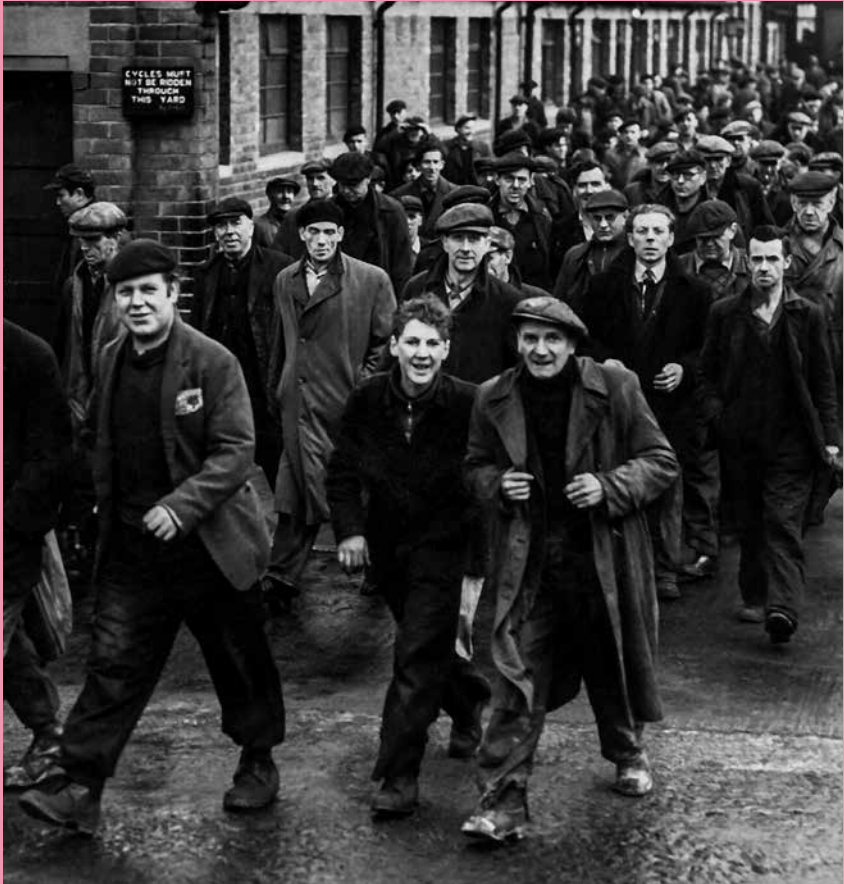


North East History

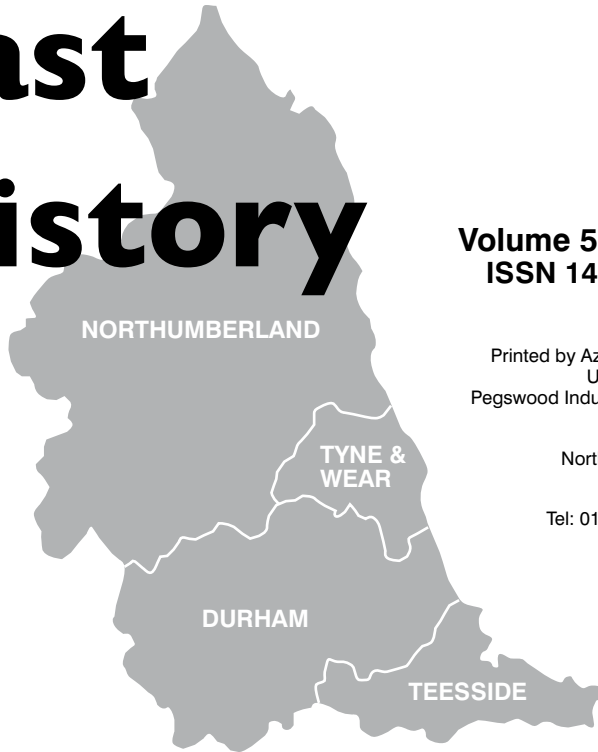
Volume 50 2019



Journal of the North East Labour History Society

north east history

North East History



Volume 50 2019
ISSN 14743248
© 2019

Printed by Azure Printing
Units 1 F & G
Pegswood Industrial Estate
Pegswood
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 6HZ

Tel: 01670 510271

Journal of the North East Labour History Society

Copyright reserved on behalf of the authors and the North East
Labour History Society © 2019

www.nelh.net

Contents

Note from the Editors	5
How to submit an article	7
Notes on Contributors	9

Articles:

Reflections on history and social class: North East England over time	<i>John Charlton</i>	11
‘This Fortress of Freedom’: A Study of Chartism in Gateshead	<i>Joel Wootten</i>	25
War, Welfare and Remembrance: A Case Study of two North Shields Ships	<i>Tony Barrow</i>	41
The War Came Early to Sleepy Valley	<i>Peter Brabban</i>	55
Raising Their Voices: Two Women of the 1930s.	<i>Rosie Serdiville</i>	73
The Knights of Labor in the North East, 1880-1900	<i>Steven Parfitt</i>	89
Discovering John Swan (1794-1885). Autobiographical Reminiscence from Afar	<i>Brian Bennison</i>	105

Reports and Commemorations

Annual General Meeting 2018	<i>John Stirling</i>	123
Newcastle University’s Oral History Unit and Collective	<i>Alison Atkinson-Phillips</i>	125

north east history

Gateshead Archive: The People's Archive	<i>Don Watson</i>	131
Living History: Redhills and Education for Action	<i>John Stirling</i>	133
Workers' Education: centenary reflections	<i>Nigel Todd</i>	137
Encountering Eric	<i>Hew Beynon</i>	143
Eric Wade 1939-2018	<i>Archie Potts</i>	147
An appreciation: Bernard Newbold, 1929-2018	<i>John Charlton</i>	151
Dr Ethel Williams: Commemorative Plaque	<i>Liz O'Donnell</i>	153
Commemoration: The Battle of Stockton	<i>Brian Bennison</i>	159
Public Recognition of a Heroic Train Driver. William George 'Billy' Hardy	<i>Simon Brindley</i>	161
Reviews		164
2018 Secretary's report		184
NELH Officers, Committee Members, and Society contact details		186
Constitution		187
Sid Chaplin Labour History Trophy		189
How to Join the Society		190

WEA History and Heritage Branch

wea.org.uk

Our history, our story

Explore and help to interpret our region's past with the WEA's courses, events and the WEA NE History and Heritage Branch.

WEA

Adult Learning Within Reach



North East Regional Office
T. 0191 212 6100
E. northeast@wea.org.uk

UK
Education & Skills
Funding Agency

metrolife

European Union
European
Social Fund

INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

The WEA is a charity registered in England and Wales
(no. 1112775) and in Scotland (no. SC039239).

Note from the Editors

This year's Journal begins with an open-ended article discussing class and history. Using the North East as an example, John Charlton discusses the way in which the overt signifiers of class may have varied over the past two hundred years but the same exploitative nature of class relations persist today. We welcome other contributions to the issues John raises and hope to publish more in future issues of the Journal and on our website.

Joel Wootten was this year's winner of the Sid Chaplin prize. His article is a study of how the strong radical stance taken by the Chartists in Gateshead, and their deep distrust of the middle classes, was distinct from the activities of the Chartist movement in the North East, particularly Newcastle upon Tyne.

The eightieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War has received a lot of attention in the media. Two related articles in this year's Journal focus on the lives of working class people in the North East during those early war years. Tony Barrow writes about the tens of thousands in the merchant navy who perished at sea, yet who often receive scant attention. Using the case study of two North Shields ships sunk by U-boats, this article compares the fortunes of the ship's owners with those of the missing crew. Tony is also critical of how the working conditions for merchant seamen worsened at the cessation of war. Peter Brabban offers a fresh perspective on the Second World War by comparing the experiences of his father, who witnessed 'the disaster of Dunkirk', with those of his mother who had to cope on her own raising a family in a small village in County Durham. This article explores how class and gender relationships began to change during the war years.

Following on from last year's celebrations of the centenary of (limited) female suffrage in the United Kingdom, Rosie Serdiville writes about the changing lives of women during the interwar years. Drawing upon a range of sources, she gives an insight into the experiences of two women from

very different backgrounds, whose activities contributed, either directly or indirectly, to the continuing expansion of women's rights.

The global connections in the nineteenth century between working class movements in the North East and the United States is an under researched area of local history. Steven Parfitt's article examines these connections, exploring how The Knights of Labor, formed as a working class fraternal society in the United States, found its way to Tyne and Wear in the 1880s. Brian Bennison's article continues this global connection. Drawing upon the diary of a Durham man who migrated to the United States, Brian tells a compelling story of childhood, apprenticeship and a young man seeking employment and spirituality during the turbulent years of the early nineteenth century.

This year the Journal has three separate sections. The first section, as described above, is for extended articles. The second section, *Reports and Commemorations*, is for shorter pieces. The reports describe the activities of local institutions and organisations relating to North East people's history. There is also an article on the centenary of workers' education and an account of the Society's Annual General Meeting in 2018. In the commemorations there is an appreciation of the lives of Eric Wade, Bernard Newbold, and the train driver Billy Hardy. There are also two articles on recently unveiled plaques: one in Newcastle, commemorating the life of Dr Ethel Williams; the other in Stockton, commemorating the famous Battle of Stockton. The *Review* section offers readers a critical appraisal of a range of recently published books, a film and the Journal of a sister labour history society.

Patrick Candon

Liz O'Donnell

Sue Ward

Win Stokes

John Stirling

John Charlton

Peter Brabban

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 186.

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.

Some past issues of the North East History Journal are still available, and these can be ordered via email to journal@nelh.org. Price per issue is £5, plus £2 p&p within the UK / £5 international.

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



Past issues of the Journal, volumes 36 – 49 (2005 – 2018) can also be viewed on-line on at: bit.ly/PastJournals

north east history

Notes on Contributors

Tony Barrow is a well-known historian of the maritime history of the north east. A former treasurer of the NELHS, he was Head of History and Archaeology at Newcastle College and Associate Lecturer of the Open University. His PhD from the University of Northumbria examined the whaling trade of the north east coast, 1750-1850, and he is the author of many books and articles, including *Trafalgar Geordies and North Country Seamen of Nelson's Navy 1793-1815*.

Brian Bennison is a former Secretary of the NELHS and lately an Editor of North East History.

Peter Brabban was born three days after the NHS was launched and spent the first two years of his life in Sleepy Valley, County Durham. After a secondary modern education he went on to a career as a portrait and fashion photographer and then as a campaigner and aid worker with NGOs like Oxfam, War on Want, Age Concern and lastly with the National Trust.

John Charlton was born in Newcastle a long time ago. He worked as a high school teacher on Tyneside and West Yorkshire then at Leeds Poly and Leeds University. After thirty years as a migrant in Yorkshire he returned to the homeland twenty years ago. A lifelong political activist and optimist.

Steven Parfitt is a Teaching Fellow in History at Loughborough University. His publications include *Knights Across the Atlantic: The Knights of Labor in Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool University Press, 2017) and numerous academic articles and book chapters. He has also published dozens of articles in newspapers and magazines including the Guardian, Jacobin, Times Higher Education, Red Pepper and Monthly Review. He is anti-

casualisation officer for the Loughborough branch of the University and College Union.

Rosie Serdiville is a local historian and writer with an interest in radical history, particularly as it pertains to women. Her work as a historic interpreter allows plenty of opportunities to use costume and domestic gear to let modern Northerners try out the lives of their ancestors.

Joel Wootten was awarded the 2018 Sid Chaplin Memorial Prize in recognition of his study of Chartism in Gateshead, a research dissertation he completed as part of his final year BA degree studies at Leeds University.

Reflections on history and social class: North East England over time

John Charlton

“By class I understand an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and ... in human relationships... The notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead and anatomize its structure.”

*E P Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963).
Preface*

If you were born in a mining village, the child and grandchild of a miner, and if you were male, heading down the pit at 8 (till 1843), 12 (till 1902), 14 (till 1944) and 16 until Margaret Thatcher rewrote the book, your perception of your class position was likely to have been unambiguous. The same is true if you were born Vane-Tempest-Stewart (two hyphens).

Before 1945 this applied not just to miners, but to the shipwrights, the caulkers, the boilermakers and to Sir Robert Appleby Bartram. To paraphrase E P Thompson, class is a relationship not a thing. You can't have one without the other or as he puts it more elegantly, 'you can't have love without lovers.' John Bowes, coal owner and aristocratic gentleman of taste, built his Museum at Barnard Castle for his French wife's pleasure

and stocked it with samples of European High Art. It was financed by revenues from pitmen toiling below them in South Durham.

This leaves females out of the picture. Wives and daughters were integral to the class relationship. The wife provided the support system; buying and providing food, provision and laundering of clothing, nursing through sickness and injury, emotional and physical comfort, child birth, child care and training. The daughters helped out here too, but had another function, ministering to the needs and submitting to the authority of Lady Jane Vane-Tempest-Stewart and Lady Anne Bartram. Vane-Tempest-Stewart or as he was better known, and hated by many, Lord Londonderry, understood this dimension only too well, strongly supporting the 1843 Mines Act which excluded women from working down the pits.

These are individual stories and they are important but the class relationship is expressed in collectives. In the film *Peterloo*, the director, Mike Leigh represented the class relationship more starkly in a mainstream movie than ever before as the classes faced each other on St Peter's Field, Manchester in August 1819. The cotton operatives and pitmen, farm workers, narrow boat workers and navvies, and their families dressed up for the day were set upon by the mounted sons of the gentry and the factory owners. The former had begun to see their latent power when gathering en masse, the latter recognising it too, cut them down. It was possibly the earliest set confrontation of its type signalling both the arrival of collective power and excessive violence. The first countryside protest movement gathered in London, Scotland, South Yorkshire and Tyneside. In October 1819 over 50,000 pitmen, keelmen, craftsmen, labourers and their families filled the streets of Gateshead, Newcastle and its Town Moor. At the latter the militia, hussars and Royal Navy were at hand, marshalled by the Home Office, the Admiralty and the Mayor - but thought better of attacking.

Throughout the nineteenth century there was an uneasy calm interrupted by great strikes and rulers' or owners' violence against miners (Northumberland and Durham 1832-3), iron workers (Merthyr, 1834),

and the Chartists (Newport 1839). After this, the working class was growing in size and confidence, and violence was largely replaced in a booming economy by the emergence of orderly trade unionism among skilled workers, the so-called 'aristocracy of labour.' Even in moments of dire crisis like that at the end of the War in 1919 and the 1926 General Strike, the violent option was held in check in a largely successful compromise with the labour leaders.

Up to the Second World War, then, your destiny was clearly marked. This was the rule. But there were a few exceptions. In D H Lawrence's autobiographical novel *Sons and Lovers* Paul Morel's mother was an outsider to the mining community, met his pitman Dad on a day trip to Skegness. Alienated from her husband and his values, Mrs Morel imbues her son with aspiration and pointed a way out, by her own sacrifice. Lawrence ended as one of the 20th century's greatest writers, despite the structural handicaps boarding him in. He had genius but he was of a type highlighted by other writers of the period: A J Cronin, Walter Greenwood, Richard Llewellyn and Arnold Bennett and in his own way, Jack Common with Kiddar, and a little later, Sid Chaplin. In this fiction, an unusually determined mother was an archetype. Alternatively, the proletarian father married a girl a notch up the social ladder usually in spite of parental opposition - a theme in Cronin's *The Stars Look Down*.

Ironically the common experience of miners', dockers', shipyard workers' daughters as house maids and skivvies in the 'Big House' or further afield could infect them with aspiration (see Catharine Cookson). In a few cases, for their sons this could translate into Paul Morel's route, if not to become a great writer, then a school teacher, or very occasionally a doctor. Methodism or Catholicism could also be 'a way out.' I put the word in inverted commas because in both these cases - minister and priest - the odds were on the boy coming back to the community from which he hailed or one much like it. John McCabe, the independent socialist councillor in Hebburn said a few years ago that he had almost gone to the priesthood. A bright boy at school, his mother and the parish priest both

encouraged him in that direction. Instead he went to the pit, then the tech and became a mining engineer - though this was in the late nineteen fifties and sixties. Overman, deputy and manager was another route for the bright, ambitious conformist. Similar trajectories were available in engineering and ship building. The very odd one could even become a proprietor himself. Sunderland's Robert Bartram's father started working life as a shipwright. Even Andrew Leslie of Hawthorn Leslie began work as a shipwright in North East Scotland. The first generation of railway engineers, such as George Stephenson and Timothy Hackett, had all been all skilled workmen.

Another route for the few was provided by the emergence and growth of the Durham Miners Association from the 1870s. A string of officials came out of generations of underground pitmen to become grey suited bureaucrats and Liberal and Labour politicians, conciliatory and comfortable in their impressive offices at Red Hills, on the benches of the House of Commons and House of Lords and welcome in the corridors of power. It was one-way traffic. There are no known examples in fact or fiction of posh recruits to the cavalier.¹ The misfit could choose emigration.

These are exceptional roads out of the day-to-day experience of class situation but what of that class situation itself? In coal mining in the North East the Durham System prevailed. Even after the ending of the Bond in 1872, pitmen and their families were bound by custom, habit and the cold hard logic of the need to eat.² 'On Friday I finished school,' said one fourteen year old, 'on Saturday morning I turned up at the pit office and on Monday morning at 5 o'clock I was down the pit being taught trapping.' The possibility of occupation elsewhere was minimal, custom savagely reinforced by the tied cottage.

Similarly, shipbuilding work was governed by family tradition, apprenticeship and exacting discipline. All occupations were subject to the capitalist boom-slump cycle, the troughs coming with roughly ten-year regularity from the early nineteenth century right up to the Second World War. The troughs brought determined attempts to cut wages and numbers

employed. Saving was well-nigh impossible unless it be for the burial club. State aid ranged from the non-existent to the minimal. The working environment was lethal especially in coal mining. Injury and premature death formed a normal part of existence. The roll call of major disasters can still chill the spine: Wallsend, 1835, 109 dead, New Hartley 1864, 204, Seaham 1880, 164, Trimdon Grange 1882, 74, Wellington 1910, 137, Whitehaven 1947, 104 and Easington 1951, 83. In three separate disasters between 1826 and 1830 100 men and boys died in Jarrow colliery. This needs to be set beside the murder of William Fairless the coal owner magistrate, the trial and execution of the pitman William Jobling (not the assailant) and the display of his corpse on Jarrow Slake in 1834 during the Great Strike. When Huw Benyon did his interviews for *Masters and Servants*, his history of the Durham Miners' Union, in the 1980s a dead miner could in living memory have been delivered to his front step in a wheel barrow covered with a piece of hessian.

In shipbuilding there was rarely large scale disaster but work in cramped, poorly lighted spaces for long hours was full of risk; serious falls, burns, damage to eyes and ears and chest disease from working in asbestos. In the 1920s, 100 men per day attended the ambulance station at Walker Naval yard. As late as the 1950s there were 40 fatalities per year in marine engineering. Labour was cheap and from many employers' perspective so were the lives of labourers. There was much resistance to first-aid provision and legislation concerning safety at work.

The North East was a focus for waves of inward migration, from the countryside, from Scotland, Cornwall and, of course Ireland. Andrew Leslie, the ship builder, brought to Hebburn Scots Protestant skilled men from the East Coast and Irish Catholics from Glasgow and Cork. Separated by skill, residence and faith they could produce cockpits of hatred and internal strife simultaneously frowned on and encouraged by employers

Yet in the bleakest hours working men and women built an intricate web of mutuality through the Union, the Co-op, the Co-op Women's Guild, the Friendly Society, the working men's club, Methodist and Catholic

societies, festivals (The Big Meeting from 1883, The Northumberland Miners Picnic from 1854) and the great amateur football teams from North West Durham: Bishop Auckland, Crook Town, West Auckland, Willington on their way to Wembley. Then then there was the ILP, the Labour Party and the Communist Party. These were defensive barricades, the creation of autonomous worlds beyond the owners, though not necessarily beyond their influence.

Tyne and Wear Archives hold the records of the Gloucester Road Branch of the Co-op Women's Guild (1925-1962). It covered a small area of about 10 streets. The subscription book suggests that about one in five households was represented and perhaps one in five of them regularly attended. Apart from fostering good fellowship, participating in political life and having fun, the Guild was effectively a community controlled social service.

However, the sharp contrast of employers and workers does not entirely capture the complexities of their world. There were those who did not fit these categories: small shopkeepers, clerks, national and local government officials, police officers and armed servicemen, clergy, teachers, accountants and attorneys. With some exceptions such groups largely serviced the interests of the elites. They were marked by incomes and job security above labourers, by dress, residence and religious observance. In Newcastle for example the districts of Jesmond and Gosforth from the late nineteenth century were largely developed to house them. Here the fashions and practices of the gentry were aped including the employment of domestic servants.

Despite the huge concentrations of industrial workers on Tyne, Wear and Tees, the largest numbers of working people by the end of the nineteenth century still worked on the land. Most rural workers were landless labourers though small farmers and smallholders survived in substantial numbers particularly in upland regions. The landless had a very visible employer, the landed gentleman, or the farmer who exploited their labour and protected 'their' property, the fruits of the land with game-

keepers and friendly magistrates.

There was a degree of permeability. An abstemious or victimised pitman might become a small shop-keeper or by intelligence, drive or just good luck a viewer or colliery manager. A shipwright's son might become a policeman or a clerk. A county scholarship, after the 1902 Secondary Education Act was an aim achieved by a tiny number. Then there was migration. Drove of north-easterners, especially in times of recession, took passages to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and America. Though there could be downward mobility from the middling groups, from the elites that was quite rare. Insurance policies like the army, the navy, the church or colonial administration could protect young men from social disaster.

Just over twenty years ago I returned to the North East after working away for over thirty years. I left an area in the mid-sixties dotted with coal mines, though the rundown had begun. There were still pits up the Tyne and Derwent Valleys, a cluster up the Northumberland Coast, in Weardale and Teesdale, as well as a rash of some fifty in north and east Durham including a dozen giant mines round Sunderland and South Shields with over 1500 workers each. The major shipyards were still functioning on the Tyne and the Wear, and heavy engineering still flourished at Vickers Armstrongs in Scotswood and Elswick, at C A Parsons on Shields Road and in a score of lesser plants. Consett Iron Works was operating at near capacity and there was an extensive railway system carrying goods—not least coal. The dock facilities at Sunderland, Shields and Newcastle were hives of activity. On Teesside ICI was at its peak and great steel works dominated Lackenby and Redcar. Though in most cases there were signs of retrenchment the working population would have been incredulous at the notion that thirty years later, inside a single working life, virtually all would be gone.

This industrial transition raises some important questions about class today. Who are the Vane-Tempest-Stewarts and Bartrams and what is

the working class today? In 1978 the Benwell Community Development Project published a report, *The Making of a Ruling Class* which documented in great detail the ownership of Tyneside industry from the late eighteenth century to the 1970s. They listed some eighteen families, interlinked by marriage, who had dominated industry for two hundred years. By the 1970s, the authors showed, the families were gradually shifting from manufacturing and extractive to finance capital and from the local and national to the international. Today many of their country estates remain in family hands, but only a tiny number of them are still engaged in the businesses which had created their immense wealth.

Nationalisation in 1947 had brought to an end the rule of the old coal owners, though their cousins in ship building and engineering survived for a while longer. The old guard did handsomely from compensation, while the pitmen predictably got none for their exploitation. The owners' relatives turned up on the NCB regional boards but those boards became largely the preserve of an alliance of mining engineers (managers), accountants and former union officials. If they did not wield authority with the chutzpah of their gentlemen predecessors, they made no mistake about their intention to rule. However, their objectives were checked by full employment, recently introduced pro-mineworker legislation, the ambiguities of government fuel policy and union power.

By the 1950s the names Armstrongs, Palmers, Hawthorn Leslie, Bartram, Dorman Long, over yards and works, survived but mergers and buyouts were usually masking management boards of an emerging professional cadre. Aided by new communications technologies, they were often geographically removed from the work spaces; even abroad in the USA, Sweden, France, Germany then later, India and Japan. Occasionally in moments of dispute a director might turn up, but ownership was frequently dispersed and anonymous.

During this post-war transition the organised working class prospered for three decades. Trade unions were strong numerically and recognised throughout industry though not necessarily welcomed. In key sectors they

were formidable players at regional and government level. However from 1980 onwards their power, influence and membership was eroded and the organisations declined. By the end of the twentieth century the key industries were gone or emasculated, the result of a mixture of trends in the global economy and deeply hostile political policy.

Until recently I did historical commentaries on boat trips on the River Tyne. The only commercially active part of the river today is the area round Tyne Dock where on one side of the river continental ferries arrive and on the other there are bulk carriers and container ships. Once I noticed a ship load of containers being docked marked K-Line which I found stood for Kawasaki. The boat was called *Helix Bridge*. A day later, I saw a K-Line container in the truck park by the Killingworth Shopping Mall. Its contents from the Far East were soon on hangers in the Matalan super store. This story forms a partial microcosm of Britain's current situation. Hardly a textile or clothing industry left, mountains of goods made in Shanghai's cheap labour export zone are carried across the world in containers by gas guzzling tankers, unloaded at container terminals, re-loaded on gas guzzling trucks and distributed across the country's roads to super stores staffed by part-time employees.

It is remarkable that the region has not experienced mass unemployment. There have been pockets of high unemployment in some former mining villages and more widespread among the young, but for some time the bleak situation was disguised by redundancy packages and work-based pensions negotiated by unions during the years of economic stability. There was also a step up in part-time employment to supplement benefits and a vast increase in women entering the labour force, part-time or full-time. Such factors helped to maintain some degree of social stability at least until the financial crisis of 2008 and the intensifying of austerity policies.

Some manufacturing industries did come into the region, the biggest being Nissan at Sunderland and Komatsu at Birtley employing several thousand workers each, with networks of subsidiaries. The region also got a substantial share of new high-tech industries and the new call centres

recruited in thousands. There was also an expansion of public sector employment in health and education; the NHS and the Universities becoming the largest employers in the region. Across the region several large shopping malls appeared from the 1980s producing thousands of jobs predominantly part-time. There was also a proliferation of fast-food outlets and coffee bars many owned by international capitalists.

Altogether there may even be more jobs numerically than there were in the post-war period, but the question is, what does the worker today have in common with his or her parents or grandparents who were indisputably working-class? Can today's workers be considered a class? Beyond the few large enterprises, manufacturing outfits are small and trade unions weak or non-existent in many sectors. Rail and bus operators continue to employ large numbers as does Newcastle Airport, and in these cases trade union density is high and the threat to disrupt service ever present. It is in the public sector where the organised and organising tradition is strongest. Previously groups who were previously relatively passive, like university teachers and junior doctors have struck to resist employer violations of contracts. Even fast-food workers, despite the small numbers in each outlet and zero hours contracts have turned to union membership.

Since capitalism emerged there has always been an unskilled labour force working in unsafe and poorly protected environments subject to arbitrary treatment by employers and discriminated against by gender, ethnicity and low educational opportunities. In this region historically, though numerous they were relatively invisible. Today, we meet them at check-outs in supermarkets and superstores, in fast food joints, as cleaners in office blocks and airports, driving vans or riding bikes for delivery services and we hear them when we ring call centres and just out of site in kitchens and distribution hubs. They are characterised by low wages, long hours and zero hours contracts. They are generally non-unionised. Their work is usually short contract employment.

A little anecdote serves to take us into this sphere. In the late summer of 2016 I had the chance of a half-hour discussion with two delivery workers

at our house. Steve and Billy were both in their late forties. Billy's family had come to Durham from Dunfermline, Fife when the pit there closed in the early 1980s. His dad had worked at Monkwearmouth Colliery briefly and then for the Council in Sunderland Parks. Billy himself had gone down the pit when he left school in 1982 along with most lads in his class. He never went back down the pit after the Miners' Strike, and had done a variety of jobs, at least twenty since leaving school. He had worked for his current employers for five years, the longest in any job.

Steve had had fewer jobs than Billy, about ten including a long stretch for the Council after school. He'd also been in his present job for five years. Neither were currently in a union though both had been members along the way. Billy was dismissive of unions, blaming the NUM for the strike's failure. Steve was less dismissive thinking it would be better to be in one.

Some of this account is borne out by a study of over 2000 workers made redundant by Swan Hunters in 1992 provides a slightly different flavour. A questionnaire organised by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Workers Unions had a 75% response. In a two-year period after losing their jobs, only 15% of workers had no work at all, while most had done multiple jobs. One man had nine in two years including taxi driving, pub management, selling videos and financial advising. All were much worse off financially and much less secure. Unlike Steve and Billy, a large proportion of the Swan's work force was skilled with considerable technical expertise. Those who found comparable jobs using their skills were dispersed across the country and even to the Middle East. Loss of local roots was a major complaint with these workers. The break-up of a complex skills network was to cause long term damage to the prospect of attracting new investment. It all played a part in diminishing the cohesion of the working population.

Steve and Billy lived on housing estates in Houghton-le-Spring. Billy was married with four children. His wife and one daughter worked at Morrison's supermarket, another, as a hairdresser and one boy in his early twenties has never had a job. Billy knew little of his neighbours in the

street. One man drove daily to a job at Teesport, and another was a school caretaker. There was at least one taxi driver and one worked at Nissan. One of Steve's neighbours was a window cleaner. Both thought there were several neighbours living on benefits. My overall impression was that neither felt much connection with other families in the street. Steve always voted, and always voted Labour but Billy said he had not voted for twenty years. It was a waste of time, but he did vote Leave in the Referendum, while Steve had voted Remain.

So many signifiers of working class experience in the North East have disappeared but one thing creates continuity within and over generations - the experience of exploitation. Men and women go to work daily expending their power to labour but never realising the full value of that effort. Such rewards and protections as they have in that process – wages, hours worked, conditions at work, compensations for injury, pensions, free health care and education are the result of past or present contests over the share of their labour power.

From the shipyard sail-maker in the 1820s to the Deliveroo cyclist, capitalists have sought to organise the labour process to maximise profits. In each stage of development working people have been obliged to find fresh means to resist. Knowledge of how to resist was accumulated over time and passed on and modified. New developments in technology and organisation proved new challenges. Recently *Forbes Magazine*, the leading business magazine, recently wrote of 3D printers:

You can get high-performance, light-weighting, and complexity that is impossible with traditional design and manufacturing processes.... If your car needs a repair, you'll soon be able to purchase a shift knob or fuel-door hinge pin that was quickly and inexpensively printed. Aerospace engineers will use the same technology to produce jigs and fixtures for spacecrafts.... There are fully automated, multi-station direct-metal printers that are essentially an entire

factory in a box. With automated parts changes and material replenishment, they can literally operate around the clock.

Where will the workers be? We may be able to see them in a van or on a bike, supervising the workshop, or as today in the school or the hospital, with fewer in the latter as the computer hoards knowledge and the robot conducts surgery. The disguised employing class is even more difficult to locate or recognise. He, she or it appears to be an app, as a Deliveroo cyclist said in a recent BBC interview. It is capitalism in the Cloud. Yet, even there with the odds so great against collective responses, recruitment to a union is rapid. Challenges in court have already happened. An employer's representative descended from the Cloud makes clear that human agency exists though not necessarily in the same geographical space as, in this case the Deliveroo operative.

We have surveyed some of the main features of class society in the North East of England over two centuries. In successive periods there have been differences and similarities. In the first phase the differences between classes seemed sharp and perhaps obvious. In the second phase the employing class became more opaque and distant; the working class more coherent. In the third the employing class is becoming almost invisible, and the working class less organised and dispersed. The unifying feature across time has been exploitation, a state which still leads to conflict expressed by the withdrawal of labour in the work situation and politically at the ballot box. The pace of technical change produces a landscape of uncertainty.

Notes

- ¹ Cavil - A working area in the pit which has been drawn for by lots
- ² The Bond – a binding contract for a year between coal owner and pitmen which ended in 1872.
- ³ Sport played a large part in working class communities. In addition to amateur football, handicap foot races, greyhound racing and rowing were very popular.

north east history

‘This Fortress of Freedom’: A Study of Chartism in Gateshead

Joel Wootten

Introduction

Chartism in the North East has been little studied by historians of the movement. D.J Rowe and William Henry Maehl wrote a number of articles in the 1970s on the region, but these focus almost exclusively on Newcastle and struggle to look beyond the violent nature of the early movement on Tyneside.¹ Keith Wilson has contributed significantly to the study of Chartism in Sunderland and, in more recent years, Mike Greatbatch has created an invaluable insight into the movement in Ouseburn.² However, no studies have been undertaken on Gateshead.

This essay challenges those works on Tyneside Chartism that see Gateshead as a satellite of Newcastle or a novel example of ‘physical force’ Chartism during 1839. It will show that there was a strong and distinct movement in Gateshead from the outset that persisted during the 1840s. Asa Briggs asserted that a ‘study of Chartism must begin with a proper appreciation of regional and local diversity’.³ However, such local studies too often portray Chartism as a distress movement – a straightforward cry of the oppressed against the hardship of the so-called ‘hungry forties’.⁴ This study will show how the Gateshead movement was part of a strong radical tradition and was deeply affected by the policies of the reformed Parliament after 1832. The legacy of Chartism in Gateshead illustrates how activists involved in subsequent political movements took into these campaigns values that they forged in their Chartist phase.

A Survey of Gateshead Chartism

To understand why Chartism emerged in Gateshead, we must extend our chronology backwards. Chartism was part of a radical tradition in the town that can be traced back to 1819. Notably, Gateshead played a leading role in the demonstrations that followed the massacre at Peterloo. On 11 October 1819, 80,000 demonstrators filled the parade ground of Percy Street, Newcastle. Despite the demonstration taking place north of the river, it was the Gateshead radicals who caused the most alarm. This is evident through the mayor's correspondence with the Home Secretary, Viscount Sidmouth: 'It is impossible to contemplate the meeting of the 11 inst. without awe. More especially... that 700 of them were prepared to with arms (concealed) to resist civil power'.⁵ The 700 men the mayor refers to were from the village of Winlaton, a Gateshead village that was to play a pivotal role in the town's Chartist movement.

Gateshead also featured prominently during the Reform Agitation of 1831-32.⁶ The agitation in Gateshead was distinct from Newcastle's. Gateshead had its own Reform Association whose meetings were heavily attended.⁷ Gateshead's commitment to reform is further evident in the conspicuous role of a group from Gateshead in a demonstration in 1831 in which they carried weapons and applied them 'unmercifully to the heads and shoulders of such anti-reformers as were pointed out to them'.⁸ When a new movement for reform emerged in the late 1830s, it is unsurprising that we find the radicals of Gateshead speaking and acting in its favour.

The working class of Gateshead felt a deep sense of betrayal when little came of the Reform Act of 1832 but a series of oppressive policies, and Gateshead's Chartists directly rooted their support for the Charter in the betrayals of 1832. This is evident in an address at the Felling Democratic Festival by John Rucastle in 1839:

When the treacherous Whigs were struggling to get into office, they promised to redress the grievances of the working men. Had they done so? (No, no) No; they could stifle, with

marital law, the groans of unhappy Ireland,they could transport the Dorchester labourers; they could pass a law to famish poverty and old age in union bastilles; but they could pass no one measure for the good of the people, upon whose shoulders they were borne into office. (Loud cheers). They had a long account to settle with both Whigs and Tories, and how was that account to be properly settled? Why, by supporting the Convention (Loud cries of “hear, hear”)⁹

The stifling of ‘unhappy Ireland’ is a reference to the Irish Coercion Bill of 1833. This included powers that could suppress even the most moderate political activity.¹⁰ There was a clear sense that if this could happen in Ireland, then it could happen in England. Rucastle’s speech indicates that the people of Gateshead realised the only way to prevent this was to gain political representation. Rucastle’s mention of the Dorchester Labourers is a reference to the Whig’s suppression of trade union activity during the 1830s. In this case, six labourers were convicted for illegally organising into a union.¹¹ The event sparked widespread criticism from radicals across the country and, as was the case in Gateshead, it was used as a prime example of why universal suffrage was necessary. The ‘law to famish poverty and old age in union bastilles’ refers to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. This Act proposed to abolish outdoor relief for the able-bodied poor, who were to be forced to find work or face the alternative of the workhouse.¹² The Act served as another reminder of how the ‘reformed parliament’ that was supposed to represent them was now oppressing the industrious poor in the harshest manner.

Gateshead’s Working Men’s Association was formed as early as 1837, and from the outset it was distinct from Newcastle. This is clear from a report of a meeting held in the town to discuss the issue of universal suffrage, when objections were voiced at the presence of speakers from Newcastle.³

By the late summer of 1838, the People’s Charter and the National Petition had been published and at a meeting in Winlaton in September

1838, the chairman declared, 'this meeting, approving the principles contained in the national petition and people's charter... pledge themselves to use all possible means to give speedy and full effect to those just and right principles'.¹⁴

In early 1839, Chartist leaders had met in London at the first National Convention. As the Convention sat, there was strong support and optimism amongst the Chartists of Gateshead. At a meeting 'crowded to inconvenience' in Felling, local Chartist William Cook raised a toast to 'the Convention, and may they go on zealously and perseveringly till Universal Suffrage becomes the law of the land'.¹⁵ The toast was received with loud cheers. The measures that Gateshead's Chartists took most seriously were the proposed 'Sacred Month' (a general strike) and the call to take up arms. Existing historiography does briefly mention the 'physical force' nature of Gateshead Chartism in 1839 and this interpretation is certainly not without foundation.¹⁶ Notably, Gateshead's delegate to the Convention was London Chartist, George Julian Harney. As will be shown later, Harney was incredibly popular in Gateshead, and was a staunch advocate of 'physical force', with his rhetoric often being so extreme that many contemporaries regarded him as an *agent provocateur*.¹⁷

As the proposed 'Sacred Month' of strike action approached, the Gateshead Chartists were becoming increasingly disruptive and militant. There was widespread manufacturing of arms at Winlaton by the radical iron workers known as 'Crowley's Crew' and in Heworth, William Cook called for the people to 'arm themselves in their own defence'. One local man, Jacob Robinson, was arrested on the 15 July and, upon being searched, two pike heads were found on his person, each measuring eighteen inches in length.¹⁸ The authorities evidently viewed this situation with alarm. For example, on 22 July the mayor, John Barras, stated that due to the 'highly excited state of the public mind in this borough and its environs' it was necessary 'to make a considerable temporary addition to the police force of the borough'. This consisted of sixteen additional policemen who had special instructions to apprehend anyone seen disrupting the peace.¹⁹

The situation escalated when reports reached authorities that people had been seen carrying out military exercises. In response, a notice was issued warning persons who had been conducting military training and exercises that they were liable to imprisonment or transportation and, called for assistance in their apprehension.⁰ There is an undeniable militancy that does reinforce Rowe's assessment that Gateshead's role in the movement was violent in character.²¹

When the 'Sacred Month' failed, plans were made nationally for armed uprisings. These plans only came into fruition in Newport, South Wales where John Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones led an attack in which twenty-four people were killed.²² In the aftermath of Newport and the arrest of the rising's leaders, plans were made in several localities for a January uprising, including Winlaton whose inhabitants played a conspicuous role.

Winlaton

Chartism in Winlaton was far more than simply 'physical force', and was better organised than has previously been assumed. From 1837 there was a Working Men's Association in the village and from the outset, the group were in contact with other organisations around the country. For example, they were vocal in condemning the conviction of the Glasgow Cotton Spinners²³ As was the case nationally, Chartism in Winlaton was complex. It often condoned direct action but it was also organised and in correspondence with more moderate groups. This complicated picture offers a convincing alternative to the depiction of Winlaton as nothing but a hotbed of physical force.

At a meeting in 1838, one speaker declared that he was 'excessively pleased to see so many of the fair women of Winlaton around him. He would rather hear the women ask for Universal Suffrage than even the men. (Hear, hear)'.²⁴ This impressive show of female attendance highlights women's active role in the movement. However, arguably a more interesting factor is the high esteem in which the men held the women. The men

acknowledged the women as equals rather than subordinates and regarded them as leaders rather than auxiliaries. Further evidence of this can be found at the 'Grand Radical Tea Party' held in the village in December 1839. The meeting was attended by George Julian Harney who offered a toast to 'the health and happiness of the cannie Lasses of Winlaton'.²⁵ Another significant element of Chartism in Winlaton was its unique relationship with one of the movement's most important figures, George Julian Harney. Harney was popular in Newcastle and was appointed delegate to the Convention in the town in December 1838.²⁶ However, it was in Gateshead and in Winlaton specifically where Harney felt truly at home. Harney visited the village on many occasions, clearly viewing the movement there as unique. In 1839, he addressed a crowd from this 'fortress of freedom' for over an hour and a half.²⁷

The New Move

In 1840, the National Charter Association (NCA) was launched and local Chartist and Working Men's Associations were drawn into it. Significantly, Gateshead had its own branch of the NCA that met at the house of shoemaker, Mr J. Young at Oakwellgate. At their inaugural meeting, there was 'upwards of twenty members formed into four classes'.²⁸

Another national initiative in the early 1840s was the New Move, an attempt within Chartism to emphasise teetotalism, religion and education. Gateshead's reaction to the New Move was to adopt some of its emphasis on education, through 'Knowledge Chartism'. Whilst in Warwick gaol, Chartist leaders William Lovett and John Collins wrote how education of the Chartist would allow him to 'be the better able to withstand social taint, and political corruption, and will, by his laudable example and energy, be advancing the welfare of society, while he is promoting his own'.²⁹ In Gateshead the Chartists established a reading room in the winter of 1840 and the *Northern Liberator* reported that a reading room was opened in the NCA meeting-house every Saturday morning. By June the following year, the room found a more permanent home in a building opposite the *Flying*

Horse in Oakwellgate. The *Northern Star* reported that:

There has been a debating society held here for the last month, which will be of great benefit to the working classes, as any person is allowed to take part in the discussion, whether he be a member of the Association or not.

The question for discussion at present is the Corn Laws; so that anyone who is wishful to gain a knowledge of them, has an excellent opportunity.....

The room is open for reading all the rest of the week.³⁰

The promotion of reading rooms as a space to develop debating skills and learn about wider issues such as the Corn Laws demonstrates how there was a clear intellectual thrust behind the movement.

The simultaneous support of mainstream Chartism and the embrace of some aspects of the New Move was not at all unusual. A similar situation emerged in Teesside. Like Gateshead, the Middlesbrough Chartists were staunch supporters of O'Connor and the NCA, yet also placed great emphasis on education. They even used their reading room to attack the New Move, urging local Chartists 'not to be led away by any new move...and as far as the Chartists of Middlesbro' are concerned they are determined to struggle for the Charter and nothing less'.³¹

1842 was the year of the second petition to Parliament, and it began with great enthusiasm in Gateshead. Evidence of activism can be found in the debate surrounding Joseph Sturge and his Complete Suffrage Union (CSU). The CSU was established by former minister Edward Miall and Joseph Sturge, a Quaker grain-importer and anti-slavery campaigner.³² It aimed to gain the support of all 'who are friendly to a reconciliation between the working classes and those that move in a sphere above them'. However, when Sturge made it clear that success meant the Chartists would have to be brought under their movement, it was seen by many, including O'Connor, as callous disregard for the political integrity of Chartism.

James Williams, the head of the Sunderland Chartist movement, stated he was 'surprised and astonished' at the extent of O'Connor's attacks on Sturge.³³ Williams believed that a movement that united Whig reformers and Chartists without giving up any points of the Charter should be given serious attention.³⁴ In Newcastle there was also support for a middle-class alliance. Here Robert Lowery was a supporter of Lovett's 'New Move' and later described it as 'one of the most comprehensive and practical plans for elevating the working men which has yet been offered'.³⁵ In 1842 Lowery signed Sturge's declaration and told a hostile O'Connorite crowd 'he would rather cut off his hand than retract his signature'.³⁶ Clearly, there were elements in the Newcastle movement that saw weaknesses in Chartism under O'Connor, and therefore sought a middle-class alliance.

The contrast with Gateshead could not be starker. A meeting was held in April to discuss the possibility of merging with the CSU. A local Chartist, Charles Cross began proceedings by declaring that:

The [CSU] conference was composed of persons who were little known to their fellow countrymen, except as their oppressors. No doubt there were some honest men in the Conference, but the object of the movement was to create division – to sow division in the ranks of the people. Let Mr Sturge and his followers join the associations of the people and combine with O'Connor, O'Brien, and other true friends to the popular cause. The working classes rejected the alliance of men who would merely use them for selfish purposes.³⁷

There was a clear consensus at the Gateshead meeting that the middle-class were to be treated with suspicion and that the CSU should combine with the Chartist movement rather than the other way around. This consensus was obvious in the remarks of Mr Sinclair, the sub-Secretary, who stated:

We know them only as enemies. Let us have good proof of their real friendship before we put any reliance in them. If they, the middle classes, are actuated by honest motives, let them join the National Charter Association. I, as sub-Secretary have brought the book here for that purpose ... but none of the drones joined; they were not prepared to go that length.³⁸

The speech illustrates the extent to which the Gateshead Chartists were unwilling to budge. The meeting was even attended by Williams of Sunderland who made a conciliatory speech which was 'well received although some showed some slight marks of disapprobation'. After Williams had finished speaking, 'three cheers were then given for the Charter, three for Mr O'Connor and three for Frost, Williams and Jones, and the meeting separated'.³⁹ This clear rejection of middle-class cooperation by the Gateshead Chartists highlights their unwavering support for the principles of Chartism, the movement's leadership and its martyrs.

Gateshead's reluctance to support Sturge was rooted in their deeply ingrained distrust of the middle-class. Wilson attributes Sunderland's support for the CSU to the 'peculiar nature of class relationships' in the town.⁴⁰ However, as this meeting demonstrates, no such relationship existed in Gateshead.

The 'doldrum years'

The years 1843-45 have been described by Chase as the 'doldrum years' of the Chartist movement as frustration grew out of the failure of the second petition and the movement's leadership fragmented.⁴¹ The situation in the North East matched the rather bleak national picture. On a visit to Sunderland in late 1843, Harney found the town's movement 'had received a terrible shock' and 'the meeting was but thin'.⁴² Similarly, on Teesside, the Chartist press did not report one single piece of activity in the area through

1844-45.⁴³ However, in Gateshead we find a very different picture. In the same trip to the North East in which Harney described a dire situation in Sunderland, he happily reported that his meeting in Winlaton 'was a very enthusiastic one and was closed with the usual democratic cheers'.⁴⁴ Moreover, it was during these 'doldrum years' that Gateshead's Chartists make serious inroads in local government, when a Chartist was elected to a municipal position to help push for radical reform.

As well as remaining active during these doldrum years, Gateshead's Chartists supported O'Connor's Chartist Land Plan, a scheme aimed at resettling workers on estates by collecting subscriptions for a place in regular ballots for allotments of land.

The Land Plan had a huge impact on revitalising the Chartist movement and in Gateshead although interest in the scheme was initially slow, by the time the scheme reached its peak in 1847, regular contributions were being made, averaging £14. This is an impressive amount, especially when compared to Newcastle. This larger and supposedly more active locality averaged £17 in contributions in 1847.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Land Plan was able to sustain Gateshead's status as a popular destination for the movement's leaders. Notably, Peter McDouall visited the borough in June 1847 where he happily reported to the *Northern Star* that in Winlaton and North Shields 'excellent branches have been formed'.⁴⁶ As was the case nationally, the scheme's emphasis on dignity, independence and self-determination resonated deeply with the Chartists of Gateshead. This is not surprising when we look at the occupations of the towns Chartists. The iron workers of Winlaton, who alone contributed £20 to the Land Company in the third quarter of 1847, had long prided themselves on what one contemporary called 'individual freedom and a spirit of bold independence', despite their trade being in steady decline.⁴⁷

The Gateshead Chartists' Legacy

By 1849, the Chartist Land Plan was in a poor state and by 1850 Chartism in Gateshead was in decline. However, as one contemporary asserted

in relation to Gateshead, the Chartist principles did not die with the organization. These ideas had taken too firm a hold on the popular mind, and there were still many faithful believers in the 'six points' as the only remedy for their social miseries – men who had ceased to believe in the old way of agitating for the charter, but who still held by it as their political confession of faith.⁴⁸

Gateshead's Chartists were active in local politics during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, when they took into these movements the principles that had taken such a strong hold on them during their Chartist phase. They were no less committed to the principles of Chartism, but they simply pursued new avenues in order to obtain their demands. This was most apparent through Gateshead's role in Joseph Cowen's Northern Reform Union (NRU). The NRU was launched in January 1858 to demand manhood suffrage, vote by the ballot and the abolition of the property qualification.⁴⁹ These were amongst the demands of the Charter, and so it was hardly surprising that former Chartists such as William Cook, who became president of the organisation in 1859, Edward Summerside and John Oxberry should become members.⁵⁰

Summerside had played a prominent role in the Winlaton Chartist movement and whilst there is no explicit mention of Oxberry in the Chartist movement he named his child after one of the movement's most prominent leaders, Ernest Jones.⁵¹

William Cook was a Gateshead publican who owned The Blue Bell Inn at Oakwellgate and who first came to notice as chair of a meeting at the Felling Democratic Festival in March 1839, a month after the National Convention's first meeting in London.

In May 1840, Cook attended a Newcastle meeting concerning Britain's foreign policy. The meeting proposed a petition to Parliament that strongly criticised the government for creating 'disastrous complications' abroad. Significantly, Cook requested that a rider be attached to the petition that read 'this disastrous state of affairs could never had existed had the people of England been represented in the House of Commons'. This is

compelling evidence that Cook's support for Chartism cannot be seen as solely 'physical force'.

The activities of William Cook also illustrates how former Chartists sought to further their beliefs through elections to local and municipal bodies in the 1840s.

In 1844 he stood as a town councillor, an event deemed significant enough to warrant a column in the *Northern Star*:

We are happy to learn that Mr. William Cook, of the Blue Bell Inn, Gateshead intends to come forward as a candidate for the office of Town Councillor in that borough. We hope he will succeed; and that the Chartists of every other borough in Britain, will use their every effort to return as many Chartists as possible, at the forthcoming municipal elections.⁵²

Two years later, Cook was elected as a Poor Law Guardian. This was a position that facilitated the implementation of the New Poor Law after 1836 and thus Chartist attempts at winning the position were a means of minimising the effects of the Act. Importantly, Cook's radical presence on the Gateshead Board of Guardians did have an impact. For example, the petition the Board presented to Parliament in 1845 contained the radical notion that the working-class had 'in exchange for their labour the inalienable right to existence from the land to which gave them birth.'⁵³ This is an important example of how the Chartists of Gateshead successfully infiltrated local government in order to push a radical agenda. The fact that a Gateshead Chartist was elected to such a position shows that they were clearly concerned about the implementation of the law and, in turn, successfully obtained municipal positions that would reduce the Poor Law's impact.

William Cook's career also illustrates how Chartism and radical Liberalism could find common ground. When Cook retired from Gateshead Council in 1856 a dinner was held in his honour. Among those who attended was Cowen, who said he was glad to have an opportunity

of showing his respect to Mr Cook, in whom he had ‘invariably found a sterling advocate of all that was right’.⁵⁴ Just three years later, we find Cook as president of Cowen’s Northern Reform Union.⁵⁵

The situation in Gateshead fits the national picture as many local Chartist leaders became active in municipal politics. Notably, former Chartists were heavily involved in the movement for the Second Reform Act in the 1860s.⁵⁶

In February 1858, the NRU presented a petition to Parliament for manhood suffrage and the vote by the ballot. Of the 34,456 signatures collected, 4,896 came from Gateshead.⁵⁷ As the aforementioned local commentator observed, the principles of Chartism had ‘taken too firm a hold on the popular mind’ and many in Gateshead still held the Charter as their ‘political confession of faith’.⁵⁸ Far from fading away in 1839, the principles of Chartism in Gateshead outlasted even the movement itself.

Conclusion

By extending the chronology backwards, it is clear that Chartism was part of a long radical tradition in Gateshead. Far from being a response to local trade-cycles, the growth of Chartism in Gateshead was precipitated by the 1832 Reform Act and the subsequent oppressive policies of the Whig government.

Support in Gateshead was by no means confined to the early years of Chartism nor was it solely an expression of ‘physical force’. This view that Gateshead Chartism was redundant after 1839 and thereafter became absorbed into the Newcastle movement can no longer be held. Looking beyond 1839, we can gain a far more nuanced understanding of the towns movement. Whilst Chartism stagnated in other localities during the mid-1840s, Gateshead’s Chartists remained active. It was during these ‘doldrum years’ that a Chartist was elected to local government. Gateshead’s support for the Land Plan was also significantly greater and longer lasting than in Newcastle or Sunderland, further demonstrating the strength and distinctiveness of the movement in Gateshead.

When new liberal movements emerged in the third quarter of the nineteenth-century, advocating objectives similar to those of the Chartists, it was natural for people like William Cook to join with them. The prominent role played by Cook and other Chartists illustrates that support for the principles of Chartism endured long after the formal organisation faded away.

Notes

- ¹ D. J. Rowe, 'Some Aspects of Chartism on Tyneside', *International Review of Social History*, 16.1 (1971); William Henry Maehl, 'The Dynamics of Violence in Chartism: A Case Study in Northeastern England' *Albion*, 7.2 (1975), pp. 101-119.
- ² Keith Wilson, 'Chartism in Sunderland', *North East Labour History Bulletin (NELHB)*, 16 (1982); Mike Greatbatch, 'Politics in the Piggery: Chartism in Ouseburn, 1838-1848', *North East History*, 44, (2013), pp. 33-59.
- ³ Asa Briggs, in *Chartist Studies*, ed. by Asa Briggs, (London: Macmillan Press, 1959), p. 2.
- ⁴ Donald Read, 'Chartism in Manchester', in Briggs, p. 31.
- ⁵ Anon., 'Crowley's Crew' in *The Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend*, Vol. 2, No. 13 (March 1888), p. 100.
- ⁶ Ian Hunter, 'Tyneside and the Reform Act of 1832', *NELHB* 16, (1982), p. 11.
- ⁷ *Newcastle Courant*, Saturday 19 March, 1831, p. 2.
- ⁸ *Morning Post*, 8 November, 1831, p. 2.
- ⁹ *Northern Liberator*, 30 March, 1839, p. 4.
- ¹⁰ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 18.
- ¹¹ James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson, eds. *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 158.
- ¹² Edward Royle, *Chartism*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 15.
- ¹³ *Northern Liberator*, 9 December, 1837, p. 2
- ¹⁴ As above, 22 September, 1838, p. 3.
- ¹⁵ As above, 30 March, 1839, p. 4.
- ¹⁶ Rowe, p. 28.
- ¹⁷ A. R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge: A Portrait of George Julian Harney* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 30.
- ¹⁸ Gateshead Central Library, William Brockie Papers (WBP), pp. 13 and 16.
- ¹⁹ Public Record Office (PRO), Home Office Papers, HO 40/42/339, 22 July, 1839.
- ²⁰ PRO, HO 40/42/337, 27 July, 1839.
- ²¹ Rowe, p. 28.

- 22 Thompson, p. 79.
- 23 *The Weekly True Sun*, 22 October, 1837.
- 24 *Northern Liberator*, 22 September, 1838, p. 3.
- 25 As above, 7 December, 1839, p. 5.
- 26 Schoyen, p. 41.
- 27 *Northern Liberator*, 2 November, 1839, p. 5.
- 28 As above, 5 December, 1840, p. 4.
- 29 Document 25 'The New Move' in Royle, p. 114.
- 30 *Northern Star*, 5 June, 1841, p. 10.
- 31 Chase, 'Chartism, 1838–1858: Responses in Two Teesside Towns', *Northern History*, 24, 1, (1988), p. 159.
- 32 Alex Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London: Croom, 1987), p. 42.
- 33 Quoted in Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 195-6.
- 34 Keith Wilson, 'Whole Hogs' and 'Suckling Pigs': Chartism and the Complete Suffrage Union in Sunderland' in *Working Class Politics in the North East*, ed. by Maureen Callcott and Raymond Challinor (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic Products, 1983), p. 19.
- 35 Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis, 'Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery', *English Historical Review*, LXXXII (1967), p. 520.
- 36 *Northern Star*, 23 April, 1842.
- 37 As above, 16 April, 1842, p. 1.
- 38 As above, 23 April, 1842.
- 39 As above, p.1.
- 40 Wilson, "Whole Hogs" and "Suckling Pigs", p. 18
- 41 Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, p. 236.
- 42 *Northern Star*, 9 September, 1843, p. 17.
- 43 Chase, *Northern History*, 162.
- 44 *Northern Star*, 9 September, 1843, p. 17.
- 45 As above, 28 August, 1847, p. 5.
- 46 As above, 19 June, 1847, p. 9.
- 47 'Crowley's Crew', p. 100, and M. W. Flinn, *Men of Iron*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1962), p. 95.
- 48 *Northern Tribune*, Vol. I, 1854, p. 63.
- 49 Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside, 1829-1900* (Monmouth: Merlin, 2007), p. 45.
- 50 Minutes of the Northern Reform Union's Annual Meeting, 3 January 1859, and Council Members of the Northern Reform Union. Tyne and Wear Archive Service (TWAS), DF.COW/C/6.
- 51 'Children Named After Famous Chartists', *Chartist Ancestors Data Bank*, <http://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/>.

north east history

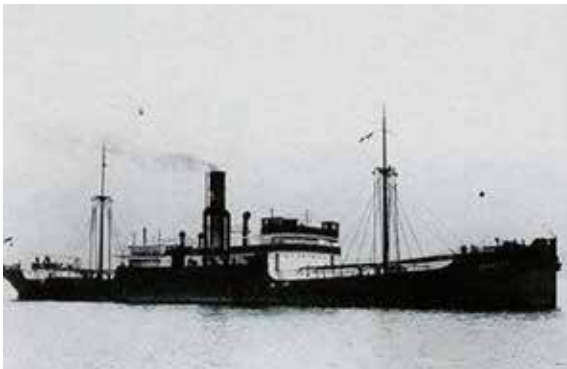
- ⁵² As above, 5 October, 1844, p. 1.
- ⁵³ ‘Gateshead Board of Guardians Minutes’, 2 February 1847. TWAS, T371.
- ⁵⁴ *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, November 10, 1855, p. 6.
- ⁵⁵ TWAS, DF.COW/C/6.
- ⁵⁶ Chase, ‘The Popular Movement for Parliamentary Reform in Provincial Britain during the 1860s’, *Parliamentary History*, 36:1, (2017), p. 17.
- ⁵⁷ ‘Petitions for Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot’, 28 February 1859. [TWAS, CP/C549]
- ⁵⁸ *Northern Tribune*, Vol. I, 1854, p. 63.

War, Welfare and Remembrance: A Case Study of two North Shields Ships

Tony Barrow



SS Euphorbia



SS Linaria

Recent years have witnessed numerous commemorative events associated with the centenary of the Great War and the Peace Treaties that followed it. Similar anniversaries of some of the major episodes of

World War Two have now begun to appear in the media, commemorating eighty years since the outbreak of that conflict. No doubt some of the surviving 'little ships' will celebrate their part in the 'Miracle of Dunkirk' although it is doubtful that any of 'The Last of the Few' will be able to take part in events recalling 'Britain's Finest Hour'. Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain naturally hold a special place in the national story, and are fundamental to British accounts of the Second World War. They represent part of a popular, received version of the past, but it is as well to remember they are the product of bias in its many forms - national, political or cultural - and historians are not immune to it.

The same is true of the debates surrounding the policies of the Attlee government after 1945. Nationalisation, the provision of social housing, and the foundation of the NHS usually dominate accounts of that government's achievement but as one recent biographer has suggested, '... some of the eulogies of the Attlee government are pointedly selective in what they celebrate...'.¹ In reality many contemporary activists, including Aneurin Bevan, were left frustrated by the limited and pragmatic character of some welfare reform, and the decision to revoke the rights that some workers had acquired under Bevin's directed labour schemes. Nevertheless, the notion that both World Wars were 'People's Wars' is well represented in historical literature and has encouraged popular engagement with remembrance at an individual and family level. The growth of genealogical websites, as well as local and community history, have undoubtedly facilitated research into the experience of 'ordinary' people and their contributions to the national story.

Eighty years on, there are now very few survivors with direct experience of World War Two, and their unique perspectives will inevitably be subsumed into more generalised accounts as the years pass. For the descendants of those who were killed or posted missing in 1940, anniversaries are likely to be less personal affairs, commemorated perhaps by medals, faded photographs or correspondence in family collections. For those who fought on land, or in the air, there was a good chance of burial

with or without identification. At least there was a way of knowing where a soldier's unit had been fighting or an airman's squadron had been operating on the day they were killed or went missing. For descendants of a merchant seaman, the death of a relative, often in unrecorded circumstances, was assumed rather than directly known. Initially the State treated them differently, because in 1939 merchant seamen were classed as civilian non-combatants, and their lives and working conditions were hidden from the view of the general public. Seafarers continued to be thought of as a race apart despite their vital contribution to Britain's war economy. They were, as one writer put it '... a third sort of person to be numbered with neither the living nor the dead: their lives hanging continually in suspense before them'.²

In October 1945, in response to a question about Merchant Navy casualties, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, said that it was believed that 30,198 deaths at sea was a direct result of hostilities, but acknowledged that 5,264 individuals were still listed as missing.³ Many of them, women as well as men were not commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, because their deaths could not be directly attributed to enemy action. Accordingly, the total number of Merchant Navy casualties is still not accurately known more than eighty years later, and there are no war cemeteries for one in four merchant seamen lost at sea during WW2.⁴

In August 1946, almost six years after Second Radio Officer John Alec Marston's ship was posted missing, his mother continued to be denied, to use a modern term, 'closure'.⁵ Her experience was mirrored by thousands of others whose sons were posted missing 'supposed drowned', during the Second World War. Alice Marston's son, together with 33 other members of the crew, lost his life when the *SS Euphorbia* was torpedoed by a U-boat west of Rockall on 14 December 1940. Her crew became another statistic of the second year of the Battle of the Atlantic and their names are commemorated on the Merchant Navy Memorial on Tower Hill in London.

Euphorbia was a typical 'Tyneside Tramp', and together with her sister ship *Linaria* was built by the Sunderland Shipbuilding Company for the

Stag Line of North Shields and completed in 1924. They were coal-burning steamers, with a single tall funnel and centrally built superstructure. Their traditional, triple expansion steam engines could drive them along at 8-10 knots on a good day, and they weighed in at 3380 tons.⁶ Stag Line worked them hard throughout the inter-war years and both made several voyages into Iberian ports during the Spanish Civil War. In September 1939 *Euphorbia* was discharging a cargo of Russian anthracite at Providence, Rhode Island, returning to British waters with Canadian grain and timber the following December. *Linaria* was in the Far East and returned to Liverpool via Suez and Gibraltar with a cargo of wheat in January 1940.⁷

At the outbreak of war, British merchant ships like *Euphorbia* and *Linaria* were requisitioned by the Ministry of Shipping, but continued to be managed by their owners who kept the accounts and employed the crews. Despite the efforts of the National Union of Seamen over many years, conditions on most British merchant ships remained poor. For ordinary members of the crew, voyage agreements were legally enforceable, food and accommodation was basic, wages were low, and a working week of 60 hours not unusual. Conditions on board vessels owned by large passenger liner companies like P & O or Cunard were usually better, if only in a relative sense. Most of the smaller commercial shipping companies, like those based in North East England or South Wales, engaged their ships in the coal trade and 'tramping' cargoes wherever they could be found. Many of them were exemplars of exploitative, penny-pinching capitalism, and Stag Line was not exceptional.

Surviving correspondence, related to the settlement of the ship's accounts after the loss of *Euphorbia*, offers a radically different perspective of remembrance and a corrective to some of the more glamorous accounts of that war. It provides a fascinating - if at times disturbing - insight into the attitude of some shipowners to their labour force and the processes involved in dealing with the loss of a merchant ship during the Second World War. The correspondence also throws some light on the enduring debate about the relationship between war, welfare reform and workers'

rights. Interspersed with letters from the Shipping Federation and the Ministry of Shipping and War Transport relating to matters of insurance and compensation, there are personal letters from relatives of the crew seeking information, attempting to settle an estate or claiming wages owed. The notorious practice, common amongst shipowners at that time, of stopping the payment of wages from the day a ship was sunk, is also confirmed by Stag Line's business correspondence. It is clear from the earliest exchange of official letters that the company was anxious to have the date of *Euphorbia's* loss confirmed, so that they could deduct advanced payment allocations and other debts to the ship before they calculated wages owed to the crew. The Ministry of War Transport outlawed the practice in the Essential Work (Merchant Navy) Order in May 1941, but many shipping companies continued to apply it in the case of ships lost before that date. The Order was a development of Bevin's directed labour policy, introduced several months before as a way of managing skilled labour shortages in key industries. It created the Merchant Navy Reserve Pool to ensure that seamen were always available to work. Essentially it was a form of civilian conscription, but it abolished casual work by providing merchant seamen with continuous paid employment even when they were on shore between voyages.⁸

Euphorbia, laden with almost 4,000 tons of coal destined for Lynn in Massachusetts, together with five other ships from the Bristol Channel and four from the Clyde, joined Convoy OB 256 in Liverpool Bay on 9 December. At this relatively early stage of the Battle of the Atlantic, outward bound (OB) convoys were dispersed in the eastern Atlantic several days after their departure from Liverpool, and obliged to proceed on their voyages independently. OB 256 was dispersed at 1800 on 12 December 1940, two days later, SSW of Rockall, *Euphorbia* was torpedoed by U-100, under the command of Kapitänleutnant Joachim Schepke, a decorated U-boat ace on his fifth war patrol.⁹ It was dark, the weather was poor, and there was a heavy sea whipped up by a SW gale. The crew launched a boat despite the stormy conditions but the survivors were never

found. News of the probable loss of *Euphorbia* did not reach Stag Line and relatives of the crew until several weeks later. Official notification came in the Ministry of Shipping Intelligence List 73, published on 21 January 1941. *Euphorbia*, together with several other ships, was listed as, 'overdue and presumed lost subsequent to 7 December last, the date, cause and position unknown'. The Ministry of Shipping subsequently advised Stag Line that the probable date of her loss was 14 December, and this became the date from which the company sought to settle her accounts. Thereafter correspondence generated by the loss of the ship obliged the clerks at Stag Line to create a separate file for it.¹⁰

The earliest letter to arrive in the Stag Line's office in North Shields predated the official notification of her loss. It came from the father of Albert Leslie Evans, aged 16, a galley boy from Swansea dated 17 December 1940. He asked, 'Would you be so good as to let me know when your *SS Euphorbia* is due back in this country and at what port as I want the boy back home as I have a job waiting for him'.¹¹

Albert Evans had joined the ship in Swansea with another Welsh teenager, George Henry Spriggs, from Cardiff. Spriggs was mustered as a deck boy, together with John Alexander Arlet from Paisley. Both were fifteen years old, too young to be conscripted but old enough to serve in the Merchant Navy. It was Arlet's first voyage after leaving the Prince of Wales Sail Training School just a few months before. He was the youngest member of *Euphorbia's* crew. The oldest was Robert Grainger aged 61 from Bootle on Merseyside who mustered as a fireman (stoker). The average age of the crew as a whole was 35, and many of them had served in the Merchant Navy for years. Since all seamen serving on-board British merchant ships were required to register their details with the Merchant Marine Department of the Board of Trade, historians can access basic information about them. Known colloquially as 'Seamen's tickets' their identity cards provide a cumulative summary of a seaman's seafaring career. For example, fireman Thomas Noonan's 'ticket' indicates that he had undertaken 46 voyages in 43 ships from September 1922 until his

death on board *Euphorbia*. Robert Grainger's 'ticket' reflected a similar seafaring career. Most of *Euphorbia's* crew were British but it also included three Estonian seamen and a Norwegian boatswain, whose registration cards confirmed they had all served on British ships since the 1920s. These men represented a skilled resource and their loss was not easily replicated or replaced. This was particularly true of the principal officers.¹²

The captain Thomas Hilton, aged 44, from South Shields served at sea throughout the First World War and was awarded a Master Mariner's Certificate in 1920. Thereafter he was employed by Stag Line for most of the inter-war years, taking command of *Euphorbia* for the first time in 1935. Following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Captain Hilton directly experienced the impact of war on British merchant ships and their crews. In May 1938, the day after *Euphorbia* docked in Barcelona, Captain Hilton and his crew experienced the first of fifteen major air raids during a three week stay in the port. In the early hours of 14 May, the ship was damaged and Captain Hilton and the second officer were wounded by shrapnel when a bomb exploded on the quayside close alongside the ship. As Captain Hilton told his employers,

My escape from being killed in Barcelona at midnight on 14th May was miraculous. From the position where I was standing the surrounding woodwork has been sprayed with shrapnel, some of the pieces falling into my bunk and burning my bed sheets.¹³

He was wounded in the thigh and the second officer, I. R. Buckingham, was later hospitalised at Istanbul and eventually returned to England overland. Captain Hilton later reported '...the stay in Barcelona has thoroughly upset the crew who have been in the most nervous condition and not being able to concentrate on their duties' and added, 'in the event of us being fixed to return to Spain I fully expect we will have difficulty with the crew'. His prediction proved to be correct. When *Euphorbia* sailed from the Black

Sea at the beginning of June Hilton reported: 'The morning after we sailed from Odessa the majority of the deck and engine crew reported to me that they wanted to be paid off as they were not going back to Spain.'¹⁴

Without these men *Euphorbia* was unable to complete the voyage, and Captain Hilton was obliged to discharge them in Marseilles, where replacement officers joined the ship and fresh seamen recruited. Hilton also left the ship at Marseilles, to return to the UK for medical treatment for his shrapnel wound. He handed over command to the first officer who completed the voyage to Alicante, where he arrived in the middle of another Nationalist air raid.

After his convalescence, Captain Hilton went back to sea and together with his crew survived the sinking of another Stag Line steamer *Gardenia* after it struck a mine off the Norfolk coast in March 1940. He then returned to command *Euphorbia* and made several voyages to Algiers and Oran before the Fall of France. Then his luck ran out.

Following official notification of her loss Stag Line set about the task of settling the ship's accounts. The company valued *Euphorbia* at £78,125 for insurance purposes, and had paid premiums of £3850 as cover for her voyages during the final quarter of 1940. She was clearly well insured, and once the Ministry of War Transport officially attributed her loss to 'war risks' the company was able to settle its claim. In February/March 1942, Stag Line received a cheque for £63,239.14.6. from the West of England Mutual War Risks Association and a credit note for £15,625 from the Ministry of War Transport Tonnage Replacement Account. It took relatives of the crew rather longer to recover the money owed to them.¹⁵

In January 1942 over a year after the loss of *Euphorbia*, Stag Line drew up a list of those who remained in debt to the ship and set about the process of recovering it. Some like Third Mate, Alexander Howie and Third Engineer, Peter Maitland, owed the company more than £20 in advanced money. Others like the teenagers Spriggs and Arlet, £2.00; David Donald, a deck hand, owed just over a shilling (5p).¹⁶ Stag Line's determination to recover these debts before they settled the crew's accounts raised clear moral

questions. A letter from the Shipping Federation concerning the debt of fireman and trimmer William Henry Harrison demonstrates this very well:

I should like to draw your attention to the case of W.H. Harrison, fireman, as the widowed mother of this mariner has been particularly unfortunate in losing two sons within a few weeks of each other and the provisional allowance which we are paying of fifteen shillings a week being in respect of both sons. In these circumstances it would be very difficult indeed to say which part of the allowance must be allocated to the son who was serving on the *Euphorbia* and I am wondering whether in order to avoid any hardship in this very sad case the Company might agree to forgo the recovery of the debt of £2-5-6d [£2.27p]. The Company who employed the other son have agreed to forgo his debt.¹⁷

Stag Line agreed to write off Harrison's debt as well as money owed to them by several other members of the crew. Charlotte Spriggs, mother of George Spriggs, aged 15, sought a small lump sum as compensation for the loss of her son '...this boy was my only support and mainstay and it is very hard to lose him and not get anything after his life is gone'. She continued to receive ten shillings a week supplementary pension, but there is no record of a lump sum payment in the Stag Line correspondence.¹⁸

Captain Hilton's widow, Nora, appears to have settled his estate quickly but the widow of *Euphorbia's* second engineer, John Joseph Reynolds, could hardly disguise her bitterness at what she perceived to be shoddy treatment by the company. In October 1942 she wrote to Stag Line requesting the payment of outstanding holiday money due to her late husband who, she wrote '...served the Company for 16 years and all those years of faithful service has only received £8.4.6 [£8.23] holiday pay'. Ironically, it was on the anniversary of Armistice Day in 1942 that she received a letter from the Ministry of Pensions acknowledging her entitlement to £107.2.9

[£107.14] in back pay after the deduction of £16.7.4 [£16.37] representing Reynolds' debt to the company.¹⁹

Numerous other letters passed between Stag Line and relatives of the crew until the end of the war, most of them seeking to settle matters of probate. The last was an application from the widow of *Euphorbia's* long serving carpenter, Reaveley Smiles from South Shields, dated 6 October 1952. She sought a death certificate for her late husband so that she could complete a probate application necessary to settle his estate.²⁰

Linaria, *Euphorbia's* sister ship, was lost in the north Atlantic in February 1941 during the period known to U-boat crews as *Die Glückliche Zeit* (The Happy Time). The successful adoption of 'wolf packs' and the partial penetration of Admiralty codes gave the U-boats an advantage over the convoys. When *Linaria* joined OB 288 from Loch Ewe (Oban) on 20 February the Admiralty was already aware, from its own intercepted signals, that the convoy was being trailed by several U-Boats when it was dispersed three days later.²¹ During the following two days ten ships, 25 per cent of the convoy, and 246 men lost their lives. *Linaria* sailing in a position at the rear of the sixth column of the convoy was a victim of U-96, commanded by Kapitänleutnant Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock. There were no survivors.²²

No specific correspondence relating to the loss of *Linaria* seems to have survived within the Stag Line archive, although it was, no doubt, similar in both content and character to the letters collected in the *Euphorbia* file. The detail that does survive suggests that the crew of *Linaria* was remarkably similar in age and experience to that of her sister ship. The captain, Henry Theodore Speed aged 54, was from Bebington in Cheshire, and the principal officers from various ports in the UK including Tyneside. The ship's carpenter, Neil Duncan Thompson aged 38, came from Newcastle and the third engineer, Thomas Phillips aged 29, was from Wallsend. Tragically, as was the case on *Euphorbia*, each of the four deck boys were teenagers, three of them just 15 years old including the galley boy, Leslie Shield, from South Shields.²³

Euphorbia and *Linaria* were two of 3,500 merchant ships sunk during the Battle of the Atlantic and the 68 merchant seamen who manned them part of over 36,000 who lost their lives during the Second World War. Their contribution to the war effort was, arguably, just as decisive as the sacrifice of 'the few' or the exploits of the 'Dambusters' even though it was less spectacular and hidden from view. But comparisons are inappropriate when it comes to the loss of individual lives whatever the circumstances. In an age dominated by the media and received versions of the history of the Second World War, selective remembrance seems unjust, even corrosive. It reinforces public perceptions of the British war effort but distorts the reality of it.

Similarly, the implementation of the Beveridge Report and the nationalisation of key industries after 1945 are frequently used to suggest a positive relationship between war, welfare reform and workers' rights, but it simply represents another received account of the achievements of the Attlee government. Remembrance in this context omits any reference to the revocation of the wartime Essential Work Orders in 1945-46. For merchant seamen it meant the abolition of guaranteed employment and a return to casual work. So much for the 'sacrifice' of the 27% of merchant seamen who lost their lives at sea during the Second World War.

When Alice Marston wrote her letter to Stag line in August 1946 seeking information about the loss of her son she still hoped to learn something about the circumstances of his death '...now that we are no longer censored' she wrote, 'could you tell me just what happened to one of your ships *SS Euphorbia* presumed lost in December 1940 or if there were any survivors and if so could you give me their addresses or tell me how I could get in touch with them?' Stag Line replied a week later: 'We very much regret that we have never been able to obtain any information from the Admiralty as to what actually caused the loss of our *SS Euphorbia* she was simply presumed lost by enemy action. We are sorry that there were no survivors.'²⁴

Notes

- ¹ J. Bew, *Citizen Clem* (London: Quercus Editions Ltd., 2017, xxvii).
- ² John Flavel, *Navigation Spiritualised*, 1682, cited in N. Rennie, *Treasure Neverland: Real and Imagined Pirates* (Oxford University Press (OUP), 2013), p. 23.
- ³ G.H. and R. Bennett, *Survivors: British Merchant Seamen in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), pp. 209-13.
- ⁴ R. Woodman, *The Real Cruel Sea* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 6.
- ⁵ Tyne Wear Archives Service (TWAS) 628/1916, Stag Line to Mrs. Alice Marston, 20 August 1946.
- ⁶ N.J. Robinson, *History of the Stag Line* (privately published, North Shields, 1978) and TWAS 628/476.
- ⁷ TWAS 628/1911.
- ⁸ www.poheritage.com accessed 28 February 2019.
- ⁹ Schepke sank two other ships during his fifth patrol, Kyleglen on the same day and in the same area as *Euphorbia*, and *Napier Star*, a Blue Star cargo-liner on 18 December; 141 merchant seamen were lost. Schepke was killed when U-100 was sunk a few months later. www.uboaat.net/men/schepke.htm accessed 28 February 2019.
- ¹⁰ TWAS 628/1916, British Shipping Federation to Stag Line, 23 January and 8 February 1941.
- ¹¹ TWAS 628/1916, Sydney and Violet Evans to Stag Line, 17 December 1940
- ¹² The National Archives (TNA), Records of the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen, BT98/349, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C478 accessed 28 February 2019.
- ¹³ TWAS 628/1909, Captain Thomas Hilton to Stag Line, 3 July 1938.
- ¹⁴ TWAS 628/1909, Captain Thomas Hilton to Stag Line, 2 and 28 June 1938. In February 1937 members of the crew of *Linaria*, *Euphorbia*'s sister ship, refused to sail to Seville with a cargo of nitrate declaring '...we vigorously protest about being made a party to the fascists in their suppression of the people of Spain'. The men were initially summoned and fined for breaching their agreements but were exonerated in the Court of Appeal.
- ¹⁵ TWAS 628/1916, West of England Mutual War Risks Association to Stag Line, 19 February 1942.
- ¹⁶ TWAS 628/1916, Stag Line to Shipping Federation, 31 January 1942.
- ¹⁷ TWAS 628/1916, Shipping Federation to Stag Line, 10 February 1942. Harrison's younger brother, Leopold, was also a fireman and trimmer. He died when his ship, *Canford Chine* of Swansea, was torpedoed and sunk on 8 February 1941 SSW of Rockall in the same general area *Euphorbia* had suffered a few months before. There were no survivors from the 35 men on board.
- ¹⁸ TWAS 628/1916, Mrs. C. Spriggs to Stag Line, 7 February 1942.
- ¹⁹ TWAS 628/1916, Mrs. L. Reynolds to Stag Line, 19 October 1942 and Ministry of Pensions to Mrs. Reynolds, 11 November 1942.

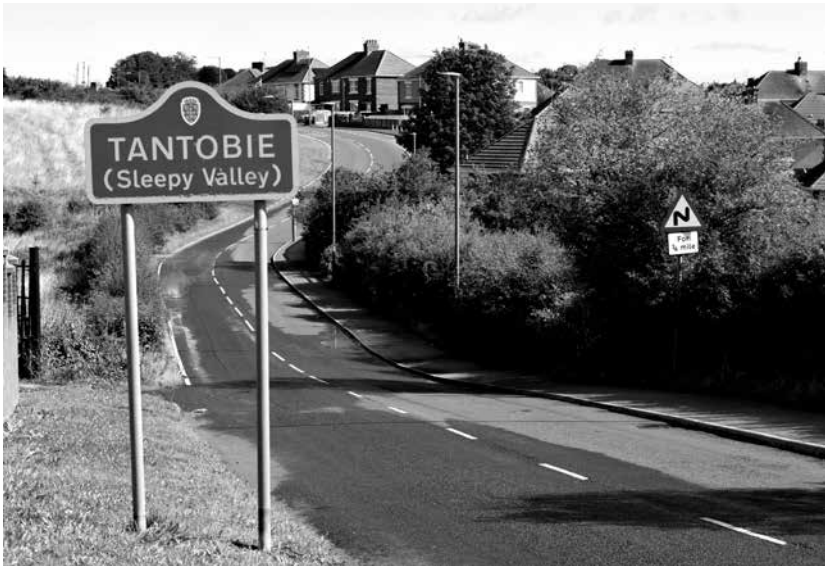
north east history

- ²⁰ TWAS 628/1916, Probate application from the widow of Reaveley Smiles, 3 October 1952.
- ²¹ Woodman, pp. 251-2.
- ²² Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock (1911-1986) was one of the few U-boat commanders to survive the war www.uboat.net/men/willenbrock.htm [accessed 28 February 2019]. His experience as commander of U-96, with some embellishment, was the basis of the 1981 film 'Das Boot' on which he acted as a special adviser.
- ²³ www.uboat.net/allies/merchants/crews [accessed 28 February 2019].
- ²⁴ TWAS 628/1916, Alice Marston to Stag Line, 14 August 1946 and reply 20 August 1946.

The War Came Early to Sleepy Valley, 1939 - 1941

Peter Brabban

On Friday 24 August 1939, an official letter was delivered to 8 Ivy Place, Tantobie, County Durham. Ivy Place is one of the streets in a small council housing estate of working class families, just down the hill from Tantobie and half way between there and Tanfield village. Tucked in a quiet little valley, the estate had soon become known as Sleepy Valley.¹



Sleepy Valley, 8 Ivy place can be seen to the right of the road sign

The letter was addressed to 35-year-old Thomas Edward Brabban, known to family and friends as Tommy. It was his call up papers instructing him to report to No 1 Army Field Workshop at Aldershot by 2 September. Included with the letter was a travel warrant and a postal order for four shillings.

Tommy had joined the Army Reserve in 1931. His skills as a bus driver, able to operate large heavy vehicles, was much in demand and he had been enlisted in the Royal Army Ordnance Corp (RAOC). He had joined up just after his second child had been born, a girl who he and his wife Mary called Jean. Being in the Reserve added to the income of Tommy's growing family. Because of this, he re-engaged in 1935 and then again in 1936. He was very aware that in time of war he would be in the first group to be called up.

All through the summer the news from Europe had been bad. Alongside this had been pieces in the local newspapers about the recruitment of volunteers to Air Raid Protection (ARP) and the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) articles about other reservists, the Territorials (TA) and the local militia being put through their paces. Then there were the obvious signs: the issue of gas masks and the preparation and supply of air raid shelters.

For Tommy's wife, 31-year-old Mary, the call-up also brought challenges. She would have to bring up their children without a father on hand. In August 1939 Tommy and Mary had a family of three children. It should have been four but their first born, a boy named Ramsey, had died of diphtheria in 1934, aged six. The remaining children were Jean aged eight, Thomas Edward (known as Teddy) who was six, and little Mary Louise who was just nine months old. At the top of Mary's list of anxieties was the loss of income, as Tommy's wage as a bus driver was replaced by the weekly wage of an army private. Even with a dependant's allowance, this came nowhere near to what they had been living on. In 1939 a Private Soldier with a wife and two children received a weekly wage of 38 shillings (£1.90) this was less than half of what Tommy earned as a bus driver². As a child Mary had experienced grinding poverty living in Tantobie with

her parents, her three siblings and a lodger in two rented rooms. It was an experience that drove her to do better for her family and her children. War was not going to nudge her off course.



The photograph of Mary that Tommy carried throughout his military service

One week after receiving his call-up Tommy left home to travel to Aldershot to begin his army service. He was there for less than a fortnight before being posted to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and sent overseas to France. For the troops of the BEF the next six months were full of tedium, boredom and what seemed like pointless activity in the 'phoney war'. They dug trenches and established a defensive line on the northern border of France next to Belgium, in an area not covered by the legendary Maginot Line defences. For Tommy the time was spent moving troops, servicing vehicles, representing his unit at football in regimental competitions, and wishing that he had brought his violin so he could entertain himself and his friends in the unit. The bright spot was the time spent with the family with whom he had been billeted, a Polish family who were living

locally. He spent Christmas 1939 with them and they continued to send him Christmas cards well after the war was over. In January 1940 he was granted ten days home leave, which was then extended by another seven days. He brought home with him souvenirs of his time in France: little metal models of the Eiffel Tower and other French bits and pieces.



Tommy outside his billet with the Polish family in France

In Sleepy Valley the declaration of war on 3 September had been brought home to son Teddy, but not by the radio broadcast of Neville Chamberlain. He had missed that when visiting his friend Alan Armstrong, and was on his way home, when the eerie nasal tone of the air raid sirens was heard coming from Tantobie. The war had officially started. Since then the council had installed an Anderson Shelter in the garden of Ivy Place, and Mary had bought and fitted blackout material to the windows, and taped them so that broken glass would not be scattered if there was a bombing raid. Rationing had been introduced early to prevent the hoarding of foodstuffs

by middle class families as in the First World War. Because there was a baby in the house, Mary was able to claim more milk and eggs. The other children were considered old enough to need adults' rations. Rationing was all well and good, but families could only get what they could afford to buy, which was a struggle for Mary. It didn't help that in the three months since the war had been declared the prices for some foodstuff had risen by 14%.³ She was fortunate to have an extensive network of support from family, friends and neighbours and the solidarity of a working-class community. Her family mostly still lived in and around Tantobie, while Tommy's family were not far away in Stanley. Friends among the women of Sleepy Valley were willing to share childcare and sometimes food and clothing.

On the beach at Dunkirk

On 10 May 1940, the phoney war ended abruptly when Germany launched bombing raids and ground troops into Holland and Belgium. The bombing of Rotterdam so shocked the Dutch that they surrendered on 14 May. The BEF response was to abandon the positions that they had carefully prepared over the earlier months and move north to confront the Germans at the River Dyle in Belgium. Tommy was kept busy transporting troops and equipment to the new positions. The advance into Belgium proved to be a catastrophic mistake, when German forces emerged from the forests of Ardennes behind the BEF and began advancing across France towards the English Channel. On 19 May, Lord Gort, the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF proposed evacuating the troops, but was ordered instead to counter attack. The failure of this action to halt the Germans led to an agreement to evacuate the BEF at Dunkirk. The evacuation began on 26 May, and it was around this time that Tommy and his unit arrived on the beaches at Dunkirk.

In 1976 Tommy recorded an interview with Radio Newcastle about his experiences at Dunkirk:

We were marched down to the beach. We were told to make ourselves as comfortable as possible and there would be transport coming to take us home. Well, we were wading out to this boat and some were in small boats to go out, when some German planes came over and they bombed the boat. They bombed everything that was round about and one of these bombs went down the funnel, well at least it looked very much like that and the boat went bang and that was it. Our transport home was gone, which meant we had to make our way back to the beach and up into the sand hills. We were told we would get further orders for what would happen. Well, this officer that we had, he kept coming saying that 'there was nothing today there's nothing yet, nothing yet' and then he said, 'It's every man for himself!'.

Tommy's comment on his officer's behaviour is brief and almost off-hand. "Every man for himself" is almost flippant, but in the recording of his interview one can just discern the contempt in Tommy's voice for this officer who had shrugged off his duties and had run off to save his own skin. Tommy continued:

There was about a dozen of us that kept together. We thought that we would have a better chance if a few of us kept together. We were pals, actually we were all like brothers so we kept together. We had a Corporal, and a Sergeant and a Staff Sergeant and they tried to keep us happy (by telling us) 'we'll not be long now'.

If only we'd had had something to eat or something to occupy our minds. The only thing we had on our minds was the German planes coming over and bashing us all the time and digging ourselves in. I think I was like a rabbit trying to get into its burrow. At night time we would snuggle in

together, we managed to find an old tarpaulin off a wagon and we put it over our sand hole and there was three of us together and we cuddled in trying to keep ourselves warm.

We were very hungry, there was nothing to eat and no sign of anything to eat. We had no water so we were both hungry and thirsty. We took turns to go and look in the abandoned wagons- service corp supply wagons. We had been there five or six days when it was my turn. I went up and I was searching for food when the Germans came over and began bombing near me and I dived under this ambulance which had broken down. I dived underneath and there was another chap there and I said to him "By God its hot out there mate". But there was no reply, the poor man was dead. That was it. But I did manage to find a tin of asparagus and I took it back to the fellows. We opened this tin and we shared it out, about twelve of us and one tin of asparagus, that was about one piece each. We thought that we had never tasted something so lovely in all our lives and it was stuff I hated! That was the way it went on for all the time we were there, we were there nine days altogether and believe me it was nine days of hell.

The bombs didn't kill a lot of people, they dug great big holes in the sand. It was just the people who were anywhere near that got killed or concussion from the blast and this hurt people more than the bomb itself. It was the same on the sand dunes, the bombs and shells would make big holes and would cover everyone with sand. The more terrifying thing was the noise of the planes coming towards you firing their guns. You could hear these things spattering around you, these bullets hitting the water or hitting the sand and you would say a little prayer and thank the lord that's it's over when it was gone. Then it would come again. We longed for

British fighters to come, but they never came. They never came.

We were all feeling lousy. I was feeling lousy, hungry, tired and thirsty. There were some small boats who came in to take us out to a boat that was further out. Seemingly this boat wasn't for us and we couldn't get on, it was for some other unit. We were swimming, we didn't bother with the small boats we were swimming out to the bigger boat to try and get on. We had dropped our gear on the beach and when we came back it was gone. That meant we had nothing, just our trousers and shirts. It must have been forty or fifty times we swam out. It was out and in, out and in. But we did manage to stick together, that was the plan, if one of us managed to get out all of us would. It was disheartening because we could see other men getting away and we weren't. Of course, we were taking our lives in our hands trying to get out to the boats because the Germans were strafing the beach and the water.

Eventually after we had been there nine days this other officer came and said that if we got on the jetty [described in most books as 'the mole'] there was a chance we might get away. So, we went to the jetty and there was a boat leaving just as we got there. There was a destroyer standing out waiting to come in. We laid on the jetty wall and the German planes came and strafed us while we there and killed quite a few men. There was a man each side of me that was killed and they made everybody scatter. When they (the German planes) went away we lined up again and this boat came in and we got on quite orderly, we couldn't do anything else. We were told to make ourselves comfortable, as comfortable as we could. About a thousand men got on that boat and we were the remnants of what was left on the beaches. There was

quite a few left but they were fighting a rear-guard action.

We were a non-combatant unit you know, we had no training, well I was a driver. We weren't classed as fighting men. We got on this destroyer where there was about a thousand men and we left the jetty. Dunkirk itself was all smoke and the harbour had some oil installations and they were burning and throwing up black smoke. All you could see was the beach, you couldn't see the town at all, it was all rubble and burning.

I felt lousy, I have never felt so bad in all my life as I did at Dunkirk. Of course, there was hunger, there was tiredness and thirst and want of a good bed I should say.

Mary would have had no inkling that Tommy was going through this ordeal until she heard the BBC 6 o'clock news on 31 May, by which time Tommy had spent four days on the beaches and had another five days to endure.

The disaster of Dunkirk

What the Radio Newcastle broadcast did not include was Tommy's tale of his arrival and reception on returning to England. He talked about how, when his ship came into port, bread was thrown onto the decks where the troops were congregated and how 'the men fought like animals to get their hands on it'. Nor did it cover his bewilderment when he saw his fellow countrymen and women applauding and cheering the returning troops, when in Tommy's eyes Dunkirk had been a disaster of both military tactics and military discipline, a defeat that had resulted in many men dying or being wounded and had resulted in near chaos on the beaches. Even after a thirty-six-year gap he was angry about the way he was dumped in a holding camp and told not to talk about his experiences. He was supposed to only tell his family that he was alive and well. Somehow Tommy managed to get to a telephone and made a call to Tantobie Post Office, one of the

very few telephones in the village, and asked the Post Master to tell Mary that he was back in England and that he was unhurt. The Post Master immediately set off for Ivy Place and passed the news to Mary, who in turn passed on the news to Tommy's mother in Stanley.

In his diary for 11 June 1940, John Lehman wrote about the returnees from Dunkirk that 'A more effective army of revolutionary agitators, penetrating to the furthest villages could not be imagined – could not have been organised by the cleverest political parties'.⁴

We can gain some insights from Tommy's descriptions of events at Dunkirk. He talks of being 'marched down onto the beach' which indicates they were still under the orders of an un-named officer who was in charge at their first aborted attempt to board a boat and for a short while afterwards until the officer announced that 'it was every man for himself'. The officer's abandonment of Tommy's unit, abrogating his responsibility for the men in his care, was not an isolated incident. Basil Dean, the Director of ENSA described an encounter in a pub in Dorchester.

The town was crammed to suffocation. In a small pub.... we listened to the seething soldiery (yes that is the only adjective to use) expressing blasphemous resentment at what had happened to them. There was a typical 'Sergeant Troy' in the bar whose loud-mouthed criticism of the junior officers of his Ack Ack unit in seizing the only available transport and making for the French coast, leaving their NCO.s and men to fend for themselves, was gaining angry corroboration among his listeners. These dismayed men, savagely wounded in their pride, were seeking relief in bitter criticism of those set over them. We promised each other that whilst the war lasted, we would never speak of what we had seen and heard that night and we never did".⁵

A doctor in a London hospital reported that 'Men swarmed into the hospital, some raging mutinously at officers for having deserted them in panic, and others swearing that they would never fight again. So complete a loss of morale in some was scaring to behold'.⁶

Even the Director of Statistics at the War Office confided to Cecil King

of the Daily Mirror that 'the Dunkirk episode was far worse than was ever realised even in Fleet Street, the men on getting back to England were so demoralised they threw their rifles out of the railway-carriage windows'.⁷ Christopher Tomlin, a Mass Observation diarist, wrote in his diary on 30 June 1940, about a conversation with an old workmate (FH) on 48 hours leave from the army in which he said, 'Two or three boys I know say the officers put on a damned bad show at Dunkirk; they were the first to be aboard. Not all officers of course, just the yellow ones'.⁸

The fact that Tommy and his mates chose not to follow the officer's advice of 'every man for himself' and instead chose to act collectively 'we would have a better chance if a few of us kept together' was a triumph for the working-class culture of solidarity and co-operation over middle class individualism. This was something that the government and those in charge of propaganda began to promote in the period after Dunkirk. It could be said that the idea of 'The People's War' was forged in the chaos and suffering on the beaches of Dunkirk.

Nowadays it is accepted that the vast majority, about 75%, of the soldiers who were evacuated from Dunkirk did so via the jetty and the Royal Navy. The small boats did a valuable and heroic job carrying the other 25%. That the small boats came to be central to the narrative about Dunkirk can be traced to the inspirational radio broadcast made by J. B. Priestley just days after the last soldiers had been brought home. He defined the legend of Dunkirk which remains to this day.

The fiasco of Dunkirk had displayed for all to see the shortcomings of the British Army. Since the end of the 'Great War' the army had ossified, retaining its social structure and its archaic mores, with tactics that sprang from an Imperialist arrogance. The heroic charge by gallant cavalry officers was still seen as the height of military valour. That some of these same officers ran away when faced with the reality of war created a crisis in the officer class. Institutionalised class resentments remained one element in the mood of soldiers at home in 1940-41. 'It's odd, the mixture there is in the army' wrote the poet Alun Lewis, 'Centralized and socialised in

distribution and production of goods, monastic in its celibacy and its veto on private property, communal as hell; and yet absolutely crucified by repression, regimentation, precedence and the taboos of hierarchy'. It was becoming clear that for Britain to fight and win this war changes would be necessary in both the armed forces and in society.

This was identified even by the Times in its Leader on 1 July 1940, less than a month after Dunkirk:

If we speak of democracy, we do not mean a democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live, if we speak of freedom, we do not mean a rugged individualism which excludes social organisation and economic planning. If we speak of equality, we do not mean a political equality nullified by social and economic privilege. If we speak of economic reconstruction we think less of maximum production (though this too will be required) than of equitable distribution. The European house cannot be put in order unless we put our house in order first. The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege, whether the privilege be that of a country, of a class, or of an individual'.¹⁰

George Orwell in his essay 'The Lion and the Unicorn' summed up what Dunkirk had revealed to the British people:

If we can survive this war the defeat in Flanders (Dunkirk) will turn out to have been one of the greatest turning points in English history. In that spectacular disaster the working class, the middle class and even a section of the business community could see the utter rottenness of private capitalism. For the first time in their lives the comfortable were uncomfortable, professional optimists had to admit there was something wrong.¹¹

It was hardly a surprise that with the collapse of morale in the army and the seething resentment at the officer class for their abandonment of their men, soldiers like Tommy found themselves isolated in holding camps throughout southern England. Tommy was not given any home leave and was kept apart from Mary and the children, who would not learn of Tommy's ordeal until years after the war. Malcolm Smith, in his book *Britain and 1940*, argues that 'Dunkirk provided the fulcrum to lever a potential major shift in national political outlook because it 'proved' dramatically and powerfully, that the old ways simply could not be continued'.

Back at Sleepy Valley

The winter of 1939-40 was hard on Mary. She struggled to put food on the table and was thankful that rationing brought a sort of fairness to shopping. According to Angus Calder in *'The People's War'*,

The annual average of wholesale prices of all goods rose by almost fifty percent between 1939 and 1941. Shortages of popular foods and consumer goods meant not only lengthening queues outside shops which had them, but sky rocketing prices, conspicuous black-market activities, and profiteering. If prices of scarce goods were fixed without some form of rationing, they tended to sell out at once, or disappear 'under the counter'.¹³



Sleepy Valley and Tantobie in the distance in 1946

It was the evenings that were the worst because the blackout made her feel like a prisoner in her own home and she hated the silence after the children had gone to bed and she was alone. She listened to the radio and knitted endlessly but it was at these times that she missed Tommy and longed for adult conversation.

In the summer of 1940 the boys of Sleepy valley, like seven-year-old Teddy Brabban, could be seen running around the streets with their arms outstretched imitating the sounds of Merlin engines and machine guns as, in their imagination, they shot each other out of the sky in emulation of the RAF pilots taking part in what Winston Churchill called the Battle of Britain. But soon their attention was drawn to the field on the other side of the road from the houses. Here the army built and staffed huts and sparked the boy's imagination by setting up an anti-aircraft gun.



Teddy, Mary Louise and Jean outside Ivy Place

The Luftwaffe launched bombing raids on the North East coast from June 1940 onwards. The air raid sirens and anti-aircraft guns were now heard regularly. In early August 1940 the air war was brought closer to home when an RAF Fairey Battle Mark III light bomber crashed near to Sleepy Valley at Causey. The crew landed by parachute in the Gibside Estate near Rowlands Gill. One of the crew, Tom Gleave, recalled the crash:

The Squadron had been given two old Battles for hack work and target practice, and one day one of them, burst into flames. An airman passenger in the rear gunner's well was too shaken to jump and Andy (the pilot John Anderson), despite the flames, climbed along the fuselage trying to persuade the airman to jump and pull his rip cord. Unfortunately, Andy was blown off by the slipstream and landed by parachute after suffering some burns. Meanwhile the airman had pulled his rip-cord while still in the well and miraculously was snatched clear by the open parachute, breaking a leg on the main plane but otherwise landing safely intact..¹⁴

The plane crash made such an impression on nine-year-old Jean Brabban that it was one of the few memories of the war that she relayed to her children in later years.

Our view of this period of the War has been coloured either by the humour (and some would say trivialisation of events) of 'Dad's Army', or through the bombast of Winston Churchill. Yet diaries and statements from this period paint a picture of trauma and real fear of the future. Some Britons seriously considered suicide should the Germans land, others looked for escape routes.¹⁵ For working-class people like the Brabbans there were very few options other than to stay put. Many people expected the German invasion to take place in mid-August 1940 because Hitler had talked of leading the parade down The Mall on 15 August and up until this point his threats had come about.¹⁶ The Government certainly took

the threat seriously and every household in Britain was issued with a leaflet entitled *If the Invader Comes* which in stilted and somewhat condescending manner instructed the population to stay calm, and in their homes.¹⁷

Around this time with regular air raids on targets in Tyneside and Wearside, the Brabban family discovered the shortcomings of their Anderson air raid shelter. Having been sunk into the garden to the level of clay that existed under the top soil, it flooded every time it rained and the water stayed for a long time after the rain stopped, rendering the shelter too uncomfortable for use. The news from the South told of the mass bombing of London, which the press was calling 'The Blitz'. The fact that the people taking the brunt of these attacks were just like the Brabbans and their neighbours in Sleepy Valley, working class people, was not lost on Mary.

In late November 1940, the real cost of the Germans bombing came home to Mary when her Aunt Emma, her mother's big sister, arrived back in Tantobie having been bombed out her home in Coventry. The bombing had destroyed almost all of the centre of the city as well as much of the residential areas and resulted in a massive dip in public morale. The media coined a word for it, 'Coventration'.¹⁸ It can be argued that the experience of Coventry led to insensitivity when the RAF intensively bombed Hamburg, Dresden and Berlin. It is noticeable how media interviews just after the bombing of Coventry gave priority to those calling for revenge raids. In Tantobie it was decided that 67-year-old Aunt Emma would live with Mary so that she could help with the children.

By the close of 1940 the army was going through a transformation; to quote historian Angus Calder, 'the amateur war was coming to an end'.¹⁹ Tommy Brabban was also going through changes in his army career. He had spent his time after Dunkirk in England, retraining as part of the restructuring of the army's tank divisions. His particular specialism would be in the recovery and repair of tanks. In a new tactic the recovery and repair units would be embedded with the combat units, so that they could effect rapid battlefield repairs where possible or recovery to frontline

workshops where these were not possible. Tommy was posted to this second group, the Second Echelon. From now on his war involved the rescue and recovery of immobilised tanks, driving the huge towing and repair trucks. In November 1940 he was transferred from the nominal role to the 7th Armoured Division as a driver/mechanic second class. December he was posted overseas.



Mary and Tommy in January 1940, the last time Tommy got home leave

By the close of the first full year of World War Two, the Brabban family along with other Britons had experienced military defeat, the evacuation at Dunkirk, the threat of invasion, rationing, the blackout and the start of the Blitz. Each experience reinforced a desire that something good should come from the struggle, that there would be no return to the misery of the Thirties. By November 1940, Mass Observation was reporting a quickening movement of opinion in politics: 'In the last few months it has

been hard to find, even among women, many who do not unconsciously regard this war as in some way revolutionary, or radical. It was not a matter of a conventional swing to Labour, but a trend towards uncertainty and questioning of the status quo'.²⁰

Notes

- ¹ This piece is planned as the first part of a trilogy covering the period of the Second World War, based on the experiences of the Brabban family as an illustration of working-class life during the conflict.
- ² J. Gardiner, *Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline, 2004) p. 85.
- ³ Gardiner, p. 85
- ⁴ A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico Edition, 2008), p. 137
- ⁵ Calder, p. 120
- ⁶ Gardiner, p. 210
- ⁷ Gardiner, p. 213
- ⁸ S. Garfield, *We are at War* (London: Ebury Press, 2015) p. 291
- ⁹ Calder, p. 248
- ¹⁰ Calder, p.137
- ¹¹ G. Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (London: Penguin Books, 2018) p.68-69
- ¹² M. Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 43
- ¹³ Calder, p. 239
- ¹⁴ R. Ripley & B. Pears, North-East Diary 1939-1945. https://ne-diary.genuki.uk/Inc/ISeq_05.html#D336. [Accessed 20 March 2019]
- ¹⁵ V. Nicholson, *Millions Like Us* (London: Penguin Books, 2011) p.89
- ¹⁶ Garfield, p. 324
- ¹⁷ Smith, p. 72
- ¹⁸ Gardiner p. 354
- ¹⁹ Calder, p.228
- ²⁰ Calder, p.139

Raising Their Voices: Two Women of the 1930s

Rosie Serdiville

*I have seen great days but this is the greatest...I never believed that equal votes would come in my lifetime. But when an impossible dream comes true, we must go on to another.*¹

Early in January 1919 the Women's Freedom League held a celebratory dinner in London.² The long and bitter campaign for the vote had brought a result and it was a moment to savour. It was also a chance to thank their three parliamentary candidates, including Charlotte Despard. Despard was a regular visitor to North East England and no stranger to the perils of public speaking. She and Dr Ethel Williams (Newcastle's first woman GP) had had to flee the stage at City Hall in 1917 when a group of 'patriots' broke up an anti-war meeting.³

The meal was modest: water rather than wine, and vegetarian – soup, mock duck, ravioli, potatoes, carrots, jam tarts, chocolate trifle, spice pudding and cheese. At the end, Despard, gave a speech, voicing what so many other women were already saying, that the fight was not over yet.⁴

That renewed battle, the struggle for equal rights, would go on for many decades. The backgrounds of the women involved would often dictate the issues they espoused and the paths they took. This article focuses in on two northern women who came from very different circumstances. Despite their contrasting experiences, what is striking is how often the same causes and concerns came to the fore.

Different worlds

Pat Washington, born near Wetheral in Cumbria in 1892, was the daughter of a woollen manufacturer. She spent much of World War One (WW1) as a volunteer ambulance driver with the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY).⁵

In May 1917, returning from convoy duty at Calais Dock, her vehicle was hit by a train. She was badly injured, losing a leg at the knee. She was evacuated to England but returned to France in 1918, the only recorded woman amputee of the conflict.

She married another disabled veteran in 1921, but sought a divorce in 1931, taking custody of their two young sons. Possibly her husband was suffering from some form of post traumatic shock disorder and had become impossible to live with. She makes no mention of her personal views.

In contrast, Phyllis Short came from a mining community, possibly Chopwell as that seems to be the first place she and her husband, George, lived as a couple. Born the youngest of 13 children around 1903/4, she knew 'early on what hardship is'.⁶ Both she and George were politically active. Her earliest mention of campaigning was during WW1 when she fought for the introduction of rationing, which was not introduced until January 1918. Before that date, food shortages had had a fully disproportionate impact on working-class families, such as those in the Northern Coalfields; they did not have the resources to compete with the better-off for what food was available as escalating U Boat attacks drastically reduced imports of wheat and other basics.⁷

Phyllis and George were committed members of both the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers movement (NUWM). They moved from Chopwell to Stockton on Tees because George had been blacklisted following the 1926 strike. George went to Russia in 1930, staying for two years to study at the Lenin School before going on to work for the Comintern. It is clear from the interview with Phyllis that they shared a powerful emotional and intellectual connection: the separation must have been hard.

‘Women’s Issues’

The enfranchisement of some women in 1918 resulted in a measurable change in attitudes, particularly with regard to working-class women. They formed the vast majority of the roughly two million women left behind by the legislation, unable to meet the property ownership or rates payment requirements.

Equal pay (and with it the implied twin planks of access to work and of equality of opportunity in other areas) was to become one of the main thrusts of the women’s organisations who were starting to recreate themselves in the post war world; carrying those ideas into the world of politics and trade union organisation.

In 1919 the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies became the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) headed by Eleanor Rathbone.⁸ NUSEC adopted a six point reform programme focusing on family endowment (family allowances), employment legislation and birth control.

The Armistice had seen thousands of trade unionists take to the streets in protest against looming unemployment, which particularly affected women war workers. The Newcastle branch of the National Federation of Women Workers took part in a large demonstration in December 1918, stating that, ‘With the arrival of Christmas...it is estimated that nearly 15,000 women on Tyneside will have received notice.’⁹ By early 1920, there were 6,000 women and 5,000 men out of work in Newcastle alone.

Arguments for equality would take time to win, particularly where issues like equal pay seemed to threaten men’s incomes. Men, it was said, needed more because they were responsible for keeping the family. That ignored the reality of women forced to enter the labour market because of their husband’s low wages, sickness, disability, or death. Women obliged in such circumstances to accept sweated wages had the further effect of depressing all women’s wage levels. It took long campaigning to persuade trade unions, the Labour Party and even women’s organisations to see it

differently. Agitation was carried out by radical women who had long been active in this region, such as Florence Harrison Bell and Lisbeth Simm.¹⁰

Suffragists had long argued that it would take female MPs to foster women's interests. Their opponents belittled them on the same grounds: that the domestic was all that mattered to women. Certainly, following WW1, domestic life became a public and political issue. The small group of women MPs introduced a disproportionate amount of legislative proposals and amendments – close to 500 by 1939. Employment legislation, divorce rights, protection of children, care of the elderly, insurance issues - all of these were picked up by these new MPs, backed by a plethora of women's organisations, sparking a profound public interest in and debate about everyday life.¹¹

How to be a clever cook

A middle-class woman like Pat Washington might not have experienced the effect of full scale poverty but she did rapidly come to understand the consequences of inequality. Her attempts to obtain a pension for her disability were dismissed: because she had not been in the services. She had to raise the money herself to pay for her prosthetic; a man would have had two artificial limbs supplied free. As Pat pointed out in her memoirs, 'Despite the fact that I had done a man's job, I did not seem entitled to the care he would have had.'¹²



*Pat relaxing after a cookery demonstration, 1935.
Courtesy of Celia Washington*

Pat did not have enough money to live independently; she had to find work. She went to France to study for a Cordon Bleu certificate and did a journalism course.¹³ Her experience offers an interesting insight into the

way in which women's personal and working lives were lived out in the public arena.

Burgeoning women's organisations were not always overtly political; there were many which catered to 'ordinary' housewives. Some, like the Anglican Mothers' Union, were long-established (1876). The Women's Co-operative Guild enjoyed its greatest support between the wars with a membership of 67,000. In addition the Women's Institutes, started in 1915, continued to grow in rural areas to around 250,000 members by the 1950s, while the Townswomen's Guilds, founded in 1929, achieved a membership of 54,000. The importance of these organisations was enhanced by sustained attention from purely commercial forces, for example, the popular women's magazines.¹⁴ And of course, from companies hoping to appeal to this new market – businesses like Unilever.

Martin Pugh has pointed out that, while many were struggling to survive, the 1920s and 30s were a time of increased prosperity for others, particularly in the South of Britain.¹⁵ The College of Modern Housekeeping was set up by Unilever to provide training and advice on household management and Pat was hired to organise a series of national events. They were hugely popular, with over 200,000 people attending between 1933 and 1937.

The *Shields News*, which organised and promoted demonstrations locally, reported that over 700 packed into a hall for each of the four days Pat was in town in 1935. 'Here was a Paris trained cookery expert telling Shields women the way they could arrange their meals, suggesting things that were exactly suited to their needs and yet were original.' The article goes on to give us details of one recipe for Creamed Salmon (tinned salmon with a cream made of flour, milk, margarine and egg yolk. It is mixed with breadcrumbs, stiffened with gelatine and then flavoured with pepper, salt, lemon juice and cayenne). Unilever were an early adopter of product placement techniques. Margarine was always to be used in preference to butter and was to be introduced by brand, not generic names. Pat got into trouble on one occasion for using the term 'pure margarine' rather than 'Stork'.¹⁷

The tours were aimed at middle class women struggling to run a home in the aftermath of WW1. Presented as offering hints and tips for women trying to keep up to date, they were often welcomed by women who could not now afford (or find) full time domestic servants. While the numbers in domestic service would increase during the 1930's, it was increasingly difficult to find women who would live in.

Being servantless was never embraced among the middle classes as a sign of modernity, but was something to be masked by elaborate subterfuge, clever interior design (serving hatches, lobbies and passages all acted as devices for separation and buffers to the odours of cooking), and a pretence that there was a cook in the kitchen and a maid to wait at table.¹⁸

As Head Publicity Officer, Pat's salary was £500 plus £250 for travelling and expenses. She and a team of helpers toured in a series of sometimes unreliable vans filled with modern appliances such as cookers and fridges.

Booklets with all the recipes and a pencil were given out at the end of the sessions, usually printed in the name of a local newspaper who acted as sponsor and the College of Modern Housekeeping. 'How to be a Clever Cook', presented at the Hippodrome in Shildon by *The Northern Echo* and the College of Modern Housekeeping contains recipes for such delights as skipper sandwiches, fruit fool, devil's toast (devilled kidneys) and salmon pasties.¹⁹

Getting By

Life for Phyllis Short and others like her was far less comfortable. We know a great deal about Stockton in the 1930s from the work of Katherine Nicholas who, in 1986, conducted interviews with 50 people who had lived through the 20's and 30's in the area. She was interested in whole families including the children of the unemployed, many of whom were



*Phyllis Short in 1979.
Courtesy of Peter Brabban*

her interviewees. She also updated an earlier piece of work by the town's Medical Officer for Health, George M'Gonigle.²⁰

By 1931 the population of Stockton was 67,722. The town had been hit hard by unemployment and the official figures largely excluded young people and many women by only recording those in receipt of benefits. Most women who worked were domestic servants, so not recordable as unemployed until 1936. It is likely that many married women did not register for benefit, especially once the 1931 Anomalies Act had come into force, as this invalidated any insurance contributions paid by a woman after marriage, only counting those paid before her wedding.

By 1933, there were 13,124 benefit claimants in Stockton, 45% of the total work force. 55% of the registered female workforce were jobless as were 51% of juveniles. Add in the unregistered women and children and the total must have been around 70% of the population.

Phyllis and George had about 28s a week to live on, of which 12s went on rent. McGonigle's figures suggest that was just under the average for unemployed people in the town. Nicholas asked her interviewees about food, and the two sources together give a good idea of what might have been found on the Short family table.

Around 13s (65p) per week went on food. Universal amongst the unemployed were home baked bread, suet puddings, stew and dumplings made from cheap cuts or a sheep's head and vegetables. Vegetable dishes such as pan haggerty, margarine (not butter) and condensed milk (not fresh) were common. Less frequently eaten were cheap fish (herrings or kippers) bacon, cooked pies, mushy peas, fish and chips, lentil soup, rabbit pie and faggots.²¹

There was a cost in terms of labour as well. McGonigle's figures for the purchase of flour reveal that the women baking bread were handling around 8 stone of flour a week (3 lb of flour cost 1½d). The capacity of women to manage a restricted income was critical to the family's survival.

Unemployed when he got back from the USSR, George became an organiser for the NUWM, which was highly active in Stockton as both a campaigning and support organisation. Phyllis got a 'little' job cleaning floors at the fever hospital in Stockton. Her wage was £1 per week for which 9s (45p) was stopped from George's dole.

Fighting for something better for our bairns

Both Pat and Phyllis had two young children. Providing for them, giving them the best start, looking after them in an emergency were perennial issues for both women. Pat was reprimanded in 1937:

I was obliged to telegraph to you on Friday because when I telephoned to the Temple you were not there and I could not get any information as to your movements. I have no objection to you going to meet your son [her boys were 11 and 13 at this time] during office hours provided you get my

permission first. But I am afraid I must ask you, in future, not to leave the kitchen during working hours unless you have previously made some arrangement with me.²²

Phyllis also struggled with childcare issues. Her daughter passed the 11 plus but there no money for grammar school clothes for a girl who was 'one of the best'. The Head Teacher asked Phyllis what she was going to do. 'What can I do?' replied Phyllis, 'I've no money.' The Head got a coat and a hat with one of the school bands from somebody who had left and sent Phyllis off to the Board of Guardians to ask for shoes for her.

Phyllis was fighting for more than her immediate family. She campaigned for dried milk and orange juice to be distributed at baby clinics. 'My generation sowed the seed for the help we get now, for having a healthy country.' She and other NUWM women were organised, with its Women's Section holding 'little social meetings... There was a real fight for old clothes for jumble sales. We joined together to help women who needed it most, if they were having a baby, for instance.'

Phyllis went on the women's hunger march (led by another Stockton woman), describing it as 'fighting for something better for our bairns'²³. They took with them a petition with 3 million signatures calling for an increase in the children's allowance and the abolition of the 26 days waiting time after first signing on.

They had a tough time on the way to London. They stayed in workhouses if no other accommodation was available. Deliberately designed to be unfriendly places, their reception was even colder than normal. Food was scanty, 'perhaps a bowl of skilly in the morning, a doorstep of bread and maybe a bit of cheese.' Often they felt their treatment was degrading, with two people watching as they had baths. Phyllis and her friends were not cowed by it; when, on one occasion, they were given lousy blankets, a delegation marched up to the master of the workhouse and threw the blankets back at him.

When other workers could make provision for them, they would be

given food – often soup – whilst men took their shoes away to mend for the next morning. Women would take their underwear to wash for them. In Nottingham, workers threw new shoes down from the factory windows. Everywhere, working men and women encouraged them to go on.

Reaching the capital, they were housed for three weeks in the worst workhouse yet. Police seized the petition and locked them in Charing Cross Station for a time. Attempts to hold protest meetings in Trafalgar Square were broken up. They went to the House of Commons to seek help in getting the petition returned, and found themselves kicked downstairs by the police, who ‘didn’t care we were women, or how badly they used you.’

‘Evening All...’

This would not be the first time that Phyllis would have to deal with police antagonism. Pat also had a brush with the law. Their very different experiences say much about the privileges of class and the risks run by those who protested too vehemently.

A series of disputes about the right to hold meetings at the Stockton Cross erupted in 1933, as the police attempted to restrict its use by the NUWM. A protest meeting grew heated and George was arrested.

I was pushed over by an 18 stone heavy and then frogmarched up the High Street. Phyllis pushed her way through the cordon surrounding me and tried to pull the same heavy away by grabbing his wrist so they ran her in as well. She only weighed 7 stone at the time ... she was a TB patient.

George was charged with assaulting a police officer and required to show reasons why he should not be bound over to keep the peace for two years. He objected and was jailed for three months. Phyllis was charged with obstructing the police by pulling away ‘this bloody fella of 18 stone’. ‘In all fairness’, said George, ‘she did bite his fingers’ - but she got off as she had two children and was bound over.

By contrast, Pat describes a jaunt out of the hospital where her new leg had been fitted:

Half an hour's fitting was enough to make the leg too tender for anything ... I discovered to my joy that I was quite well able to drive a small car with one foot. I was lent a sporting Morgan tri-car which did more to keep up my spirits than anything else. The side brake was broken and somehow never got repaired, so the one foot had quite an exciting time. It was anything but safe, but it did not matter. One day, driving down the Portsmouth Road with a fellow-sufferer, a policeman waved his arms frantically in front of us. 'What's happened,' I asked my friend, 'are we supposed to stop?' 'I'm afraid so,' he replied, 'I should think we've been caught in a trap.'

...As we drew up and the policeman saw the crutches, he said: 'I'm sorry, sir, I didn't see your crutches, or I wouldn't have pulled you up.' The friend, who happened to be wearing his leg, said, 'Oh, they aren't mine, they belong to this lady.' The good policeman was temporarily speechless. When at last he got his wind he was full of concern. 'You don't say, sir? Well, I never did. Don't you take on, we won't run you in, Miss,' he added consolingly, turning to me. 'I'll fix the stop-watch man.' I was beginning to enjoy myself immensely. He regarded us for some minutes and made a round of the car. 'Well,' he said at last, 'I call you a couple o' sports!'²⁴

Tackling 'Dole Death'

Many of Nicholas' interviewees talked of one great scourge of unemployment: boredom. It was the NUWM's role in tackling what George Short called 'dole death' that made him and Phyllis so central in Stockton life at this point.

Dole death for George was dying in your head: losing hope, belief, the capacity to think and, eventually, the will to live. He describes bodies being taken out of the river every month, men who had killed themselves. Nor was it just the men. Phyllis spoke of

women going mental, suicides, men beating their wives.
Poverty to blame. We were shown the way to go – young people do not have those sorts of leaders today, leaders who had sprung up from the working classes themselves and had ideas on how to achieve a better life.

That better life was less about money than security, the sense that life would go on and get better.

Labour history classes were held outside a church at the bottom end of Yarm Lane. George recounts how they spent that first summer sitting on the gravestones there in groups 25 or more, studying Marxist theory, debating politics, learning about the world and their place in it. It got them to focus on their problems and work out how to get past them – to keep alive their desire and hope. ‘There’s nothing worse for eating into a man’s character than a long period of unemployment... this gave them some semblance of hope and kept their brains alive.’

When asked about the role of women in the organisation, Phyllis’ amplification of her initial response – ‘the greatest contribution of the Women’s section was to stand by their men and support their demands for work’ - made it clear she was not talking about something passive. ‘You need the support of each other to get you through - action gave them something to do – hope for the future.’

There must have been times when it was hard to feel connected, able to hold it together, especially if your neighbours were not behind you; ‘If the family next door had a job in ICI, they had got their emancipation - they did not want to speak to you. They thought you did not want to work, it would be better if George kept men away from meetings rather than acting

as a leader for the unemployed.'

On the other hand, Pat's aim, in her cookery demonstrations, was to promote Unilever products by encouraging the 'clever' cook, using all the 'new methods and appliances science has devised', to become 'not one who can merely make exciting dishes. Her results must of course be appetising, but in addition, she must know how to cook economically and without worry.'²⁵

Family Planning

We do not know Pat's views on contraception. Phyllis, on the other hand, took up that other great feminist campaign of the 1920's and 30's: gaining political support for the provision of family planning facilities.

In 1924, Dora Russell and Leah L'Estrange Malone, both members of the Labour Party helped found the Workers' Birth Control Group (WBOG) who devised the campaign slogan: 'It is four times as dangerous to bear a child as to work in a mine, and mining is men's most dangerous trade.' To discuss women's sexual behaviour and campaign for choice in working women's lives openly, despite the advent of Marie Stopes, was still little short of revolutionary. NUSEC was deeply divided as was the Labour Party. It was here that activists like Florence Nightingale Harrison Bell were to play a key role.

Women in the Labour movement were cautious in their initial response, reflecting the subject's controversial nature, for there was no doubt of working women's desperate need for the kind of relief which had been available to middle-class women for many years. Some socialists believed birth control was a capitulation to capitalism – allowing the employers to keep wages low. However, by 1925, the Labour Party had moved on:

The question has now been before three Women's Conferences and while there might have been reason to fear that any hasty adoption of this proposal would have caused a division amongst our members, now that the matter has been discussed during the last two years there seems no

doubt at all that the great mass of the women are strongly in favour of the view taken by the Conference.²⁷

Phyllis had long fought for family planning to be made available for working women though this sometimes puzzled her family: 'Mother thought you would get some terrible disease if you planned your family or your man's health would break down.' She was also not afraid to walk into the lion's den; she once addressed a Catholic women's group on the subject and approached a number of local Councils to demand they address the issue.

If you can get a few people in the same mind as you can change things. They went to every Labour women's group and Co-op section in the area - had some very rough times in Stanley and Chester le Street. Then the fight to get doctors to help. The first Marie Stopes clinic was on Scotswood Road in Newcastle....Dora Russell, Dora Cox all helped to campaign... You had to ... [there was] nothing to feed bairns with, nothing to bring them into the world to.

Conclusion

The differences between the two women are striking but so are their similarities. Both struggled to live independently and with dignity, choosing their own paths and successfully raising their children. However, Pat's endeavours were essentially self-interested, whereas Phyllis was conscious of the necessity of collective action. The final word should go to Charlotte Despard:

I am on a little ...tour for the Labour Party amongst the Northumbrian miners. They are such a fine set of men and their women, a crowd of whom I addressed last night in ... Ashington, are worthy of them. It is out of such material that the better world of the future will be built up.²⁸

Charlotte came down firmly on the side of working class women like Phyllis rather than those from a more privileged background like Pat. It was a sound choice. For it would be the work of women like Phyllis that would eventually bring about the welfare state.

Notes

- ¹ Charlotte Despard, quoted in Jane Robinson, *Hearts and Minds: The Untold Story of the Great Pilgrimage and How Women Won the Vote*. Black Swan edition (London: Transworld Publishers, 2019), p. 284.
- ² Robinson, p. 284. The Women's Freedom League was a militant, committedly democratic, suffrage organisation, which espoused direct action tactics such as taxation resistance and non-cooperation with the census.
- ³ *Mapping Radical Tyneside* website, <http://radicaltyneside.org/events/newcastle-workers-and-soldiers-council-28-july-1917> Accessed May 2016.
- ⁴ Robinson, p. 284.
- ⁵ Biographical information about Pat Washington from her memoir: P. Beauchamp, *Fanny Goes to War: An Englishwoman in the Fany Corps*, (London: J. Murray, 1919) Beauchamp was a family name which Pat used as a pen name. In personal life she preferred to use her married name (Washington) rather than her maiden name (Waddell). She also used the professional names Anne Carr and Anne Beaton.
- ⁶ Oral history interview with George and Phyllis Short by Pete Brabban (1979). Phyllis's birth year is extrapolated from information given in the interview, where she mentions that she and George had been married for 58 years and that she had been seventeen at the time of the ceremony. Unless otherwise indicated, the account of Phyllis and George's activities and the quotations are from this interview. Pete Brabban 'The National Union of Unemployed Workers in the North-East, 1919-39', unpublished BA dissertation, Sunderland Polytechnic, 1979.
- ⁷ There is a description of the conditions that provoked the Usworth School Strike of November 1917 when the children of mining families refused to go to school until the Feeding of School Children Act was implemented by Sunderland Council, in Steve Humphries and Richard van Emden, *All Quiet on the Home Front: An Oral History of Life in Britain During the First World War* (London: Headline, 2003), p. 248.
- ⁸ Liverpudlian Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946) was a long-term advocate of women's rights. She became an Independent MP in 1929 and was instrumental in developing the idea of the Family Allowance. Sheryl Law, *Women: A Modern Political Dictionary* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2000), pp.128-9
- ⁹ *Newcastle Journal*, 11 December 1918, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ Florence Nightingale Harrison Bell (1865-1948) was a socialist, suffrage campaigner and supporter of women workers in Newcastle upon Tyne. Cramlington born Lisbeth Simm (1870-1952) was also a suffragist and labour movement activist, and a founder of the

Women's Labour League. S. Law, pp. 76-77 and p.133.

- 11 Martin Pugh, 'Women, Food and Politics, 1880-1930', in *History Today*, 41:3 (March 1991)

<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/women-food-and-politics-1880-1930>. Accessed April 2018

- 12 Beauchamp Washington, p.199.

- 13 Washington papers. Personal papers held by her granddaughter, Celia Washington. Accessed 2013 and 2017.

- 14 Pugh.

- 15 Pugh.

- 16 *Shields News*, 11 October 1935, p. 5.

- 17 Letter to Pat from College of Modern Housekeeping, 3 March 1936 (Washington papers)

- 18 Review of Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/who-mops-the-floor-now-how-domestic-service-shaped-20th-century-britain> accessed April 2019.

- 19 Copy of 'How To Be a Clever Cook' in the Washington Papers.8

- 20 Katherine Nicholas, *The Social Effects of Unemployment in Teesside*, 1919-1939, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); George M'Gonigle and John Kirby, *Poverty and Public Health*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936)

- 21 Nicholas p 59

- 22 M. Bacon Russell of the College of Modern Housekeeping to Miss Anne Carr (Pat's professional name), 22 February 1937. Washington papers,

- 23 Don Watson, No Justice Without A Struggle. *The National Unemployed Workers' Movement in the North East of England 1920-1940* (Merlin Press, London, 2014) pp110-115. The women's march, Phyllis mentions, was separate from but part of the 1932 National Hunger March.

- 24 Beauchamp Washington, p.277

- 25 *Shields News*, 8 October 1935, p. 3

- 26 Dora Russell, quoted in Janet Howarth (ed), *Women in Britain: Voices and Perspectives from Twentieth Century History*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p.123

- 27 Vivien Law, *The Women's Cause: Feminist Campaigns, 1918-1928*, Doctoral thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, 1993, p.339. <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/10018942/> Accessed February 2019

- 28 Letter from Charlotte Despard, April 1920, 7/CFD/A/13, Women's Library, LSE Special Collections

The Knights of Labor in the North East, 1880-1900

Steven Parfitt

For ten years, between 1884 and 1894, the North East of England was home to one of the largest global working class movements of the nineteenth century: the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor (the Knights). Originally formed in the United States, the Knights acted both as a fraternal society which gave its members a sense of solidarity in a world of constant change, and as a benefit society which kept a member from death's door and a pauper's grave in an era before the welfare state. This article will examine these global connections, exploring how a working class movement, formed in the United States, found its way, in the 1880s, to Tyne and Wear.

The Knights began as a secret fraternal order, based to some extent on the Freemasons, in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), in 1869. By 1886, they numbered three-quarters of a million American workers. Between 1885 and 1887, Knights led most of the thousands of strikes and boycotts, and hundreds of local political campaigns based on local labour parties, in a period American historians now call the 'Great Upheaval'.

The Knights also spread their movement around the world. In addition to the United States, they established their assemblies (branches) in Britain, Belgium, Ireland, France, Italy, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.¹ The Knights in north-eastern England became a part of this global story. Glassworkers at Hartley's in Sunderland were among the first recruits to the Knights of Labor outside North America in

1884. Sunderland Knights played an important role in the region's labour politics, and in the wider labour movement.

The longer-term impact that the Knights had in north-eastern England was not only due to the people they recruited there. Their name became so well known that two other organisations calling themselves the Knights of Labour emerged in the North East with no clear connection to the glassworkers in Sunderland. The Independent Order of the Knights of Labour at Jarrow, a small fraternal society, and the British United Order of the Knights of Labour, a rapidly growing society that offered sickness, funeral and other social insurance to its members, both borrowed the name of the American movement that had become famous worldwide thanks to the titanic battles it fought across the United States in the 1880s. That they did so testifies to the global dissemination of news, movements and ideas, as well as of goods, capital, empires and people that characterised the world of the late nineteenth century – a period that most historians see as the first age of globalisation.

Glassworking Knights in the North East

The story of the north-eastern Knights begins in the United States. In 1880, the skilled window-glass workers across America merged their various organisations into Local Assembly (LA) 300 of the Knights of Labor. Despite the name, LA300 operated across the United States, with its headquarters in Pittsburgh, and immediately became, in the words of Pearce Davis, 'the most powerful labor organization in the history of the United States.'² The assembly maintained a closed shop across North America, enjoyed higher wages and longer holidays than all other skilled American workers, and rapidly built up a substantial war chest. When their employers attempted to break up their countrywide closed shop by locking them out in 1882 and 1883, the glassworkers were able to hold out and finally win.³

The main danger to their closed shop, as they saw it, was not so much their employers as the possibility that unemployed glassworkers from

Europe would come to the United States to break strikes and push a non-union wedge into American glassworks. American glassworkers responded to this perceived threat in two ways. First, they lobbied Congress to ban 'contract labor', that is, the bringing of workers already under contract into the US. Second, they sent representatives to Europe, in the hope of establishing a transatlantic organisation that could defend the interests of glassworkers on both sides of the ocean and regulate the international migration of glassworkers.

They succeeded with the first plank, getting the Foran Act, banning contract labour, in 1885. They also succeeded with the second. LA300's first representatives to Europe sailed in 1880, although their work was interrupted by the lockouts of 1882 and 1883. In 1884, with the strikes won, they sent further representatives around Europe, and these achieved an unprecedented result: in the same year, glassworkers from England, Belgium, Portugal, France and Italy signed up to a Universal Federation of Window-Glass Workers.⁴ When the original representatives returned to the United States, they were replaced by A G Denny, armed with a commission from the General Master Workman (President) of the Knights, Terence Powderly, to organise any and all workers he met into assemblies of the Knights of Labor.⁵ Denny went first to Belgium, where assemblies soon appeared among glassworkers, ironworkers, and craftsmen in several luxury trades in Brussels.⁶ He then went to England. The product of his work was Local Assembly 3504, composed of window-glass workers across the country and headquartered in Sunderland.

LA3504, like its American parent, was not in fact a "local" assembly. Rather, it was a collection of four 'preceptories', or sub-branches, at the four main sites of English window-glass production: Chance Brothers at West Bromwich near Birmingham; Pilkington's and William Stock and Co. in St Helens; and Hartley's of Sunderland. Of these, only the preceptories at Chance Brothers and Hartley's ever became viable branches. Managers at Pilkington's, the largest of the four glass manufacturers, used private and public detectives to identify and then victimise Knights in St Helens.

Knights at Pilkington's suffered further from the fact that their branch secretary, Joseph Norbury, was an alcoholic, and not a high-functioning one either.⁷

The preceptory in West Bromwich became, in time, the base for the growth of the Knights around the Birmingham and Black Country area. By 1889, there were around fifty assemblies and perhaps as many as ten thousand members in the West Midlands alone.⁸ The same rapid growth did not occur in the North East. Partly this was because the labour movement in the Black Country was relatively small, while unions in the North East were strong. T R Threlfall, President of the 1885 Trades Union Congress, wrote in 1894 that 'it is a significant fact that the society seemed to flourish best in those portions of the Black Country where trades unionism is weak.'⁹

James Brown, Recording Secretary of LA3504 and a glassworker at Hartley's, referred to the second half of the equation when he told the Knights' General Secretary-Treasurer, John Hayes, in 1892 that 'as to the efforts for organisation we have done our best but in the north of England they are all large trade organisations, the Boilermakers, Engineers, Shipwrights, National Labourers Union and believe in their own principles and customs.'¹⁰ The Sunderland glassworkers' union had collapsed in the 1870s. The Knights of Labor appeared here as the saviours of an unorganised trade, and not as a rival to the union of an organised trade. James Brown, LA3504's Recording Secretary, served as secretary and then treasurer of the Sunderland Trades Council in 1891 and 1892, and ran for the local council on a Lib-Lab ticket. He and others in the assembly pushed for causes ranging from the organisation of women workers, to working class political representation in the form of a local branch of the Labour Electoral Association, a body designed to encourage working class candidates of any party.¹¹

The Sunderland glassworkers initially established good relations with their employer at Hartley's. Branch meetings record the admiration of local Knights for the Hartley family, and the manager of the Hartley's

works occupied a seat of honour at the Sunderland preceptory's second annual dinner in November 1886.¹² Yet the cordiality between Knights and managers at Hartley's began to break down at the end of the 1880s. The firm, like Chance Brothers in West Bromwich, had failed to invest as heavily as the largest English glass manufacturer, Pilkington's. As a result, Hartley's operated at a competitive disadvantage with Pilkington's, as well as with other glass manufacturers in Europe and the United States.¹³ Ironically, this pressure on Hartley's and the Knights was partly due to the lobbying efforts of American glassworkers. They had pressed the government through LA300 for protectionist measures and were rewarded in 1890 with the McKinley tariff, which dramatically raised the price of English-made glass in the US.

Forced to speed up production while wages were being kept down, the Knights and their employers headed towards open conflict. The opening skirmishes came with several minor strikes in 1888 and 1889.¹⁴ The main battle, however, was joined in 1891. Hartley's wanted to introduce the "continuous tank" system, a technique that had already allowed other manufacturers to produce glass more efficiently and continuously rather than the older "pot" system, while at the same time reducing wages by ten per cent. The result was a strike which soon extended to the Knights' other glassworkers' branch at Chance Brothers in West Bromwich, where workers faced similar impositions.

English glassworkers asked for help from their American comrades. They received it, in the form of hundreds of dollars from LA300. They also received further help from local unions in the North East, including miners, ironworkers, shipbuilders and glass bottle makers, among others.¹⁵ Yet as the strike went on past a month, then two, without any sign of resolution, the situation became desperate. Glassworkers at Chance Brothers held out until the end of 1891, before the trickle of Knights returning to work became a flood, and the strike there failed. Their colleagues in Sunderland fared rather better; in November 1891 they agreed with Hartley's to go to arbitration, and after reaching agreement they returned to work. After a

mere two weeks on the job, however, they faced disaster of a very different kind. A fire ravaged the Hartley's works, leaving the newly-retained strikers unemployed and the company on the verge of insolvency.

Sunderland's Knights struggled to maintain their assembly. James Brown told General Secretary-Treasurer Hayes in August 1892 that 'we are doing our best to keep the members of our Assembly together so as to be ready for anything that may turn up in our own trade so as we will be able to get the best terms we can.'¹⁶ Their hopes were raised at the end of the year, when Hartley's reopened part of the works. Yet the firm closed down for good in 1894, battered by the twin blows of the long strike and fire, and unable to compete with domestic and foreign competitors that had avoided both.¹⁷ The glassworkers assembly ended with it, and so did the history of what we might call the "official" Knights of Labor in the North East.

Imitations and Plagiarisms

Yet the story does not end there. The history of the Knights of Labor involved more than the rise and fall of an organisation, with its importance measured by strikes, political influence, and fluctuating memberships. They left a lasting imprint on the labour movements of every country where they set up assemblies – whether in the United States or elsewhere. In New Zealand, for example, they helped push through legislation ranging from female suffrage to industrial arbitration and conciliation acts, much praised in reformers' circles around the world as a supposed solution for class conflict.¹⁸ Knights in South Africa had a less salutary effect on the future, as they pioneered in the diamond town of Kimberley a whites-only movement, hostile both to the big diamond and gold monopolies and to indigenous black workers.¹⁹ In Britain they became part of two movements that reshaped British society and politics: the move to working class representation on local councils and in Parliament, which led in time to the Labour Party, and the development of trade unions as mass organisations and not the preserve of a skilled minority.²⁰

The second of these trends began, or was greatly accelerated by, what became known as the “new unionism” – the growth of trade unions among the large mass of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers previously unrepresented in the British labour movement. Historians tend to locate the new unionism in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and emphasise the big battles that took place in London during that time, such as the Bryant and May matchgirls’ strike in 1888, the Great London Dock Strike of 1889, and the tremendous growth of the Gasworkers and General Labourers Union after its founding in the same year.²¹ Yet workers in the North East, as A E P Duffy recognised, had done much the same thing several years earlier. On 20 November 1886, workers on Tyneside created the National Labour Federation, a predecessor to all the federations and general unions that proliferated in 1889 and 1890.²² If the new unionism reached full fruition in London, it first found expression in the North East.

This new National Labour Federation owed a great deal to the example of the Knights of Labor. Searles writes that its founders drew inspiration from a victorious strike by tramwaymen in New York, organised by the Knights. They liked the way the Knights strove to organise all workers in an industry irrespective of skill. They thought, Searles writes, that this ‘all-grades’ approach could herald a breakthrough on Tyneside.²³ And J. Ramsey, the Federation’s first secretary, acknowledged his debt to the Knights when he wrote to Terence Powderly in December 1886 to ask for:

an outline of the working of your society, your Code of Rules, number of members and your rate of increasing your plan of action, when engaged in a strike or dispute, and any other information you may consider likely of service to us in our future operations.

Nor were the leaders of the new Federation simply copying what they read in the news. Ramsey told Powderly that ‘one of the Executive

Committee is a Knight of your Society, and it is our desire to have the co-operation and support of those of your members who may be residing in England.²⁴

Ramsey did not identify that Knight, and the two organisations do not seem to have maintained much in the way of formal ties. Indeed, the Federation probably occupied the space among unskilled workers in the North East that the Knights, in other circumstances, would have hoped to fill themselves. Yet the Knights also inspired two other organisations that took their name. The first and murkiest of these was the Independent Order of the Knights of Labour, based at Jarrow. Nothing has survived of this group except for a few brief snippets in the newspapers and entries in the annual reports of the Registrar of Friendly Societies. According to these snippets and entries, the Independent Order never extended beyond about 100 members.²⁵ It seems to have operated as a run-of-the-mill fraternal order that participated in the procession of friendly societies that took place on many holidays, and offered its members a chance to celebrate together as a corporate body.²⁶ So far as the official records are concerned, the Independent Order continued on in obscurity until 1900.²⁷

The second organisation lasted even less time than the Independent Order, but achieved a greater historical significance in the brief period it existed. Like the National Labour Federation, this so-called 'Knights of Labour' did have, at the beginning, some ties to 'official' members in Sunderland. In November 1888, at the Hedworth Hotel in Chester-le-Street, members of a society with that name met to discuss its expansion. The last names of some of the delegates match those of leading figures in Local Assembly 3504, and a 'Brother Brown,' possibly James Brown – although a subsequent meeting referred to a 'W Brown' – was one of the speakers. A Mr Stratton claimed that the new movement 'would be governed by the rules and regulations of the American societies from the head branch,' listed wrongly as New York.²⁸

They certainly adopted the grandiose goals and rhetoric of the American Knights. Stratton claimed that they had 'a higher mission to

serve than the forming of a mere political party', and made their objective 'the education of the masses to that point where they would fully see, not only their wrongs and degradation, but a full and final solution of the labour problem'.²⁹ Yet the new body would also address the practical day-to-day problems that its members encountered. At one of their first meetings, the new Knights proposed that, in exchange for an entrance fee and weekly contributions, members would receive fixed benefits in case of sickness, strikes, or death.³⁰

The staple subjects of labour history have always been trade unions, left-wing parties, strikes, elections, revolutions, rebellions, co-operatives. They leave out, particularly for the nineteenth century, the other networks and institutions that working class people built to protect themselves against the perils of everyday life. Chief among these were fraternal orders, the places where workers, almost always men, could establish communities of their own safe from the prying eyes of their employers and the law; and benefit societies, which guaranteed to members a certain level of healthcare, subsistence during strikes or unemployment, and a proper funeral and burial in case of death, in the days before welfare states provided some or all of these services to citizens by right.³¹

These different types of societies were not hermetically sealed from one another. Some trade unions offered sickness, death and unemployment benefits to members: the most developed of these was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which provided all these benefits in exchange for high contributions and proved so successful that when members emigrated, they took the union with them so that they might still draw on the benefits associated with membership.³² International fraternal orders with a large working class membership, such as the Freemasons, Oddfellows and Foresters, ran benefit schemes on an enormous scale, with balance sheets running into what in today's money would be hundreds of millions, if not billions, of pounds.³³ Yet the American Knights of Labor, despite the fact that they not only operated as a trade union, but also functioned as a fraternal order, political club, self-help organisation and co-operative

society, never made more than a few half-hearted attempts to set up a strike fund, let alone sickness or death insurance.

The version of the Knights that began in November 1888, on the other hand, took the opposite path. They soon dropped all mention of the political action and political education that marked their early meetings. By July 1889, they had restyled themselves as the All-England Royal Order of the Knights of Labour, or alternately the British United Order, with 18 branches and 4000 members. Indeed, as this Order grew, its resemblance to the American Knights decreased. Its branches were styled as “lodges,” not assemblies, while its president or general secretary was styled as a Grand Knight (or Grand Knight President), not a General Master Workman.³⁵ Their most likely model was the British United Order of Oddfellows, not just because of the first three words of their name, but because one of their members had previously served as the Oddfellows’ Grand Master.³⁶

By 1890, the British United Order had registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies. Meetings now were dedicated not to ‘the labour question’, but exclusively to the level of contributions and benefits, and that most important detail for any society which promised health coverage to its members: the election of a doctor who would take care of them when sick. The Order established a central fund in February 1890, as it continued to expand. Matters relating to the operation of the fund were discussed at an annual convention, called the Annual Moveable Delegation, in June 1890. At that time the British United Order claimed 12,000 members in 48 lodges, stretching from Blyth in the north to Shildon in the south.³⁷

Yet the British United Order soon outgrew its original name. The founding members in 1888 probably chose it to capitalise on the worldwide fame of the Knights of Labor; by 1890, the Knights had declined sharply from the peak of their membership in 1886, and the name no longer held the attraction it once had. At the end of that year, the lodge at Shildon decided to leave the British United Order. They chose as their replacement a name that aptly symbolised the end of any connection to an American organisation and an affirmation of their British concerns:

the Independent Order of St George.³⁸ Their decision to leave may have had something to do with a court case at the beginning of 1891, with the British United Order claiming that the Hetton-le-Hole lodge had failed to send its contributions to the central fund as required.³⁹ Embezzlement, or the breakdown of the link between contributions and benefits were always the weak points of benefit societies of this type.

Whatever the reason, the departure of the Shildon lodge was only the beginning. By October 1891, some lodges already styled themselves 'late Knights of Labour'.⁴⁰ By October 1892, the Annual Moveable Delegation of the British United Order of the Knights of Labour had become the annual conference of the Durham Conquerors Friendly Society, with 'late Knights of Labour' in brackets at the end. The reason for this change of name might have been, in addition to the decline of the American Knights as an organisation to be plagiarised, the decline in membership to 3,000 from the 12,000 of two years previously.⁴¹ Here, too, as with the Shildon lodge, the cause of this decline may well have been worries by contributors about the court cases and, in turn, the security of the Order's funds and the likelihood of seeing something back by way of benefits. In any case, the name of the Knights of Labor had faded away, as it would with the glassworkers by 1894, and with the small, inconsequential Independent Order at Jarrow in the first years of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

What should we make of this fractured story, at once a very localised, regional affair and yet the product of global processes and a working class movement that spanned the world? Certainly, the Knights in the North East – whether the official version, made up of glassworkers with ties to the American headquarters in Philadelphia, or Jarrow's Independent Order, or the British United Order – never achieved the numbers or historical significance of Knights in other parts of Britain, or other parts of the world. So far as the official Knights went, the several hundred glassworkers in Sunderland pale next to the thousands, possibly tens of thousands in

the Black Country, or the substantial numbers recruited in Liverpool, Glasgow, South Yorkshire and even Northern Ireland.⁴² The glassworkers in Sunderland did not even form a successor union, because the closure of Hartley's forced them to look elsewhere. Looked at from this angle, the history of the Knights in the North East appears as a failure.

That conclusion would overlook several crucial points. The fact that a foreign movement could establish itself in Sunderland, with full support from local trade unionists – support measured in a practical way, by contributions they received from other unions when on strike in 1891 – should make us think again about common notions that the British working class of that or later periods was necessarily insular, nationalistic, even xenophobic. So should the idea that workers in north-eastern England would choose, on two separate occasions, to name their own ventures after a foreign movement they had read about in the news. Both these points lead to a third: that the world which workers inhabited in the late nineteenth century was a cosmopolitan one, open to international influences, and perhaps a more cosmopolitan one than our own.

The origins of the new unionism is a case in point. Historians might argue whether that movement or trend began on Tyneside with organisations such as the National Labour Federation in 1886, rather than in London in 1888 and 1889. What does seem clear is that the Federation was at least in some measure the product of struggles taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. Certainly, the idea of organising workers together regardless of skill or other potential points of cleavage between them – an idea we would now term industrial unionism – was one that the founders of the Federation explicitly took from the striking Knights in New York. Historians have turned towards 'global' or 'transnational' approaches in recent decades, in an attempt to find connections across national borders that previous historians, more concerned to study events on a local or national level, tended to overlook.⁴³ The influence of the Knights of Labor on Tyneside, and on movements that helped to radically change the composition of the British labour movement over the following decades, is

precisely the kind of connection that makes these global and transnational approaches worthwhile.

The history of the Knights in the North East also reminds us that labour history not only refers to attempts by working people to combine against their employer, or against capitalism, or some of that system's worst features. It also refers to their attempts to combine against the daily fear of being made destitute by sickness or unemployment, or of their family's destitution due to the costs of their funeral and burial. The short life of the British United Order of the Knights of Labour bears this out: beginning as an attempt to mimic its American namesake, this new movement became a simulacrum of other fraternal-orders-cum-benefit-societies, such as the Oddfellows, which it ended up resembling more closely than the Knights themselves. In an age of resurgent food banks, welfare cuts and structural unemployment, we would do well to remember these early attempts to blunt capitalism's rougher edges. The task of the subjects of more familiar labour history – the unions, parties and co-operatives – is to make sure that the revival of this kind of working class self-help will never again become necessary.

Notes

- ¹ Summaries of this global history include: Robert Weir, *Knights Down Under: The Knights of Labour in New Zealand* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), ch. 6; Steven Parfitt, 'The First-and-a-Half International: The Knights of Labor and the History of International Labour Organizations in the Nineteenth Century,' *Labour History Review*, 80:2 (2015), pp. 135–67.
- ² Pearce Davis, *The Development of the American Glass Industry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 126.
- ³ Quentin R. Skrabek, *Michael Owens and the Glass Industry* (Gretna: Pelican, 2006), pp. 38–39.
- ⁴ *John Swinton's Paper*, 27 July 1884.
- ⁵ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor* (Philadelphia: Knights of Labor, 1885), p. 55.
- ⁶ Leon Watillon, *The Knights of Labour in Belgium* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 21–29, 34.
- ⁷ Henry Pelling, 'The Knights of Labor in Britain, 1880–1901,' *The Economic History*

Review, 9 (1956), pp. 319-20.

These numbers were claimed by Thomas Dean, one of the main leaders of the Black Country Knights, in *Halfpenny Weekly*, 1 June 1889.

Manchester Times, 26 January 1894..

'Letter from James Brown to John W. Hayes,' 31 August 1892, Box 10, *John W. Hayes Papers* (JHP), Catholic University of America Archives

Sunderland Daily Echo, 15 April 1891; 22 October 1889.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 16 November 1886.

Norman McCord, *North East England: An Economic and Social History* (London: Batsford Academic, 1979), p. 143

Sunderland Daily Echo, 20 and 22 June 1888; 6 December 1889.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 2 July 1891

'Letter from James Brown to John W. Hayes,' 31 August 1892, Box 10, *JHP*.

Catherine Ross, *The Development of the Glass Industry on the Rivers Tyne and Wear, 1700–1900* (unpublished PhD thesis, Newcastle University, 1982), pp. 517–18.⁸ Henry Pelling, 'The Knights of Labor in Britain, 1880–1901,' *The Economic History Review*, 9 (1956), pp. 319-20.

See Weir, *Knights Down Under*.

Jack and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* (London: Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 45.

Steven Parfitt, *Knights Across the Atlantic: The Knights of Labor in Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), chs. 5 and 6

For a comprehensive (and critical) examination of the literature on the new unionism, see Derek Matthews, '1889 and All That: New Views on the New Unionism,'

International Review of Social History, 36:1 (1991), pp. 37–39.

A. E. P. Duffy, 'The Eight Hours Day Movement in Britain, 1886–1893,' *The Manchester School*, 36:4 (1968), pp. 307–08.

M. Searles, 'The Origins of New Unionism on Tyneside,' *North East Labour History*, 25 (1991), p. 37.

'Letter from J Ramsey to Powderly,' 6 December 1886, Box 27, *Terence V. Powderly Papers*, Catholic University of America Archives.

In 1894, for instance, the Independent Order reported 82 members. 1893-94 [C.7063] [C.7063-I] [C.7063-II] [C.7063-III] [C.7063-IIIA] Royal Commission on Labour. Fourth report of the Royal Commission on Labour. Appendix, p. 98.

Shields Daily Gazette, 20 September 1897.

1900 [Cd.422] *Trade unions*. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions in 1899 with comparative statistics for 1892-1898, p. 198.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 21 November 1888 and 11 December 1888.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 11 December 1888.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 21 November 1888

Comprehensive studies of these organisations include Simon Cordery, *British Friendly*

north east history

Societies, 1750–1914 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and P. H. J. H. Gosden, *Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Batsford, 1973).

J. B. Jeffreys, *The Story of the Engineers* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1945), pp. 61–2.

Josef Baernreither, *English Associations of Working Men* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1893).

Sunderland Daily Echo, 9 July 1889

Sunderland Daily Echo, 7 March and 2 April 1890.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 8 July 1889.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 2 April 1890, 11 February 1890, 2 June 1890.

Northern Echo, 22 October 1891.

Northern Echo, 18 March 1891.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 30 October 1891.

Sunderland Daily Echo, 10 October 1892.

Parfitt, (2017)

See Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

north east history

Discovering John Swan (1794-1885). Autobiographical Reminiscence from Afar.

Brian Bennisson¹

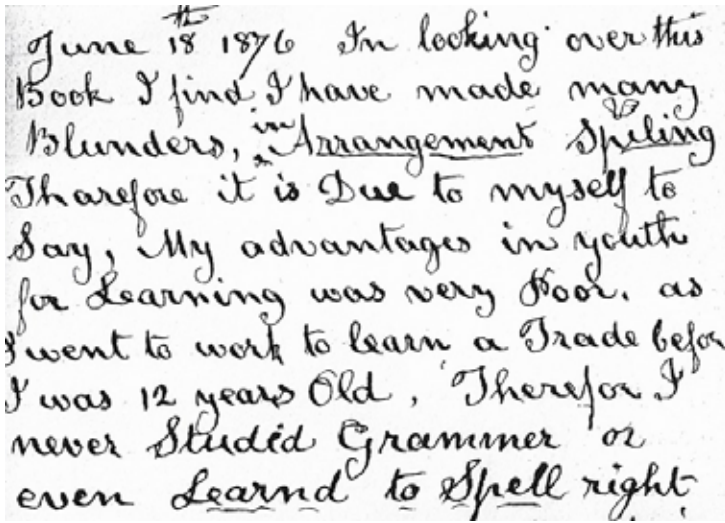
Introduction

John Swan died in Maine in the United States at the age of 91 in 1885, after a life described as one of 'benefaction to all who came under his influence'.² In his adopted home town of Camden he had helped found its temperance society and earned a place in Methodist folklore as the man who single-handedly dug the foundations for the community's first chapel. Swan had emigrated to America in 1819 from County Durham as a young working-class man with a limited and fragmentary education. We know this because in 2003 a gentleman looking through his late mother's effects in a Newcastle attic found a leather-bound book containing 190 pages of writings by Swan.³ The first entries were made sometime after a visit to England in 1850, and the last in 1876, when Swan sent his book to a John Howson in Barnard Castle.⁴

Page 91 of Swan's book is headed '*The Autobiography of John Swann*'.⁵ In the following 22 pages he records memories of the twenty-five years from his birth until he set foot on American soil, and it is this section of the book with which this article is concerned. Swan, of course, was writing at some distance in both time and space from his early life and what we have are recollections from someone who was by then a devout churchman, and this may well have determined the perspective from which he approached his autobiographical narrative. Nonetheless, Swan's writings offer a rare insight into the impressions and preoccupations of a lad growing up in the North East at the time. What follows is an account of the events Swan felt

were significant, along with some consideration of the extent to which his perceptions of that time reflected the general circumstances of the period.

Extracts taken from Swan's book are reproduced exactly as he wrote them. He himself was well aware of his own shortcomings when it came to literacy, as this illustration from his book confirms:



June 18th 1876 In looking over this Book I find I have made many blunders, in Arrangement Speling Therefore it is Due to myself to say, My advantages in youth for Learning was very poor, as I went to work to learn a Trade before I was 12 years Old, Therefore I never Studied Grammer or even Learned to Spell right.

Early Life and Schooling

Swan opens his autobiography by saying

I was born of poor honest parents the youngest of six Children 4 girls and 2 boys of William Swann and Frances Armstrong they being brought up together their parents living next door neighbours from their youth up. I was born at Blacky mill in the parish of Ebchester in the county of Durham England on the 8 day of May 1794.⁶

The time period covered by Swan's early life prohibits a comprehensive reconstruction of his childhood and his family's domestic arrangements. The

first census returns lacked detail and have in any case been destroyed; civil registration of births, deaths and marriages was not introduced until 1837; and there was nothing approaching a systematic network of schools and no requirement for those that existed to keep attendance or other records. However, the Swans were Anglicans and from baptismal records it has been possible to establish that John Swan's siblings were Mary (born 1779), Frances (1781), twins William and Elizabeth (1785) and Jane (1788).⁷

Swan says his father was a papermaker and his 'Blacky mill' would have been Blackhall Mill on the River Derwent, which was one of the earliest and most rudimentary of the district's paper mills. Being dependent on the same dam and millrace as Blackhall forge, it produced 'course grey paper from old rags and sails'⁸. William Swan appears to have spent at least part of his working life moving with his family between paper mills. This pattern of migration in search of employment was carried on by his son John throughout his youth and young adulthood.

When Swan was about three years old, his father went to work at 'Linceford papermil' where '2 accidents occurred which nearly ended my life'.⁹ Lintzford Paper Mill was two miles downstream from Blackhall Mill and a bigger establishment, probably making use of a reservoir.¹⁰ The mill and its surrounds served as a playground for Swan and his friends as young children. On occasion, they courted serious injury or drowning. Once, when attempting to prime a homemade 'squirt gun'¹¹, Swan stumbled into the mill race and in another incident

fell over the wharf on to a rocky hard bottom head foremost where I lay stunded... after a time I came to... a large cut on my forehead, the mark of which will be seen as long as I live. I went into the Mill where my Brother William was to work and he carried me home and they put loaf sugar in the wound.¹²

When Swan was around five years old his parents moved to what he calls 'Orpeth papermill'¹³. This would be Urpeth Paper Mill at Mount Escomb

on the Urpeth Burn on the River Team's south bank. It was near Beamish and a few miles from Chester le Street. William Swan may have transferred between mills because the same master papermaker was at both the Lintzford and Urpeth mills at the turn of the century.¹⁴ It was while living at Urpeth that Swan first experienced some schooling, although this and subsequent school attendance reflected the *ad hoc* and random provision of education at the time. Schooling was a rare commodity amongst poor children.¹⁵

I went to Pelton 2 miles to the first school. I did not like to go their, a bout this time my oldest sister Mary got married and set up housekeeping at Durham and I went to live with them and went to School their to a Mistress where I lernt more in 6 months than in any 2 years after...After 6 months I returned home to Orpeth.¹⁶

The nature and quality of education available to Swan would have depended on what enterprise was shown at grassroots level and to what extent his family could afford to participate. Some schools may have been organised by the parish or a charity, but most were private in the sense that they charged for tuition in basic literacy and numeracy. In Durham, Swan looks to have attended what was known as a 'dame school', part of a cottage industry of women teaching paying pupils in their homes, which was to remain common until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁷

Swan's parents moved from Urpeth to Heworth High Lane for six months and then on to Heworth Shore, from where he attended a school at Bill Quay. Swan found life in this urban industrial area unsettling after his previously rural existence and 'became exposed to the bad influences of wicked boys'¹⁸. To illustrate the distasteful nature of the environment he now found himself in Swan cites the case of 'one of my school mates Mother had 5 children within 2 years'¹⁹. Swan paints himself as a sensitive lad, explaining a little self-righteously that he

was considered by the neighbours in that place to be an uncommon obedient and wonderfull boy. I was an anomaly for that time and place, as I had been brought up in the Country where I was not surrounded with bad influences of Disobedience to parents... so much that the neighbours would make remarks to that affect.²⁰

Apprenticeship

Swan's parents moved again, this time to a new house at Ballast Hill at the Felling Shore, from where he attended a school at High Felling.²¹ But he

never liked to go to School and their was no Town schools to go to, and private schools cost 12 cents per week for common reading and writing, my parent was not particular to send me all the time. I would rather go to work than go to school.²²

Swan's parents found themselves in a situation that most working-class families were having to face. Living at not much beyond subsistence level, most could not afford to pay for education, assuming there was some provision in the neighbourhood, and even if they had the means they had to balance this with the lost opportunity of the child's earnings in work. Consequently Swan, as a 12 year old in March 1806, went to 'learn the Blacksmiths trade with one Joseph Fawsit at the Highfelling'²³. He left after a year. He had moved away from home and lived-in at the forge but

my allowence of food was so poor for Breakfast nothing but hasty pudding made of oate meal and plenty of sour beer to wash it down. I had not been used to such hard fair and could not bare it.²⁴

Swan was then bound for seven years to a papermaker, the attraction being that he could 'board at home all the time and have good food'²⁵.

The apprenticeship was at the mill where his father was employed, the Heworthshore Paper Mill (sometimes known as the Fellingsshore Paper Mill) which was the first to adopt steam power. Known as the Tyne Steam Engine Paper Mill, it was built in 1798 and rebuilt after a fire destroyed it in 1803.²⁶ Swan did not enjoy his time there, feeling he was 'exposed to all kinds of Vice and immorality'²⁷. He worked amongst '8 prentices and as many journamen' who he felt were 'proficient in all the kinds of wickedness that could be thought of'.²⁸ He described their work pattern thus:

The first 2 or 3 Days in every week was generally spent in drinking Strong beer which they commonly had brought from the beer shops by the boys who was allowed as much as they wanted to drink free of cost to them, and the boys was not Backward in learning their wicked expressions and tricks they were practising at those times when they had nothing else to do, as their work was piece or job work and the last 2 or 4 days was Drive Drive to make up loss time, 2 days works in one which made it hard work for boys.²⁹

Swan, who in America had become actively involved with the cause of temperance, took a rather puritanical view of the culture of the paper mill in his memoir. It seemed to him that he had been exposed to 'evil influences too numerous to name' and regarded himself as fortunate in having his father alongside him acting as his 'great Guard and Guide'³⁰. He wondered how he

was not altogether ruined, as most all of the fellow prentices was. not any of them stayed their apprenticeship out but running away, some enlisting for to be Soldiers and some for Sailors, and running away caught brought back getting flogged so as they died of their wounds, and others came to a Disgraceful end.³¹

Swan's account of the fate of other apprentices may be a little fanciful and the product of anecdote, but it was the case that an apprentice enlisting by falsely declaring himself not to be an apprentice risked two years in a house of correction. It was also a commentary on the harshness of living and working conditions of the time that young men and boys felt that joining up during the Napoleonic Wars was the better option. The government had sought to deal with the education and welfare of apprentices, but with no agency to scrutinise and enforce regulations there was no real improvement. On 25 March 1814 Swan's apprenticeship ended and he was expected to organise his 'outing'. It was

customary for those who were able to provide a Feast or
Supper for all the Mill hands and tea for the old woman
And strong Drink for the men wich Outing cost me over 25
Dollars, and no thanks to me after it was over.³²

Swan's costing of the event looks to be excessive, but reflects his feelings about 'how much of my hard earnings I might have laid up or saved if I had been wise'³³.

Seeking Work and Finding God

With his apprenticeship bond ending, Swan imagined better times were ahead but soon faced disappointment. He entered a labour market where supply exceeded demand, as men joined the workforce following the end of war, mechanisation reduced the requirement for manpower and the population quickly rose.

Instead of me being Free and Independent I was much of the
time out of employment and depending on A, B and C for
work to make a living and finely I worked at Blacksmithing,
Farming, Brickmaking, Quarry, Pottery, Boating, Casting
Ballast and finely could not earn my own board.³⁴

In the summer of 1815 Swan's ill luck continued when he was taken sick with typhus fever, a disease associated with overcrowding and poor sanitation. During his illness he had the first of his religious 'awakenings' when he endured 'a great Dread of Dieing' and 'promised the Lord if he would raise me up I would be good'.³⁵ Recovering after 15 weeks, Swan forget his promise but had a similar episode after a traumatic visit to his 'Sister Stonehouses at Harrington'.³⁶ His sister Jane had married James Stonehouse in 1809 and lived at East Herrington. When Swan arrived at his sister's home he discovered that

the night before I got their Mrs Smith House had been Set on Fire and Burnt down, and the servant girl the only one in the House had been murdered by incendiary and Burgelers which caused great consternation in the place, the house and all in ashes and there lay the poor girl with her throat cut when they had just time to drag from the burning flames, it was truly a Solumn Sight.³⁷

Newspaper reports show James Stonehouse, a blacksmith, giving evidence at the inquest. On the night of the incident he was woken by his brother John, a blacksmith, who slept on the floor above. John Turnbull, also a blacksmith, said he was awakened by John Stonehouse, his partner, who slept in the same bed with him.³⁸ At the Stonehouses' home, Swan's brother-in-law led a prayer meeting of nine people which 'affected my heart ... I commenced crying ... a poor helpless helldeserving Sinner'.³⁹ For Swan, however, this state of mind proved to be of a temporary nature for 'in a short time wore of my Convictions' and he had 'relapsed into my old habits'.⁴⁰ Not long afterwards he '*went to here Mr W Bramwell*'.⁴¹ William Bramwell (1759-1818) was a celebrated itinerant evangelical preacher of the Methodist revival who travelled around Newcastle in 1815.⁴² Swan came away from Bramwell's sermon 'deeply convicted promising in my own mind to do better' but 'of course in a short time got rid of my good resolutions once more'.⁴³

If Swan found sticking to the religious straight and narrow a challenge, he found the search for a job of any kind equally problematic. In August 1815 a tavern keeper neighbour gave him some casual work that involved going two miles in a boat to collect furniture which first had to be carted two miles over a rough track. On the cart journey back to the boat Swan was sitting high on the load when it was tipped over.

I came quick to the ground which full Dislocated my left shoulder. I first did not know it was done, untill I comenced helping to unload, when I found I had lost the power to use my arm, and when we got the things into the Boat, I had to row cross handed 2 miles. I could not discribe my suffering and pain that I endured in that time.⁴⁴

In this pre-railway age most travelling was done on foot, so to obtain treatment Swan walked 15 miles to Durham to call on a bone setter, an unqualified but cheaper alternative to a physician. He was to suffer 'great pain in going through the operation of setting'⁴⁵ and was instructed to keep the shoulder still for two weeks. A fortnight later the shoulder remained dislocated, so Swan went back to the bonesetter and through the same procedure for the second time. This was unsuccessful.

after waiting 2 or 3 week more I tried to use it, but I found it still out. I then felt Discouraged and thought I must be a cripple for life. But I finaly heard of a bonesetter in Newcastle. I went to see him and he gave me Oil to put on it a few days and then went back to him, he got 2 men to hold me and he got old of my hand and pulled with a jirk and the guide went into its place with a snap, bound it up and in 2 weeks from that time I went to work But it was long before I could use it like the other.⁴⁶

In the three years since Swan had completed his apprenticeship he had not had any steady work. So, not having 'earned my own board in all that time' he decided to 'take a tramp to seek work'.⁴⁷ At the back of Swan's mind was the notion of going to America, but government restrictions prevented this and he realised that he would not be allowed as 'a mecanik to leave the country'⁴⁸. Swan's idea was to go in the first instance to Dublin and 'on the 17 of May 1817 packed all the cloths I could carry and started up through Northumberland, Cumberland to Whitehaven'⁴⁹ and found a vessel to take him to Ireland's capital. He makes no mention of endeavouring to find a passage to America, but spent eight days going around the paper mills within a ten mile radius of the city. He failed to secure work and took a packet to Holyhead. Swan arrived at the Welsh port on 4 June and took a roundabout route back to Tyneside, arriving on 27 July 'feeling gratified and satisfied that I had seen Ireland and England if not America'⁵⁰.

Following two years in which Swan 'had not thought much about Religion or former awakenings', he reached what he termed his 'Final Conviction and Conversion' after attending a preaching by 'Matthew Valenses at Heworth Shore' and began to 'see the folly of all vain amusements'.⁵¹ Asked to 'then and their to seek and serve god', Swan said he would 'consider it'.⁵² Within a couple of weeks he had become part of the great surge of Methodist converts in the decades around the beginning of the nineteenth century⁵³.

I had an appointment to go to a Dance... I went to it and enjoyed it as well as I did any and in returning home that night all alone made up my mind it should be the last. I would turn right a bout and seek religion and this was Feby 2 1818...I commenced praying 3 times a day ...I joined the Class as a Seeker.⁵⁴

Emigration

For a time, says Swan, considerations about emigration and finding employment did not bother him, but by 1819 he realised

the world looked larger and time longer, and that I must be industrious while in this world and then I could not find employment enough to earn my own living. Notwithstanding that I had worked at half a dozen different trades, and would have done anything as so I could stay with my parents as they were getting Old, all of the rest of the Children married of and I was the only one left at home with them. But I could not bare the thought of their having to support me then.⁵⁵

The chance to go to America came through Swan's brother who was captain of a brig, a two-masted sailing ship.

William was ...a bout sailing from London to America. I got the consent of my parents to go with my Brother be a Sailor. So I packed up all the cloths I could get into one trunk and on the 27 March 1819 with a full heart so full I could not eat or speak to Father William... I started with mary vasey to help carry my trunk to Newcastle to take the Stage for London it then took 3 days and 2 nights to travel. I arrived ship in London and on first of April set sail for Bucktush in nova-scotia⁵⁶

The 'mary vasey' mentioned by Swan was his sister who married a John Vasey in 1800. His mode of travel to London raises the question as to why a humble unemployed working man did not take the cheaper option of travelling as a passenger on a collier. Swan's port of 'Bucktush' was Bouctouche, New Brunswick. The brig arrived there on 27 April and Swan worked on board for three weeks. Then on 18 May, he joined the schooner *Ann* under a Captain Mabel which was 'bound for Karsty, Lower Canada'.⁵⁷ Having reached their destination on 21 May, the crew spent some weeks loading fish for Halifax.

They may have put in at more than one point on that particular coastline, since Swan talks about loading with 'no harbours' and having to 'to keep

anker watch'.⁵⁸ It was whilst here that he was 'offered 30 Dollars amonth to be a Blacksmith an as much to be a Clerk where their Dried Fish'.⁵⁹ Swan was not interested. He found the behaviour of the local population an anathema. The district had welcomed many Irish migrants and it was presumably this element he referred to when he said 'They were most all Cathliks and such an heathenish set, Fidling and Dancing on Sundays. No money would induce me to stay their'.⁶⁰ On 19 June Swan's vessel

sailed for Halifax came through the Cut of Canso. Went ashore on Cape Briton. Arrived at Halifax July 1 1819. Sunday I went to meeting the first time for 16 weeks it seemd like water to a thirsty traveller. Mr Black was the minister. I had a god time to love feast and sacrament. Here was a Mr Holensworth a printer who was building a new papermill 3 or 4 miles out of town, he got me to go with him to see the situation and offered to give me employment if I would stay.⁶¹

Swan's eyes were set on America and after eight days in Halifax he paid 3 dollars for a berth on the *Olive Branch* which was bound for Boston with a load of salt and 21 passengers. It turned out to be an eventful journey under a Captain Tibbols.

we were 2 days out and it came on to blow south wind all the rest of the crew but Tibbols being green hands... all but Tibbols was seasick and not able to do duty and I was the only one of the passengers that was any use in helping to manage the vessel. I was called upon to assist Tibbols.⁶²

The trip was expected to take three days and the passengers had only taken provisions for that length of time. The storm lasted a week and Swan, who was now being fed like a member of the crew, gave his 'vitals to the passengers to keep them from starving'.⁶³ After the storm abated

the Crew returned to duty, one of the owners being one of the crew he discharged me. We still 3 days from our port. I then being young and bashfull, Starvation began to stare me in the face as passengers whom I had given my food to had none to give me in return. Of course after being Discharged when it was noon I did not go to the Diner with the rest of the crew, when the mate Tibbotts saw that I was not there he enquired for me, they told him the owner had discharged me, he replied he did not care for that . I should eat in the cabin as long as he was on board.⁶⁴

Swan was not paid any wages for his labour but his passage money was repaid. By July 19 1819 he had made it to America and was initially exhilarated with 'the sensations sailing up into Boston harbour when I first see the state house and all the church spires'.⁶⁵ Then came the immigrant's realisation that he was 'a Stranger in a strang Land' and 'the only soul' he was 'acquainted with in all the Continent'⁶⁶ was Captain Tibbols, to whom he was about to say goodbye.



John Swan's grave in Mount View Cemetery, Camden, Maine, USA.

Conclusion

John Swan's book contains some compelling stories from his boyhood and early manhood. His autobiography cannot be regarded as an impartial account, but therein lies its strength. It is the authentic voice, unmediated by some better educated commentator, of an elderly man looking back at a restless period in his life. Swan's vibrant cameos add to our appreciation of a number of themes at play in the lives of working people during his County Durham days: the social dislocation of transfer from rural to urban living, the few crumbs of schooling available, the inadequacy and bleakness of apprenticeship, the struggle to make a living and the turn towards nonconformism for spiritual contentment. And ultimately, the conclusion is that it was the taking of a chance to forge a new life in a new country that offered hope.

Notes

- ¹ The author is indebted to Mr David Clements for allowing access to John Swan's original work and some preliminary research done by the Clements family. He would also like to thank Mr Ken Gross of the Walsh History Centre, Camden Library.
- ² *Camden Herald*, 12 June 1885
- ³ John Swan's Book (hereafter JSB) was found by Mr David Clements. It is not clear how the book came into the possession of his mother. One possible explanation is that it was amongst estates bequeathed to Mrs Clements by friends in the 1980s. John Swan's book is in the possession of Mr Clements of Stocksfield, Northumberland.
- ⁴ John Howson had a drapery and clothing business. It has not been possible to trace any connection between Swan and Howson or Howson and the Clement family. However, two newspaper entries show that Howson was a temperance advocate like Swan: he was Barnard Castle's delegate to the North of England Temperance League's annual meetings and Treasurer of the South Durham Lodge of the Independent Order of Good Templars (*South Durham & Cleveland Mercury*, 24 February 1877; *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 27 September 1881).
- ⁵ Swan himself spells his surname with a double 'n'. The quasi-official publications – baptismal transcripts, marriage records and his obituarist – use the more conventional spelling, which the author of this article adopts.
- ⁶ JSB, p. 91.
- ⁷ John George Gibson, *The Registers of Ebchester in the County Diocese of County Durham, 1619-1812* (Sunderland, Durham & Northumberland Register Society, 1900) pp. 15, 18; *Ryton Baptisms*. Vol VI. 1771-1787 (Typescript held by Newcastle City Library,

north east history

1913) p.52. A death notice for Jane gives her birth year as 1788 (www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBPRS/D/357141) [accessed 2 May 2019]

8 Jean V. Stirk, *The Lost Mills. History of Papermaking in County Durham* (Sunderland: Sunderland University Press, 2006) pp. 36-39

9 JSB, p. 91.

10 Stirk, pp. 24-27.

11 JSB, p. 91.

12 JSB, pp. 92-93.

13 JSB, p. 93.

14 Stirk, pp.94-97.

15 The *Report of the Parliamentary Committee on the Education of the Lower Orders of Society*, 1818, showed that only a quarter of children received any form of education and for most of them it actually amounted to very little. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DTFbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&cf=false [free eBook, accessed 16 May 2019]

16 JSB, p. 93

17 Swan makes no mention of Sunday Schools, which at that time were an important source of learning

18 JSB, p. 95

19 JSB, p. 94.

20 JSB, p.95

21 At this time the various Heworths and Fellings were quite separate and distinct places.

22 JSB, p. 96. Presumably Swan's use of American currency, by then more familiar to him, is meant to suggest the equivalent of a few pence.

23 JSB, p. 96

24 JSB, p. 96

25 JSB, p. 96

26 Stirk, pp. 49-52

27 JSB, p. 97

28 JSB, p. 97

29 JSB, p. 97

30 JSB, p. 98

31 JSB, p. 98

32 JSB, p.100

33 JSB, p. 99

34 JSB, p. 99

35 JSB, p. 97

36 JSB, p. 100

37 JSB, p. 100

38 *Globe* 2 September 1815

39 JSB, p.101

40 JSB, p.102

- 41 JSB, p.102
42 Clive D Field, 'William Bramwell 'in Donald M Lewis (ed) *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography. 1750-1860.*, Vol 1 (Oxford, Blackwell,1995) p.133
43 JSB, p.102
44 JSB, p.103
45 JSB, p.103
46 JSB, p.104
47 JSB, p.104
48 JSB, p.104
49 JSB, p.105
50 JSB, p.105. Swan gives his homeward itinerary as 'Flintshire, Shropshire, Cheshire, Staffordsaire, Midlesex, Essex, Kent, Surry, Cambridge Shire. Hamp S, Hunting S, Northampton S, Licester s, Derby S, York S and Durham County'.
51 JSB, p. 107
52 JSB, p.107. Nobody of the name Matthew Valense can be traced. The only man in the region with a similar name is Matthew Valence, who appears in the 1841 Census as a waterman aged 60 living at Heworth Shore
53 See, for example, *William Gibson, Church, State and Society, 1760-1850* (London, Macmillan, 1994) p. 85
54 JSB, p. 107-108
55 JSB, p. 107-108
56 JSB, p. 107-108
57 JSB, p. 112. This last destination does not appear as a place-name in the 1820 census for Quebec (also known at the time as Lower Canada). However, karst is a very distinctive topography which was well developed in Canada's Maritime Provinces and Swan may be referring to the general landforms towards which they sailed.
58 JSB, p. 112
59 JSB, p. 112
60 JSB, p. 113. For detail on Irish migration to the area see *The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830* (smu.ca/webfiles/murphy-mergence_of_maritime_catholicism_1984.pdf)
61 JSB, p. 113
62 JSB, p. 114
63 JSB, p. 114
64 JSB, pp. 114-115. Tibbols told Swan that if it was not for his efforts the vessel would have been forced to go off course and attempt a landing at Cape Sable on Grand Mannan.
65 JSB, p. 114-115
66 JSB, p. 115

North East Labour History Society



Reports & Commendations

Annual General Meeting 2018

John Stirling

The Society's AGM took place on 11 September 2018 at the Mining Institute on Westgate Road in Newcastle. The Secretary reported a growing membership and the sound financial basis of the Society was also noted. The Sid Chaplin prize was awarded to Joel Wootten for his article on Chartism in Gateshead (published in this edition). Our guest speaker was Hilary Wainwright. She had a full lecture hall, with about 60 members present, and many in the audience knew Hilary personally from her time at Durham University and her sojourn on Tyneside, which had clearly been significant in her life and her politics.



*Joel Wootten being presented with the Sid Chaplin prize by Grahame Chaplin. Hilary Wainwright is seated front right.
Photograph courtesy Mike Greatbatch.*

Hilary spoke from her own personal experiences in the North East mainly in the 1970s. She was careful to locate the personal with the political and give a strongly socialist and feminist context to events. She had become connected to the North East first through a job at Durham University, and then through active engagement with the Tyneside Socialist Centre and the local trade union movement. Much of the contemporary history she touched on was familiar to many of the audience members - in particular, the development of the Tyneside Socialist Centre, which became a focus for active campaigning around the political issues of the time. It also hosted speakers such as Tony Benn and Sheila Rowbotham who, with Hilary and Lynne Segal, became one of the authors of a socialist feminist classic: *Beyond the Fragments*, which has recently been republished (Merlin Press, 2013).

She also discussed shop steward activism in the 1970s and 1980s and the *Workers Report on Vickers* (Pluto Press, 1979) which she wrote with Huw Beynon and in conjunction with the trade unions' Combine Committee. These campaigns went beyond simple wage demands and offered whole new strategies for alternative production as a way of changing the work people did and keeping jobs in the Region. Interestingly, Mike Cooley's book, *Architect or Bee*, which was such an inspiration for Lucas Aerospace and similar campaigns in this Region has also been recently reprinted (Spokesman, 2016)

She also talked briefly about her recently published book, *A New Politics from the Left* (Polity 2018). Her presentation led into a lively discussion with audience members who had been active in the Centre, the Trades Council and other local campaigning organisations.

Some of the same ground has been covered in the Journal before (see, for example, Phil Lenton in No. 47, 2016 for a public sector view and John Stirling in No. 48, 2017 on plant closures) but Hilary's talk created considerable debate, and we would like to hear more from our members and readers. If you contributed on the night, or were actively involved in the politics of the period, please contact us via our website (nelh.net) as we'd like to talk to you or, better still, encourage you to write for us. Simply email the Secretary with the heading 1970s and briefly describe how you were involved or what story you could tell.

Newcastle University's Oral History Unit and Collective

Alison Atkinson-Phillips

The North East of England, and Newcastle University in particular, have long been important centres for oral history activity. Within academia, oral historians research and teach across disciplinary boundaries from creative arts to medicine; in the community cultural sector, oral historians work in community education, museums, archives and within a diverse range of community organisations. Recognising the wealth of experience, in 2017 Newcastle University appointed a new Chair of Oral History, Professor Graham Smith, and launched the Oral History Unit and Collective, operating within the School of History, Classics and Archaeology.

At the launch of this initiative in January 2018, the priorities were to work regionally, nationally and internationally; win research income from diverse sources; and collaborate with both academic and community-based colleagues.

By spring 2018, we had established our core Unit of three research associates (Sue Bradley, Andy Clark and Alison Atkinson-Phillips) and three associate researchers (Rosie Bush, Silvie Fisch and Kath Smith). While research associates are directly employed by the university, our associate researchers are community partners who bring their own projects to the Unit for mutually beneficial collaborative working. Our aim was to create a balanced group of academic and community oral historians in the North



Oral History unit team:

Left to right (front row):

Rosie Bush, Andy Clark and Graham Smith

(back row):

Silvie Fisch, Alison Atkinson-Phillips, Kath Smith and Sue Bradley

East of England, capable of undertaking local and global projects. Together, this group has many years of local, national and international experience and expertise. As the unit grows, more people will join the team, with a new associate researcher appointed for every new research associate.

Over the following months, the team worked to build the Oral History Collective, a looser community of researchers, colleagues and oral history practitioners around the region. The Collective provides a forum for knowledge exchange with a common purpose: to explore the dynamics of memory and historical narrative through theory and practice and to include those voices too often marginalised in representations of the past. Key to this has been a public lecture and seminar programme, monthly term-time reading group, and monthly practitioner drop-ins that are open to anyone interested in using oral history.

We also spent this period developing, leading and collaborating on grant applications, which meant designing a number of pilot studies and sub-projects. Particularly heartening were the early successes of Alison Atkinson-Phillips and Rosie Bush, who won a Catherine Cookson Foundation Award to develop a schools' website on shipbuilding; Andy Clark who obtained British Academy (BA) funding to build a national Deindustrialisation, Heritage and Memory Network; and another BA scoping grant to examine responses to the Lockerbie Disaster.

As the year progressed, we began to develop a sense of identity, and to articulate what it is that makes the Oral History Unit and Collective special. We came up with three core values:

- we seek as community and academic oral historians to meet civic and regional responsibilities;
- we attend to issues of social and historical justice; and
- we engage in interdisciplinary research.

Given the importance of industry in the North East's history, the impact that deindustrialisation has had on the local economy and society, and the innovation of some of the area's regeneration efforts, it is unsurprising that a key focus so far has been on working class histories. 'Work and After' is an umbrella title for several small and pilot studies exploring work and identity in the North East after 1945. Oral history is an ideal method for helping to understand the way ordinary people experienced and remember these events, and how they make sense of them in the present.

The first of our 'Work and After' projects is an oral history of the Sigmund Pumps Wartime Apprenticeship Scheme (1938-1944). Based in the Team Valley, the scheme was a very early form of the modern apprenticeship training. Apprentices were paid rather than indentured, and were trained in all aspects of engineering work, as well as participating in citizenship and wellbeing activities. Led by Andy Clark, this research has sought to examine the impact of the scheme on the career trajectories of the wartime apprentices, and to analyse the ways in which their training is reflected and narrated through the lifecourse.

The 'After' part of 'Work and After' has purposely been left open, but one theme we are exploring is the loss of work, and the impact that has on people's lives. This led to our involvement, in collaboration with Northern Cultural Projects (NCP) and Newcastle West End (NWE) Foodbank, in the Foodbank Histories research project. Researchers on this project have been Alison Atkinson-Phillips, Silvie Fisch (director of NCP) and Jack Hepworth, a PhD candidate and member of the Collective. Participants included foodbank users, volunteers and supporters, and there has been some crossover between the three groups. Interviewees were asked about the life journey that brought them to the Foodbank, their experience of the services, and their hopes for the future. Throughout the project, we worked to share our findings with participants and the wider community through social media posts, displays within the two NWE Foodbank centres, and finally a report. In November, this led to invitations to contribute to briefing the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, who was visiting Newcastle as part of a fact finding mission, and to provide material for a Guardian UK podcast.

A Foodbank Histories exhibition ran from 15 to 24 November 2018, as part of the national *Being Human* festival of the humanities. The exhibition aimed to move past the statistics of food insecurity and share these real stories of life on Tyneside. The result was a great deal of publicity that encouraged a rise in donation as well as new foodbank volunteers.

In March 2019 we celebrated the end of our first full year as the Oral History Unit and Collective by hosting internationally renowned oral historian Paula Hamilton for our annual public lecture. Her focus on an under-researched aspect of labour history - women's domestic service - and discussion of how stories of exploitation are both hidden and made public inspired us for a new year.

You can keep up to date with the activities of the Oral History Unit and Collective by following our blog, <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/oral-history/>



*I Daniel Blake star David Johns opening the Foodbank Histories exhibition,
part of the Being Human festival, November 2018*

north east history

Gateshead Archive: The People's Archive

Don Watson

A major Heritage Lottery Fund grant is supporting the transformation of the Gateshead Library local studies service. It is re-launching as The Gateshead Archive: The People's Archive. Work is due to begin in August to re-design the existing reception area, shop and reference sections of Gateshead Central Library, to improve the study facilities and the space available to display and promote the local history collections. This is accompanied by activities to engage with the local public through the Friends of Gateshead Archives (FOGA). More than 200 volunteers have already been recruited to FOGA and training on a number of projects is in progress, in partnership with the WEA.

The Living Memory Project involves volunteers interviewing local residents and recording memories of Gateshead life in the post-war years. In another strand, volunteers are researching the history of selected shops, commercial buildings and other key sites in Gateshead with the aim of establishing a local Heritage Trail.

A self-directed and supported Community History Programme will develop the local history knowledge and skills of FOGA members, and promote the resources and methods available for ancestry and Gateshead history research. It is intended to host an annual Local History Conference, at which ideas and current research can be presented and discussed.

Volunteers will also help to complete the indexing and cataloguing of the library's Gateshead collections and will be trained to digitise material.

north east history

This will make items in the collections much easier for readers to identify and use.

The FOGA Steering Group is overseeing these projects, alongside the library staff. The objective is to showcase the local history collections, improve public access to them, and establish a continuous engagement with local history activity.

Living History: Redhills and Education for Action

John Stirling,

I was travelling home on the train from a conference where there had been many good ideas and good talk but not much action. My fellow traveller, Dave Wray, and I started discussing taking action ourselves. Education was under funding attack from the Tories, and Education Secretary Michael Gove wanted to turn school history into kings and queens. What could be done in response with little or no money? Dave, the ex-pitman who once had a numbered seat in the Council Chamber at the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) building in Redhills, as a union lodge representative, thought that we might ask general secretary Davey Hopper if we could have some free space in the building to put on: well, we weren't exactly sure what.

Brother Hopper observed this cockney academic with a quizzical eye and spent much of our meeting time dealing with members' problems. It seemed to go alright, however, and clearly Dave Wray would be looking after the union interest.

The Redhills building dominates that bit of Durham just outside the city centre and many folk don't know what it is, and even fewer were using it at the time. Without its history, we would not have had a starting point. By happy coincidence, other forces were on the move to preserve the building and turn it into the community resource it always should be.

The DMA was looking for funding, The Marras (Friends of the Durham Miners Gala) were soon to be up and running. Put another way, there was plenty of opportunity to bring the building to life and life to the building.

Education for Action (E4A), meanwhile, had acquired a name and had grown from the seeds of an idea into a proper committee with an agenda. Kath Connolly played a pivotal role in bringing others on board and we were soon joined by women and men who had played their part in the Great Strike and wanted to bring that knowledge and experience to local school children before it was lost or left to 'the enormous condescension of history'.¹

We built some links with the Workers' Education Association (WEA) and the North East Labour History Society, who were invited to have a look at the 'archives'. Scattered across the building but mainly piles and piles of files housed in a damp basement, these archives were not to be a quick job for amateurs to sort out, and they soon became a focal part of other plans. Most importantly, Redhills was bringing its history to local school children who were, in their turn, bringing their voices to the echoing rooms. 'What's this?' might be the starting point of a session where few of the children were able to identify the lump of coal that their fathers and grandfathers had dug from the ground to fire their grates and drive the wheels of industry.

A lot was done with no money, but E4A made a successful bid in 2017 to the Lipman Miliband Trust for approaching £2000. Much was done with it as E4A activities expanded, most particularly showing people the building and running events in the build up to Gala week. The sad death in 2016 of Davey Hopper, whose support had been so important, meant that E4A went on to organise sell out annual memorial lectures.² One of these featured film maker Ken Loach, calling for socialist unity in what he foresaw would be an onslaught on any Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn.

A further successful bid, this time with Northumbria University, to the National Lottery Heritage Fund led to the Mining The Memories project,

which recorded the memories of miners and their families in the Durham coalfields. They will be made available on-line to the wider public and make a valuable contribution to E4A's schools work.

Another bid has been submitted from the DMA to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. If successful, it will not only preserve the existing physical space but build for the future with additional new premises. It will be great to have such new facilities but nothing must be lost. What can compare with sitting in the Committee Room where the Durham coalfields decision to support the 1984/5 strike was won on the casting vote of the chair? Or to being part of a sixth form group debating in the building's great chamber, site of the 'Pitmens' Parliament'? There is a lesson from history too. Whatever success comes from revitalising the building, it is people, working together in solidarity through their different organisations, who make things happen, in tribute to the miners who paid their pennies and pounds in their union subscriptions to build Redhills.

Notes

- ¹ This well-used phrase is from E. P. Thompson's: making of the English Working Class and is thus normally attributed to him. However, Sheila Rowbotham recalls that 'neither Dorothy [Thompson] nor Edward was quite sure which of them invented the famous phrase...though Edward considered that it was Dorothy'. *Sheila Rowbotham, Remembering Dorothy and Edward*. (Worcester, Past Pixels, 2012).
- ² See John Creaby's tribute to Davey Hopper, on our website at <http://nelh.net/resources-library/who-was-who/davey-hopper-1943-2016/>

Workers' Education: centenary reflections

Nigel Todd

Revisiting 1919 offers rich pickings for historians of workers' education. The year marked the opening of a Ruskin College women's hostel, removing barriers for activist working women. In Manchester, the Co-operative Movement established its own Co-operative College. The City Literary Institute ('the City Lit') took adult liberal education to clerical and warehouse workers at London's financial and mercantile heart.¹

The North East had its story, too. 1919 saw Tommy Jackson on Tyneside as organiser of the North East Labour College Committee. Tommy, or T.A. Jackson was one of the most creative proletarian intellectuals of the interwar Left. For 18 months, Jackson immersed himself chiefly among the Northumberland and Durham miners, delivering lectures, and collaborating with Ebby Edwards and Will Lawther in a movement for independent working class education. Labour Colleges were really local workers' educational agencies, advocating class struggle and Marxism. They joined together in the National Council of Labour Colleges in 1921.²

The North East was contested territory in workers' education, between the Labour College and the Workers' Educational Association whose North East District had been formed by trade unions and working class women's organisations in 1910. Committed to adult liberal education, some WEA leaders regarded the Labour Colleges as 'propagandists', whereas Lawther caricatured the WEA as the 'Wasted Effort Association'. They clashed in seeking funding from the Northumberland and Durham miners' associations,



T.A. Jackson, aged 41
North Eastern Organiser for the Labour Colleges
Courtesy Working Class Movement Library

and the rivalry exploded in 1916 when the WEA gained a £50 grant from the Durham miners.³

As the WEA was known to be approaching the Northumberland miners for a grant, Lawther and Edwards formed a regional Labour College organisation and challenged the WEA's national General Secretary, James MacTavish, a former shipwright, to a public debate. In the end, the 'debate' took the form of separate public meetings in Newcastle and a vigorous pamphlet 'war'.

Another difference between the two educational organisations was that whilst the Labour College militants were predominantly male industrial workers, the WEA's active members by 1916 were often female. By the end of the War, local newspapers sometimes referred to the WEA as the 'Women's Educational Association.'

Beyond the formal antagonisms, the extent to which the two movements were fundamentally distinct in practice is less clear. Tutors could teach for the WEA and the Labour Colleges, and WEA provision could be ‘committed’. A legendary WEA economics tutor at Sunderland and in the Durham coalfields, Mrs. Caldwell Brown, would ‘pace about [her class], a closed fist held against the top of her head [as she] read out the *Communist Manifesto* slowly and lovingly’.⁴



WEA Durham Summer School 1921

(Note the children)

Courtesy WEA Collection: Tyne & Wear Archives

There were powerful mediators, too. The miners’ and other unions could aid the WEA and the Labour Colleges even-handedly, and the same was true of the co-operatives. At Ashington, the Co-operative Society’s Chester Armstrong, a mining checkweighman, used local relationships to co-ordinate educational programmes with the Labour College among miners and the WEA active in the wider community. Ebby Edwards, a good friend of Armstrong, encouraged miners’ union students from his Labour College economics classes

to move on to Armstrong's WEA-style Co-op long-running sociology study circle. The WEA's community based courses led in the 1930s to the famous Pitmen Painters. Armstrong achieved a further Co-op 'bridge' by bringing Harold Laski to give an annual Ashington lecture series on Socialist policies during the 1920s.⁵

Yet 1919 was significant in underlining differences. The WEA campaigned for State funding to expand adult education, embedding this demand into the Ministry of Reconstruction's '1919 Report' on the future of adult education. Contrastingly, the Labour Colleges believed that taking funding from a capitalist State would compromise education for class struggle.⁶

Although post-War 'reconstruction' largely didn't happen, there was an unexpected immediate breakthrough for the WEA's State interventionism. The '1919 Report' recommended a Government bursary, enabling demobilised soldiers to enrol on teacher training or university courses.⁷ The scheme, limited to male officers (intriguingly, many would have come from lower down the social scale by 1918 than previously), only ran for three years from 1919. But 33,668 men took part, pioneering the idea of the 'mature student'. They generated the National Union of Students in 1922 as a vehicle for international reconciliation, revived students' campus political life and started branches of the League of Nations Union. They were, in a sense, student radicals.⁸

Notes

- ¹ Henry Sanderson Furniss, *Memories of Sixty Years* (London: Methuen & Co 1931), pp 174-5; Tom Woodin and Linda Shaw (eds), *Learning for a Co-operative World: A Century of Education, Social change and the Co-operative College* (London: UCL Press, 2019); T. G. Williams, *The City Literary Institute: A Memoir* (London: The Saint Catherine Press 1960).
- ² T. A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet: Some Memories of Socialist Agitation and Propaganda* (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1953), pp. 143-166.
- ³ Jonathan Brown (ed), *The Right to Learn: The WEA in the North of England, 1910-2010* (Newcastle upon Tyne: WEA 2010), p. 17.
- ⁴ Arthur Appleton, *When the Leaf was Green: Autobiography 1913-1939* (Sunderland: Black Cat Publications 1993), p. 135.
- ⁵ Chester Armstrong, *Pilgrimage From Nenthead: An Autobiography* (London: Methuen & Co 1938; Nigel Todd, 'Before The Pitmen Painters: Chester Armstrong's Ashington' in

north east history

Dr. Jude Murphy (ed), *The Highway: Turbulent Times 1918-28 – Educational and Social Campaigning Within the WEA and Affiliated Organisations in the North East, 1918-28* (Newcastle upon Tyne: WEA 2018), pp. 10-13.

⁶ Robert Turnbull, *Left for the Rising Sun, Right for Swan Hunter: The Plebs League in the North East of England, 1908/1926* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications.2014).

⁷ Harold Wiltshire et.al (eds), *The 1919 Report: The Final and Interim Reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-1919* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham 1980), p. 104.

⁸ Daniel Laqua and Georgina Brewis, *Students in England and the Legacy of the First World War* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumbria University/UCL, 2018).

Encountering Eric

Huw Beynon

I was sad to hear of Eric Wade's death. He was a good man. I came to know him well in the late seventies and eighties when I lived and worked in Durham. After my move away to Manchester we met occasionally, the last time being at the Lit and Phil, I think in 2010. On that occasion, Eric was presenting the case for a new deep coal mine in the north east of the county, drawing on the reserves that had been left after the closure of the Wearmouth colliery. Dressed in a suit, he delivered in his inimical style, with a variety of slides and the occasional slip and misquote, after which he was warmly applauded.

Talking with him afterwards, he seemed pleased with the response. Standing there in the library alongside a table laden with sandwiches, with his head slightly to one side, he said, 'There is a chance; a good chance, I think'. Sadly not – the tide for coal in the UK had turned, probably irreversibly.

It was no coincidence that we met on that day, for he and I had each gained a reputation as Don Quixote figures, forever chasing the windmills of lost causes in the coal industry. We were an odd pair in the seventies; I didn't have a suit and never wore a tie in those days. He was deeply embedded in the North East with a long and practical involvement in the coal industry; I was the late arrival who had written about car factories and seemed to be a bit of a know-all. All the elements for friction were present

but (with one or two hiccups) we got on.

Quite early on in our relationship we met for lunch with a man from the US Embassy whose name I have forgotten. The meeting was arranged by Bill Dowding, the well-connected research officer at the NUM regional headquarters at Redhills, and took place at the County Hotel. After introductions, two bottles of Muscadet were ordered and the topic for discussion established as the labour movement in the North East and the relationship between the Labour Party there and the local trade unions, especially the miners. It was here that I learned of Eric's political involvement and of his experiences in Hexham, and it became clear that our views of the Labour Party were rather different. We agreed, however, that trouble was on the horizon in the coal industry and this seemed to interest our American host. Later on, in my researches into the leadership of Sam Watson, I became alerted to the close involvement of the CIA's labor attaché programme with the Durham NUM. Introduced after the war as part of the Marshall Plan, these attachés built up close links with right-wing trade union leaders as part of a strategy to limit the effectiveness of the Communist Party, especially in the vital coal industry. It seemed likely that in 1979 we had been part of an induction programme for a new recruit! I would occasionally tease Eric about our time with the CIA, when we had passed on the secrets of the Labour movement for a couple of bottles of cheap wine.

Eric and I would often meet in the Half Moon pub in Durham to catch up and discuss issues relating to coal mining. By this time, it had been established that he knew much more about the industry than I ever would, and on that basis we would talk endlessly and to my advantage. He had a way of mentioning as asides, things that were often eye-openers. On one such occasion, we were discussing coal mining research in the forties and fifties, particularly the paper by Trist and Bamforth on 'autonomous group functioning' in the Derwent valley area. Quietly, Eric explained with pint in hand, 'of course Chopwell was a drift'. Of course! The men could leave as they pleased without recourse to the cage. In that, and in many other

ways, he revealed a deep and detailed knowledge and understanding of the practices and culture of coal mining, generally (he had a special knowledge of the German industry), but especially in the North East. His essay, *The Northumbrian Putter*, on the social significance of the division of labour in the mines before heavy mechanisation was a classic account, and would benefit from being republished.

In the early eighties, and in the prelude to the miners' strike of 1984-85, everything changed. During those years, our conversations were concerned with more immediate issues, especially the Report of the Monopoly and Mergers Commission into the coal industry. The identification of large numbers of loss-making collieries, concentrated in particular regions, made the future of mining in the North East precarious. This was made clear in a number of reports produced by the NCB, and became a reality in the year following the strike. At that time, the defence of the mining industry seemed to rest on an argument relating to reserves and investment, alongside another that itemised the costs to the Exchequer and to society of precipitate closures. Eric wrote on both these issues, focusing on Blyth in Northumberland and (with colleagues in the Geography department in Durham University) on the Easington District of Durham.

Matters came to a head when in 1985 the miners in Bates and Horden collieries voted against the closure of their mines, and took the decision into the new Modified Colliery Review Procedure. It was natural for Eric's help to be called upon in both cases. While the NCB lost the argument over Bates, it still closed the colliery, revealing the obduracy of the corporation. This standpoint was most apparent in the cross examination of Eric's evidence in the Horden review. The Area Director, David Archibald, made clear that as the monopoly producer of coal in the UK, the NCB also claimed a monopoly of knowledge and expertise. Eric's evidence was a challenge to this and, rather than discuss the issues, he chose to attack the evidence at source challenging the authority of Eric's academic background with a series of questions: 'Are you qualified to manage a coalfield? What practical management experience have you had? You were never really interested in

managing? Have you any personal experience in selling coal?’ and so on. It was a dramatic moment and Eric held his own, but it revealed a great deal. The mines were going to close and the Board would entertain no argument.

In the end all the pits were closed, in the North East and then across the whole of the country. This takes us back to that event at the Lit and Phil when Eric spoke about the vast reserves of coal off the north-east coast of Durham, coal that could be mined and substituted for the millions of tonnes being imported each year. After much serious discussion of the mining problems, the infrastructure needs and the planning issues involved, it was concluded that the project would be at least ten years in the making. This brought home the enormous size of the task and the tragedy of the industry’s ending. Ten minutes to close a mine; ten years to start again. Eric Wade’s working life helped to emphasise the importance of all this, and the nature of the world we have lost.

Eric Wade 1939-2018

Archie Potts

On 6 June 2018, mourners gathered at Newcastle's West End Crematorium for the funeral of Dr Eric Wade. The attendees were largely from his family, the Northumberland mining community, the Open University and the Labour Party. Eric had been a longstanding member of the North East Labour History Society, and of the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers (NEIMME), and both organisations were represented. It was a simple, secular service of music, together with a commemoration of Eric's life by a former colleague at the Open University.

Eric Wade was born into a mining family in Broomhill in 1937. He attended the Duke's Grammar School at Alnwick, although he did not like its meritocratic ethos. After leaving school at sixteen, he went to work down the pits and attended evening classes at Ashington Technical College. Under a National Coal Board scheme, he was awarded a scholarship to study for a BSc in mining engineering at King's College, Newcastle, after which he successfully completed a PhD. He then obtained a state grant to study on a postgraduate course in sociology at Edinburgh University. This was followed by a year's project work at Cambridge University.

Eric's first teaching job was as a temporary staff tutor in industrial relations in the Adult Education Department at Newcastle University, followed by a lectureship in industrial sociology at the then Newcastle Polytechnic (now Northumbria University). He then joined the Open University (OU) at its inception in 1970, when its Northern Regional Centre was above a fishing

tackle shop on the corner of Newcastle's Percy Street and St Thomas Street. He was appointed to the faculty of Social Sciences as a Staff Tutor, a post that involved appointing, instructing, and delivering staff development to part-time tutors living in the North East and Cumbria. The role entailed frequent visits to the OU's headquarters in Milton Keynes.

Another aspect of the post which Eric particularly enjoyed was Director of the OU's annual residential school for first-year social science students based at Keele. He carried out this responsibility for a total of 60 weeks while with the OU, and he took great pleasure in the opportunity it gave him for meeting students and staff from all parts of the country, and for inviting guest speakers to the school.

The OU encouraged Eric to continue his research interests which centred around the mining industry. Among his publications, he co-authored *Stand True: A Centenary History of the Northumberland Colliery Machanics Association* (1975) and in 1985 he published *Coal Mining and Unemployment: A Study of the Blyth Valley* for Blyth Borough Council, followed by *The Social and Economic Consequences of the Coal Industry in Northumberland* for the OU.

Eric was also Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Earth Sciences at Durham University, and at the time of his death was Vice President of NEIMME. The OU awarded him an honorary degree in 2005, for his services to the university and he was made an Honorary Research Associate on his retirement. Eric also acted as adviser to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), notably on the issues surrounding pit closures. He was a close friend of NUM President Lawrence Daly and met up with him at the union's headquarters whenever he was in London. Eric made several trips to both East and West Germany, as the guest of their respective miners' unions.

A major part of Eric's time at the OU was taken up with Association of University Teachers' activities. Serving initially as branch secretary, he rose through the ranks to be a National Executive member for several years, and National Secretary for fifteen years.

Eric was a staunch member of the Labour Party and served terms on both Northumberland County Council and Newcastle City Council. He had parliamentary ambitions and fought the Hexham constituency at the two general elections of 1974. Although he was subsequently shortlisted for several winnable seats, he was never selected. Perhaps he lacked that bit of luck sometimes necessary for political success, but in addition he was never a 'yes man'. Although his loyalty to the party was never in doubt, he had his own views on several issues and was not afraid to express them. Influential trade union officials often favoured more deferential candidates for safe seats.

Eric Wade remained true to his roots. He enjoyed talking politics and football over a beer, and was a keen supporter of Newcastle United. As an original staff member of the OU, he is fondly remembered by former students. His last months were clogged by failing health, and he spent some time in a Marie Curie hospice before his death. He is survived by his wife Marlene and his son Carl.

An appreciation: Bernard Newbold, 1929-2018

John Charlton



Bernard Newbold, who died in February 2018, had a lifetime of activity in the labour movement - in South Wales, Lancashire and for the last forty years in the North East. His first experience was in the Communist Party League of Youth, in Manchester as a teenager. His father Horace, a Party member, was for many years a full-time officer for the Transport and General Workers' Union, and Secretary of the influential Manchester Trades Council in the 1940s and 1950s.

After leaving school at 14, Bernard had gone down the pit after a brief time in an office. He would say that his mother was horrified and though she had never seen the inside of a colliery, she was right to be appalled. His recollection of life below ground in the late 1940s was of complete shock at the scant attention to coal mining safety by management, and sadly the carelessness of many miners themselves. He was fired by this experience to try to do something himself. He became strongly interested in safety, especially dust control. This led to a new job in the NCB Scientific Department after qualifying as a mining engineer. In 1970 this brought him to the North East. He was in the area during the great strikes of 1972,

1974 and 1984-85. He resolved never to cross a picket line without the express permission of the local lodge secretary. This was rarely given, but when it was, he saw those occasions as it as an expression of the miners' responsibility to keep the plant in safe working order for when there would be a return to work, much in contradiction to the media's attacks on the union.

While a young pitman, Bernard was taken to Sheffield to hear and meet Pablo Picasso. The artist drew his famous symbol, the dove of peace, on a table napkin, which was auctioned for party funds. Bernard also heard Paul Robeson, a lifelong hero, sing in Manchester. He had more excitement as a young man visiting Eastern Europe, as a member of delegations visiting coal mines and factories. He was impressed at the time by the advanced safety measures he saw, beyond those in British workplaces, but later in his own life he came to understand that he had only been shown model pits and factories. His early enthusiasm for Russian communism was lost in the 1950s, after the suppression of the Polish and Hungarian risings. However, Bernard always considered himself to be a Marxist, placing class struggle at the centre of his practice.

He joined the Labour Party in the 1950s, and was elected to North Tyneside Council in the 1970s though he was not comfortable with what he saw as the right-wing policies of the local leadership. He chaired the Housing Committee. He had a strong belief in public housing and a mission to keep private developers at bay. This, he admitted, was a very difficult task, especially after the victory of Margaret Thatcher.

He and his life companion, his wife Jean whom he married in 1955, were both members of NELHS. Both attended regularly, except when they were on their world travels, which took place several times and included South Africa, where they met Desmond Tutu and visited Robben Island and Nelson Mandela's cell. In the last few years Bernard was plagued by deafness and ultimately blindness which to his great frustration restricted his movements and closed down his formidable life of activity.

Dr Ethel Williams: Commemorative Plaque

Liz O'Donnell



Portrait photograph of Ethel Williams (EWL/2/4), Ethel Williams Collection. Newcastle University Library

Former Newcastle University students of a certain vintage will be very familiar with the name Ethel Williams, as the title of the University's female-only hall of residence, opened in 1950. By the 1970s, the idea of separate living facilities for male and female students seemed hopelessly outdated. If we thought at all about the woman after whom it was named, we probably dismissed her as a typical Victorian prude. Fortunately, the intervening decades have seen the efforts of more enlightened scholars to explore and make known the life and work of this extraordinary

and thoroughly modern woman, culminating, on 18 July 2018, in the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on her former home and place of work (1910-24) at 3 Osborne Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne.



Image courtesy of Brian Bennison

Ethel Williams, born in Norfolk in 1863, did indeed grow up in the Victorian age but she was always ahead of her time. The plaque sums her up as the city's first female general practitioner, a radical suffragist, pacifist, educationalist and social welfare campaigner. However, the list tells only a small part of her story. In addition to her pioneering medical work in the city – she specialised in the health of underprivileged women and children – and her crucial part in the fight for women's suffrage, she was also the secretary of the Newcastle Women's Liberal Association, a founder of the Medical Women's Federation, a member of the Senate of Durham University, as well as serving as a Justice of the Peace.¹ In

1901, five years after she had moved to the North East, an article by Ethel Williams appeared in the Dundee Evening Post. Entitled 'The Woman Doctor: Her Difficulties and Chances of Success', it is a sobering reminder of the considerable lengths to which she had gone to qualify as a doctor and make a living from medicine. As well as the long period of study and the associated costs, she wrote, the capital held more opportunities and chances of success, whereas in the provinces 'women will still find much prejudice to overcome and ridicule to live down'. She continued,

A woman settling out of London must not only be well equipped for her professional work. She should have financial resources which will enable her to spend considerably more than her professional earnings for at any rate three or four years.²

It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that Dr Williams was prepared to risk her professional reputation by campaigning so vigorously and publicly for the right of women to take part in general elections. She had signed the Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage as early as 1889, and took part in many suffrage demonstrations, including the infamous 'Mud March' of 1907. In 1912, her goods were distrained and auctioned off after her refusal to pay taxes until the vote was granted, and in 1913 she lent her car to fellow campaigners in the Houghton-le-Spring by-election, leaving her to 'spend much time and energy in walking and cycling on her enormous rounds'.³

At the beginning of the First World War, the *Newcastle Journal* featured Dr Williams in a series called 'In the Public Eye: Sketches of Notabilities in the North', describing her as 'a citizen of whom Newcastle can be proud...[with] unflagging energy...[giving] splendid service to the cause of women'.⁴ One wonders whether the writer of that piece was aware of her opposition to the war; she was involved with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from its inception, and in

July 1917 helped to organise a meeting of the Newcastle Soldiers' and Workers' Council, set up to work for an end to the war in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. The meeting, consisting mostly of local labour activists and pacifists, was broken up by 'patriotic' members of the Anti-German League and soldiers on leave, and Ethel Williams and others had to escape through a side entrance.

The Newcastle branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies presented her in 1918 with a copy in bronze of 'Winged Victory' and a £60 cheque for a charity of her choice as a token of their appreciation for her role in the (partially) successful struggle for the vote.⁵

A century later, the plaque which was unveiled to Ethel Williams was due to the lobbying of the City Council by members of the Workers' Educational Association. Dr Williams was a leading figure in the WEA, and during the turmoil of the First World War she was one of a handful of women who kept the classes going.⁶ It is fitting that the event was timed to coincide with the end of the WEA-led 'Turbulent Times, 1918-28', an eighteen month long project exploring educational and social campaigning in the North East through historical research, drama, art, crafts and music. The response of the organisers and volunteers to the unveiling by the Mayor of Newcastle, David Down, was appropriately creative. Rosie Serdiville, in the role of Ethel Williams, was 'interviewed' by Jude Murphy, as a fictional 1924 reporter, and the short walk back to the WEA office for a celebratory lunch took place behind a replica of Ethel Williams' own suffrage banner, accompanied by a lusty rendition of 'Bread and Roses.' Dr Gillian Rye, a present incumbent of Ethel Williams' practice (which until recently had only employed female doctors), was invited. She brought along a signed photograph of the doctor, which had hung in the practice since her retirement in 1924 to Stocksfield, where she lived with her companion, the mathematician Frances Hardcastle until her death in 1948.



*WEA members with the replica of Ethel Williams' suffrage banner.
Image courtesy of Nigel Todd*

It was a worthy commemoration of a true pioneer which should help to ensure that her huge contribution to women's rights, welfare reform and educational opportunities for all will never be forgotten.

Notes

- ¹ Nigel Todd, 'Ethel Williams: Medical and Suffrage Pioneer', in *North East Labour History* (30: 1996) pp. 19-21
- ² *Dundee Evening Post*, 16 April 1901, p. 6.
- ³ *Common Cause*, 11 April 1912, p.14; Friday 28 February 1913, p. 10

north east history

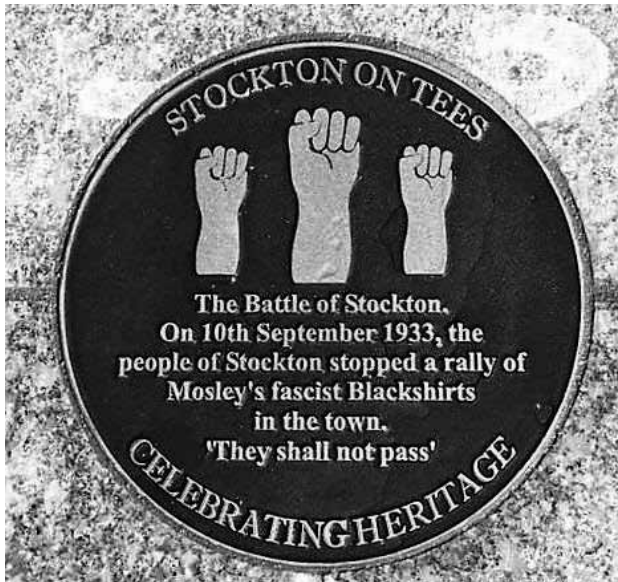
⁴ *Newcastle Journal*, 7 September 1914, p. 6

⁵ *Newcastle Journal*, 1 July 1918, p.4

⁶ Nigel Todd, 'A Working-class Hero is Something to Be: the Origins of the Workers' Educational Association in the North-East to 1920', in *The Right to Learn: the WEA in the North of England, 1910-2010* edited by Jonathan Brown (London: Workers' Educational Association, 2010), pp. 6-23

Commemoration; the Battle of Stockton

Brian Bennison



On the morning of September 9, 2018 over a hundred people gathered in Stockton High Street for the unveiling of a plaque, commemorating the day 85 years earlier when townspeople had stood firm against Mosley's Blackshirts. In September 1933 trade unionists, representatives of the National Unemployed Workers Movement, and members of the Labour, Independent Labour and Communist parties had prevented a march and rally by large numbers of British Union of Fascists (BUF) from taking place.

The Battle of Stockton Campaign Group had worked hard to ensure a previously neglected episode in Teesside's political history was publicly acknowledged. Amongst the guests at the unveiling were two principal speakers who placed the events of 1933 in their local and national contexts. Marlene Sidaway is not only President of the International Brigade Memorial Trust, but a native of Thornaby-on-Tees. Her speech included a moving account of the radicalisation of her late partner, John Marshall, who as a bright schoolboy in the 1930s had joined the civil service and begun work at the Middlesbrough dole office. So disturbed was he, by both the poverty he encountered in his daily work and the growth of fascism, that he left his job and became one of the first British volunteers to fight in Spain. In another powerful address David Rosenberg, social historian and author of *Battle for the East End: Responses to Fascism in the 1930s*, outlined the background to the rise of the BUF and paid tribute to the people of Stockton who had grasped so quickly the danger they posed. He stressed the need to remain vigilant and stay true to the traditions of resistance established on that day in 1933.

As the official ceremony ended, the Infant Hercules, a male voice choir dressed in the clothes of the 1930s working man, emerged from the shopping centre belting out songs of both protest and hope. In the afternoon, in the Georgian Theatre, a specially written play was performed, bringing alive the issues faced by the working folk of Stockton in 1933, and the lessons still to be learned.

A series of workshops, lectures and other events is to take place in Stockton over the corresponding September weekend in 2019. An inspiring chapter in the town's past has become the springboard from which to engage local people in a wider appreciation of their own history, and to keep alive that resolute spirit of 1933 in the face of extremism today.

Public Recognition of a Heroic Train Driver, William George 'Billy' Hardy

Simon Brindley



*Billy Hardy, right, is shown in a J71 class shunter.
Photograph supplied by the author*

On what would have been his hundred and sixteenth birthday, 14 January 2019, Northern Rail named refurbished local diesel passenger train 156483 after Driver William George “Billy” Hardy (1903-1950). Billy came from a strong North East railway family and worked for North East Railway, London North Eastern Railway, and British Rail.

Born in the railway house at 73 Stepney Lane, within a few feet of the rails, Billy drove steam and electric engines on Tyneside and beyond.

Working out of Heaton Yard, he drove the electric engines on the steep Quayside branch line up to Manors station and the Tyneside electric passenger services. On other days he might take a steam train to Doncaster and back. He worked seven days a week through most of World War Two.

On the day he died, Billy was driving an electric passenger train into Newcastle from the coast. There were problems with the brakes, so he called ahead from Wallsend. He pulled up perfectly at the old Central Station platforms on the site of the current car park. As the brakeman came towards him, Billy collapsed in the cab with a fatal heart attack. No one else was hurt. He was only forty-seven years old.

'Dad loved his job' said both his daughters (now eighty-seven and eighty-nine years of age), when they attended the official naming ceremony at Newcastle Central Station. In March 1950 they saw him go to work and never come back, but in January 2019 perhaps he did. About thirty of his descendants and wider family joined Northern Rail and ASLEF officials, railway enthusiasts and ordinary passengers on the inaugural journey to Morpeth and back, with Billy's great nephew Driver Dave Hardy proudly at the controls.



*Family and friends with Northern Rail's newly named diesel train at
Newcastle Central Station on 14 January 2019.
Reproduced courtesy of Mike Greatbatch.*

North East Labour History Society



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

Reviews

Colin Ryder, *A Visit to the Seaside. A history of County Durham railway excursions from the 1840s to the 1960s* (Durham County Local History Society, 2017) 214 pp. Illus. ISBN 978-0-902958-32-1, £15

The ever-expanding body of work on the history of County Durham is full of accounts of coal-mines, pit-work, trade unionism and strikes. This book provides a refreshing break from the routine with an extensive schedule of outings by rail. Richly illustrated, it spans 140 years but has a thematic structure organised into three digestible time periods. There is much here for those interested in the leisure time activities of working people.

After outlining the origins of the rail excursion, the author considers the nature and logistics of all those trips that took Durham folk to coast and countryside. He provides fascinating and sometimes comical insights into how the region's holiday resorts sought to distinguish themselves over the years. The first excursions were private arrangements made by particular groups with railway companies. In 1841, for example, Mechanics' Institutes along the Newcastle & Carlisle Railway line visited a Polytechnic Exhibition in Newcastle and the Stockton Mechanics' Institute had a day out in Castle Eden. As the rail network developed the train operators developed their own programmes of excursions, none more so than the North Eastern Railway. The author explores the ways in which that company broadened and boosted its range of pleasure trips. By 1904, for instance, excursions included the Pittington Amicable Industrial Society's visit to Blackpool and an excursion starting from Brandon for members of the public wishing to see *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show* at West Hartlepool. A few years later, an excursion from Consett to Newcastle tempted theatregoers with the

opportunity to see a pantomime or the new musical *Dear Little Denmark*.

Ryder analyses in detail seaside excursions in four particular summers, drawing out the characteristics of that season's timetables. In 1910, for example, the most popular destinations were Redcar and Saltburn, over two-thirds of trips were open to the public, most were half-day outings, and the majority of private excursions began on branch lines and were for chapels or workingmen's clubs. By 1950 Seaton Carew was the most popular destination, the majority of excursions were full-day trips and the most frequently used point of origin was Bishop Auckland. There were also popular evening excursions to Redcar and Sunderland illuminations. For the real devotees of illuminations a trip to Blackpool left Crook at 10.35 a.m. and got back the following day at 4.52 a.m.

By the mid-1950s there were no Sunday School outings, something that was feature of rail excursions in the early days, and the demand for short, organised away-days began to reflect social and economic change. Seaside visits were now extended into longer stays, and regular holiday expresses were introduced to serve resorts. In the 1960s, competition came from coach travel, private cars and the temptation of a trip abroad. The end result is set out in the book's final appendix; a list of around 115 passenger stations to have closed in County Durham since 1925.

The author takes us on an enjoyable and enlightening ride. Highly readable, the book accommodates a lot of supplementary detail and explanation in endnotes. It comes with a comprehensive bibliography and many appendices. Anyone interested in the social and railway history of the region should climb aboard.

Brian Bennison

Kenneth Warren: ***A Victorian Power House: Industrialisation on Teesside and in south Durham 1825 to 1875*** (the Leazes Press 2017) 320pp ISBN 978-0-995748-55-2 £9.99 pbk., illus.

It is hard not to make a current political point in reviewing the late Kenneth Warren's book since its title, and his Preface, echo the failed policy of the pre-Brexit Conservative Government to create a "Northern Powerhouse". (Northern in the sense of Leeds and Manchester!) While there is ample evidence of a real northern Victorian powerhouse in this book, I see no signs of a late Elizabethan powerhouse in the decimated local government areas along the modern Tees Valley but with the new combined authority who knows??.

Granted the book's starting date, it seems strange that its initial focus should be on the importance of 'outsiders' in the Teesside iron industry's dramatic mid-century take off. However, after downplaying the role of local entrepreneurs in later developments, the author immediately switches to explaining the importance of the Pease family of Darlington, albeit without recognizing the influence of other local Quaker families such as the Backhouses. This failure to give prominence to the significance of local enterprise in 1825, when the Stockton and Darlington Railway opened, weakens the introductory chapter and, indeed, the 21 chapters following it seem more like vignettes highlighting aspects of the "power house" rather than a coherent history

Warren's research interest was in the iron industry and this is probably reflected in the closing date of the study, for Teesside remained an industrial powerhouse to the end of the century and beyond.

There is much of interest and a great deal of information in the book's 21 chapters, but the quality of the referencing is somewhat variable. For example, in chapter 5 which deals with ironmaking in south west Durham, the location of Charles Attwood's important letters (notes 4-9), presumably the Baring papers in the London Guildhall library, is not given. Also, the Weardale iron company, while based in Tow Law, as indicated in the

chapter title, had works at Stanhope, Wolsingham and Tudhoe.

In conclusion, this book is a timely reminder of the intertwined character of the development of the coal, coke, railways and iron and steel industries in County Durham and Teesside in the mid years of the nineteenth century. This may be the moment to look in more detail at the total experience of heavy industry in this period not just in output figures or technical invention but in terms of workers' lives and the environment

John Banham

Workers' Educational Association, ***The Highway: Turbulent Times 1918-28*** (WEA North East, 2018), 138 pp. pbk. Illus. No price or ISBN. Available from northeast@wea.org.uk

This is not a 'book' in the conventional sense, but rather follows a magazine format, adopting the name of the Workers' Educational Association's (WEA) own journal *The Highway*. Indeed, its origins lie in a WEA project, and the publication has benefited from collaboration with academic institutions such as Northumbria University. The outcome is a wonderful mixture of authors and articles, songs and poems, art and illustrations, which is a pleasure to look at and to read. I counted 28 authors (the majority of them women) and 44 different pieces and did not have the energy to count the diverse and illuminating illustrations, many of them in colour and immaculately reproducing historical photographs.

The sub-heading of 'turbulent times' is certainly clear from the articles: the turbulence is reflected not only in the broader 'times' but, often poignantly, in the personal lives of the 'ordinary folk' who figure prominently in the stories that are gathered together. Inevitably, the starting point of 1918 includes retrospection about the Great War which was the basis of so many shattered lives. These include those of conscientious objectors who left prison on crutches or faced the mistreatment of their communities

before, in the case of Ernie Gompertz for example, going on to be a South Shields councillor and having gardens named after him. There were also lives that people might have tried to re-connect with, via spiritualism – the subject of another interesting piece.

Women's lives and roles after the war are particularly strongly recorded, from well-researched pieces on women's rights or lives in mining communities to sad commentaries on one woman's disappointment as her hero returned from the fighting shattered and no longer the man of her dreams. I particularly liked the story of the 'flappers', illuminated by one father of a 15 year-old girl who, he felt, might be placed in a 'seminary' for a year or two 'with the object of taming her. It is not education she requires, she has too much of that already!' This is just one example of the many eye-catching quotes that the researchers have dug out, and which can sum up so much in a single sentence.

A further theme is that of housing and 'homes fit for heroes' - more correctly, the failure to provide them, with the North East shown to have the worst examples of overcrowding. One piece demonstrates how the employers used 'model housing' in Lynemouth not only to provide much-needed accommodation, but also to quell industrial unrest. In another case, people took rehousing into their own hands and squatted in wartime buildings in 'Elisabethville', the settlement that had been built for the 'Birtley Belgians' and had been partly inspired by the garden city movement.

I could easily go on! The book is a treasure trove. Although there are no conventional editors for the collection it is clear that the designer Tommy Anderson, and the project organiser Jude Murphy, deserve enormous credit for bringing the overall project to such a fine outcome. Get a copy, enjoy it, and be inspired to do your own research.

John Stirling

Svetlana Alexievitch, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (Penguin Random House 2017), 331pp. ISBN:978-0-141-98352-3, £9.99

I was unsure whether this book should be reviewed in North East History, as at first sight there would seem to be little connection with the North East. However, the style of the author, a journalist who conducted a large number of oral history interviews of Russian women who served in the front line of the Second World War is very similar to that of many of the researchers and oral historians who write for our journal. In addition, the subject matter of the role of women during the War is worth comparing with what we know about the local experience of women working in the huge armaments factories of Vickers Armstrong and Birtley, or as forestry or land workers. It is a compelling and at times emotionally draining account of what some women suffered as our allies in the Russian front in the war against German fascism, during which over 26 million Russians were killed.

The author begins with a quote from the Russian poet Osip Mandestam which powerfully sets the scene, 'Millions of the cheaply killed have trod the path in darkness'. This is a history of feelings, of the soul. Alexievitch says men hide behind history, behind facts; war fascinates them as action and as the conflict of ideas, whereas women are caught up with feelings.

For many years this book was not allowed to be published, as it contradicted the heroic 'official' history of the war. Alexievitch's early exchanges with the government censor are particularly revealing. The censor wrote: 'Who will go to fight after such books?.....You make them into ordinary women, females. But our women are saints', and 'We don't need your little history, we need the big history Of the Victory', (p. xxxv)

Some of the women's husbands also were so concerned that they spent time before their wives met the author coaching them on the 'correct history'.

The reality is that throughout these stories of ordinary women at the front line as nurses, doctors, cooks, snipers, aircraft workers, as well as partisans, their humanity is deeply moving and powerful. In some places it is almost unbearable to read their accounts, such as that of a mother who

must sacrifice her new-born child as she knows her child crying would lead to the capture of herself and her fellow-partisans, hiding in the swamp, by the Germans (p. xxxii).

Or the women drivers: 'We pick up the dead after the battle; they're scattered over the field. All young. Boys. And suddenly there's a young girl lying there. Killed....Everybody falls silent.' (p. 53); Or the partisan passing through the German checkpoint with her small baby who she had rubbed with salt to make it cry, give it a rash and a temperature, so that she could cry 'typhus' and be allowed through with medicine and supplies hidden in the child's swaddling (p. 44).

For over 40 years these stories were untold, and the role of women was largely unrecognised. The men came back heroes (unless they had been captured). The women suffered severe prejudice, often called 'unwomanly' or 'sluts'. They had frequently aged badly and were often unable to marry and start a family or career.

When it was eventually published in 1985 the book became a best seller in Russia. Its powerful critique of the utter hell and awfulness of war stands alongside its vivid description of the camaraderie and fellowship on the front line fighting for a cause. That cause was the patriotism of defending the motherland and socialism against the vile brutality of the fascist German occupying forces. This is a constant theme, and the shock of train loads of girls and women going to the front singing, with the dawning realisation that all the train loads going to the front were female, as the men and boys had already been killed, is very poignant. (p. 28).

This is a thought-provoking book that is at times very difficult to read. It explores questions of compassion, even for German prisoners or the wounded, as well as telling stories of brutality by all sides. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rising tide of fascism across Europe, the Middle East and America today, who now would be prepared to make such sacrifices?

Keith Hodgson

Joyce Quin and Moira Kilkenny, *Angels of the North: Notable Women of the North East* (Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2018), 192pp. ISBN-13: 978-0951048863, £12.99, hbk., illus.

Margaret Hedley, *Women of the Durham Coalfield in the 19th Century: Hannah's Story* (The History Press, 2019), 144pp. ISBN-13: 978-0750989886, £12.99, pbk., illus.

It is more than forty years since 'women's history' burst onto the academic scene, with a new wave of feminist historians vigorously claiming a place for women in the historical canon. Arguing that the role of women, or the impact of historical events on their lives, had been minimised or completely ignored in traditional historical accounts, female writers set out to challenge the consensus, to reclaim a place for those who had been, in Sheila Rowbotham's words, 'hidden from history'.¹ Today, while the study of the past has been transformed through the inclusion of women and other previously marginalised sections of society, both these volumes, in markedly different ways, show that the work of retrieval is far from complete.

Angels of the North examines the lives of forty notable women either from the North East or with strong links to the region. Many of the characters are (almost) household names – such as the heroic Grace Darling or the suffragette Emily Wilding Davison – but a substantial number will be new to most readers. The authors have included women from a wide array of periods, backgrounds and fields – the arts, politics, science, business, and sheer bravery – and have provided a timely reminder of their struggles for equality and freedom.

The compilers of this fascinating assortment are Baroness Joyce Quin, former Labour MEP, MP and Cabinet Minister, and Moira Kilkenny, an educationalist. As neighbours and fellow local history enthusiasts, they came up with the idea of celebrating the many pioneering north-eastern women who, despite contributing so much to regional and national life, were virtually unknown to a wider public. The individuals, each given a

brief title summarising their significance, are organised alphabetically, from Mary Astell (1666-1731), the 'Pioneer Feminist Writer', to Dr Ethel Williams (1863-1948), 'Newcastle's First Woman Doctor and Suffragist.' The authors decided not to include any living women, but the most recently deceased, Denise Robertson, 'Novelist and Well-loved Agony Aunt', only died in 2016, while the earliest figure (Dorothy Lawson, 'Recusant and Priest-harbourer') was born in the sixteenth century.

Joyce Quin, unsurprisingly, has tended to concentrate on female politicians, who are well-represented in the collection; her tribute to her friend Mo Mowlam, Labour MP for Redcar and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the time of the historic 1998 Good Friday Agreement, is especially moving. The region can boast a number of 'firsts' in many fields, including Margaret Bondfield (1873-1953), Labour MP for Wallsend from 1926-1931 and 'The First Woman Cabinet Minister', and Rachel Parsons (1885-1956), 'Founding President of the Women's Engineering Society', who also helped create an all-female engineering firm, Atlanta Ltd., in 1920. Even the well-known story of Grace Darling is given a new twist, by showing how her heroism turned her into an early victim of media frenzy. Less familiar is the story of how Sunderland-born sisters Ida and Louise Cook ('Opera Buffs and Heroines of the Holocaust') used their love of opera as a cover to facilitate the rescue of dozens of Jewish people from the horrors of Nazi Germany.

The subject matter and approach of *Hannah's Story* could not be more dissimilar. The author uses her research into the life of her great-great-grandmother, Hannah, the daughter, wife, mother and grandmother of County Durham mineworkers, as a vehicle to explore what it meant to be such a woman in the nineteenth century. Less is known about the home life of the miners than of their experiences underground, and yet the work of the male workforce was dependent on the unceasing physical burden of domestic work carried by their womenfolk. Hannah (who was illiterate) and her like have been truly 'hidden from history', with scant documentary evidence available. To uncover events in her ancestor's life and give her a

voice, Margaret Hedley has woven together family stories with a paper trail of official documentation and newspaper accounts turned up by her extremely efficient research. Hannah, who saw her fair share of hardship and tragedy, may seem 'typical', a mere representative of a type or class, but the many surprising twists and turns in this account remind us that she is an individual with her own unique story.

The publication of the *Angels of the North* book in 2018 was fortuitous, coinciding as it did with the so-called Great Exhibition of the North and the celebration of the enfranchisement of some women through the 1918 Representation of the People Act, but perhaps it was a desire to rush it out that led to some rather unfortunate typographical and factual errors. The fault for the former undoubtedly lies with the proof-readers, whether mistyping the date of Mary Astell's death as 1771 in the list of contents (correctly printed as 1731 a few pages later), repeating the abbreviation BEM (British Empire Medal) in the heading for the entry for Sister Winifred Laver (p. 8), or referring to the 1918 post-war election as taking place in 1919 (p. 60). These blunders can be an irritant, but a bigger problem is an over-reliance on too few sources for a number of the women. In the case of Emily Davies (1830-1921, 'Pioneer of Women's Higher Education'), for example, the use of a single source has meant repeating an inaccurate identification of one of Emily's closest friends. Moreover, the references at the end are not as helpful as they could be: 'Tyne and Wear Archives' is a dauntingly broad category (for researching Kathleen Brown, 'Suffragette and Newcastle's First Hunger-striker'), while David Neville, the author of *To Make Their Mark: Women's Suffrage Movement in North East England, 1900-1914* (published in 1997 by our own Society), used for the entry on Charlotte Marsh, 'Militant Suffragette, suffered imprisonment and force-feeding', is not even acknowledged.

Similarly, *Hannah's Story* presents obstacles to anyone wanting to follow up the references, because there are no endnotes, just a bibliography and a list of (undated) newspapers. In addition, this particular reader found the inclusion of imaginary conversations and scenes to be jarring and

unnecessary, an uneasy juxtaposition of fact and fiction. Although the author is highly adept at providing details of the wider historical context, her attempts to make direct links between, say, political events and her family can seem contrived. It is hard to understand, for example, why she decided to assume that Hannah's family would have been against the Chartist activities in Thornley in 1839.

However, neither of these publications pretend to be aimed at anyone other than the non-specialist reader. *Angels of the North* is an attractively presented (with at least one illustration – and frequently more – for each entry) anthology of remarkable females, spanning several centuries, with connections to the North East. Readers with an in-depth knowledge of particular women may well wince at the inaccuracies but it is almost certain that no one will have heard of *all* those included, and surely everyone will find something intriguing in this selection of notable women. Who would have thought, for example, that Elinor M. Brent-Dyer (1894-1969), author of the hugely successful 'Chalet School' series, set in a Swiss girls' boarding school, was born plain Gladys Eleanor May Dyer in a humble terraced house in South Shields?

Hannah's Story is likewise not aimed at the serious researcher but could spark real interest in a general reader about the domestic conditions in the Durham coalfield in the nineteenth century, perhaps inspiring them to investigate their own family history stories.

Liz O'Donnell

¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against it*, (London: Pluto Press, 1973)

North West Labour History Society, *North West Labour History*, no 43, 2018-19, cover price £7.95, available from www.nwlh.org.uk.

As noted in last year's *North East History*, North West Society have a radical approach to the presentation of their journal. It is appearance rather than the contents that will be reviewed here. While there is little difference between *North East History* and this publication in the area of academic rigour, with footnotes, references and serious use of sources of all sorts, there is a very great difference in appearance. *North West Labour History* is twice the size of most journals with its A4 format giving it the appearance of a magazine. However, this a magazine with serious intent. The A4 format offers a far greater opportunity to use graphics and photographs and the editors make full use of this opportunity. The entire journal is a triumph of graphic design. It is colourful, well laid out with photographs and graphics of a size and quality that moves them from being a small but interesting side-line of the writing to being an integral part of the article. The simple device of using a different background colour or design helps to gives each article a distinctive identity.

The high quality of the design of the publication indicates two things. One, that this is a professional piece of work, and two, that the editors give as much preference to the design and appearance of the publication as they do the contents. They have produced a bright, attractive and engaging publication. This approach does not appeal to everyone. To some, the size makes it appear more of a magazine than a serious journal. It also makes it difficult to shelve alongside other journals. Others may feel that the colourful layout is a distraction from the contents; that what it gains in colour and vibrancy, it loses in academic legitimacy. It could be that the editors of *North West History* are thinking about their readership and are making a determined effort to widen their base by producing a journal that can attract readers outside academia. It is a bold move and an expensive one; the design costs and use of full colour alone will have been significant. If the editors have adopted this design-based approach with the intention

of widening their readership they are to be applauded, and we should watch with interest to see how successful it will be.

Peter Brabban

Dave Harker, ***Billy Purvis: The First Professional Geordie*** (Wisecrack Publications 2018), ISBN 978-0-9957418-2-9, 139pp illus. hbk £15

Geordie Ridley, Joe Wilson, Ned Corvan, and now Billy Purvis; Dave Harker is well on the way to becoming THE chronicler of nineteenth-century north-eastern popular entertainers.

Billy Purvis's story is almost a 'prequel' to that of these performers. His style went back to the circus tradition of the eighteenth century, when travelling players provided entertainment for rural crowds gathered at markets and fairs across the country.

Yet there was nothing in his background to suggest that this might be his role in life. The son of a god-fearing Scottish tailor, who had established himself in Newcastle in the 1780s, by 1809 Billy was a skilled carpenter working for a Newcastle cabinet-maker but already involved in matters musical and theatrical, and running a dancing school in the evenings.

In the next few years he acquired the skills that would turn him into a multitalented showman conjuring, puppetry, fiddling and the uilleann (or as he called them 'union') pipes as well as the patter of a raconteur. By 1820 he had a mobile booth and was touring the race meetings and fairs of Northumberland and Durham with it, hiring performers as he went but remaining at the centre of it all. In the winter months he could go back to being a dancing master and/or carpenter.

It is not clear when or why he adopted his trademark clown costume. In fact despite all the material that Harker has uncovered and a wealth of near contemporary biography the man himself remains an enigma. In the pantheon of nineteenth century Tyneside entertainers where does one place him?

I am unconvinced by the subtitle. Although he could always go back to his journeyman status in Newcastle when times got hard, and retained the accent and vocabulary of the town of his upbringing, on the basis of the material presented here he does not come over as an archetypal Geordie entertainer -whatever that is. That his fiefdom was northern is not in doubt but he died and was buried in Hartlepool, and was mourned in Cumbria. By the end of what in public entertainment terms was a relatively long life he was clearly regarded affectionately as bit of an anachronism. The context had changed but he hadn't.

Dave Harker has amassed a vast array of well documented factual material about an very interesting individual and those with whom he came in contact, but without evaluating what it amounts to in the wider picture of nineteenth century working class entertainment. That is a pity, but the material is there and referenced which is a major achievement.

Win Stokes

Peterloo, (2018) film written and directed by Mike Leigh.

Mike Leigh's *Peterloo* is a fine film. NELHS organised a performance, to a full house and there were sixteen further showings. A number of people e-mailed their comments about the film to me afterwards. Only one of them disliked it, thinking it lacked strong narrative, rounded characters and lively dialogue. The rest were positive even when they had some reservations.

Some thought it too long especially in the static 'discussion' scenes, and felt that the language was stilted. In striving for authenticity, in a film strongly educational as well as politically partisan, the director had to make compromises. He was aiming to unravel the differing opinions within the reform movement and within the local authorities and government, before the event of 16 August 1819. The language was wherever possible based upon contemporary documents, letters and newspapers and therefore in reported

speech, for example with most of the words of Henry Hunt and the well-known leaders. The words could sound more natural where they were being written anew.

Compromise was also needed in building a narrative which would hold together dramatically. For example, Oliver the Spy was shown as being in the town during the days leading up to the demonstration. Spies and informers were routinely deployed round radical activity, and Oliver is the best known of those active in the Regency period, but he had left Manchester well before Peterloo. So too had the young man John Bagguley, to whom he spoke to in the lane - in his case to two years imprisonment for agitation in an earlier movement, the Blanketeers.

Others felt that cinema-goers were being assumed to have more knowledge of the historical events than would be the case. It is hard to see, however, how an already long film could indulge in further elaboration. Explanation of what happened afterwards would also have much lengthened the film. The interview between the Prince of Wales, the Home Secretary Sidmouth, and Prime Minister Liverpool was an attempt to deal with the immediate aftermath and illustrate the attitudes to the masses of these key figures.

On the other hand there was much praise for other scenes, especially the crowd scenes on St Peters Field. One person was reminded of their experience on Aldermaston Marches in the 1960s. Another remembered the sight of an empty mill on strike day as a symbol of working class power, a potent source of the fear and rage of the magistrates and the yeomanry on the day. Many expressed shock at the portrayal of the yeomanry charge, the horses ridden into the heart of the demonstration and the brutal slashings by the mounted men. The eye level camera work was especially effective. The final scene at the burial was considered very moving in its stark simplicity.

The film provided many questions for discussion immediately following. This may be its greatest legacy.

John Charlton

Richard J Evans; ***Eric Hobsbawm: a Life in History*** (Little, Brown: 2019), ISBN-13: 9781408707425, 785pp, £35 hbk.

Richard Evans is renowned for his trilogy on the Third Reich, his demolition of postmodernism in history and above all for his destruction in court of David Irving's attempt to justify his holocaust-denial writings. Eric Hobsbawm, 1917-2012, has found in Evans a biographer worthy of his reputation. Evans had the co-operation of Hobsbawm's family and access to his archive, and so we learn not only about his achievements but also about his two marriages and several affairs. Evans also had access to the clandestine recordings made by MI5 of conversations with and about Hobsbawm by the Communist Party leadership in its London headquarters.

Hobsbawm was a lifelong communist, one of the most celebrated of the Communist Party's members. From the fifties he was academically by far the most famous. Otherwise he would almost certainly have been expelled for his unorthodox statements contradicting Party policies.

The state's interest began when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge in the late thirties. Surveillance continued when as a military conscript during the war he used a wall newspaper to advocate left-wing-views in his unit. The scrutiny continued into the postwar years and retarded his academic promotion.

The issues with which Hobsbawm was concerned are the same as those dealt with by our Society, the struggle for emancipation by exploited and subjected masses against the elites who oppressed them. He wrote not only on industrial workers but also peasants, agricultural workers, social bandits and other marginalised communities.

The Historians' Group and after

In 1946 the Communist Party established a Historians' Group, several of whose members were to become historiographical luminaries along with Hobsbawm, such as E P Thompson and Christopher Hill. Hobsbawm regarded the Group as central to his development both as a historian and a communist, but Evans

largely skims over it, apart from its role in establishing the journal *Past & Present* and the Group's fragmentation in 1956-7 over Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin's crimes and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution. Hobsbawm sympathised with the dissidents and this occasioned his quarrels with the CP hierarchy, although he remained a Party member. Neither of the Group's successors are mentioned by Evans; the renamed History Group and, after the Party's dissolution in 1991, the Socialist History Society. Hobsbawm was heavily involved in both, and was Honorary President of the latter until his death.

We do however learn in detail of his successful publishing career from the sixties onwards, his jazz criticism (under the name Francis Newton), his globetrotting and the uproar created on the left by his article 'The Forward March of Labour Halted' in the late seventies. In the following decade, he suggested that the Labour Party should ally with the SDP to defeat Thatcher. He was accused of being the intellectual godfather of New Labour, though in reality he despised Tony Blair and referred to him as 'Thatcher in trousers'.

Despite his political disagreements, Evans sums up in his Preface 'Eric was as far as I can tell entirely without malice or ill will. He was kind, generous and loyal to a fault'. Hobsbawm's own closing sentence in his final volume *How to Change the World*, was 'Once again the time has come to take Marx seriously'.

Willie Thompson

Maureen Taylor Gooby, ***The Birth of Billy Elliot Land: the beginning of Easington, Horden and Blackhall Collieries*** (Searching Finance Press 2015), 232 pp. ISBN 978-1-907720-17-8 £9.99.

This book lays bare how short-lived was the creation - and the subsequent hollowing out - of many colliery villages in County Durham. This was particularly true for the colliery towns of Easington, Horden and Blackhall, situated within a few miles of each other on the east coast of Durham. All three pits were opened for production at the turn of the twentieth century, yet within the lifespan of a single person they had all closed. Blackhall was the first to close in 1981, in production for just 72 years. Horden colliery closed next in 1987; it remained open for only 86 years. Easington was the last to close in 1993, opened the longest, for 94 years.

Nonetheless, within that relatively short space of time, this book explores the stoic tales of working class life along this narrow strip of the Durham coastline. This is also the story of capital and how the pursuit of the latent lucrative profit that lay beneath the ground almost overnight turned this sparsely populated agricultural land into three utilitarian company towns, eventually producing record amounts of coal.

Instead of drawing on 'Billy Elliott Land' (filmed in Easington) for its title, the author should really have referenced the film 'Get Carter', (the famous violent end-struggle was filmed on Blackhall's blackened polluted beach) or even The Who's famous 'Who's Next' album cover (photographed near Easington colliery) to best illustrate what happened to this area: the backdrop of a bleak, despoiled and alienated landscape. For all the time that has passed since the last pit shut, the area is only just recovering from the callous eco-destruction of this once beautiful coastline.

To get at the rich seams, which mostly lay under the sea, and to transport it for sale demanded mammoth infrastructural investment and an enormous amount of migratory labour. This book describes, but does not attempt to analyse, the local transition of land use from feudal ownership to the emergence, in the late nineteenth century, of a group of entrepreneurs who

set up coal companies seeking to reap huge returns. The serious flooding that resulted from sinking the pits in order to get at the coal was not their greatest problem. They also had to construct transport links and build houses. While the houses were being built, there was an influx of over 1,500 navvies, mostly Irish, into the area to build the railway line and viaducts that connected the three coalmines to Seaham and Hartlepool. These men lived harsh lives in self-erected huts adjacent to their work. Likewise, the miners' houses were built next to the pit heads with such indecent haste that there wasn't even time to name the streets; instead most of them were given numbers (First Street, Second Street, Third Street etc.) In Horden, one building contractor boasted that he erected 365 tightly built terrace houses in just 365 days! It seems that these coal owners didn't share the paternalistic welfarist vision seen in the model villages built by the Cadburys or Titus Salt.

Yet it is the stories of the people who lived in these houses that this book is mostly about. Keeping labour cheap meant that life was hard and often tragic. The author makes good use of early twentieth century census data, local records, school records, personal accounts and newspaper reports to map out and uncover the stories of the people who came to work in these three isolated colliery towns. Much of this evidence exposes the prevalence of obscene levels of overcrowding, ill-health and infant mortality. Some of the stories are truly heart-breaking. One family in First Street in Horden had 14 children, of whom only three survived to adulthood. Then there were the injuries and death at work. In 1951, an explosion at Easington Colliery killed eighty one miners and led to the death of two rescue workers. The vigil outside the pit lasted three days.

Despite these hardships, the best stories in this book are about the agency of the miners and their families in their attempts to resist exploitation. In the early days of Horden colliery there was a long and bitter industrial dispute about the introduction of the three-shift system. Its imposition would have a deleterious impact on homes, already overcrowded with family members and lodgers. The strike started during the bitter winter of 1910 and quickly turned into a riot. Nearly 2,000 miners watched as the Workingmen's Club,

owned by the coal owners, was burnt to the ground. Miners also looted the grocer's shop, wrecked colliery buildings and marched on Hardwick Hall, where the hated coal manager lived. Massive police reinforcements, baton charges and dawn raids on suspected ring leaders brought these disturbances quickly to a close. Nine men received jail sentences. Eventually the miners were starved back to work in April, having gained nothing. Later in the book the author compares this occurrence with the riot in Easington and nearby Murton during the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. As in the Horden riot, police were stationed in the town in an attempt to quell rioting that went on for three days.

Overall, this book is written in a spirit of empathy and solidarity with the people who lived (and still live) in these three towns. The author, a miner's daughter, was born in Horden and remembers it in her childhood as a vibrant place, proud of its gardens, brass band, sports facilities and community life. There is always a danger that populist history books like this will indulge in sentimentality. This book only just manages to escape that pitfall, but it does lack a proper historical perspective. The question of 'class' raises its head at every turn but is frustratingly dodged. Too often the book lurches from one subject to another; there is repetition and a lot of supposition. In her conclusion, the author is fearful for the future of these three towns now that the mines have shut, but remains hopeful that the community spirit and resilience that kept these people strong will be the bond that will continue to hold them together.

Patrick Candon and Sue Simpson

Secretary's Report

The Society has continued to progress in the past twelve months with membership now standing at 151 and another 120 people on our mailing list. By the time of the Annual General Meeting it is estimated that the total attendance at our events will be around 500.

The talks given during the year, usually held under our First Tuesday banner, were:

4 September – *The Battle of Stockton*, Rosie Serdiville

11 September – *The Past is Before Us: Experiences from Tyneside in the 1970s*, Hilary Wainwright (at the Annual General Meeting)

2 October – *Billy Purvis, The First Professional Geordie*, Dave Harker

3 November – a special showing of Mike Leigh's *Peterloo* at the Tyneside Cinema with an introduction by John Charlton

6 November – *The Birth of Billy Elliot Land*, Maureen Taylor-Gooby

14 November – *The Wind from Peterloo: 1819 Newcastle's great reform demonstration*, John Charlton

8 January – *The War came early to Sleepy Valley*, Peter Brabban (also given by Peter at Tantobie Community Centre on 24 May)

5 February – *A Bridge Across the Seas. Newcastle Migration Hostels for Boys and Young Women 1927-37*, Liz O'Donnell

5 March – *Progressing democracy: the Jarrow Land and Labour League, 1880-1887*, Joan Allen

2 April – *The Post-War Unrest 1919-1921: The Consolidation of Socialism and the transition from Syndicalism to Communism in the Durham Coalfield*, Joe Redmayne

7 May – *Sir Charles Trevelyan of Wallington – Northumberland's Upper-*

Class Socialist MP, Mike Fraser

4 June - *The Sigmund Pumps Apprenticeship Scheme*, Andy Clark

9 July - '*The Little Dictator*' and '*The Three Musketeers*': *The NUM Durham Area at a time of Nationalisation and Cold War*, Huw Beynon

3 September - *Writing Historical Fiction in the North East*, Val Scully

In addition, eighteen members visited Nenthead Mines in August 2018 and the Christmas social was held in Newcastle on 4 December with entertainment provided by Appletwig Songbook and a history quiz devised by Peter Brabban.

This issue of *North East History* has been produced by a new Editorial Board consisting of, Patrick Candon (Editor), Liz O'Donnell, Sue Ward, Win Stokes, John Stirling, John Charlton and Peter Brabban. The Society wishes to record its thanks for their work and also its appreciation of the contribution previously made over several years by both Brian Bennison and Mike Greatbatch.

To link with Mike Leigh's *Peterloo* film in November, and in conjunction with Sean Creighton's History and Social Action Publications, we published John Charlton's *The Wind from Peterloo: 1819 Newcastle's great reform demonstration*, which was originally written for *North East History* in 2008.

We are grateful to Peter Nicklin for his work on the website. In addition to the first issue of the Society's bulletin published in 1967, issues 36 to 48 of the Journal (2005 – 2017) are now available on-line: bit.ly/PastJournals. Our Facebook page, *North East Labour History* continues to generate a wide range of contributions.

The Sid Chaplin Prize for 2018 was awarded to Joel Wootten, a student at Leeds University, for his dissertation, '*This Fortress of Freedom*': *A Study of Chartism in Gateshead* with the presentation being made by Grahame Chaplin.

The Society organised a members' visit to sites of historical interest in Manchester and Salford in August, which included visits to the Pankhurst

Centre and two Peterloo exhibitions, *Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest* at the People's History Museum and *Peterloo: Manchester's Fight for Freedom at the John Rylands Museum*.

David Connolly

Officers:

President:	Archie Potts
Vice President:	Maureen Callcott, Terry McDermott
Chair:	John Creaby
Vice Chair:	Kath Connolly
Treasurer:	Judith McSwaine
Secretary:	David Connolly
Journal Editors:	Patrick Candon, Liz O'Donnell, Sue Ward, Win Stokes, John Stirling, John Charlton and Peter Brabban

Committee Members:

Brian Bennison (Gosforth)	Lynda MacKenzie (Newcastle)
Peter Brabban (Newcastle)	Peter Nicklin (Newcastle)
Patrick Candon (Tynemouth)	Liz O'Donnell (Gosforth)
John Charlton (Newcastle)	John Stirling (Morpeth)
Mike Greatbatch (Newcastle)	Win Stokes (Tynemouth)
Steve Grinter (Wylam)	Don Watson (North Shields)

How to contact the Society

Email: secretary@nelh.org

Write to: David Connolly, 1 Exeter Close, Great Lumley,
Chester-le-Street DH3 4L J

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. Organisations that are members of the Society shall carry one vote only at the AGM

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	2007	Candice Brockwell
1989	Elaine Knox	2008	Ruth Blower
1990	Sylvia Clark	2009	Rob Doherty
1991	Martin Searles	2010	David Reed
1992	David Ridley	2011	Deborah Smith
1993	Pauline Lynn	2012	James English
1994	Kathleen Smith	2013	Aidan Harper
1996	Reg Brown	2014	Molly Courtice
1997	Angela Goldsmith	2015	Adam Woolley
2000	Robert Hope	2016	Leanne Carr
2004	Craig Turnbull	2017	Leanne Smith
2005	Craig Armstrong	2018	Joel Wootten
2006	Elsbeth Gould		

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 £100 book token.

North East Labour History Society

Membership Form

Please complete all sections, ticking appropriately ✓.

1) Your details

Name

Address

.....

Post Code: Email:

2) Annual Subscription rate

Individual: £15 ☐ Students, unwaged: £7.50 ☐

Institution: £25 ☐

Please add £5 if international postage is required.

3) Payment method:

☐ Standing Order: I have completed a Standing Order Mandate which I have sent to my bank/enclose with this form.

☐ Cheque: I have written a cheque made payable to: North East Labour History Society and attach it securely to this form.

Send this form (**and cheque or Standing Order Mandate, or both**) to:

Judith McSwaine

Treasurer

12 Whitfield Road

Forest Hall

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE12 7LJ

North East Labour History Society

Standing Order Mandate

To the Manager

Bank
Address

I/we hereby authorise and request you to debit my/our

Account Name:

Sort Code:

Account Number

Amount £

Frequency Annually

beginning date: .../.../..... and, there after on .../....., each year until
you receive further notice from me in writing.

And Credit

Beneficiary	North East Labour History Society
Bank	Unity Trust Bank, plc
	Birmingham
Sort Code	60-83-01
Account No.	58254950

Signed Date

.

A Victorian Powerhouse

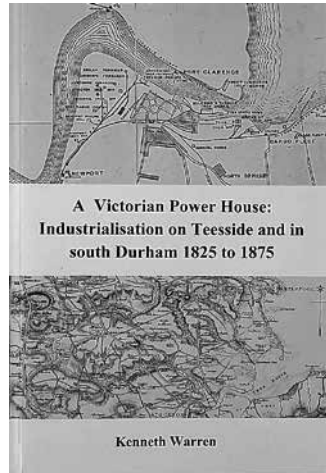
Kenneth Warren

In mid-Victorian years, the development of Teesside and the associated boom in the coal and iron ore economies of south west Durham and the Cleveland Hills were wonders of an era of great achievements. This book examines this expansion in the basic industries of the North East and the accompanying transformation of the areas society and landscape.

Underlying this book, and all his work on the North East of England, has been a deep love for the people, places and history of the region.

The author lived in the North East for 14 years. Earlier on in his career he lectured in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, before moving to Jesus College, Oxford. He is an acclaimed authority on the steel industry of the United States as well as having written on various aspects of North Eastern economic development, including Armstrong Whitworth, Palmers Shipbuilding and Iron Company, and the Consett Iron Company.

Copies of the book at £9.99 (including p&xp) can be ordered from jekwarren@gmail.com



North East History Volume 50

- **Reflections on history and social class:
North East England over time**
- **'This Fortress of Freedom': A Study of Chartism in
Gateshead**
- **War, Welfare and Remembrance:
A Case Study of two North Shields Ships**
- **The War Came Early to Sleepy Valley**
- **Raising Their Voices: Two Women of the 1930s**
- **The Knights of Labor in the North East,
1880-1900**
- **Discovering John Swan (1794-1885).
Autobiographical Reminiscence from Afar**

Cover: Workers leaving the main gates for their lunch break at Smiths Dock Co Limited, North Shields, 14 December 1956
Photograph courtesy The Evening Chronicle



The north east history society holds regular meetings on a wide variety of subjects. A calendar of forthcoming events are updated on its website: www.nelh.net. Back copies of of journal articles from 2005 can be viewed online at: bit.ly/PastJournals. The society welcomes new members.

Journal of the North East Labour History Society

<http://nelh.net/>