' accused the COS of being 'pro-German' for offering relief to the 'dependents of those of the same nation which is obsessed with the most intense hatred of this country, and would, if they could, treat us as they have done the Belgians', concluding, 'Has Miss Merz read the German Hymn of Hate against England?' None showed awareness of Teresa's German forebears, although

'Citizen' demanded that wealthy Germans who had made their fortune in Britain should support the families of their countrymen.²² Teresa continued this work until after the war was over: in January 1919 she was still 'busy with treats and presents' for aliens in Newcastle.²³

Alice often referred in her 'Family Notes' to Teresa's 'hard and grim work'; although 'not first rate as regards health... she does not relax in her good works in the least'.²⁴ For example, in addition to 'pursuing her fine and unselfish work in the slums' as a COS case worker, she was secretary for the Mother and Babies' Welcome Society, which aimed, in its five Newcastle branches, to educate working-class mothers in hygiene, household management and disease prevention in order to reduce an appalling level of working-class infant mortality, said to be as high as 150 per 1,000 in the families of artisans and labourers but only 50 per 1,000 within the professional and educated classes.²⁵

In August 1916, Teresa was part of a deputation from the Newcastle and District Patriots' League of Honour (including suffragist Dr Ethel Williams, Tyneside's first female GP, who was chair of its Women's Executive Committee) to the Newcastle Watch Committee, urging the employment of women police in the city.²⁶ There was intense anxiety about the increased moral peril to which girls and young women were being exposed, starting in the heady atmosphere of the war's early days and exacerbated by large numbers of unattached females flocking into towns and cities for essential war work, while nearby military training camps swelled in size.²⁷ '[G]irls seemed to have lost their heads' around the men of the Gosforth military camp, remarked one observer. 'One was shocked to see the number of girls rambling about the streets between 10.30 and 11 o'clock at night'.²⁸ A variety of bodies established girls' clubs to deal with this problem; the Patriots' League clubroom in Byker, for example, boasted an average attendance of seventy, offering 'healthy recreation' to munition workers and factory girls as well as the wives of serving soldiers.²⁹ Women volunteers patrolled public parks, ports, railway stations and entertainment halls, aiming to protect young girls from the 'dangers

resulting from the promiscuous intimacies which go on'.³⁰ By June 1917, there were three women police officers in the city, with another planned for the Central Station by the North East Railway Company, but Teresa, said to be 'discouraged by drunkenness and immorality in the town', still wanted to 'hear of ladies willing to undertake patrol duties', and even went out at night herself in addition to her heavy day-time work-load.³¹ Her concerns illustrate the strong connection between the sexual purity and women's suffrage movements, motivated, it is argued, by 'a complex mixture of humanitarianism, feminism and class prejudice'.³²

Teresa also developed an interest in agriculture, perhaps feeling the redemptive pull of the rural idyll, away from the corruption of city life.³³ '[O]ne of Teresa's Castles in the Air is to have a farm and make it pay', observed Alice, noting that her daughter had gone with Professor Gilchrist and his agricultural students to Armstrong College's farm at Cockle Park, Northumberland, while in the summers of 1915 and 1917 she did '[h]ay piking and all manner of work' on a farm, Rayheugh, in north Northumberland, where a rented farm cottage had been providing reinvigoration and retreat for Teresa and her close female friends for over a decade.³⁴

'A woman with experience of boarding house management will be needed': Quaker relief work in Corsica³⁵

Teresa's 'war effort' also included accommodating 'munitions workers and tramway girls' in her lodging house, a seat on the management committee of a day nursery opening in the West End of Newcastle for the babies of women working in local factories, and the initiation of an interdenominational Patriotic Club for soldiers' wives and mothers, with singing classes and 'cheer up' sessions for the lonely.³⁶ How comfortably did all this lie with the Quaker peace testimony?

Early in the war, Newcastle Quakers heard a talk by a London Friend, Henry Hodgkin, on 'Christianity and the War', in which he declared a greater loyalty was owed to Christ's message of love and brotherhood of

the human race than to the nation. The war, however, had divided the Society. In December 1916, nine local Quakers, including Teresa and four of her close relatives, signed a notice in the *Newcastle Journal*, calling for a negotiated peace, yet not only had many young Quakers volunteered for the armed services – at least sixty-one from Newcastle Monthly Meeting – but some older Friends actively assisted recruitment.³⁸ In stark contrast, a small minority of absolutist conscientious objectors, refusing to play any part whatever in the war, suffered imprisonment and ill-treatment. In Newcastle, the majority appear to have followed their Meeting's encouragement to 'throw their best efforts with local arrangements for relief of distress and suffering', including allowing its Pilgrim Street premises to be used as headquarters for a ladies' workshop, sewing clothing for the sick and wounded.³⁹ Some served abroad with bodies like the Friends' Ambulance Unit and the Friends' War Victims Relief Committee (FWVRC), work that could be undertaken without violating the peace testimony.



Emblem of the FWVRC, reproduced by kind permission of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

The FWVRC, formed in early September 1914 by Quakers who ‘felt a great call to devote themselves to the alleviation of the suffering which the war brought to the civilian population’, first approached Teresa in June 1915 to work with them in Holland.⁴⁰ She refused, probably feeling she would be more useful at home, but by November she had agreed to help Serbian refugees in Greece. One FWVRC report described the Serbs as living skeletons. ‘In the winter of 1914 in England we thought the Belgian nation a pathetic and pitiable spectacle’, it continued, ‘but their sufferings are nothing to those of the Serbians, who have been driven this way and that and had no rest practically for four years’, referring to the displacement already suffered during the 1912-13 Balkan wars, even before the retreat from the Austro-Bulgarian onslaught between August 1914 and November 1915.⁴¹

Within days of meeting the committee in London, Teresa had been inoculated and issued with a passport, returning home to pack and delegate her ‘big work’ in Newcastle. ‘It is hard to spare her’, wrote Alice, ‘but she feels “called” to this service’.⁴² Soon she was sailing from Liverpool with forty pieces of luggage and four other volunteers, one of whom was the suffragist and pacifist Kathleen Courtney.⁴³ The voyage, via Malta and Alexandria, where they were held up over Christmas, was long and tedious. ‘[W]e are quite sick of it... life on board is very monotonous and dull’, reported Teresa.⁴⁴ On arriving in Greece on 4 January 1916, they discovered that their assistance in the Salonika refugee camp was no longer required; instead, they were to accompany 350 Serbian refugees almost immediately to new accommodation on Corsica offered by the French government. Teresa was frustrated by the time wasted and hoped for ‘real hard work...otherwise I shall feel that I must return to Newcastle and take up all my own concerns again as I fear, from what I hear, that they are having a rather stiff time without me’.⁴⁵ *En route* from Salonika to Corsica, their ship was chased by two U-boats; it was ‘quite an exciting time...the guns saved us – I heard – and even a Quaker must admit it!’ she wrote.⁴⁶

Teresa's task in Ajaccio, Corsica, was to take charge of a hostel for fifty-five educated Serbs, in a 'most beautiful place, right above the sea, and rocky cliffs and hills – cold and very bracing'.⁴⁷ She immediately brought her organisational skills to bear, starting up workshops for the refugees to make goods for use and sale, partly as a means to avoid demoralisation. Writing to Ruth Fry, FWVRC secretary, she requested fabric (flannelette, calico, corduroy etc), large shoes ('Serbs have very large feet'), but no cast-off boots unless in good condition. Overcoats and furs were *not* required, and there should be '[m]ore discrimination as to cast off clothes: only those in good condition'.⁴⁸ Gatrell argues that working with refugees assisted the professionalisation of social work by enabling volunteers to become more knowledgeable, but many, like Teresa, already had considerable experience.⁴⁹ Teresa's aim was to help the refugees become self-governing: 'A month or two ought to see the "Colonie Serbe en Corse" well established and organized'.⁵⁰ After a spell in isolation due to an attack of mumps, she went home in March 1916, immediately resuming her social work commitments. Service in Corsica earned her the Medal of Merit from the Crown Prince of Serbia, although her parents were 'more pleased about it than she confesses to be'.⁵¹ From July 1918, Teresa worked with the FWVRC in Paris, where two of her co-workers were early victims of the Spanish influenza epidemic.⁵²

'Not the only possible social order': Post-war projects⁵³

As the war ended, Teresa returned to Tyneside, where 'a vast amount of work await[ed] her return'.⁵⁴ There had been partial victory for the suffragists, the Representation of the People Act of February 1918 admitting about eight and a half million women over the age of thirty to the franchise (the new male electorate numbered about thirteen million). In the general election that December, women voters 'certainly made the most of their new privilege, and it is estimated that out of every five electors who voted at least three were women'.⁵⁵ Teresa, however, abstained, believing that 'neither candidate [was] the right man!'⁵⁶ It has

been argued 'enfranchisement, in the end, hardly figured as a reward for women's war effort', but that nonetheless, war had 'served as a catalyst for women's political emancipation by putting electoral reform on the political agenda'.⁵⁷

Moreover, despite a postwar backlash against women's employment in 'men's jobs', some measures developed by feminists during the conflict, like maternity centres, were taken up by government. The 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act required local authorities to set up committees which were empowered to provide child welfare and ante-natal clinics. Teresa was instrumental in establishing Bensham Grove settlement house in 1919 following the death of her aunt, Elizabeth Spence Watson, whose Gateshead home it had been, which aimed to 'provide a common meeting ground for men and women to learn through class study, discussions, music and the fruits of Fellowship'.⁵⁸ A significant portion of the settlement's work, however, was the creation, in conjunction with the local authority, of a mother and baby clinic, offering health monitoring of infants and 'mothercraft lessons'.⁵⁹ The settlement's first warden, a veteran of the FWWRC like Teresa, was Lettice Jowitt, who brought together a group of like-minded women as settlers.⁶⁰

Teresa's interest in peace also continued. For a short while she was a member of the Friends' War and Social Order Committee (FWSOC), set up in 'the super-heated wartime atmosphere' of 1915 by a radical group of Quakers who believed that 'Universal Brotherhood cannot be established under the present competitive system of industry'.⁶¹ In May, 1918, London Yearly Meeting, the annual gathering of British Quakers, had approved FWSOC's eight 'Foundations of a True Social Order' after a vigorous debate, but its vision of profit-sharing and worker control of industry was definitely not supported by the majority of Friends.⁶² However, Teresa's involvement in FWSOC was short-lived, because in September 1920, for reasons unknown, Teresa resigned from the Society of Friends and joined the Anglican Church.

Conclusion

After the war, Teresa's dedication to social welfare was undiminished. If anything, her workload increased; for example, she was one of six new women magistrates appointed in Newcastle in April 1921. She was also awarded an OBE in 1928 for her work with migration hostels, training unemployed boys and women for work in the Dominions. Through the years of the Depression, the Second World War and even into the era of the welfare state, she remained a familiar figure within Tyneside's social work community, reportedly working at her desk until two days before she died on 12 November 1958.⁶³

Very few of Teresa's private papers survive so her motivations have to be inferred from her actions and the comments of others. Undoubtedly, as with many of her contemporaries, she was driven by a sense of moral and religious purpose, made stronger by her Quaker background, which acted as a progressive force for change rather than as a reinforcement of traditional values.⁶⁴ This essay, by examining the activities of one woman during the Great War, has shown how supporters of women's suffrage continued to work for economic and social reforms to advance women's rights throughout the conflict. Not only was the issue of female enfranchisement being kept alive, but the way was being prepared for further gains in the years ahead.

Notes

- ¹ Alice Mary Merz, Family Notes (Family Notes), September 1914, p. 129 (Tyne and Wear Archives Service, henceforth TWAS), L4032. These Family Notes are a typescript of a private record of family life made by Alice Mary Merz between 1874 and 1923.
- ² *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette (Sunderland Echo)*, 11 March 1915, p. 6.
- ³ See, for example, Anne Logan and Catherine Lee, 'Tunbridge Wells Women in the First World War.' https://www.academia.edu/10549353/Tunbridge_Wells_Women_in_the_First_World_War accessed 13 March 2016.
- ⁴ *Sunderland Echo*, 7 June 1917, p. 5.
- ⁵ Birgitta Bader-Zaar, 'Controversy: War-related Changes in Gender Relations: The Issue of Women's Citizenship'; Susan R. Grayzel, 'Women's Mobilization for War.'

Both articles from http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/womens_mobilization_for_war accessed 23 February 2016.

6 Richard Van Emden, *Meeting the Enemy: The Human Face of the Great War*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 3.

7 Family Notes, June 1904, p. 44.

8 Helen Victoria Smith, 'Elizabeth Taylor Cadbury (1858-1951): Religion, Maternalism and Social Reform in Birmingham, 1888-1914' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012), p. 248.

9 Family Notes, November 1911, p. 105.

10 Anne Logan, 'Political Life in the Shadows: the post suffrage political career of S. Margery Fry (1874-1958)', *Women's History Review* 23:3 (2014) p. 367.

11 Family Notes, June 1911, p. 102.

12 'Lodging Houses' typescript (Northumberland Archives, NRO 2281/15)

13 Family Notes, June 1915, p. 139.

14 *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 11 December 1914, p. 6.

15 *Newcastle Daily Journal (Journal)*, 1 September 1914, p.3; Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914-1918* (London: Fontana Original, 1977), p. 34.

16 *Journal*, Letter, 24 August 1914, p. 3.

17 As above, 14 November 1914, p. 8.

18 As above, 4 December 1914, p. 7.

19 Emden, *Meeting the Enemy*, pp. 85-9.

20 Family Notes, September 1914, p. 130.

21 Hansard 30 January 1918. Perhaps in anticipation of jingoistic smears, Charles accepted the post without pay, doing his 'generous "bit" for his country. (Family Notes, 19 January 1918, p. 176).

22 *Journal*, 5 December 1914, p. 7; 10 December 1914, p. 3.

23 Family Notes, 21 January 1919, p. 190.

24 As above, 9 December 1917, p. 176.

25 *Journal*, 4 October 1917, p. 3.

26 As above, 26 August 1916, p. 6.

27 See Angela Woollacott, '"Khaki Fever" and its Control: Gender, class age and sexual morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:2 (1994), pp. 325-347.

28 Meeting of the Newcastle Diocesan Society for the Protection of Women and Girls. *Journal*, 5 November 1914, p. 2.

29 *Journal*, 22 February 1917, p.8.

30 *Sunderland Echo*, 6 April 1916, p. 4.

31 *Journal*, 22 June 1917, p. 3 and 5 October 1917, p. 5; Family Notes, February 1917, p. 164.

32 Paula Bartley, 'Preventing prostitution: the ladies' association for the care and protection of young girls in Birmingham, 1887-1914', in *Women's History Review*, 7:1 (1998), p. 54.

- 33 Susan R. Grayzel, 'Nostalgia, Gender, and the Countryside: Placing the "Land Girl" in First World War Britain', *Rural History* [1999], 10:2, p. 168.
- 34 Family Notes, November 1916, p.162; June 1917, p. 170
- 35 Summary of John Bellows' Report on Serbian Refugees in Corsica (typescript) 14 January 1916 (Friends' House Library, henceforth FHL), FEWVRC/9/5/6.
- 36 *Journal*, 5 April 1916, p. 8; 4 October 1917, p. 3; 17 December 1918, p. 3.
- 37 As above, 21 December 1914, p. 3.
- 38 As above, 18 December 1916, pp.2-3; Thomas Kennedy, 'Many Friends do not know "where they are": Some Divisions in London Yearly Meeting During the First World War', in *Quaker Theology*, 11 (2005). [<http://quakertheology.org/Issue%20-%2011%20-%20Kennedy%20-01.html>], accessed 8 March 2016; Record of War Service, Minutes of Newcastle Monthly Meeting, 13 Feb 1918, TWAS, MF173.
- 39 Ruth Sansbury, *Beyond the Blew Stone. 300 years of Quakers in Newcastle* (Newcastle upon Tyne Newcastle Preparative Meeting, 1998), p. 224.
- 40 A.Ruth Fry, *A Quaker Adventure: The Story of Nine Years' Relief and Reconstruction* (London: Nisbet and Company Ltd, 1926), p. vii.
- 41 Extracts from a letter from Hannah Bellows, 6 March 1916 (FHL, FEWVRC/9/5/6); Peter Gatrell, 'Refugees and Forced Migrants during the First World War', in *Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, 26/1-2 (2008), pp. 92-101.
- 42 Family Notes, November 1915, p. 145.
- 43 Courtney resigned in February 1915 from the Executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies over their support for the war, becoming chair of the British branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom that April. See Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), pp. 50-60.
- 44 Teresa Merz to Miss Fry, 18 December 1916 (FHL, FEWVRC/9/5/6).
- 45 As above, 18 January 1916.
- 46 As above. The ship she travelled in, the *Provence*, was sunk by U-boats in February 1916; many lives were lost.
- 47 T Merz to Miss Fry, 27 January 1916 (FHL, FEWVRC/9/5/6).
- 48 T Merz to Miss Fry, 24 February 1916 (FHL, FEWVRC/9/5/6).
- 49 Gatrell, 'Refugees and Forced Migrants', p. 106.
- 50 T Merz to Miss Fry, 24 February 1916 (FHL, FEWVRC/9/5/6).
- 51 Family Notes, 16 May 1918, p. 181.
- 52 As above, 12 October 1918, p.186.
- 53 *The Friend*, 19 September 1919, p. 583.
- 54 Family Notes, 12 October 1918, p. 186.
- 55 *Journal*, 16 December 1918, p. 5.
- 56 Family Notes, December 1918, p.188.
- 57 Bader-Zaar, 'War-related Changes in Gender Relations'.
- 58 E. Spence Weiss, *The Background of the Bensham Grove Settlement* (Arbroath:

T. Buncle and Company Ltd, nd), p.11 ; 1st Annual Report of the Bensham Settlement, October 1919 – February 1921, p.4, Gateshead Libraries Local Studies Collection.

⁵⁹ Shirley Brown, 'The Bensham Grove Settlement. From religious influence to social concern: an examination of the factors which combined to change the policies of the settlement' (Unpublished MA dissertation, Open University, 2012), p. 29.

⁶⁰ As above, p. 11

⁶¹ Thomas C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860 – 1920. The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 369, 374.
⁶² Kennedy, *British Quakerism*, p. 384.

⁶³ *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 17 November 1958.

⁶⁴ Anne Logan, '“Lady Bountiful” or Community activist? Amelia Scott (1860-1952)', in *Women's History Magazine*, 62 (2010), p. 16.

Ruth Nicholson



Ruth Nicholson on graduating from the Newcastle School of Medicine.
Reproduced courtesy of Rosemary Nicholson.

Ruth Nicholson was born in 1884, the eldest child of the Rev. Canon Ralph Nicholson, curate and later vicar of St. Stephen's Church in Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne. Ruth decided at an early age to train as a doctor and, encouraged by her parents, she graduated from Durham University's School of Medicine in 1909, the only woman in her year.

Despite her qualifications, Ruth found it difficult to secure employment as a doctor, and when she offered her services to the army in 1914 she was rejected out of hand by the officer in charge. Undeterred, Ruth volunteered for the Scottish Women's Hospital, an initiative by women medics that the French military established at the Abbey of Royaumont, outside Paris, in January 1915.

Ruth Nicholson served as a surgeon and second-in-command at Royaumont until its closure in 1919, by which time the hospital accommodated 600 beds, with almost 11,000 patients being treated by the end of the war.

After the war, Ruth Nicholson worked in obstetrics at Liverpool University and later became the first woman President of the North of England Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. She died in 1963.



Doctors from Royaumont awarded the Croix de Guerre in December 1918; Ruth Nicholson stands on the far left.
Reproduced courtesy of Rosemary Nicholson.

Ruth's story came to light through *Fenham Remembers*, one of many Lottery funded community projects helping today's generation to commemorate and celebrate the generation of 1914-18. Her story is a testament to her personal strength of character and dedication, but it also reflects the wider contribution of women to the Great War and the post-war legacy. What the French army was prepared to support during the war, Britain and its National Health Service ultimately benefitted thereafter.

We would welcome the opportunity to publish further evidence of the contribution of women to the Great War and post-war public service. Anyone wishing to share a similar story can contact Mike Greatbatch on michael.greatbatch@sky.com



LOTTERY FUNDED

James Aytoun's Plumpers Radical Voters in the 1835 Newcastle Parliamentary Election

Mike Greatbatch

In August 1841, the Secretary of the Ouseburn Charter Association, John Hall, wrote an open letter to the Editor of the *Northern Star* in which he made the following criticism of Newcastle's leading radical political body:

Soon after the last Northern Political Union commenced, a few *would-be-thought middle-class men*, shopocrats, at Newcastle, thrust themselves in to the council; lenders of it they would be; its funds they kept at their almost sole disposal; none but themselves would be allowed to hold office, either as president, treasurer, etc, they seeking to gain a popular name, in order to get a run to their own shops. They kept the Union in a state of turmoil, and brought it to the close it had, solely through their own incapacity.

After the close of the Northern Political Union, a spirit of apathy and distrust was felt by the working population here, until the present organisation of the National Charter Association commenced, when the association here gathered strength, and at the present moment every prospect of success appears; when lo! the parties alluded to, finding, no doubt, their tills rather low, and seeing the people beginning to move, think it a good time

for them to be stirring, and to swamp the Charter Associations by getting up a Northern Political Union again; they, of course, to be the sole managers and directors, as before, of its funds.¹

A study of the membership of the Northern Political Union's Council, as set-up at its re-launch in September 1838, appears to support Hall's characterization, with shopkeepers and tradesmen being prominent, though not necessarily overwhelmingly so.²

The Northern Political Union had originally been launched in 1831 to petition Parliament on the issue of franchise reform.³ When this reform came, in the form of the 1832 Reform Act, many of those who had supported the Union's campaign were left disappointed, as the property qualification of £10 for the new householder voters continued to exclude many skilled workers and small businessmen and, of course, all those without property or the vast majority of working men. Furthermore, in Newcastle, the free burgesses retained their hereditary franchise, and with just a 40-shilling qualification, continued to form a dominant body within Newcastle's registered electors.⁴

To determine to what extent this narrow franchise served to strengthen shopkeepers' and tradesmen's support for Newcastle's radical movement, and the Northern Political Union in particular, we can use the poll books for parliamentary elections published after 1832. One such poll book, for the 1835 parliamentary contest, survives in a volume of Burgess Reports now held by Newcastle Local Studies.⁵ This detailed record of voters and their votes, provides a useful opportunity to test John Hall's contention that the Union's constituency were increasingly those '*would-be-thought middle-class men*, shopocrats'.

Poll Book of Electors, 1835

Poll books were a published record of those people who voted together with details of which candidate, or candidates, they voted for. They were published from the 1690s on a regular basis until the secret ballot was introduced by the Act of 1872. The secret ballot was of course, one of the demands of the Chartist movement.

The poll book for the 1835 Newcastle election was published by L. Hewison and printed by the office of the *Newcastle Courant* on Pilgrim Street. It is thirty-two pages long and contains the names of the 3,107 men who voted, listed in alphabetical order, and recording for each of them, their name, address, voter qualification (Freeman or Householder), and for whom they voted.

Before 1832, all freemen had two votes, and the Newcastle constituency returned two Members of Parliament. This arrangement continued after 1832, except that some non-freemen now qualified as householder voters. In the 1835 contest, these newly enfranchised householder voters accounted for 53% of all those recorded in the poll book.

In the 1835 contest, there were four candidates, so each voter could choose to split his two votes between two candidates, or simply use one of his votes to plump for a single candidate. The timber merchant Stephen Lowrey opted to split his votes between the Whig William Ord and Sir Matthew White Ridley, a former Whig now standing as a Tory candidate. It was for Ridley that James Archbold, lime merchant and owner of the large kiln in Ouseburn, opted to plump, choosing to advertise his Tory allegiance by casting just one vote for one candidate.⁶

All such splits and plumpers are recorded in the poll book, and the summary 'of splits and plumpers polled by each candidate' is recorded as a record of the votes secured by each candidate. In 1835, there were four candidates, and the two with the highest number of votes were William Ord (1,844 or 33%) and Sir Matthew White Ridley with 1,509 votes or 27% of the total.

The two losing candidates were the Tory John Hodgson (1,257 or 22%) and James Aytoun, the Radical candidate, with 988 or 18% of the total number of votes cast. Of these 988 votes, 23 were plumpers, and by looking at these voters we can identify who within the electorate were James Aytoun's staunchest supporters, and thus most committed to the Radical cause.⁷

James Aytoun

James Aytoun hailed from Kirkaldy in Fife.⁸ A Scot well known for his political views, and celebrated enough to be later the subject of a pioneering

photographer, Aytoun was an advocate by profession and an elected member of the Burgh of Edinburgh, having been re-elected to that body in the 1833 municipal elections.⁹

His radical views on both franchise reform and Ireland won him notoriety and the support of at least some of Edinburgh's working men; in August 1834, at a public meeting of 'the operative classes of Edinburgh', he was presented with a silver cup, value fifty guineas, inscribed with the words,

As a Mark of their Esteem for his Talents,
Their Approbation of his Civic and Political Conduct,
And their Gratitude for his Arduous and
Important Services in the Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty'¹⁰

Less than six months later, the *Caledonian Mercury* informed its readers that Aytoun had received 'a very flattering deputation from Newcastle' requesting that he allow 'the Radical interest for that burgh' to nominate him along with William Ord, 'a strict Whig', and together to challenge the incumbent Tories, Ridley and Hodgson.¹¹

In December, Aytoun travelled to Newcastle. He addressed his supporters at a meeting in the Music Hall, and John Fife and Thomas Doubleday welcomed him as their radical candidate in the forthcoming contest.¹²

Mr Aytoun's Plumpers

The 1835 poll book records the names and residential address of each voter, and identifies whether individuals qualify for the freeman or householder franchise. Unlike the poll book of 1832, it does not provide a record of voters' trade or occupation.

However, for the period 1829 to 1838, there are at least four trade directories published for Newcastle; Pigot (1829), Ihler (1833), Pigot (1834), and Richardson (1838). These directories were used to cross-reference the names and addresses published in the poll book. They were supplemented by a search through the *Newcastle Courant* newspaper, the

electoral register for 1837-38, and the 1832 poll book, an especially useful reference for identifying the trades of the freemen voters.¹³

A summary of the results of this exercise is provided in the appendices as Tables 1 and 2. However, a number of individual voters deserve more detailed documentation, by way of example.

Charles Larkin was a surgeon living in Cumberland Row and qualified as one of the new householder voters. He was an active reform advocate, prominent in radical circles and a future member of the re-launched Northern Political Union. Larkin spoke briefly at the meeting held for James Aytoun in the Music Hall in December 1834, and in October 1836 he would launch *The Newcastle Standard* weekly newspaper, 'devoted to the advocacy of the cause of reform'. At the Music Hall meeting, Larkin had been jeered by a portion of the assembled crowd, due to his past record of attacking the Whigs and thereby appearing to favour the Tories. However, in 1835 he happily 'gave a plumper to Mr Aytoun' to demonstrate his commitment to radical reform, in opposition to both Whigs and Tories.¹⁴

John Arkless was another of these newly enfranchised householder voters. Arkless was a publican-victualler who ran the *New Market Hotel* before moving to the *Northumberland Arms* in 1836. The *Northumberland* was a much more commodious establishment, and one that provided greater potential for financial gain. In November 1836, Arkless placed an advert in the *Courant* to promote his new establishment, complete with apartments, stabling and coach house, and, 'J. A. begs to state, that having a brewery on the premises, families can be supplied with their family ale, of superior quality and flavour'.¹⁵

David Orrick was another householder voter who plumped for Aytoun. He is recorded in 1833 as residing at freehold property on the south side of Sandgate, including a house, two shops, a bake-house and other premises 'in the several occupations of Mr. David Orrick, Messrs Graham, Speedy, Macallum, and others'. In 1838, Orrick is recorded in Richardson's directory as a 'flour-dealer and grocer'.¹⁶

Table 1. Household Plumpers for James Aytoun

Name	Residence	Trade/Occupation
Arkless, John	Pilgrim Street	Victualler <i>New Market Hotel</i> , Market Lane
Brown, William	New Road	Shopkeeper, Sandgate Baker & flour dealer, Sandgate
Burlinson, John	Tyne Street	Boot & shoe maker
Graham, John	Shield Field	Farmer
Larkin, Charles	Cumberland Row	Surgeon
McLin, John	Castle Yard	Clothes dealer, Castle Garth
Milner, Joseph	Pilgrim Street	Hardware dealer, ironmonger & Wholesale dealer in Sheffield & Birmingham goods, 127 Pilgrim Street
Monroe, William	Bigg-market	Whip & thain manufacturer, 44 Bigg-market; h. Pipewellgate, Gateshead Whip & thong maker
Muir, Walter	Green-court	Travelling agent, 9 Green Court Linen & woolen travelling draper, Green Court, Newgate Street
Orrick, David	Sandgate	Flour-dealer & grocer
Smith, Anthony Harris	Gateshead	Grocer & tea-dealer, 11 Bridge End, Newcastle
Wallace, Robert	Blackett Street	Robert & James Wallace, joiners and builders, 13 High Friar Street. Wallace, James, joiner etc; h. 38 Blackett Street
Wybrow, Thomas	New Road	Agent

Source: Newcastle Poll Books 1832 & 1835; Parson & White's History, Directory & Gazetteer of Durham & Northumberland (1827); Pigot's Northern Counties Directory (1829); Ihler's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1833); Pigot's Northern Counties Directory (1834); Richardson's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1838); Register of the Names of Persons Entitled to Vote for the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne for the Year 1837-38; and the *Newcastle Courant*, 1832-1838.

Table 2. Freeman Plumpers for James Aytoun

Name	Residence	Trade/Occupation
Brown, William	Castle Stairs	Shoemaker
Brown, John	Northumberland Street	Victualler <i>Bay Horse</i> , Northumberland Street
Clark, William	Stowell Street	Cordwainer
Moralee, Isaac	North Shore	not recorded
Owen, Thomas	Gallowgate	Cooper
Rowell, Robert	Prudhoe Street	Joiner
Stephenson, Joseph	Gallowgate	Bricklayer
Thompson, Robert	Croft Stairs	not recorded
Thompson, Robert	Sandgate	Boot & shoe maker
Tinn, George	Gateshead	Butcher, 34 New Market W; h. Oakwellgate, Gateshead. High Street, Gateshead (with stand or shop in Meat Market)
Source: Newcastle Poll Books 1832 & 1835; Parson & White's History, Directory & Gazetteer of Durham & Northumberland (1827); Pigot's Northern Counties Directory (1829); Ihler's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1833); Pigot's Northern Counties Directory (1834); Richardson's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1838); Register of the Names of Persons Entitled to Vote for the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne for the Year 1837-38; and the <i>Newcastle Courant</i> , 1832-1838.		

Anthony Harris Smith had business premises not far from Orrick's flour and bake-house. Despite living in Gateshead, Smith held property in Newcastle close to the Tyne Bridge at Sandhill. Sometimes recorded as a grocer, Smith was far more than this implies, specialising in teas, coffees and sugars. He had ended a business partnership with William Broomhead in July 1832, and on 14th July the *Courant* carried an advertisement for his 'New Tea Establishment' at 11, New Buildings, Bridge-End.

This advertisement announced the launch of an up-market business selling fine teas, bought from the East India Company, and a range of coffees that included 'Good Jamaica' at 1s 8d per pound, Jamaica mixed with

mocha at 2s per pound, and 'Finest Mocha' at 2s 4d per pound. Groceries, including raw and refined sugars, would also be sold on the premises.

Business appears to have gone well for Smith, and in 1835 he is recorded as having an additional shop at North Shields. However, in 1837 his business collapsed and he was forced to assign all his personal estate and effects to trustees for paying his creditors. Such business failure was not uncommon in the 1830s, and the trade depression of 1837 claimed other casualties and would be followed by a further slump in trade in 1842. It was a risk that ambitious businessmen like Anthony Harris Smith simply had to live with.¹⁷

Thirteen of James Aytoun's twenty-three plumpers were newly enfranchised householder voters of this sort. Details are provided in Table 1.

Identifying the trades or professions of the ten freemen voters who plumped for Aytoun has been far more challenging; nevertheless, seven of the ten can be confirmed with some confidence.

These freeman voters included another publican-victualler, John Brown of the *Bay Horse* in Northumberland Street. Brown is recorded in both Ihler's directory of 1833 and Pigot's directory of 1834. Likewise Thomas Owen of Gallowgate, a cooper, Robert Thompson of Sandgate, a boot and shoe maker, and George Tinn, a butcher with premises in the New Meat Market; Tinn is another Newcastle voter who actually lived in Gateshead, in his case in Oakwellgate, with another shop on Gateshead High Street.¹⁸

Many of the freemen voters are recorded in the 1837-38 electoral register but this merely confirms their freeman status and their residential address. However, some are recorded in the 1832 poll book for Newcastle, and these include a shoemaker, a cordwainer, a joiner, and a bricklayer.¹⁹

Robert Thompson of Croft Stairs and Isaac Moralee of the North Shore are not recorded in either directories or the 1832 poll book. However, a Miles Moralee is recorded as a boot and shoe-maker at Sandgate in Richardson's directory (1838), and a John Moralee is recorded as a shopkeeper at St Ann's Street, Sandgate in both 1827 and 1829 directories. Given the unusual surname, it is likely that these men were related, and of course Sandgate/St Ann's Street is most definitely North Shore.²⁰

Conclusions

Of the thirteen householder voters who plumped for James Aytoun, all bar three were shopkeepers or tradesmen. The exceptions were Charles Larkin (surgeon), Thomas Wybrow (an agent), and John Graham of Shield Field who is recorded in the 1832 poll book as a farmer.

Freeman voters were, by definition, members of guilds and therefore tradesmen, or retired tradesmen. Those who can be identified confirm this, and details can be found in Table 2.

So John Hall was correct in recognizing that under the post-1832 franchise it was shopkeepers and tradesmen who were most enthusiastic for further reform in Newcastle. In Ouseburn, this led Hall and others to found Charter Associations composed almost wholly of working-men, quite separate from the middle-class leadership of the Northern Political Union. Freed from the 'shopocrats', Hall (as secretary) and Isaac Bruce (treasurer) were able to develop activities more attuned to the political needs of workers (pitmen especially), in particular the establishment of a Reading Room and Discussing Society where workers could debate a wide range of radical issues. By 1843, this development had become inseparable from the Miners' Association and national trade unionism.²¹

Following his election defeat, James Aytoun's supporters raised the money to pay his election expenses, a sum amounting to £261 18s 9d. The fund set-up to pay these expenses attracted 698 subscribers. On Monday 1 February 1836, a Public Dinner was held in Aytoun's honour, attracting 165 people who bought tickets costing 5s 6d each. It was held at the Music Hall and was chaired by Alderman Fife. Thomas Doubleday, soap manufacturer, Quaker, and standard-bearer of the Northern Political Union was also present.²²

In the first four decades of the nineteenth century, Newcastle like many regional towns, experienced a significant growth in its service sector economy, as expanding trade created opportunities for craft workers and ambitious entrepreneurs to enter a rapidly expanding market. Trade depression in the 1820s and 1830s may have caused some businesses to fail but such was Tyneside's, and thus Newcastle's, economic growth during these years that

new business start-ups outweighed the failure of those like Anthony Harris Smith.

The evidence of the 1835 poll book for Newcastle confirms what John Hall and other working men came to recognize in the 1840s. The radical politics of Chartism became increasingly fractured between those like Hall who sought autonomy for workers' organisation, and those like James Aytoun who after 1835 continued to advocate suffrage reform whilst organising for the repeal of the Corn Laws. Free trade and the abolition of restrictive tariffs were political goals far more in tune with those who could afford to buy dinner tickets costing 5s 6d and subscribe to an election fund totalling over £261.²³

Notes

- ¹ Letter to the *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* from 'J. H. Ouseburn', *Northern Star*, 21 August 1841, p. 7. The italics are in the original.
- ² Mike Greatbatch, 'Politics in the Piggery. Chartism in Ouseburn, 1838-1848', Table 1. Council Members of the Northern Political Union, *North East History*, Volume 44 (2013), p. 38. Shopkeepers and tradesmen account for ten of the eighteen members whose occupations can be identified with any certainty. The seven whose occupations cannot be identified means that it isn't clear if they dominated the Council membership, though only two non-skilled members can be identified with any certainty - William Parker, a labourer from Ouseburn, and Thomas Hepburn, a collier and president of the Newcastle Working Men's Association.
- ³ Letter from Thomas Doubleday and Emerson Charnley (Secretaries) to Thomas Wilson, 16 December 1830, and report of speeches made at the public meeting on the Town Moor on 17 October 1831; items 662 and 748 respectively, in *Thomas Wilson Collection, Volume 3*, Newcastle Local Studies.
- ⁴ www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/newcastle-upon-tyne accessed 30 March 2016.
- ⁵ 'Poll Book of the Electors who Voted at the Contested Election for Newcastle upon Tyne on the 6 and 7 January 1835', Newcastle Burgess Reports. Newcastle Local Studies (henceforth Newcastle Poll Book 1835). The poll book for 1832 is also available, courtesy of Google Books, as Poll Book of the Free Burgesses and Householders, Newcastle upon Tyne 1832, <http://books.google.co.uk/books> (henceforth Newcastle Poll Book 1832). Whilst this is useful for confirming voters' trade and professions, it is six years before 1838, the year the Northern Political

Union was re-launched and the Ouseburn Working Men's Association established, of which John Hall was a founder member.

Newcastle Poll Book 1835, pp. 18 and 3 respectively.

As above, p. 32.

This is the spelling used in all documents of the period, and so has been used in this text, although the town's name is now spelt as 'Kirkcaldy'.

For Edinburgh election see *Caledonian Mercury*, 9 November 1833, p. 3. The photograph of Aytoun is a calotype taken in the 1840s by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, in www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw163000/ James-Aytoun accessed 30 March 2016.

Mr Aytoun's Cup', *Caledonian Mercury*, 21 August 1834, p. 2.

Caledonian Mercury, 20 December 1834, p. 3.

'Meeting of Mr. Ord and His Friends', *Newcastle Courant*, 27 December 1834, p. 2.

'Register of the Names of Persons Entitled to Vote for the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne for the Year 1837-38', in *Thomas Wilson Collection, Volume 6*, Newcastle Local Studies, and Newcastle Poll Book 1832.

Larkin was especially critical of the Whigs' measures in Ireland. See his speech at the dinner given for James Aytoun at the Music Hall in January 1836 in *Newcastle Courant*, 6 February 1836, p.2. For *The Newcastle Standard* newspaper, and his role as editor/proprietor, see the *Newcastle Courant*, 17 September p. 1, 22 October 1836 p. 1, and 7 April 1837 p. 4.

In the 1835 poll book, two men named John Arkless are recorded at the same address (Pilgrim Street), and both are householder voters. One split his votes between Ord and Aytoun, and the other plumped for Aytoun. They were possibly father and son; in the 1832 poll book there is just one John Arkless living at 'New market hotel, Pilgrim st'. In his advert for his new business at the *Northumberland Arms*, Arkless refers to his former establishment as the *Butcher Market Hotel*, but no such public house is recorded in contemporary directories, whilst they do record Arkless at the *New Market Hotel*; see *Newcastle Courant*, 12 November 1836, p. 1. For a later description of the *Northumberland Arms*, see the sales notice in the *Newcastle Courant*, 16 February 1838, p. 1.

Sales notice, *Newcastle Courant*, 9 February 1833 p. 1, and Richardson's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1838).

Newcastle Courant, 21 November 1835 p. 2, and 4 August 1837, p. 1.

Ihler's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1833) and Pigot's Northern Counties Directory (1834).

The Poll Book of the Free Burgesses and Householdors, Newcastle upon Tyne 1832. <http://books.google.co.uk/books>

Richardson's Directory of Newcastle & Gateshead (1838), Parson & White's History, Directory & Gazetteer of Durham & Northumberland (1827), and Pigot's Northern Counties Directory (1829).

Greatbatch, 'Politics in the Piggery', pp. 54-55.

- ²² For the election expenses and ticket sales, see *Newcastle Courant*, 23 January 1836, p. 1. For the report of the dinner, see 'Public Dinner To James Aytoun Esq.', *Newcastle Courant*, 6 February 1836, p. 2.
- ²³ For Aytoun's support for the Anti-Corn Law movement see the report of a meeting held in Kirkaldy in the *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 January 1840, p. 4. James Aytoun was Kirkaldy's delegate at the meeting held by the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association later that month; 'Great Anti-Corn Law Banquet', *The Manchester Times*, 14 January 1840, p. 1.

The Genteel Militant: Elizabeth Spence Watson's Work for Women's Suffrage and Peace

Ann Craven ¹

Introduction and Background

Although known and respected by her contemporaries, not least as the wife of a prominent Tyneside figure, Elizabeth Spence Watson seemed destined to be, like Catherine Blake, one of those 'whose daily example has helped to civilise our race' but never found fame.² Reforming females were generally neglected.³ Such women, however, are now acknowledged for demonstrating how steady lobbying, pamphleteering, and campaigning could achieve political and social change, although sadly Elizabeth was overlooked by the curator of the 2013 Hatton Gallery exhibition, *Inspirational Women in the North East*.⁴

Positions held by Elizabeth included President of the district's Women's Liberal Association (WLA), which she founded, and President of the Newcastle branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage. She was a member of the Gateshead Nursing Association, the Women's International League, and the Tyneside Peace and Arbitration League, and was a Poor Law Guardian for eighteen years. For a bit of light relief Elizabeth hammered in the central rivet of the Redheugh Bridge on its opening day. At the age of seventy-five she climbed Mount Wellington in Tasmania. What follows is an account of her work in the areas of women's suffrage and peace.

Elizabeth Spence Watson agitated, wrote countless articles and letters for publication, spoke frequently in public, raised six children, and pioneered

rational dress. She was married to lawyer, Privy Councillor, Liberal Party agent and businessman Robert Spence Watson, who 'attributed the enlisting of his zeal in the cause for peace' to his wife.⁵

Elizabeth was born in 1838 into one of the North East's leading Quaker families. Her father was the proprietor of Richardson's tannery. Her mother, described as having 'a great power of sympathy with the troubled and anxious', nursed the poorest people during the 1853 cholera epidemic and forbade the household to use sugar as it was slave grown.⁶ The family tended to shun the outside world but it was a home more liberal than many orthodox Quaker homes and one in which women were regarded as the intellectual as well as spiritual equals to men.⁷ Imbued with a positive sense of her own worth, Elizabeth was disinclined to settle for the role of housewife and cultivated outside interests that focused on peace, women's suffrage and Liberalism.⁸ For such women a pattern was beginning to emerge in which 'caring work moved from the private to the public realm'.⁹

Politics and Peace

In 1886 Elizabeth founded the Newcastle and Gateshead WLA at a time when such associations were about to expand rapidly.¹⁰ By 1894 there were over thirty WLAs in Northumberland and Durham, many of them inaugurated by visits from Elizabeth.¹¹ This work was being undertaken in a period when it was thought that middle-class men and women were becoming less home-centred, but there is nothing in the letters and journals of Elizabeth's daughters to indicate any resentment about neglect of home or children.¹² Unlike her parents, who tended to shun contact with the outside world, her husband's many roles meant that Elizabeth was regularly bringing it into the home by offering hospitality to educationalists, explorers, politicians, artists and poets.¹³ The 1881 census lists four general servants at the Spence Watsons' Bensham Grove home, and that for 1891 shows just two general servants and a cook. Elizabeth appears to have subscribed to some extent to the conventional domestic

role of women; in 1887 she became secretary of a committee providing cookery classes for 'the wives of working men' at a cost of two shillings for twelve lessons and classes 'for ladies' offering a 'higher style of cooking' at ten shillings and sixpence for a dozen lessons.¹⁴

Elizabeth chaired the first meeting of the Newcastle and Gateshead WLA on the 25 November 1886. Guest speakers came from the Leeds and London WLAs, and also on the platform were Robert Spence Watson, MPs James Craig and James Joicey, plus several other local notables. Elizabeth opened the meeting by saying they did not wish it to be 'a mere party movement' or 'additional machinery available for electioneering purposes'.¹⁵ The principle of the association was to educate both men and women that women were capable of being full citizens and should be given the franchise. Others spoke of 'the many women who look upon political questions as outside their sphere' but 'the more they took an interest in politics the more they would see it was a woman's duty to care for such things', and how 'everyday duties were not sufficient to fill up the whole existence of an able-bodied woman'.¹⁶

Appeals to a woman's sense of duty were being stepped up – an activist told the *Women's Penny Paper* that it was 'the duty of all women to inform themselves in order to inform others' – and a religious dimension was added when the president of a London WLA spoke of a 'sacred duty' to educate women to be fully enfranchised citizens.¹⁷ Women, therefore, could hardly be censured for stepping outside their spheres if the work was seemingly sanctioned by God. The statements emanating from WLA branches offered a distinct contrast with those of the Tory Primrose League whose aim, through their hierarchy of Grand Council, Habitations, Knights and Dames, was to be 'the complement and never the rival of men in politics'.¹⁸

The report of the Newcastle and Gateshead WLA Annual Meeting for 1888 may be taken as a typical year, with speakers and discussions on women's suffrage, a woman's place in modern politics, Ireland before the Union, reform since 1832 and municipal government. Elizabeth

introduced the issue of peace into her annual address, arguing that WLAs should consider the question of war and suggesting that if all the people of England united then useless and wrong wars could be prevented. This new direction, giving a high profile to peace, differentiated the Newcastle and Gateshead WLA from others. Elizabeth recommended that all WLAs consider arbitration versus war, and make their protest when wars were anticipated, but because of difficulties expected within the WLA over this question, she had helped form a 'little Peace Association', the Newcastle and Gateshead Ladies Peace Association.¹⁹

The second annual meeting of this association was reported as 'only a small gathering' and there does not seem to have been a cohesive women's peace movement before the Hague Conference of 1915, only isolated groupings which were overshadowed by the women's suffrage campaign.²⁰ Nonetheless, Elizabeth returned to the peace question at most WLA meetings and enjoyed some success. By November 1899 other members backed her on the issue and passed a motion congratulating John Morley MP for his stand on the peace question, adding that 'at a time when so called Imperialism and the greed of land are rampant, where bravery and success in war are glorified beyond any of the deeds of peace it requires some courage to oppose a popular grant'.²¹

Women's Suffrage and Peace

With regard to women's suffrage, one historian identifies two distinct strands in existence from the late nineteenth century: the older Quaker-led one lying within the maternalist 'separate sphere', and the second, the equal-rights feminism.²² Elizabeth may have been rooted in the first, but played a leading role in the second, like some other Quakers, frequently emphasising the theme of 'no taxation without representation'.²³ There were few women who straddled both peace and equal rights but Elizabeth was one.²⁴ By 1911 she reckoned that 'women are now admitted to town councils, education is free, ... and the Parliamentary Franchise for women is almost in sight' but 'as for Peace ... over the restless waves of what inland

seas or mighty oceans does Peace securely spread her wing?²⁵

The relationship between working for peace and women's suffrage is a tangled one. Some felt that suffrage would bring peace. Ann Knight, for example, linked all social ills to the suppression of 'woman's diviner instinct' and the *Englishwoman's Review* thought that once women had the vote, 'the horrors of war will be in a great measure averted'.²⁶

The belief that women had the moral superiority and the ability to change the world was shared by Robert Spence Watson for whom there would be 'no remedy' for the ills of the world 'until women get political power'.²⁷ Liberals were particularly keen to promulgate the idea that women had a 'mission to purify and elevate the moral tenor of public affairs' – again, a religious element – but there was a potential political conflict between what could be regarded as the genteel and civilizing side of women and a more assertive side required to achieve anything.²⁸ This split the suffragists from peace campaigners, and the suffragists from the suffragettes. Elizabeth's ability to keep both women's suffrage and peace on the agenda of the Newcastle and Gateshead WLA is noteworthy.

Elizabeth's public profile was enhanced by her ability to bring well-known and contentious figures to speak to her WLA and Peace Association. She was relatively unusual amongst her contemporaries in maintaining a holistic belief in peace and women's suffrage. However, her task of promoting both issues in tandem was made the more testing by local reaction to the Boer War. In 1901 she regretted that more attention had been given to 'guns and khaki costumes than to the principles of justice and peace'.²⁹

The Conservatives had won the 1900 general election by making the war a campaign issue, which indicated widespread support for the conflict. This clearly placed Elizabeth in a minority of the population as a whole, but her persistence in pursuing the issue of peace attracted adherents. Without a comprehensive study of the peace movement in the North East, the only way of gauging the reception campaigns received is from the local press. Robert Spence Watson kept newspaper cuttings about his and his wife's

activities, mostly from the *Newcastle Daily Leader*, a Liberal paper that was generally supportive.³⁰ Press coverage did include some adverse comments, but there is no evidence that the Spence Watsons suffered because of their views. Elizabeth could take comfort from her loyal group of supporters forged over fourteen years in the WLA and bolstered by encouragement from the Quaker community.

There were, however, some incidents of opposition on the ground. Elizabeth had arranged for leading anti-war activist Cronwright-Schreiner to speak at Gateshead Town Hall as part of his national tour.³¹ Despite a number of precautions – no posters, a ticket-only private meeting and a ticket design that was not easy to forge – word of the meeting got out about this ‘pro-Boer’ meeting and a Gateshead councillor ‘marched a Gateshead Jingo crowd’ to the Spence Watsons’ home where Cronwright-Schreiner was staying.³² The crowd, with an ‘ugly look’, jeered and broke a window.³³ Meanwhile, Elizabeth was rearranging the planned meeting to one between Cronwright-Schreiner and anti-war campaigners at her home later in the evening, the *Daily Leader* reporting the proceedings under the headline ‘How the Crowd was Baulked’.³⁴ Elizabeth found it ‘a memorable occasion’ with Cronwright-Schreiner’s contribution ‘most interesting and clear’.³⁵ The stone thrown into the house was polished, engraved and treasured by the family as the ‘free speech stone’.

Elizabeth’s commitment to the cause of peace continued unabated, more convinced than ever that her country had failed to act up to the high standard expected of it and was bullying South Africa. In 1900 she went to ‘one of the most remarkable women’s meetings held in London’ which Elizabeth told her daughter was the most inspiring meeting she had ever attended.³⁶ She met up with one of the organisers, Emily Hobhouse, who like Elizabeth bridged both the Liberal and Quaker communities.³⁷ Hobhouse was busy bringing the plight of South Africans into the public eye through a series of lectures following visits there on behalf of the Women & Children’s Distress Fund. She was inevitably invited to Gateshead and equally predictably there was opposition; for instance a

letter in the *Morning Mail* objected to the Co-operative Hall being used and hoped that the pro-Boers would see that Gateshead intended to 'fight to the finish'.³⁸ Untroubled, Elizabeth pushed on, publishing a review of William Jones' *Quaker Campaigns in Peace and War* and sending letters to the press on such matters as the military training of boys, and Quakers, and military service. In 1905 she addressed the WLA on the increase in expenditure on the army and navy, about compulsory military education and the desirability of teaching arbitration skills, and again pointed out the urgent need for all women to band together to secure women's suffrage.

Suffragist v. Suffragette

Elizabeth's vigorous yet peaceful approach to campaigning was being challenged by more militant groups, where direct action was replacing passive resistance. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) were active in the North East, breaking the windows of the Liberal Club in 1909, holding a huge rally on the Town Moor in 1911, setting fire to Hexham Station and to post boxes, and attacking a post office and council offices.³⁹ Elizabeth, of course, did not approve. Interviewed in her capacity as an executive member of the Committee for the North Eastern Society for Women's Suffrage by the *North Mail* reporter, she said, 'it is a very great pity that some of these extreme women are acting as they are'.⁴⁰ Asked for her opinion later in the same year, Elizabeth told the *Daily Graphic* that although the methods adopted by the imprisoned suffragettes did not commend themselves to her, 'it must be remembered that quieter methods have been pursued during a long course of years with apparent want of success'.⁴¹

She wrote to the *Northern Echo*, just before a visit in 1909 by Christabel Pankhurst, to reiterate the official WLA line against the suffragettes methods, but was aware that after forty years campaigning via 'endless meetings, drawing-room meetings, meetings of Liberals and Conservatives, of associations, of federations' it had to 'be admitted that it is extremely difficult for women suffragists to find out the best means of influencing our legislators'.⁴²

Nonetheless, she reminded a conference of the Free Church League for Women's Suffrage in 1914 that she was 'strongly against those methods of violence adopted by militant suffragettes...violence in any form ought to be condemned'.⁴³ Differing views on the effectiveness of the quieter modes of campaigning that divided the peace movement, also divided the women's suffrage movement and were further challenged by attitudes to the First World War.⁴⁴

Activity in Later Life

After she was widowed in 1911, Elizabeth, then in her seventies, cut back a little on her activism. For instance, in 1912 she stood down as chair of the WLA. Yet, in 1916, according to her daughter Mary's journal, she attended the Leeds Peace Conference and was supporting conscientious objectors by attending tribunals as *amicus curiae*.⁴⁵ These were unpopular acts in a town regularly holding military parades, flag days and fetes to promote the war effort. Newcastle Council was voting to intern all alien subjects and Gateshead pork butchers' shops belonging to people of German descent were being attacked. According to her granddaughter, on hearing of the latter incidents Elizabeth 'sallied forth to put a stop to it!'.⁴⁶

Throughout her life Elizabeth remained within the Quaker faith and its discipline while other activists, including her sister Anna Deborah, parted company with the Friends.⁴⁷ In engaging with the questions of peace and women's suffrage, and in linking the two issues, she was the forerunner of a new generation of suffragist peace campaigners who used the same tactics through the First World War.⁴⁸ In April 1918 she chaired a rally in Newcastle to celebrate the passing of the women's franchise. Following her death in the following year the Dean of Worcester spoke of how 'we are now accustomed to women in public life' such that 'we hardly realise how much Elizabeth Spence Watson was a pioneer'.⁴⁹

This essay has attempted to shed light on Elizabeth's endeavours in the fields of peace and women's suffrage, but this is only part of her involvement in progressive causes.⁵⁰

Acknowledgements

I am much indebted to the help of Benjamin Beck (great grandson of Elizabeth) who has transcribed many of his family's diaries and letters, some of which he has put on-line; Tyne & Wear Archives; the Special Collections Librarian at the Robinson Library, Newcastle University, and the wonderful library of the Society of Friends which provided a welcome cool retreat in the middle of a hot summer opposite Euston train station. I recommend it to you.

Notes

- ¹ This article is based on part of the author's MA dissertation 'Elizabeth Spence Watson: a Quaker Working for Peace and Women's Suffrage in Nineteenth Century Newcastle and Gateshead (University of Newcastle, 2004), a copy of which is deposited in the library of the Newcastle Literary & Philosophical Society. A paper entitled *The Paradox of Elizabeth Spence Watson* was given at the weekend school of Newcastle History Department in June 2002 at Adderstone Hall, and an updated paper on her life was given at *A Celebration of the Life of Robert Spence Watson* at the Lit & Phil in March 2011.
- ² Victorian women were defined by their relationship with their husbands. For instance, a search of the British Library's Newspaper on-line archive delivers only nine references to 'Elizabeth Spence Watson', five of which add 'Mrs Spence Watson' in brackets. A search for 'Mrs Spence Watson' produced 234 entries. Catherine Blake was the wife of the poet William Blake. See Edith Sitwell, *English Women* (London: Prion Books, New ed. 1997; originally published 1942), p. 9.
- ³ See Christine Johnson, 'Quaker women and peace campaigners in England, 1820-1915' (unpublished University of Staffordshire PhD thesis, 2002), p 65, who points out that the names of many reforming male Quakers have endured over the years - for example, Joseph Rowntree, George Cadbury, Joseph Sturge and Joseph Pearse - but few people could name a female contemporary other than Elizabeth Fry.
- ⁴ See for example Jill Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham* (London: Virago, 1989), and Clare Midgley, 'Women and anti-slavery campaigners, with special reference to the North East', *North East Labour History*, 29 (1995), pp. 343-362.
- ⁵ *Friend* 11 March 1911, p. 129. This and other newspaper cuttings are taken from the volumes of cuttings in Newcastle Central Library, catalogued as Robert Spence Watson, Newspaper Cuttings 1838-1911 (L920, W341) (henceforth, Cuttings). Where possible, page numbers have been added from the British Newspaper Archive; where this has not been possible, the location in the Cuttings volumes has been given. As a businessman, Robert Spence Watson was a founding director

of both the Swan Electric Supply Co. and the Newcastle Electric Supply Co. and a significant shareholder in the Redheugh Bridge Co. In terms of wealth he was not in the same league as the leading coalowners and industrialists, and in terms of attitude his arbitration work set him apart. According to Benwell Community Project in *The Making of a Ruling Class* (Newcastle: Benwell Community Project, 1978), p. 23, he 'epitomises the ambiguous role of the Liberal Party in this period in his trying to reconcile the inherent conflict between a capitalist class and the working classes. His sympathetic attitude to the labour movement...very different from the position taken by men like Lord Armstrong'.

⁶ Elizabeth Spence Watson, *Reminiscences* (transcribed by her daughter Evelyn Weiss, held by a family member), 1918, p. 18.

⁷ J. Wigham Richardson, *Memoirs 1837-1908* (Glasgow, 1911) recalled a somewhat austere life which 'was very isolated, and barring the occasional party which was confined entirely to members of the Society of Friends, we had no entertainments'. However, the family was more progressive than, say, that of the respected Quaker MP John Bright who was something of a hero to Robert Spence Watson. Bright is quoted as saying that he could never bear women to assert themselves (Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) p. 92. Sheila Wright, *Friends in York: the Dynamics of Quaker Revival, 1780-1860* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1995), discusses the concepts of spiritual equality and perfect womanhood in Quaker marriages and concludes that in many instances the wife was still expected to be submissive.

⁸ It was a time when 'the radical Liberal tradition enjoyed a close affinity with equal rights feminism'; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 139.

⁹ Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public: The Womens Movement, 1850-1900* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979).

¹⁰ In 1886 there were forty WLAs with a total of 10,000 members. By 1912 there were 837 with 133,215 members.

¹¹ In December 1889, for example, she visited WLAs at Cramlington and Ryton and helped to found one in Consett.

¹² This was not the case with Elizabeth Fry's family; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 139-140.

¹³ Visitors included Emily Dickinson, Birkett Foster, William Scott Bell, Millicent Garret Fawcett, Thomas Hughes, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Prince Kropotkin, William Morris, the explorer Nansen and the freed slave Frederick Douglass. Visitors' Books from Bensham, held by members of the family.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Spence Watson, *Family Chronicles* (transcribed from the originals by family member Benjamin Beck, n.d. Held by the family), p. 27.

¹⁵ *Newcastle Daily Leader* 26 November 1896, p. 8.

¹⁶ As above. Similarly, Lady Trevelyan told the Morpeth and Wansbeck WLA at its

inception that such 'associations were not formed for amusement' and at a later date reminded its members that the primary objective was 'to educate women in political principles with a view to bring their influence to bear on the legislation of the country'; *Morpeth Herald*, 23 February 1889, p. 7, and *Women's Herald*, 20 February 1892, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Women's Penny Paper*, 13 December 1890, p. 113; *Women's Herald*, 20 February 1892, p. 3.

¹⁸ Linda Walker, 'Party political women: a comparative study of Liberal women and the Primrose League', in *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914*, ed. by Jane Rendall (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p. 176. Walker adds that initially the work of the WLAs was similar to that of the Primrose League, in that they were both concerned with 'electoral activity grounding in the political issues of the day: fiscal policies, factory acts and other legislation, municipal and county councils' concerns'.

¹⁹ *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 4 December 1888, p. 8. The Association had begun with 45 members, rising to 78 together with 120 from mothers' meetings.

²⁰ *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 20 November 1889, p.8. During the year, following her WLA practice of inviting notable speakers, the Newcastle and Gateshead Ladies Peace Association had visits from the likes of Ellen Robinson of Liverpool, who is highlighted by Liddington as a major actor in the peace campaigning of the 1860s and 1870s (pp. 43-48).

²¹ *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 16 November 1899, p. 8.

²² Liddington, pp. 43-48.

²³ For example Anne Knight; see G. Malmgreen, 'Anne Knight and the radical subculture', *Quaker History*, 71 no. 2 (1982), p.106.

²⁴ Liddington, pp. 43-48.

²⁵ E. Spence Watson, *Newcastle upon Tyne Central Women's Liberal Association, Report for year ending 31st October, 1911* (Newcastle upon Tyne: J. W. Hindson, 1912).

²⁶ Malmgreen, p. 109.

²⁷ *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 26 November 1886, p. 6.

²⁸ Walker, p. 176.

²⁹ *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 22 February 1901, p. 8.

³⁰ In 1898 Elizabeth Spence Watson said the paper had done 'splendid service in the cause of peace', *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 26 October 1898, p. 8.

³¹ 'Cron' Cronwright-Schreiner was the husband of South African author Olive Schreiner, originally Cronwright, then Cronwright-Schreiner (usually but not always hyphenated), and then Cronwright again after the couple became estranged. He enjoyed a formidable reputation amongst anti-war campaigners. He wrote, for example, that 'patriots have made many of us loathe the very sight of the Union Jack'. He was always keen to point out that although he had been brought up in South Africa he considered himself to be a patriotic Englishman, having a particular veneration for his mother country, feeling a particular agony to see her acting in

a way 'which we were taught proudly to regard as un-English, because cowardly and despicable', S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Land of Free Speech: a Record of a Campaign on behalf of Peace in England and Scotland in 1900* (London: New Age Press, 1906).

32 *Sunderland Echo*, 13 March 1900, p. 3.

33 *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 10 March 1900, p. 5.

34 *Newcastle Daily Leader*, 10 March 1900, p. 8.

35 Letter from Elizabeth Spence Watson to her daughter, Mabel Spence Watson, 10 March 1900, Tyne & Wear Archives Service (TWAS), 213/278.

36 Quoted in Sybil Oldfield, *Women Against the Iron Fist: Alternatives to Militarism, 1900-1989* (London: Blackwell, 1989). This was a large women's peace protest meeting at the Queen's Hall. Emily Hobhouse found it 'a magnificent assemblage of women, representative not only of London, but of the entire country'; A. Ruth Fry, *Emily Hobhouse: a Memoir* (London: Cape, 1929), p. 66.

37 Hobhouse and the Spence Watsons represented one shade of opinion in a Liberal Party that was divided over the war. Elizabeth had once shared platforms with Millicent Garrett Fawcett on woman's suffrage but Fawcett, when President of the Women's Liberal Federation, was 'unwavering in her support of the war', Liddington, p. 53. See also Concentration Camps Commission, *Report on the Concentration Camps in South Africa, by the Committee of Ladies Appointed by the Secretary of State for War* (HMSO, London, Cd. 893, 1902).

38 *Morning Mail*, 19 July 1901, in Cuttings Volume 5, p. 25.

39 See David Neville, *To Make Their Mark: the Women's Suffrage Movement in the North East of England, 1900-1914* (Centre for Northern Studies, University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1997).

40 *Northern Mail*, 16 March 1906, in Cuttings Volume 5, p. 58. The same article carried a statement from the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) disassociating themselves from disruptive behaviour.

41 *Daily Graphic*, 7 November 1906, in Cuttings Volume 5, p. 59.

42 *Northern Echo*, 8 October, in Cuttings Volume 7, p.9.

43 *Newcastle Journal*, 11 March 1914, p. 10.

44 The divisions between the various Pankhurst factions have provided a vast literature, but Wiltshire stitches the peace element into the picture, and says 'half the leading women in the British suffrage movement opposed the war', Anne Wiltshire, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War* (London: Pandora, 1985), p. 3.

45 One of whom, R.W. Ridley, wrote to her daughter Mabel on 24 February 1919: 'I cannot forget trying days in 1916 ... when Mrs Watson insisted on staying with me during the long hours ... before Gateshead Tribunal, the only friend I had in court'. (TWAS temporary deposit Z11028/3/8)

46 Transcript of conversation between Mabel Weiss (grand-daughter of Elizabeth and Robert) and Ann Craven; Lamel Beeches, York, 26 August 2003, audio cassette

deposited in Robinson Library, Special Collections.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Spence Watson's sister, Anna Deborah Richardson, left the Quakers for the Anglican church, as did (among others) the eminent north east Quaker Elizabeth Pease and the radical Anne Knight. For more on Anna Deborah Richardson see E. A. O'Donnell, 'Woman's Rights and Woman's Duties: Quaker Women in the Nineteenth Century with Special Reference to Newcastle Monthly Meeting of Women Friends' (unpublished PhD thesis, Sunderland University, 2000).

⁴⁸ For example, Kathleen Courtney and Margaret Ashton; see Liddington, pp. 59-107.

⁴⁹ *Friend*, 7 March 1919, p. 133.

⁵⁰ She was involved, for example, in an official capacity with the administration of Ragged Schools and the Poor Law, and devoted time to local issues with regard to poverty, education and philanthropy. For more on Ragged Schools see E. A. O'Donnell, 'Newcastle Ragged and industrial Schools, 1847-1890: A Study in Juvenile Delinquency and Philanthropy' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Sunderland, 1993).

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We Need to Talk about the Secondary Moderns: A Conversation about a Local History Project

Peter Brabban and Patrick Candon ¹

There is a brief timeline in Appendix 1 describing some of the events discussed below.

Patrick Candon: So, Peter we're going to talk about the secondary moderns. Part of this conversation is to get at your personal experiences - relate them to mine - and then use these experiences as a backdrop for our research into the tripartite education system in Newcastle in the post-war years. The aim of our project is to examine how the tripartite system worked, who benefited from it, and to record people's personal school-life experiences of secondary moderns, so as to better understand the quality of education most working class children experienced during that period. Would you like to say something about how you feel about what happened to you?

Peter Brabban: I was an Eleven-plus failure. That was significant in my family because all my older siblings had passed the Eleven-plus. All of them had gone to Stanley Grammar School. Whereas, I failed and I was sent to a secondary modern school. In fact, my parents didn't send me to the local secondary modern in my village of Dipton but instead sent me to Burnopfield Secondary Modern, which they thought of as a better, more respectable, school. My failure came as a great blow to my parents because they had invested quite a lot in me going to grammar school. I had

been in the 'A' stream in primary school and was also in the Eleven-plus 'crammer group'. I'd even had some coaching from my brother-in-law, who was a teacher. I got through the first round of the exam and then had to go to Stanley Grammar to sit the second half, which I failed. I took this as a personal failure. The fact that you were called a 'failure' at eleven was significant. I've since learned that I was part of a huge number of marginal kids, who as part of the baby boom were destined to fail because, at that time, there were many more pupils than places. I didn't know that at the time. I just knew that I'd failed; I was a failure and I'd been sent to this secondary modern school. About four or five pupils in my primary school passed the Eleven-plus and went on to grammar school. After the age of eleven, apart from at Scouts, I lost contact with those grammar school pupils entirely.



Peter Brabban in 1959

Secondary moderns were not seen as a real alternative to grammar school. Respectable working class kids didn't go to a secondary modern. And the more you read about it, the more you come across horrendous attitudes towards secondary moderns. In one book I read, a primary school teacher described secondary moderns as: 'academies for louts and layabouts'.² Here I was going to a school where you didn't get qualifications, or the ones you got were worthless. There was a real sense that your chance in life had gone and if you didn't go to grammar school you didn't get a good job. I felt I'd been written-off, both by the education system and by my parents, because I was the thick one in the family, though I might be a bit hard on my parents.

I arrived at Burnopfield Secondary Modern in 1959 at the height of the baby boom. The school was overcrowded. In my first year at secondary modern, I think the class size was 42. However, because I was put in the 'A' stream, I wasn't with any of the so-called 'louts or layabouts'. I received what you would call an elementary education. You followed a curriculum of English, maths, science and so on, it certainly wasn't technical. The nearest we got to a technical education was woodwork lessons and technical drawing. For most of the time, there was an awful lot of emphasis on controlling the kids. They were quite liberal in dishing out corporal punishment. I was caned a number of times, even as a quiet lad in the 'A' stream. Other forms of physical punishment were used as well.

Burnopfield Secondary Modern was built in the inter-war years and everyone who went there was an Eleven-plus failure, even though the teachers didn't call us failures. Overwhelmingly, it was a fairly low-level education and it was expected that after your time there, boys would go into manual labour and girls would go into retail and low-level clerical jobs until they married. Outside of that you were not given much of an option.

Yours was a different kind of secondary modern to mine?

PC: Yes it was. And this is something we've begun to appreciate the more we've looked into the secondary modern experience. In fact, it is a hidden area of social history. Not much has been written about it and

very few ex-secondary modern pupils have spoken publicly about it. We've also begun to appreciate that the secondary modern experience wasn't a uniform one. It depended on when and where you went to a secondary modern.

I went to a Catholic secondary modern in St Albans, Hertfordshire. It was a new build, only three years old when I arrived in 1965. My older brother had also failed the Eleven-plus and was already there. I left in 1970 with 'O' levels, mainly because I was put into the 'A' stream. Like you, we received a general curriculum. In the morning we did English, maths, science, history, geography and so on. As well as doing a lot of P.E. - particularly playing football - most afternoons we did woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing. For me, what came out of that five year experience was a life-long love of participating in sport and I developed some very useful practical skills: being able to fix things and being good at DIY. Looking back, I suppose those particular learning experiences were quite productive.



Patrick Candon in 1965

However, like you, I do remember that period as a time of public shame. I had already watched the demeaning ritual of my brother failing and the stigma attached to that. For me, the Eleven-plus was like an impending doom. It was a dark shadow that hung over the whole of my primary education. I too felt written-off by the age of eleven. Yet, I think I had been written-off by the age of eight or nine because of the streaming in my primary school.

I was brought up on a council estate and I can only remember two or three boys on my estate passing the Eleven-plus. Like you, I lost contact with them while they attended grammar school; they became ostracised from the other children on the estate. The lad across the road from me, who had been my best friend, went to grammar school. As a reward for passing the Eleven-plus, he received a brand new racing bike from his parents. Instead of being out on the street playing football with us, he was inside doing his homework. For five years, he virtually disappeared from our lives.

A very small proportion of pupils at my secondary modern passed 'O' levels, most gained some CSEs and then left to find work. But what is clear is that you had a different kind of experience to me?

PB: Yes, the big difference I see is, 'O' levels were made available to you, which depended upon having an extra year at school. Everyone left my school at the age of fifteen. We were never offered the option of doing 'O' levels or CSEs. All told, I view my four years at secondary modern as being fallow years when I didn't feel I developed at all, educationally.

PC: Yes, this is often described as warehousing, not really knowing what to do with secondary modern children. There was a notion that the secondary modern curriculum was meant to be innovative and experimental because teachers didn't have to follow a classical curriculum.

PB: This didn't follow in my school at all. My education was 'grammar school lite'. It was the same as a grammar school except you didn't do languages and you didn't do specialist science subjects, you did general science.

PC: Gary McCulloch writes about the secondary modern curriculum.³ Initially, it was hoped that some secondary modern teachers, free from the constraints of examinations, would implement a distinctive ‘modern’ kind of education, with an integrated curriculum and activity-based project work but generally they ended up aping the grammar schools but at a much lower level.

So, Peter, let’s summarise our two sets of experiences. We both failed the Eleven-plus and we both went to secondary moderns but we had quite different experiences. You attended an older school building in the midst of the post-war baby boom. Mine was later, at a purpose-built secondary modern, in another part of the country. What I’d like now is for us to talk about our secondary modern experiences within a political and historical context. Yet, what is interesting is that while we’ve been researching this topic we’ve found that those who passed the Eleven-plus have been very eager to step forward to tell us their story but people like you and me have always been coy about mentioning that we failed.

PB: I think the crystallisation of our feelings came to a head when we attended Selina Todd’s book launch *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class*, at Newcastle City Library.⁴ In the Question and Answer session afterwards, when we were discussing the chapter on the myth of ‘the golden age of the grammar school’, I was miffed that all the responses that were going to Selina were about grammar schools. I lost my patience. I stood up and said: what about the secondary moderns? Why don’t we talk about them? 80% of us went to secondary moderns. Why is it that all the focus of attention is on grammar schools? For example, did they provide social mobility? Huge numbers of us went elsewhere and have been ignored.

PC: Yes, they have been ignored, they are the forgotten generation. We thought it’s about time we uncovered their story.

PB: Especially today when you’ve got people in the Conservative Party, and the other parties, saying: bring back the grammar schools. Well, if you bring back the grammar schools, you have to bring back the secondary

moderns. That is important because in my view the secondary moderns let down a whole generation of people. That's why we need to talk about the secondary moderns.

PC: We continue to focus on the small number of pupils who passed and not the very large cohort who failed. We know a lot of stuff has been written about the tripartite system by sociologists and educational historians, like Jackson and Marsden, Floud and Halsey, Partridge, Brian Simon and so on in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ But as soon as the comprehensive system was introduced, it mostly stopped.

PB: Yes, we became interested in this topic in a number of ways. First of all was looking at the criticisms of the tripartite education system. Even in the 1950s, these writers were showing how the system was unjust, in that it was stacked in favour of middle class kids and against the interests of working class kids. We wanted to take a local historical context and look at whether you could prove if that was the case: were working class kids being discriminated against? The second area was the political processes which first gave rise to the tripartite system and then got rid of it. We were surprised about what we discovered about what went on in that period. The third area, which I'd never thought of as significant, was how demographic changes were putting huge pressures on the system. The baby boom was as much a cause of the destruction of the tripartite system as the political processes.

PC: Brian Simon describes that period, as the whole system 'bursting at the seams'.⁶ It was failing on all sorts of levels. Essentially, the national tripartite experiment lasted just twenty years, from 1945 until the famous, or infamous, Circular 10/65 in 1965.⁷ We wanted to discover the factors that brought the secondary modern experiment to a crashing end. Even during this so-called 'golden age of grammar schools', not only the Labour Party but some senior Conservatives were having serious misgivings about the tripartite system. There was also a growing realisation that secondary moderns weren't producing the type of educated worker that the new light industries required and it didn't suit the growing de-industrialised

society that we were moving towards. But we were particularly interested in how social class dominated our education system both before 1945 and afterwards.

PB: My first big surprise from our research was to discover that it wasn't the 1944 Education Act that imposed the tripartite system. This Act stipulated that compulsory secondary education should be extended to the age of fifteen and should be free. The decision to go tripartite wasn't taken by the wartime coalition government, it was imposed by the Labour government after the war, by Ellen Wilkinson in 1945, in the teeth of what her Party's activists were demanding.⁸ This is quite surprising when you look at the Attlee government's other major social policy legislation on the National Health Service and the introduction of Family Allowance, which were universal and not selective. This education policy decision stands out because it was all about selection and elitism.

PC: Yet, the idea of secondary moderns was sold to the British people using the term 'parity of esteem'.

PB: It was sold as 'different but equal'. But in every aspect it wasn't. The Ministry of Education sent out a publication in December 1945 that explicitly told local authorities to think in terms of three types of state secondary school: grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns. This effectively meant that working class children were not going to receive a comparable level of education. The outcry was so great from Labour Party activists they had to withdraw the publication. Nevertheless, Ellen Wilkinson still went ahead and imposed a selective system, which reflected the class system of that period.

PC: Is our conclusion then, that pre-war secondary education was not much different from the post-war tripartite system? Our research into secondary education in Newcastle upon Tyne shows that most of the old elementary schools were rebranded as secondary moderns. And, only a very small number of schools were designated as technical schools.

PB: Apart from the small numbers of working class children who passed what was effectively the old scholarship exam, it was the middle class

who gained most from the tripartite system. This was legitimised by the perceived wisdom of the time that children were born with a general level of intelligence. Fundamentally, a decision had to be made: whether or not it was worth investing in the education of children with low intelligence.

PC: Yes, talking about this idea of intelligence, there was a lot of eugenicist stuff around at the time: the spurious notion that only some types of people are innately intelligent. Do you think that Ellen Wilkinson was influenced by that?

PB: I think Ellen Wilkinson, along with the authors of the Spens Report and the Norwood Report etc. were heavily influenced by some of the ideas of psychometricians at the time, that there were distinctive 'types of minds'.⁹ Most of the research that backed up these ideas was still respectable. Perhaps, she felt you could discern a person's intelligence at the age of eleven and you could allocate children to a school appropriate to their general intelligence. All that research was not yet shown to be bogus. The truth of the matter was that the mechanics of passing the Eleven-plus exam was taught to middle class kids, you could say that they were trained to pass the exam and by and large working class kids weren't. Intelligence testing was the academic sleight-of-hand that allowed the Eleven-plus to go ahead.

PC: Before we go on to examine the pressures that the tripartite system came under, we know something about the allocation of resources to the different types of school, both nationally and locally, after 1944. We do know that, nationally, three-quarters of all spending on secondary education went to the grammar schools or to the very few technical or commercial schools. This emphasised the elitist attitude: that it was only worth spending money on the selected kids. So, despite the fact that 75% to 80% of state educated pupils attended secondary modern schools, these schools only received one quarter of the available budget.¹⁰ Do we know how much this spending pattern was replicated in Newcastle in the twenty-year period from 1945?

PB: This has been quite hard to discover because of the lack of

documentation available from the City's Education Department. However, we do know there were two big capital projects to rebuild the two sets of grammar schools in the west end and the east end of the city. The plan to build a new secondary modern in the late 1950s was overtaken by events: it subsequently opened as a comprehensive school.

PC: When we began our research, we decided that the best way to map all these issues was to look at how the tripartite system operated in one place and with one cohort of children. Tell me how it was that we chose Newcastle upon Tyne in 1958/59?

PB: The decision was to do a case study. We looked at a number of areas in the North East and plumped for Newcastle because that was where we found the data we needed. By then we had discovered that the amount of data and original historical sources about education were very sparse. It was surprising to me that we couldn't find any paperwork from Newcastle local authority's education department.

PC: However, we came across Newcastle Council's 1946 Education Plan. This showed us how Newcastle Council went down the tripartite road without deviation, strictly following the remit from the Ministry of Education.

PB: A big aspect of our research, which led us to look at Newcastle was the feeling that if you want to know the story of the secondary modern, you have to get at data about the people who ended up in these schools. That was very difficult, until we came across the 'Red Spot' children.

PC: So who were the 'Red Spot' children?

PB: 'Red Spot' is shorthand for a study that took place in the post-war period of a thousand children who were born in Newcastle in 1947 and then followed through for the rest of their lives. Initially, it was meant to be a longitudinal, sociological, medical study of their health. When these children got to school age, the study also began plotting their school careers.¹¹

PC: So, these were all the children born in Newcastle between May and June of 1947. Its aim was to track their life trajectories. The study is

still going on, those children are now approximately sixty-eight or sixty-nine years old. From this study we were given access to some very useful historical data.

PB: Yes, it was a gold mine. When they get to age eleven, the number of children had reduced to 732 but what the study recorded was not only their birth and where they were living but also their IQ and their social class, based upon their father's employment and using the Registrar General's scale at the time. It also told us about their gender, what primary school they went to and which secondary school they ended up attending. So, you've got all the basic data from a large sample. We could then start to test some of the theories about secondary education in terms of class, gender and location.

PC: Without going into great detail - because it is presently being developed into a fuller piece of research - what sort of broad conclusions were we able to draw from this data? What is it telling us about that cohort of children who took the Eleven-plus in Newcastle in 1958? What sort of picture emerges?

PB: The two things that emerge are, firstly, that the criticism of the tripartite system, as it pertains to class, was absolutely sound. The vast majority of working-class kids in Newcastle - those in the Registrar General's classification of classes three, four and five - ended up in secondary modern schools. Whereas, a much higher proportion of the class above went on to grammar school. In other words, the failure rate in the Eleven-plus grew as you went down the social classes. When you get down to social class five, the unskilled working class, over 92% of those children went to secondary moderns, whereas in social class two, it was 40%. There was a tiny number of children in the sample from social class one, of which *none* went to grammar school. They mostly went to direct-grant schools or private schools, except for one poor lad, who was sent to a secondary modern!

PC: We don't know how long he lasted at the secondary modern?

PB: No, we don't. The second thing that we tested was an assertion made in debates at Newcastle Council. From the minutes of Council meetings in 1958, Labour councillors were quite adamant that if you were a child from Walker, for example, your chances of going to grammar school were tiny but if you were a child from Jesmond, your chances were far greater. From our data, those assertions work out to be entirely right.

PC: So, there's a spatial element to this. We began to map out the location of the primary schools across the City and the relative chances children, in those schools, had getting into a grammar school. Is it true that the further away the primary school is from the river Tyne, the greater the chance of passing the Eleven-plus?

PB: That's not entirely right because of housing redevelopment. With post-war slum clearance, there was a mass migration away from those congested riverside wards to places like Slatyford and Kenton. A lot of big housing estates were being built. That was important because in many of the debates in the 1950s and 1960s about why working class children failed the Eleven-plus, they centred less on class and more on 'poor attitudes to education' or inadequate housing conditions, especially overcrowding. Yet, the working class children who moved from overcrowded riverside wards to brand-new houses in Kenton, for example, nevertheless took their class discrimination with them. Even when they were living in more spacious housing, they still ended up in a secondary modern.

PC: We started to examine the debates taking place in Newcastle Council in the late 1950s about the pressures on the tripartite system and the serious consideration being given to moving towards a comprehensive secondary system. At the time, the tripartite system was being defended by Conservative councillors. They wanted to maintain the grammar schools.

PB: It's significant that when Labour took control of the Council in 1958, one of the first things they did was to abolish the Eleven-plus. It had become a hot political issue. It was a debate the Tories had suppressed while they had been in power.

PC: However, the Labour Council's first initiative was only to

experiment with comprehensivisation. We know from Brian Simon, that some local authorities, like Leicestershire, had gone much earlier with full comprehensive reform.¹²

PB: By the end of the 1950s, the whole system was creaking and so you got different responses to those pressures from different parts of the country. In Newcastle, they thought it was, first of all, important to get rid of the Eleven-plus exam.

PC: Yes and they also started an experiment with Kenton secondary school, which was originally planned as a new secondary modern but then opened as a comprehensive school. The Conservatives were keen that this would remain only a small, localised experiment.

PB: However, by 1965, Newcastle has three comprehensive schools.

PC: But before then, many Newcastle secondary modern schools could be described as 'slum schools'. They were converted Victorian or Edwardian school buildings with additional prefabricated classrooms to cope with the increased numbers of children. For most of that twenty year period, the actual physicality of those schools did not change. Essentially, they were refurbished elementary schools. Many were still 'all-age' schools, with younger children attending primary school in the same building.

As part of our research into the physical condition of secondary schools in Newcastle, we examined Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) reports from that period. If we pick out two HMI reports to compare and contrast: one is Rutherford Grammar School and the other is Canning Street Secondary School, which was also an 'all-age' school. Those two reports offer the reader a stark contrast, in terms of each school's physical environment. In the Rutherford report, inspectors comment upon the less than perfect condition of the cricket square. Moreover, despite having over 4000 books in the school library, the Sixth Form section of the library was considered to be under-stocked. By way of contrast, in the Canning Street report, inspectors were very critical because the school building lacked even the most basic amenities. The school didn't have a library! Nor did it have a gymnasium or a dining room; it had no science labs. The report is

particularly critical of the school's sanitary arrangements: just seven outside toilets shared by 270 secondary and junior boys! I know you've got to be careful with language but you could almost describe it as an 'educational apartheid'.

PB: I read about an American academic, who when visiting Britain at the time, described the notion of 'parity of esteem' in the English education system ringing as hollow as the 'separate but equal' equivalence to racial segregation in America.¹³

PC: In many senses then, the system was separating working class kids from middle class kids. Rather than creating 'parity of esteem', it legitimised two quite different standards of secondary education.

PB: We need to also talk about the pressure that the baby boom put on the system. When you look at the data, you see as the population of school age children grew, the tripartite system couldn't cope because the number of grammar school places remained static. As the population rate grew, the failure rate grew. In Newcastle in the late 1950s, the failure rate went up from 68% to almost 80%, just because of population pressure. This impacted upon parents who became very dissatisfied because even if they had a bright child, they would still be sent to the Gulags! This created a groundswell of dissatisfaction.

PC: It's worth comparing this groundswell of public dissatisfaction against the tripartite system with 'official' attitudes. We know that, in a protest over Newcastle Council's implementation of comprehensivisation, there were two resignations from the Education Committee: they were both academics from Durham University! The move to comprehensives was unlocking some very deep-seated prejudices.

PB: Yes, both Education Committee members were from an elitist institution who could not accept that the elite selection system in Newcastle was going to end. But it wasn't just them. As soon as the decision was announced to bring in comprehensive schools, there was a petition against it from the parents of pupils at Heaton Grammar. There was some resistance from a small number of people who benefitted from

the old system but no resistance from the great majority who did not.

PC: A big part of our research has concentrated on class. Yet, we also looked at gender differences. Our research shows that working-class girls in particular were least likely to benefit from the tripartite system. One woman I interviewed recently, who failed the Eleven-plus in Newcastle in 1958, describes her education at secondary modern as being highly gendered. The curriculum was heavily biased towards girls doing cookery and home craft. At her school there was a specialist prefabricated building where the girls would learn to keep a house clean and make a meal for a future husband. The boys did woodwork and metalwork. How much does gender come into our research?

PB: If you look at our data, and you take class out of it, the first thing you notice is that there were fewer selective places for girls, a matter of about 5%. However, when you overlay class on to that, you discover that by and large the girls going to grammar schools were either middle class or in the upper levels of the working class. Very few working-class girls got to grammar or technical schools. Yes, there was discrimination against girls because there were fewer selective places available to them but in terms of pass rates, class was far more significant.

PC: To conclude, Peter. We're looking at a piece of historical research which has a heavy focus on the relationship between class and education. We see this as a dominant feature in that twenty-year period, from 1945 until 1965. Yet, sometimes we've struggled to convince a sceptical audience that this is the case.

PB: I think it's because people are trying to impose today's attitudes on an historical experience. They're looking at education in the 1950s through a postmodern prism. It is quite clear class was the determining indicator in the tripartite system. This conclusion sits awkwardly with the way some people want to view society today. Even using the term 'working class' confuses people. When we say that the tripartite system discriminated against working-class children, people want to know what we mean by working-class children. We refer them to the Registrar

General's definition, used at the time.

PC: Without going too deeply into class analysis, we are aware that the Registrar General's definition of class has its faults but as a basis for our research, it gives us some indication of the way resources were allocated in Newcastle in that twenty-year period. The empirical data substantiates our belief that class was the predominate factor in explaining what happened.

The title of our research is: We Need to Talk about the Secondary Moderns. We want to talk a little bit more about this subject and we're looking for people to interview (see Appendix 2. below). We would like people from that generation to come forward and talk to us about their secondary modern experience, in what was effectively for them a 'rite of passage'.

PB: The Eleven-plus was a defining factor in many people's lives; it was the 'great divide' for our generation. For the grammar school pupils it certainly was significant, which is why secondary modern people often shrug their shoulders and are surprised that you want to know about them. They often become nostalgic about their school friends but don't think of their secondary education as being significant. In historical terms, there has been a woeful blindness in ignoring those 80%.

Appendix I. A time-line of events in the development of the tripartite system.

Date	Event	Description
November 1938	The Spens Report is published.	This report recommends a tripartite system in the secondary phase: grammar schools for the academic child; technical schools for the child with a technical bent; modern schools for the majority of children.

June 1943	The Norwood Report is published.	This report backed Spens' idea of three types of schools by arguing that children naturally had three 'types of mind'.
August 1944	Education Act (sometimes referred to as the Butler Act).	The Act established a nationwide system of free, compulsory schooling from age 5 to 15*. *School leaving age of 15 not enforced until 1947.
December 1945	Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education, issues Circular 73. ¹⁴	This circular instructs local authorities to 'think in terms of three types of state secondary school': grammar; technical; secondary modern. An accompanying booklet, <i>The Nation's Schools</i> , explained that the new 'modern' schools would be for working-class children 'whose future employment will not demand any measure of technical skill or knowledge'. ¹⁵
April 1947	Newcastle local authority submits its 'Educational Development Plan' to the Ministry of Education. ¹⁶	Based on a strict adherence to the tripartite system, Newcastle's plan for secondary education* include: 23 secondary modern schools; 2 secondary commercial schools; 2 secondary technical schools; 2 boys' grammar schools and two girls' grammar schools (named high schools). * These numbers do not include Roman Catholic schools.

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May 1958	Labour takes control of Newcastle Council for first time since 1949.	September 1958, Newcastle Education Committee vote to abolish the Eleven-plus exam but continue with selection using teacher assessment. ¹⁷
April 1959	Newcastle Council moves towards comprehensive schooling.	Newcastle Education Committee agree to a limited experiment with comprehensive education by adapting the existing plans to build a new secondary modern school at Kenton. ¹⁸
March 1961	Newcastle opens its first Comprehensive School.	Construction on the original secondary modern school at Kenton, which started in 1958, was officially opened as Kenton Comprehensive School by the Right Honourable Lord Morrison of Lambeth to pupils and staff on Friday 17 March 1961.
July 1965	The Labour Government issues Circular 10/65.	This circular invites local educational authorities to submit plans for the introduction of comprehensive schools.

Appendix 2.

Did you go to a secondary modern school?



If you took the 11 Plus in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1958/59 and went on to a secondary modern school, a team of local historians are keen to interview you.

Your story of your school-life experiences could help us illustrate this important part of our history. If you would like to contribute to this study email eleven.plus1958@gmail.com to contact the team.

Notes

- ¹ This is an edited version of a longer conversation.
- ² David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: Opening the Box* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 547.
- ³ Gary McCulloch, *Failing the Ordinary Child: The Theory and Practice of Working-Class Secondary Education* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1998).
- ⁴ Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class 1910-2010* (London: John Murray, 2014).
- ⁵ Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class: Some General Themes Raised by a Study of 88 Children in a Northern Industrial City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966); J. E. Floud, A. E. Halsey, and F. M. Martin, *Social Class and Educational Opportunity* (London: Greenwood Press, 1956); John Partridge, *Life in a Secondary Modern School* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966); Brian Simon, *The Common Secondary School* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955).
- ⁶ David Rubinstein and Brian Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School, 1926-1972* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), p. 54.
- ⁷ Department of Education and Science Circular 10/65, *The Organisation of Secondary Education* (London: HMSO, 1965).
- ⁸ Rubinstein and Simon, p. 38.
- ⁹ Report of a Consultative Committee chaired by Mr. Will Spens CBE; *Board of Education: The Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (London: HMSO, 1938); Report of a Consultative Committee chaired by Sir Cyril Norwood; *Board of Education: Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1943).
- ¹⁰ Selina Todd, *The Golden Age of the Grammar School: Exploding the Myth*. Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture 2012 (London: Socialist Education Association), p. 3. https://socedassoc.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/cbml_2014.pdf (accessed 1 March 2016).
- ¹¹ F Miller, E. Knox, S. Court and S. Brandon, *The School Years in Newcastle upon Tyne 1952-62: Being a Further Contribution to A Study of a Thousand Families* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). For more information about The Thousand Family (Red Spot) Study visit http://research.ncl.ac.uk/plerg/Research/1000F/1000_home.htm (accessed 1 March 2016).
- ¹² Rubinstein and Simon, pp. 83-85.
- ¹³ Kynaston, p. 240.
- ¹⁴ Ministry of Education Circular No. 73, *The Organisation of Secondary Education* (London: HMSO, 1945).
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Education Pamphlet No.1, *The Nation's Schools, their Plans and Purposes* (London: HMSO, 1945).
- ¹⁶ City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee (1947), *Education*

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Development Plan under the Education Acts 1944 & 1946.

¹⁷ Newcastle upon Tyne Council Minutes, 17 September 1958, *Secondary Education*, pp. 311-322.

¹⁸ Newcastle upon Tyne Council Minutes, 22 April 1959, *Comprehensive Education*, pp. 912-923.

History, Heritage, and Nostalgia: How We Remember the Past

John Stirling

The journal *North East History* has a tradition of publishing contemporary history about trade union disputes in the region from those who were close to the actual events.¹ We are pleased to continue this tradition in the current edition, with Phil Lenton's essay and shorter contributions from Keith Hodgson and Neil Griffin. We also have four pieces drawing on memories from north-east students at Ruskin College, Oxford. We want to continue this tradition and invite more contributions from labour movement activists, but such history raises a number of issues that need considering when evaluating such testimonies.

The first of these issues concerns the veracity of the stories that are told. One recent contribution caused considerable discussion among North East Labour History Society members who had different recollections of the same event. That was a good discussion to have, but the point is that the personal history contributions to the journal are what they say they are: an individual's personal views. Such personal views are the stuff of history; it is just that they usually reflect the opinions of those with power and wealth whereas our aim is to give a voice to those who are often denied one.

The second issue raised by such contributions is: isn't this just nostalgia and the mythic memories of some long past 'glory days'? Such an argument should be strongly contested for at least two reasons. Firstly, this is 'our history' made by us in the conditions we are given (to re-coin a phrase from Karl Marx). The pages of this journal aim to show how working class men

and women are active agents in history. This brings us to another important point: while it is important to preserve what we know, it is equally important in that it helps us in shaping our future. It may be a cliché to say we have lessons to learn from history but that makes it no less true as, for example, Phil Lenton's descriptions of the NHS disputes serve to illustrate.

The third issue can be summed up as: why didn't I know that? This may be asked by someone who participated in an event but is given a new perspective by reading an alternative point of view, or equally, by someone who had never heard of the event in question. Let's not forget that if you are under the age of thirty you were born after the great miners' strike. History based on the recorded memories of living participants can often illuminate issues previously obscured, especially where national events are interpreted through a regional perspective. The ongoing research that we publish in conversation between Peter Brabban and Patrick Candon in this issue is just one such example and it is interesting that the subject reappears in the piece by Archie Potts.

The final issue may be summarised as: that's all very interesting, but doesn't it need putting into context? The answer to this is 'yes it does' but the journal cannot provide the space for all of this context. This is why endnotes and bibliographies are encouraged, to provide readers with options for further reading and research. For example, for Ruskin College there is Harold Pollins' standard history as a starting point as well as the surrounding debates about trade union education in general.²

Let's take a further example and get a taste of what we are faced with by looking at trade unionism in the 1970s and 1980s. We could begin 'the context' in the 1960s, for example, with the famous Donovan Inquiry into trade unions or something more polemical such as Eric Wigham's *What's Wrong With the Unions*.³ We could re-read breakthrough sociological accounts of workers and unions such as those by Huw Beynon or Anna Pollert, or we could try a more specific (and partisan) history such as *Glorious Summer*, recounting the strikes of 1972.⁴ We could dig out old copies of *The Workers' Report on Vickers* for a local perspective, or even try another set of

personal reflections from autobiographies such as Jack Jones' *Union Man*.⁵

Other readers will have an equally subjective list from their own experience and background. In other words, context also presents a point of view and a mode of analysis that can be just as value laden as any personal reflection.

The context for the action covered by Lenton and Hodgson is that of a period of remarkable trade union action and creativity. Trade union membership peaked in 1979, workplace organisation and action was either well-established or getting there, and union members were prepared to stand up and take strike action. But this is not a nostalgic reflection: women workers' rights and engagement were often neglected as were those of ethnic minority communities, and significant parts of the membership was engaged through closed shop agreements that often had as much to do with employers as actively engaged trade unionists. (Phil Lenton tells a different story.)

To sum up, I would argue that *North East History* is a vital repository for working class history, some of which is contemporary and some of which is personal. We welcome it, and we are happy to have more. Such histories illuminate our past and give a version of events from those near to them and from within our communities. They tell us about ourselves and how we are changing and, just as importantly, how we might change in the future.

Notes

- ¹ Recent examples include: Dave Neville, 'The 1972 Dispute at C. A. Parsons', *North East History*, 40 (2009), pp. 10-30, and various authors on 'The Miners' Strike of 1984-5', *North East History*, 45 (2014), pp. 145-161.
- ² Harold Pollins, *The History of Ruskin College* (Oxford: Ruskin College Library, 1984), and for example, John Fisher, *Bread on the Waters* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2005) for a history of TGWU education.
- ³ Lord Donovan, *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965-1968* (London: HMSO, 1968); Eric Wigham, *What's Wrong With The Unions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).
- ⁴ Huw Beynon, *Working For Ford* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Anna Pollert

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Girls, Wives, Factory Lives (London: Macmillan, 1981); Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain 1972* (London: Bookmarks, 2001).

- ⁵ Huw Beynon and Hilary Wainwright, *The Workers' Report on Vickers* (London: Pluto Press, 1979); Jack Jones, *Union Man*, (London: Collins, 1986).

NUPE in the North: Union Organising and Activism

Phil Lenton

Introduction

This is my account of the history of the Northern Division of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) from 1971 when I was first appointed as an Area Officer, to 1993 when NUPE merged with the Confederation of Health Services Employees (COHSE) and the National and Local Government Officers (NALGO) to form UNISON.¹

I joined NUPE as an Area Officer, effectively a local organiser, towards the end of 1971. I couldn't drive a car, but had a motorbike, which I used both to travel to see my family in Nottingham until I could find us a house in Newcastle, and for my work. I lived in a friend's flat in Isabella Street, Scotswood. Ronnie was a bus conductor and active in the Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU).² I remember the flat well, as the wallpaper had to be fixed to the walls with drawing pins and there was an outside toilet.

I had NUPE branches allocated to me and my job was to service those branches and recruit new members. NUPE always put a strong emphasis on recruitment. I had the Newcastle Hospitals branch, South Shields Health and Local Government, and a variety of health and local government branches in what is today North Tyneside. The officer structure in NUPE in a Division (the equivalent of a region) started with Area Officers, of whom there were about a dozen in the Division, an Assistant Divisional Officer, and the Divisional Officer, who was responsible for the entire Division. The

Division stretched from the Scottish border to the whole of Yorkshire, as it then was, and also including the former counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland. Our Divisional Office was in Morley, Leeds.

First Job

My first job was to visit the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) evening domestic staff, who were mainly NUPE members but, as there was no check off system in operation at the time, subscriptions were collected in cash and the shop steward had run off with the money! ³

Practically all the members I organised were very low paid and few had bank accounts. They were living from one week's pay packet to another and were not easy to organise. However, I got to know the members at the RVI, where, over all the grades, the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) was the majority union. This was just as well because in 1971, following national negotiations over pay at the Ancillary Staffs Whitley Council the unions decided to take industrial action for the first time in the NHS. ⁴ I was told to organise a strike at the RVI, but this was going to be difficult as the other union involved, COHSE, didn't want a strike. I suspect NUPE General Secretary, Alan Fisher, had bounced the other unions on the trade union side of negotiations at the Whitley Council into it. After all, there was a growing mood of militancy in the country.

The one area that was strongly organised was the RVI Stores, including drivers, so I persuaded them to come out on strike for as long as we could sustain it. Many of the drivers had an industrial background and understood what was involved, including picketing the hospital and preventing deliveries. ⁵ The strike was very effective locally, forcing the group hospital at Wylam to close. I remember the staff from Wylam, who were solidly COHSE, being redeployed to the RVI and expecting to see a COHSE picket line, only to discover it was a NUPE picket. However, the strike was lost nationally due to the patchiness of the industrial action. Strike pay at the time was £5 per week, and you could not expect low-paid workers to exist on that amount for long, but we learnt some very useful lessons about tactics and the need for unity.

Nurses On Strike

1973 was to be very different. I shared an office with a young Tom Sawyer, the Area Officer for Sunderland Hospitals branch, a well-organised branch.⁶ NUPE had by far the majority membership in Sunderland, with a very strong nurse base. Dissatisfaction had been growing about Prime Minister Heath's pay controls and with the way the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) had a stranglehold on the national pay negotiating machinery.⁷ There was also a growing shortage of nurses in the NHS. Sunderland was a traditional mining area, and many nurses were from coal mining families.

The nurses began to discuss what could be done about the pay situation and, while reluctant to strike, they came up with a highly effective way of taking industrial action in the NHS. Many of the leaders were Ward Sisters or Charge Nurses, the then male equivalent. Those at Cherry Knowle Hospital, in Ryhope, were the most militant. They came up with a plan to reduce the NHS in Sunderland to emergencies only, by the Ward Sisters and Charge Nurses refusing to admit non-emergency patients to their wards. This took a lot of courage and belief, but they did it. This was the first group of nurses to take such action, taking the unions and management by surprise. We organised a march of uniformed nurses in Sunderland, and the press reaction was exactly what we wanted. The action spread to other NUPE nurses in other hospitals in the Division, but it was made difficult because neither the RCN nor COHSE would support the action. COHSE's strongest membership base was in the big psychiatric hospitals, as the union had started life as the Asylum Workers Union. What started as a local action soon became a national action and continued into 1974, ending with a promise of an enquiry into nurses' pay to be conducted by Lord Halsbury.

In 1973, the Ambulance Service was still part of local government. In County Durham, the NUPE ambulance members were concerned about their low pay, and wanted a bonus scheme like other County Council workers. The employers refused, so on 14 November 1973 they all walked out to start the first ever ambulance strike. After a week, the County Council agreed to the ambulance crews' demands and the strike was hailed

as a victory. We knew that the NHS and local government were about to be reorganised and the ambulance service would be transferred to the NHS, but we also knew that terms and conditions would be protected.

Reorganisations Everywhere

A group of academics from Warwick University, led by Bob Fryer, conducted research into the effects of NHS and local government reorganisation on the structure of NUPE.⁸ Local councils were to be merged into Metropolitan Boroughs, County Councils, and District Councils within county boundaries. The NHS was to be reorganised into Area Health Authorities, whose boundaries would be coterminous with local government. Fryer's team recommended that NUPE branches should be coterminous with the employers, so that a new Northern Division would be established comprising Cleveland, County Durham, Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and Cumbria. Each Division would have service-based Area Committees and a Divisional Council.

Rodney Bickerstaffe was appointed our first Divisional Officer and Tom Sawyer and Keith Robinson were appointed as Assistant Divisional Officers. NUPE carried on its traditional approach what we liked to think of as 'democratic centralism'. This description was based on the fact that we had democracy through our National Conference, and now, through the Area and Divisional Committees and Divisional Conference, we had a charismatic leadership and an officer corps, mainly made up of young lefties, who were committed to implementing the union's policies. There was no gulf between members and officials.

Local government reorganisation, in particular, proved very challenging to NUPE. Because of the multiple mergers and the break-up of the old councils, in which there had been a lot of local bargaining, we ended up with each of the new councils employing staff on a range of different conditions. The new employers, in both the NHS and local government, wanted to introduce payment of wages by cheque instead of cash. Most of our low-paid members did not have bank accounts. So we came to agreements to

use the Cooperative Bank, which gave local Cooperative stores banking facilities. In exchange, we demanded the check off system, under which the employer would deduct union subscriptions from pay and pass them on to the union on a monthly basis. I must have given the Cooperative Bank thousands of new customers.

After the Labour Government came to power in 1974, they introduced the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act (TULRA), both of which gave us huge organizing opportunities.⁹ Following the introduction of check off across all the major employers, membership had soared. We were now required to organise Health and Safety Representatives in workplaces and this led to a rapid growth in the shop steward numbers, their facility time, and their education and training.¹⁰ TULRA allowed us to negotiate Union Membership Agreements, effectively closed shops, and we were not slow off the mark. I remember thousands of application forms arriving at the Divisional Office in Jesmond. The legislation also gave unions the right to steward training and time off, and gave union members the right not to be unfairly dismissed and access to Industrial Tribunals.

Pay: the Priority

During his tenure as Prime Minister, Ted Heath had done everything he could to restrict pay rises. His last attempt, the so-called 'threshold agreements', had involved tying pay increases to inflation, so every time inflation went up by 1%, it would trigger an automatic pay rise for everyone. By 1974, inflation was increasing at a high rate, and so our members were getting higher pay rises than they had expected. What would Labour do on pay? That was a question that was on every union leader's mind. In 1970, the outgoing Labour government had written the Equal Pay Act into statute, but it had not yet been implemented. In both the NHS and local government, there were separate pay scales for men and women. The new Labour Government implemented the Act in 1975 and our women members, who made up the bulk of our membership, received phased pay increases until there was only

a single pay scale.

However, we were soon to learn what the Labour Government was going to do on the issue of pay. They had offered to abolish the hated Industrial Relations Act of the Tories, in exchange for what they described as a 'Social Contract'.¹¹ It was intended that trade unions would be restrained in their pay claims and the government would introduce social legislation. This was at a time of double-digit inflation and growing trade union militancy. In NUPE, we had no time for this Social Contract.

By 1976, the government was introducing cuts in local government spending. At the time, I was the official for Sunderland Local Authority branch, Sunderland Health branch and Durham County Health branches. In Sunderland Local Authority branch, we had a very good branch secretary in Mike Atkinson. Tom Sawyer had serviced the branch before me and with the help of the branch officials and stewards, he had turned it into the most organised branch in the Division. The National Executive had asked Divisions to organise strikes against the government's cuts, and Sunderland was the branch best placed to deliver. The strike was a success, but because we were striking without other unions involved we inevitably lost a few members, mainly among school caretakers. However, we recruited hundreds of new members. We had a new range of stewards now in the branch, mainly women. We had some good campaigning around the issue of the cuts in local authority spending, but that didn't blind members to the fact that pay was being eroded by inflation, astronomically high by today's standards.

The rate of inflation in 1975 had been 25% and 17% in 1976. The following year it was 16%. If these annual rates are aggregated, prices had risen by nearly 60% over those years. The Government had declared 5% to be the maximum pay settlement, which it would enforce in the public sector. We began to have a broad exchange among the membership of the union, and as a consequence NUPE submitted a proposal to the National Joint Council for Local Authority Manual Workers and to the Ancillary Workers NHS Whitley Council for £60 per week in 1978. Similar claims were submitted for University Manual Workers, Police Civilian Manual Workers, and to the

Water Workers National Joint Council (NJC). Meanwhile, 57,000 motor industry workers had walked out on strike in protest at the 5% limit, with Vauxhall workers settling for 8.5% and Ford workers for 17%. Fuel tanker drivers were on strike as well as railway workers and lorry drivers.



NUPE members protest against the imposition of a 5% pay rise in 1979.

Taking Action: the 'Winter of Discontent'¹²

A Day of Action was called in London in December 1978 in support of our claims. It was a bitterly cold winter as we marched through the streets of central London. This was followed by coordinated industrial action. Labour historians often suggest that the strikes were random, but that certainly was not the case in the north. We called out on strike NUPE members at the

five waste disposal and incineration plants across Tyne and Wear as well as at the waste incinerator in Middlesbrough and members at landfill sites. This had the effect of stopping refuse collection across the North East, as there was nowhere to dispose of the refuse. The bin-men were laid off on full pay. We called out the school caretakers in Sunderland. As the weather was so cold, there was a risk of expensive damage to the schools' boiler systems, so the employer negotiated a deal whereby they would close the schools completely, laying off staff on full pay, in exchange for the caretakers looking after the boiler systems in every school whilst being paid their basic pay. After threats to strike by caretakers across the region, it wasn't long before other local authorities wanted the Sunderland deal. Strike pay was still only £5 per week at this time, so this was a highly effective strategy.

Meanwhile, our members in the NHS were taking various forms of industrial action to reduce the service to emergency admissions only. Various groups would stage lightning strikes alongside a work to rule. NUPE was a relative newcomer to the NHS, except in certain areas like Sunderland, Darlington and North Tyneside. This was to change as thousands flocked to join the union. Taking advantage of the freezing weather, we called highways gritting lorry drivers out on strike.

By late February, there was a settlement of the Local Authority dispute, with our members being offered 11% plus £1 and an enquiry into low pay. There was a slightly worse offer in the NHS ancillary workers' dispute, which was accepted by the T&GWU, COHSE and the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) but rejected by NUPE. This created an impossible situation in which NUPE decided to go it alone. At this time, I was the Area Officer for Darlington Health, Durham Health, South Tyneside and Gateshead Health. We were told to reduce services very rapidly to emergencies only. My response to this was to ask the porters at Bishop Auckland General Hospital to come out on strike and to picket Aycliffe Hospital, near Darlington. NUPE had no members in Aycliffe Hospital as they were all COHSE, except for two drivers at the laundry, who were in the GMWU. The laundry provided linen to every hospital in the Durham

County area, as well as local authority residential homes. The two drivers were good trade unionists, who I knew would not cross a picket line, and they lived up to my expectations. Within days, uncollected dirty laundry was piling up in the corridors across the county and no clean linen was being delivered. This reduced the number of beds available and the service was reduced to emergencies only. However, it was only for a few weeks as NUPE fell into line with the other unions, but it had been another useful learning exercise.

Margaret Thatcher Takes Office

In May 1979, Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister. State-owned British Steel had rejected a pay claim from the steel unions and strike action followed. The full-time officers of NUPE in the north decided to make a gesture of solidarity to the steel workers, and we collected several hundred pounds to publicly hand over to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) at Consett. While there were moans from some members that the steel workers had never supported our members, we knew that sooner or later it would be our turn, and we would need support. Thatcher took the steel workers head on and threatened to close the industry. After the steel workers lost their pay campaign, NUPE was in a good position to help them fight the closure of the profitable plant at Consett. We were talking to the leader of ISTC about a possible occupation of the plant. However, redundancy payments won the day, and the plant was closed.

In June 1981, NUPE organized the first ever strike and campaign for young workers on the Youth Opportunities Programme.¹³ 125 YOP workers in Consett aged between sixteen and nineteen came out on strike when their travel facilities were withdrawn. The free transport was reinstated and the elected stewards went on to organise some impressive events to highlight the poor pay for YOP workers. They organized a demonstration to Parliament, a further regional one day strike and a rally of 600 YOP workers in Newcastle as well as a video to highlight their cause. Keith Hodgson, our recently appointed Education Officer, was responsible for providing the

support for this campaign.

In 1982, a year in which 11,000 bankruptcies were recorded due to the collapsing state of the economy, the NHS unions submitted a pay claim for 12.5% increase. Tom Sawyer, who had been NUPE Northern Divisional Officer during the 'Winter of Discontent', had been appointed as a National Officer and was representing NUPE in the NHS pay negotiations. I was able to tell him that the soundings we had taken amongst the membership suggested that they were ready to fight for pay. We drew up plans in the north for key groups of NHS workers to strike indefinitely, supported by one-day strikes by other members. Stores workers were one of the main groups, although in Sunderland, where I was the Area Officer, we opted for the Theatre Sterile Supplies Unit (TSSU), which incidentally, was staffed entirely by women.



Nurses in Sunderland protest against the Government's 6% pay limit in the NHS.

When the talks broke down, under Thatcher's direction, the strike went ahead, starting, as always, with a day of action. We kept the key groups out on strike and tried to build support for the strike days. After the second one-day strike, local miners told us to put pickets on all the pits in the North East. We had asked local authority members to support us on the third one-day strike and we picketed the pits and closed many of them. Meanwhile the TSSU strike had reduced services to emergencies only, by agreement with management. We had no idea that this strike would go on for eight months, whilst Thatcher went to war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. After eight months we had to settle for 6%, but we had learnt the truth about the Thatcher government.

In January 1983, water and sewerage workers came out on strike, for the first time in their history, over declining pay. Throughout the dispute in the north, NUPE members took the initiative. The single most dramatic event was the successful occupation of the Howden works in North Shields for seven days and nights. The occupation caused major disruption for the Water Authority and achieved national publicity. It was well organised and the conclusion of this national dispute marked the first victory in the resistance to Thatcher.



The occupation of the Howdon works in January 1983.

In 1984, the miners' strike began, and NUPE was determined to repay the solidarity we had received from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).¹⁴ I was involved in raising money for the miners and colliery mechanics at Easington Colliery. I was now the Area Officer for Newcastle Health as well as Newcastle City Council. The miners' strike went on for a year and we kept up our solidarity throughout. Rodney Bickerstaffe was now our General Secretary, and was known to be a friend of the Durham miners.

More Privatisations

Meanwhile, the government had been drawing up plans for the privatisation of our members' jobs in the NHS through a process of competitive tendering. NUPE in the north drew up plans to combat this process. The Government's hit list included domestic, catering and laundry workers. In 1984, a secret meeting of the Regional Health Authority was convened in Newcastle to draw up the regional timetable for the tendering process. We learnt about this meeting and turned up, with media in tow, to occupy the meeting to prevent it happening. However, they reconvened in secret and drew up the timetable. The first major contract to be put out to tender, in 1985, was for domestic services at the RVI. Our strategy was to resist cuts in pay and hours in the tendering process. In the event of cuts in pay, we would reject the tender and move to industrial action. I was the negotiator for NUPE in Newcastle and so we prepared for the worst and planned our campaign. Public support would be crucial.

The RVI domestic contract negotiations failed as management wanted drastic cuts in hours from most staff. They issued the specification for tender. There were three expressions of interest, from Mediclean, Initial Cleaning, and Office Cleaning Services. We researched their background and discovered that one of them had the contract at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge. We publicised every fault that OCS had committed at Addenbrooke's whilst preparing for industrial action. The evening shift at the RVI was strongly NUPE but the day domestics were strongly COHSE.

It was therefore necessary to get COHSE on board. We reached agreement and called a three-day strike, one day for each of the contractors. The strike was solid and the picket line respected. We called for a mass picket on the third day and around 4,000 turned up. The crowd was so big that we simply marched them around the town, halting at Leazes Park. Catering staff then walked out for a week followed by laundry workers; the porters worked to rule. There was massive support from the Easington Miners, with whom we had built a very good relationship. The management called in a private laundry firm from Cumbria to replace striking laundry workers. NUPE members in the Cumbria hospitals where this firm held the contract locked up all the linen, thus denying access to dirty and clean linen. The giant Cook-Freeze unit at St Nicholas Hospital, Gosforth, which provided meals to hospitals around Newcastle, was picketed by striking RVI staff for a week. The contract was awarded in-house, but at a high price. At least we kept the contractors out. The RVI strike highlighted the problems of competitive tendering.



NUPE and COHSE members protest against privatization of Health Authority jobs in the 1980s.

There were numerous similar battles and occupations in hospitals from South Tees to Northumberland, but the next big battle was to be in Sunderland the following year. The union had reached an impasse in Sunderland similar to that we faced in the RVI. This time, it was the Health Centre Domestic staff who were put out to tender. Once again joint union action, through week-long strikes around various hospitals in Sunderland, took place. Why did hospital domestics, catering staff, laundry workers and porters strike in sympathy? Because they knew it would be their turn soon. Finally, in the run up to the awarding of the contract, we called an all-out strike across every Sunderland hospital and health centre. Once again, the contract was awarded in-house with much lower cuts to hours as a result of the strike. We were still keeping the contractors out. It's worth pointing out that staff at the Regional Health Authority Central Stores in Killingworth came out on indefinite strike in sympathy with Sunderland. Their strike affected over sixty hospitals across the region. I was threatened with an injunction as a result of the secondary action, but we found a way round that.

In 1987, the Cleaning and Catering Contractors Association complained to the Regional Health Authority that they were being denied contracts in the Northern Region because of unfair union action. They said they were not going to bother submitting any further tenders in the Region. Meanwhile, Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) was introduced into local government. This time, local authorities would be legally compelled to put services out to tender.

So when in 1988, Queen Elizabeth Hospital management in Gateshead called me in for a meeting at 8:00 am to tell me they were submitting the in-house tender with massive cuts for domestic workers, our response was immediate. We no longer had to worry about private competition. Management insisted on the cuts in hours. So I walked out of the meeting and went straight to the central telephone switchboard and asked them to walk out. While our steward went to the domestic staff and persuaded them to walk out, I spoke with the porters who immediately walked out, as did

the catering staff. The Manager, Stephen Hayes was trying to catch up with me to have me evicted. I had just entered the Laundry when he caught up with me as I was about to address the laundry workers, who I knew well. We argued, but eventually agreed that he would address the laundry workers first, followed by myself. I waited outside whilst he tried to persuade them not to walk out. Then it was my turn. I had agreed to leave the premises after this meeting. The laundry staff walked out. Bill Worth, the District General Manager, then approached me on the picket line. He asked me what we wanted and I told him that the in-house tender must be on existing terms and conditions with no cuts in hours. He agreed, and the contract was thus awarded.

In 1986, Newcastle District Health managers decided to close the Cook-Freeze Unit. Sixty jobs were to be lost. We responded to the news by immediately occupying the Cook-Freeze Unit, locking out the management. The staff continued to work inside the unit. Eventually, management conceded that they would guarantee every Cook-Freeze worker would be guaranteed a job on no worse conditions. That was all we wanted. During the occupation, the workers were entertained with music from the late Joe Scurfield and the Old Rope String Band.

During the rest of the decade, NUPE concentrated on issues such as personal injury compensation, sexual harassment, equal pay and stress. However, 1988 was to see another battle. Nurses at Craigielea Private Nursing Home in Gateshead went on strike for one day over issues of patient care. They were all sacked. However, after a long campaign in which they produced a record and a play, they received compensation after legal action by Thompson's Solicitors, and many of them found work with Gateshead Council. (See Keith Hodgson's essay in this volume for further details.)

Undervalued NHS Workers

The following year, the nurses' new clinical grading structure, forced in at the end of 1988, led to widespread protest by NUPE nurses, who felt devalued by Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke. He boasted that appeals by dissatisfied

nurses would be resolved within six months. Four years later, there were still 24,000 appeals outstanding. His attempt to introduce market-based reforms of the NHS fuelled protests, which began to involve the public in defending their NHS. Opinion polls showed that only one in five had confidence in the Government's handling of the NHS. Having just been appointed as Assistant Divisional Officer, I was able to take something of a lead in this campaign. The first thing was to set up a broad-based organisation, that included medical staff, members of the public, as well as health unions. It was called Newcastle Health Concern, and was a model to be followed elsewhere as a campaigning body for the defence of the NHS.

In 1989, NUPE set up its Youth Advisory Committee. The Committee undertook many activities, such as rock climbing and abseiling that helped bring young people together. It was built on the back of the YOP campaigns a few years earlier. It followed the example of our Women's Advisory Committee, which had, among other things, campaigned for a National Women's Officer. NUPE's first woman Area Officer had been appointed to the Northern Division in 1988.

1990 saw NUPE lead the national pay dispute in the Ambulance Service. We now had to ballot our members and they had voted for action short of strike action. However, many had been able to create situations in which they were effectively locked out. I was temporarily responsible for Northumbria Ambulance Service at the time. Crews and controllers had been working to rule and really wanted to strike, partly because they hated Laurie Caple, the Chief Ambulance Officer who had derecognised all trade unions some years earlier. At a packed meeting in Gateshead Civic Centre we found a means to declare the ambulance staff 'locked out', and that was it. The braziers were burning outside every ambulance depot in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland.

In March 1992, I was promoted to Divisional Officer of NUPE. I would only serve a short term, as NUPE was due to merge with COHSE and NALGO in July 1993, to create UNISON. Apart from tightening up organisation before merger, I wanted to do something for the African

National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. We had hosted Themba Nxumali, General Secretary of the South Africa Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) in 1986 when he was 'on the run'. South Africa was on our televisions every night. So the Northern Division invited a delegation from NEHAWU, the South African Health and Education Workers Union. They visited members across the region and we agreed a twinning arrangement with them. The visit ended with a concert in Newcastle Civic Centre Banqueting Suite, with top South African reggae band Lucky Dube performing. The concert was intended to celebrate UNISON, our forthcoming new union.

UNISON would have to face more privatisation, including the privatisation of all the remaining nationalised industries and the extension of CCT to white collar staff, airports, ports, bus companies, parks, museums and leisure centres. We had to make sure that UNISON would be up to the job. Many had said that NUPE would not survive the eighties, but we had. Sad though it was that NUPE would soon be no more, we were all very proud of its achievements.

Notes

- ¹ NUPE was the dominant union for manual worker grades in the health service and local government. COHSE represented mainly nursing staff and competed with NUPE. NALGO was a public sector white-collar union.
- ² The T&GWU was the largest union in the country with a peak membership of two million. It became a major constituent part of UNITE.
- ³ The system under which union membership subscriptions are deducted directly from salaries by the employers, for payment across to the unions.
- ⁴ The Whitley Council system provided the forum for pay negotiations between employers and trade unions in most of the public sector and civil service.
- ⁵ Picketing was not controlled by the law at that time and workers could support others even if they were not directly involved in the dispute. A code of practice on picketing was introduced by the Conservative government in 1980 and restricted numbers of pickets to six and only to those directly involved in the dispute.
- ⁶ Tom Sawyer was later to become actively involved in the Labour Party and was the General Secretary from 1994-98. He was created Lord Sawyer in 1998.
- ⁷ The RCN was often regarded by other trade unionists as a professional body and not a 'proper trade union'. It registered as a trade union in 1977 and has continued to debate whether or not to join the TUC. It remains unaffiliated to this day.

- ⁸ Bob Fryer's research papers are now held at the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University. See <http://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/FRY> for further details.
- ⁹ In particular, these Acts gave union representatives rights to time off work to carry out their duties and receive training. In a number of public sector workplaces this led to union representatives carrying out their duties on a full time basis and being paid by their employer.
- ¹⁰ Facility time' was paid time off work to carry out their union duties.
- ¹¹ The Industrial Relations Act introduced under the Heath government had effectively fallen into disuse. The Social Contract was not legislation but a voluntary agreement on pay restraint in an era of high inflation. Most union leaderships supported the proposals but this was not necessarily the case among local branches or members.
- ¹² 'Winter of Discontent' was a phrase rapidly picked up by the media to cover a number of overlapping disputes.
- ¹³ The YOP scheme was introduced under a Labour government in 1978 to provide training and work experience for young people. It was extended under the Thatcher government until 1983 and became associated by many trade unionists with low-paid cheap labour which could undercut 'proper' jobs.
- ¹⁴ This was the major dispute during 1984-85 when members of the National Union of Mineworkers struck against the programme of pit closures.

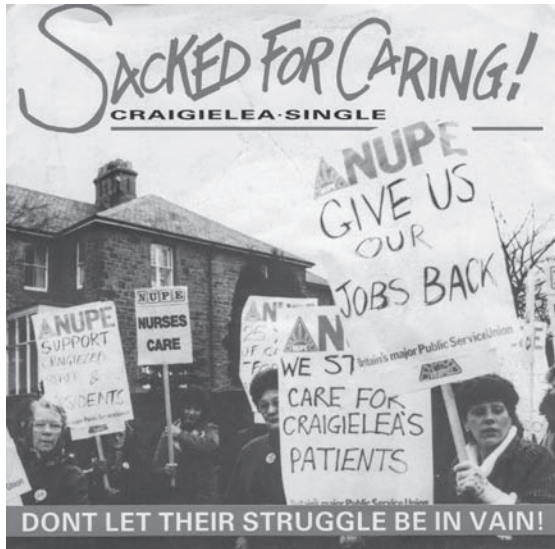
The pictures in this article are taken from *Northern News and Views* published by NUPE (now a part of UNISON). They were attributed in the original publication as follows: Richard Grassick (pp. 119, 123 and 125) and Jim Varney (p. 122). We are grateful for their use.

Campaigning at Craigielea

Keith Hodgson

The Craigielea dispute in January 1988, in which the employer in this private nursing home in Gateshead unilaterally sacked nineteen members of staff, including long-serving nurses and carers, became a major cause for the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE). The dispute

began when the union gave notice of a 12-hour stoppage over the attitude of the matron, the treatment of patients, and the lack of a proper disputes procedure. Using the new anti-union laws introduced by Margaret Thatcher, the employer ruthlessly sacked the staff and refused to negotiate, presenting the staff and their union with a massive problem. It is hard to convey the feelings of those first few days when the staff



Front cover of the 45rpm record featuring songs of solidarity and protest written and sung by staff sacked from Craigielea Nursing Home.

gathered each morning at the union offices to organise their campaign. It gradually became apparent that the employer was determined to teach them and their union a lesson in 'knowing their place'.

The sacked staff produced leaflets and packed envelopes to highlight their campaign for reinstatement and fair treatment, and developed a series of songs to keep their spirits up. One of the sacked workers had previously sung on cruise ships and had a very good singing voice. Eventually, with union backing, they produced a record describing their plight. One side was their composition of a song called '*Standing Strong – Holding On: we can make it through each day*'; the other side featured an improvised version of the '*House of the Rising Sun*', beginning 'there is a house in Gateshead, they call it Crazylea...'. This record was taken up by the trade unions, the labour movement and local radio and TV to highlight their campaign very effectively.

Through contact with Richard Stourac, who was a senior member of staff in charge of Theatre Studies at Northumbria University, two students agreed to work with the sacked staff on telling their story. Out of this a play, *Sacked for Caring*, was developed with the sacked workers themselves acting out the dispute. From small beginnings it eventually toured all over the north of England, and was even performed at a national Labour Party conference in London, to great acclaim.

Through their creativity and hard work, the sacked staff had turned a defeat into a victory. Alternative jobs were found in the local authority and the health service, and the nine months of this campaign were said by many to have been the most exciting of their life. The employer was shown in a very poor light, and even the Bishop of Durham intervened and condemned their cruelty.

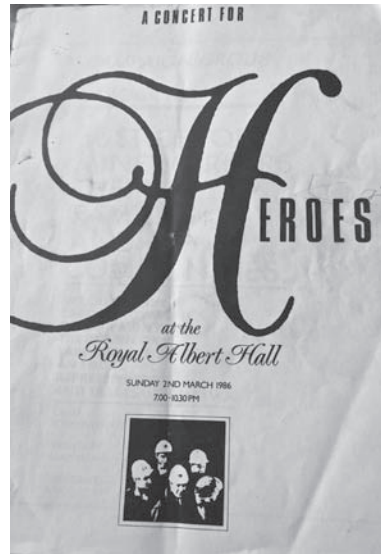
Such use of songs and theatre to tell a story of oppression has a long history in the North East with song writers such as Tommy Armstrong, the miners' poet, who wrote songs about the Durham Lockout and other mining disputes. Another example is the Heroes concert of March 1986, discussed in detail in Neil Griffin's essay *Heroes all at the Royal Albert Hall*.

Heroes all at the Royal Albert Hall

Neil Griffin

For many on the left, the 1984/85 miners' strike was a defining moment in Labour history and in our own lives. Sunday 6 March 2016 marked the thirtieth anniversary of an historic concert at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1986, in the aftermath of the strike.

The *Concert for Heroes* was held to launch the *Heroes* album, a compilation album of tracks donated by local and nationally known musicians. The album was to raise funds for the 625 miners sacked in the bitter dispute between the National Union of Mineworkers and the Thatcher government. The event and the album were both organised by a small group of activists from County Durham (the now sadly defunct Conssett Music Project), members of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Support Group, and the Durham Women's Support Group.



*Poster advertising the Heroes concert
on Sunday 2nd March 1986
Reproduced courtesy of the author.*

Consett Music Project was a community recording studio initiated by redundant steel workers, victims of Thatcher's earlier attack on the steel industry. The project was developed by local musicians and supporters to offer creative opportunities for young people in an area of crippling high youth unemployment. It was in Consett Music Project's small studio that many of the *Heroes* tracks were recorded in a series of sessions in 1985.

The album featured tracks by Billy Bragg, The Flying Pickets, Jock Purdon, Robbie Burns, The Annie Orwin Band, Ed Pickford, Prelude, Mal Finch, Eve Bland, The Wildon Brothers, the Workey Tickets, Lindisfarne's Alan Hull and comedian and tireless activist Mike Elliot. It was a quality blend of national and local talent, all of whom had worked vigorously throughout the strike and across the coalfield, playing benefit after benefit to support the miners and their struggle.

The *Heroes* album was an attempt to articulate musically the spirit, sacrifice and solidarity that had prevailed across the country's coalfields for the duration of the strike. From Alan Hull's exhortation to us all to recognise the miners as *Heroes*, to Billy Bragg's reminder of the power of collective strength with *Power in a Union*; from Annie Orwin's call to arms *The Pressure is Rising*, to Jock Purdon's moving account of the *Easington Explosion*; from Prelude's denial of the *Enemy Within* (rhetoric of the Thatcher press office), to Robbie Burns' *Heroes*, an enigmatic and soulful attack on media lies; from Eve Bland's haunting evocation of the *Garden of England*, to Ed Pickford's portrait of hopelessness in the prospects for teenagers in Thatcher's Britain: *16 On the Dole*.

The album also included the aspirational *Monika Engineer*, by the then chart-topping Flying Pickets, a bleak portrait of working class life in *Factory* by the Workey Tickets and a hilarious examination of the role of the police in the strike, by Mike Elliot's *PC 1150*, written by Pat McIntyre. It closed with the defiant Ed Pickford song, *They'll Never Beat the Miners*, performed by the Wildon Brothers and the Durham Women's Support Group. This may have become the anthem of the album, but it was the

second of Mal Finch's contributions to the album, *Here We Go: Women of the Working Class* that had become the anthem of the strike.

The growth of powerful, articulate and organised Women's Support Groups was a triumph of the dispute. Women across the UK coalfields emerged as community leaders. Many returned to education, going on to successful, professional careers, an aspiration previously unimagined. This song told their story, acknowledged the women's contribution to sustaining the strike and supporting their 'men'. It also became the anthem of the movement;

*You are women you are strong, you are fighting for your lives,
Side by side with your men, who work the nation's mines,
United by the struggle, united by the past and it's
Here we go, here we go, for the women of the working class!*

When the album was produced the idea emerged to launch it at a major venue. It brought together volunteers and activists, including Mike Elliot, Dave Wray, miner and veteran of the strike, Durham Women's Support Group's Ann Suddick, Consett Music Project's John Kearney. They contacted other interested organisations, supporters and artists, to plan a concert. When Ken Livingstone, then Leader of the GLC, offered the Royal Albert Hall as a venue, the momentum gathered. A small group of individuals, from a decimated community in the North East of England, took on the challenge of organising, publicising and delivering a concert of major names, to a capacity audience in the capital's most iconic venue.

It was a huge success. Just short of four thousand people - miners, their wives, and supporters packed the Royal Albert Hall. The show was brilliantly compered by Mike Elliot, whose relentless campaigning and wholehearted support had led him to be made an honorary member of Durham NUM (the greatest honour of his life, he later claimed). There were speeches from Tony Benn and the NUM's Peter Heathfield, and even a couple of songs from Dennis Skinner. Apart from Billy Bragg, who was touring elsewhere, everyone from the album performed. They were joined

by Tom Robinson, Paul Weller, Ralph McTell and the astonishing Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger.

The strike was a dispute that left many of us in no doubt about which side we were on. Local Labour Party branches played a pivotal role in the Durham coalfield, with many constituency members working unstintingly to help. In Durham, a recently retired local activist, Johnnie Dent senior, worked full-time to coordinate a constituency-wide food bank (back then, they were a novelty). It was funded by a levy on party members, street collections, benefit concerts and food donated from far and wide, (I recall jars of Russian jam and packets of American biscuits). The family of every striking miner received a weekly food parcel, with a £5 note enclosed when funds allowed. Sadly, the party leadership did not share the grass roots' commitment.

In the thirty-one years since the Great Strike, many of the values, principles and rights that it embodied have been eroded. Continuing attacks on trade union rights, by UK governments of all colours, from blue to pale blue, confirm the view that the defeat the miners suffered has harmed us all, in ways too numerous to calculate. Had the leadership of the Labour Party of the day stood firm with the miners, as so many individual members did, maybe the plight of our vulnerable citizens today may not have been so dire. Who knows?

Those values of solidarity, defiance, courage, determination, camaraderie and social cohesion were abundant at the concert. It was filmed by a professional crew, hired by respected television producer Ian Krause. The cost of editing the film back in those days was prohibitively expensive, so it was sadly never seen. However, all that is about to change. The film cassettes, which have been stored in Ian's garage for 30 years, have been transferred to high quality digital format and edited by film students at New College, Durham. The film, including interviews with some of the surviving participants, was premiered at Durham Miners' Headquarters, Redhills, on the evening before Durham's Big Meeting and the digital version of the album will also be released in 2016.

Ruskin College, Oxford 1956-58

Archie Potts

On the evening of 3 October 1956, I was one of sixty new entrants to Ruskin College assembled in the common room at The Rookery. The group was overwhelmingly male, containing only six female freshers. The Rookery was a large Victorian mansion-type building in spacious grounds, located in Headington village on the outskirts of Oxford. It was used as a hall of residence for first-year students studying at Ruskin College. Second-year students were accommodated in the college building in Oxford.

The Principal of Ruskin College, H. D. Hughes, had been a Labour MP (1945-50), when he had served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Ellen Wilkinson at the Ministry of Education. A small, balding man dressed in a crumpled two-piece suit he stood in the centre of the room and welcomed the new intake. 'Well,' he said with a smile, 'you have fooled them all and you are here'.

How did I come to be there?

The road to Ruskin

I had a peripatetic childhood. Born in Sunderland in 1932, I attended five different primary schools. In 1937 the family moved to Bedford, where my father had found employment in a brickworks, and I started school there. The family returned to Sunderland in the following year when the shipyards reopened and my father returned to his old job as a riveter. This move entailed two changes of school. I was evacuated twice during the Second World War

and attended village schools in Yorkshire and Durham. On my return from evacuation in 1941 I sat the Eleven-plus examination for Bede Grammar School and failed. I was fortunate, however, to be given a place at Monkwearmouth Central School. Sunderland had two Central schools, one on each side of the River Wear. They were a kind of intermediate school between the grammar school and the elementary schools where most of the Eleven-plus 'failures' were educated. As in all of Sunderland's senior schools at this time, boys and girls were educated in separate schools, so the Monkwearmouth Central School consisted of a boys' school and a girls' school on the same campus. Segregation between the two schools was almost total.

The Central schools had a broader curriculum than the elementary schools. In addition to core subjects we were taught French, woodwork, metalwork, technical drawing, book-keeping and an introduction to shorthand. The teaching was good and the staff knew how to control unruly boys without crushing their spirit. The school had its own allotment and was keen on drama, debates and choral music.

I left school at the age of fifteen to become a railway clerk. I left without any paper qualifications but the school had given me an educational foundation on which I was able to build. As part of my job I attended evening classes in accounts and railway administration.

At eighteen I was called up to do national service and I served three years in the Royal Air Force (RAF). The RAF provided educational facilities for those inclined to take advantage of them and I left the RAF with GCE 'O' level in seven subjects.

I returned to my former job on the railways and became active in the Labour Party and my trade union. I also attended several Workers' Educational Association (WEA) classes. The WEA weekend schools held at the Rex Hotel in Whitley Bay were particularly useful. At the age of twenty-four I applied for a place at Ruskin College. On my application form I had to provide evidence of continuing education since leaving school. I also had to submit an extended essay on a historical topic of my choice and I chose to write about the French Revolution. My three referees were: one of my

WEA tutors, my former Education Officer in the RAF, and the chairman of my Constituency Labour Party who also happened to be the headmaster of a local school. I was offered a place at the college and was interviewed – unsuccessfully – for a Trades Union Congress (TUC) scholarship. However, I was awarded an adult exhibition, covering my fees plus a maintenance allowance, by the Sunderland Education Authority. I was on my way.

Ruskin in the 1950s

There were several misconceptions about Ruskin College in the 1950s. Some people believed it to be a kind of educational sausage machine in which working-class students were stuffed in at one end and emerged as ‘Scargill-type’ militants at the other end. A contrary view was that class-conscious students were stuffed in and came out de-radicalised by the experience. Neither of these extremes was true. Most Ruskin students (I include myself) entered the college with a tendency to think in clichés and speak in slogans. A Ruskin education taught its students how to think and did not attempt to lay down what they should think. It was not a place of indoctrination but one that encouraged students to consider different views and form their own conclusions.

Most students studied for the Diploma in Economics and Political Science, examined and awarded by Oxford University. A small group opted for the University’s Diploma in Public Administration, while others did a literature course with no examination at the end of it, or specialised in the study of Industrial Relations. Students followed a programme of college lectures supplemented by seminars and tutorials. Ruskin students were also allowed to attend lectures at the University and to use the Bodleian Library. Ruskin’s teaching staff were good at their jobs and most of them moved to university posts in the 1960s.

There were five African students in my year studying British trade unionism. They were a jolly crowd who appreciated a good joke. When Ghana became independent in 1957 Ruskin students held a Ghana Independence Day dance at The Rookery which was attended by the African

students wearing their traditional robes. Hopes were high that other African territories would soon gain their independence, although the creation of the Central African Federation in 1953 was seen by the African students, and many others, as an attempt to perpetuate white settler rule after Britain had withdrawn from the area. There was, of course, strong opposition among all Ruskin students to the Apartheid regime in South Africa, and I heard Solly Sachs, the exiled South African trade union leader, speak to the Oxford University Labour Club on the subject.

We were very lucky that Ruskin attracted top guest speakers. Hugh Gaitskell, then Leader of the Labour Party, came to speak, as did G. D. H. Cole, Tony Crosland, Richard Hoggart and John Strachey. Most Ruskin students joined the Oxford University Labour Club and I heard Richard Crossman and Ian Mikardo address its members on several occasions. Among trade union leaders George Woodcock, then Assistant General Secretary of the TUC, gave a series of lectures on British trade unionism and Frank Cousins, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, spoke on the same topic.

On 24 October 1956 Soviet troops intervened in Hungary to put down what developed into a popular armed uprising against the Communist regime. After a few days Soviet troops were withdrawn but returned on 2 November in full force to re-impose Communist rule in Hungary. Ruskin students were gripped by these events and copies of John Saville and Edward Thompson's *The Reasoner* were circulated in the college. There were three active Communist Party members in my first year at Ruskin and they had a difficult time defending Soviet actions. The Hungarian uprising, however, was soon overshadowed by Suez.

On 31 October 1956 Britain and France launched a military attack on Egypt, ostensibly to secure the Suez Canal. The student body at Ruskin immediately moved into action: a public meeting of protest was organised, a mass demonstration marched through the centre of Oxford, and two coaches were booked to take Ruskin students to the House of Commons to lobby their MPs.

Social activities at the college included the holding of a dance every Saturday evening at The Rookery. There were six miners on National Union of Mineworkers' and National Coal Board scholarships in my first year at Ruskin. Like miners everywhere they stuck together and were largely responsible for organising the weekly dances. If there were only six female students in our intake where did the female dancing partners come from? The answer is that there was a nurses' hall of residence near The Rookery and off-duty nurses came to the Ruskin dances. Incidentally, many of the Ruskin students were very good ballroom dancers having honed their skills at dance halls in their home towns.

A group of eight of us joined the Oxford University Film Society. Meetings were held in one of the University's science lecture theatres that had facilities for showing films. The films shown were mostly screen classics such as Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, with an occasional showing of a Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton comedy for light relief. These film shows were extremely popular and drew packed audiences to the lecture theatres.

The General Secretary of Ruskin College was John Ennals. A former official of the United Nations Association he had many international contacts. In September 1957 he organised a Ruskin trip to Poland and in the following year a similar visit to Czechoslovakia. I was fortunate to be in the party that visited Czechoslovakia, which was then regarded as one of the most 'Stalinised' states of Eastern Europe. We received a warm welcome from our Czech and Slovak hosts and were accommodated in buildings that were formerly occupied by the Habsburg aristocracy. The country was ruled by the Communist Party and no attempt was made to disguise this fact. The regime delivered full employment, good welfare services and some of the new housing projects we saw were impressive. Furthermore, the country's five-year plan of economic development held out the prospect of an increase in living standards. A Western-style parliamentary democracy it was not, but I came back feeling that the regime had a large measure of popular support. I did not foresee the Prague Spring of 1968, much less the collapse

of Communist rule in 1990.

In the first term of the second year at Ruskin the Principal interviewed each student and asked what they intended to do on completion of their course. I said I should like to become a WEA tutor. The Principal thought this a realistic ambition but said I should need a degree and he offered to provide a reference should I decide to apply for a place at a university. He was as good as his word and supported my application to Oriel College to read for a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. I followed this up by being awarded a state scholarship which covered fees plus maintenance. Possession of the University Diploma entitled me to senior status that meant that I could complete the three-year course in two years. I was delighted to 'save' a year but it meant that I had to keep my nose to the grindstone for the two years I was at Oriel. There was little time for outside activities. I graduated with a Second Class Honours degree in July 1960.

After Ruskin

Although it was a time of full employment it was six months after graduation before I landed a full-time job. I filled in with temporary jobs while I applied for a permanent post. I found myself up against strong candidates at interviews. I was shortlisted for a post at the TUC, a research job with a trade union, and two jobs with the WEA. I then turned to the job advertisements in the *Times Educational Supplement* and saw there was a vacancy for an assistant lecturer in economics and economic history at North Oxfordshire Technical College. I applied and was appointed to the post. This turned out to be a piece of luck because the further education sector was entering a period of rapid expansion. I moved to a higher graded post at York Technical College and in 1965 was appointed a lecturer at Rutherford College of Technology in Newcastle. This proved to be another stroke of good fortune because within three years I found myself on the staff of the newly formed Newcastle Polytechnic. I worked there until I took early retirement in 1988. In conclusion, I can say I owe a great deal to Ruskin College. I enjoyed my two years of study there and the education I received opened up a new career path.

Blitheringly Fantabulous: Ruskin College 1967-69

Nigel Todd

When I left a South East London secondary modern school in 1964 I kept in touch with a few school friends, but apart from a youth club that we attended once a week, run by a very nice young Methodist couple, hedonism and dances passed me by. There was a coffee bar on the High Street in Welling, serving espresso in transparent cups, made ‘exotic’ by the seemingly sly proprietor. For a real taste of that era, a Wimpy Bar opened further along the street and there was a new milk dispenser on the high street corner – the only drawback being that the cops would sometimes harass you in the hope that you’d been trying to get at the cash.

Joining the LPYS

My accelerating interest was really politics. I think the pictures of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre made an indelible impact. They attracted me to the Anti-Apartheid Movement and I later went to meetings and rallies. But this overlapped with my growing interest in the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS). I knew they were there because my grandad, with whom I lived on a Welling council estate, had been getting me to take his engineering union subscription to his local branch meetings on Friday nights. The meetings took place in the Bexley Labour Party’s constituency office and the routine was always the same. The union door keeper opened the meeting room door, just a sliver, to take the membership card and money, and then quickly shut it so that you couldn’t see inside. Meanwhile, I read the Party’s notice board and saw

details of the LPYS meetings in the basement room. Then the door opened a crack and the card was returned together with the latest union magazine.

One evening, as the 1964 general election broke out, the place was buzzing and I summoned up the courage to ask the Labour Agent, Tony Quinn, how I could join the LPYS. A week later I was out canvassing for the first time, 'nursed' by local bigwig Labour alderman Jim MacLean, one of many Labour activists in our suburb who had fled from Scotland, Wales and the North during the 1930s in search of work.

The LPYS was a lovely group of young workers and a few college students. We heard speakers, did country rambles, went to folk and jazz clubs, saw *The War Game* at a local independent cinema, upset staid Labour councillors, nagged endlessly that the Labour Government should dissociate Britain from the US war in Vietnam, debated with the Young Communist League, demonstrated with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and on one memorable night interrogated a young guy from the American Embassy, Bernard C. Crump, about Vietnam. He asked for his travelling expenses as the Embassy was hard up!

It was really through the LPYS that I caught sight of a different world that introduced students, CND, middle-class lefties, Communist teachers, Labour organisers (some good ones), and Royal Arsenal Co-op activists with a vision of how to re-organise the world. And from a household where the Sunday Express was the most intellectual paper you ever saw (some of the writers like A.J.P. Taylor were good), I started to read *New Society*, the *New Statesman*, *Tribune*, the *Guardian* and even tried serious books.

In 1965, the *New Statesman* carried an advert for a clerk in the Workers' Educational Association's (WEA) London District office. By then I was into my second dead end job working, first, as a packer in a children's clothing warehouse, and then as an office boy for a firm of appalling Tory solicitors. The WEA seemed a good escape and, to my amazement, they hired me, even though I couldn't really type as much as I'd claimed. At the same time, I joined the clerks' union and then moved to the Transport and General Workers

Union (TGWU) administrative section. Like the Royal Arsenal Co-op, the unions were keen to encourage education and paid course enrolment fees.

I went to TUC/WEA weekend schools, did a TUC postal course, and joined WEA evening classes on industrial relations and political philosophy (I didn't understand much of it). It struck me that by going to college and getting some qualifications I might not have to be a clerk for ever. Ruskin was an obvious choice and the WEA's kindly district secretary, Stan Church, was very supportive. He got me to write short articles and book reviews for the District's magazine as preparation for essay writing. A terrific WEA tutor-organiser, Edna Wilderspin, encouraged me to go to one of her politics summer schools where you had to write an essay, and Jack Woolford, the Oxford University Extra-Mural Staff Tutor for Kent, welcomed me into his WEA European history course where another essay was possible. The only drawback was that Jack's course took place on the same night as the LPYS meetings, but I could still catch up with the comrades in the pub afterwards.

Applying to Ruskin

Applying to Ruskin in early 1967, and writing the obligatory essay, led to an interview with the Principal, Bill Hughes. I doubted that I'd got in as he thought I was quite young compared with Ruskin's other students. He also looked askance at my plan for a 24-hours TV news channel: 'Don't you get enough of it already?' he said wearily. To my surprise, a letter came a long time afterwards offering a place on the two-year Diploma in Social Studies course (maybe someone else had dropped out).

I wasn't sure what to expect when I turned up at Ruskin Hall in Headington in the autumn. As grants were paid by cheque I knew that I had to open a bank account. Therefore my first step when I got off the bus was to go into the Headington Co-op store to hand in my Co-op Bank forms. Two really friendly women shop assistants looked at the forms and, in a motherly kind of way, told me to just leave it with them and they'd sort it out. And they did.

At Ruskin Hall, most people were eager to get to know each other, and I found two who I knew slightly – David Smith from the Royal Arsenal Co-op and Roger Huddle, who had come to speak to our LPYS. But I soon felt I was out of my depth.

Systematic studying every day was a wholly different way of life. Bill Hughes warned us all about two curses that we'd encounter – mental fatigue and the sultry Oxford climate. Whilst he was right in anticipating those problems, the College assumed that students already knew study skills, and they left you pretty much to sink or swim. For me, the first term was more about sinking than swimming. My other big issue was food. I found it hard to adjust to the canteen food, especially lunch and dinner. I wasn't used to much of the food and I'd sometimes duck out for fish and chips in Headington. Eventually, I came to terms with the College food, and got on top of the studying.

What really helped me through that early period was the friendly ambience of the College, the comradeship of other students, an unwillingness to pack it in as a 'failure' and the sheer novelty of Oxford and living away from home. It was a fascinating city. The range of theatre, pubs and pub food, libraries, politics, demonstrations and discussions was huge. There was nothing like it on Welling High Street, which still lacked an Indian restaurant.

I opted for courses in sociology, history, social and political theory, public administration, social anthropology and, as a way of avoiding economics (I had no maths), social administration. Doing social administration meant joining part of the Residential Child Care course for social work placements. The wackiest placement was in a children's nursery at Henley that seemed to be a miserable place for staff, and probably not much better for the poor kids. As all the staff were female except for the gardener and me, the head of the nursery required the children to call the adults aunty. So, I became Aunty Nigel! The other memorable aspect of the course was teasing the tutor, who was believed to be a Liberal, by writing essays that reduced the solution to every social problem to socialism and a redistribution of wealth. She took it in good part having heard it all before, I imagine.

Every tutor was good at what they did. And they usually had a political empathy with Ruskin's ethos. Raphael Samuel's history tutorial sessions opened new windows on working-class history and life, though sometimes the miners would make up stories for the joy of seeing Raphael write them down on his endless index cards. Above all, most of the tutors focused on constructing logical arguments backed by evidence. The 'analytical essay', rooted in Oxford's linguistic philosophy of deconstructing the key words in a question, was king. It was a technique appreciated by those students who hoped to become trade union negotiators. Raphael Samuel looked more for the gentle but penetrating lilt of a well-crafted story that could resemble a novel more than a report.

The College had a strong social life. One older student, David Morgan, had a deep interest in poetry. He had been a conscientious objector during the war, and having been put to work on a farm he stayed with land work until going to Ruskin. Fairly quickly, he launched a stencilled termly magazine called *Ruskin Prose & Poetry* that reflected his slightly anarchic outlook, but he got other students to contribute. There was also an 'official' College magazine, *New Epoch*, that gave me my first taste of being an advertising manager to help fund it. In addition, dances were organised in exchanges with other residential colleges, such as Hillcroft, and there was a lot of freedom for students to organise their own time, important when you stayed up most of the night to complete the weekly essay. Varied choices were created, with one small group known for taking off for a day at the races.

Political Issues

Yet the big factors that shaped the Ruskin experience for me were political. The meat grinding war in Vietnam was hugely consuming, and there was great support for the Vietcong's astonishing Tet Offensive in January 1968 that marked the beginning of the end for America's will to carry on. Nearer home, the College community experienced two strikes, the first since 1909. The one that united everybody was against Enoch Powell's notorious *Rivers of Blood* speech in 1968. Ruskin gained national headlines for calling a symbolic

strike and playing a major part in organising one of the largest demonstrations ever seen in Oxford. The second strike, held in protest against Barbara Castle's 1969 White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, seeking to limit trade union freedom, drew a lot of support across the College, although not from everyone. I supported it.

Really, the College was starting to feel the strains that were increasingly apparent in the wider Labour Movement as shop stewards' militancy and a more diverse and assertive Left began to emerge towards the end of the 1960s. It wasn't easy for Bill Hughes and the College 'establishment' to balance those expectations with their relationships with Oxford University and trade union leaders. Some changes began to be made – a Labour Studies Diploma was introduced in response to students' demands – but the arrival on the scene of both the women's movement and History Workshop posed big questions.

Leaving Ruskin in 1969 I went to Lancaster University, itself becoming a hot bed of revolutionary fervour when, coincidentally, a pile of lefty mature students all turned up in the same intake! But Ruskin provided the foundation of skills, personal relationships, self-confidence and political understanding that changed my life forever. It helped me to do the jobs that I could only dream about prior to going to Ruskin, working in adult education, largely for both the Co-operative Movement and the WEA, but also trade unions and universities. It was all blitheringly fantabulous!



Ruskin College strike against racism, following Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968. Ruth Todd is in the centre wearing a leather jacket. Copyright Ruskin College, Oxford.



Ruskin College students strike against 'In Place of Strife', 1st May 1969. Supplied by author.



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Ruskin College 1967-1969

Ruth Todd

When I arrived at Ruskin College in 1967 as a twenty-two year old single woman it felt like embarking on an adventure in luxury! My life up to that point had been spent in Hunslet, a working class district of Leeds where street after street of soot blackened back-to-back houses filled the gaps between the many engineering factories of South Leeds. My junior school 'playing field' was a large cinder patch where the adjoining foundry scattered waste from the furnace. As a child, I happily inhabited this tight-knit working class community where my dad's family had lived for generations. Factory yards and warehouses were our adventure playgrounds.

My parents, my five brothers, and I were crammed into a two-up two-down back-to-back house, with no running hot water or bathroom, and a shared lavatory down the street. My dad worked in a local engineering factory and my mam helped out in the chip shop or worked evenings in a local factory on a shift specially created to enable women with young children to go out to work after their husbands came home from work to babysit.

Imagine my amazement (and initial disbelief) when on arriving at Ruskin I was allocated a spanking new study-bedroom - all light wood, shiny surfaces and a ceiling to floor cupboard that opened to reveal a vanity unit complete with washbasin and running hot water. All set in the beautiful grounds of Ruskin Hall in Headington. My living standards had soared! I'd given up my job as a clerical worker in Leeds, and was getting a full maintenance grant, all my meals provided and two years of free higher

education with mature students, many of whom were political activists and working class. I really did feel I was living the dream.

Joining the Labour Party

I found my way to Ruskin College via the Labour Party. I left school at sixteen, having scraped together enough GCEs to get me a place on a one-year course at Leeds College of Commerce to train as a shorthand typist. Whereas I had really enjoyed the neighbourhood junior school, I had hated my years at Grammar School and wanted to get out as soon as possible. Training as a shorthand typist would equip me with the skills to avoid factory work, and give me enough pocket money to dance my Saturday nights away at Leeds Mecca or the student union gigs and enjoy a midweek night at a local jazz club. So that's the route I took.

I can't remember how or when it occurred to me that the world was an unfair place for working class people and women, but the feeling always seemed to have been with me. As a five or six year old I had refused to touch my parents' birthday present of a doll with a pram, sensing the restriction such a role-defined toy would place on me. My brothers would never have been offered such a present. I wanted a bike and after months of rejecting them, the doll and pram were sold and I got my bike. Action paid off.

Soon after starting work I joined the union, believing at that time that it was through union membership and voting Labour that working class people would defeat the injustice of their daily lives. I saw poverty all around me while people worked long hours, often in physically demanding and filthy jobs. The union meetings turned out to be unappealing, bureaucratic and not very relevant as far as I was concerned. They were dominated by older men, who didn't seem very interested in the concerns of young women. I gave them up and turned my thoughts to joining the Labour Party (LP) in the hope that this might be a more effective vehicle for change. I remembered how, as a child I had always enjoyed election-day in Hunslet when the place seemed to come alive with canvassers and campaigning. Maybe I could find more action there!

Everyone I knew seemed to vote Labour but I was unaware that any were members. Eventually I made contact with the Labour Party through a woman I worked with when I became the administrator for a voluntary sector social work agency. She was an active member and referred me to the Leeds Labour Party agent when I asked if she knew of a local Young Socialist Branch (LPYS).

Although I was unaware of it, the LPYS branches had recently been closed down by the Labour Party, following infiltration by the Socialist Labour League (SLL). I had no knowledge of this history or even what the SLL was.

When I met with the Labour Party agent he grilled me about my background, and then insisted that a LPYS branch might be a possibility if I could furnish him with a list of at least twelve names and addresses of young people in South Leeds who were interested in joining the LPYS. It didn't occur to me at the time, but in retrospect he was obviously worried that I might be an infiltrating 'Trot'. Of course, I didn't know what a Trot was, and unfortunately for me I didn't know twelve young people in South Leeds who were interested in getting involved in the LPYS. I knew of only one other besides myself.

After asking around amongst friends I did manage to get the list of twelve names and addresses to satisfy the LP agent. This was after persuading friends that if they supplied their names and addresses so that I could get a LPYS off the ground, they would only need to attend the first meeting and there would be no further commitment required. Very generously friends and friends of friends added their names to the list. Some weeks after being given the list of names and addresses - and no doubt having checked them to be genuine - the Labour Party agent agreed a date for a meeting of the South Leeds LPYS. He, of course, with other Labour Party officials attended that first meeting and seemed satisfied, so the go ahead for the LPYS branch was given.

I was forever grateful to the twelve people who allowed their names and addresses to be used, but, as expected, they were never seen again at a LPYS meeting after that initial one. However our future meetings turned out to be very lively, and were well-attended, mainly by university and art college students who were members of or sympathetic to the International Socialists (IS). There was one supporter of Militant! We had a few years of heated

political discussion and activity and it provided my introduction to a political education.

Having joined the Labour Party via that Young Socialists' branch I became involved in ward, constituency and the district Labour Party as well as the Labour Party Womens' Section. As a young and active member in my Hunslet ward, where although there was a large Labour Party membership on paper active members were thin on the ground, I was soon ward secretary and delegate to the constituency and the city-wide Labour Party. I became heavily involved on the left of the party and also in anti-racist campaigns. I remember being incensed at a constituency meeting when a City Councillor opposed - in racist terms - a proposal to provide facilities for travellers and gypsies. That led to me becoming a founder member of the Leeds Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD). Women's rights were another issue I felt strongly about, constantly having to battle against the expectations of men that I along with other women should service meetings by making tea.

Ruskin and Oxford Life

After having worked in clerical jobs for the five or six years since leaving school I was looking for some other challenge, but opportunities for someone like me, with few or no qualifications or contacts, were limited. I had toyed with the idea of voluntary service overseas but was not fully committed to this. Then Ruskin College came to my notice through a piece in the *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, the local Labour Party paper. Ruskin College was inviting applications for prospective students from people with trade union and Labour movement experience. I'd never heard of the college but the courses looked attractive, and when I looked further into it and discovered I could get a grant to fully support me, this seemed like too good an opportunity to miss so I applied.

After submitting the obligatory essay, I was called for interview and offered a place. During the interview it was made clear that as a woman I would be in a minority at Ruskin as 90% of their student intake were male. There was some discussion on how I would cope in such an atmosphere. To me it was just another example of the male domination that existed throughout society

and having survived in a household with five brothers I seemed to convince them I'd get by!

My application had been for a place on the one-year Childcare Course, mainly because I thought I might like to be a social worker and that this course would give me a social work qualification. Also, I felt more confident about tackling an essay on poverty, which was the topic for entry to that course. At my interview Bill Hughes (Ruskin Principal at the time) asked whether, given my experience in the Labour Party, I wouldn't be better off on the two-year Diploma Course which offered a more political education. When I made it clear I wanted the social work qualification but some of the Diploma course was very attractive to me, I was offered a place on the one-year childcare course, with the promise that if I successfully completed that I could stay at Ruskin for a second year and take the Diploma in that final year. And that is what I eventually did.

I settled quickly into life at Ruskin and really enjoyed both the studying and social life. I was a student from 1967 to 1969. At that time Ruskin had approximately 100 full time students in each of the two years, and as said earlier only 10% of these were women. The average age of students was probably mid to late thirties, so those of us under 25 were in a minority. Of the small group of women, many were young and single, unlike most of the men, who were married and had wives and children back home. It would have been difficult if not impossible for married women with children to attend Ruskin, given their family responsibilities.

Although some Ruskin students expressed a dislike of living in Oxford, I relished the opportunities it gave me - secondhand bookshops, access to university facilities such as the Bodleian Library, university lectures and student societies, teashops and restaurants, old pubs and beautiful buildings. It was a totally different world from the one I had known and I embraced it, including drinking wine for the first time (other than a sweet sherry at Xmas). I was introduced to live theatre at Oxford Playhouse. I was also eating food I had never even seen before, and coming across Indian Restaurants for the first time. A Ruskin student, a middle aged ex-miner who professed experience in

these matters, suggested a group of about twelve of us should go for an Indian meal. Since he was the only one amongst us who claimed to have eaten Indian food, he would guide us in our choice of menu. Following his advice we all ordered vindaloo followed by a creme de menthe. The strangest Indian meal I have ever had in my life!

The late 1960s saw a great deal of political activity and unrest, including opposition to the Vietnam War which was at its peak; students throughout the country were demanding more democracy in their universities and colleges; Enoch Powell delivered his 'Rivers of Blood' speech in Birmingham; Barbara Castle produced the White Paper *In Place of Strife* in an attempt to curb trade union powers; the Abortion Act was introduced. As Ruskin students we were very involved in political protest. We marched through Oxford to the chant of 'Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today'; lobbed eggs at Enoch Powell as he tried to enter Oxford Town Hall; picketed hairdressers' shops in the Cowley Road after they refused to cut the hair of black students; joined university students in their demands for more democracy in their colleges; and Ruskin students struck in protest at Enoch Powell's racist speech and again in opposition to *In Place of Strife*. I remember Bill Hughes, the Principal of Ruskin, making an announcement to a packed dining hall that Oxford University were threatening to withdraw facilities from Ruskin students unless we stopped supporting the University occupations.

My next door neighbour at Ruskin Hall was an Italian communist. She would often wake me up early by banging on my door so that she might deliver the news of some victory the Vietcong had secured. She later became a Communist MEP and well known international peace campaigner.

After Ruskin

After Ruskin I worked as a Probation Officer for some years. I eventually gave it up for good when I could no longer justify to myself being part of the court system. Throughout those years I had identified more with the clients than the court and the conflict became too great to continue. I went into advice work where I felt I was no longer a figure of authority. My reasoning was that

information is power, and the more information I could impart to people by being an advice worker the more power they had in their own lives. I felt I was more able to stand alongside them rather than over them. Initially I worked advising and representing people on their right to social security benefits, and finally advised people on their immigration rights.

I remained a very active member of the Labour Party until the late 1980s, after a brief flirtation with the Communist Party in the late 1960s. I left the Labour Party following the defeat of the leftwing and the Party's lurch to the right, but rejoined last year when Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader. Although not a member of any political party during those years, I remained politically active, campaigning on women's and workers' rights and opposing racism.

Going to Ruskin College was a great experience and provided me with an education and opportunities I could never have imagined as a young kid in Hunslet.



Ruskin College students: Shirley Mashyiani (a nurse and refugee from apartheid), Ruth Todd, and Nigel Todd, 1969. Supplied by the author.

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Ruskin Days

Rob Turnbull

I am currently studying for a postgraduate qualification in history at the University of Cardiff, having written two books and with a third due out next year. I will always be eternally grateful to Ruskin College, for giving me a second shot at education, whatever its detractors may say. If Ruskin did anything for me, it opened my eyes to the informal education that goes on all around us, not just in the academic mainstream to which I am now happily married.

I can't honestly say that before the 1984-85 miners' strike I was particularly political, other than the fact that I come from a long line of working-class Tories, the sort of people who helped Mrs Thatcher achieve three general election victories. When I was a curious, albeit sickly, bookish child, my father was always ready with an anecdote about the Machiavellian skulduggery of Harold Wilson and the labour movement in general.

This however was not what made me into a political animal, and what my wife refers to jokingly as a historical nerd. That honour goes to Arthur Scargill, Margaret Thatcher, and a certain history teacher at GCE 'O' Level who must remain nameless. So I guess I should start by saying a huge thank you to Mrs Thatcher, Arthur Scargill, Neil Kinnock and others, for opening my eyes to the realities of the wider world in all its glorious and sometimes inglorious machinations.

The Road to Ruskin

I was born in that seminal revolutionary year of 1968, at the height of the

Vietnam War, as students took to the streets of Paris, and I grew up with the subsequent fall-out from that epoch-defining decade. Edward Heath's three-day week, of 1974, the IMF crisis of 1976, and the shadow of IRA violence, such as the 1984 Brighton bomb. However, what really altered my political outlook was the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in May 1979 and her all-out assault on the labour and trade union movement that followed.

The lessons that I took from those years, and the beliefs that they engendered, collectivism, solidarity and a somewhat dogmatic interpretation of Marxism, have never left me. For a long time after leaving school in 1985 and subsequently taking GCE 'A' Levels, I drifted from job to job, without ever really knowing what I wanted out of life. This era, readers will recall, was the time of the YOP or Youth Opportunities Programme on the one hand, and the yuppies on the other.¹ Some things never change.

I knew I wanted a degree, but hadn't the faintest idea how to go about it. Then browsing my local library shelves one afternoon, I came across a leaflet advertising Ruskin College's one-year diploma in history. I filled the application form in as best I could; my handwriting has never been wonderful, and of course there was no internet in 1994, and I waited. A few weeks later I found I had been invited for interview.

Time at Ruskin

My Ruskin interview took place on a cold January afternoon in 1994, and, if I recall, on the panel that day were Chris Wilkes, Steven Yeo, Hilda Kean and Raphael Samuel. I can't say I remember much, other than that I was completely overawed by the prospect of studying in Oxford - probably, looking back now, more than I was at the thought of studying at Ruskin. A few weeks later, I received confirmation that I had been successful at interview and had been offered a place to start in the September of 1994.

Places such as Balliol College where one of my history-writing heroes, Christopher Hill, had been Master, or the Oxford Union that had hosted the famous 1933 debate *'This House will not fight for King nor Country'*,

were now very real places with real people and real debates. I was fortunate to witness one such debate between Michael Foot and Michael Heseltine in October of 1994, in which the motion was proposed that '*This House believes the class war is over and the capitalists have won*', a suggestion that seemed very real in that decade of apparent Conservative hegemony.

The Oxford Union, together with the Bodleian Library, formed a major backdrop to my time at Ruskin. History was being made and I was eager to absorb as much as I could, and more importantly to learn. The Oxford Union in particular was where it seemed to be happening and where I was fortunate to witness one of the greatest scientists of all time, Professor Steven Hawking, give a lecture on the meaning and nature of time. Equally memorable was a debate on the then embryonic Northern Ireland peace process, in which I heard David Trimble (an honest and decent man) debate with various strands of Irish nationalism as to the prospects for peace, something that would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier

My impressions of the fabric of Ruskin, its buildings, and its staff - to say nothing of its politics - have naturally become clouded by the passage of time, but one or two moments stand out. The first of these was the demo of October 1994 against the Criminal Justice Bill, in which the Ruskin students had hired a coach for the day to go up to London. The background to this bill was that the then Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard, had brought forward a piece of legislation aimed at outlawing raves and any other form of unlicensed musical entertainment.

To this provocation the musical community and many others responded with a demonstration that began peacefully and ended up in a riot. It once and for all destroyed any lingering notions that I may have had about the political neutrality or otherwise of the police. I must add that this apparent conversion on the road to Damascus took place as a result of a heavily armoured police officer on a horse, bearing down on me, in the middle of Park Lane, with the intention of smashing his truncheon in my face. A lesson I have never forgotten from that day is that the State will use any means necessary if it feels its class interests are threatened.

Raphael Samuel

I was fortunate to be at Ruskin for the last few months of Raphael Samuel's teaching career, before his tragically early death in December of 1996. If I was to say that going into Raphael's office for the first time reminded me of entering a disaster zone, I would not be exaggerating. Picking one's way through the debris of scholarly articles, books read and discarded, works in progress, old newspapers and general rubbish was an effort in itself. This was more than compensated by the genuine warmth, to say nothing of historical curiosity and a willingness to look beyond the conventional façade of academia that Raphael inspired in his students. His eccentricities we overlooked, for I think we all realised and were inspired by the depth of his knowledge and his commitment to the ideals of the journal he had helped to found, *History Workshop Journal*.

After Ruskin

My time at Ruskin was sadly all too brief, and if I'm honest I resented having to leave. I had grown to love Oxford, its hustle and bustle, and the sense of history which enveloped you, never more so than walking into the Bodleian and realising that this was where King Charles I had had his headquarters during the English Civil War; or walking into the Museum of Oxford, and being shown the door behind which the three Protestant martyrs, Ridley, Latimer and Cranmer had gone to their deaths in 1555 and 1556, outside Balliol College just along the road. All three were burnt alive at the stake.

I could have quite happily stayed on for another year or two had the opportunity been presented, but I was now in my mid-20s and needed to find something that would sustain me, both in terms of career progression, and on a personal level.

As so often happens, luck intervened and, having worked in the field of learning disabilities and mental health for many years, I found myself living in South Wales and undertaking professional nursing training.

I qualified in September 1999 and returned to the North East in the autumn of 2000, having decided to quit nursing. In March 2001, I broke

my right leg in two places, and after a long period of soul searching decided to apply to Northumbria University in the summer of 2001 for a place on their history degree.

If I was ever unsure of Ruskin's ability to open doors, my Northumbria interview convinced me otherwise. The interview went something like: 'I see you went to Ruskin, Rob? - Yes I did - So, you would have been tutored by Raphael Samuel? - Yes - Excellent.' We then proceeded to a discussion of Raphael's last published work *Theatres of Memory* and my impressions of Oxford as a city. After this the rest of the interview was a formality and after three wonderful years at Northumbria I graduated in July 2004 with a 2:1 in history.

Since leaving Ruskin and subsequently Northumbria, I have written for the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) and *BBC History Magazine*, and have become a published author with a couple of appearances at the Edinburgh Festival to promote my work. I am now studying for an MA in history at the University of Cardiff, with the intention of going on to doctoral level. None of this would have been possible without the help, encouragement and guidance of Ruskin, for if Ruskin taught me anything, it was the necessity of discipline, working to deadlines etc. but more than that it was my window on to a world which I had previously only been able to read about. For that I will always be grateful.

Notes

- ¹ See endnote 13 to Phil Lenton's piece in this issue for an explanation of the Youth Opportunities Scheme.



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Terry Conway Folksinger, Songwriter, and Working Man, 1943-2013

Brian Bennison



Terry Conway in 1979. Courtesy of Linda Gowans.

The spontaneous outpouring of affection that swamped a packed Newcastle Crematorium at the end of Terry Conway's funeral on 14 June 2013 was repeated two years later at a memorial concert at a sold-out Queen's Hall in Hexham. It was one of Terry's finest compositions, *Fareweel Regality*, with everyone joining in the chorus, which provided the moving climax on both occasions. A song about parting and exile, it is rooted in a particular time and place but carries within it a timeless resonance.¹ It was first recorded by Terry on Kathryn Tickell's 1998 album, then taken up

by the Unthanks, and has since found its way into recordings in Australia and New Zealand. The song opens as below. The use of the vernacular is no affectation on Terry's part, but reflects the pronunciation used by those amongst whom he lived and earned a livelihood.

*And now it's time to say fareweel, though Aa hope that we may meet again,
And aal things may be reet again, we've lived and spent the day.*

*And we'll cry fareweel Regality, and cry fareweel the Liberty,
To honest friend civility, to winter's frost and fire,
And there's nowt that Aa could bid yer,
But that peace and love gan with yer,
Never mind wherever caal the fates,
Away from Hexhamshire.*

Written only three decades ago, *Fareweel Regality* is sometimes taken to be a much older work, a compliment to Terry's ability to utilise his deep appreciation of the history and music of his native Northumberland. His adult life was spent working outdoors across the county and a further verse of the song captures the authentic voice of the labouring man fearing he may have to leave the land he loves:

*And as Aa set the mossy stanes, and de me bits o' jobs and gaff the dykes,
Aa hear the whisper down the sykes, fareweel, they sigh, fareweel.*

Terry – strictly speaking, Shaun Terence – Conway was born in the maternity unit at Dilston Hall, alongside the Devil's Water at Corbridge. His parents moved shortly afterwards to Southport, but he returned to Tynedale as a four-year-old with his mother. He left school at fifteen to work in a garage before joining an uncle in his building firm. Then for thirty years he was employed as a roadman for Northumberland County Council, and after early retirement in 1998 became a jobbing gardener.

Terry began to perform, somewhat reluctantly at first, at Hexham Folk Club at the beginning of the 1970s. Raymond Greenoaken, who as a young man became a regular at Hexham, remembers first hearing Terry at Haltwhistle when he sang *The Bowers of Satan* from the floor. Raymond thinks this may have been his first shot at songwriting, though the song struck him as not the work of a novice, rhyming, as it did, 'the oak and the ash' with 'the yoke and the lash'.² Terry was a dependable resident at the Hexham club, always ready with a song or three. Raymond remembers a bottomless repertoire that consisted in large part of songs never heard from anyone else, including his own which were slipped in almost furtively.

Despite growing recognition by the folk cognoscenti, Terry remained very modest about his own talents and was disinclined to accept paid engagements. Faced with a concert or booking, Terry would say that he would only begin to enjoy it when the last note had died away. His idea of touring was to nip up to Newcastle and Kinross once in a while to sing in traditional competitions. One of his favourite venues was the exit to the Wentworth Car Park in Hexham, where he would busk.

Terry was a lovely gentle man, but a ferocious autodidact. An expert on Border Ballads, Terry was recruited by the BBC when they needed singers to take part in a broadcast on Radio Three in May 1979. Again, when the organisers of the commemorative events celebrating the Hexham riot of 1761 wanted a song, it was to Terry they turned. Terry and his partner Liz wrote the piece together and were able to redress the balance of contemporary reports that restricted themselves to the authorities' view of events. *The Hexham Riot* was performed by a community choir at the unveiling of a plaque in the town's Market Place, where around fifty protesters were shot dead. It expressed the rioters' view of a Militia Act that was 'ill understood and thoroughly detested'.³

Terry's knowledge of a wide range of subjects informed much of his songwriting and made him so much more than an outstanding traditional singer. He was, for example, keenly interested in military history; his friend and fellow singer Mike Tickell felt that Terry, a pacifist, knew more about

regimental histories than anyone. The penultimate line of the chorus to *Fareweel Regality*, for example, references *Quo Fata Vocant* (Whither the Fates call), the motto of the Northumberland Fusiliers. Terry's *Ballad of Erwin Rommel* became part of the repertoire of the highly respected Lou Killen, who called it a major ballad and performed it across the United States and Canada. When Pete Coe, with fifty years' folksinging behind him, was asked which song he would have liked to have composed, he chose Terry's *The Walls of Troy*. Pete judged it the ultimate anti-war song, which was also recorded by the House Band in the UK and by groups in Canada and California. In an ironic juxtaposition – following Mike Tickell's obituary of Terry in the *Guardian* – an edition of Radio Four's *Last Word* ended with a piece about Terry, having begun with a fulsome tribute to Sir Sandy Woodward GBE, KCB, Commander-in-Chief of the British Naval Task Force in the Falklands War.

Another favourite with Pete Coe's audiences over many years is *I Do Not Want to Lose You* (Harry Wharton). Terry's own presentation of his work was restrained, with little introduction and no exposition. Raymond Greenoaken believes that some titles were an afterthought, there being no need for them until Terry started recording. At times, listeners were required to come to their own conclusions about the precise subject matter of a song, and *I Do Not Want to Lose You* is a case in point. The song has a cryptic quality. It begins with an allusion to an innocent world of schooldays experienced principally, one imagines, via the work of Frank Richards rather than the Northumberland Education Committee. Part of the opening verse and chorus go as follows:

*When the snap kicks and the scorn, made me wish I'd not been born,
You could make me think the world was all serene,
Oh what liberties were penned, how realities could bend,
In a world where you had been so long fifteen.*

*And I do not want to lose you Harry Wharton, my old chum
You were twice the man that I was, that's for sure,
I could lean on you and feel myself secure
In a world that's made of blood and sweat and iron.*

As the song progresses, it moves into a more disturbing, unfriendly adult world, inviting speculation about its true meaning. Pete Coe, who has been performing the song to some acclaim since the early 1980s, admitted at Terry's memorial concert that he still wasn't sure what it was all about. The extract below suggests Hiroshima, the Cold War and nuclear threat.

*And the fat boy they released on that doomsday in the east,
He's the spectre at the feast and it's him we have to pay,
For the iron hand is closing, Harry Wharton, my old chum,
It's shaking all the stuffing from my brain
I will never sit here and talk with you again
For you go to pick up sides among the dying.*

There was a serious, contemplative side to Terry, but he was equally capable of coming up with humorous songs. *Hawkhope Hill*, for example, deals with the building in less than perfect circumstances of a housing development to accommodate some of the residents rendered homeless by the creation of the Kielder Dam. Written on a timesheet on site at Falstone, the lyrics had to be recovered from the wages clerk.

Another biting funny composition came after an acquaintance mistakenly remarked that Terry sang country and western songs, so he thought he had better equip himself with one. Like many others, Terry probably subscribed to the view that there is little wrong with country music but the lyrics are somewhat problematical, and wrote a parody called the *Cowboy Song*. The opening verses and chorus are reproduced below. Familial tragedy is piled upon familial tragedy as the song captures perfectly the cloying sentimentality of the genre. Roy Harris said the song made his sides ache.⁴

north east history

*My Daddy died last Thursday and the angels took his soul,
When my time is come I'll meet him there,
But I've got my country music as I ride along the road,
And the tyres on my 12-wheeler hum a prayer.*

*And they say the Good Lord always has a reason,
For the things he does and good folks don't ask why,
And if I met an angel as I ride along the road,
I'll ask him why my daddy had to die.*

*My ma stepped off the sidewalk, stopped a streetcar with her ear,
She never took good care ('cos she was bored),
The angels came and kicked her twice to see she was sincere,
And they took her hand in hand to meet the Lord.*

Over the years Terry wrote almost seventy songs and an article of this length can only scratch the surface of his writing.⁵ But even if Terry had never composed a single song his interpretation of traditional songs from across the UK and Ireland would have still ensured his place as a gifted performer of some stature. Yet Terry was a modest, unassuming man. Raymond Greenoaken became aware almost forty years ago of how Terry would wring every drop of nuance out of a song without ever calling attention to his own expertise. Terry never liked making a fuss about anything, although he would occasionally permit himself a smile, a light sigh or a shake of the head. Terry's main concern was that of the working man: to be reliable and give full value, whether it was performing, gardening or driving a snow plough.

Around twenty years ago, Terry formed a musical and personal partnership with singer and dulcimer player Liz Law (later Conway). It was Liz who persuaded him to take up offers of bookings, both within and outside the region, and encouraged him to record. A CD they did together was released in 2001 and a second in 2008. Terry sang four of his compositions on the 20-CD *Northumberland Anthology* project and also contributed to an album

of Georgie Ridley songs. To coincide with the memorial concert of Terry's songs in September 2015, a CD version of a tape-recording from 1992 was made available. Like the concert proceeds, monies from the CD were to be donated to Mesothelioma UK to help support research into the disease from which Terry died.

A year before he passed away, Terry, along with Liz and supported by Julie-Ann Morrison, recorded *Songs for the North of England* live at Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society. Terry had been unwell and was showing the advancing symptoms of the illness that was to take him from us, so the occasion was not without its stresses. But Terry, as he had done all his life, quietly got on with the job. And the occasion leaves us with a fitting image of Terry: singing alongside Liz in a library of 170,000 books.

Terry Conway can be heard on the following recordings. His singing of his *Fareweel Regality* can also be accessed on [tps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcCLmqUIM9w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcCLmqUIM9w).

Premier, Terry Conway and Liz Law (Stonehouse Music, 2001, SHMCD001)
Of Riots & Rabbits, Terry Conway and Liz Law (Stonehouse Music, 2008, SHMCD002)

Songs from the North of England, Terry Conway and Liz Law (Stonehouse Music, 2012, SHMCD003)

The Haydon Bridge Sessions, Terry Conway (Stonehouse Music, 2015, SHMCD004)

The Northumbrian Collection, Kathryn Tickell (Park Records, 1998, PRKCD 42)

The Northumbria Anthology, Various Artists (MWM, 2002, CDSP 31-50, vols 34, 36 & 37).

Gannin to Blaydon Races! The Songs of George Ridley, Various Artists (MWM CDSP 107)

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Liz Conway, Mike Tickell and Raymond Greenoaken. As fellow performers, their memories of, and thoughts about, Terry were invaluable in preparing this appreciation

Notes

- ¹ The Regality and Liberty were private jurisdictions in Hexhamshire that had been granted by Anglo-Saxon kings to favoured individuals. For an exhaustive, and exhausting, account see A. Hinds, *History of Northumberland*, Volume III, Hexhamshire: Part 1 (1896), pp. 20-64.
- ² It probably wasn't Terry's first composition, which was more likely to have been *Lizzie Storey*.
- ³ A. B. Wright, *History of Hexham* (Alnwick: W. Davison, 1823), p. 202. The military authorities found themselves short of manpower during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and so an Act was introduced to conscript men into the militia. Hexham and the surrounding area became a focus for conscription efforts and a large gathering of local people gathered to protest. After the Riot Act was read and the protestors stood their ground, the North Yorkshire Militia opened fire. As well as the dead, many more people were wounded.
- ⁴ Sadly, Roy Harris died while this appreciation was being prepared. For an indication of the standing of Roy Harris in folk music circles, see his obituary in the *Guardian*, 22 February, 2016.
- ⁵ Liz Conway has catalogued sixty-six of Terry's songs but Terry was in the habit of recording his work on cassette tapes and passing them on, so there may be others not yet listed.

North East Labour History Society



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

Reviews

Gillian Cookson (ed.), *Victoria County History, County Durham vol. V: Sunderland* (Boydell and Brewer for the Institute of Historical Research, 2015), x+ 332 pp. ISBN 978-1-904356-44-8, £90 hbk.

The Victoria County History (VCH) was founded in 1899, one of the projects inspired by Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, and the aura of royal patronage persists in the rededication by the present queen in her own jubilee year of 2012. However, be reassured - beyond the title page there is no whiff of monarchy, although the national editors have decided to retain the original format of a large hardback book bound in what might be construed as 'regal' red.

The aim of the original compilers was a set of 160 volumes, quickly adjusted to 184 volumes to accommodate London in its own right, rather than being considered as part of Middlesex and Surrey. As with any operation on this scale within a decade the momentum and the money began to run out but research carried on, frequently on a shoestring and using volunteers – all of which will sound familiar to those working on present day local history projects. After a period on the verge of bankruptcy, the enterprise passed to the University of London whose Institute of Historical Research remains the co-publisher.

County Durham already had three volumes in print by 1928, when publication ceased. Volume IV on Darlington appeared in 2005. By this time the older volumes, although still useful to local historians, had become historical records in themselves, demonstrating as they do the preoccupations of a past generation of researchers, but also in their more topographical and architectural approach providing valuable information about what still existed in the early twentieth century and exists no more.

The revived Durham project was fortunate enough to be chosen as one of the pilots for the Heritage Lottery funded England's Past for Everyone, and as a result was able to produce three paperbacks: one for Darlington and two for Sunderland. The first of the Sunderland ones, *Monks to Mariners* (2007), dealt with the origins and development of the settlements that eventually came together to form the town, while the second, *Building a City*, offered insights into its later physical development up to the time of writing (2010). Both were designed to engage the interested local observer and as such fulfilled the aims of that project. The research undertaken for these paperbacks has fed into this Big Red Book, but this is a very different product with different aspirations. It is designed to offer a thematic chronological history from the earliest times to the present day as well as examining the histories of individual institutions: churches, industries, public utilities and cultural organisations. Whether this is the optimum division of subject matter is open to question.

Sunderland's history is a complex story of fluctuating fortunes, usually the result of forces beyond the townsfolk's control, a situation that remains true to this day. From the point of view of the researcher into the history of Sunderland's workers, there is more useful contextual material than direct engagement with labour issues. As with any compilation of this size and scope the amount of space devoted to a specific topic depends on the available material and the priority given to it by the editorial team. Thus there is an interesting section on labour relations and public protest in the early and mid-nineteenth century (pp.132-7) which would repay further exploration, and continuing the topographical tradition of the earlier volumes, examinations of the spatial expansion and changing physical appearance of the town which raise issues of housing provision and workers' living conditions.

Shipbuilding, the industry that came to define Sunderland, is given its due place in the stories of alternating growth and recession that helped to define the town in the nineteenth and for most of the twentieth centuries. However from the point of view of the labour historian there are other

stories that could be told about the 1970s and 1980s and particularly about the cynical stroke of Thatcherite policy that almost overnight consigned the assets of a recently re-equipped industry to the scrap heap.

As this volume's final chapters demonstrate, Sunderland is still struggling to reinvent itself in the face of continuing central government cynicism but with much community spirit and cultural will (and for the moment, Nissan cars).

So do not dismiss this volume as irrelevant to the history of labour even if it is only providing a context. Like the earlier volumes it will date, particularly in an increasingly digital age, but as a work of reference it will retain its value. Even if you already know Sunderland you will find much in there to discover. If you don't know the place, it's a good starting point.

Win Stokes

Malcolm Chase, *The Chartists: Perspectives & Legacies* (Merlin Press, 2015), 252pp. ISBN, 978-0-85036-625-9, £15.99 pbk.

This excellent book brings together twelve essays previously published during the years 1991-2013 in a variety of specialist publications, thereby making them available to a wider audience in a single volume. As one would expect from this author, whose *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester University Press, 2007) we reviewed in *North East History* volume 39 (2008), each essay is scrupulously researched and stimulating and thought provoking to read.

The first essay is based on a lecture delivered at the Houses of Parliament in 2013, and examines the legacy of Chartism for parliamentary democracy. Legacy is an important theme throughout this book, as Chase presents compelling evidence for the long-term influence of Chartist ideas, well beyond 1848. These legacies materialized in a variety of ways, through workplace-based associations like the National Association of United

Trades (NAUT), Chartist-inspired candidates for parliamentary elections (examined in detail in Chapter 8), and the growing advocacy of land reform and allotments that developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century and endures to this day.

Living in the Newcastle suburb of Fenham, I am reminded on a daily basis of the lasting influence of working class advocacy of allotments and gardens, and for me the most fascinating essays in this book are the three devoted to the Chartist Land Plan and its legacies. Written off as a failure by contemporaries, Chase argues that 'back to the land' was a vital theme of Chartism, and demonstrates how Fergus O'Connor's brave experiment in raising funds to purchase land and establish five workers' colonies bequeathed a model of allotment settlement that later generations were happy to acknowledge. With 20,000 shareholders and (at its peak) 70,000 weekly subscribers and 600 local branches, the Chartist Land Plan was a nationally organized initiative that offered a persuasive alternative to the grossly unequal distribution of wealth and power in Victorian Britain.

In addition to discussing the legacy of the Land Plan, Chase also examines how the Plan has been treated by historians and other writers up to the present day. The evaluation of how Chartism and its legacies have been interpreted is another important theme throughout this book. Each essay is accompanied by extensive endnotes, and two essays ('Rethinking Welsh Chartism' and 'Labour's Candidates: Chartist Challenges at the Parliamentary Polls, 1839-1860') include tabulated lists of Chartist activities, culled from various sources to provide detailed empirical evidence pertinent to that chapter's subject matter. These numerous citations offer a rich source for anyone interested in further exploration of the themes of this book. For anyone relatively new to Chartism, they are invaluable.

Strongly recommended.

Mike Greatbatch

Les Turnbull, *The World of William Brown: Railways - Steam Engines-Coalmines* (North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, 2016), 124 pp. ISBN 978-0-9931151-1-0, £15 pbk.

The rationale for this well-researched and illustrated study is the laudable desire to rescue William Brown the 18th century mining engineer from the obscurity into which historians have consigned him. Les Turnbull contrasts this with the attention given to his close contemporary, namesake and fellow North Easterner Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, born in 1715.

The tercentenary of William Brown's birth falls in 2017 and his career spans that period before the arrival of steam driven locomotives and metal permanent way when the bases of that 'transport revolution' were being laid in the northern coalfield through the development of the wooden waggonway and the steam pump. These were both developments with which William Brown was intimately involved. By the time of his death in 1782 colliery 'viewers' like Brown were well on the way to becoming engineers rather than mine surveyors.

Brown did not invent the steam pump but he introduced it to the North East, initially importing the parts from Coalbrookdale but latterly fabricating them on the Tyne. Reputedly, he was responsible for commissioning or building over 80 pumps in the region. The first viable pumps for draining mines had been developed by Thomas Newcomen as early as 1712. The originals were not very efficient, but after the expiry of Newcomen's patent in 1733 and the development of precision engineering, the way was open for modifications. Since there is little in this study on the construction and operation of the pumps produced by Brown it is not clear whether or not he introduced improvements on the Newcomen model. The study does demonstrate, though, the ubiquity of these pumps in the northern coalfield by the time of Brown's death and their significance in the development of the deep mining that maintained the region's prosperity for the next two centuries.

However, in the nature of his position as a member of that band of viewers who served the 18th century coal owning élite, Brown was involved not just in pumping technology but in every aspect of mining; hence the subtitle of the study and a certain loss of focus on the centrality of Brown as an industrial innovator. Although it may distract slightly from the author's express aim, this approach has the bonus of drawing the reader's attention to the richness of the sources he has used. The viewers conferred with each other and with their employers and left manuscript 'view books' of their day to day activities. These volumes, comprehensively indexed, form part of the extensive collection of manuscript and printed sources available to researchers in the library of the Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers and have formed the basis of the present study. For the reader seeking insight into the lives of those who got the coal, built the pumps or laid the waggonways, the manuscript sources probably provide more information than the book itself but in passing there are accounts of negotiations at the annual bindings at collieries, and references to housing provision and to the feasts that always accompanied a new 'winning', as well as to the floodings and explosions, accidents and fatalities as new and experimental technology took its toll.

The book is scrupulously referenced, which means that the information it contains can be followed up by those with interests other than mining engineering. Hopefully, Mr Brown will not be allowed to lapse into obscurity again.

Win Stokes

Judith Green and St. James' Heritage and Environment Group, ***Men's Lives In The West End of Newcastle*** (St. James' Heritage and Environmental Group in partnership with West Newcastle Picture History Collection 2014), 40 pp. ISBN 978-0-9929183-0-9, free. Available as a digital download via <https://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com/publications-and-resources/>

Men's Lives is a terrific local history booklet, full of stories of men who worked in the now largely vanished industries of Newcastle's West End Riverside. It's also packed with photos from personal and factory albums and the wonderful West Newcastle Picture History Collection.

It begins with a summary history of workplaces such as Richardson's Leatherworks and the Armstrong engineering works, but this is followed by the detailed life stories of fourteen men who spent much of their working lives on the Riverside and told in their own words. Collectively, they recount the nature of an industrial life in a hands-on, labour intensive era of manufacturing, and pretty much from the standpoint of the shop floor.

The stories confirm the often fluid nature of industrial employment in the mid-20th Century and the practices that made it function. Several of the men describe the haphazard 'career' patterns of early working life. Stan Brown from Elswick started delivering furniture on foot from a barrow in the 1930s, before gaining an apprenticeship at Vickers-Armstrongs as a ship's caulker in 1938 at the age of 16. The caulker's job was to use a pneumatic tool to press ('caulk') metal sheets together to stop water leaking into the hull through the thousands of rivet holes. On a Friday afternoon, Mick Brady left school in Benwell in 1958 and walked to the Low Monty Pit to ask about a job. He was told to start on Monday. But then walking home past a shop in Denton Square he came across another job as a shop order boy that paid a pound more each week, and gave up going down the pit. Later on, delivering bread to the Sungold Warehouse he asked if they had any jobs in the print department. The manager offered him an apprenticeship as a silk screen technician. Mick went on to do other jobs, eventually spending 25 years as a bus driver and union man.

The stories tell of horrors because of the lack of health and safety measures, the dominance of powerful minor personalities in shaping what happened to you for good or ill in the industries of the Tyne, respect for those with skills, the importance of the unions in the workplace, and in some cases the role of the army as a temporary escape route from the industrial routines.

Each of these stories leaves you wanting to know more and knowing that there is more to know. Reading about Tommy Tuff from Glue Terrace in Scotswood told me things about the life of a man I knew as a Labour activist in Elswick in the 1980s, when he was living out his redundancy from Vickers where he had spent most of his working life. Tommy was a thoughtful, quiet man with lots of interests. I hadn't known however, that he'd spent part of the Second World War evacuated to Blackpool where, just turned twenty, he had to manage a team of five female capstan operators. They would have loved him!

Nigel Todd

John Daniels, Dr Stafford M. Linsley, Alan Morgan and Ken Smith, ***The Real Northern Powerhouse: The Industrial Revolution in the North East*** (Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2015), 100pp. ISBN 978-1-857952-23-0, £7.99 pbk.

This book illustrates the best and the worst of the style of local history publications favoured by its publisher. The title has an obvious link to George Osborne's much vaunted vision of a Northern Powerhouse, launched by the Chancellor on a visit to Manchester on 14 May 2015. Whilst acknowledging the region's industrial heritage, Osborne's vision was one in which the aspirations of northern cities would be freed to take greater control of their regional economy. Industry, technology, and communities are thus bound up with the notion of the Northern Powerhouse, and it is a shame that this new publication largely ignores the last while presenting much of what we already know about the first two.

The problems start for me right at the beginning, with Adam Hart-Davis' definition of the Industrial Revolution. This began, he claims, in 1709 when Abraham Darby discovered how to smelt iron using coke rather than charcoal. There follows a brief survey of other notable technological milestones in the development of steam power, with the usual litany of innovators such as

Newcomen, Darby, Watt, and Trevithick. While not denying the significant contributions of such entrepreneurs, this focus on the 'captains of industry' not only fails to explain the nature of industrialization, but also sets the tone for a book that presents the Industrial Revolution in our region as a history of pioneers, that minority of successful businessmen and inventors who found lasting fame and personal fortune.

The book provides two case studies and a series of chapters, each devoted to a particular industry or commercial activity. Thus we have the familiar stories of coal, shipbuilding, glass, pottery, chemicals etc, plus chapters on transport, ports and harbours, and agriculture. These last three are written by Stafford Linsley and are amongst the best on offer. Indeed, Linsley's essays are generally good, and he is the only one to make the crucial point that the term Industrial Revolution refers to 'a process rather than an event' (p. 78).

Anyone in business knows that profits derive as much from the skills, hard work, and price of labour, as from the utilisation of the latest technology. Yet the industrial workforce is almost absent from this book. Linsley at least acknowledges their existence, through his observations on the region's rich source of engineers, and on agricultural labour (women in particular), and the inclusion of extracts from the *Law Book of the Crowley Ironworks* is excellent. Again, when he highlights the plight of lead workers he makes the connection between the price of labour and how this might encourage or delay technological innovation. Nevertheless, the workers who sustained our region's industrial development, indeed the great bulk of the region's population, are largely invisible.

This book has some excellent illustrations, both archive and contemporary, and contains some useful essays on topics not readily available elsewhere – the manufacture of paper, and the quarrying of stone, for example - but its content is more likely to appeal to those who subscribe to the view of an industrial powerhouse achieved through the efforts of a few entrepreneurial pioneers. There is no bibliography.

Mike Greatbatch

Nigel Todd, *Roses and Revolutionists: The Story of the Clousden Hill Communist and Co-operative Colony 1894-1902* (Five Leaves Publications, 2nd ed., 2015), 106 pp. ISBN 978-1-910180-17-5, £6.99 pbk.

Let's begin by saying that every reader of this journal should have a copy of this fascinating and highly readable account of this Tyneside community experiment, published originally by People's Publications in 1986. This second edition deserves a wide readership with its new additions and a reflection by the author on the experiment's contemporary relevance. It is a shame to have lost the odd photograph from the first edition, but this is more than made up for by the inclusion of a number of fascinating press reports from the local papers, including one which devotes itself to the role of 'women as farm colonists'.

Todd follows the story of the colony from its potential precursors in Sunderland to its eventual foundation on eighteen acres of land at Forest Hall on the edge of Newcastle at an annual rent of £60.00, in spite of some local opposition to the 'Jews and anarchists' moving in. Anarchist ideals were certainly an inspiration for the colony although, as Todd points out, one of the key founders Franz Kapir, had made his renunciation of violence quite clear along with the adoption of the principles developed by Prince Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin was one of the many visitors to the colony listed by Todd, and this goes to emphasise not just its local importance but also its national significance.

Inevitably, utopian colonies are also the scenes of personal disagreements and arguments, especially when confronted with the problems of living the 'simple life' as a reality. Todd notes how the weekly meetings were 'dominated by strongly argued disagreements about direction of travel' (p. 84). He also records the equally pressing practical problems such as when 'one of the newly purchased cows proved to be blind, another went mad, whilst a third died whilst calving' (p.81). I leave the rest of such stories for the reader to discover!

What is equally important about the book is Todd's concern to situate the colony in a context not only of Tyneside but of the experiments and utopianism that characterised a significant section of the socialist 'cause' at the time. This coincides with a reawakening of interest in the arguments of the period and the practical experiments (Five Leaves has further contributed to this with its republication of Gillian Darley's excellent *Villages of Vision*). Todd seeks to bring this further up to date in an interesting preface to the new edition in which he draws on his own experience as a Newcastle city councillor and a green campaigner.

In particular, Todd is keen to show the ways in which ideas about the importance of gardening, organics and home growing are becoming more commonly adopted as vital for our futures and how the working class was at the forefront of such movements. Todd concludes that the colony could never have survived without an 'overall alteration in the economy and society'. For that we are still waiting.

John Stirling

Lewis H. Mates, ***The Great Labour Unrest: rank and file movements and political change in the Durham coalfield*** (Manchester University Press, 2016), 328pp. ISBN 978-0-7190-9068-4, £75.00 hbk. illus.

'The Great Labour Unrest' was the contemporary term for the few years before 1914 when trades union membership in Britain doubled to four million and there were unprecedented waves of strike action, including the first national miners' strike. This period also marks the disentangling of organised labour from the Liberals and the development of first the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and then the Labour Party. In County Durham this meant the demise of liberal economics – holding that wage levels were linked to the price of coal, and so therefore owners and miners had a common interest – and the end of dominance of the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) by Liberal officials. At the same time, Labour's

parliamentary advance was being challenged by the 'revolutionary trade unionism' of small parties influenced by syndicalism and anarchism.

The book includes a thorough historiographical discussion which shows how the debates over the Unrest need to be (but seldom are) linked to debates about the rise of Labour and the influence of syndicalism. In this context, existing accounts of the Durham coalfield are shown to be selective and partial, with insufficient attention paid to how rank and file movements and class politics were involved in the shift to Labour. The evidence for this case includes a good use of several local newspapers in the County which reported on public meetings in detail and provide the historian with important material about what was being debated and by whom. This is crucial when it comes to understanding working miners' reactions to the agreements over a three-shift system which generated a massive number of local disputes, the concerns over doctors' fees and other issues, as well as agitations for a national minimum wage in the industry. Discontent over how the union leadership was failing to deal with the miners' material concerns provided many opportunities to advance left politics, and of this there is clear evidence. Inextricably linked was the need to secure mechanisms within the DMA that would ensure that officials were accountable to the membership for their decisions and performance.

Progress was not smooth, however, and key Liberal officials such as John Wilson had a limpet-like ability to cling to office. Also, the coalfield was diverse and the term 'miner' covered a very wide range of jobs, pay, conditions and issues, with different areas and their lodges having their own different traditions and loyalties. Bearing this in mind, there is a detailed discussion of why the ILP, and the Durham Forward Movement it led, achieved far more traction in the County than the syndicalist politics advocated by militants like George Harvey.

This is a painstakingly thorough account that manages, most of the time, not to drown the narrative in excessive detail. It is a tour through the complex processes by which the political consciousness of a key group of workers changes, achieved through a local case study of activists largely

north east history

unknown outside their own areas. As such it vindicates the pursuit of local labour history to help to explain important national developments. It is to be hoped that the publisher will produce the paperback edition soon.

Don Watson

Secretary's Report

This report marks the end of my three-year stint as Secretary. It has been a privilege to serve the oldest regional labour history society in Britain and to work with such an enthusiastic group.

The last year has, despite a hiccup with venues, seen the continuation of a First Tuesday programme covering a range of topics from competitive leek growing to conscientious objection. These monthly meetings are entirely dependent upon a supply of willing speakers and I am very grateful to everyone who agreed to participate. The other important aspect of the Society's endeavours is the publication of the annual journal. As you read this, you probably do not need me to tell you that the editors have come up with another splendid volume of *North East History*. In an age when similar organisations are retreating to on-line versions, the Society is to be commended for once again producing a high quality, well-written journal in book form. This achievement is down to the efforts of Mike Greatbatch, John Stirling, Win Stokes and Sue Ward.

I have recently become aware of my doing little more than keeping things ticking over and that it was perhaps time for someone to take over and breathe new life into the Society. Fortunately, a successor has been found with a different and wider range of experience and contacts than myself. I know from my own experience that the new Secretary will be able to rely on the help and advice of Committee members.

Brian Bennison

Thanks and grateful appreciations

Our Secretary, as you see above, has decided to relinquish his role but to continue to be involved with the Society. The Committee and officers in thanking Brian, underline our appreciation for all the work he has

undertaken on our and the members' behalf. Without his disciplined approach, the Society would have been an empty shell. First Tuesday's presentations, and the informal social events, continue to be successful due to his efforts. We know we will still benefit from his advice and knowledge in future Committee meetings.

John Creaby

Chair, on behalf of the Committee

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Vice President:	Maureen Callcott
Chair:	John Creaby
Vice Chair:	Kath Connolly
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Liz O'Donnell (Morpeth)	Peter Nicklin (Newcastle)

How to contact the Society

David Connolly (Designate)
1 Exeter Close
Great Lumley
County Durham
DH3 4LJ

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.

- 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.

Journal:

The Society shall publish an annual journal, *North East History*. The Committee shall appoint the Editor/s of the Journal. The Editor/s shall report to the Committee on matters affecting the production of the Journal.

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	2015	Adam Woolley

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:

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- **Ruskin College, Oxford 1956-58**
- **Terry Conway, Folksinger, Songwriter, and Working Man, 1943-2013**

Front cover: Students from Ruskin College, Oxford, including two from the north east, protest against *In Place of Strife* in 1969. Reproduced courtesy of Nigel Todd



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/>