North East History

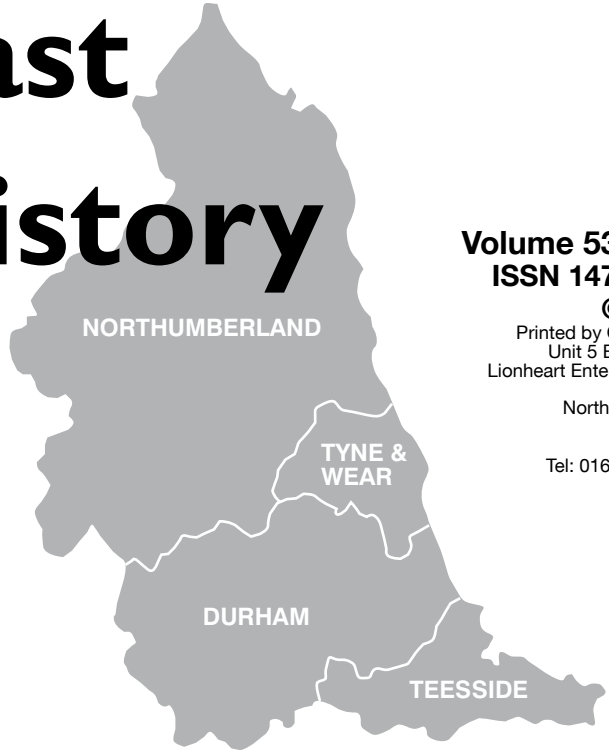
Volume 53 2022

Journal of the North East Labour History Society


Fraternal Greetings to the North East Labour History Society from The Durham Miners Association.
We look forward to welcoming you at the Durham Miners Gala on the 8th July 2023.
DURHAM MINERS' ASSOCIATION
Alan Mardghum
Secretary
Stephen Guy
Chair

north east history

North East History



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Note from the Editors

Last year Patrick Candon, then Editor of this journal, wrote of our intention to use this issue to celebrate the life of the much missed historian and activist Nigel Todd. We would like to thank Patrick for his work as editor – he steered us through a period of immense and unprecedented upheaval. Last year's bumper issue was a remarkable achievement given the difficulties of meeting and the financial problems that made it necessary to carry out some last minute fund raising to enable printing.

The steep rise in costs that affects every aspect of life at the moment has made the production of this year's journal equally fraught. We have managed it, but only just and have had to reduce the size of the journal as a result. We would like to take this opportunity to appeal for sponsorship for next year's edition to help get things on an even footing. From the first issue in 1967 right up to date, it has been clear that this, the oldest regional labour history society in Britain, has promoted the study of working people lives, helping us all to take pride in our heritage, to educate our children in their past and to foster an appreciation of that past as a tool for action.

That idea of education for action is very much in the Nigel mode. By the time this hits the shelves two community events, designed to applaud Nigel's many causes and interests, will have taken place. Entitled 'The Active Utopian' (which sums him up so well) it will need a full day session to consider the width and variety of his legacy. This 2022 Journal reflects the spread of his body of work.

We have reprinted Nigel's 1987 article, Black on Tyne: the Black Presence on Tyneside in the 1860's" as a tribute to him and in recognition of his long fight for equality and against racism and fascism.

A comparison of the 1987 and the 2022 journals is striking. The original looks to have been done on that remarkable instrument of community publishing, the Roneo machine. Anyone who spent time spinning its handle to produce a succession of journals, flyers, leaflets and other calls

to arms, will recall how important it was as a cheap tool of outreach and communication (as long as you had access to an organisation like the Community Development Projects which housed one).

We could not have envisaged the difference that changes in technology and the rise of the internet would make in terms of access to and dissemination of ideas. It is all too easy, looking at Nigel's work, to forget that his research was not aided by google, he could not call upon digitised documents or pick up the phone to casually call a colleague on the other side of the globe without having to consider the cost of the call.

A PDF of the original article is available online at newcastle.antiquaries.org.uk Thanks to Patrick Candon for transcribing it for this reprint. Patrick has given us a new forward, noting how clearly Nigel made the link between slavery and the thinking that underpinned Empire. That link and its consequences: the impact it has had on the lives of people of colour living in Britain now, has been the subject of much discussion in the last few years. Our article about black lives in Gateshead is intended as a contribution to that discussion, a reminder that there are still people whose voices have not been heard, waiting in the archives for us to pay attention.

Nigel was much taken by the Clousden Hill Anarchist Colony. Charlotte Alston's appreciation of his book, Roses and Revolutionists, celebrates the way he "treats the Clousden Hill colonists seriously, not as a curiosity or as hopelessly utopian, but as individuals trying to make a difference in their own lives and in society more broadly."

His commitment to green issues went deeper than simply recording the agricultural collective at Clousden. He was a driver in the Greening Wingrove initiative – a collective attempt to transform the environment of the area. Steve Grinter and Dave Webb present us with a portrait that is very familiar to those who knew Nigel, "…ensuring that co-operative values were at the heart of what went on. His work in this capacity seemed to be a combination of a personal concern for climate change and an awareness that Labour Councillors needed to work beyond the confines of local government committees to advance a transformative agenda within communities."

Co-operative housing was very much part of that package, indeed Nigel himself lived in one such unit. Bill Haylock explores the work of Banks of the Wear Co-op with particular regard to its engagement with the NUM.

The need to rebuild communities savaged by de-industrialisation and government policy is one legacy of the Miners' Strike of 1984. Robert Gildea has interviewed local people involved in that dispute, recording their life histories to demonstrate how they 'shaped the campaign and were shaped by it"

Les Turnbull steps back a century to explore the conditions of those living and working at Hetton Colliery, making use of some fascinating archive material on wages and the economics of the industry. Also making striking use of new material is Cathy Hunt who introduces us to the work of the Newcastle branch of the National Federation of Women Workers through a newly discovered minute book.

Nigel's book, "In Excited Times: The People Against the Blackshirts" documented the fight against fascism in the North East in the 1930's. Amongst those engaged in that struggle were Phyllis Short and her husband, George. Tony Fox (whose recent book about the Spanish Civil War is reviewed in this journal) recounts a tale of lifelong activism and commitment to social justice and political change.

That theme of political life during the 1930's continues with Brian Bennison's analysis of John McNair's time on Tyneside and his acquisition of the soubriquet, 'the boy orator'. Matt Perry also considers a key activist from the same era, Ellen Wilkinson.

Nigel's long service as a Councillor was a prominent theme in the many appreciations published after his death. John Griffiths takes us back to the 1950's to trace how Labour came to take power in Newcastle, offering many insights into the evolution of the Labour Group Nigel joined thirty years later.

Finally, a word of encouragement to anyone thinking about a labour history research project. This journal only works because of the contributions of people right across our region. We encourage the use

of endnotes to help people identify the sources used by our writers and to encourage others to explore the rich seam of archival material available to us all. We have a set of guidelines that will help you put your own material together. So please do get in touch if you have a story to share, be it a local study or a personal history that illustrates the importance of working people, their lives, conflicts and achievements.

The Editorial Board has worked long and hard to get this year's Journal to this stage – everyone deserves high praise for their dedication and sticking power! The members are

Don Watson
Sue Ward
Win Stokes
John Stirling
John Charlton
Steve Grinter
Brian Bennison
Rosie Serdiville (editor)
Bill Haylock

Notes on Contributors

Les Turnbull is a recognised authority on early railways and North East mining history. 'The History of Lead Mining in North East England', has been reprinted four times since it was published in 1975. He taught in several schools in the region and in Canada before becoming a lecturer at Newcastle University.

Charlotte Alston is Professor in History at Northumbria University. Her research includes work on Russian emigration, revolution, Tolstoyans, and Anglo-Russian connections

Nigel Todd Nigel was a veteran Labour councillor who served the city of Newcastle upon Tyne from 1980 onwards but he was also so much more: an anti-fascism activist, a stalwart supporter of the Co-operative Movement, a well published radical historian, a committed educationalist through decades of work for the Workers Educational Association (WEA) and a long serving member of North East Labour History Society.

Rosie Serdiville is a local historian and writer with an interest in radical history, particularly as it pertains to women.

Cathy Hunt is an independent historian who has written extensively about women, work and trade unionism. Her biography of Mary Macarthur,' Righting the Wrong' was published in 2019.

Bill Haylock became a founder-member of a housing co-op while a mature student at Newcastle Polytechnic from 1977 - 80. He subsequently became Chair of the regional housing co-op development organisation, Banks of the Wear Co-operative Housing Services, and then North Region officer

of the National Federation of Housing Associations. He later left social housing and was a youth and community worker in Gateshead until his retirement in 2013.

Tony Fox is a member of the International Brigades Memorial Trust. He recently published 'I Sing of My Comrades: Remembering Stockton's International Brigaders' which is reviewed in this journal. He is a history teacher who has done much to develop good practice in embedding local history in school curricula.

Matt Perry has taught broadly across twentieth century European history. He has research interests in British and French labour and social history, particularly in the fields of protest and social memory. He has also published on questions of general historiography in particular the Marxist school of history.

Steve Grinter trained as a teacher and then worked for 35 years in trade union education. Prior to retirement in 2012, Steve worked for the International Textile, Garment and Leather Worker's Union (ITGLWF) promoting trade union rights in global supply chains, particularly in South East Asia. The ITGLWF is now part of the global trade union federation IndustriALL based in Geneva.

Dave Webb joined Greening Wingrove as a director in 2014 before taking on the role of Company Secretary and working with Nigel to raise local concerns with Newcastle City Council and partners. He was part of the WEA Greening Wingrove project 'Reclaim the Lanes', which ran for three years with the aim of creating community pride in a local back lane. He became Secretary of Newcastle Central Constituency Labour Party in 2019, seeking a member-led approach to the party and co-operative public services aimed at energising social movements. He is a Senior Lecturer in Town Planning at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University.

John Griffiths is a Newcastle-based historian and adult education lecturer. In 2020 he was awarded PhD for his thesis 'Mr Newcastle: the Career of T Dan Smith'

Brian Bennison has served as secretary of NELHS. He taught for decades at the former Newcastle Polytechnic and has published on local and social history including a very entertaining look at the history of Newcastle pubs.

Robert Gildea is Professor of Modern History at Worcester College, Oxford. He works on French and European history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular interests in the fall-out from the French Revolution, everyday life and resistance in the Second World War and 1968. He is currently writing an oral history of the 1984 miners' strike.

Katerina Friberg says "I first met Nigel in 1999. I was a PhD-student from Sweden, doing a comparative study of consumer co-operation in Sweden and Britain, and Nigel was one of the top names on David Connolly's list of people I ought to interview. This turned out to be quite accurate. But I found in Nigel much more than that – a fellow historian, a good friend, an appreciator of Swedish coffee, and an ever-present warm smile at countless co-op functions".

Katarina Friberg, teacher at a lower secondary school and an affiliated historian at Stockholm School of Economics.

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 237.

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 copies 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.

Past issues of North East History, volumes 36 - 51 (2005 - 2020) can be viewed online at our website: nelh.net/the-societys-journal/previous-issues. There is also a searchable index of articles and reports.

Black-On-Tyne: The Black Presence on Tyneside in the 1860s

Nigel Todd

Foreword

The article below was first published as the North East Labour History Bulletin No.21 in 1987. As part of this year's Journal's dedication to the life of Nigel Todd, the Editorial Board decided to republish the article in its original form. This work is a fine illustration of Nigel's research interests, particularly his desire to capture the lives of people who are usually 'hidden from history'. It also explores the contradictory position of some the individuals and groups who, while championing the abolition of slavery and the cause of racial harmony, were not prepared to question the role of Empire in keeping black people subjugated.

A pdf of the original article is available online at newcastle.antiquaries.org.uk.

Patrick Candon

Our perception of the past is inevitably influenced by the concerns of the present. Just as the revival of socialist feminism over the last twenty years has produced a re-discovery of women's social and political movements, so the need to deal with racism is now uncovering extensive evidence of cultural and racial groups in working-class history. Thanks to Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984) and Ron Ramdin's *The Making of Black Working-Class in Britain* (London,

1987), we can now appreciate people such as William Cuffay, a black leader of London Chartism, as well as a variety of black working-class activities. This work is of tremendous importance since the results must lead towards the construction of a far more sophisticated definition of labour history, and therefore of the character of working-class politics and culture, than the image used until fairly recently. And the scope for reconstructing that definition on Tyneside, for example, can be gauged by a broad sweep through the historical data and issues related to race in the 1860s.

Culture

The very first Australian cricket team to visit England was black. They came in 1868, and one of the places where they played was North Shields. Apparently, the aboriginal team enthralled crowds with displays of boomerang-throwing as well as cricket.[1] But the first black cricket team to play on Tyneside was American. The players were drawn from touring concert party - *The Real Blacks* - who took on a team of 'picked players' from local clubs, at a match on Newcastle's Town Moor in September 1862, and won.[2]

The Real Blacks performed at the Tyne Concert Hall in Neville Street, Newcastle, and at North Shields in 1862. Their entertainment was 'certainly not excelled by any of the pseudo professors' of black song and dance,[3] white performers who tried to act the part of 'negro minstrel'…. *The Original African Opera Troup*, who raised money for the Newcastle Infirmary in 1861, were also compared favourably with impersonators of black performers ('spurious blackamoors') when they played the Nelson Street Musical Hall in Newcastle.[4] The Troup returned in 1862 and sang extracts from Italian operas.[5]

As it happened, *The Real Blacks* and *The Original African Opera Troup* were part of a constant stream of black singers and dancers and comedians who performed on Tyneside in the 1860s. And the Tyne Concert Hall, a principal centre of working-class entertainment, was the usual venue for

black artists. *The Female Christi Minstrels* – '7 young ladies of the coloured opera troup' - came in December 1860, spicing their act with political Jokes. A favourite was one about General Garibaldi, a popular hero on Tyneside:

Q. If Garibaldi were to give you a glass of wine, why would he not offer you another?

A. Because he was never known to re-treat.[6]

The *Dwight Family* from Maryland, who 'held a very high place in the profession', played the Concert Hall in April 1862.[7] They were followed by the *Cedar Family*, 'celebrated negro vocalists and dancers', who were a 'great hit' in May,[8] and two further sets of black American 'melodists' in December.[9] Black people continued to be engaged on a regular basis at the Concert Hall, and featured prominently in the Hall's advertising right through 1864.[10]

Elsewhere, the *Ohio Minstrels* played Jarrow in December 1865,[11] and a singing troupe of ex-slaves from Georgia took Newcastle Town Hall by storm in 1867,[12] And in the wake of the aboriginal cricketers, a remarkable company of Indian jugglers and acrobats had audiences flocking to the Town Hall in October 1868.[13] Meanwhile, black people were also active in other leisure trades. One of Newcastle's few restaurants in the 1860s - a 'chop house' in Grey Street - was run by 'a noted black man'.[14] And a former seaman Francis Davidson ('a man of colour'), was a well known figure at the pub where he worked in Newcastle's Market Street in 1860.[15]

Class

Davison was one of a probably large number of black seamen from Africa and the West Indies who found themselves on Tyneside at mid-century. Some had arrived out of desperate bids for personal freedom. In 1855, a 'poor black' from Africa 'had been so cruelly ill-treated on board ship that on reaching the Tyne he had 'fled into the country…… until he was

nearly starved to death by hunger and cold….and found perishing in an out-house near North Shields.' Due to frostbite, the man had both feet amputated, and eventually died in a Workhouse.[16] Another 'coloured man' made a 'marvellous leap for liberty' from an Australian barque off South Shields in July 1867, and 'escaped clear away into the country.' Handcuffed when he dived into the water, he had got his arms free by the time he reached the shore.[17]

North and South Shields were the chief centres for black seamen. A local journalist noted in 1866 that 'a considerable number of coloured seamen were coming into the mercantile service, and there are some negroes in Shields following the sea.' The same journalist was particularly interested in the part played by black sailors in a seamen's strike on the Tyne in June 1866. For several days, hundreds of seamen struck for higher wages in ports along the Tyne, organising mass pickets of ships, open-air meetings and flamboyant processions. The black sailors were heavily involved in the strike, with a journalist observing: 'Whatever may be the feeling of the people of America or elsewhere against colour, it is not participated in by our tars, who walk arm in arm with our coloured men.'[18]

As part of an emergent working-class, engaged in the enjoyments and struggles of working-class communities on the Tyne, black people shared the same kind of treatment given to their white counterparts by Tyneside police and middle-class magistrates. The Tyne Concert Hall's long-running and bitter battles with the Newcastle magistrates (especially with the Mayor and senior Councillors, who as Tories and Whigs could not stand the Concert Hall's Radical Proprietor) often revolved around the Hall's 'unbecoming' image in the eyes of the local Establishment. The consistent employment of black performers, billed on posters headed 'Licensed by the people but not by the Magistrates', no doubt add it to the Concert Hall's reputation.[19]

The individual experiences of black people at the hands of the magistrates were illuminating. When Henry Niles, a seaman and 'young man of colour', together with two white sailors, was virtually kidnapped

by a North Shields publican in January 1861, and put under pressure to join an Italian ship, the North Shields bench merely imposed a small fine on the publican.[20] Vagrancy was a favourite target of magistrates and the police. So, when William Baptist, 'a black man', was brought before the Hetton bench under the Vagrancy Act in March 1869, he received no mercy. Baptist had been found sleeping rough in the shed in Houghton Colliery. In his possession was a note book containing details of small amounts of money he had collected to pay for his return to 'his own country'. The magistrates sent him to prison for one month's hard labour.[21]

One man who gave the magistrates and the police a hard time appeared before the South Shields bench in November 1869. This was a 'coloured seaman' named 'Prince Frederick', who had been arrested with a white friend in South Shields Market Place, allegedly 'drunk and riotous'. The 'Prince' said that he had been robbed in North Shields and that the police were not interested because they were 'all the same, a set of b- thieves.' He objected to being searched by the police - 'he was most outrageous' - and on being put into a cell he 'kicked P.C. Small in a very dangerous part of his body'. The Court hearing was a battle-ground from start to finish, and the press said of Prince Frederick: 'It was with great difficulty that he could be prevailed upon to keep quiet for even a few minutes. He treated the Bench with great contempt, answering questions put to him very impertinently.' His 'most unbecoming manner' got him a fine of five shillings and costs of fourteen days in prison for being drunk, and one month for assaulting the police. At this point, Prince Frederick told the magistrates just what they could do with their dignity, and what he intended to do to them. This brought an extra three months imprisonment with hard labour. The Prince left South Shields for Durham Gaol still 'violently resisting the police' and threatening the life of an inspector.[22]

Race

It could be said that these three cases were typical of many other instances in which magistrates drawn from the 'respectable' and propertied classes

dealt with working-class Tynesiders. To a large extent there was common treatment, but where Niles, Baptist and the 'Prince' were concerned there was also a difference. At almost exactly the same time as the Hetton bench *sentenced* William Baptist to a month's hard labour, the North Shields magistrates *discharged* an Irish labourer who had been 'foremost' in leading a sectarian riot between Catholics and Protestants in the town five days previously. Not only had hundreds of people taken part in the riot but shots were believed to have been fired and the army as well as the police have been called out to restore order.[23] Again, newspaper reports of black people in court were highlighted in a way that was not typical of the press treatment of other cases. The Henry Niles case was headlined 'Nigger-stealing in Shields',[24] William Baptist was labelled a 'Black Imposter',[25] and the Shields Gazette titled its report of the Prince Frederick affair: 'A Darkie before the South Shields Magistrates'.[26] It was not difficult to get the point.

Race prejudice was pretty evident on Tyneside. So much so, that liberal journalists were prompted to denounce hostility towards black people. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle thundered in a leading article in January 1865: 'We deplore the prejudice against colour, and we are severely censorious towards those who exhibit it' (a policy which nevertheless failed to curb the paper's abusive description of black people in some reports).[27] One of the Chronicle's more radical columnists commented critically on an outburst of prejudice in March 1866, concerning 'unrest' in colonial Jamaica: 'A large class of Englishman is going in dead against the negro at the present time.'[28] Similarly, in 1868, the same journalist criticised 'a certain class of ship's officers who had the impression that a black man had no rights that ought to be respected.'[29]

Tyneside against racism

Colour prejudice did not seem to matter to the seamen who went on strike in June 1866. But this was not altogether surprising. There had been, after all, a recent and dramatic experience of English white working-

class solidarity with a black cause - the abolition of slavery in the United States. Working-class communities, and especially those in Lancashire cotton towns, had lent material support - at the cost of considerable social hardship - to the anti-slavery cause in the American Civil War (1861 - 65). That solidarity found strong sympathy on Tyneside, and in two chief ways. Firstly, a great effort was launched to collect money and clothing to sustain the Lancashire cotton workers (the Newcastle magistrates refused a license to Tyne Concert Hall for a theatrical benefit night in aid of the Lancashire Distress Fund).[30] Secondly, the anti-slavery cause was promoted by highly organised bodies of Nonconformist congregations and Radical politicians. The Nonconformist and Radical stands were rooted in the history of the black anti-slavery movement of the early nineteenth century, and in continuing links with American Abolitionists (particularly black Americans) who were frequent visitors to Tyneside from the mid-1840s. The most prominent black American Abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, Charles Lennox Redmond, William Wells Brown and William and Ellen Craft, came to Tyneside and spoke at public meetings before 1860.[31] The pace then quickened in the early 1860s. In November 1861, the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet of New York, 'a gentleman of colour', addressed meetings in Newcastle chapels, arguing that a Northern victory in the American Civil War would have the effect of ending slavery even if Abolition remained excluded from the official war aims.[32] William Craft made the same point when he re-visited Newcastle in February 1862 to speak at a church-arranged meeting on the war and slavery.[33]

It seems likely that the Christian-based Newcastle and Gateshead Anti-Slavery Society was the vehicle for mobilising the Nonconformist community.[34] And noticeable among the religious opponents of slavery were Quakers like Anna and Henry Richardson in the West End of Newcastle. The Richardsons had a long association with the anti-slavery movement, and had helped to buy the freedom of Frederick Douglass in 1846, causing a controversy among American Abolitionists, some of whom regarded the 'purchase' as recognition of slave-owners' claims to 'own' black people.[35]

The Nonconformists also brought James Watkins, 'a Fugitive slave' from Maryland, to speak on Tyneside in April 1862. Watkins gave three lectures against American slavery to meetings in Newcastle, one at Blaydon (an established centre of radicalism), two at Wallsend and two more at North Shields, all within a short space of time. 'His style of speaking (was) pleasing, being devoid of exaggeration either of manner or matter.'[36] James Watkins was in Newcastle again in October 1862 when he wrote a stinging letter to the Chronicle as 'a citizen of America, born a slave' condemning President Lincoln's 'diabolical….scheme' to avoid the slavery issue by persuading several million black people to emigrate to 'colonies' in central America and Africa. Slavery, wrote Watkins had inflicted 'the cruellest indignities that man's diabolical ingenuity could devise.' Forcefully rejecting the 'emigration scheme', Watkins insisted: 'Citizens we are; citizens in the face of Mr Lincoln's double-dealing. As American free coloured subjects we claim the rights of citizenship.'[37]

The Newcastle Daily Chronicle

The Chronicle had already sharply criticised Lincoln's emigration plan as 'chimerical', and reflecting a failure to grasp the need to abolish slavery, a problem created 'through white instrumentality.'[38] The paper served as a cornerstone of the anti-slavery cause on Tyneside during the American War, whilst other local papers tended towards Confederate sympathies. The newspaper's proprietor, Joseph Cowen, Jnr, was already a veteran of Chartism and Northern Reform Union, and had worked closely with various European revolutionaries (for whom he supplied arms, volunteers, ships and political assistance). His predisposition on the slavery question was heavily reinforced by personal contacts with William Wells Brown - they spoke on the same platform at Blaydon in 1850 - and William Lloyd Garrison. Moreover, Cowen's great friend in the campaign for an Italian independence, Jessie White Mario, was nearly lynched in America when she 'dared to advocate publicly and before an audience of slave holders, the rights of coloured people to freedom.' Cowen rightly threw himself into

the American struggle, and 'his impassioned eloquence was everywhere heard for the Union, from the Tees to the Tweed, and his able journal, the Newcastle Chronicle never faltered in the cause.'[39]

Under Cowen's control, the Chronicle built-up a staff of radical journalists. This meant that some of the most 'advanced' positions on race to be found in English Radicalism were expressed through the paper's sometimes contradictory editorial content. Two journalists, in particular, merit special attention for their role in shaping the more perceptive aspects of the Chronicle's editorial policy. Sydney Milnes Hawkes, who wrote the socially biting 'Elfin' or 'Lord Gossip' column, made a point of challenging racial prejudice on numerous occasions (it was Hawkes, for example, who later reported the multi-racial seamen's strike). Hawke's own background revealed a passionate commitment to political liberty that went far beyond speech-making or journalism. A colleague wrote to Hawkes: 'the gentlest and most tender-hearted of men… (he) committed some desperate crimes in the cause of 'Italian liberty'. He carried out to Paris the dagger and pistol with which Pianori was to assassinate the French Emperor; he forged passports for Italian refugees; frequently, at the risk of his own life, he conveyed financial aid to both Mazzini and Garibaldi', and after he had spent all his money on European revolutions, he drifted into journalism 'at Joseph Cowen's instigation.'[40]

The other key figure on the Chronicle was William Edwin Adams. Like Sydney Hawkes, W.E. Adams also had a long involvement with the more exotic reaches of European politics, and had found himself at the centre of a major political trial in 1858 after writing a pamphlet justifying 'Tyrannicide'. Adams had been connected with the revolutionary and internationalist wing of Chartism. By the early 1860s he, too, was deeply involved with the American War. Cowen invited him to contribute a column to the Chronicle under the pen name 'Ironside', and several of these columns were about the politics of the struggle in North America. In early 1863, Adams came to Newcastle to join the full-time staff on Cowen's newspaper, but he could often be found addressing public

meetings of 'working men' on the implications of the Civil War (he gave a series of lectures at North Shields in the autumn of 1864, for instance). One significant feature of Adam's position was that he clearly saw the anti-slavery fight as a double-edged crusade: it was about justice and freedom for black people oppressed by racism, and it was also about the rights of workers everywhere. There is a close similarity between Adam's views on the meaning of the American War and those of Marx.[41]

William Craft

The Radicals and the Nonconformists approached the American Civil War and the issue of race from quite different sources of inspiration. But the two groups did find ways of working together. It was a collaboration that produced marked successes, including a sensational public rebuttal of white racism by a black man in Newcastle during 1863.

The British Association for the Advancement of Science held its national conference in the town in the summer of 1863, and two 'experts' - who turned out to be Confederate sympathisers - were anxious to assert that black people were not really human beings. They might have got away virtually unchallenged but for the skill of William Craft.

William Craft and his equally resolute wife Ellen, had lived in England for thirteen years following a dramatic escape from slavery in America. A founder of the London Emancipation Committee, William Craft was respected in Radical circles and a practised debater. At the Newcastle Conference he brushed aside attempts by the British Association hierarchy to prevent him from speaking in the 'ethnology' session, carefully and humorously destroyed the arguments of the two Confederate 'experts', and told a fellow of the Royal Society that when 'blacks had equal opportunities with the whites they had shown that they possessed considerable intellectual ability.' Whenever William Craft spoke he received ovations, and through the Chronicle, Cowen, Adams and Hawkes promoted him as the 'star' of the occasion. The two Confederates were instructed by the Chronicle 'not to try it on in Newcastle where a Negro is treated as a man and a brother.'[42]

Echoes from Jamaica

After the war, black Americans who had been willing to work with both the Radicals and the Nonconformists still made occasional visits to Newcastle to explain, like Dr Young of Kentucky ('a gentleman of colour'), the conditions faced by black people in the post-war Deep South.[43] And the Nonconformist and the Radicals went on from the War to make common cause on some other racial issues.

One controversy that claimed a good deal of attention in the immediate aftermath of the American War exploded in mid-November 1865 with news of a supposed black 'insurrection' in Jamaica. This was believed, by those who had sympathised with the Confederacy, to bear out their prediction that black emancipation in the United States would unleash black uprisings and the extermination of white people in other parts of the world. So powerful were the rumours and the atmosphere of panic that the Chronicle published a long leading article, on 15 November, urging calm until more reliable information was available. When more news did arrive, Radical and Nonconformist opinion was stunned. There had been no black rebellion to exterminate whites in Jamaica. Instead, a grisly massacre of hundreds of black people, the politically-inspired murder of a black member of the Jamaican legislature, summary executions conducted on the whim of army officers and a litany of brutalities had been inflicted by a white planter regime seeking to suppress protests about poverty and hardship.

The *Jamaican Outrages* provoked public 'indignation' meetings all over the country, and the Mayors of Newcastle, North and South Shields each bowed to public petitions and called meetings in December 1865. The Newcastle ministers, who had links with colleagues in the West Indies, led the agitation on Tyneside, and the Chronicle naturally lent support, recalling earlier antislavery campaigns: 'Newcastle, for more than 50 years, had been true to the coloured people of the West Indies.'[44] Joseph Cowen was appointed by the Newcastle meeting to be part of the deputation, ultimately 300 - strong, from towns and cities throughout Britain, which

lobbied the Government. The agitation succeeded in the sense that the Governor of Jamaica was removed and an inquiry did take place (leading to no more than a change in the style of colonial government in Jamaica).

The limitations of 'English gentleman'

Significantly, the *Outrages* exposed attitudes that were not so evident during the American War. The same broad division of opinion were still present, but those who defended the Governor of Jamaica raised an issue that could not have been put forward in relation to Americans. As the Shields Gazette stated: 'while we are all wishful to see fair-play for the Black, there is *no necessity that we should take it for granted that English gentleman needlessly shed the blood of their fellow creatures*.'[45] (My emphasis) The fact that Englishmen were being criticised rather than Americans, and that the outrages had been committed in the British Empire and not in a 'foreign country', did make a real and detectable difference. The difference was clear enough to the Shields Gazette and Tory opinion, but it was present, too, in the camp that sought 'justice' for the Jamaican blacks. A Chronicle leader in February 1866 indicated the nature of the difference: 'we have a right to see that our coloured countrymen are not wronged, but *it is not so much out of regard for the rights of the negro* as out of regard for the honour of England that we are disposed to demand the strictest justice. We owe it to England *even more than we owe it to the outraged to black man*, that the crime is committed under English authority should be adequately and justly punished.'[46] (My emphasis)

The *Jamaican Outrages* had many implications for English politics.[47] But their impact on thinking about racial issues demonstrated certain limitations in understanding that had been concealed by a concentration on one institutionalised facet of racism - slavery. In Britain, the Nonconformists and the Radicals 'dissented' from the unreformed class state that they confronted in their battles for liberty and democracy. Within this context, the demand for the abolition of the institution of slavery was a logical extension of Radical and Nonconformist ideas. But the two

groups also had 'civilising missions' of their own in religion and politics - and in saving souls or promoting English liberties the Nonconformists and Radicals had a few equals. Those 'missions' were readily translated into active expressions of racial superiority as soon as they engaged with the military prerogatives and commercial dominance that kept black people in colonial subordination. The Empire made a difference. At root, there was a fundamental acceptance of the right (or 'duty' or 'responsibility') to rule over an Empire. When pressed to explain how England had come to acquire their 'right' or 'duty' or 'responsibility', the answer was likely to be posed in a terms of race because a root-and-branch critique of the social and economic system that had accumulated an Empire lay beyond the ideological horizons of both Radicalism and Nonconformity. As the Chronicle was to argue in 1867: 'Questions of national power always resolve themselves into questions of race.'[48] It was a half-open door through which imperialism was the storm and conquer as the nineteenth century wore on (even Cowen later became an ardent imperialist).

This brief catalogue of black cricketers, concert hall artists, church ministers, politicians and sailors, together with 'snapshots' of the American Civil War and the Jamaica Outrages, indicates something that has been 'hidden from history' on Tyneside. It is quite clear that a black presence - defined as the presence not only of black people but also of ideas and issues that forced positions to be taken on relations between black and white - formed a significant contour of the area's history during the middle of the last century. Just how much more significant is a question that remains to be researched. And there is plenty of scope for further investigation. There is information about black residents in the census records, and material in the press about the impact made by the Maori Wars on social attitudes to name but two relatively unexplored avenues. This article is simply intended as a 'signpost' pointing to how much information can be found from even a narrow range of local sources. Hopefully others will follow the route!

1 Newcastle Daily Chronicle 21 August 1868
2 NDC 13 September 1862
3 NDC 2 September 1862
4 NDC 4 February 1861
5 NDC 2 December 1862
6 NDC 1 January 1861
7 NDC 14 April 1862
8 NDC 28 May 1862
9 NDC 9 December 1862
10 NDC Feb – March 1862; 15 November 1864
11 NDC 10 December 1865
12 NDC 10 December 1867
13 NDC 9 October 1868
14 W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom* Vol II (London 1903), p.463
15 NDC 12 July 1860
16 NDC 10 January 1858
17 NDC 8 July 1867
18 T'Elfin' in NDC 25 June 1866
19 SEE NDC 25 March 1862 and regular Tyne Concert Hall adverts in NDC
20 NDC 12 January 1861
21 NDC 25 March 1869
22 Shields Gazette 29 November 1869 NDC 30 November 1869
23 NDC 26 March 1869
24 NDC 12 January 1861
25 NDC 25 March 1869
26 Shields Gazette 29 November 1869
27 NDC 23 January 1865
28 'Elfin' in NDC 5 March 1866
29 'Elfin' in NDC 24 August 1868
30 NDC 8 December 1862
31 Percy Corder, *The Life of Robert Spence Watson*. (London 1916 edn.) p.24; Newcastle Guardian 5 January 1850
32 NDC 26 November 1861
33 NDC 25 February 1862; SEE: Lary Cary 'Ellen Craft' in Edward T James (Ed.) *Notable American Women 1607-1950* Vol 1., (Cam. Mass., 1971) pp 396-98.
34 NDC 26 November 1861
35 P and E Pumphrey, *Henry and Anna Richardson: In Memorium*, (Newcastle upon Tyne 1892), pp 11, 14-15. Booker T Washington, Frederick Douglass (London, 1906), pp112-14; W.E. Adams op cit, Vol II, pp 422-27.
36 NDC 5 & 10 April 1862
37 NDC 22 October 1862
38 NDC 2 September 1862

39 E.R. Jones, *Life and Speeches of Joseph Cowen MP.* (London, 1885), p.21 Newcastle Guardian 5 January 1850; Jane Cowen, MSS *Life of Joseph Cowen* Chap. IX in Cowen Papers Tyne and Wear County Records Office; K Harris 'Joseph Cowen' in Joyce Bellamy & John Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol I. (London 1972) pp 81-86

40 A. Watson, A Newspaper Man's Memories (London c.1924), pp33-34; M. Milne, Newspapers of *Northumberland and Durham* (Newcastle upon Tyne) p.79.

41 W.E. Adams *op.cit*, Vol II p.441; Karl Marx *Surveys from Exile*, (London 1973) pp 334-6; 350-51; John Saville, 'William Edwin Adams' in Bellamy and Saville, op. *cit* Vol VII (1984), pp 1-4.

42 SEE Adams, op cit. Vol II pp.425-27; *Nigel Todd, Black-on-Tyne: N.A.M.E. Workshop Papers*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1987), Appendix D; Lary Cary, op cit. NDC August – September 1863

43 NDC 3 March 1869

44 NDC 27 November 1865

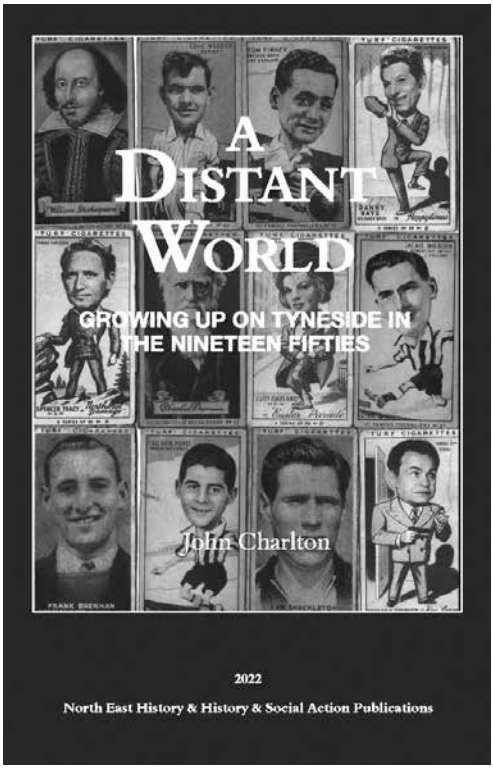
45 NShields Gazette, 12 December 1865

46 NDC 15 February 1866

47 Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, (London, 1965), Chap. III

48 NDC 22 April 1867

Growing Up on Tyneside in the Nineteen Fifties - a new book from John Charlton



John is author of Hidden Chains about slavery and abolition in the North East and The Wind from Peterloo.

Available from johncharlton@blueyonder.co.uk, £12.50 including post & packaging.

Their Stories Are Our Stories: Black Lives in Gateshead in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries

Rosie Serdiville

Introduction

Early in 2021, my colleague Silvie Fisch and I were commissioned by Gateshead Archives to seek out historical evidence of the town's diverse communities.

They wanted to tell the stories of those who have been too long forgotten, starting with the story of Gateshead's involvement in the slave trade. The teaching pack we prepared for them tells the stories of the enslaved and their descendants, and of those who fought to end the slave trade.

We wanted to know how many people of African and Caribbean descent had lived in the area. Gateshead has always drawn people from all over the world. Some came here in search of work and trade, but others had little choice, having been enslaved and taken from their homes. Travelling far across the Atlantic, they came to the North East and made it their home as well.

These were people like Elizabeth Hunter, the daughter of two enslaved Africans, who was probably brought here without her consent. She raised children here who would go on to play an important part in building the town (as explained below). She died here, far from home and kin.

We found a few, but there are probably many more in the historical record just waiting to be found.

Context

In 1764 *The Gentleman's Magazine* reported that there was 'supposed to be near 20,000... Negroe servants' in London: the magazine went on to say that 'the main objections to their importation is, that they cease to consider themselves as slaves in this free country, nor will they put up with an inequality of treatment, nor more willingly perform the laborious offices of servitude than our own people'.[1]

James Walvin has analysed advertisements in English newspapers from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.[2] He found ample evidence of England's black society and of the individuals who were bought and sold like other items of trade. Black people were sold and bartered, especially in the seaports of London, Bristol and Liverpool; they were bequeathed in wills. They were widely employed as domestic servants throughout the country, a fact confirmed by the abundance of illustrative material – portraits, cartoons and sketches – in which black servants appear with their employer's family.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was an enormous expansion of British slaving interests. The 'triangular trade' involved the shipping of ever-more Africans from their homelands in order to satisfy the appetite for black labour in the tropical slave colonies of the Caribbean and the Americas. As slavery in the New World became a major institution – transforming the demography of the region as surely as it revolutionised the local economies, those English ships trading with Africa and the slave colonies returned home filled with tropical produce – and with the occasional coffle (people chained together) of slaves.

Returning sailors, plantation owners, military and government officials retiring to England and of course planters coming home, brought with them those they had enslaved. Their number offered some indication of an ex-colonial's position or wealth. Soon the habit became fashionable in English propertied circles, and black people were imported to satisfy fashionable tastes.

After 1783 there was an influx of more slaves – brought by those who had fought on the losing British side in the American War of Independence. Slaves who fought for the British in the American War of Independence were

promised freedom and transported to Canada, which did not prove welcoming. Significant numbers came to England, where they could be found living on the streets. Enslaved people brought by their owners would usually (not always) be described as servants, particularly after the Somerset case in 1772

Public pressure, from all social classes, became an important factor in ending the slave trade in 1807. The ending of this trade began to reduce the numbers of black people living in Britain. Walvin argues that slaves were now too valuable to export from the colonies and the English black population began to decline and to be absorbed into the wider host society.[3]

Banned from importing new slaves from Africa, the plantation owners had to rely on those born in the colonies. The Slave Registers of 1807 onwards were designed to allow the authorities to keep track of those already enslaved: to ensure that no new 'imports' could be slipped past the authorities. Each year plantation owners had to return a list of those living on their property with details of their origins. What we now think of as terms indicating skin colour or degrees of mixed race genes were actually technical terms indicating the number of steps from being of African origin.

The numbers of black people in Britain began to rise again with the development of new steamship lines to West Africa and the Caribbean which led to the settlement of newer black communities in the seaports of Cardiff, Liverpool, Bristol, and elsewhere.

Current estimates are that about 12 million to 12.8 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic over a span of 400 years.

The Local Trades

Newcastle and Gateshead gained immensely from the slave trade and from the subsidiary industries it promoted. This area was rich in coal which was needed to run the sugar refineries in the Caribbean and the cotton mills of the American South. North East ships made the trip out with coal and returned with valuable sugar and cotton.

John Charlton has documented the value of trade between the Americas, the Caribbean and the North East.[4] *'A Scot, a rat, and a New-Castle*

grindstone, you may find all the world over'. This traditional saying from the seventeenth century evokes a nursery rhyme but the reality was no childish entertainment. The axes, scythes and sickles used by slaves in the sugar plantations were sharpened by these 'New-Castle grindstones' produced in quarries that stretched from Whickham to Hebburn, with the most famous being those on Gateshead Fell, operated by the Kell family.

Other Gateshead families like the Cotesworths [this is where the place name Coatsworth finds its origins) and the Crowleys engaged in the two-way trade. The export of slave trade related goods and products was a valuable one, including coal, hoes, sugar shovels, shackles, chains and branding irons. Log cabins in the colonies were lit by Cotesworth's candles. In return luxury foodstuffs and merchandise such as sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate and tobacco, and expensive dyes for textiles made their way back across the Atlantic.

> *The how [hoe] for the plantations in the West Indies were forged here. They were huge and heavy implements, used by the slaves. An old man, still living at the Mill, informs me that the price for making them was so small that even the production of them was slavery itself. They were afterwards taken by rail to Swalwell, and finished at that establishment.*[5]
> *Newcastle Chronicle, 1 October 1892*

The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 brought even greater wealth. Enslavers were paid approximately £20 million in compensation for people freed in the colonies of the Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope. Invested as annuities, the payments passed the profits of slavery down the generations. Those who had generated this bounty received nothing.

For example, until 1837 Alexander Denoon and his business partner George Henry Hooper acted as agents for other slave-owners. Denoon was one of the trustees for the reputed children of the Guyana planter James

Kirkwood in the 1840s. In 1861 we find him as a visitor at his sister Isabella's house at Catherine Terrace in Gateshead. His occupation is stated as East India Merchant, London. She had two servants, and it is more than likely that she was financially supported by her brother. In the 1851 Census she is recorded as receiving an 'annuity'.[6]

The Archives Project

Our aim was to document the diversity of Gateshead life through the centuries by to drawing out individual stories as a point of connection and empathy. Those accounts were key to the production of the teaching pack for local schools. Personalising history helps people to empathise and engage with their own diverse communities; walking in somebody else's shoes creates understanding and helps to redefine modern prejudices and misconceptions. *Gateshead and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* included activities which extended young people's research skills and encouraged

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> *Newcastle Chronicle, 1 October 1892*

them to step inside the lives of our subjects: to ask how they would have felt in the same circumstances. We also wanted to turn the children into researchers, looking at historical records as documents to be interrogated and considered. We give some examples in the box above and others below.[7]

Here is an example of an entry in the Compensation Registers. We know members of John Graham Clarke's family married other slave owners in our region. Could this be another relation in a different part of the country? How would you find out?

Ann Jones Clarke (née Gascoigne)

1. Ann Jones Clarke was the beneficiary and executrix of the will of Mary Hall Stanton of Barbados proved 15/08/1789. Mary Hall Stanton left her 'my negro woman Fanny and her children with her and their issue and increase', and all her [the testator's] claim on the property of William Clarke being a judgment assigned to her by John Clarke for £3114 1s 4d currency with interest from Jan. 1st 1776 until the whole shall be fully paid.

We rapidly discovered that far more information existed about the enslavers than the enslaved, particularly in the period before 1807 (when the Slave Registers began).

A search through the records of births, marriages and deaths from the late sixteenth century onwards seemed to offer the best hope of tracing individuals. Access to archives was still limited by lockdown measures so we began with the microfiche parish registers for St Mary's Church on Gateshead quayside. This had the advantage of being one of the oldest churches in the area, dating from the thirteenth century. It sat at the heart of the original township. The transcription sto be found on sites such as 'Ancestry' and 'Find My Past' were not terribly helpful – they tend to record official information rather than the marginalia we were seeking.

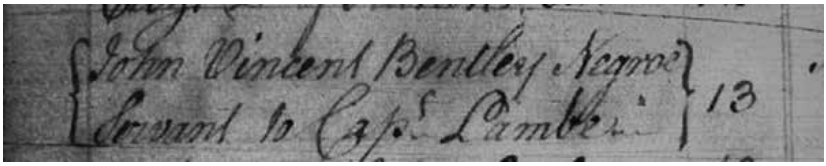
The task was made easier by the existence of a digital microfiche reader which enhances text. It has a number of tools for deciphering handwriting: a godsend given that handwriting styles change over the centuries and the

inevitable encounter with impenetrable individual calligraphy. We were looking for oddities – notes added in the margins, information which extended the normal length of an entry: casually recorded scraps of data that stood out as different on the page.

Once spotted they were not necessarily easy to decipher. We became adept at reversing images into negatives, seeking out other words in the same hand to determine letters and learning the shorthand and contractions dear to generations of curates and church wardens. We had a number of false starts and quickly realised how easy it was to misread an entry that seemed to be just what we were looking for. The skill and experience of archivists Jenifer Bell and Simon Green were invaluable here: deciphering text, providing context and offering a second, objective, eye.

Gateshead Archives had arranged a series of talks by historian and genealogist, Paul Crooks and we were able to draw on his expertise with regard to some of the material we found.[8] His work on tracing African and Afro Caribbean ancestors helped us to understand that what appeared to be casual descriptions (eg. 'negro' or 'african') could also be technical terms that actually defined the origin and status of those they were applied to. The use of these terms, particularly with regard to the slave registers, was quite specific and offers significant clues to the background and heritage of our Gateshead folk.

Slowly, the enslaved emerged from the archives, beginning with the record of a burial in St Mary's church on 13th February 1776.[9] It reads, 'John Vincent Bentley, negroe servant to Captain Lambe'. We have not been able to find any more information about John Bentley; though we do know something about Captain John Lambe.[10] He was the son of the vicar at St Mary's, William Lambe. He became a lay rector for a parish near Alnwick and died in 1790, leaving a 'considerable sum'. He died at 'Gateshead Hill' which suggests that he did not actually carry out any church duties. He may well have taken the post because it had an income attached to it. (A lay rector was a lay person who was entitled to receive the rectorial tithes of a benefice in return for taking on legal duties such as carrying out repairs to the chancel of the church).



We are assuming that the term 'servant' really meant John Bentley was enslaved at some point but we cannot prove it.

Too early to appear in the Slave Registers, often the only record we have of these men and women are one or two lines in the parish registers. We do not know for example, if John Bentley had any family in the area or even how old he was. There is a later entry which is suggestive but not conclusive. Hannah, daughter of John Bentley was also buried in St Mary's, on 17 September 1786. We found no other Bentley in the registers in the search period (1559 – 1870). That does not mean there are no other Bentleys there, of course; simply that we did not spot them.

However, we did find other people (around a dozen so far) who seemed worth investigating. There are some whose status is baldly given as 'slave', and others whose point of origin offers the only clue to their standing.

John Jackson

John Leonard Jackson is described as a 38 year old man of colour. We know nothing else about him except for the words written in the parish register by the Rector of St Mary's, John Collinson when he buried him in February 1821.

The words 'man of colour' probably mean he was free rather than a slave because he was mixed race. He may have been the son of an enslaved woman and an enslaver father. Children of enslaved mothers were themselves categorised as slaves, but could be freed ('manumitted') by their father, and it was not unusual for such children to be given their release when their father died. Alternatively, he may have been an octoroon – somebody who was one-eighth black. That would mean he had an African great grandparent. Octoroons were free to leave the plantation though it would

have undoubtedly been difficult for them to make a life for themselves away from family and point of origin.

Sources of information; the Compensation Database

The Legacies of British Slave-ownership Project at University College London has been running since 2009. It has digitised the records of the Slave Compensation Commission. This body was responsible for compensating those who claimed 'property' in people following the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean, the Cape of Good Hope (both 1834) and Mauritius (1835). As part of the measures to end slavery the government paid enslavers, their representatives and their executors and trustees £20 million in compensation (around £2.4 billion in modern terms according to sources such as Full Fact).[12]

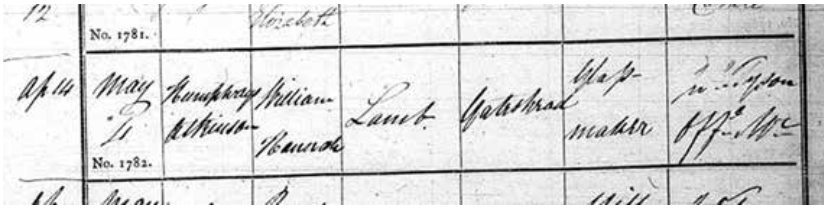
The British government had to borrow the money, which amounted to a massive 40% of the Treasury's annual income or about 5% of British GDP. There were approximately 46,000 claimants, although not all of them were successful in gaining compensation. Of the £20 million paid out, nearly half of the money stayed in Britain.

The records often show links to other families who profited from the slave trade. They were often friends and neighbours and it was not unusual to find marriages between them.

For example, John Charlton's work on Newcastle merchant John Graham Clarke, who owned 13 Jamaica plantations, established his links to the Barrett family (which included the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning).[13] Clarke also owned two sugar refineries in Gateshead. The database threw up another suggestive entry, namely, *'Ann Jones Clarke was the mother of John Jones Gascoigne Clarke (q.v.) and co-owner with him of an estate named Jones'*.

As you will have seen above, this commonality of names came in very handy when we were putting the teaching pack together.

The database connections can also lead one on to other sources. For example, it was not unusual to find in the baptism records of the parish registers children given family names as middle names. One marriage entry suggested a link between the Atkinson and Lambe families.[14]



The Atkinsons and their relatives are a significant presence in the database and were to prove highly relevant to our search. As so often, we know a great deal more about them than we do about those who worked for them (willingly or unwillingly). One important source here is an excellent examination of his own family's history by Richard Atkinson.[15]

George Atkinson (1730-81) began his working life as a tanner but turned to bill-broking and was later appointed the Crown's Receiver General for Cumberland and Westmorland. His brother, Richard (1739-85) went to London, where his financial acumen rapidly secured him a partnership in a firm of West India merchants with lucrative Government contracts and he further extended the family's influence when he became an MP.

It was presumably through Richard that his nephews, George (1764-1814) and Matthew, came to be sent to Jamaica, where George held the post of Island Secretary and Notary Public in the 1790s and Richard was a partner in the firm of Atkinson, Mure and Bogle, merchants.

Both men became plantation owners, and indeed they may have inherited at least some of these interests from their uncle Richard. George married the daughter of another plantation owner, but in about 1799 he returned to England, where he had purchased the Morland estate in Westmorland a

couple of years earlier. He settled at Newcastle upon Tyne, but at the end of his life moved to a property near Canterbury (Kent), where he died in 1814.

Matthew stayed in Jamaica until at least 1802 and became Agent-General to successive Governors of the island. When he returned to England he settled at Carr Hill House near Gateshead, which he bought in 1806, when he established an ironworks at Lemington. George's son and heir was another George Atkinson (1795-1849), who inherited his father's Jamaican interests and spent much of his life in the island until he retired in 1846.[16]

Census Records

Our search was aided by the availability of census information from 1841 onwards. A search of the data up to 1881 gave us 19 people born in the West Indies living in Gateshead. 12 of them were born before 1834 (the date of the last Slave Register).

An entry in the 1851 census, regarding the household of another member of the Atkinson family, William, provided our first glimpse of Elizabeth Hunter. As with the Lambe family, there was an ecclesiastical connection; she was living in William's Rectory as a servant. She was to appear in the census again in 1861 and in 1871. Her place of birth was given as Jamaica.

Elizabeth Hunter

The 1851 census gives her birth year as about 1825, while in 1861 it was given as 1824. The first entry was done by Atkinson, the second by her husband. He got it right (as you would hope), as confirmed by the Slave Registers and Jamaican parish registers.[17]

Elizabeth Hunter was born in October 1824 to Matthew Hunter, owner of the Smallfield Plantation, Jamaica and Sarah Tharpe McFarlane, an enslaved woman.

Elizabeth is not recorded as being enslaved, but her mother, Rachel (known as Sarah) was. We know that Rachel/ Sarah was born in 1782 at Smallfield, when the estate was owned by Duncan McFarlane (who gave his surname to all the enslaved people living there). The Slave Register of

1817 gives her skin colour as 'negro' and tells us that she was African, with two black African parents. Using the information provided by Paul Crooks, we can interpret this to mean that she had been born in Africa and forcibly transported to Jamaica.[18]

McFarlane sold the plantation to Matthew Hunter around 1820/21. The slave register tells us that Rachel was 'alias' Sarah. That was not unusual. Many slaves had additional names they were known by, called 'country names'.

Sarah had four children by Matthew Hunter between 1819 and 1827. The children are listed as 'quadroon' on their baptism records which means they were considered mixed race but not sufficiently so to guarantee their freedom. To be automatically born free, a child would need to be an octoroon, that is, to have one eighth black ancestry.

Elizabeth does not appear on any of the Smallfield registers, which is how we know she was free. Perhaps her father freed her. Did he do the same for his other children? Her mother, Sarah, does not appear on the 1823 Slave Register. Did Matthew free her as well? Manumission by father would be the only way the various Hunter children and the mother could be free, unless Rachel/ Sarah could get together the money to buy herself out, and that seems unlikely. Or perhaps she was dead by 1823?

Comparing the three sets of records for Jamaica offers clues rather than conclusive information about how Elizabeth ended up in Gateshead.

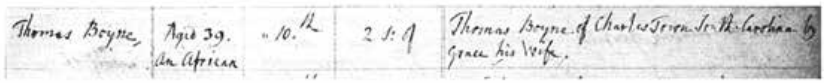
Another Elizabeth Hunter turns up in the records. This Elizabeth was a slave owner at the same time George Atkinson was active in Jamaica. Atkinson owned slaves in the Westmoreland and Hanover parishes, which bordered the Elizabeth parish where Elizabeth Hunter's slaves were held. Possibly they knew each other and he decided to name slaves after her. What is definite is that a William Atkinson was the owner of 50 slaves in the Jamaica parish of St Ann's in 1792 – one of them a Benjamin Hunter, and that by 1851 our Elizabeth Hunter was working as laundress for William Atkinson, Rector of Gateshead. How she came to be there and whether it was by choice is unknown.[19]

When she crops up on the next census in 1861 she is married (as of 1852), to Joseph Elder, a successful stonemason. Ten years later they employed ten men, and must have contributed much to the building of Gateshead. She had four children; one of her sons went on to become a marine engineer and her daughter, Sarah, was a governess.[20]

Elizabeth also appears on the 1871 census, but died shortly afterwards, when only 47 years old. We do not know what her cause of death was, but her burial record offers a clue. She was interred in an unmarked mass grave in Gateshead East Cemetery. Such graves often suggest an emergency such as an epidemic. Diseases such as cholera and typhus swept our area in the nineteenth century, and. perhaps she caught one of those illnesses and had to be buried quickly.[21]

Thomas Boyne

Another bald and perplexing entry appears in the parish register for 1805, this time for a baptism rather than a burial.[22] but it's an odd one. The person being christened is 39 years old and is described as an African. Thomas Boyne is the second son of Thomas Boyne of Charleston, North Carolina by 'Grace his wife'. Charleston was at the heart of the American slave-owning cotton industry. Most other baptism records in this period give us the wife's maiden name. Was Grace a slave who was not seen as important enough to be named? The name largely disappears from the Gateshead records until the arrival of the Irish later in the nineteenth century. We have one entry which may be tied in – the burial of Anne Boyne, a Gateshead resident aged 64 in March 1815.


Thomas Boyne | Aged 39. an African | 10. 12 | 2 1. 1 | Thomas Boyne of Charles Town So. Carolina & Grace his Wife.

Tantalising glimpse from other resources offer clues about what became of these people and also of how much research is still to be done. What is emerging is the value of linking up and communicating information and findings. Family history is sometimes seen as a purely personal activity, but

it has a wider value. It draws in people prepared to put in time and effort to trace their own history and they bring information into the public arena in the process. Those family projects have developed community and political connections.

One of them is the Heritage Exchange Program in the US.[23] This is a collaboration between descendants of slave owners, descendants of those enslaved, and the US Black Heritage Project, in order to document those who were enslaved. The goal is to build family trees which connect enslaved ancestors to their descendants.

Their records produced an interesting reference to a Thomas Boyne. The dates do not fit our man but the name, location and background is interesting. Of course this is entirely speculation, and we need to remind ourselves that many black people share enslaver names.

The Thomas Boyne of their records was born about 1849 in Prince George's County, Maryland. His parents are unknown. He passed away in 1896 in Washington DC. Thomas was a recipient of America's highest military decoration - the Medal of Honor - for his actions in the Indian Wars of the western United States. He served as a Sergeant in the 25th Infantry Regiment between 1864 and 1889. We do not know what his role during the Civil War was, though he was enlisted at the time. The Indian and Civil wars were concurrent so it is entirely possible that his service was solely in the West of the country.[24] In which case (as another colleague, Sue Ward, pointed out in conversation) it is ironic that he was fighting on behalf of the US against another group of people oppressed by colonialists.

John Bunting

We know a bit more about the final black resident of Gateshead we are going to consider. Finding out something of his story was a challenge, a real archive detective story.

We started with a search through the parish records for St Mary's which told us about a christening on Christmas Day 1808, '2nd son of Samuel Bunting of Jamaica, Port Antonio, & Jenet - both slaves'.[25] This is one year

after the 1807 Act. It would be interesting to know when Samuel and Jenet came to Gateshead.

Port Antonio is a parish in Jamaica and that was where we turned for our next clue to the family. Looking through the parish and slave registers we discovered that there were lots of Buntings. This was a classic example of something very common; slaves were often given the same surname as their owners. We think Samuel and Jenet were owned by the Rev. Anthony Bunting, who was born in 1778 in Gateshead and married a local woman, Jane Elizabeth Brown here in 1802. The family left for Jamaica where their son, John Roddam Bunting, was born in 1804.

The Rev. Anthony Bunting as Chaplain of Port Antonio, Portland Parish, Treasurer of the Workhouse of Port-Royal, and master and minister of a school until his death in 1832. So what were Samuel and Jenet doing in Gateshead in 1808?

We know that Anthony Bunting owned slaves. The Jamaican parish registers tell us about two women named Bunting who were in their late 20s when they were baptised in April 1810. They were enslaved and lived on the property of Anthony Bunting of Portland Parish, Jamaica.[26]

The clue lay in Jane Bunting's family. We discovered that her father was still living in Gateshead in 1808. Her mother had died many years earlier, but her father lived until 1810. Perhaps he was in poor health and Samuel and Jenet had been sent over to look after him? That suggests they were very trustworthy, if they were expected to be carers as well as servants.

There is a good chance that Jenet returned to Jamaica after the death of Elizabeth Bunting's father. Anthony Bunting's Slave Register return of 1817 includes a 'Janet Bunting' born 1785. Could this be Jenet? Or has Anthony just re-used that name for another person? That would be sad but not uncommon. There is no mention of Samuel. In fact, his name only appears once more in any record in August 1809 and it is for the saddest of reasons.

This is the burial record of John Bunting. He only lived 8 months.[27]

One of the defining experiences of this project has been that, in setting out to tell stories that would connect local people to their past, we found ourselves engaged and connected. These are not simply names from the archives. They were real people just like us who underwent experiences that we would find unendurable. Their struggles and eventual victory were only partial.

Slavery still exists today and the Anti-Slavery Society, set up in the nineteenth century is still active. According to a Walk Free report in 2018, there were 46 million people enslaved worldwide in 2016.[28] We have debts to repay.

Acknowledgements

Silvie Fisch and I would particularly like to thank Jenifer Bell and Simon Green of Gateshead Archive Service whose expertise in pulling together sources of information was a godsend, and Paul Crooks whose advice on all aspects of Black Afro-Caribbean history and genealogy was invaluable.

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Nigel Todd and the Greening Wingrove Project

Steve Grinter & Dave Webb

It felt like the end of the world. Drains exploding, pedestrians floored, homes ruined.[1]

Every good story needs a dramatic opening and Nigel Todd began Greening Wingrove's with 'Thunder Thursday'. It was a powerful choice. In June 2012 Newcastle saw more than a month's rain fall in less than two hours. The quayside's medieval steps became torrents of white water, drivers were trapped in motionless traffic and 23,000 homes lost power. Lightning crashed into the structure of the Tyne Bridge, adding a kind of biblical symbolism to the weather's curse on the city.

Greening Wingrove is a resident-led environmental initiative covering the inner party of Newcastle's west end, uphill from the city centre, taking in the residential areas of Wingrove Road and Arthur's Hill as well as Nuns Moor Park and a large part of the Town Moor. Back in 2012, it was rainwater from this area that had gushed through the Victorian drainage system, quickly overwhelming the subsystem in central Newcastle and sending plumes of water sometimes three or four metres into the air. The story acted as a portent of things to come, sending a message that Newcastle would need to transform its attitude to the environment and its infrastructure to make the best of the years ahead.

Greening Wingrove began around 2010 as a loose network of local residents and community organisations. The network received a huge boost with the success in 2012 of a major funding bid to the Big Lottery Fund

(BLF) with a grant of £978,147 awarded through the Communities Living Sustainably Programme (CLS). As the chair of Greening Wingrove, Nigel Todd was instrumental to ensuring that co-operative values were at the heart of what went on. His work in this capacity seemed to be a combination of a personal concern for climate change and an awareness that Labour Councillors needed to work beyond the confines of local government committees to advance a transformative agenda within communities. If council work is about exercising power over things - mainly the aims and programme of a local authority - then Greening Wingrove was about generating the collective power to make things happen in the community. Bringing the two together meant electing individuals who were connected to, and part of, the area they represented; people whose power could be spread not just wielded.

Nigel's favourite analogy for the Councillor's role was that of a shop steward for the area, and this was how he set about his work with Greening Wingrove. He encouraged a groundswell of interest in environmental issues that began at the point where they connected with individuals, through their experience of flooding, traffic jams, fly tipping or food growing. This attempt to prefigure a future form of Municipal Socialism was underpinned by a life steeped in the co-operative movement and by a historical interest in anarchism and co-operative action. Nigel's book *Roses and Revolutionists*, first published in 1986 and then in a revised edition in 2015, told the story of Clousden Hill communist and co-operative colony.[2] But it seemed strikingly similar to Greening Wingrove's contemporary efforts at consensus-based decision making, widened democratic participation and home-grown agriculture. Greening Wingrove could also be seen as an expression of Nigel's earlier work with the West End Housing Co-operative, established in 1979, which had grown into a well organised group of twelve homes by 2021.[3] It was a £500 donation from the housing co-op that provided the first bit of financial support for Greening Wingrove: an organisation whose turnover would grow to over £50,000 a year.[4] Nigel's way of working must have had some kind of broader impact, as one Labour

cabinet member from the East side of the city apparently complained that he seemed to be 'setting up his own state over there'.

Greening Wingrove had begun in 2011 by group of residents looking for ways to influence their local area so as to make it 'cleaner and greener'. The group always combined direct action, such as litter picks and planting in underused green spaces, with efforts to influence the delivery of council services and those provided by other organisations in the area. Much of the early work focused on Nuns Moor Park, where residents wanted to mobilise local volunteers around creating a greater variety of plants and trees as well as better habitats for wildlife. This led to planting schemes, the establishment of a community orchard and the reclamation of a burned-out bowling pavilion as well as to a general increase in consciousness about the importance of the local environment and its effects on people. Efforts to plant trees and bluebells brought a mixed reaction where land belonging to the Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne[5] was concerned and led to lengthy negotiations. These became even more lengthy once the question of the local allotments came up. The green agenda was quickly matched by concerns about an increase in litter and fly tipping, with *The Times* naming Arthur's Hill as one of 12 'grot spots' nationally.[6] Monthly litter picks ended with soup, cake and chat… good natured gossip about local issues, what might be done and how.

While all this was happening roughly around 2011, an opportunity emerged to bid for a seed fund from the Big Lottery Fund and develop a plan for a larger project. Nigel worked with others to form a partnership and pull together ideas for a big environmental improvement and learning project focused on the ward. The bid would channel resources and capacity into a disadvantaged part of Newcastle. It would be a pathfinder for addressing environmental degradation, raising awareness of climate change and confronting its impacts, all from the perspective of community development and education.

The Big Lottery Fund decided to support twelve Communities Living Sustainably projects nationally and the announcement that the Greening

Community meeting

Wingrove bid was one of the successful ones was big news in the area.[7] The project design envisaged that the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) would help Greening Wingrove manage nearly a million pounds of spending aimed at community experiments in environmental behaviour change. The 'WEA Greening Wingrove Project' would operate for four and a half years, after which it was hoped that the now fully constituted Greening Wingrove and Arthur's Hill Community Interest Company (CIC) would carry on the best elements of the work while developing forms of self-funding. The success of the funding bid was helped by Nigel's links with the WEA, where he had worked as regional director, as well as his active involvement in the North East WEA's pioneering Green Branch[8]. The partnership also saw input from the Co-operative Group in which Nigel was an active member as well as Newcastle City Council, Newcastle University, the North East network for the black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector and the Time Exchange a local community-based 'time bank'.[9]

The WEA Greening Wingrove Project

The project's aims were to support people to understand their impacts on the environment, and on climate change in particular, and to build

awareness of actions people could. A further aim of the project was to enhance cohesion in north east England's most ethnically diverse ward.

The WEA Greening Wingrove project was distinctive among other Communities Living Sustainably projects in the extent to which it sought to be led by ideas and action from local people and over time it became a kind of melting pot of ideas for community-based change. A hallmark of the project was its use of a 'community innovation fund', which devolved funding to local groups in the area through participatory budgeting.[10] This proved effective at drawing out creative ideas from local people, from an environmental radio show aimed predominantly at the Asian community to a feasibility study for developing local food supply chains to youth work on place-making.[11] Over time, Nigel negotiated to remove the competitive aspect of the community innovation fund, with the emphasis shifted to co-operation.

The final evaluation report of the Greening Wingrove project, produced by Centrifuge Consulting for the WEA, offers a thorough account of the extensive work that was undertaken. It divides this into four themes: 'greener and cleaner', 'grow and eat', 'saving energy' and 'community capacity building'. While many of the other Communities Living Sustainably projects addressed wide areas, even whole local authority districts, Greening Wingrove was distinctive in being tightly focused on one inner urban part of Newcastle. The product was an almost festival-like era of community development, with many of the central initiatives shaped by Nigel's long experience of working with Freirian and Gramscian approaches to community development. Rather than repeat the analysis in the evaluation report the focus here is on three ways in which Nigel used this expertise to shape the programme as it developed.

1. From litter picking to community organising …to schools-based environmental education

For a Councillor in Wingrove, street litter was an ever-present issue, generating a lot of friction and unease within the community and posing a particular challenge to a local authority beset by severe cuts. Where much

of the country thinks of litter as the odd stray plastic bottle, the problem in the west end of Newcastle is on a different scale altogether. There was much discussion, both of the sources of litter and of how residents should respond. Council staff were encouraging community litter picks as services retreated, but would this just smooth the way for more neoliberal cuts? Residents were even being offered the same kind of bright yellow vests formerly worn by council staff. There initially seemed little alternative, and the monthly litter picks did bring neighbours together who might otherwise never have met.

The community innovation fund provided a way of thinking differently about this problem. Greening Wingrove pioneered community organising in the north east with the aid of community organisers Tom and Sarah. They knocked on doors, listened to concerns and invited residents to a meeting where over 40 people negotiated problems and agreed priorities. A 'world café' style process was used to generate ideas and prioritise support for them, then the top ones were taken forward.[13] The litter picks also became routes by which residents could share local knowledge and frustrations. They became a stepping stone towards experimenting in coproduction with local authority officers through meetings about service delivery.

Nigel exerted the same kind of democratising influence on the WEA Greening Wingrove project's 'my pledge' programme, which sought to enlist residents to change their behaviour. Combining the pledge with a petition helped shift the scheme's focus away from blaming individuals while increasing support for co-produced solutions. That in turn led to joint meetings with Newcastle City Council officers, the establishment of a dedicated e-mail address to report concerns, and efforts to change the way services were delivered. Along with other councillors, Nigel worked door-to-door to encourage residents to sign up for recycling bins and pass the invitation on to their neighbours, again seeking a collective solution.

One of the potential solutions to street litter generated by local residents was to educate young people about the consequences of littering for communities and the environment. Towards the end of the programme much of the learning about the behaviour leading to street littering was

channelled into a programme of environmental education in local primary schools. An unexpected outcome was not only the enthusiastic engagement of young people but also a ripple effect, with children becoming effective at educating their parents about why they should not drop litter. This was an educational programme where everyone was learning at the same time, in the true spirit of mutualism, and the curriculum and materials went on to be shared with schools long after the project had finished.

2. From a burned out shed to an environmental hub

The WEA Greening Wingrove Project funding bid had pledged to look at ways in which local assets could be used to address environmental issues and at the centre of much of this thought was Nuns Moor Park. When first laid out at the end of the ninteenth century, the park was a formal space. A brass band played in the bandstand on a Sunday, there was an enclosure for deer and three bowling greens, one of which had its own pavilion.[14] During the 1980s and 1990s, the area lost jobs and population and became more diverse, helped by the availability of cheap, more spacious housing. The bandstand was used more spontaneously (the KLF used it during the mid-90s amidst a party scene that developed throughout the neighbouring terraces). However, that period also saw vandalism in the park, with the bandstand reduced to its brickwork stand and the bowling pavilion set on fire. Surveys revealed the ground beneath the greens to be poisoned with lead.

With the aid of Greening Wingrove Community Interest Company (CIC)[15], Sustrans, Newcastle City Council and the WEA Greening Wingrove project, the area's neglected and underused spaces gradually became the focus for new endeavours by local people.

The bowling pavilion was restored to a workable, secure space where community events could take place and park projects could be co-ordinated. The space then changed 'owners' as waves of volunteer interest succeeded each other. A gardening space gradually also became a community hub centred on a hand built, wood-fired pizza oven with events such as wassailing and the apple day festival drawing connections with the seasons. The WEA Greening Wingrove project supported garden festivals, a food festival, a maker market, youth outreach work, an 'activist garden' and even a visiting circus, while the Time Exchange brought people together to grow food and learn horticultural techniques such as willow weaving. For a time, the space was used to house a group of 'magic hat' pay-as-you-feel food carts, a business that would grow into a permanent space in Newcastle city centre with a mission to turn unwanted food into cuisine.[16] Underpinning all these initiatives was Nigel Todd's effective leadership style, based on supporting and nurturing creative energies from the community and not succumbing to the temptation to lead from the front. He alluded to this in what would be his last chair's report for Greening Wingrove;

The CIC's approach is essentially democratic and encouraging rather than controlling. As a result, groups that emerge from Greening Wingrove's activities display a high degree of self-organisation within a solidarity framework – eg the vertical veg growing group, the Friends of Nuns Moor Park and the litter picking groups.[17]

The space continues as the 'bike garden': providing a base for Northern Slice coffee and Bonsai Billabong's local plant nursery, while also being used for 'Dr Bike' sessions and food growing.

3. From fearfulness to 'vertical veg'

One of the lessons learned from the litter picks was the power of engaging people around doorstep concerns and the practical issues affecting their lives; another was the potential to turn a problem into an opportunity by being creative about how to respond to it. Growing food and plants offered another practical and highly visible way of encouraging people to think differently about their immediate environment and meet others with a similar interest. The thin front yards of terraced streets could be seen as under-used assets much like the burnt-out bowling pavilion. They were generally overlooked even by longer term residents: many were small and awkwardly shaped, there were issues with theft of plants and pots and a history of defensiveness left over from historically high rates of burglary which had encouraged a retreat indoors.[18]

Nigel's thoughts were to try and attract the community through 'street theatre' in the form of outdoor lessons about how to grow food in cramped spaces. These were aided by Mark Ridsdill-Smith of 'Vertical Veg' who brought his large, ghostbusters-style estate car full of pots, seeds and compost.[19] Regular sessions led to sharing of experiences about what would grow and what wouldn't while a number of residents expanded into the street planters, replacing the thorny municipal planting with vegetables, flowers and herbs. Photos were shared in a growing competition and in Greening Wingrove calendars, produced each year. Meanwhile the closure of the local Nuns Moor allotment site by Newcastle's Freemen forced some residents to try and squeeze the best of their plants into their rear yards, creating tiny oases of green.[20]

As the chair of the City Council's Freemen Working Group, Nigel connected a continued interest in community growing with lobbying against the removal of the allotments. When this failed he drew on diplomacy in an effort to negotiate the return of a smaller number of allotments to the moor: a project that was sadly curtailed by his death. He did succeed in ensuring that a number of mature trees, which had been felled on the site without permission, were replaced with new planting. The return of some

allotments would certainly be a fitting way to honour the memory of Nigel and his work in the community. On this only time will tell.

Outlook and approach

Each of the three examples above entailed joining up individuals around shared concerns and encouraging the sharing of experiences. Nigel was an adult educator, a historian and a longstanding local politician with formidable skills in diplomacy. Wherever possible he used these skills to position people's experiences within a history of struggle, to build individuals' confidence in articulating their claims and to connect them strategically with people acting for institutions. Nigel's community politics radiated friendliness, politeness and integrity; it was fundamentally about much more than just asking nicely, although that might get you a long way too. In this, Nigel was outstanding in recognising the cultural as well as the institutional content of democracy.

While this way of working might seem basically anarchist and mutualist, it was Antonio Gramsci who Nigel referenced as his main inspiration. Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony fits well with Nigel's strategy of 'raising consciousness' by positioning lived experience against institutional actions and agendas. Like Gramsci, Nigel was highly attentive to the diversity of class positions, interests and outlooks but was not prejudiced. His support for autonomous associations within a 'solidarity framework' was an effort to align this diversity so as to develop the conditions under which social and institutional structures might respond to radically extended participation.

Writing at a time when authoritarianism and Fascism were on the rise, Gramsci was keen to stress the opportunities for solidarity. 'The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born; now is the time of monsters', he said.[21]

Contemporary politics has not quite returned to this point, yet climate change is accelerating the decline faster than many of us realise. In that sense Nigel's work was a classic Gramscian effort to build a new world, beginning

at the point where individuals experience the failure of neoliberalised institutions to manage the old one.

The context for Nigel's work with Greening Wingrove was one of a local state struggling with the realities of austerity-driven dispossession. Services were being radically stripped down with visibly negative effects on the local environment. A whole host of local authority staff was lost, from neighbourhood wardens to local neighbourhood management, and the local police force was reduced. Housing associations were, in general, losing local offices while trying to engage their residents from further afield. Local facilities like post offices were being removed while park management was being reduced and parcelled out. These changes were generally inflicted on, rather than willingly driven by, those working in these organisations. In recognising this Nigel was able, to some extent, to extend the reach of his solidarity framework into these organisations; to secure support from Karbon Homes for community clean-ups and take up some of the ideas from residents in the park. He used his connections with the Time Exchange, CHAT Trust, Home Housing and Nuns Moor Play Centre to explore forms of collaboration and shared funding strategies. Greening Wingrove delivered a contract from Northumbria Water for community-led behaviour change while Nigel worked through Newcastle University, the Workers Education Association (including its Green Branch) and the Co-operative College to raise the profile of Greening Wingrove, resulting in what he termed a 'magnet effect' of interest from those working in nearby organisations.

Looking forward

It is clear from the many contributions by and about Nigel in this journal that his life and outlook were formed by the confluence of some powerful social and political movements, from his entry into the co-operative movement to his experiences at Ruskin College in 1968 to his near misses as parliamentary candidate and prospective Labour Group leader in Newcastle. Nigel was the architect of a peaceful revolution in community activity in the west end of Newcastle, one that generated over 14,000 individual engagements

with residents through the WEA Greening Wingrove project alone. This from someone who was described by the local Evening Chronicle in 1994 as 'a constant thorn in the side of the Newcastle City Council leadership'.[22] These formative influences mean that Nigel is simply irreplaceable.

Nevertheless, he leaves behind him a co-operative organisation with a constitutional commitment to member-based democracy, a membership base of over 100 and a local legacy much wider. His principles of solidarity and autonomy are mirrored in the Elswick and Arthur's Hill Mutual Aid movement, which perseveres despite the knowledge that Westminster has been captured by an insulated, self-serving elite. As the climate crisis grows so does the need for systemic transformation, and Nigel's diplomatic work at the interface of communities, government and institutions offers lessons about how we generate the political pressure for change. Less well explored are the obvious benefits Nigel's solidarity approach brought for people's mental health. This speaks to those who have drawn a political connection between individualism and mental health plus those and want to do something about it. These are the challenges, and also the opportunities, that face those seeking to continue Greening Wingrove's work.

Many thanks to Ruth Hayward and Anne Staines for their comments and input on an earlier draft of this article.

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15 The Greening Wingrove CIC was formed around the same time (ie 2012) as the Greening Wingrove Project began. Whilst there was some overlap between the two initiatives the CIC's focus was on more strategic issues including engaging with community stakeholders whilst the Greening Wingrove Project had a more narrow focus on the more specific aims and objectives set out in the project planning documentation. (seeSee also endnote 10...

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Housing Co-ops and Colliery Housing in the North East

Bill Haylock

In the autumn of 1979 I was about to start the final year of an Environmental Studies degree course at Newcastle Polytechnic as a 29-year-old mature student. I was living in a shared private rented flat over a shop in Heaton Road, Newcastle where the rain dripped through the ceiling of my attic room and the wind whistled through the missing window panes in the unheated bathroom. I was new to the North East when I arrived in September 1977, but after two years knew I wanted to stay after the end of my course and so, with some friends, I started to explore ways of finding better housing.

That led me to become a founder member of a housing co-op which still exists, and in due course to become secretary, and then chair, of a housing co-operative development organisation, Banks of the Wear Cooperative Housing Services (BoW) and, later, into a career in social housing. This article combines personal memories of my involvement in housing co-ops, a brief historical background to the development of housing co-ops in the North East in the 1970s and 80s and, consideration of the role that BoW and the NUM played in a tenant buy-out when the National Coal Board decided to sell off its housing stock.

My life in housing coops

I cannot remember how my friends and I first had the idea of setting up a housing co-operative, but soon I was going to a fact-finding meeting with

Graham Woodford, a development worker for Falconar Street housing co-op in Sandyford, Newcastle.

Graham gave me a run-down of the basic principles of Housing Association Grant, a mechanism through which we could get Government money to buy and renovate a house, in which we would be both tenants and our own landlord. It seemed too good to be true, but before long we had found a Development Agent (Tyneside Housing Association), and a large terraced house for sale in Summerhill Square, Newcastle and, on 28 March 1980, we registered Summerhill Housing Co-operative (Newcastle) with the Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies. I am glad to say the Co-operative still exists.[1]

It was bad timing, however; just then the Housing Corporation, the quango through which government distributed Housing Association Grant, declared a spending moratorium of 6 months. That delayed the purchase of 6 Summerhill Terrace until the end of the year. In the meantime, I became a lodger for three months at 1 Summerhill Terrace, the home of a Newcastle University lecturer I knew through the local anti-nuclear movement. That lecturer went on to become one of the giants of the Labour Movement in the 20th century. She was Mo Mowlam – the future Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who negotiated the Good Friday Agreement. My memories of Mo during that time of living in her house were of the warmth and engaging directness for which she became known as a politician, but also a tough steeliness I am sure she needed in her political career.

We, the original seven founding members of Summerhill Housing Co-op, finally moved into 6 Summerhill Terrace late in 1980. Unlike most of the housing co-ops developed in the North East at that time, Summerhill Housing Co-operative provided shared communal housing, rather than family housing. As individuals we had no stake in the house as a capital asset – that was vested in the Co-operative as a separate legal entity. Each of us was a shareholder in the Co-op, to the value of £1 each. As occupiers of the house we were, in effect, tenants paying a weekly rent,

but as the member-shareholders of the Co-operative, we were its managers and decision-makers, responsible for the maintenance and repair of the building, the management of the co-operative and the selection of new tenants. The formal business of the Co-op was conducted at fortnightly meetings of all seven tenants, along with discussion and decisions on the day-to-day domestic issues of living in a shared house.

Although Banks of the Wear (BoW) had not acted as our development agent for the purchase and improvement of the house, Summerhill Housing Co-op decided to affiliate to BoW for ongoing housing management support. BoW was what is called a secondary co-op, which means that it had a democratic structure, with a management committee, made up of delegates from each of the affiliated co-ops, and I became the delegate for Summerhill Housing Co-op. I soon became absorbed in the wider work of BoW, which by now had grown from its roots in Sunderland to take on a regional role promoting, developing and supporting housing co-ops. Most of the co-ops supported by BoW provided family housing in working-class communities, mainly in Sunderland, Newcastle and east Northumberland. I was elected as Secretary, and then later as Chair, of the management committee. My time as chair was brief, however, because a few months later, I was appointed as the North Region Officer of the National Federation of Housing Associations (now the National Housing Federation) and I stepped down from the chair of BoW to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

The public funding model

The financial model for the public funding of Housing Co-ops which existed at that time needs some detailed explanation. To understand the context, we need to go right back to the introduction of rent controls by an Act of Parliament in 1915. This was an attempt to prevent abuse of the imbalance of power between landlords and tenants, at a time of housing shortage, and was partly a response to the Glasgow Rent strike of 1915, but was originally only intended to be temporary. After the end of the war,

however, the shortage of housing continued and a further act was passed in 1920. Although from 1923 to 1939 the regulation was gradually reversed, with the outbreak of the Second World War full rent control was reimposed.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s poor housing conditions and abuses by unscrupulous landlords gained significant media attention. Ken Loach's film *Cathy Come Home* led to the establishment of the housing charity Shelter. The Housing Act 1964 set up the Housing Corporation to oversee the so-called 'voluntary housing sector' of housing associations and charitable trusts in England and Wales. The Rent Act 1965 introduced a Rent Officer Service, funded by central government, and under the control of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Rent Officers were responsible for setting and registering Fair Rents - the maximum rent that could be charged for a secure tenancy.

The Housing Act 1974 made significant public funding available in the form of Housing Association Grant (HAG), through the Housing Corporation, for the provision of rented housing for people in housing need by registered housing associations. As explained by Kevin Gulliver:

The 1974 Act introduced significant state funding of housing associations ... for social housing development for the first time. In return for registration with a revamped Housing Corporation, the government quango charged with supervision of the voluntary housing sector, housing associations were allocated virtually the whole costs of housing construction and renovation of existing housing; quite different from today's Affordable Rent Programme where the majority of funding is raised from private financial institutions.[2]

Housing co-ops could also gain access to this funding, but generally needed outside expertise from a development agent - usually a registered Housing Association or a Secondary Co-operative, such as Banks of the Wear - to deal with the administration of the finance and the technical oversight of the building or refurbishment work.

The starting point for the calculation of the amount of subsidy for each housing development funded by HAG was the rental income. This in

turn was determined by the Fair Rent set for each unit of accommodation. A housing co-op was responsible for collecting the rents due from each of its properties. This represented the sole income of the co-op. Out of this rental income, the co-op was allowed to retain specific allowances for its management costs and the maintenance of that property. Any surplus rental income left after the deduction of these allowances went towards repayment of the debt owed to the Housing Corporation for the capital cost of the initial purchase and refurbishment of the property by the co-op. The surplus rental income in reality was enough only to cover repayment of a fraction of the interest and capital on the loan from the Housing Corporation and the balance was met through public subsidy. In practice, 80–90% of the capital costs were covered by this subsidy.

For the Thatcher Government which came to power in May 1979, this amount of public subsidy was anathema to its free-market principles. However, its top priority in housing policy was not initially reform of social housing finance. The Right to Buy was the Thatcher government's flagship policy in the 1979 election and the main focus of housing policy for their first decade in power. That policy, introduced in October 1980, together with the subsequent wholesale transfer of council housing from local authorities into the management of housing associations, resulted in a complete reshaping of the social housing landscape.

A House of Commons Research Report from 1999 stated, 'Since its introduction local authorities, new town corporations and housing associations have sold over 2.2 million properties. Some 30% of tenants have exercised their Right to Buy...' The report also noted that:

During a period of falling investment in social housing the Right to Buy has contributed to the process of social change on council estates. More affluent tenants have bought and moved out of the sector so that those that remain come from a narrower social base and a higher proportion of them are low-income households or are reliant on welfare benefits. The Right to Buy has resulted in the best council properties being sold to the most affluent tenants.[3]

The Conservative government finally turned its attention to the financing of social housing in the 1988 Housing Act, which greatly reduced the subsidy for social housing and required housing associations to raise private finance to fund the shortfall. This has had a negative impact on social housing tenants, with higher rents and the worsening of poverty traps for tenants, as Gulliver points out. Previously '...69 per cent of working age tenants were in work, despite relatively higher unemployment than today, while now this has slumped to 51 per cent. At the same time, the proportion of housing association tenants in receipt of housing benefit has increased from about half to two thirds'.[4]

In the late 80s, I had been appointed North Region Officer of the National Federation of Housing Associations largely on the basis of my experience with housing co-ops. The NFHA realised that the Conservatives' proposals would have these negative impacts and we lobbied politicians before the Act became law. I happened to meet Tony Blair at the opening of a new housing association development in his Sedgefield constituency. I told him of Housing Associations' concerns about the proposed Housing Bill. His eyes soon started scanning the room for someone else he could talk to... it was clear that he was not going to defend publicly-funded social housing.

The birth of Banks of the Wear

The organisation that became Banks of the Wear had grown out of ad hoc meetings in the early 70s between individuals who wanted to steer Sunderland Council's housing policy in a more radical direction. As a short history of the organisation in the 10th anniversary report of BoW explained

'By the mid-1970's, the traditional approaches to housing provision were being questioned in some quarters; paternalistic management by local authorities had been heavily criticised by the Home Office's Community Development Projects and a small but vocal tenants movement...

Elsewhere, the almost dogmatic faith of bureaucrats and politicians in the efficiency of mass production, with its inherent sacrifice of quality

for quantity, has been tested by co-ordinated tenants campaigns against structural problems, dampness, high heating bills, vandalism and general neglect in deck access, walk-up maisonettes and system-built housing…

Tenants were usually regarded by such people [Local Authorities] as willing and passive recipients of a reasonable housing service at minimal rents; they were incapable of understanding the complexities of housing management and most 'were not interested anyway'... In short, tenant involvement was not seen as a way forward for housing: on the contrary, it was an unwelcome constraint on the provision of a more efficient service.'[5]

The report went on to say that the previous decade had seen a gradual, yet remarkable change in this apparently well-entrenched conventional wisdom, starting with the creation of the Co-operative Housing Agency in 1976. This had been a personal initiative by Labour Housing Minister Reg Freeson 'His enthusiasm for co-ops led to a major upturn in activity, and the creation of Secondary organisations, such as Banks of the Wear, in various parts of the country. They were to act both as Support agencies for existing co-operatives and catalysts for future growth'. However, the Agency lasted for just three years and its target of securing 10% of the national Housing Corporation Capital Programme for co-ops was never reached. 'Needless to say, those in the Housing Corporation and elsewhere who were quietly sceptical about tenant involvement in housing, had all their professional prejudices pleasantly confirmed. 1978 was a bad year for co-ops.'[6]

In its short life the Co-operative Housing Agency had broadened knowledge of, and support for, co-ops in various parts of the country. It also secured important legislative change in the 1977 Housing Rents and Subsidies Act, which introduced grant aid to support new Secondary agencies and for education programmes aimed at ordinary co-op members. With this grant aid Banks of the Wear, which by late 1976 had become a registered association, began work on its first project in Sunderland. A new approach to housing in the North East had begun. Within a decade BoW would have 14 employees working from five offices across the North East

and an annual budget of £2 million. It had expanded its geographical area of operation from its origins in Hendon, Sunderland, to Newcastle, Blyth Valley, Wansbeck, Langley Park near Durham, and Middlesbrough.

Democratic control of rented housing

In the North East and elsewhere, tenant control began to be seen, at least by some, as a way of providing much needed affordable rented housing in a way which up-ended the traditionally paternalistic power relationship between tenants and housing professionals. 'Co-operatives in various parts of the country were demonstrating that working class people could not only challenge professional providers of housing, but, more importantly, could also work in partnership with them, in practical ways, to achieve their aims.'[7]

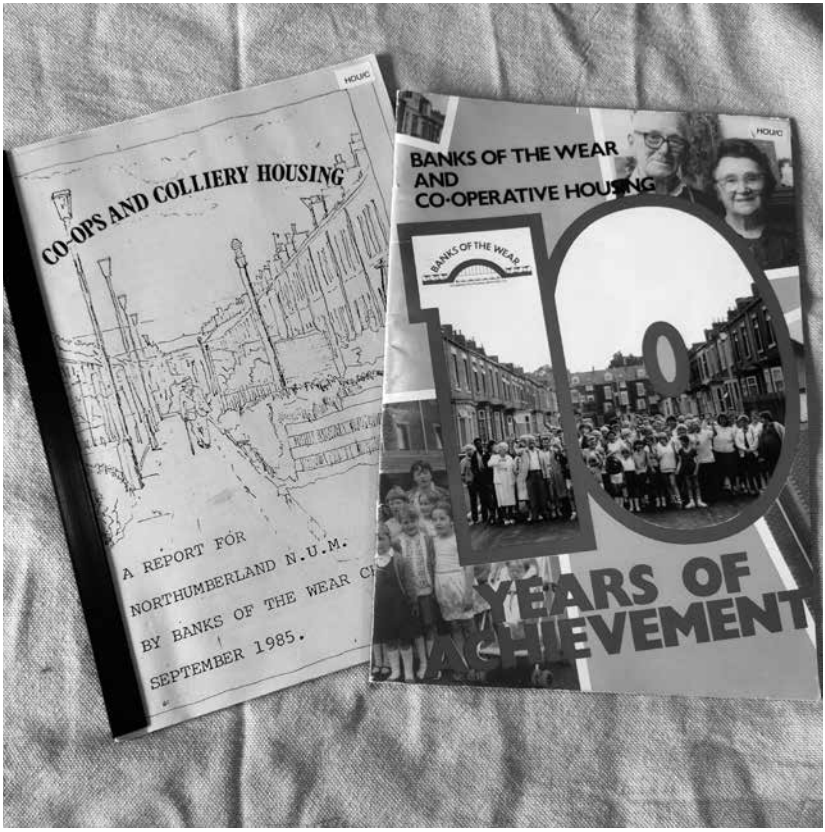
Co-ops are the most democratic form of tenant control. Inevitably they need some professional advice and support to fulfil their self-management role, but the power should always be with the co-op member, rather than the professional support worker. Thus a commitment to equality and democracy lay at the heart of the way Banks of the Wear was organised and operated.

'As the Secondary has grown, it has deliberately tried to embody within itself the principles it so readily preaches to others. The organisation's committee comprises delegates from the Co-operatives with which it works - there are no co-options, no Solicitors, Bank Managers, Accountants or Architects. Control lies where it should - in the hands of ordinary co-op members. The work force is organised on a non-hierarchical basis. There is no Director or even a Co-ordinator, everyone is a general co-op worker as well as a specialist in his or her field; **whatever their job everyone receives the same salary**' [emphasis added]'.[8]

At the time, that did not seem so extraordinary to me, as a member of the committee which made that decision on equal pay. It does seem extraordinary now, more than 35 years on, so used are we to the gross inequalities in the pay and status of different, but all essential, roles in today's unjust economy.

Banks of the Wear and Colliery Housing

One of the biggest projects BoW undertook was to enable tenants of colliery housing to take collective ownership and control of their homes. The standard of the miners' housing owned by the National Coal Board had been of concern to mining unions for many years. Various plans for the 384 homes owned by NCB around the Wearmouth Colliery in Sunderland – for the NCB to modernise the housing itself, purchase and modernisation by Sunderland Council, and an application to the European Coal and Steel Fund - had all been mooted, but failed to progress.



At the time the colliery, with a workforce of 2,500, was still active and projected to have a long-term future. BoW was invited to attend a meeting of the Wearmouth Colliery Advisory Committee on 22 November 1979, to present a fourth plan, for the sale of the houses to a housing co-op and their subsequent improvement using Housing Association Grant from the Housing Corporation. It was agreed at the meeting that BoW would produce a feasibility study which could be discussed by the Unions with their members. The production of that feasibility study in just a fortnight was an impressive achievement achieved through '...a remarkable degree of co-operation by a number of organisations...' as the introduction to the study notes, between BoW, the Housing Corporation Leeds office, the Department of the Environment Newcastle office, the NCB, the Sunderland Rent Officer service, the District Valuer in Washington, and architect Michael Pearce.[9] It was particularly impressive considering that at that time BoW only had four paid workers: John Blackburn (Finance and Administration), Pete Duncan (Development), Simon Underwood (Education) and Carolyn Hodgson (Secretary). BoW's Committee consisted of representatives from already existing housing co-ops supported by BoW and interested individuals.

Many of the houses, even at this late date, did not have bathrooms or inside toilets. Of course, in the two weeks it took to prepare and write the feasibility study it was not possible to do a thorough technical survey of all the housing. However, the feasibility study listed the improvements which would be carried out, including:

Provision of a bathroom and inside toilet where these do not already exist;

Provision of hot water to kitchen sink, wash basin and bath, again where there is no existing supply;

A new, fully modern kitchen, with units, worktops and cupboards, and space for a cooker, fridge and washing machine:

Improved heating facilities, including radiators in living rooms, kitchen and halls where requested by individual occupants;

The removal of the existing steep and often dangerous staircases, and their replacement by a new, modern staircase.

It also listed comprehensive repairs to and improvement of the structure of the houses and curtilage, and said that 'Each improvement scheme would, as far as possible be tailored to the needs and requirements of each family. Before a scheme is drawn up each co-op member would have the opportunity to discuss their ideas with an architect...'[10]

The improvements would have to be carried out in phases, the study explained. The decision on which homes were prioritised would be a decision for the co-op members to make collectively, it emphasised, as would the ultimate choice of which contractor to use.

The choice of what sort of heating system might be used was also addressed by the study. The majority of families in established housing co-ops had opted for gas fires or gas central heating. However,

'In view of the financial advantages of retaining solid fuel which mineworkers enjoy [that is, the free coal allowance] ...we would expect most families in the area to adopt some form of solid fuel heating... One point to remember – the Government will not allow the Co-op to provide radiators (or any new form of heating) in bedrooms, unless there are special problems – for example an elderly person who spends a lot of time in bed'.[11]

The projected average cost of the improvements to each house reveals that the smallest, one-bedroom, houses would be the most expensive at £10,000, - 'because they required more substantial internal alterations to fit a modern staircase. The improvements to two-bedroom houses would cost on average £8,500 and for three-bedroom houses £10,000. The feasibility study also provided some typical room layout plans for the improvements.

The feasibility study clearly convinced the NCB's tenants, but the birth of the project was protracted. As the BoW's 1986 report explained,

Following two years of behind-the-scenes discussions, involving delicate negotiations with the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers, it was agreed that coal board tenants living in 382

unmodernised terraced houses adjacent to Wearmouth Colliery should be given the option of either buying their homes or joining a co-operative. Backed by the Corporation's Regional Office, who were prepared to invest several million pounds of their capital finance into the scheme, Banks of the Wear set about launching the idea with the tenants. The response was overwhelming. 250 people turned up to the first public meeting and within weeks a strong committee had been formed to get the co-op idea off the ground.[12]

After several months of intensive training with BoW staff, the new co-op's committee applied for registration to the Housing Corporation's Board. At this last hurdle, an unexpected political obstacle threatened to stop the project dead in its tracks. The Housing Corporation was, at the same time, under pressure to register a new union-sponsored colliery housing association in South Wales. Relations between the Thatcher government and the NUM, which were to break down completely just over two years later in the all-out industrial action of the 1984 Miners' Strike, were already tense. The political implications of handing out millions of pounds of public money to an NUM-run association struck fear into the hearts of the Housing Corporation hierarchy. Although the Wearmouth co-op's application was not directly linked with the NUM, it got caught in the crossfire.

As BoW's 1986 report explained,

'The Corporation's Deputy Chief Executive at the time seemed determined to sink the Wearmouth application without trace, and encouraged Banks of the Wear and the new co-op to submit its registration application to the Board, with the clear intention of having it either deferred or rejected. (Either way, the project would have been dead and buried). The co-op threw an unexpected spanner into the works by withdrawing the registration application the day before the Board meeting, resubmitting it some six months later when the dust had finally settled. It was then approved and 160 houses have subsequently come into co-operative ownership as a result.[13]

The project benefited from an unusual combination of funding. The six-month moratorium on Housing Corporation funding in 1980 had

heralded a tightening of the purse strings by the new Thatcher government. This caused a delay in new projects across the country (including my own co-op's large shared house improvement works) and encouraged BoW to look for other sources of funding. A visit to Brussels and Strasbourg as part of a North East Labour Party delegation led to discussions with EEC officials about low interest loans through the European Coal and Steel Commission (ECSC). Although the Commission had substantial funds, strict conditions attached to the money meant it they had only been available to Local Authorities in the UK. However, the ECSC was prepared to be flexible, although the Housing Corporation's initial response was not;

'Flexibility in Europe was initially matched by scepticism at home. The Housing Corporation's Deputy Regional Manager prophesied that ECSC loans could never be combined with Housing Association Grant. A year later he was proved wrong, when the Treasury gave their approval to two schemes, one combining 75% HAG with 25% ECSC loans and the other combining 45% HAG with 25% ECSC loans and 30% Local Authority Improvement Grants'.[14]

It was the first time that Housing Association Grant had been combined with other forms of funding to build Fair Rent housing. The Wearmouth colliery housing co-ops eventually received £250,000 of European Coal and Steel Commission loans.

In 1980 BoW had begun informal discussions with Wansbeck District Council. This led to the development of the first housing co-op in Ashington, Hirst Housing Co-op. A second co-op, Myrtle Street Housing Co-op, grew out of the purchase of two terraces of unmodernised homes from the National Coal Board. This raised the question of whether housing co-ops could be the answer when the NCB decided to sell all its 4,300 dwellings in the Northumberland coalfield. Another feasibility study was completed by BoW for Northumberland NUM.[15] This persuaded the union to back a plan for the local authority to buy up to 1,500 of the NCB houses and sell them on to housing co-ops which BoW would support local people to set up. The stumbling block was funding. The Housing

Corporation was by this time focusing its limited funds on the inner cities. Blyth Valley and Wansbeck were both designated by the Corporation as 'non-stress' areas for housing. The result was that in the colliery housing areas the Housing Corporation's funding allocations were only enough for 15 homes. With around 1,300 homes in the pipeline, most of them in urgent need of modernisation, it would take 85 years to complete them all as the BoW 1986 Report explained. Time BoW did not have.

Dark clouds were gathering on the horizon. Funding had always been precarious and it was 6 years before BoW made its first small surplus, in 1982/3. Income was largely dependent architects' fees, payable from the Housing Association Grant, for designing improvement schemes. By employing its own architects in-house, BoW accumulated a surplus which was used to cross-subsidise losses made on the development, education, and management services provided to the co-ops. The 10th Anniversary Report, published in December 1986, carries a prescient quote from Archie Armstrong, the long-serving voluntary treasurer;

'Unless we get a change in Housing Policy I can see we will be forced to seek private finance. Co-op members are worried about this – are we going to be able to provide accommodation at the same rents? We are concerned that we might be pricing out the type of people who need co-op housing. Already rents are so high that only people on high wages or on the DHSS can afford them. What about people on low wages?'.[16]

Less than two years later, the Thatcher government passed the 1988 Housing Act into law. This enabled the wholesale transfer of Council Housing into the ownership of housing associations and rewrote tenancy law in favour of private landlords. It also drastically curtailed the amount of government grant to support new social housing developments. Perhaps most significantly, it replaced capital subsidy from public funds with the requirement for social housing landlords to seek private finance for a majority of the capital cost of new social housing.

At the first post-1988 Act NFHA conference I noticed an immediate change in the culture of the housing association movement. People in grey

suits were replacing the more informally dressed housing activists, there were stands representing financial institutions and a change in language; housing association directors started talking of 'customers' rather than tenants. I decided to leave the NFHA shortly afterwards. I set up as a publicity consultant to housing associations, mainly producing glossy annual reports for some of the biggest housing associations in the country, as well as some small, local ones in the North East.

Banks of the Wear ultimately collapsed in 2015, no longer viable in the brave new neoliberal world of private finance, it has had a lasting legacy. Most of the co-ops it helped to create still survive. Another less tangible but equally important legacy is the impact it had on the people it worked with and for. Informal education was always at the heart of its activities The last word should go to one of the people I knew and worked with on the committee of BoW, and who is quoted in the 10th Anniversary report. Bob Berry followed me as chair of BoW's committee. Involvement in the NUM and the Labour Party had given Bob confidence to speak in front of meetings of up to 200 people, but by the time he became chair he was unemployed. Bob was the treasurer of Myrtle Street co-op in Ashington;

'I lived in the area when the co-op was formed. Originally I didn't want to get involved, but other people convinced me. After several meetings I got more and more involved; the idea of co-operatives, particularly control, was the main factor in getting me interested. I think having control and a say is vital. The co-op keeps me in Ashington, I feel committed to staying despite being unemployed.

Being in a co-op is an education really - it helps you learn and that's the benefit. People living in the co-ops know each other - l only knew one or two people in the street before joining the co-op.

During the miners' strike, the co-op decided to leave rents of striking miners until it was over. Several members were involved in the strike, and they got good support from the co-ops'.[17] An example, perhaps of the wider impact that Housing Co-ops had on both individuals and the communities they operated in.

Notes

1 The Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 replaced the 'Industrial and Provident Society' legal form with two new legal forms: co-operative society and community benefit society. The Register of such societies is now the Mutuals Public Register, maintained by the Financial Conduct Authority. The entry for Summerhill Housing Co-operative is at https://mutuals.fca.org.uk/Search/Society/25283.

2 Kevin Gulliver, *The 1974 Housing Act points the way forward for social housing*, London School of Economics, 2014, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-1974-housing-act-points-the-way-forward-for-social-housing/ [accessed – 21.6.22].

3 House of Commons Research Paper 99/36, *The Right To Buy*, 30 March 1999.

4 Gulliver, 2014, as above.

5 Banks of the Wear Co-operative Housing Services Ltd, *Banks of the Wear and Co-operative Housing: 10 Years of Achievement*, Dec 1986 (hereafter BoW, 1986). Authors own copy

6 BoW, 1986, p10.

7 BoW, 1986, p 7.

8 BoW, 1986, p 11.

9 Banks of the Wear Co-operative Housing Services Ltd, Wearmouth Colliery Houses Feasibility Study, 1979, p 8

10 BoW, 1979, p 3.

11 BoW, 1979, p 4.

12 BoW, 1986, p 7.

13 BoW, 1986, please provide page number.

14 BoW, 1986, please provide page number.

15 Banks of the Wear Co-operative Housing Service Ltd, *Co-ops and Colliery Housing: A Report for Northumberland NUM*, 1985, p15

16 BoW, 1986, p 7.

17 BoW, 1986, p 8.

Roses and Revolutionists: Nigel Todd's History of the Clousden Hill Colony

Charlotte Alston

In 1895, a small group of Sunderland-based anarchists set out in search of land on which to establish a communist cooperative agricultural colony. After an unsuccessful search on Wearside, they settled on a 20-acre farm at Clousden Hill, near Forest Hall to the north of Newcastle. For the following seven years, they lived and farmed collectively. There is not much left to see of the Clousden Hill colony now. The farmhouse still stands, but it is now a private house hemmed in by a much more recently built housing estate. Near the Stephenson Trail, which follows the path of an old waggonway that transported coal from West Moor Pit at Killingworth, a heritage map from 1915 shows the very edge of what would have been colony land. In the Clousden Hill pub, reopened under that name in 2018, there are black and white photos showing the area's history, including some of colony life at Clousden Hill Farm. As Clousden Hill's historian as well as a Labour councillor in Newcastle, Nigel Todd officiated at the pub's reopening, and I would guess he provided the photos too.

I own two copies of Nigel Todd's *Roses and Revolutionists,* which tells the story of the Clousden Hill colony. I bought the first edition, published in 1986 by People's Publications, second hand when I was in the early stages of writing a book about the international movement inspired by Tolstoy's Christian anarchist thought. I did not know the author at the time, but I valued the book especially because it treats the Clousden Hill colonists seriously, not as a curiosity or as hopelessly utopian, but as individuals trying to make a difference in their own lives and in society

more broadly. Clousden Hill Farm was part of a thriving international movement of anarchist, communitarian and back-to-the-land enterprises, not only in Britain but (for example) in the Netherlands, Finland, Bulgaria and Mexico. The colonists were internationalists, with far-reaching connections. Clousden Hill's founder, Franz Kapir, was born in Prague and was fluent in five languages: one of his first enterprises after moving to Newcastle in 1890, where he worked as a tailor, was to teach French to Tyneside workers using texts by Peter Kropotkin. When Kapir and William Key decided to set up their own cooperative agricultural experiment they wrote to Kropotkin to ask if he would be treasurer and fundraiser for the project. He declined, saying that he could barely manage his own finances, but he visited Clousden Hill in 1896 though, and gave the colonists advice both on agriculture and on how to make the colony structurally a success. His advice included making sure people weren't too isolated and could operate in family units, and that women should be included in projects on an equal footing, not consigned to doing domestic work (though from later reports it does not seem that the colonists necessarily acted on this latter piece of advice). In 1895 the German anarchist Bernard Kapffmeyer reported on a visit to the colony that its residents seemed 'skilful, practical, industrious, and to possess the essential quality of being able to agree with either other'. The French anarchist Elisée Reclus also visited in 1896, and there were regular summer visitors of many nationalities.

In *Roses and Revolutionists* Nigel also demonstrated how closely connected to the life of the socialist movement on Tyneside the Clousden Hill colonists were. Like members of other communal experiments at the time they were criticised for their perceived naivety, and for their refusal to participate in mainstream politics. There were rivalries with other groups who wanted to establish more exclusive cooperative enterprises. But far from wanting to absent themselves from society, the colonists aimed to provide a model for others to follow. They embraced new agricultural theories, including Kropotkin's, and practised intensive cultivation: one of the first projects at Clousden Hill was the building of a 100-foot-long

greenhouse. In ILP circles in Newcastle and Sunderland there was plenty of support for the colonists at Clousden Hill, and they sold their produce to local cooperatives. Joseph Cowen's *Newcastle Chronicle* gave them sympathetic coverage too.

The kind of people who were involved in anarchist, communitarian and back-to-the-land movements in the late nineteenth century were pretty ordinary. They did not often go on to 'greater' things, and their manuscripts and correspondence were rarely kept. As a result it is not an easy job to reconstruct the lives, experiences and reflections of the participants. Nigel did a meticulous job with his research on Clousden Hill, piecing together material from local, national and international newspapers, socialist and anarchist pamphlets and periodicals, and the memoirs and accounts of people connected in one way or another to the colony. All these things make *Roses and Revolutionists* a really valuable source for understanding the late nineteenth century anarchist and communitarian movements.

I bought a copy of the second edition of *Roses and Revolutionists* at the book's launch at Newcastle's Central Library in 2015. Inside the book I still have the programme for that event, and the questions I wrote for a Q&A that we organised about the book. This was Nigel's preferred format, more interactive than giving a formal talk. The second edition included additional material that Nigel collected in the thirty years following the first edition of *Roses and Revolutionists,* and it was published by Five Leaves Press (appropriately a publishing house interested in 'personal change, political change, understanding history, understanding the world we live in'). The additional material he had gathered added further detail on life at Clousden Hill Farm, and on the broader contexts for the activism, and the agricultural innovations, of the colonists. I remember we exchanged quite a few emails while Nigel was updating the book about minor figures in the Tolstoyan movement who were in touch with or wrote about Clousden Hill. In his introduction to the second edition, Nigel also highlighted some contemporary developments in Tyneside in which the Clousden Hill colonists might have been able to identify aims that were common to their

own. There might not be much physically remaining of the colony, but cooperation, fair trade production, organic farming, community gardens, adult education, and efforts to use green forms of energy were by this time flourishing – all efforts in which Nigel himself was closely involved.

Few of the agricultural communities of the 1890s survived beyond the very early years of the twentieth century. For some colonists getting along together proved more difficult than anticipated; there were problems with finance or productivity; and most often the participants became disillusioned at the difficulty of putting sincerely-held principles into practice. All this was true for Clousden Hill Farm. After the departure of Franz Kapir it lost something of its anarchist and communitarian focus, and as various colonists left, it ultimately ended up as a private enterprise. But the movement of which Clousden Hill was part was about much more than agricultural communities. In *Roses and Revolutionists* Nigel avoided as far as he could the predictable narrative of idealism followed by failure. He celebrated the colony's achievements, including its role as a safe haven for political prisoners, but also recognised the further trajectories of the activists involved. Some went on to found other enterprises (for example the Whaggs commune at Whickham), while others continued their work in the other various social movements of the day, and took with them their experiences of the communitarian experiment.

Nigel was a mine of information on Tyneside radicals and their international connections. His work on Clousden Hill also reminds his reader that Newcastle in the late nineteenth century was in mainstream terms hardly a backwater: it was a major centre for engineering, industry, and armaments. Initiatives like Clousden Hill were a direct response to the dismay and alienation of their participants at industrial society of the time, and an effort to redirect their energies towards a positive future – just as the cooperative, community and environmental initiatives in which Nigel was involved in twenty-first century Newcastle are a response to the many pressing concerns we currently face. The Clousden Hill colonists could not have had a better historian.

The Progressive Decade? Politics in 1950s Newcastle

John Griffiths

For most of the twentieth century, Newcastle upon Tyne was far from being the Labour Party stronghold of popular imagination. Labour first won control of Newcastle City Council in 1945, and has controlled the council for 55 of the subsequent 77 years, but its rule has been interrupted by significant periods in opposition, including the nine years from 1949 to 1958.[1] For almost all of the 1950s, the city was controlled by the Progressive Party, a fractious coalition of anti-Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives. Meanwhile, the Labour Party in the city sought to remodel itself, fighting out the contradictions between traditionalists and incomers, and mirroring the national struggles between Bevanites and Gaitskellites. By the end of the decade a new leadership group had emerged centred around the Walker councillor Thomas Daniel 'T Dan' Smith (1915-1993), with an armoury of new policies and plans for a municipal revolution.

The Progressives

According to a Newcastle Labour Party report, the Progressive Party was founded in the 1930s, but its genesis can be traced to the influence of the Economic Union (Newcastle and Northumberland) - not to be confused with the Economic League - an organisation founded in 1923 'for the protection of ratepayers', and perhaps even further back to the influence of the London Municipal Society, founded in 1894.[2] The Economic Union sought to bring Liberals and Conservatives together and to elect persons 'who would exclude party politics from local administration' in the face of

Labour's post-1918 surge in support.[3] As a result, 'Newcastle City Council no longer knows any party distinction in its membership, other than Labour on the one hand and Anti-Socialist on the other'.[4] Already in the early 1920s a 'Business Group' of anti-Labour councillors controlled the council, although this was to dissolve in mid-decade.[5] The Progressive Party was part of an interwar trend for the formation of local anti-Labour alliances characterised by names such as Progressive, Moderate, Citizens', Municipal Alliance and Ratepayers.[6] In the north east, Gateshead, Wallsend and Blyth all had Rent and Ratepayers' Associations; Middlesbrough the Civic Association; South Shields, Ratepayers.[7]

The Progressive Party existed solely in order to elect members to Newcastle City Council, but individual membership was encouraged, and by the 1950s the party had approximately 800 members. It was run by an executive committee of six councillors, six non-councillors, and four officers from either category, which would select candidates for its panel. Four district sub-committees would then select candidates on the panel for individual wards. According to a local Labour Party report, the Progressives' ability

…to maintain its position as a catch-all for Liberals and independents as well as Conservatives is probably largely due to careful, diplomatic handling of panel and candidate selection. The Progressive Party first of all avoids making enemies by very rarely rejecting anyone for the panel. Secondly… the selection committees usually check informally to make sure that the proposed candidates are at least reasonably acceptable to the Conservative constituency associations…'

As an election machine, though, it barely existed: 'Each candidate is left largely to fend for himself, though records of helpers and supporters are usually made available to them by the Constituency Conservative Association'.[8]

The Progressive machine began to break down in 1951, when Leigh Criddle, a former Progressive councillor, retained his seat standing as a Conservative.[9] In 1955 two Conservatives stood for Newcastle seats; by

1956 there were three Conservative councillors.[10] In October 1956 the Newcastle Central Conservatives decided to support their own candidates in the six wards in that constituency. Its agent, Norman Welch, described the Progressive Party as 'a nebulous body' from whom they were now divorced.[11] Two years later the Northern Counties Area urged 'effective and efficient support for all Conservative candidates in view of the tremendous importance of local government elections'.[12] In November 1958 Newcastle Tories withdrew their support from Progressive candidates and formed a joint committee of the four constituency associations to select and assist ward candidates, a decision supposedly prompted by the Labour Party policy on comprehensive education in the city.[13] A decision by the Progressive Party to contest the 1959 municipal elections on 'non-political grounds' prompted Newcastle Conservatives to declare that they would only support candidates who stood as 'straightforward Conservatives' and that the party would stand against Progressives.[14] Cllr Arthur Grey, who had recently resigned as chairman of the Progressive group, announced on 11 March 1959 that he would stand as a Conservative in the coming municipal elections, commenting of the Progressives 'There is no plan of campaign, no organisation, nothing of that kind in the Progressive Party. It is useless to go on, because it is impossible to put breath into a corpse'.[15]

On 17 March 1959 ten Progressive councillors – including Grey – announced that they were leaving the Progressive Party and forming a Conservative group on the council which previously had just two members.[16] In February 1960 six more Progressives joined the Conservative group with two further members becoming independent councillors, and of the rump of seven Progressive councillors, two more defected in March 1960.[17]

Like the Progressives, the Conservative Party in Newcastle was prone to factionalism and splits, particularly in its Newcastle North association, whose bitter infighting throughout the 1940s and early 1950s was chronicled by the local MP Cuthbert Headlam in his diaries.[18] This, according to Headlam, was due initially to the arrogance of his predecessor

as Newcastle North MP, Sir Nicholas Grattan-Doyle, in attempting to install his son as Conservative candidate when he resigned in April 1940. A rebel Conservative Association proposed Headlam as their candidate, and he defeated Howard Grattan-Doyle at the subsequent by-election.[19] The divisions exposed by this incident did not readily heal, and Headlam suspected Alderman William Temple ('…an unpleasant piece of work, and not a person in whom one can put much trust'), who was to be a senior postwar Progressive alderman, of stirring up trouble.[20]

In his varied recollections, Dan Smith was noticeably more positive about his Progressive opponents than about his Labour Party colleagues. 'Many of them had quite a lot of ability and if you took them man for man I would say they far outweighed as individuals the people of the Labour side with one or two exceptions'. Among the figures he admired were John Chapman, Cuthbert Carrick, Robert Parker, William McKeag 'who play acted Winston Churchill and was highly competent as a debater' and A Charlton Curry, and so the standard of debate surprised… and impressed me… it let me see that it was necessary to understand their business if you were going to translate attacks on slum houses and property and the city centre… I was perceptive enough to see that they had these abilities and qualities and that if you didn't do your homework they could trip you up. It mightn't have been obvious to your colleagues but it was obvious to you.[21]

Of his Labour colleagues, by contrast,

…I sat at the back of a hall listening to them talking and I thought Oh God! What the hell am I getting myself into here? They hadn't a clue… as to what they should be doing in a city like Newcastle which was… a capital city of a declining region. So twenty years work I thought, maybe, and we can use this as a base in order to radicalise and bring into revolutionary perspective what the labour movement should be doing in Britain.[22]…

Smith's memories may give an undeservedly positive impression of the Progressives, for all the quality of individual members. Its governance of Newcastle during the 1940s and 1950s was marked by a series of corruption scandals, division and ultimately disintegration.

In 1943 two senior Progressive aldermen and former Lord Mayors were tried for corruptly procuring Admiralty contracts for their dry dock and shipbuilding company (one, Sir Arthur Monro Sutherland, was acquitted; Alderman Robert Dalglish and an Admiralty official were gaoled).[23] The following year, the Home Secretary ordered an inquiry into the running of fire and civil defence services in Newcastle. It revealed, among other matters, that a city fire engine had been sold for £15 to a scrap company run by the chairman of the Watch Committee, Cllr Embleton; that Embleton's men had also, when meant to be 'removing rubbish' at the Fire Brigade HQ, removed and cut up for scrap a fire pump, and that Embleton, along with family and friends, had stabled their horses at public expense at the police stables. More seriously, Embleton's company had bought a boat at auction which the Fire Brigade had sought to acquire as a fire boat but mysteriously failed to bid for. Embleton had stated that he would make the vessel available to the Fire Brigade when needed, but at the time of the fiercest air raids on Newcastle the boat was some distance downriver, working for Embleton's company, and was never brought into service. Despite the nature of the inquiry's findings, the Watch Committee voted by 5 to 4 that no change be made in civil defence arrangements, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Embleton was induced to resign.[24] It is indicative of the fractious nature of the Progressives and the feebleness of Newcastle Labour at the time that the attack on Embleton was led by his Progressive colleague William McKeag.

In 1952 it emerged that the Housing Committee had irregularly approved an open-ended contract for consulting engineers Brian Colquhoun and Partners to work on the council's Longbenton housing scheme for fees estimated at up to £150,000, even though the City Engineer's Department was well able to have carried out the work at a fraction of the price.[25] Subsequent lengthy debates on the matter saw Progressive representatives speaking out against the Housing Committee chairman, Alderman William Temple, and voting against the Progressive leadership, while the Progressive leader, Charlton Curry, protested that

'[e]ver since this job was started there has been some evil genius at work creating an atmosphere which has so vitiated the climate in which we live in this Chamber that it has become quite impossible for many individuals and the majority Party… to do its best work'.[26]

The Labour Group and City Labour Party

Dan Smith was initially unimpressed by his Labour colleagues: 'I remember going to the first group meeting. Strangely enough, my new colleagues were not discussing what they were going to do tomorrow; they were discussing what they should have done yesterday'.[27]

This first meeting saw Edward Short stand for election as Labour Group leader against the long-time leader, the 'ageing' and (apparently) 'complacent' James Clydesdale.[28] Smith supported Short

…on grounds of his energy, ability and youth, although I was surprised to find that, unlike voting in my previous 'left wing' election experiences, politics played no part in choosing this candidate. There was no discussion on the political attitudes we would be pursuing in the coming year or about the policies we would be advocating in opposition. There was a noticeable attitude of arrogant 'superiority' displayed by those councillors who had already served… They believed that if you were in a council minority 'you could not do much about it'. Having always been in a very small political minority, I knew for certain just how foolish such a belief was'.[29]…

Smith's suspicions of many of his new colleagues were amply reciprocated. 'The combination of those those who wanted to give me help and advice, and those who positively disliked me, made for a difficult situation'.[30]

Nevertheless, it is possible to make too much of Smith's isolation at this period. He clearly had sufficient support within the Labour group to be elected deputy leader by 1954.[31] Short's resignation of the Leadership to run for Parliament (he was elected MP for Newcastle Central in 1951) however had enabled the old guard led by Clydesdale to regain the group leadership by 1952; he was replaced in 1954 by another right-wing Labour councillor, Frank Russell, a former policeman.[32]

After his election in 1950, Smith failed to be appointed to any of the major council committees and was consigned initially to the backwater of the Libraries Committee.[33]

Work more to Smith's taste and ambition came in 1952 with his appointment to the city's Health Committee.[34] This shared responsibility for slum clearance in the city with the Housing and Housing Management committees, and Smith was also a member of a Joint Committee as to Slum Clearance.[35] He was also appointed to the Insanitary Property, the Smokeless Zones and the Public Abattoir sub-committees.[36] The aim may have been to keep Smith out of the way – he believed so – but the experiences of these committees gave him the material to make a name for himself campaigning on housing and environmental issues.

The City Labour Party

An important new ally of Smith was the Newcastle City Labour Party secretary, Joe Eagles, appointed in 1951.[37] Smith had a good impression of Eagles, who was 'a rare fellow because he had vision and organisational ability… I always admired him because I felt he was a man of principle'.[38] Eagles was able to encourage Smith when, during long years in opposition, he felt frustrated by events.[39] The two men were to work closely on developing and executing policies for the Labour Party in the city, particularly after Smith was elected Chairman of the City Party, which, he recalled, took place in 1953.[40] The City Party had previously not been seen as particularly important in municipal affairs, as Jack Johnston was to recall:

…The city party representing… the four constituencies used to plough on its own track and the group used to go in its own track, and often the group used to take decisions that the city party was not very keen about; but we had managed… to get the City Labour Party to control the group or to try and control the group…[41]

Influence over the City Party was important not least because its executive committee controlled the municipal panel, the approved list of

Labour candidates for council from which individual ward parties would make their selections. Smith and his allies in the City Party sought to rejuvenate the local Labour group as a preliminary to regaining power, but the process of doing so was as likely to lose as to win him friends: 'I... was almost hated because I knocked people from… getting on to the panel, the Collins and people like that couldn't get on the panel in my time. I was looking for people who showed … ability'.[42]

The ill-feeling seems to have reached a climax with the resignation of Councillor Mary Shaw from the City Party executive committee in March 1956, telling Eagles that 'I no longer find myself willing to serve under the Chairmanship of Coun. Smith. I view with distaste many of his actions and do not feel that I can give of my best to help my party under his Chairmanship'.[43] She had earlier written to Smith:

.. I can no longer continue to serve under… a man for whom I have such a feeling of disgust and loathing… from the first year I have watched you hound, witch hunt and get rid of decent people who helped to make my party great… I should, I suppose, feeling as I do that you are destroying my party, stay and fight you but I am so filled with disgust and disappointment that I can find no enthusiasm to be ever in your company.[44]…

Under threat of deselection, Shaw was induced to apologise for her accusations.[45]

Not all took rejection well. Some complained to Transport House; Byker councillor Wesley Oliver had supported Russell for Group leader after Edward Short's resignation.[46] On being informed of his removal from the panel, he immediately resigned from the Labour Party and went on to stand against it as an independent in Byker in May 1954.[47] Issues of undemocratic practices were also raised. In 1954 Frank Verbeek, a long-standing Labour activist, threatened to resign from the party claiming that Jack Johnston, the former ILP member expelled with Smith in 1945 for Trotskyist subversion and now vice-chairman of the City LP, had miscounted a vote on a resolution and repeatedly refused a recount, and had allowed an ineligible delegate to cast a vote.[48]

Smith's attempts to create a cadre of energetic and forward thinking councillors and candidates saw a number of his former left-wing comrades join the council. Jack Johnston, was elected as a Labour councillor at a by-election in December 1954, Ken Sketheway (another ILP'er expelled in 1945), was returned at the May 1957 municipal elections. Another keen supporter was the AEU convenor at Vickers, Roy Hadwin, elected in May 1954.[49] They formed the core of what has been described as Smith's Praetorian Guard.[50] More influential perhaps was Ted Fletcher, a former fighter with the ILP contingent in the Spanish Civil War. He joined the city council in 1952 and served until 1964, when he was elected MP for Darlington.

This was almost certainly not a consciously entrist tactic. Of the 'Praetorian Guard' only Sketheway remained an avowed Trotskyist.[51] Smith abandoned Trotskyism in the late 1940s; Johnston never joined the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) after his expulsion from the ILP; Hadwin was never in the RCP. Nor did they work together as a clique. Johnston recalled that

> …we did not work… consciously as a group; it was not necessary. If an issue came up and it was my branch meeting I would see a resolution got through to the City Labour Party and… I could be sure of somebody seconding, not necessarily Dan or somebody like that [but] some other people were sympathetic…[52]

Smith's support came from more than just a coterie of 1940s comrades. Other councillors and party members became trusted associates, including Nobby Bell, John Huddart, Ann Wynne-Jones, Peggy Murray and Doris Starkey, 'a very good politically conscious group of people, many of whom had a good sound traditional socialist approach'.[53] Other important figures on the City Party executive included Rowland Scott-Batey from the Newcastle North Constituency Labour Party (CLP), who chaired the City Party before Smith and afterwards; Gladys Robson, 'a veteran of the women's suffrage movement and pre-war trade union activism' and Peggy Murray, 'an old thirties left-winger'.[54]

As propaganda activity, the City Party continued to hold Sunday evening soap box meetings in the Bigg Market. It relaunched the May Day celebrations as a large march and rally, and published its own newspaper, the Northern Star, between 1951 and 1954. Described by John Charlton as a 'Bevanite monthly newspaper', it 'featured discussion round nationalisation, NATO, Test Ban Treaties and German re-armament'.[55]

Policies for the election manifesto required the endorsement of the City Party, and following acceptance, would be discussed at branch meetings at which delegates to the City Party reported back to ward parties and other institutions. Falling attendances at branch meetings didn't worry Smith: 'Even though attendances were dropping, an important group of citizens knew what you were aiming to achieve'. Smith claimed that wards were encouraged to make policy suggestions: 'such ideas were always welcomed and if they had merit, were adopted'.[56] The City Party executive created policy working groups on 'every activity in the political spectrum' including issues such as German re-armament. Draft policies were widely circulated. Recipients included staff at King's College and local further education institutions, 'much to the annoyance of many other Labour Party members'.[57] The working groups addressed numerous issues which were to become council policy after Labour secured control in 1958; for example, in 1956 Jessie Scott-Batey and Gladys Robson visited Coventry to examine its comprehensive schools with a view to reforming education in Newcastle.[58]

The City Party published a manifesto concentrating entirely on housing in advance of the critical 1955 municipal elections, where Labour needed to win just one council seat to gain control. *Peril in a City!* subtitled *The Appalling Story of Newcastle's Housing Tragedy – and Labour's Solution* was a sixteen-page brochure describing the problems of housing and land shortages in Newcastle and pledging the construction of high-rise flats and the building of a new satellite town. Copious tables and statistics accompanied the programme. It was, perhaps too detailed, the message being diluted rather than enhanced; Labour failed to win the seat it needed.[59]

Relations between the City Party and the Labour group on the council remained strained, as the group, according to Smith,

…still saw itself as a law unto itself and above the decisions of the City Party whose interference it resented. I saw this attitude …as being undemocratic and believed that the role of the Council Group was to direct the professional council officers towards implementing seriously considered party policies. In this was I could see a live democracy at work…[60]

These strained relations echoed the conflicts in the national Labour Party between National Conference and the NEC on the one hand, and the Parliamentary Labour Party on the other, over who should ultimately determine policy.[61]

At national level, a report by the Labour Party's Sub Committee on Party Organisation, chaired by Harold Wilson, expressed itself extremely disturbed at the state of city parties, seen as undermining constituency organisation. Its preference for parliamentary over municipal success may not have seemed particularly relevant in Newcastle, where in 1955 the city council had been finely poised between Labour and the Progressive Party whereas two or possibly three of the four parliamentary seats could be considered safe for Labour.[62] The report was acclaimed by Labour leaders but remained, according to Ben Pimlott, 'a monument to what should have happened, rather than what did'.[63]

In June 1954 the City Party, after considering a motion to recommend withdrawal of the whip, censured the recently-elected Labour Group leader, Cllr Frank Russell, and his predecessor, Alderman Clydesdale 'for speaking against and failing to vote for, the policy of the group in the City Council'.[64] Russell and Clydesdale had failed to support Labour policy on demands for an inquiry into the Longbenton housing estate described above, and despite the controversy following the council meeting on 5 May, Frank Russell was elected leader later that month and Dan Smith replaced as deputy leader by Benny Russell. Ward organisation in the city was weak. A 1954 report found that while

…all wards and sections are functioning… ward meetings are still poorly attended, and consist in the main of women members, who seem to prefer a cup of tea and a chat with each other, and consequently emphasis is on the social side. This has the unfortunate result of keeping the men away…[66]

Was this the 'dilapidated, almost atavistic character' which 'permeated branch life on the 1950s left' a party whose organisation 'erred towards the improvised and decrepit' as identified by Lawrence Black in 2000?[67] Individual membership of the City LP was rising in the early 1950s, from 2,614 in 1951 to 3,592 in 1954, not inconsistent with national trends which saw Labour Party individual membership peak in 1952.[68]

In Smith's own ward, Walker, membership fell from 200 in 1952 to 128 in 1953, although this can partly be accounted for problems with recruiting collectors for membership dues; and perhaps also by the safety of the seat: Smith was returned unopposed in 1953.[69] Understandably, attention was focussed on wards perceived as marginal, such as Walkergate, Kenton, Elswick, Westgate and St Nicholas.[70]

Bevanite but anti-Bevan?

For much of the 1950s Dan Smith and the City Labour Party appeared to follow a left wing policy which could broadly be described as Bevanite. MPs and other invited speakers were largely from the left of the Labour Party: in 1952-53 these included Tom Driberg, Ellis Smith, Ian Mikardo, Michael Foot, Fred Mulley, Dick Crossman, Barbara Castle, Fenner Brockway, Pat Barclay as well as the Guyanese leader Cheddi Jagan and the South African trades unionist Solly Sache.[71]

Consistent with Radhika Desai's view that 'the Bevanite lack of concrete proposals for domestic reform was matched by its emphasis on questions of foreign policy', the Newcastle party campaigned actively on overseas and defence issues – protesting against a visit by the Japanese Crown Prince Akihito to Newcastle in 1953, and against German rearmament, including passing a resolution critical of Clement Attlee's 1954 party political broadcast on the issue.[72] On the rearmament issue, the party was

not above resorting to apocalyptic scaremongering on its leaflets: 'Twelve divisions will soon become sixty or more… Atomic artillery will become part of their equipment… The SS men will drop the pretence of being democratic once they are armed… German rearmament is the road to World War III' and concluding with a chilling 'They are out for revenge'.[73] In 1953 the City Party protested at the sending of troops to British Guiana, although, under pressure from the Labour Party to deny a shared platform to Cheddi Jagan of the (Guyanese) People's Progressive Party, it withdrew its joint sponsorship of a public meeting which was subsequently run by the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism alone (in practice, leading to Smith wearing one organisational hat rather than two).[74] In 1955 Smith addressed the Labour Party Conference in Margate in support of a resolution urging the abolition of national service.[75]

There was no evidence of any formal Bevanite organisation in Newcastle – if any were needed. Such left-wing organisation as took place in the Newcastle Labour Party occurred later, with the Victory for Socialism campaign. A VFS group was formed in June 1958, its convenor Ken Sketheway. Sketheway was also associated with a further body formed in 1959, the Tyneside Left Club, 'a club on Tyneside where people of the left could meet and discuss the problems of the Socialist movement'.[76] This formed around a nucleus of non-CP shop stewards from Vickers and Parsons, as well as Labour Party Young Socialists, and according to John Charlton 'provided a new forum for committed Marxists who did not have to defend Washington or Moscow and were strongly interested in the idea of workers' control'. It lasted for around two years.

A revisionist programme?

The policies adopted by Labour in Newcastle during the fifties were increasingly influenced by Smith and consideration of what lay behind his thinking is important. Following the war he moved away from conventional Marxist ideology, and towards in increasing awareness of the potentialities of science and new technologies, and by the mid-1950s to

have views on national prosperity not dissimilar to those that were to be advocated by Anthony Crosland.

In interviews conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Smith refers on several occasions to the influence that James Burnham and his work *The Managerial Revolution* had on his thinking. Burnham's argument was that while capitalist society was moribund, there was no inevitability that it would be replaced by socialism, but rather by a '*managerial society*, the type of society now in the process of replacing capitalist society on a world scale' in which power would rest increasingly with a technocratic managerial elite.[77]

Similarly, Anthony Crosland produced brilliant syntheses of what became known as 'revisionist' ideology. In *The Future of Socialism*, Crosland urged abandoning 'old dreams…dead or realised', and returning to the 'basic aspirations, the underlying moral values' of socialism. These he saw as rooted in a striving towards equality, to be brought about by improvements in educational opportunities, enhanced welfare provisions and redistributive taxation.[78]

However, for a man who had abandoned the dogmatic Marxist formulations of Trotskyism, the intellectual challenges posed by the likes of Burnham and Crosland must have been stimulating to Smith.[79] One can only surmise exactly which parts of the revisionist programme might have appealed to Smith. That it represented a rising intellectual tide and was imbued with a sense of modernity would have enthused him: his impatience with the timid and rearward-looking nature of the Newcastle Labour Group might indicate that, just as in 1940, he had embraced revolutionary socialism as a panacea. He was a reader of the revisionist house journal *Socialist Commentary*.[80] The technocratic impulses of the journal were also increasingly compatible with Smith's own views. That Crosland's programme assumed continued economic growth ad *infinitum* would fit comfortably with Smith's belief that 'there is no problem of creating wealth'.

Perhaps most importantly, major aspects of the revisionist programme were not reliant upon central government. In the postwar period,

educational provision, from infant schooling to further and higher education, became an increasingly important duty of local government. The same applied to social welfare and housing policies, and, if councils were so minded, to arts and culture. These – together with concern for the environment, and city centre redevelopment predicated on new ideas about urban renewal, offered ample opportunities for change at local and regional levels and as such would have appealed to Smith and many of his Newcastle colleagues. They provided the basis for the municipal revolution that Newcastle Labour sought to bring about during its control of the city council from 1958 to 1967.

1 Labour controlled the council 1945-49, 1958-67, 1973-2004, and 2011 to the present.

2 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1267 File 2. 'The Progressive Party', undated document (almost certainly from 1950s). *The Times*, 26 October 1927 p. 9; John Gyford, Steve Leach & Chris Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government* (London: Unwin Hyman,1989), p. 11.

3 *The Times*, 26 October 1927 p. 9. In Newcastle Labour representation rose from 9 councillors in 1915 to 17 in 1921: Nigel Todd, 'Ambition and Harsh Reality. Local Politics… Local Politicians' in Anna Flowers & Vanessa Histon (eds) *Water under the Bridges: Newcastle's Twentieth Century* (Newcastle: Tyne Bridge, 1999) p. 96.

4 Gyford, Leach & Game (1989), p. 12; John Gyford, *Local Politics in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 100-102; *The Times*, 26 October 1927 p. 9.

5 Todd (1999), p. 96.

6 Gyford, Leach & Game (1989), p. 13.

7 *Evening Chronicle* (hereafter EC), 12 May 1949, 12 May 1950 p. 9. The South Shields Ratepayers captured the county borough from Labour in the 1945 municipal elections. Many ratepayers' associations from all parts of England and Wales applied for institutional membership of the London Municipal Society between 1921 and 1935, including the Durham Municipal and County Federation of Ratepayers Associations, but neither the Progressive Party nor the Economic Union are recorded as having done so. Ken Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party: The London Municipal Society and the Conservative intervention in local elections 1894-1963* (Leicester University Press, 1975), pp. 227-231, 'Appendix 2 Institutional membership. of the London Municipal Society'.

8 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1267 File 2. 'The Progressive Party'; However, in 1935 the regional *Sunday Sun* newspaper (29 September 1935, p. 15), reported excitedly on the creation in central Newcastle of 'a nerve centre and information bureau from which the activities of the party in every one of the 19 wards are being controlled' as part of their campaign to 'prevent the Socialists gaining municipal supremacy'.

9 *EC*, 11 May 1951.
10 *EC*, 11 May 1955 p. 21; 11 May 1956 p. 9.
11 *EC*, 24 October 1956 p. 5.
12 *The Journal & North Mail* (hereafter Journal), 2 June 1958 p. 7
13 *Journal*, 4 November 1958 p. 3.
14 *Journal*, 6 March 1959 p. 7.
15 Ibid
16 *Journal* 18 March 1959 p. 3.
17 *EC*, 27 February 1960 p. 9; 3 March 1960 p. 10.
18 Sir Cuthbert Headlam (1876-1964) was Conservative MP. for Barnard Castle (1924-1929, 1931-1935) and for Newcastle North (1940-1951). Stuart Ball (ed.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: The Headlam Diaries 1935-1951.* (Cambridge University Press 1999), pp. 15-18, 30-37 and subsequent pages. It might be more accurate to refer to the Newcastle North associations as the party there was as liable as the Trotskyists to splitting.
19 Ball (ed.) (1999), pp. 15-16, 184 and subsequently to 205. The by-election was contested only by the official and rebel Conservative candidates.
20 Headlam quote of August 1944 in Ball (ed.) (1999), p. 30. Temple was behind an attempt to deselect Headlam in 1949-50, and may have been involved in a similar attempt in 1945.
21 TDS (T Dan Smith) Archive, disk 9A. Northumbria University,
Chapman ran a prominent Newcastle furniture shop; Carrick was an accountant; Robert Parker one of the founders of the major Newcastle estate and property agency Storey Sons & Parker. William McKeag (d. 1972) was National Liberal MP. for Durham 1931-35 and went on to achieve ultimate office as chairman of Newcastle United FC. Aaron Charlton Curry (1887-1957) was National Liberal MP. for Bishop. Auckland 1931-35, first defeating and then losing to Hugh Dalton. On McKeag, see Todd, '(1999) p. 98.
22 Amber: Transcript of interview with TDS by Steve Trafford, Amber Films, Tape 1 Side 2 pp. 2-3., 1987, Held by Amber Films, Newcastle
23 *The Times*, 25 May 1943 p. 2; 26 May 1943 p. 2; 21 July 1943 p. 2; 26 July 1943 p. 2.
24 *Newcastle-upon-Tyne Inquiry* (1944 Cmd 6522); Craig Armstrong, *Tyneside in the Second World War* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2007), pp. 68-73. This was not the only time that Embleton's misuse of public resources in wartime came to public attention.
25 *Proceedings of Newcastle Council* (hereafter *Proceedings*) 18 June 1952 (pp. 154-161); 28 July 1952 (pp. 258-280); 17 December 1952 (pp. 651-688) ; 7 January 1953 (pp. 723-747); 4 March 1953 (pp. 896-933) ; 6 January 1954 (pp. 698-709); 3 February 1954 (pp. 780-784); 16 June 1954 (pp. 74-78); 1 September 1954 (pp. 252-264; 274-285)
26 For example, Cllr Arthur Grey complaining of the lack of action, *Proceedings*, 7 January 1953 p. 742, p. 747; 4 March 1953 p. 927.
27 T Dan Smith, *An Autobiography* (Newcastle: Oriel Books, 1970) p. 34.
28 Todd (1999), p. 99. Alderman Clydesdale was the 'grand old man' of the local Labour

Group. Blind from the age of eight, he had participated in the National League of the Blind marches of 1920 (which had pioneered the use of long distance marches as a political tactic in Britain) and 1936, although he had opposed the latter march and indeed as the League's regional organiser had covertly supplied information on the organisation of the march to the Ministry of Health. He was elected to Newcastle council in 1922, becoming an alderman in 1943. He died in 1962. Matthias Reiss, 'Forgotten Pioneers of the National Protest March: The National League of the Blind's Marches to London, 1920 & 1936', *Labour History Review* 70 (2) (2005) pp. 133-165; *Proceedings* 1962-63, p. 485, 17 October 1962.

29 Amber, TDS unpublished autobiography (hereafter Amber TDS), p. 51This second autobiography is unedited and unpublished, but it has been digitised and summarised by volunteers on the Amber Films archive at https://www.amber-online.com/collections/t-dan-smith/t-dan-smith-autobiography/ [last accessed 1 June 2022]

30 Smith (1970), p. 34.

31 Smith is described as deputy leader in EC, 6 May 1954 p. 18. Following the municipal elections that year he was replaced as deputy by Benny Russell (*Journal*, 24 May 1954).

32 EC, 13 May 1952 p. 8 records Clydesdale as group leader; on Russell's appointment, Journal, 25 May 1954.

33 TWAM MD.NC/133/9 Libraries Committee minutes 1949-1952.

34 TWAM MD.NC/98./30 Health Committee minutes 1952-53, meeting of 28 May 1952.

35 TWAM MD.NC/98./30 Health Committee minutes 1952-53, meeting of Joint Committee as to Slum Clearance, 28 March 1953.

36 TWAM MD.NC/98./31 Health Committee minutes 1953-54, meeting of 8 June 1953.

37 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1268. Edward Joseph Eagles had been LP. organiser in Workington since 1948. He was appointed secretary of the Newcastle City LP. as of 1 January 1951.

38 Smith (1970), p. 33.

39 As above, p. 35.

40 As above, p. 36; he states that he served for three years. Whether his period as chairman actually did last from 1953 to 1956 is uncertain as Smith's published and unpublished recollections tend not to be fully accurate on dates. For example, on p. 33 of *An Autobiography*, Smith claims that his election to the council in 1950 coincided with Labour's loss of control; that in fact took place in 1949. Similarly, in his recollections he refers often to becoming Labour group leader in 1960, rather than the correct date of 1959; and occasionally of resigning the group (and council) leadership in 1964 rather than the correct date of 1965. He is described as chairman of Newcastle [City] Labour Party in the EC, 11 May 1954 p. 3 and *Journal*, 25 May 1954.

41 Amber Transcript of interview with Jack Johnston, 1987 (hereafter Amber, JJ transcript).

42 TDS Archive disk 28B.

43 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 File 14.

44 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 file 14, Mary Shaw to TDS, 21 January 1956.

45 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 file 14. Smith did not take part in the official deliberations on this episode.

46 TDS Archive disk 8A.

47 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 A L Williams, Labour Party National Agent to Joe Eagles 30 October 1953. Williams wrote of two complaints about municipal panel nominations and stating that 'we saw no reason to interfere' but advising against ballot votes on candidates. TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 Wesley Oliver to Joe Eagles 16 October 1953. (EC, 13 May 1954 p. 17). Four years later, his previous opponent Tom Hurst himself stood as an independent and Oliver was standing as a 'Liberal-Progressive' (*EC*, 22 April 1958, p. 10).

48 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1266 F A Verbeek to R Scott Batey (Chairman, Newcastle North CLP) 16 November 1954: 'Although I still am (or better 'because I am') a socialist in heart and soul, I cannot belong to a Party which is corrupt'. Verbeek evidently withdrew his resignation as he is recorded as Newcastle North CLP. Secretary throughout the mid and later 1950s.

49 *Proceedings*, 1954-55 List of the Council, 1961-62 List of the Council.

50 Interview with Sir Jeremy (now Lord) Beecham, 3 January 2008.

51 Sketheway, who stayed in the RCP. after Smith's expulsion, was to remain true to his beliefs and was a member of the 'Militant' group late in life.

52 Amber, JJ transcript.

53 TDS Archive tapes 9B, 16B.

54 John Charlton, *Don't You Hear the H-Bomb's Thunder? Youth & Politics on Tyneside in the Late 'Fifties and Early 'Sixties* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2010) p. 41.

55 As above, p. 42.

56 Amber TDS, p. 54.

57 TDS Archive disk 28B. King's College was the part of the federal University of Durham located in Newcastle upon Tyne. It was to become the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1963.

58 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1263 Newcastle City LP. 1956 Report; Acc 608 Box 1269 file 12 W L Chinn, Director of Education, Coventry City Council, to Joe Eagles 3 July 1956.

59 Newcastle upon Tyne City Labour Party, *Peril in a City* (1955).

60 Amber TDS unpublished autobiography p. 59.

61 Stephen Haseler, *The Gaitskellites. Revisionism in the British Labour Party 1951-64* (1969; 2nd edition London 2005) pp. 149-154.

62 Labour had high hopes of capturing Newcastle City Council at the May 1955 poll, by which time the Labour Party had one councillor more than the Progressives, and needed just one more seat to dominate the impending aldermanic elections (the election of senior members of the Council) and gain control. However, they lost two seats and power remained with the Progressives. EC, 11 May 1955 p. 21, 13 May 1955 p. 8.

63 'Interim Report of the Sub Committee on Party Organisation', Labour Party, *Report of*

the 54th Annual Conference, 1955, pp. 80-81. The report famously described the party as being 'at the penny-farthing stage in a jet-propelled era';Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London 1993) pp. 193-196. Pimlott was himself briefly a candidate on Newcastle's Municipal Panel in the 1950s. It is not known whether or not the constitution of the Newcastle City Labour Party was revised. The City Party itself was wound up in 1975: TWAM Acc 608, Letter, Doris Starkey to members, Executive Committee 12 December 1975 re meeting to be held on 18 December 1975, 'The only item of business is the winding up of the City Party'.

64 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 file 17, letter dated 4 June 1954 to Alderman Clydesdale. The carbon is unsigned but almost certainly was from Joe Eagles, City Party Secretary.

65 *Proceedings*, 5 May 1954, pp. 1101-1116; *Journal*, 25 May 1954. Ken Sketheway, as Secretary of Newcastle East CLP, also wrote to Eagles to convey a resolution condemning the group decision to appoint Russell before disciplinary proceedings had finished and expressing no confidence in him as Group Leader (TWAM Acc 608 Box 1269 File 17, Sketheway to Eagles 2 June 1954). Newcastle Council in the 1950s boasted four councillors surnamed Russell but only one Smith. Benny and Harry Russell were brothers; Harry was married to Theresa Science Russell; Frank Russell was unrelated to the other three.

66 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1268 File 5, Newcastle CLP Report for Half Year Ending 31 June 1954.

67 Lawrence Black, "Still at the Penny-Farthing Stage in a Jet-Propelled Era': Branch Life in 1950s Socialism', *Labour History Review* vol 65 no 2 (2000) pp. 202-203.

68 Kevin Jefferys, *Politics and the People. A History of British Democracy since 1918* (London: Atlantic, 2007), p. 135; Black (2000), p. 202.

69 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1268 File 5 Newcastle East Divisional LP Organisers Report 1953.

70 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1268 file 5: Report on Organisation (n.d. but mid 1950s) (The report was signed by Bob Brown, Ted Fletcher, Bill Lewcock and Dan Smith); Minutes of Organisation Committee 29 December 1953.

71 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1263 Newcastle City LP, 1953 Report.

72 Radhika Desai, *Intellectuals and Socialism. 'Social Democrats' and the Labour Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994) p. 101; TWAM Acc 608 Box 1266 file 2 Joe Eagles to Labour Party, 11 June 1954.

73 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1256.

74 TWAM Acc 608 Box 1266 File 2 Fenner Brockway MP, to Joe Eagles, 6 November 1953; Tribune 13 November 1953 p. 1.

75 Labour Party, *Report of the 54th Annual Conference, Winter Gardens Margate October 10th-October 14th 1955*.

76 *Tribune* 13 June 1958, 27 November 1959.

77 James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) pp. 46-47, 54-55, 73-142.

78 Anthony Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006) pp. 24, 72-

73; Jeremy Nuttall, ''Psychological Socialist'; 'Militant Moderate': Evan Durbin and the Politics of Synthesis', *Labour History Review* vol 68 no 2 (2003), pp. 235-252.

79 I have so far come across no references to *The Future of Socialism* in Smith's archive papers, published writing or recorded interviews. Nevertheless it is inconceivable that he would not have been at least acquainted with the substance of Crosland's arguments.

80 Personal papers of T Dan Smith in the author's possession include a number of copies of *Socialist Commentary*.

"I've had a life fighting to improve the conditions of working people."

Phyllis Short

I have lived in a time of heroes and heroines
Of great objectors to subjection and persecution
David Marshall – I have lived in a time of heroes [1]

Phyllis Short in 1979. By Peter Brabban

David Marshall's evocative poem looks back to his youth - a time when he was actively engaged in one of the numerous terrible events of the 'Turbulent Times' that followed the 1914-18 Great War. David had fought in Spain as part of the newly formed International Brigade. He

was not, however, remembering his comrades who had fallen at Boadilla or who had served in the XV International Brigade, He makes it clear that his heroes and Heroines are the 'great objectors to *subjection and persecution'*. I think it is almost certain that one such heroine he had in mind would have been Phyllis Short. David knew Phyllis well, he was close to her daughter Doris. Phyllis, with her husband, George regularly attended International Brigade reunions, held in London on David's sailing barge; 'The Jock' in the 1970s and 1980s.

Phyllis Waugh was born into a mining family in 1903. The Waugh's lived in Chopwell, nestled deep within the North East's concentration of mining and heavy industry. Chopwell was one of a number of pockets of vibrant Communism which became known as 'Little Moscows': the village had a Communist Club as well as Henry Bolton's Socialist Sunday School.

Phyllis was barely sixteen when she married the twenty year old George. They complimented each other perfectly for the next sixty years. George (and his close friend Wilf Jobling) were also born and raised in Chopwell. Doris, the Short's first child, was born a few months after the wedding, and William was born two years later. Alan Short, their grandson says that:

> *Billy Waugh, Phyllis' father, was not pleased about the pregnancy or the marriage, however, when George had an accident down the pit that crushed his hand, Billy took him up the valley to see the bone setter. At each pub they passed on their way to the bone setter, Billy bought his son-in-law a glass of rum so that by the time they reached the bone setter George could not feel a thing. The bones were set and in a few days, George was back at work.* [(2)]

The first few years of marriage were uneventful. Then in 1924 there was a local strike in the Chopwell and High Spen part of the Durham coalfield. Due to Lord Londonderry's intransigence the strike lasted for almost eighteen months. In a recording made in 1979 Phyllis describes

how women and children "liberated" coal from the pit spoil heap and took produce from farmers' fields. The hardship was unrelenting and long lasting; the men had just gone back to work when the General Strike of 1926 started.

On the first day, 1st May 1926, the son of the Chopwell vicar decided to answer the government call for volunteers. Unfortunately he chose to work down the local pit. Most pitmen and their families were Methodists. Indeed, the Durham and Northumberland Mineworkers Union was formed and initially led by Tommy Hepburn and later by Peter Lee, both leading Methodists. On the other hand the coal owners were largely Anglican. This meant that this young man wasn't hugely popular at the best of times.

> *When the news that the Vicar's son had blacklegged the Chopwell women decided that they would meet him when he came off shift. They surrounded him on the way home singing Methodist hymns. When they got into the churchyard, they completely enveloped him. As they passed a grave with a wreath they put it over his head and by the time he reached the vicarage gate he was clearly having a nervous breakdown. He never turned up for work at the pit after that* [(2)]

Alan tells me that when Phyllis related the story she made it quite clear that she was one of the women involved. During the General Strike the Government controlled the emergency distribution of food; Government shops were set up, with distribution arranged through a process of negotiation between Regional government officials and Regional Strike committees. Lorries making deliveries to the shops needed an official certificate from the Regional Strike committee. One day a lorry arrived in Chopwell without a certificate. The driver, unsure of his position, found the locals sympathetic to his dilemma; they eagerly helped him unload the food. However, once the lorry had been emptied, he found that his cargo

had not been taken to its official destination. Chopwell had no time for the government shop: a very effective boycott had forced its closure.

After 10 days the TUC called off the General strike. A strong sense of betrayal led many families towards the recently formed Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB): Phyllis and George among them. The miners stayed on strike for a further nine months, during which time the CPGB produced a hand printed paper called the Northern Star. The police wanted to shut it down, putting immense effort into tracking the printing press, but the CPGB members moved it from place to place, eventually hiding it in a half-built council house in Chopwell that Phyllis and George later moved into.

In the aftermath of the General Strike, despite the national agreement that there would be no victimisation, some 30,000 County Durham miners were sacked; including George Short. Hereafter the small mining village of Chopwell became notorious for its association with Communism; portraits of Marx and Lenin appeared on the miners' banner and streets were named after communists. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that Phyllis was part of the first women only delegation to the Soviet Union in 1927.

Two years later her husband, George, also travelled to the Soviet Union, where he entered the prestigious International Lenin School. On his return in 1931 George got a job in the Billingham Anhydrite Mine that became part of the ICI chemical plant which necessitated a move to Thornaby. He had lost his previous job when the police informed managers of his CPGB membership, just as Macdonald formed his National Government and imposed cuts, including a 10% cut to unemployment benefits. He was soon out of work again.

In a recording George tells us that he and Phyllis organised demonstrations in Stockton whilst Ellen Wilkinson organised demonstrations in Middlesbrough. Wilkinson would speak at their meetings whilst George would speak at hers. This stopped when Wilkinson lost her seat in the October election, but they continued to communicate right up until her death in 1947.

Phyllis and George worked tirelessly for the unemployed to prevent what they called 'Dole Death'; George was a member of the Stockton Trades Council and set up the Stockton branch of the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM), whilst his close friend Wilf Jobling was NUWM Secretary for the North East Coast.

> *The Communist Party alone were supporting and doing anything to help the unemployed, because you see, the TUC and the Labour Party had already deserted them. (3)*

George and Phyllis held 'surgeries' for the unemployed on Stockton's Market Cross. Meeting three times a week, with the largest gathering on Saturday evening; these events allowed men and women to seek advice on a whole range of matters.

> *Doris was my eldest daughter and her mother was a big influence on her. But sometimes I would talk to her and I would tell her about the sort of life that we had lived when we were younger, about the life that our parents and their parents had lived before them. Therefore Doris and I became very close because she sort of appreciated and understood this approach. So then I used to take her out with me and when I used to speak for the unemployed, when she was very little, she would come with me down to Stockton Cross and sit on there while I spoke for the unemployed. (3)*

Phyllis was head of the Women's section of the Teesside NUWM.

> *We used to have little social evenings, and things like that. If there was a meeting on the Cross we all went to Stockton Cross to the meeting, or we went to help the Middlesbrough meeting and we used to run jumble sales. …we'd join up to help anybody who was really hard up, you know, like having a baby and that. (3)*

George and Phyllis not only offered advice; they provided representation for those appealing Means Test rulings.

> *At the Labour exchange they were entitled to have a lawyer or a friend, well the unemployed couldn't have a lawyer so I went along and spoke on their behalf. I had to get myself well acquainted with all the regulations, what you could get and what you couldn't get. We put out in cypher style all that they were entitled to and weren't entitled to. It wasn't the ability to argue a good case, it was that if an injustice was done to an unemployed man, the whole town would know.* (3)

George says that he gained huge support for their campaign against the 10% cut, and that upwards of four thousand people would attend NUWM meetings. It is difficult to underestimate the value of this work. George and Phyllis not only appear to be the first to actively assist the unemployed but seem to be amongst the most effective. The local magistrates, keen to get the unemployed off the streets in order to minimise bad publicity, were unhappy about the large gatherings Phyllis and George organised. They were also in fear of the political nature of the meetings, banning the NUWM from the Market Cross and offering alternative venues well away from the centre of Stockton. George had a history of s successful appeals against the ban, his fine oratory and persuasive arguments routinely used to obtain a rapid reversal of the rulings. For me what makes this campaigning even more poignant is that Phyllis and George were directly affected by the Means Test:

> *I got a little job at the fever hospital in Stockton, not the electric polishers and that they have today, the old dummies pushing backwards and forwards, my wage was a pound a week, and they stopped nine shillings dole a week off his money, this was how the Means Test worked.* (3)

George and Phyllis also campaigned for 'The Children's Shilling'. In Stockton the Labour Exchange paid three shillings per child to the unemployed, whilst in Middlesbrough they paid out just two. Phyllis and George arranged demonstrations and marches, one of which ended at Middlesbrough Town Hall, where Phyllis led the delegation made up mostly of women who spoke to the Mayor and council officers tasked with implementing government policy. Needless to say, faced with this skillful campaigning the council relented and the campaign was a success; Middlesbrough increased the payment to three shillings per child.

My girl passed her 11 plus and I just went up to the school and said well she can't go because I haven't got the clothes for her to go in and I haven't got the money to buy clothes. The headmistress said well it is a pity as she is one of the best girls in the school, we'll have to do something about it. [3]

A further way Phyllis and George brought the plight of the unemployed to public notice was through the National Hunger Marches. They organised the Stockton Contingent for the 1932, 1934 and 1936 National Hunger Marches. The 250 strong Stockton band was one of eighteen that marched to London in 1932. Phyllis was a pioneer; despite suffering from Tuberculosis she took part in the 1932 march as part of the 25 strong women's group. This was the first Women's contingent, it set the pattern for future marches.

> *It was decided that the women wouldn't march with the men, so there wouldn't be this talk in the country, you know, that we were linking up with the men. So we took a different route, but we did do 250 miles. . . . We had neither warm clothes nor good shoes or anything like that, and the reason we went on the march was to fight for something better for our bairns.* [3]

The march carried a petition containing a million signatures demanding the abolition of the Means Test and the 1931 Anomalies Act, to be presented

to Parliament after a rally in Hyde Park. The marchers were greeted by a crowd of about 100,000 upon their arrival at Hyde Park on 27th October 1932. *The Daily Herald* reports that in response The Home Secretary, Lord Trenchard, mobilised a total of 70,000 police against the demonstration.

> *At Hyde Park in a scuffle a policeman's helmet was knocked off, batons were drawn, mounted police charged and many people were injured. Three times within a week hundreds of thousands of London workers massed on the streets in support of the Marchers and each time fierce clashes occurred with the police. There was a baton charge when marchers assembled in Trafalgar Square and a number of men tried to mount a red flag on the Cenotaph. A million-signature petition demanding the abolition of the means test never reached the House of Commons; it was confiscated by the police. The March frightened the Government and some small changes were made in the administration of the Means Test.* (4)

When mounted police were used to disperse the demonstration serious violence broke out.

> *It was at the meeting in Hyde Park that I was attacked by mounted police using long night sticks.* (3)

Whilst George and Phyllis were on the 1932 National Hunger March the Stockton Magistrates imposed a ban on his NUWM surgeries at the Market Cross. Only the NUWM and CPGB were banned and George could not be present at the Magistrates Court for an appeal. In his absence there was nobody to overturn the ban. On their return to Teesside Phyllis and George used peaceful direct action to protest against the decision; they said they would not allow the unemployed to be hidden away, they chose to demonstrate on the High Street.

On Saturday 8th April 1933, George was arrested for protesting against the Magistrates decision, speaking from the Market Cross and leading a parade up and down Stockton's High Street. Whilst George was being hauled away Phyllis attempted to intervene, hitting the arresting policeman. She too was arrested. George was charged with breaching the peace, Phyllis with a breach of the peace and assault.

> *Despite her size my grandmother was a formidable woman, whilst being roughly manhandled by a big policeman she bit him on the hand, she was charged with assaulting the policeman. Mind you, as George said, "she did get through to the bone."* (2)

At the Magistrates Court George refused to be bound over to keep the peace, (as this would have prevented him campaigning for the unemployed) and was sentenced to three months in Durham Prison, where he joined his close friend Wilf Jobling. When the five-foot-tall Phyllis; who was still showing the effects of Tuberculosis, was asked if she had assaulted the six-foot six-inch policeman standing next to her, her shrug reduced everyone in the magistrate's court to fits of laughter. Found guilty Phyllis reluctantly, for the sake of their two children, agreed to be bound over.

> *I was in prison when the first attempt by the Mosley fascists to organise their first meeting on Teesside happened, and that was in Stockton, they held a meeting on Stockton's Cross, and whilst it was a rowdy meeting, they carried it off.* (3)

On his release George and Phyllis planned and organised 'real resistance' to a planned British Union of Fascists (BUF) meeting. The BUF's North East Organiser, Michael Jordan, had planned to speak at the Market Cross on Sunday 10th September 1933. The Short's perfectly executed counter-demonstration was a significant setback for the BUF on Teesside; resulting in Jordan, who had been with Mosley in the New Party, submitting a

long and rather acrimonious resignation letter. He left the BUF taking a number of experienced activists with him. Hereafter The BUF relocated to Middlesbrough;

> *In Middlesbrough they learnt their lesson, they held no outdoor meeting, instead they held them in Middlesbrough Town Hall.* [3]

Phyllis and George's constant campaigning ensured that, despite relocating, the BUF never established a foothold. Communists continued to disrupt BUF meetings, which were held in Middlesbrough Town Hall. In February 1935 George and Phyllis called a meeting on Linthorpe Road, at what George Called 'Woolworth's corner', to plan a demonstration against Oswald Mosley himself, who was due to speak in Middlesbrough Town Hall.

> *Shortly after seven o'clock a large number of Communists, who came from Middlesbrough, South Bank, Stockton and other parts of the district, marched to the Town Hall, to the beating of drums, and flaunting banners, which read: Down with Fascism ," "Mosley's Pal. Hitler," Fascism an end of Free Speech," and "Fight Fascism--Protect the Workers' Organization." Hundreds of curious people followed the procession, and, at one time, the streets around the Town Hall were blocked. Loud cheers, cat-calls, jeers and the shouting of slogans created pandemonium. Mr Heald spoke to the leaders of the Communist demonstration, which held up for a time in front of the Municipal Buildings, and the procession promptly marched down Albert-road in orderly fashion, towards the old part of the town.* [5]

Despite the Police cordon Communists had managed to get into the meeting. When fighting broke out inside, Middlesbrough Town Hall was badly damaged. Phyllis was outside with George, where she and her fellow

members of the Women's section treated a number of comrades who were injured.

> *The women stood outside and when one comrade came out with his ear almost torn off she rushed into the hall waving her umbrella. She came out with just the shaft remaining after setting about the blackshirts.* [(2)]

The North East Daily Gazette failed to report on the violence, instead it gave Mosley's speech in full, a speech he was unable to deliver. The authorities were well aware of what had happened and councillors objected to rate payers footing the bill for the damage, together with the high cost of policing BUF meetings. Three weeks after the Mosley meeting local authorities voted to prevent the BUF from booking the Town Hall and also from hiring halls anywhere on Teesside. A report in *The North East Daily Gazette* highlights the consequences of this: on 12th October 1936, there were just *'thirteen BUF members' who 'had to take to their heels' because '3,000 Communists and their supporters'* turned up to prevent the BUF's National inspector speaking in North Ormesby.

The youth wing of the Communist Party, The Young Communist League (YCL) had on Teesside one of the largest branches in the country (after Cheetham Hill YCL), and one of the few with its own premises (this was in Middlesbrough). George and Phyllis would assist and give talks to the young people right up until the late 1960s. They were also regular speakers at the Labour League of Youth (LLY) meetings; another CPGB 'front organisation', these meetings were held in Hartlepool. In 1936 Teesside YCL members started the Teesside Unity Theatre, taking political sketches round working men's clubs in the area. In 1945 Joan Littlewood; *'The mother of modern Theatre'* took the Teesside Unity Theatre to Ormesby Hall and formed the Theatre Workshop. This toured the country, eventually relocating to Manchester, and later on to London where, in 1953, it set up at the Theatre Royal.

When Franco's coup against the Spanish government failed and the Spanish Civil War broke out, 35, 000 men and women volunteered to support the Spanish government, either in the International Brigades or the international medical services. George vetted and organised the volunteers from Teesside. David Goodman, a Middlesbrough Brigader, writes in his *From the Tees to the Ebro* that George Short recruited him, and later that Phyllis, George and Doris would attend reunions on David Marshall's boat in London. In a fragment of an interview held by Manchester's Labour History archive the role Phyllis and George played in the recruitment process is revealing:

> *I used to meet them and before they left the area, that night, they'd have a cup of tea and a bite at our house, and then I would say to them, you know, 'make up your mind. If you don't want to go – no hard feelings. You're going there; you may not come back.' We never had one withdraw. We lost the flower of the party. [George was quite upset at this point so I turned off the tape recorder]* [(6)]

The location of this important final meeting, their Thornaby home, is enlightening. The presence of Phyllis would ensure that volunteers would not feel the need to maintain a macho bravado, and indeed one or two mention that 'Tea with the Shorts' before departure reminded them of exactly what they were giving up. George organised twenty-one volunteers for the International Brigade, seven of whom did not return. Phyllis was also prominent in the Aid for Spain campaign on Teesside, raising funds and supplies for humanitarian aid, some of which was sent directly by ship from Tees dock to Spain. They also worked with Ruth Pennyman who had arranged for 37 Basque refugee children to be cared for at Hutton Hall, Guisborough. There is a suggestion that it was Phyllis herself who directly liaised with Ruth Pennyman, [(7)] as they were both on the Teesside Basque Children's Committee. Firmin Magdalena mentions George and Phyllis a few times in recordings recalling his time at Hutton Hall. [(8)]

Phyllis and George also campaigned against the wars in Abyssinia and Manchuria. In 1938, despite Trade Union leadership opposition, George successfully persuaded Middlesbrough dockers not to load the SS Haruna Maru with pig-iron bound for Japan. This was one of the first in a series of industrial actions in British ports taken to protest against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. [9]

During the Second World War George was a volunteer on a local anti-aircraft rocket battery. He also worked in the shipyard. When a strike was called because the licensing hours had been reduced shutting the pubs early, George persuaded the men to call off the strike arguing that, as with Spain, defeating Fascism was more important than closing time. Phyllis was also active during the war, she was nursing a newly born herself, but still found the time to help others.

> *The women fought very very hard for rationing because the people who had money were buying everything up, and us that had nothing . . . we got groups of women together then, to go to the food controllers and that about rationing and orange juice for the babies.* [3]

Phyllis also travelled the region to speak to groups about Birth Control, on one memorable occasion addressing a Catholic women's group:

> *they tried to shout me down, but they didn't.* [3]

She volunteered to work unpaid at the birth control clinics in Thornaby and Stockton, continuing this voluntary work right up until the early 1970s. Their second son, George, was born in October 1938, some 18 years after William.

> *The women at the family Planning Clinic used to tease her a bit by asking her if it was a planned child* [2]

George and Phyllis had been renting 25 Derby Terrace in Thornaby. They finally managed to get a mortgage in 1946 with the help of their lodger, Otto Estensen. Otto had a very special relationship with George and Phyllis. A member of the Communist Party since 1933, he had fought Fascism at home and abroad. Otto Estensen was one of the twenty-one Volunteers George had sent to Spain, where he had commanded the elite XV International Brigade Anti-tank battery. After Spain, as an International Brigader, Otto was blacklisted from serving in the British armed forces during the Second World War. Instead he served as a seaman, at times on the hazardous Artic Convoys. At the end of the war Otto returned to Teesside and married, finding work in his brother-in-law's firm of Sutherland and Riddle Solicitors, where he completed the documentation for George and Phyllis's mortgage. 25 Derby Terrace remained George and Phyllis' home until they moved to sheltered accommodation in the early 1970s.

George and Phyllis organised 'Ban the bomb' demonstrations immediately after the second world war, becoming founding members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) on its foundation in 1957. Ever the campaigner, in the 1960s George volunteered to be a 'lollypop man'. Finding that there was a variance in pay and conditions he travelled across Teesside to research the rates of pay and conditions in different districts, finding huge discrepancies. He and Phyllis then campaigned for uniformity across the whole of Teesside; at the highest rate, and once again were successful.

They were also both very active in the campaign for pensioners' rights, resurrecting their surgeries at the Market Cross. This time, however, they were not for the unemployed; they were to assist their fellow pensioners in dealing with benefit claims. The nationwide campaigning led to the graduated retirement benefit (GRB) in 1961 and then, in 1978, to the State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme (SERPS). They campaigned for and helped establish the Teesside Pensioners Association, which linked many local pensioners clubs together. Though an agreement with the local

Trades Unions and major employers, such as ICI, employees could donate a penny a week to the central organisation.

On one occasion the money was used to send 4,000 Teesside pensioners, by coach, to the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool to lobby for better pensions. Phyllis led the women's contingent. The funds helped them campaign for a free bus pass - their aim was that every pensioner, no matter what their income, could receive one. Sheffield had been the first to achieve this and Teesside became one of the next.

After a lifetime of campaigning Phyllis passed away in 1979, the year of the recording in which she said:

> *I am very proud that I did it. I'll say this, we have three children, and while they are not active, you know, not wanting to get to the top, be an MP and or anything like that. They are very close to us and they understand that the fight that we've made, and the little improvements that they're getting now are because of the stand that I made.* [(2)]

I am in communications with Stockton Borough Council regarding a plaque to be placed at 25 Derby Terrace where; the Short's former house still stands. [(10)] I feel that the work of Phyllis Short, and George, should be commemorated and celebrated, Phyllis was a pioneer in so many aspects, her ceaseless campaigns to improve the lives of others is an inspiration.

Notes

1 *The Tilting Planet* – David Marshall (London Voices 2005)
2 Alan Short interview 2020
3 Extracts from a 1979 recording provided by Rosie Serdiville.
4 *Hunger Marches and Hyde Park* - Bob Edwards, M.P (Hyde Park Pamphlet No.3 1983)
5 *North East Daily Gazette* 11th February 1935
6 CP IND Kett 5 4001 – Labour History Archive, Manchester
7 https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/research_guides/spain/
8 Magdalena family archives (Thanks go to Sharon Hardy)

[9] https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/stories-communist-party
[10] https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/the-power-couple-of-teesside-communism

Tyneside's Boy Orator: The Legend Examined

Brian Bennison

John McNair (1887–1968) was born in Lincolnshire and moved with his family to Tyneside at the age of three. He became a significant figure in the Independent Labour Party (ILP), acting as its General Secretary for sixteen years from 1939, a period during which the party led opposition to the second world war and went on to play prominent roles in campaigns such as those for a united Europe. Although a member for sixty years, his direct involvement with the ILP covered a brief period up to 1910, another of eleven months that straddled the June 1923 General Election, and from 1936 – the year he went to Barcelona to work with the Partido Obero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) and co-ordinate the ILP's efforts to assist the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War - until his death in 1968. The intervening years were spent in France. Little attention has been paid to McNair's life, although his time in Spain assures him of a footnote in almost every biographical work on George Orwell.[1] McNair himself completed an autobiography in around 1960, but it remains unpublished.[2]

What follows is a close look at McNair's life before he left for Paris in 1911. According to an article in the *Newcastle Journal* written at the time of his death, he had by then become 'affectionately known as the boy orator' and 'his vigorous campaigning was not liked by employers and he found it difficult to hold a job'.[3] It is these two enduring claims that are examined below.

The Debater

In October 1900 when McNair was about to leave school, his headmaster recommended him to the Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Co. and he was taken on as an office boy. As he adjusted to working life, he took classes in shorthand and typewriting, and progressed to junior typist and then fully-fledged correspondence clerk.

Amongst the friends McNair made in the years that followed was a group whose interests embraced current affairs, religion and literature. One of them, Joseph Jackson, a practising Roman Catholic and a staunch Tory who would eventually become a Labour councillor in Cornwall, approached McNair in 1906 with the idea of forming a debating society.[4] Together, McNair and Jackson founded the Tynemouth Amateur Debating Society, which later became the Percy Debating Society. A close debating pal of McNair's was Tom Manson, the son of a schoolmaster, who was to go on to hold the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University, and became a lifelong friend.[5] It was amongst such contemporaries that McNair developed his formal debating skills, in a society where speeches were carefully prepared but it was deemed essential that they appeared extemporary, and reading them was regarded as a serious weakness.

McNair's prowess as a debater was also honed at public events like those held under the auspices of the North Shields Literary Institute, reports of which were carried by local newspapers. In 1908, for example, McNair's 'very able speech' persuaded a large audience that socialism was a practical policy.[6] Similarly, his eloquence ensured that the question 'Is Modern Civilisation a Failure?' was answered in the negative by 'a large majority'.[7] In 1909 McNair was asked to assist with the setting up of a debating society in Blyth and successfully proposed the motion that 'The House of Lords should be abolished'.[8] There is no doubt that McNair was proving to be a very effective and convincing public speaker, but by now he was in his early twenties. In 1910 he decided that the debating society had become 'too sedate and elderly'.[9]

Engaging with Socialism

Even before he launched the debating society, McNair had started to take a keen interest in politics. In 1902 he renewed an old school friendship with Willie Kennedy and began dropping in to his home in Willington Quay. The head of the family, Tom, was a non-smoking teetotaller who appeared to McNair to spend all his money on books and music, and was 'widely known in the district as a great rationalist and one of the pioneer socialists'.[10] This did not endear Tom Kennedy to everyone and McNair was warned off him by religious friends, but he was a regular visitor to the Kennedy house between 1902 and 1906.

At that stage McNair regarded himself as 'a young liberal'.[11] He had many discussions with Tom Kennedy about socialism and borrowed Blatchford's *Merrie England* and *Britain for the British*, and also books by William Morris, Edward Bellamy and Henry George. Finally, Kennedy handed over works by Karl Marx and over fifty years later McNair recalled how

> during the whole vintage summer of 1906 I read "Das Capital" for the first time. I read it carefully but I was not convinced. Whilst I accepted Marx's analysis of the economics of capitalism, I could not accept his monolithic conception of the one-party state, nor his theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, nor indeed his whole basis of economic determinism. The jesuitical assumption of his followers that 'the end justified the means' I found repugnant.[12]

Tom Kennedy had been hoping to persuade McNair to join him in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) but was unsuccessful. The SDF was then looked upon rather simplistically as 'a narrow dogmatic sect' and a party of 'narrow outlook and political sterility', while McNair himself was 'groping' his way 'to a humane, libertarian, international type of Socialism'.[13] He was repelled by socialist speakers at open-air meetings, with their 'lack of constructive thinking and bitter attacks on the Liberal

party and existing institutions'.[14] He gave as an example Bill Gee of the SDF, once described as 'Socialist Propagandist No 1 of the British Isles', who always ended his peroration with 'we shall storm the last bastions of capitalism and plant on its highest citadel the blooded banner of the Socialist Republic'.[15] For McNair, this was 'good, ripe stuff' that failed to 'get one very far'.[16]

At the Wallsend Slipway McNair became friendly with George Handscombe, a foreman brass-finisher whom he may have met first in debating circles.[17] McNair and Handscombe took meals together, played chess and talked. Handscombe gently cajoled McNair out of the habit he had developed of stammering when in conversation, which he thought resulted from 'being shouted at and generally pushed about by his bosses'.[18] With Handscombe's encouragement McNair made long speeches to himself during walks home across fields and repeated phrases that caused him to stammer until they rolled off his tongue.

Handscombe was a member of the ILP and recruited McNair as a party member.[19] It is not difficult to imagine why McNair found the ILP a more attractive proposition than the SDF. The recent General Election had seen seven ILP-sponsored MPs returned and other party members standing as trade union sponsored candidates had also taken seats. The party would seem to be making headway along conventional democratic lines. One historian notes that 'the ILP in the North East was well suited to the task of leading the progressive reformist tradition away from the Liberal Party'.[20] From McNair's own account it looks as if he joined the ILP in late 1906 or early 1907.[21]

The Platform Speaker

McNair and Handscombe made contact with another ILP member, one-time preacher George Wilson of Tynemouth, who suggested that they 'got out the old orangebox'.[22] They secured the blessing of Matt Simm, the ILP's organiser in Newcastle, and on a Sunday in March 1907 the trio cycled to Blyth for an open-air meeting.[23] They were met by a few pitmen

sympathisers but the Market Place was deserted, except for children and dogs. Handscombe spoke for twenty minutes, exhorting the children to fetch their parents for an important meeting. Wilson then got up on a chair, enticed people forward and gathered a small crowd. McNair was then introduced as 'the boy orator'.[24] We can only speculate on why Wilson chose to describe McNair in the way he did. It was probably a spontaneous attempt to differentiate McNair from the usual speakers by drawing attention to the novelty of his relative youth. The label of 'boy orator' was being applied to others featuring in newspapers of the time and possibly Wilson, being aware of them, borrowed the phrase.[25]

McNair quickly went on to gain a reputation as an energetic platform speaker. On occasions he was addressing meetings two or three times a week and saw himself as 'a fully-fledged ILP propagandist'.[26] In October 1910, for instance, McNair addressed meetings in Gateshead, Blyth, Consett, Byker and Chopwell, and at Hexham made 'a splendid impression' with a large crowd 'pressing closer for handshakes'.[27]

The speaker McNair most admired was Victor Grayson.[28] He went to help his campaign during the first General Election of 1910 and was asked to support him at a big rally in a Huddersfield theatre. McNair remembered being introduced as 'the boy from the North' and told to speak until Grayson arrived.[29] McNair spoke for an hour and a quarter, others said a few words and the meeting closed. When he went backstage to collect his coat McNair saw Grayson 'slouching on a big chair almost completely drunk'.[30]

The Boy Orator?

When McNair was making his well-received platform speeches he was unquestionably an accomplished orator, but he was hardly a boy. When he spoke at the Huddersfield rally he was twenty-two and had been working for nearly a decade. There are no independent, contemporary references to McNair as 'the boy orator". The only sources are McNair himself in his anecdote about the Blyth meeting and another in his autobiography

recalling his surprise when visiting Tyneside in 1923 to find old comrades remembering him 'as the Boy Orator'.[31] Four other published pieces which acclaim him as 'the boy orator' are all reliant on McNair's own memories for details of his earliest involvement in politics.[32] When McNair retired and returned to Tyneside, interviews and summaries of his career, including his days as 'the boy orator', were used by the district's press to complement stories about such things as his university studies, the publication of his biography of James Maxton, and accidents that befell him. From 1955 McNair appears to have been in regular contact with local reporters, supplying them with information about both his current activities and his past. For example, the 'Around the Town' column in the *Shields Daily News* often included a paragraph or two about McNair, who the columnist called 'my good friend'.[33] The 'Boy Orator of Tyneside' sobriquet first surfaced in public in a paragraph about the author that appeared on the jacket of McNair's book on Maxton in 1955 and was repeated in a press story printed to coincide with publication.[34] When George Wilson had introduced him as 'the boy orator' at Blyth in 1907, McNair had thought it a 'ludicrous description', but he considered such a characterisation worth repeating half a century later.[35]

Relations with Employers.

McNair's working life on Tyneside is invariably written up in the context of a man constantly at odds with his employers and suffering badly as a result. Two seemingly authoritative sources, McNair's *Who's Who* entry, in which he himself will have had a hand, and his *Times* obituary state that 'he could not find continuous work employment', and that he was 'victimised on Tyneside for his political activities, and he went to France'.[36] These comments were probably the basis for the brief biographical notes on McNair subsequently published in the literature on Orwell's life, in which can be found assertions such as that he 'ran into trouble with employers because of his left-wing sympathies and in order to find work went to France'.[37]

From McNair's autobiography, it appears that it was certainly the case that whilst he was thriving on his participation in politics, he was less content within the sphere of work. He reckoned that if he had knuckled down or showed any ambition he would have been promoted, but his own account of his relations with his employer suggest they were less dramatic than those usually portrayed. McNair's recollection was of an employer who was at first not too bothered about his activism until it came closer to his place of work. It was when he became a founder member of the Newcastle branch of the National Union of Clerks, and then talked to his colleagues about signing up that the office manager in charge of clerical staff advised him to pay less attention to politics and more to his work. For a few months McNair was politically inactive, before he was asked by the ILP to address meetings on behalf of locked–out boilermakers. He was now more conspicuous; this was a clerk, one of a group of workers generally assumed to be subservient to their employers, using his lunch break to address hundreds of men at shipyard gates. His immediate boss called him in for an interview. McNair believed he had avoided a sacking and blacklisting because the firm was aware that public opinion on the dispute was strongly against the employers and they feared unwelcome publicity.

McNair concluded that his career was going nowhere and he should think more about his future. He read books on commercial training, speeded up his shorthand and typing, became more efficient at his job and received compliments about his work. But there remained nagging doubts about whether he could change his employer's underlying suspicions about him. McNair decided that a new job in a different part of the country was the answer and he responded successfully to an advert placed by Alfred Herbert Ltd of Coventry. The recruitment process was carried out by Herbert's representative in Newcastle, which begs the question as to how pronounced was McNair's reputation as a local activist and how far it travelled outside the ILP. To assist his bosses in Wallsend, he willingly worked a longer notice than was contractually required.[38] He was not 'dismissed', as has been stated elsewhere.[39]

By the end of December 1910 McNair was in Coventry carrying out routine clerical duties, but was soon asked to prepare material for the firm's catalogues. Given a more important role and a relatively free hand, he said it was the first time he had enjoyed working in an office. McNair's memoirs describe his many rambles and cycle rides in the Warwickshire countryside, but there is no mention of any political activity, perhaps because the ILP's presence in Coventry was relatively weak.[40] In the autumn of 1911 he was asked if he would go to assist the manager of the Paris office and he agreed. The move abroad was a voluntary act. McNair did not, as one Orwell biographer states, go to France 'having been blacklisted for his politics in England'.[41]

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the young McNair made a name for himself within the Labour Movement. For example, when he visited the General Secretary of the ILP in 1923, Fenner Brockway remembered him 'in the years before the Great War as an active socialist propagandist'.[42] But apart from the draft autobiography, there is a dearth of information on McNair's post-school, pre-France life. It is perhaps not surprising that a couple of unsubstantiated but romantic claims - that he was known as the 'boy orator' and that his prospects of finding and keeping a job caused him to leave the country – filled a vacuum, were repeated, and became the conventional wisdom. As to the 'boy orator' idea, the evidence available suggests that the description was not only inappropriate on the grounds of age but not generally attached to McNair during his lifetime. Nor is the notion of a perpetually volatile relationship with employers accurate. In the twenty-three years after leaving school McNair had only four employers and was never out of work.

Notes

1 The most comprehensive published account of McNair's life is A Potts, 'McNair, John Leaf (1887-1968). Independent Labour Party General Secretary' in K Gildart and D Howell (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol XV (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) pp. 169-177.

2 The typescript of McNair's autobiography is entitled *Life Abundant: The Autobiography of a Workman*. A photocopy of this typescript came to the author via the late Archie Potts, who had obtained it from Mrs Hilda Proctor of East Howdon, a niece of McNair's. A photocopy of some early chapters is deposited with the Local Studies section at Newcastle upon Tyne Central Library. In late 1958 McNair was said to be 'in the middle of writing his autobiography', in early 1960 it 'was recently finished' and 'will be published in the autumn', and in 1968, it was stated that before his death he had been intending to 'to rewrite parts of his autobiography' (*Shields Daily News*, 10 October 1958, p. 2; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 5 January 1960 p. 8; *Newcastle Journal*, 21 February 1968, p. 1).

3 *Newcastle Journal*, 21 February 1968, p. 1.

4 Joseph S Jackson (1878-1967) became a secondary school teacher.

5 Thomas Walter Manson (1893-1958), said to have been 'a great Christian scholar', was also Pro-vice-chancellor of the university and moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England in 1953. McNair visited Manson two weeks before the latter's death. (*The Times*, 2 May 1958, p. 13)

6 *Shields Daily News*, 18 February 1908, p. 4.

7 *Shields Daily News*, 7 December 1908, p. 4.

8 *Shields Daily News*, 10 December 1909 p. 3.

9 Autobiography p. 87.

10 McNair described Thomas Kennedy as 'manager of the big lead factory of Cooksons and in a fairly comfortable financial position'. Census returns gave his professions as 'foreman white lead works'and 'under-manager white and red leadworks' (Autobiography, p. 44; Census of England and Wales 1901 https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/7814/images/NBLRG13_4800_4801-426 p.3 [accessed 3 February 2022]; Census of England and Wales 1911 https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/2352/images/rg14 30768 0223 03 p.224 [accessed 3 February 2022])

11 Autobiography, p. 49.

12 Autobiography, p. 51.

13 D Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) pp. 5 & 389; Autobiography, p. 52.

14 Autobiography, p. 52.

15 K Morgan, Labour Legends and Russian Gold (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2006) p. 218; Autobiography, p. 52. William Gee (1869–1954) was known as the Socialist Dreadnought.

16 Autobiography, p. 52.

17 On at least one occasion McNair and Handscombe went head to head in a public debate, when McNair led for his own society and Handscombe for the Monkseaton Mutual Improvement Society (*Shields Daily News*, 7 December 1908, p.8).

18 Autobiography, p. 53.

19 George W Handscombe (c.1873-1937) of Whitley Bay, appeared on a list of ILP speakers in 1908, was lecturing Shildon ILP on Bolshevism in 1919, was chairman of Whitley Bay and Monkseaton Labour Party in 1923, and in the mid-1920s was President of the North Shields branch of the Amalgamated Managers and Foremen's Association. (ILP, *Annual Report of Seventeenth National Conference* (1908) p. 120 https://microform.digital/boa/documents/6235/annual-reports-of-the-ilp-1905-1909 [accessed 3 January 2022]); *Labour Leader*, 14 August 1919, p. 11; *Shields Daily News*, 20 August 1923 p. 3, and 17 July 1925 p. 3).

20 A W Purdue, 'The ILP in the North East of England' in D James, T Jowitt, K, Laybourn, *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Krumlin: Ryburn Academic, 1992) pp.17-42.

21 The entry for McNair in *Who Was Who, 1961-70* (London: A and C Black,1972) p.733, states that he joined the ILP in 1908, but he was certainly active in the party 'from the heady days of Curran's victory in Jarrow' in 1907 (Purdue [1992]). As explained on their website, for *Who's Who* each biographee provides the details for their own entry. Who Was Who is their historical archive going back to 1897, which includes the entries of over 94,000 people, now deceased, who were included in previous editions of *Who's Who* (https://www.ukwhoswho.com/ [accessed 14 January 2022]).

22 Autobiography, p. 57. George Ernest Wilson (c.1876-1929) of Tynemouth appeared on a list of ILP speakers in 1908. He was a shipbroker's clerk in 1901, but around 1910 became manager and secretary of the Shields Ice & Cold Storage Co. In 1916 he was initiated into the St Oswin's Lodge of freemasons in North Shields (Census 1901, 1911; ILP, *Annual Report of Seventeenth National Conference* (1908) p. 121 (https://microform.digital/boa/documents/6235/annual-reports-of-the-ilp-1905-1909 [accessed 3 February 2022]); *Shields Daily News*, 22 February 1918, p. 3; United Grand Lodge of England Membership Registers 1910-1921, Country W 2074 -2257 to Country X2258 -2380 p.157 (https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/60620/images/43971 [accessed 3 February 2020]).

23 Matthew Turnbull Simm (1869-1928) left the ILP over its opposition to the First World War. In 1918 he became MP for Wallsend, standing as the candidate of the patriotic National Democratic Party. He failed to hold the seat in 1922.

24 Autobiography, p. 59.

25 For example, the *Labour Leader's* 27 October 1905 edition (p. 3) carried reports on Harry Laidler 'the boy orator in America', who travelled 'through the country addressing socialist gatherings'. In 1906 there had been much newspaper coverage of the visit to Britain of American Presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan,

still referred to as the boy orator from Nebraska.

26 Autobiography, p. 63.

27 *Labour Leader*, 10 June 1910 p.12, 29 July 1910, p.12, 7 October 1910, p. 12, 14 October 1910, p. 6, 28 October 1910, p. 15, and 30 October 1910, p.12.

28 Grayson, born 1881, remains an intriguing figure in labour history, principally because of two events: his victory in the Colne Valley by-election of 1907 and his disappearance in 1920. He lost the Colne Valley seat in January 1910, and lost his deposit when he fought Kensington in December 1910. There followed periods of fatherhood and bereavement, flirtation with a new party, mental illness, near-bankruptcy, relocation to parts of Europe and the Antipodes, trench warfare in the first world war and involvement in an honours scandal, before his unexplained disappearance. (See D Clark, *Victor Grayson: The Man and the Mystery* [London: Quartet, 2016]).

29 Autobiography, p. 65. D Bateman, 'Introduction' in *J McNair. Spanish Diary* (Manchester: ILP Publications, c.1979) which is based upon McNair's unpublished autobiography, states that at the Huddersfield meeting McNair was billed as 'the boy-orator from the North'. This, presumably, is the source for an identical statement in C Hall, *In Spain with Orwell. George Orwell and the Indpendent Labour Party Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Perth: Tippermuir Books, 2013) p. 65.

30 Autobiography, p. 65.

31 Autobiography, p. 213.

32 Potts (2019); A Potts, 'John McNair: From Tyneside Boy Orator to a Life In Socialism.', *North East History*, Vol 49, 2018, pp.71-84; R Challinor 'John McNair: A Truly Human Tyneside Socialist', *North East Labour History Bulleti*n 25, 1991, pp.61-64; Bateman (c. 1979).

33 *Shields Daily News*, 10 October 1958, p. 2.

34 J McNair, *James Maxton: The Beloved Rebel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955); *Shields Daily News*, 29 April 1955, p. 7.

35 Autobiography, p. 59.

36 *Who Was Who, 1961-70*, p. 733; The Times, 21 February 1968, p. 12.

37 S Orwell and I Angus, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Vol 1: An Age Like This.1920-1940.* (London: Penguin Books, 1970) p.296.

38 McNair (c.1971) p.92.

39 Challinor (1991).

40 In 1910, there was only one ILP branch in Coventry compared with 25 in Birmingham (ILP, *Report of 18th Annual Conference* (1910) pp. 105-6 (https://microform.digital/boa/documents/6236/annual-reports-of-the-ilp-1910-1914 [accessed 3 February 2020]).

41 G Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Abacus, 2004) p. 203.

42 F Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliaments* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1942) p. 294. Archibald Fenner Brockway (1888-1988) joined the ILP in 1907 and became editor of the *Labour Leader* in

1912. He was an MP from 1929 to 1931 and again from 1950 to 1964, after which he accepted a peerage.

Uncovering Women's Industrial Past; the Newcastle on Tyne Branch of the National Federation of Women Workers, 1912-13

Cathy Hunt

This is an article that highlights the importance and the excitement of historical discovery. It focuses on the Newcastle upon Tyne branch of the all-female trade union, the National Federation of Women Workers (the Federation) between 1912 and 1913, using material that has only just come into the public domain. It is heartening and encouraging to learn that documents which enrich our understanding of the lives of ordinary men and women are still turning up. History is never 'done', and every new piece of material found adds depth, sometimes as confirmation of what we know, and other times altering the narrative.

In 2021 I gave a talk to the North East Labour History Society to mark the centenary of the death of the founder of the Federation, Mary Macarthur. When I was asked to follow up the talk with an article on the work of the Federation in the North East of England, I was very happy to do so. Working on it one afternoon earlier this year, my attention was grabbed by a tweet from the TUC Library announcing a brand-new acquisition to its Collections. The message was accompanied by two images which stopped me in my tracks. They were the opening pages of a hand-written minute book belonging to the pre-First World War Newcastle upon Tyne branch of the Federation, dated August 1912 to September 1913. I got in

touch with the TUC Library immediately and learned that the book had been found by a woman whilst clearing her mother's house after her death.[1]

My excitement knew few bounds. Such finds are the very stuff of the history of working people's lives and are priceless. I have been researching and writing about the Federation for over a decade. In 2014 Palgrave Macmillan published my history of the Federation, founded in 1906 by the charismatic Mary Macarthur (1880-1921).[2] The research for the book had been funded by the Nuffield Foundation, who provided me with the funds to work with national collections and to travel to local archives and local studies libraries.

Thanks in large part to the endeavours of Gertrude Tuckwell of the Women's Trade Union League (under whose guidance and protection the Federation operated), an extensive and valuable collection of annual reports, newspaper cuttings, pamphlets and notices relating to the Federation (and more broadly on women and work) is available for consultation at the TUC Library in London.[3] What was harder to find was detailed information about just how the union operated at the grassroots level. This I had tried to knit together, albeit with many frustrating gaps, by looking at newspapers and at the records of other organisations, such as local Trades Councils, which sometimes offered support to the Federation in its attempts to protect women industrial workers and improve their often appalling pay and conditions. For example, in 1908 the Federation's Julia Varley worked alongside the Darlington Trades Council resulting in 150 Federation membership forms being completed.[4] It is not clear whether a branch was ever firmly established there, although the records do note that by 1909 numbers had fallen away.[5] This was not uncommon, as we will see; even after the liveliest of disputes, without the most dedicated activists – not to mention those willing to brave the intimidation not uncommonly meted out afterwards by employers – and regular assistance from the union's HQ, branches could struggle to keep going.

Brief branch reports (a paragraph or less was usual) were submitted to and published by the Federation's newspaper, Woman Worker (1907-10

and then 1916-21) and others included within its Annual Reports. At the end of my book, I had included an appendix listing all the branches I had identified. My frustration at it's almost certain incompleteness is there for all to see in my note indicating that 'this is not a comprehensive list but is included here to encourage and facilitate further research' (my fervent hope). I recorded, where they emerged, the names of branch secretaries, treasurers and presidents, and of the industries in which women members in the different regions of Britain were employed. The book chapters also pay attention to the establishment of branches, the disputes that drew in members, the triumphs when disputes ended in improved conditions and the despair when at times organisation had little lasting success. There *is* detail, but it is not always enough to tell stories in their entirety. When piecing together – often very small – snippets of information from a myriad of sources, I was acutely aware of how much more there was out there, undiscovered and also of how difficult it can be to capture the grassroots history of a national union that existed over a hundred years ago.

And then, a decade after I started to write the book (and eight years after its publication) came this amazing discovery of the first extant branch minute book of the Federation I have ever seen. It is only a few pages long, from the inaugural meeting of the Newcastle upon Tyne branch on 14 August 1912, until the final recorded meeting, on 9 July 1913. If meetings did continue until – or beyond – September, there is no evidence of them in this booklet.

The National Federation of Women Workers

Before I turn to the Minute Book, a little more background on the Federation might be useful. In 1903 Macarthur became the secretary of the Women's Trade Union League (League), a London-based organisation, first established in 1874, set up to encourage women's trade unionism around the country. If there was no appropriate trade union for women to join, or if they were excluded from a male-only union, an alternative was to create new societies, which could affiliate to the League and benefit

from its support. Mary Macarthur became increasingly concerned about the chances of long-term survival for many of these financially fragile unions. In 1906, she persuaded the League to back her plan to create one national federated general union, to enable women from various trades to unite under one banner and to receive a range of benefits including strike pay. This union, the National Federation of Women Workers, focused on those who were effectively excluded from other unions, either because they were women or because their jobs did not fit into any one single category of work.

Mary Macarthur's vision for the Federation was that it should serve women who worked in some of the worst-paid jobs in Britain. From 1906, it began to establish branches across the country, representing women who worked in factories and workshops, making goods whose production relied on an army of mostly ill-paid women. These workers endured poor contracts, worked in inadequate working conditions and did an assortment of jobs that nobody paid much attention to, either because they were regarded as 'women's work' or because they were so hidden away that no one gave them a second thought. They made goods such as paper bags, cardboard boxes, metal chains and baby clothes. They sweated over the production of jam, sweets, biscuits and soda water. They cleaned, they washed, they served food. Their bravery at both joining a trade union and dealing with intimidation and victimisation from their employers, let alone demanding better pay and conditions cannot be overestimated.

Before the First World War, the Federation was effectively a union for those women considered by the more established labour movement to be too difficult to organise. Even within mixed-sex unions, there were men who assumed that attempting to recruit women was a waste of time and resources, unless women's presence in an industry was regarded as a threat to the men's position, in which case it was acknowledged that if the women couldn't be removed from the trade, they had better be organised. The low numbers of women members then 'proved' to these men that women were apathetic. Macarthur's vision was that once women

were recognised to be reliable trade unionists, there would be no need for single-sex organisation. Until then, however, the Federation was to serve as a training ground where women would gain confidence and experience as union members.

The work of the Federation was never uniform because local economies - and women's jobs with them - were varied. If its organisers failed to understand regional characteristics and customs, they were unlikely to achieve much success. The Federation worked with, for example, rope workers in Dorset, lace workers in Nottingham, school cleaners in London and chainmakers in the Black Country. The North East of England, with an economy dominated by the types of heavy industry which relied on male labour, saw many women workers in small factories, workshops, laundries and shops where it was too readily accepted by established trade unions that women were unorganisable. In 1911 the annual gathering of the Trades Union Congress was held in Newcastle. A meeting with an impressive platform of speakers, including Mary Macarthur, was held at the Bridge Assembly Rooms to persuade women workers to join the Federation. Some powerful arguments were put forward; the trade union movement, said one speaker, was 'opening the door to liberty and life and the working girls and women of this country were at liberty to pass through'.[6] Of course, how many working women were actually at this meeting is unknown and certainly the Federation made little organising headway in the city that year.[7] Trying to recruit women when they worked together in relatively small numbers was never easy. Organisers were so often up against employers who assumed that women workers would not challenge their paternalistic wisdom that included paying women far less than men (who were assumed to have dependents and were therefore in need of the so-called 'family wage').

The Minute Book, Newcastle upon Tyne

The inaugural meeting of the Newcastle branch of the Federation was held on August 14th 1912 and was attended by about 18 people. It was presided

over – and almost certainly arranged – by Mrs Florence Harrison Bell, who was a local and active member of both the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Women's Labour League (WLL). With its own small team of national organisers stretched and unable to respond to all calls for help, the Federation was always grateful for the strong support it received from the WLL. This organisation, working closely with the Labour Party, aimed, in Macarthur's words, 'to bring the mother spirit into politics'.[8] The first issue of its paper, *The League Leaflet*, urged readers to loyally support their trade unions without which 'a strong Labour Party is impossible'.[9] At the inaugural Federation meeting in Newcastle, Mrs Harrison Bell oversaw the election of the new branch officials, one of whom was the Secretary, Mrs Edith Howson. She reported that the branch began with a membership of about a dozen, plus some who had already joined via direct application to Federation Head Office (Mecklenburgh Square in London's Bloomsbury).

Setting up the branch was an impressive achievement. The Federation, with too few organisers of its own to give continued support to new branches, relied on elected officials to retain - and wherever possible to increase - membership. If these were themselves working women, so much the better, because their knowledge of industrial life was both immediate and current. If I have correctly identified these women from the 1911 Census, the Secretary, Mrs Edith Howson, worked at the Board of Trade's Labour Exchange, which would have meant that she had knowledge of women's pay and working conditions.[10] The Treasurer, Miss Cissie Page, who lived in Byker, was a 23-year-old machinist at Armstrong Whitworths. The eldest of nine children, all still living at home (their father, John was an electrician at Armstrong Whitworths), Cissie's younger sister Florence was also employed as an Armstrong's machinist. A Flo Page was later elected as part of the branch's Social or Dance Committee.[11]

It was decided to hold monthly meetings at the Northern ILP Club Rooms, 18 Clayton Street. This was a typical venue choice for a Federation branch. Picking a location that was central made it as easy as possible to get to the meetings. There was then the question of finding somewhere

'respectable' so that women's families would know that they were not going to meetings held within a pub (which was far less a problem for male trade union members).[12] Finally, there was the need for a meeting place that was removed from the vicinity of the workplace so that the women felt reassured that they could meet without employer surveillance. A charge was made for the room and with a note of despair that will be recognised by all those who book venues for local meetings, the Secretary, after just a few months, had to remind members to attend because the branch could ill afford to pay for a room that went unused.

The ILP Club in Newcastle (author's own image)

Once the branch was established, it seems that Mrs Harrison Bell did not attend again but she certainly did not forsake the cause. It appears from the Census that she was, by 1911, unwaged (before marriage, she had worked as an elementary school teacher). This meant that although she could not become a full Federation member, she was entitled to honorary membership, a status used often in branches.[13] It made sense to involve honorary members in local employment negotiations, thus protecting workers from direct confrontation and its consequences. Two months after its inauguration, the branch meeting was held in conjunction with a special organising event which concluded a campaign led by Harrison Bell and other members of the Newcastle WLL. According to the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 24 meetings had been held over a two- or three-week period, with new members reported to be joining daily.[14] According to the Federation's October branch meeting, 29 new members had joined. Federation campaigns usually included lunchtime open-air meetings as near to work premises as possible, evening indoor meetings, and often a social event to round things off and encourage membership among those who had stayed away from meetings. A late September factory gate meeting was held at the works of Jebb Bros, a paper stock and scrap metal merchants on Howard Street and was addressed by Mrs Harrison Bell, who referred to a 'flourishing' branch of the Federation in Newcastle.[15] Another was held at the gates of the Shell and Turning Shop of Armstrong Whitworth's Elswick Plant.[16] Here, Mrs Harrison Bell said that she had thought that the most important thing was to seek a reduction in women's hours of work (eight in the morning until a quarter to six at night) but now she realized that it was better pay that was needed above all else.

Such meetings were not without risk for anyone who stopped to listen, especially when they did so in relatively small numbers (there were around 50 at the Elswick meeting). Imagine, for example, the panic at a similar outdoor meeting in Coventry when the boss of the nearby factory strolled by, resulting in the women gathered to listen fleeing in fear.[17] A safer bet for the Newcastle campaign was probably the evening event held at the

ILP Club's Lecture Hall, where women could feel reasonably sure that no one from the firm could see what they were doing.[18]

The Agenda

One of the problems faced by organisers and officials was how to make meetings interesting enough to encourage retention. Mary Macarthur likened the Federation to a school at which women could gain confidence in procedures and deepen their understanding of the benefits of being in a union. This, however, took time and considerable effort on the part of the officials. For new members who were not at all familiar with formal meetings, merely turning up to the branch could be daunting. I am struck by Ellen Wilkinson's recollection of her first attendance at an ILP branch meeting. She was 16 and came away confused and alienated by all the acronyms and shorthand used by those present, 'feeling that if this were politics there seemed to be little room for me'.[19] (I vividly remember attending a constituency Labour Party meeting when I was young and accepting my nomination onto the GC as a member of the Women's Section. On the way home, I turned to my friend and asked, "What IS a GC?").

Whilst learning the ropes was important, it took time to do so and perhaps not every topic of discussion, however important, had an electrifying effect on inexperienced members. Considerable skill would be needed by the Secretary to enliven her readings of the Federation's National Council minute summaries. Similarly, the women of the WLL who came to talk about the advantages of organisation needed to be able to do so without lecturing and in a way that would keep the meeting's attention. Above all, topics discussed needed to be approached in a manner that would highlight their relevance to women workers. Issues for consideration included involving working women in the planning of new working-class housing in Newcastle and the inadequacies of the tram system to Scotswood (the location of Armstrong Whitworth, where hundreds of women were employed). By contrast, very little time was

given over to discussion of working conditions or specific grievances. Even when 'improvements' at Armstrong Whitworth's were announced by the Secretary, she nonetheless followed this up with a reminder to those who worked there to stick together and try to get new members so that further gains could be made.

One potentially dull-sounding topic that came up not just at branch meetings but during the autumn organising campaign, was the National Insurance (NI) Act of 1911, under which workers began to pay compulsory contributions from their wages for sickness benefit. The Act permitted trade unions to set up Approved Societies to administer NI in addition to their own benefits.[20] The fear within trade unions was that members would consider it too expensive to pay out both union and NI contributions and would therefore leave the union. The Federation, with its very low-paid women members, poured resources into a nationwide campaign to encourage women to join its own Approved Society. By urging membership of this, it felt it could at least keep the women close by where they could remind them of the benefits of full trade union membership. It was hard work. Whilst the Federation hoped that the campaign might strengthen failing branches and create new ones, the reality was that many women workers felt unable to pay two lots of contributions. As Mary Macarthur later concluded, the NI Act 'falls with a heavier incidence upon women's wages than upon men's' and administering it had brought some trade unions to 'breaking point' and diverted staff from their 'true aims'. The NI Act came into effect in July 1912, just weeks before the inaugural meeting of the Newcastle Federation branch. It is very likely that this was one of the hooks used by activists to get it up and running. There is a strong possibility that it was also one of the reasons for the branch's failure to thrive.

Attendance

There are no recorded disputes in the minute book. Whilst Mary Macarthur was often at pains to explain to members that being in a union was the

best way to avoid striking in the first place, there was little doubt that disputes were an excellent way of bringing new members and excitement – albeit by disruption and hardship – into branch life. Strikes and their aftermaths (particularly successful ones) often resulted in spikes in branch membership but even so, there was never occasion for complacency. Even when industrial action brought in large numbers of members, as in the women chainmakers' strike of Cradley Heath in the Black Country in 1910, or in Bermondsey in London in the summer of 1911, keeping membership steady once life had returned to normal remained challenging for officials and organisers.

Despite the early efforts of the WLL and even a Christmas dance, the Newcastle branch of the Federation struggled to keep its meetings going. The highest attendance – about 35 – was at its third monthly meeting (October). Two consecutive meetings in January and February of 1913 did not go ahead because hardly anyone turned up. 14 January was a 'very stormy night', making it easy to understand why staying warm and dry at home at the end of a long working day might be preferable to coming out for a union meeting. There seems, however, to be no obvious explanation why the branch officials were the only ones present in February and from then on attendance never made double figures. With such a new branch, an early slide away by members was never good news.

Although the dance organised and held by the branch just before Christmas at St Joseph's Hall, Benwell, was declared 'a decided success', all it really seemed to achieve was some fun on the night and a profit of two shillings (rightly hailed by the branch as better than a loss). If any new members were recruited that night, they certainly did not turn up in number at subsequent branch meetings. It was, however, always worth a try; Federation branches laid on all sorts of events and outings, from garden parties and picnics to dances and whist drives.

It is important to point out that non-attendance was seldom down to indifference. As historian Deborah Thom reminds us, when examining women's trade unionism at the start of the twentieth century, the question

should not be why so few women became members, but why so many did, against odds that included being too poor to pay their subscriptions and being constantly preoccupied with family cares.[21] Certainly, the courage of those who did join should not be overlooked. A 1911 dispute at the Cerebos Works in Hartlepool among women employed to pack Saxa table salt illustrates just how difficult employers could make it for women to approach, let alone join a union. When 26 'girls' were dismissed after objecting to piecework reduction rates, Mrs Harrison Bell and Mrs Agnes Cook attended the factory on behalf of the Federation for a meeting with the employers.[22] Objections to this 'outside interference' were laid out in a management statement to the *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* which sought to show that they, not the union, had the true welfare interests of the girls at heart.[23] These were tried and tested employer tactics, which encouraged women workers to believe in a paternalistic system. Look, explained the statement, we don't regard our girls as 'mere hands', but as 'members of a happy family'. Despite admitted price fluctuations, pay was described as 'liberal' and generally increasing; care of the workforce included morning tea (at a cost of two pence per week), warm dinners provided daily ('under cost'), protective white caps and aprons (laundered at the company's expense), a sick fund and even a bonus scheme. Such advantages, stated management, were certainly not 'enjoyed at most similar works'. There was an answer for everything; when the Federation demanded the reinstatement of the dismissed women, the firm threw up its hands; surely it could see that it would be a 'grave injustice' to discharge those girls who had been taken on to do the work during the dispute?

Building trust in a union took time but time was always in short supply. All those who endeavoured to organise women had to compete against the endless demands on women's time - and income - as well as having to persuade them of the advantages of being in a union when those around them were not. And, as is always the case, those doing the organising were usually over-stretched themselves. Mrs Constance Calver, from the National Council of the WLL, 'gave up almost the whole of her holiday' to

support Newcastle's autumn organising campaign in 1912; the Secretary urged more involvement from branch members and explained that she had too little time to be able to work with the women at Messrs Gleaves who had 'forsaken the Union altogether'. At the same meeting it was agreed to write to the Federation in London asking for an organiser to be sent up to help. All that Head Office could offer was to bear the request in mind and send someone when they could. Whether they did is not known but it is unlikely, given the fragility of the branch by this time.

The final entry in the minute book is for a meeting in July 1913, to which nine people turned up.[24] At the previous meeting, the Secretary had announced the resignation of the Treasurer who had married and moved away. Losing an activist was never good news for a struggling branch. Discussion moved on to hopes of sending a delegate to the Federation's Annual Conference, in Glasgow that year. The problem was that the branch did not have enough members to be entitled to do this and it is a sad indictment both of its situation - and that of some other branches - that it was agreed that if the Newcastle Secretary was accepted as a delegate, she would go as representative of a number of other branches (Clyddach, Merthyr, Swansea, Newport and Gloucester), none of which were numerically strong enough to send their own. I have not been able to find out if she *did* go.

The Federation's 1914 Annual Report reveals the extent of the branch's struggle and the despair felt, asking, 'Why don't the women of Tyneside wake up to the fact that they will never get decent wages till they organise?' Newcastle was no exception; as the arrangements for the Annual Conference show, there were a great many branches struggling to keep going.

It was not just Newcastle which struggled. A branch of salt packers – presumably as a result of the Cerebos dispute - was started in Hartlepool in 1911 but this too seems to have faded away.[25] There was a branch in Sunderland in 1911 and in October of that year, the Federation asked the Sunderland Trades and Labour Council (TC) if the seemingly tireless Mrs Harrison Bell could visit the town to talk to laundry workers about

organising. In this case, another problem for the Federation presented itself. According to the TC, the Gas Workers and Gas Labourers' Union was already in the town and 'making progress' with the laundry workers, and so the Federation's request to send an organiser was politely rejected.[26]

I don't know whether the Newcastle Federation branch limped on or was formally closed. What came next, however, represented a dramatic change in its fortunes. The Federation's 1915 Annual Report referred back to the ticking off it had given a year ago to the unorganised Newcastle women, 'little dreaming that their awakening was so near'.[27] The awakening, however, was the direct result of the First World War. Newcastle had some of the Federation's biggest wartime branches, largely the result of the thousands of women who came to work at Armstrong Whitworths. There were 4,000 Federation members in Newcastle by 1916 and nearly 9,000 a year later, not just at Armstrongs but at other factories and among ward maids and cleaners at two city hospitals.[28] Branches were also established in Gateshead, Middlesbrough, South Shields and Stockton on Tees. The wartime endeavours of Federation members and their organisers are worthy of a further article, but here I point out merely that many of the obstacles encountered before the war were now overcome by a range of factors. These included confidence in belonging to a union, the result of working in large numbers, thus reducing (but never eliminating) the risk of employer intimidation. Not only were women members supported by an increased team of wartime organisers, but success was also ensured for the many dances and garden parties that were laid on. Thousands of women were now living away home in hostels and lodgings and although their working hours were excessively long, they did not have to rush home to perform domestic duties and opportunities to let off steam at the end of a shift were welcomed.

Conclusion

The Newcastle Minute Book reveals no glorious strike or heroic dispute. Nor do its pages necessitate a rewriting of the history of the Federation

or of women's trade unionism in the early twentieth century. The book's value and significance lies in what it says about the struggles facing women workers in the years before the First World War. It shows what an uphill task it was to organise among women who were overworked, underpaid and vulnerable to employer intimidation. At the same time, many of these women were learning how to be union members. None of this was unique to Newcastle and this record of one branch adds immeasurable richness and depth to the history of the extraordinary experiment that was the National Federation of Women Workers.

1 Minute Book of the Newcastle upon Tyne Branch of the National Federation of Women Workers 1912-3, HD 6079 TUC Library Collections, London Metropolitan University. Minute book donated by the Hazlehurst family

2 Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers 1906-21*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

3 Gertrude Tuckwell Papers (GTP), TUC Library Collections, TUC Library, London Metropolitan University.

4 *Woman Worker*, October 1908

5 Federation Annual Report, 1909 p.3

6 *Newcastle Journal*, 6 Sept 1911, GTP.

7 *Newcastle Journal*, 6 Sept 1911, GTP.

8 *Western Gazette*, 8 Feb 1910, GTP.

9 *The League Leaflet (LL)*, January 1911. The name was changed to Labour Woman in 1913.

10 Edith Howson was also a member of the WLL, LL February 1913

11 I hope that someone will be able to help identify the branch President, Miss Millie Cuthbertson.

12 In this case, however, it may well have been that the ILP Club rooms were *above* the pub!

13 1891 and 1911 Census returns, Ancestry UK www.ancestry.co.uk Accessed between January & March 2022

14 *Newcastle Daily Chronicle (NDC)*, 14 Oct 1912 p 13.

15 *NDC*, 24 Sept 1912 p. 8.

16 *NDC*, 21 Sept 1912 p. 8.

17 *Women's Trade Union Review,* Oct 1907, p. 33 GTP.

18 *NDC*, 14 October 1912 p. 13.

19 Paula Bartley, *Ellen Wilkinson*, Pluto Press, 2014, pp. 3-4.

20 Part 2 of the NI Act provided unemployment benefit in limited and predominately male trades. Part 1 provided health insurance for most workers.

21 Deborah Thom '"The Bundle of Sticks": Women Trade Unionists and Collective Organisation Before 1918' in *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I*, IB Tauris, 2000, p. 94.
22 I have not been able to identify Agnes Cook with any certainty.
23 *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 7 Oct 1911 p. 3.
24 There were 2 branch meetings in July, the second perhaps called to formalize the decision to send the Branch Secretary to Annual Conference.
25 *LL* Oct 1911.
26 *Sunderland Daily Echo & Shipping Gazette*, 6 Oct 1911 p. 5.
27 Federation Annual Report 1915 p. 30.
28 *Woman Worker,* June 1916; *Woman Worker*, March 1917.

Thanks to British Newspaper Archive www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk & Ancestry UK www.ancestry.co.uk

Red Ellen, Destroyed Intelligence Files and the Pause Button of History: the Playwright, the Biographer and Public History

Matt Perry, Newcastle University

Introduction

Red Ellen, a play by Caroline Bird, ran for a fortnight at Northern Stage in the spring of 2022, and has since toured to Nottingham and the Edinburgh Lyceum. However, its chief character Ellen Wilkinson remains in some ways an enigma. Her diary was destroyed after her death, and as explained below, notes taken during interviews with friends, and her MI5 file have also not survived.

She is best known now for her participation in the Jarrow Crusade and her fifteen-month spell as Minister of Education. She is a figure who, partly because of her gender, looks and short stature, has loomed larger in representation than in life. With her countless press nicknames - the shelter queen, fiery atom, pocket pasionaria, red Ellen, wee Ellen – representations of 'our Ellen' have often seemed ubiquitous at Labour movement events.

Several aspects of her life have suffered from this. One is her internationalism. Causing no end of difficulty, including near-expulsion from the Labour Party, Wilkinson balanced institutional commitments at home, to the Labour Party and to the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW), against a campaigning commitment to anti-fascism, anti-imperialism and feminism which disregarded national

frontiers. Far-flung archival material has recently offered new insights into Wilkinson's life: the KV series of MI5 files, Labour Party records, oral testimony, and periodicals from Britain, France and Spain in which either her journalism appeared or there are records of her international reach. This new scholarship has revealed some uncomfortable truths.[1] A second neglected aspect of Wilkinson's life is the complexity of her politics and its dramatic changes over time. Caroline Bird has used the new scholarship on Ellen Wilkinson to dust off some of the old assumptions. I had a long conversation with Caroline at an early stage of the play's development but this only complemented her thorough grasp of the wider literature. The play reflects the more recent historiography that has paid greater attention to Ellen Wilkinson's internationalism, and views her beyond the traditional Labourist frame.

Caroline confessed that she had to whittle her first draft down from five hours and dozens of characters to manageable proportions. She used dramatic license to reorder some events and, to fill gaps where evidence was missing; this is a play after all and a wonderful piece of both drama and of public history at that. The play personalises Ellen Wilkinson without depoliticising her, engaging in her private life without sacrificing her public one. The play concentrates on twelve years of Ellen Wilkinson's life, from 1933 to her death in 1947. Even with this shortened chronology, much has had to be omitted. Her trip to Spain in the aftermath of the Asturian insurrection, her visit to the sit-down strikes that unionised the US car industry, her time in the workplace occupations in France, her trip to Czechoslovakia in 1946 on the eve of communist takeover have all had to left out.

The play simplifies the chronology so as to grapple with the complexity of Ellen's intellectual itinerary, her efforts to reconcile reform and revolution and her parliament and extra-parliamentary campaigning. These dialogues in Ellen's head spilled into the script and onto the stage through her work with the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, the Jarrow Crusade, her German trip that resulted in the scoop that Hitler planned to march into the Rhineland, her encounter with the novelists Dos Passos

and Hemingway in the Hotel Florida, Madrid in 1937, the deep shelters controversy during the Blitz, the 'Ellen Must Go' campaign during her time as Education Minister, and her death. Equally, Ellen Wilkinson's kaleidoscopic networks of acquaintances had to be brought down to the twelve people who appear in these episodes.

The play will surely defy common assumptions about Ellen Wilkinson and challenge some myths: particularly that of a Red Ellen of immutable politics and unceasing energy. It possesses some lovely touches. The dialogue is powerful, and brings Ellen Wilkinson's character to life and captures her disarming wit. Caroline Bird faced the same problem as Wilkinson's biographers: the lack of personal papers and large gaps in our knowledge. Perhaps suggesting Bird's poet-turned-playwright trajectory, Act 2, Scene 9 delivers a beautifully-crafted song, *On Our Last Legs*, to add to the musical tributes to the Jarrow Crusade such as Will Todd's Burning Road, Alan Price's *Jarrow Song* and Alan Hull's *Marshal Riley's Army*. The play avoids the didacticism that has romanticised Ellen Wilkinson's life, being more agit-not than agit-prop. If there is nostalgia it is of the reflective variety, for a critical - but not immobilised - left.

Ellen Wilkinson in the 1930s

Several issues that the play addresses are worth more consideration and might help to unpack the play for those who saw it. The first is her relationship with Otto Katz and Isabel Brown. Through her participation in the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism (RCVGF), Wilkinson played a prominent role in another campaign orchestrated by Comintern propaganda chief and German Communist, Wilhelm ('Willy' or 'Willi') Münzenberg.[2] Her key contacts in this regard were Isabel Brown and Otto Katz, neither of whom are much known today

Isabel Brown (1894-1984) was born in South Shields and brought up in North Shields. She was a Communist Party full-timer and national secretary of the British Section of the Workers' International Relief.[3] Like Ellen herself she came from a working-class background, did well at school

and trained as a teacher. In 1979, five years before her death, David Reid interviewed Isabel Brown along with many others, while he was writing a doctoral biography of Wilkinson.[4]

Despite the passage of time, Brown was able to recall her close friend's flat, its divan, a wooden chair built by NUDAW President John Jagger, and her 'Bloomsbury-ite' friends. Isabel lived nearby with her husband Ernest Brown, Executive Committee of the Communist International member. Isabel and Ellen first met at the Manchester conference of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1921, two of only seven women attendees. In 1924 they parted political company, when Ellen Wilkinson chose to leave the CPGB when dual membership with the Labour Party was no longer permitted. Their work together for the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism in 1933 was their first reunion since then, and it is at this point that Caroline Bird's play begins. Interestingly, Brown believed that Ellen Wilkinson never turned against her communist beliefs. Perhaps most significantly, and an example of the gaps in our knowledge of Ellen Wilkinson, when the interview alighted upon the Relief Committee, Brown asked for the recording to be paused and spoke off the record. The same practice occurred in nearly all of Reid's interviews and his scribbled notes gave him an insider's understanding now lost forever as he died when I was writing my biography of Ellen.

Otto Katz was a Czech Comintern agent, known by numerous aliases and the basis for central characters in both *Watch on the Rhine* and *Casablanca*. He claimed to have married Marlene Dietrich and brought the Hungarian actor Peter Lorre to Ellen Wilkinson's flat during his flight from the Third Reich. The author Arthur Koestler, writing in 1954, described Katz as 'a smooth and slick operator [...] dark and handsome with a somewhat seedy charm'.[5] Koestler remembered how Katz would deploy this charm on Wilkinson or other female acquaintances in a purely instrumental fashion.

Given Wilkinson's rudimentary German and Münzenberg's lack of English, it was Katz who was Wilkinson's key contact with this group.

She evidently visited the Paris headquarters of Münzenberg's group on more than one occasion in 1933. In one newspaper article, she described the four or five badly furnished offices' and their occupants, without mentioning them by name. A 'youngish man with tousled hair and bright eyes', with a heavy price on his head would have been Münzenberg, whose '…few words are always listened to and acted upon without question'. Katz was 'a quiet faced Jew with humorous grey eyes'. On a previous visit, she had met a young metalworker from the Ruhr who was now in the concentration camp at Dachau. Wilkinson's article described the work of the group attempting to establish an underground network, and their work gaining documentary evidence of secret rearmament, torture and the concentration camps and of providing illegal literature for the resistance.[6]

Years later, *New Statesman* editor Kingsley Martin recalled Wilkinson's central role in the RCVGF:

Her little flat was the centre of activity. The Committee … owed much to her. One day she would be persuading a Cabinet Minister or an ex-Ambassador to use his influence to get someone out of a concentration camp; the next she would be organising a protest meeting at the Kingsway Hall.[7]

A principal initial focus for the RCVGF was the 'Leipzig trial' of autumn 1933, after the fire at the Reichstag, the German Parliament building, in February 1933 of that year. The day after the fire, the Nazi leadership had used it as a pretext for mass arrests of communists, for whom it was claimed the fire was a signal for a general insurrection. The fire signalled an immediate and brutal crackdown on the left with wholesale round-ups of the Communists and other opponents and their incarceration in concentration camps. Over 4,000 people were arrested as suspects. The Government also issued the Reichstag Fire decree, which provided the cover for the dismantling of German democracy. [8] In the trial, the prosecutors of the Third Reich were seeking to convict four prominent communists for collaborating with the arsonist Marinus van der Lubbe, who had been discovered at the scene of the fire.

As well as the RCVGF, there was a separate, though similarly named, World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism (WCVGF), which was, as Barry Penrose and Simon Freeman have pointed out, 'cover for intelligence-gathering and propaganda' throughout the west for Münzenberg.[9] Wilkinson had herself visited Germany, as she put it, while the 'cinders of the Reichstag fire were still hot', accompanying Frederick Voigt, the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*.[10] She regarded the Reichstag fire as 'the Nazi excuse for some of the worst things they have done since'.[11] Wilkinson's early involvement in the RCVGF relief committee tended to create the impression that she initiated it.[12]

She did, though, take a large part in the British publication and advertising of *The Brown Book of Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag*, a book originally written in Paris in August 1933 by an anti-fascist group including Willi Munzenberg. There is a record of her writing to Katz from her Guildford Street address on 27 June to say that she had spoken to left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz about the proofs.[13] The translator was to be Emile Burns, about which, revealingly, she was pleased because he was a Communist Party member and 'knows what he is doing and [will] work quickly on it'.[14]

Katz visited London between 30 June and 4 July 1933, and embarked with Wilkinson on a frenetic round of social gatherings and public and private meetings. Wilkinson acted as his chauffeur ferrying him around in her car, and he stayed overnight in her flat. The play portrays them as lovers although there is no evidence for this. The visit began with a party for a selection of press and in her words 'bourgeois celebrities' to meet Katz, one of many that Jennie Lee MP, her neighbour in the Guildford Street flats, recalled later. They were an integral element of her political campaigning. Wilkinson would play salon hostess, making introductions and forging networks from her small Bloomsbury home. Twenty or thirty people would crowd into her two-roomed flat.[15]

Wilkinson and Katz went straight on to a public meeting at Kingsway Hall, with an impressive platform of speakers and leading Labour peer

Lord Marley in the chair. Wilkinson delivered a rousing speech:

'We are here to make a demonstration of the power that can fight fascism. This meeting, different and varied as our organisations are, does represent that solid power of the working-class, that, if only it can be used as a solid power, is the power that can smash Hitler'.[16]

She described the work of the relief committee in the Saar, which at that time was a neighbouring League of Nations mandate until a referendum in 1935 returned it to Germany. For her it seemed 'so irrelevant to ask who belong[ed] to the Second International and who belonged to the Third International, when the urgent need was help'. She showed the audience some of the instruments and weapons that were used in the torture cellars and in the street attacks: a rubber truncheon, a spring-loaded steel rod and a whip. They could be used, she said, to break bones, lacerate or create organ damage, but leave minimal visual traces. She concluded:

'As a member of the Labour Party, as a Trade Union official, as a candidate of the Labour party, I say to you that we must fight this horror that is creeping over Europe. Amongst the organised workers of Great Britain centres of solidarity are being built up from the streets, from the factories, and it is to them that I appeal. I ask tonight that no sectional feeling should come into this meeting. I can only say that I want to do my part, and I believe that my comrades of other organisations want to do their part in saying not only that we will smash Hitler, but that we shall stand together to fight fascism wherever it appears'.[17]

Reports by American journalist Hannen Swaffer, next day and again a few days later, praised the Kingsway meeting as 'wonderful' and told of the reception in Wilkinson's flat where she displayed the Nazi torture instruments that had been smuggled out of Germany and recounted their effects in detail.[18]

More meetings occurred on Saturday and Sunday, but Special Branch who were responsible for keeping them under surveillance, had to admit failure in pursuit of Wilkinson's car, confirming her notoriety for reckless speed behind the wheel:

'Complete details of KATZ's movements were not obtained as they were carried out in the main by means of Miss Wilkinson's car, which was able several times to out-distance the motor cabs in which he was followed'.[19]

The play delighted in Ellen Wilkinson's daredevil driving. When Katz returned to London on 4 August, to lose their Special Branch tail Ellen drove around in circles for 40 or so minutes before returning to her flat at 11.40pm.[20]

Katz's visits demonstrate the importance of London to the RCVGF internationally, and that Ellen was at its very centre. Writing to Katz shortly after his departure, Wilkinson relayed Gollancz's pleasure at the publicity achieved for the *Brown Book* during the author's visit and that the proofs were now with Burns.[21] She also intriguingly noted that there was a very curious story behind the *Daily Herald* article that she would tell him about when she saw him. Sadly, we do not know what the mysterious tale was.

The play also dealt with the encounter between Ellen Wilkinson and Albert Einstein, which was a consequence of her association with Katz. In order to make the greatest sensation, Gollancz had wanted *The Brown Book* to bear the name of the World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, of which Albert Einstein was President, and to have simultaneous publication in Britain, France and Germany. Given that Wilkinson believed Einstein to be in Paris at that time, she asked Katz to secure his approval. This seemed to have been secured, but then in a press statement on 15 September, Einstein disassociated himself from the Committee.[22] The timing could not have been more embarrassing as this was two weeks after the publication of *The Brown Book*, and during the International Inquiry into the Reichstag fire. The reason for this was that he had been sent a copy of the Labour Party's *The Communist Solar System*, published that month. Its aim was to undermine the RCVGF and the International Inquiry. The pamphlet described campaigns like the RCVGF as planets in orbit around the 'central fervid globe' of the Communist International, whose purpose was, it suggested;

'to divert energetic members of the Labour Party from their Party work to work that plays into the hands of the communists; to persuade prominent members of the Party to lend their names and prestige to these organisation and thus attract other members who might not otherwise join; and generally to cause confusion and dissension'.[23]

Of the RCVGF, it stated that one of the joint secretaries was the communist Isabel Brown and that all the officers were associated with the 'Anti-War Bureau', a reference to the anti-war campaign launched by the communists.[24]

George Bernard Shaw followed Einstein shortly afterwards, sending a letter to a RCVGF public meeting. He demanded that the letter be read out at the meeting and gave a convoluted reason for breaking with the RCVGF - that they had no right to interfere in the trial of non-British subjects. As chair, Wilkinson duly read out the statement in front of several thousand in the Kingsway Hall. The audience responded with cries of 'shame' and 'don't buy Shaw's books'.[25] She observed pithily that 'the claims of justice transcend the bounds of nationality'.[26]

There was more to Einstein's renunciation than simply a realisation that the RCVGF was a communist front. The Nazis were viciously harassing Einstein in their press as a principal means of discrediting the *Brown Book*.[27] Talking of the 'moral execution' [*moralische Hinrictung*] of Einstein, their paper the *Völkischer Beobachter* rounded on 'the Jew Einstein' in a series of articles for his shaky convictions, his pacifism, his association with the communists, his supposed hatred of Germany and even, though NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party) journalists were clearly not in a position to make an informed judgement on the matter, his supposed scientific charlatanism.[28] Relativity apparently was anti-German. Such personal intimidation and anti-Semitic incitement was not without its results. Einstein had already fled Germany, had his German bank account, summer villa in Caputh and sailboat confiscated, and faced harassment in Belgium.

Despite Einstein's public disclaimer, *The Brown Book* caused quite a sensation, polarising opinion. The liberal press deemed it to be a

heavyweight indictment of the Nazi regime. The *News Chronicle* described it as 'perhaps the most serious case ever brought before a responsible government'.[29] *The Manchester Guardian* believed it to be the 'most important book … published on the Hitlerite dictatorship'.[30]

Wartime and after

The play handles Ellen Wilkinson's shift in political outlook around 1940 through the trauma of Spain, hostile encounters with working-class East End women during the Blitz and her relationship with office, personified by Herbert Morrison.

MI5 files reveal that Wilkinson's associations with Katz persisted, after the events of 1933, despite her having to distance herself from the RCVGF on the threat of expulsion from the Labour Party. Indeed, her last documented dealing with Katz was in relation to his visit to Britain in March 1946 on route from Mexico where he had spent the war to Czechoslovakia, when she was a Government Minister. In Southampton, Katz was able to produce a telegram from Wilkinson asking him to phone on his arrival in the country. He was allowed to stay for fourteen days as a result of Wilkinson's intervention.[31] By this time, however, the anti-fascist network that Wilkinson and Katz had collaborated within was shattered. The outbreak of war and the Hitler-Stalin Pact had been the end of the line for the network. Key figures such as Arthur Koestler, Louis Fischer and Gustav Regler became Cold War liberal intellectuals. In June 1940, after being released from his internment camp with the advance of German troops, Münzenberg had died in woods near Saint-Marcellin (Isère), with a steel noose around his neck.[32] Indeed, convinced that the GPU were responsible, Koestler reported that Wilkinson had told him the circumstances of Münzenberg's death.[33] Katz himself was executed in the show trial in communist Czechoslovakia five years after Ellen Wilkinson's death.

During Katz's fortnight in the UK, Ellen had a busy schedule of ministerial appointments and his MI5 file makes no mention of them

meeting, though it is possible that they did. Ellen did, however, visit Czechoslovakia in late September 1946. Again there is no evidence in the MI5 files of them meeting. This visit, and plans for one to Yugoslavia, strongly suggest that she too had traversed the route from anti-fascism to Cold War anti-communism, albeit with a Labourist inflection with 1940 as the turning point.

The evidence from her relationship with Otto Katz illuminates a piece of the jigsaw of Ellen Wilkinson's life but many other pieces are still missing. David Reid indicated to me that one of his interviewees, speaking off the record, had told him that when as Minister of Education Ellen Wilkinson had requested her MI5 file, she was told it had been burnt that morning[34]. We do know that the file existed from the annotation above her name in the surveillance of Otto Katz: 'PF42136 destroyed 1946'.

Conclusion

Occupying the same space of public history, the playwright and the biographer exercise two different and complementary crafts. With a first responsibility to the audience, the playwright must plot a coherent narrative arc. The dramatist is free of the historian's constraints hesitating before every lack of evidence. Conversely, where the biographer can ask the reader to decide or outline provisional alternatives, the playwright cannot and ultimately has to be braver about the past. That is what Caroline Bird did in relation to Red Ellen. I admire her for bringing Ellen Wilkinson to a wider audience than I can, and imagining a destroyed file's contents and an interview without a pause button.

1 Matt Perry, *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson: her Ideas, Movements and World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Newcastle University Special Collections T.D.W. Reid, 'Wilkinson: Revolutionary politics and ideology, 1917-1926', unpublished thesis without award, October 1984.

2 Sarah Wilson, 'Comintern Spin Doctor', English Historical Review, CXXVII, I526, (2012), pp. 662-668; *Willi Münzenberg: Un Homme Contre: Colloque International,*

26-29 Mars 1992 (Aix-en-Provence, 1993). Alain Dugrand, and Frédéric Laurent, *Willi Münzenberg, artiste en révolution (1889–1940)* (Paris: Editions Fayard, 2008); John Green, *Willi Münzenberg: Fighter Against Fascism and Stalinism* (Milton: Routledge, 2019).

3 Her life is summarised in the online *Encyclopaedia of Communist Biographies*, maintained by Graham Stevenson, at https://grahamstevenson.me.uk/2008/09/19/isobel-brown/ last accessed 2 April 2022.

4 David Reid interview with Isabel Brown, 26 October 1979. (North West Sound Archive, Clitheroe).

5 Arthur Koestler, *Invisible Writing* (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 209-11.

6 *The Star*, 15 December 1933.

7 Kingsley Martin's obituary, *New Statesman and Nation*, 17 February 1947, p. 130.

8 Hans Mommsen, 'The Reichstag fire and its political consequences', in Hajo Holborn, *Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 129-222.

9 In *Conspiracy of Silence: the Secret Life of Anthony Blunt* (London: Grafton, 1986), p. 190.

10 *Clarion*, 9 June 1934.

11 Letter Wilkinson to Ivor Montagu, 26 June 1933 (The National Archives [henceforth TNA] KV2 1382 43).

12 So thought American journalist Hannen Swaffer, in the *Daily Herald*, of 3 July 1933.

13 World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag, with an introduction by Lord Marley* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933).

14 Letter Wilkinson to Otto Katz, 27 June 1933 (TNA KV2 1382 43b).

15 Obituary in *Tribune*, 14 February 1947.

16 Notes of the meeting of the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, Kingsway Hall, 30 June 1933 (People's History Museum [henceforth PHM] LP ID CI 26).

17 *Daily Herald*, 1 July 1933.

18 *Daily Herald*, 1 July 1933 and 3 July 1933.

19 Special Branch to MI5, 3 July 1933, pp. 2-3 (TNA KV 2 1382 46b).

20 Inspector's report on Katz, 4 August 1933 (TNA KV 2 1382 52b).

21 Letter Wilkinson to Otto Katz, 5 July 1933 (TNA KV 2 1382 46c).

22 *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1933.

23 PHM LP ID CI 8 43 *Communist Solar System* (London: Labour Party, September 1933), pp. 21-2.

24 In her interview with David Reid on 26 October 1979, Isabel Brown observed that she was in fact the only communist in the British section of the RCVGF).

25 *Western Australian*, 23 September 1933.

26 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 September 1933.

27 'Einstein is being held responsible by the Nazis [for the Brown Book]' MI5 to Home Office re Katz, 6 August 1933 (TNA KV 2 1382 62c).

28 *Völkischer Beobachter*, 6 September 1933, 11 September 1933, 12 September 1933, 14 September 1933.

29 *News Chronicle*, 1 September 1933.

30 World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *The Reichstag Fire Trial the Second Brown Book of the Hitler Terror* (London: Lane, 1934), p.31.

31 Report from Southampton, 7 March 1946 (TNA KV2 1384 394). In February 1944, Katz cabled Wilkinson for a visa for Trinidad on his journey to a conference in Montevideo, and gave him a reference as a 'reliable and trustworthy individual and a true friend of the allied cause', K.P. Witney (Ministry of Home Security) to Mrs Beamish, 12 February 1944 (TNA KV 2 1384 366c). Wilkinson also looked into the case of Bruno Frei (Benedikt Freistadt) after a request from Katz, Rudolf Feistmann to Jurgen Kuczynski, 6 June 1941 (TNA KV2 1384 333b).

32 Report, 20 December 1940, on intercepted letter from Babette Gross to Edo Fimmen of 7 November 1940. (TNA KV2 774 280A).

33 Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, p. 407.

34 Author's discussion in David Reid's home, 10 July 2010.

What mining families remember about the Miners' Strike in County Durham

Robert Gildea

This study is based on a sample of twenty-four life-history interviews with twenty-eight interviewees undertaken in County Durham in 2020-21. Such interviews navigate between the personal and the political, shedding light on how individuals shaped the strike and were shaped by it. They trace pathways that began before the strike and led up to the present, showing that the aftershocks of the strike live on. And they speak for the families, the mining communities and the coalfield to which they belonged. The sample is part of a project of 120 interviews with 144 interviewees, from South Wales to Scotland, recorded for a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust entitled 'Class, community and family: the Miners' Strike of 1984-5 in History and Memory'. The full study will be published in time for the fortieth anniversary of the strike in 2024.[1]

Class, Community and Family

The miners were at the forefront of the organised working class. In County Durham this was epitomised by the headquarters of the Durham Miners Association at Redhills, opened in 1915 in order to demonstrate their equality with the mineowners. Miners were characterised by trade union muscle and by the camaraderie of the marras (mates). Peter Byrne from Blackhill near Consett explained how union consciousness was slowly inculcated;

…My father-in-law worked at Eden, my brother worked at the Eden and I was a face electrician. You were available if there were any breakdowns; and having bait [packed lunch], you would be sitting listening to the guys talking. And they sort of educated you about the union, and about your rights, and about standing up for what was right, and not being afraid to challenge management. And you know, they are not better than you, they just have a different job. And that was something that they instilled in you.[2]…

The cohesion of mining communities was fondly remembered, but it was not always as simple as that. Miners were generally immigrants into the North-East, coming from elsewhere to seek jobs, and forced to move on when pits closed. Mary Stratford, the wife of an Easington miner who moved inland to Great Lumley after she married in 1976, researched her origins back to the Irish Great Famine of the 1840s;

…Well, my grandma and grandpa, they're like many Durham people. Originally, mostly Irish backgrounds, some Welsh. My mam's side is more English, but my dad's side is almost all Irish. Came over in the famine. Started in Northumberland and worked their way around County Durham like they were industrial gypsies, for want of a better word. That's what it was like in those days. People moved with the bond, people moved around from colliery to colliery.[3]…

The miner was expected to demonstrate his masculinity. This was defined by being a breadwinner, a fighter when strike action called, and a man who kept his womenfolk in order. Miners in the UK (although not in the USA) were all men; the only women employed at the pit were cooks, cleaners or office staff. However, families were more matriarchal than might be imagined. Women often took control of the pay packet, giving their men pocket money for drink, cigarettes and betting. In a 2012 interview for the North East Labour History Popular Politics Project, Mary Stratford explained the division of labour;

…It was very matriarchal in the sense that my mother and grandmother all took care of the money in our family. There was never any idea of

'housekeeping'. My mum collected the wages, took all the responsibility and 'nurse-fed' the men. But the power lay in the hands of the men outside the home. The home was the women's domain but outside that – the Labour Party – the women's section had to defer to the NUM quite a lot.[4]…

Reluctant Strikers?

The story of how the Durham miners joined the strike is part of local folklore, ritually told by guides to Redhills and appearing in oral testimony.[5] According to Eden and Sacriston electrician David Wray, the leadership of Durham Miners Association was

…soft, managerial, go along, get along sort of thing. Manage the miners rather than defend them. Sam Watson was the leader of the [Durham] miners for twenty years, and for those twenty years the miners were the lowest paid in the country.[6]…

The moment of truth came on Friday 9 March 1984, when the Area Committee of lodge secretaries from the various pits, chaired by Harold Mitchell, met in the grand council chamber at Redhills, its walls hung with colliery banners. According to Wray,

[left-winger] Davey Hopper said, 'I propose that we come out on strike in support of Yorkshire. And it was a tie, right? And the President of the Durham Miners' Association - in the case of a tie - has to go with the proposer. And the story is that it took him three minutes.[7]

Picketing Out

Whereas the Yorkshire miners immediately sent flying pickets to Nottinghamshire, in a campaign to bring the Notts miners out on strike – an aggression used as an excuse by many Notts miners not to strike – Durham miners seem to have been more cautious. Jim Coxon, a shift charge engineer at Herrington, argued that he was active on the home front;

…I never went anywhere. I never went to Orgreave, or Nottingham or anywhere like that. Our pit was one of the most precarious anyway. There

were two in Durham; Sacriston and Herrington were on the top of the closure list. So we were there to save our own pit.[8]…

By contrast Billy Frostwick, an electrician at Herrington, explained how it was soon impossible to get into Nottinghamshire, so that he did most of his picketing in Leicestershire and gave a good deal of support to the 'Dirty Thirty'.

…Nottingham was locked down, you couldn't get it. As soon as you went to Nottingham the police stopped your car, they ask where you are going and as soon as they heard the accent, 'Turn around, go back'. We heard it was easier to get into the Leicestershire coalfield. The police there weren't so strict. The reason that being because in the Leicestershire area there was only thirty miners out on strike in the whole coalfield.[9]…

Frostwick was also present at Orgreave for the 'battle' on 18 June. He soon worked out that the police had welcomed them onto the field for a reason. He saw that the sides were unevenly matched and that this was not the time for heroism;

…You've got trainers on, shorts on and your T-shirt up against someone in riot gear you haven't got a chance really. They were so well organised, man, it was a trap. And we fell for it, went straight in […] It was an absolutely horrific day. I will never ever forget it. I was petrified. I ended up hiding in somebody's garden shed. Because if I kept on the road, the police were hitting everybody with truncheons and I said, 'This is not for me. I could get killed there. It's not worth it.'[10]…

Support Groups and the Role of Women

A month or two into the strike it was clear that families and communities were in for the long hall. Support groups were set up to organise soup kitchens, make up food parcels and to raise funds. Miners' wives came into their own here, generally with the help of the union but also coming up against deep-seated trade union conventions.

…'There's a common misconception that women in mining communities are held down', said Heather Wood, one of the founders of

the original support group, Save Easington Area Mines (SEAM). 'Well it's the opposite actually. Mining women have always been the backbone.' Heather was frustrated that SEAM was dominated by male councillors, miners and tradespeople and set about recruiting women. To start a soup kitchen they needed the permission of Easington lodge and its secretary, Alan Cummings. No woman had ever attended any of their meetings and Heather was kept waiting while they decided whether she could come in.

…When you opened the door there was the Committee room table straight ahead of you. At one end was Alan Cummings and then all these men sat round. All round the walls were portraits or photographs of men, the only woman being the Queen, the head. The picture in my mind is so vivid. There was a wooden threshold and I lifted myfoot like that and I said to Alan, 'Are you sure? Because once it comes in it's not coming out'.[11] …

Meanwhile Billy Etherington, the general secretary of the Durham Mechanics Association, realised that support groups should be organised not around the pits, which for the moment were idle, but in the mining villages. He 'lent' his secretary, Anne Suddick, to coordinate in the Durham Area Support Group the support groups that were springing up across the coalfield. The question arose, however, whether this would be controlled by the Durham Mechanics or Durham Miners' Association, or whether it would be more democratic and shaped by women. Mary Stratford, who had become secretary of the Lumley support group, was alert to a union bid for power. 'I knew immediately there were power struggles going on' she said, 'And I was sitting there thinking, 'I don't like this at all. This is going to be taken over by vested interests". She spoke to Pat and Vin McIntyre, she a mature student at Durham University and he the head of its careers service, and also called Heather Wood.

…So they came and we had a meeting, quite a lively meeting, actually, and we eventually thrashed out that there wouldn't be a committee […] Every support group could send anybody. If you went to the meeting you got a vote, and it would be the decision of the meeting as to what you

would do. So it was very much about not letting any particular group take control of the whole thing.[12]…

To reinforce the separate, democratic constitution of the Durham Area Support Group, meetings held every Monday night were moved from the Durham Miners headquarters at Redhills to the Crossgate pub in the city. This opened the Durham Area Support Group to activists from outside the mining community, many of whom were – like Pat and Vin McIntyre – members of Durham Peace Action and a left-wing ginger group, Independent Labour Publications (ILP).

Fundraising was a priority and miner's wives learned how to address public meetings to win over support. This was not always easy. Mary Stratford, accompanied by Elspeth Frostwick of the Chester-le-Street support group, were not impressed by the reception the two of them received from Durham University students.

…I got what I would call an ill-informed response […] One bloke's response was, 'well they closed down pits because there isn't any coal. What do you want them to dig, mud?' […] My view is if you get to a prestigious university, surely to God you would open your mind to what's going on beyond the four walls in which you live. So I was a bit shocked. They just didn't have a clue. It was more the level of ignorance, I suppose, for want of a better word. I was quite shocked, and I know Elspeth was as well.[13]…

More responsive were some of the graduates of the university. Hartlepool-born Neil and Michaela Griffin were respectively a teacher and a social worker, members of the ILP and the Durham City Miners' Support Group. Neil was also a musician, playing in local pubs and clubs. He did fundraising gigs with Pat McIntyre, who wrote and sang her own political songs, such as 'The Tory Version of Law and Order' to the tune of 'The Teddy Bear's Picnic'.[14] Neil was also involved in a recording studio set up by a group of unemployed steel workers, the Consett music project. Music-making was central to fundraising in County Durham. A high point was the evening at the Consett Empire Theatre with a bill including

the Newcastle-based folk rock band Lindisfarne with singer-songwriter Alan Hull, which had made *Fog on the Tyne* in 1971, and the Essex-born Billy Bragg who had released 'A New England' in 1983. Neil Griffin remembered that

…Lindisfarne were very big supporters of the strike. Billy Bragg is still is a very big supporter of socialism [...] I remember there being a concert, a gig in Consett that Billy Bragg played at, and I think we might have played that. In fact, we did play that as well, because I borrowed Alan Hull's amplifier and broke it.[15]…

The State of Siege

Picketing fell into two phases. While the pits in County Durham were out, some Durham miners went to picket out pits in the Midlands. But from the end of the summer the government and National Coal Board exerted huge pressure to get even one or two miners back at each pit, enforced by what seemed like a police occupation of the mining villages. Pickets were forced to return to defend their own collieries, to be met by a brutal show of force.

Heather Wood, described how provocation from the Tory MP for Newcastle Central led to a police invasion of Easington in defence of a scab miner and how she was confronted by it, driving her boys to school.

…On the evening of 23rd August Piers Merchant who was a Tory MP at the time came on the television news and he said, 'Why is it that the Durham Constabulary cannot get one man in at Easington pit? The next morning, as I turned [the corner] the youngest, Peter, said, 'Look at the green, it's black'. And It was. It was black because it was full of police. It was like a panic. It's anger, it's a panic, it's fear of what was going to happen. I turned the next corner and there was a police blockade.[16]…

Paul Stratford, who worked at Easington and had picketed ports in Essex and pits in Staffordshire and Leicestershire, now came back to stop a scab named Wilkinson from getting into the colliery. They were promised by the manager that Wilkinson would come through the front

gate, but the pickets turned him back. On the third day a new, younger manager was brought in, with whom the miners had no relationship, and smuggled Wilkinson in at the back. 'So the Coal Board had reneged on their agreement', said Stratford, 'and the next thing you knew, it just all went up. All went up, you know, 'The police has done this, done that', and there was cars got smashed inside, the manager's car, the engineer's car.' Stratford was caught by a snatch squad and taken to court at Seaham in November on a trumped-up charge of stealing a police helmet. He was full of praise for the NUM's Newcastle barrister, Vera Baird, who exposed the idiocy of the charge.[17]

Christmas

Christmas 1984 was a significant marker in the history of the Miners' Strike. The strike had lasted ten months and now, as winter approached, demand for coal would intensify and the miners might triumph by managing to 'switch the lights out' across the country. By the same token, however, many striking miners had had enough. They were running out of reserves, whether material or moral, and some were drifting back to work in order to recover the wages that would get them through Christmas and into the New Year. Mary Stratford in Great Lumley recalled that a lot of families by October had no money for shoes …and kids grow out of shoes as you well know. We had no shoes left. So one or two of the families sent them [to school] in plimsolls, black plimsolls. And the kids were sent home and excluded, in a former mining community. Absolutely disgraceful. So that was when we realised there was a problem with that, and that's when one of the county councillors organised a shoe thing and were eventually able to get shoes for kids.[18]…

Striking miners were sometimes able to fall back on the wife's income, if she worked, or on support of the extended family or friends. Elspeth Frostwick was grateful to family and to Kath Mattheys, a teacher and secretary of the Chester-le-Street support group, now Kath Connolly.

…Bill's family [three brothers] was brilliant. And we know there was a lot of hardship, we know that it broke marriages. They lost their homes. We were really, really fortunate. My dad would give us money to pay the electric bill, your brothers did the same, my [two] sisters would say 'don't worry this weekend I'll make dinner' and Kath would say the same. You know 'come to us for dinner, I'll make that'. Christmas, she came with a Christmas tray for us, can you remember?[19]…

Perhaps the most powerful memory of Christmas for mining families in County Durham was the 'Toy and Turkey' project conceived by Anne Suddick, secretary of the Durham Area Support Group. Every miner's child would receive a Christmas present and every miner's family a Christmas turkey, in order to demonstrate that thanks to the solidarity of the coalfield, sacrifices for the strike would not leave people without. At five o'clock in the morning on 21 December sociology student Matt Smith was summoned from his bed to talk to the French lorry driver who had brought the load of frozen turkeys provided by a French trade union, but was also delivering to Scotland and had to be back home by Christmas Day.[20] It was agreed to store the turkeys at Murton colliery, which had a huge, unheated Miners' Welfare, from where they were distributed to support groups across the county. The assignment for Chester-le-Street was collected by David Connolly, another member of the ILP, and Billy Frostwick, who complained about the size of the birds. 'I've seen bigger wood pigeons', he jested.[21]

Meanwhile, money to support mining families through the winter was running desperately short. At the end of November Kath Mattheys wrote to local churches to ask for help with food parcels that cost £3 per week and helped ninety families in difficulty. She also wrote to Social Democratic and trade union comrades in Kamp-Lintfort, the North German town with which Chester-le-Street was twinned.[22] In the New Year the net was cast ever wider, with a mission to continental Europe. David Connolly and Billy Frostwick of the Chester-le-Street support group flew from Manchester to Copenhagen to receive funding collected by the trade union of Carlsberg brewery workers.

…After a couple of days we went to Nakskov which was twinned with Chester-le-Street and was a train journey away. There we got treated extremely well, got interviewed by the radio, got interviewed by the daily local paper which was a social democratic paper, woke up the next morning, and there we were the lead story with a photograph on the front page. The paper launched an appeal for Chester-le-Street miners, which eventually sent over I think about £1100. So we were probably about £2000 up on that trip.[23]…

The Return to Work

The strike, nevertheless, was losing momentum. As winter bit, more and more miners began to drift back to work. Steel-meshed buses appeared to take miners from their villages to the deep mines on the coast. This provoked schisms within mining communities and even within families. Dave Wray, who with his wife Dorothy and NUM official Norman Henderson ran the Leadgate soup kitchen in the Methodist chapel, recalled that

…One day, me and my friend Norman were standing outside the chapel, then Norman said, 'them bastards are going back to work'. This was a Friday. So, on the Monday we found out that they were going to be picked up in Leadgate opposite the working men's club. A few of us went up and stood across the road and there they were on the other side of the road and then a sort of armoured bus came along. One of the main instigators of the call back to work…his sister came along the street and as he was getting on the bus, she hit him. She nearly took his head off, in front of everyone, 'Whoosh!' But he got on the bus; and that was the start.[24]…

At the crucial NUM meeting in London on Sunday 3 March 1985 delegates from County Durham and those from South Wales voted in favour of an orderly return to work. This was a devastating blow for miners and miners' wives who wanted to continue the struggle, but Mary Stratford took the view that the union and families were in danger of fracturing;

…Paul and I, it was probably the only thing we were really split about. He didn't think they should go back. I said, 'you've got no option, but

to go back. If you don't go back, this will destroy the union and destroy everything we've worked towards. It will lead to all sorts of divisions' […] So it was a huge relief for me that they voted to go back. Paul was not happy, but the decision was made. And you go with the democratic vote.[25]…

The return to work was very painful for striking miners, who were now confronted by miners who had gone back to work and were protected by the management. Even to call someone a scab was to risk dismissal. But accusations came freely the other way. When Billy Frostwick returned to Herrington he was in a minority of striking miners who were 'labelled as militants and left wing and Scargill lovers.' Herrington closed in December 1985 and Frostwick moved to Vane Tempest, where he found himself up against another group of strike-breakers protected by the management.

…We had a group called the Royal Family who were the bosses' handpicked men. And it was strange that every one of them had gone back to work […] We were outsiders really and some of my immediate bosses y'know, they didn't like us at all because I'd been out on strike for a year. And I had left-leaning attitudes and thoughts. But as I said I brought some good lads down with us, and we all stuck together, and it lasted and closed in 1993.[26]…

Fall and Redemption

On 2 March 1986 the Consett music project and Durham Miners' Support Group enlisted the support of GLC leader Ken Livingstone for a Concert for Heroes in the Albert Hall, raising money for sacked and struggling miners. The star-studded bill included folk-singers Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger, Ralph McTell, Lindisfarne, Tom Robinson and Paul Weller. The evening concluded with the Durham Miners Wives Support Group singing their signature song, 'You'll Never Beat the Miners'.[27]

The miners, of course, were beaten. The pits closed with frightening rapidity, Herrington and Sacriston in 1985, Horden in 1986, Seaham in 1988, Dawdon and Murton in 1991, Westoe, Wearmouth, Vane Tempest and Easington in 1993. Communities were hollowed out and divided.

Sam, the daughter of Dave and Dorothy Wray, said that

…Leadgate was never the same again. Half of the village couldn't stand the other half; obviously the half that went back were despised by the half that didn't and probably vice versa. So, the whole camaraderie if you like, the nice villagey feel had gone.[28]…

Families came under huge pressure, dealing with unemployment and depression. Some decided that they could not go back to life as it was before and that they needed to return to college and find a new career. Of these a fair number embraced the caring professions, dealing with the fallout in former mining communities. Dorothy Wray took A-levels in psychology and sociology and did a sociology and social work degree at Newcastle Poly. 'I have worked twenty three or four years in social work', she said, 'and I finished my career as a manager of child protection team'.[29] Her husband Dave graduated from Durham in 1989 with a degree in sociology and politics, completed a masters and was recruited to teach industrial relations, becoming a senior lecturer in social sciences. Mary Stratford went to the new Northumberland university (it had been Newcastle Polytechnic up until 1992) and qualified as a probation officer. She recalled 'the bane of my life' when she was told that some offender had been found housing. 'I said, 'Don't tell me it's Easington colliery'. And they say, 'How did you know'? They dumped, they literally dumped people and caused all sorts of social problems'.[30]

Her daughter Helen, born just after the strike, studied medicine at Newcastle and became a GP. She found a calling dealing with medical and family problems that were the legacy both of work in the pit and the pits' closure;

…South Hetton's definitely got problems with drugs, alcohol, offending behaviour, crime, interlinked with the drugs to be honest, unemployment. […] It was clear the impact the closing the mines had had. A lot of it was the younger males who have the drug taking and the crime. Probably the ones who were less academic and would have followed generations of going down the mine but that choice wasn't there. Or their dad had

become unemployed and struggled to find work elsewhere.[31]…

Shared Stories

Paradoxically, as the pits closed, there was a revival in attendance of the Durham Miners' Gala from the mid-1990s. Stories of the Durham Gala have been collected by the Mining for Memories project of local heritage group Education4Action.[32]

There was also a revival of banner making in order to – as Northumbria University colleagues David Wray and Carol Stephenson have suggested -'emotionally regenerate' former mining communities. They cite the setting up of a Miners' Banner Partnership at New Herrington in 1999, chaired by Bob Heron, the former lodge secretary, with his wife Pat, a former shop steward in the clothing industry, as treasurer. Said Bob,

…Part of what we are doing is about letting Thatcher and her like know that we are still here. They closed the pits and took the jobs, but every time we take the banner out we are saying to them, 'We're still here and we're still fighting for our communities.'[33]…

Making new banners fired up a new cottage industry in which a leading role was played by Lotte Shankhill, a Danish-born artist, anti-apartheid, Greenham and ILP activist, her husband Hugh, lecturer in Italian at the University of Durham, Durham Peace Action and amateur artist and their daughter Emma. Their business took on a market dominated by Tutills in London, which had been making trade union banners since the 1840s. One of Emma's commissions was to design a banner for the Women's Banner Group which declared, 'feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings'. In this new phase the most important development was to take their work into schools, to engage the schoolchildren and to make the stories less traditional and more inclusive. To mark the Commonwealth Games in 1998, they designed a banner featuring a Bangladeshi tiger with Shincliffe school, where two Bangladeshi boys were being bullied. 'There's nothing more cool than a tiger, said Lotte, 'so these two boys became the heroes of the school.'[34]

Conclusion

The strike was a brutal defeat for the Durham miners and mechanics and in the 1990s there was talk of selling Redhills to the University. Miners were left unemployed or confined to low-paid jobs. Their sons did not have the opportunity of 'leaving school on the Friday and starting at the pit on the Monday'. A good number of former miners and miners' wives reinvented themselves through education and new careers, although these are probably overrepresented in our sample. Many of these too embraced the 'caring professions' and gave back to their communities that were now suffering from joblessness, deprivation and drugs. Most significantly, there was an inverse relationship between the deindustrialisation of mining communities and the revival of the Gala and the banner-making that went with it. The story of the Durham miners lives on.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to David and Kath Connolly who arranged the interviews I undertook in County Durham and to the generosity of all those who agreed to participate.

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Workers and Wages at Hetton Colliery, County Durham

Les Turnbull

2022 marks the bicentenary of the opening of Hetton Colliery in County Durham, an event which is historically important for two reasons: firstly, it proved the presence of top-grade household coal beneath the magnesium limestone plateau which led to the development of the East Durham Coalfield; and secondly, the colliery's railway to Sunderland was the first complete line to be designed by George Stephenson. The success of Hetton established Stephenson's reputation as the leading contemporary expert on railways resulting in his appointment as the principal engineer on the Stockton and Darlington, Liverpool and Manchester and London and Birmingham lines. These events were also of international significance: the first led to the development of deep mines in other parts of the world, notably the Ruhr Coalfield in Germany, by William Coulson and his team from Northumberland and Durham; the second led to the nineteenth-century railway revolution when British engineers such as George and Robert Stephenson took the technology of the railways, developed in the North East of England, to other parts of the world. As a result such was the significance of Hetton to contemporaries that detailed evidence for aspects of its operation that is rarely available elsewhere, is available for Hetton. Among this is information about the workers and their wages.[1]

Hetton Lyons Colliery opened in November 1822, following more than a decade of trials and failures. From the beginning it attracted notice because of the technology used in the winning of the mine and its output. In 1825, it was visited by two Prussian engineers, von Dechen and von Oyenhausen, who were amazed at the scale of the operation.[2] In that year the colliery produced over a quarter of a million tons of coal. Annoyingly, there is no record of the labour force at Hetton which accomplished this remarkable output by that date. However, records do survive for Heaton Main Colliery in Northumberland which enable an educated guess to be made. Heaton Main was another mine which attracted the attention of the engineering and scientific community. It was visited by William 'Strata' Smith, the father of geology, and by the distinguished mineralogist Charles Hatchett.[3] Both were undoubtedly attracted by the scale of production at Heaton. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the manager at Heaton was John Buddle, one of the most eminent colliery engineers of the Great Northern Coalfield, who was called upon to give evidence to parliamentary committees. Buddle used a formula for calculating the number of men needed to achieve Heaton Main Colliery's output, on the basis of each hewer producing a score of coal each day or 2.15 chaldrons (about 5.7 tons). For example, the projected output for 1816 was 34,000 chaldrons or 16,000 score per year (about 90,000 tons). This amounted to 615 score per fortnight of 11 days. Therefore, 56 hewers would need to be hired. He also allowed for absenteeism and hired 60.[4] If the same thinking is applied to Hetton, about 177 hewers would be required to mine 265,791 tons. This figure would increase to 265 as production reached 397,500 tons in 1830. The hewers were the aristocrats of the workforce. They were paid by the amount of coal sent to bank, and the money they were able to earn depended upon their ability and the nature of the coal seam where they were working. People as politically divided as the coal owner Elizabeth Montagu, the radical William Cobbett and the philosopher Frederick Engels all agreed that the miners were well paid in comparison with other members of the working classes and even small

traders. At Hetton a good hewer would be earning between £40 and £50 a year.[5]

Usually, a similar number of men and boys would have been employed as drivers and putters, with the task of transporting the coal to the eye of the colliery for winding to the surface, but because the transport system underground was highly mechanised at Hetton, it was undoubtedly fewer. If at Hetton there were about 180 hewers and 160 drivers and putters, plus 140 other underground workers, then the workforce underground in 1825 would have been in the region of 480 men and boys. There was also a large number of men employed at the surface – usually about half the number employed underground. If we assume a similar proportion of surface workers to underground workers at Hetton, then the total workforce would have been in the region of 750.

In the first national census of 1801, Hetton recorded a population of 253 which had increased to 322 by the time of the second census of 1811. This increase was probably a result of John Lyons' mining operations which had begun in 1810. By the time of the third census in 1821, the population had increased to 994, principally because of the development of Lyon's colliery. When the new mine opened in November 1822, much of the workforce of sinkers, builders and construction engineers would have left and been replaced by hewers, putters and the other labour needed to operate the mine including the railway workers. The impact of the winning of Hetton Lyons Colliery on this small agricultural community was dramatic. By 1851, the population had increased to 5,731, of whom only 4% were born in Hetton, the remainder arriving mainly from elsewhere in Durham and Northumberland.

Railway workers had existed in the North East of England for over 200 years before Hetton Lyons Colliery opened in 1822. Tenants of local coal-owning gentry are known to have supplemented their income by acting as waggoners to the coal trade in the seventeenth century.[6] By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the records of the staffing of the early railways become more complete, notably those of Hetton. The manager

of the overland railway to Sunderland, George Dodd, produced a detailed description of the railway above ground, including a list of the men employed and their wages.[7]

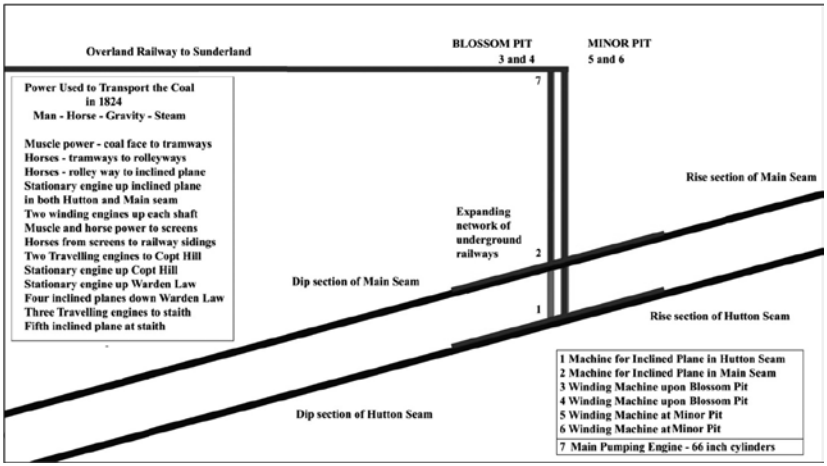

Figure 1; The Transport System at Hetton Lyons Colliery

The principal task of the colliery's chief engineers was to design a mechanism for getting coal from the pit face to the tidal waters of the River Wear. There were four elements to the solution. Firstly, the changing network of underground railways, with a mileage comparable to the railway above ground, which included two stationary steam engines, five self-acting inclined planes and the services of over eighty horses. Secondly, the winding system to raise the coal to the surface which consisted of two shafts, the Blossom and Minor pits, each equipped with two haulage engines, all made possible because of a mighty 66 inch pumping engine draining the mine. Thirdly, the overland railway to Sunderland which used horses, stationary haulage engines, self-acting inclined planes and 'travelling engines' – that is, locomotives. The final element was the staith at

the terminus of the railway for transferring the cargo directly to the collier ships moored in the river. That is what the colliery's engineers – principally George Stephenson and his brother Robert – designed and implemented between 1819 and 1822. Because of the hazards at the mouth of the River Wear, the collier ships were assisted in getting out of the river by a steam tug owned by the Hetton Company.

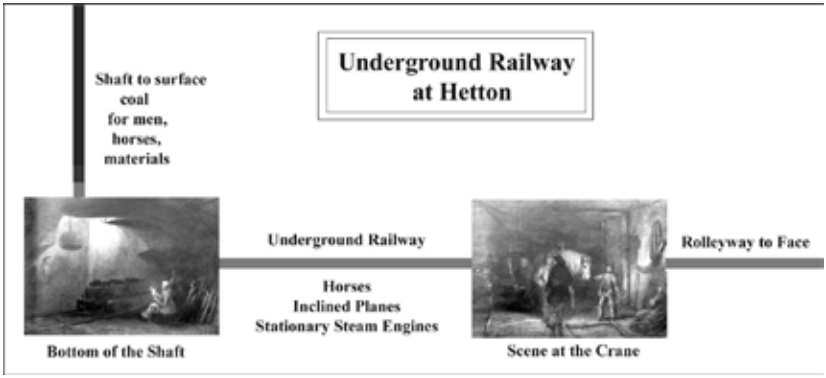

Figure 2: the Underground Railway at Hetton

The putters moved the coal from the coal face by muscle power on a sledge or iron tramway to the rolleyway where the onsetter and craneman loaded three corves onto each of the flat waggons known as rolleys which were driven by drivers. The rolleyway at Hetton was an iron railway powered by horses. Manager George Johnson reported in 1827 that there were 40 horses employed in the Main Seam and 44 in the Hutton Seam. In the eastern parts of the mine stationary steam engines provided assistance to haul the waggons up the inclines from the dip. Johnson describes the operation thus:

'The coals from these dip workings are conveyed to the pit bottom partly by horses and partly by means of machinery. A high-pressure steam engine having a 24 inch cylinder is situated near the shaft which winds the

rolleys up the inclined plane, about 1,200 yards long, and lands them at the pit bottom. To the bottom of this inclined plane the coals are brought by horses; the engine drags 8 rolleys up at a time, each rolley carrying 3 corves, and takes them to the head of the plane in 7 minutes but allowing for time of changing and casual stoppages suppose 12 minutes which equals six score per hour'.[8]

The rolleyway from the rise ran downhill to the shaft bottom and there was therefore no need for haulage engines; but there were five self-acting inclined planes making use of the weight of the waggons descending to return the empties to the coal face. Hair's watercolours in the diagram above show the underground railways at Walbottle Colliery to the west of Newcastle in the late 1830s. At the bottom of the shafts, the onsetter's job was to attach the corves to 'the machine for drawing coal to bank', that is, the winding engines. There were two steam-powered winding engines for hauling the coal out of the mine at each shaft: the Minor Pit served the Hutton Seam and the Blossom Pit the Main Seam. The men travelled in and out of the mine via the Minor Pit shaft in the corves or by clinging with their hands and legs to the rope, which was a hazardous affair. Cages were not in general use until the 1840s.The putters and drivers, like the hewers, were on piece work. In 1831, it was recorded that in the collieries on Tyneside boys from 12-16 years of age 'become Waggon-drivers at 14d (6p) per day; or Putters, two Boys to a Tram: after the age of 16, if Putters are able to put a Tram alone, they earn fully as great Wages as the Hewers'.[9]

Details of the machinery and staff needed to operate the system above survive together with a lithograph produced for the opening of the railway overland on 18 November 1822. Dodd's description and Robinson's lithograph, like most accounts of the transport system which followed, only featured the railway above ground from the pits at Hetton Colliery to the staithes at Bishopwearmouth. By totally ignoring the very extensive network of railways underground, which were equally as important for the task of getting the coal to market, such accounts give a false picture.

At the surface, the corves were off-loaded by the banksman and his

team and then taken to the screens where the wailers sorted out the rubbish and graded the coal. Eight labourers at the screens loaded the coal into waggons for which they were paid 2s a day. Next, two waggonmen and their horses shunted the waggons into trains of sixteen vehicles. The men were each paid £20 a year but the upkeep of each horse amounted to £45 a year. The first mile and a half to the foot of Copt Hill was built as a single-line railway with a passing loop midway. The crossing of Rough Dene was the major civil engineering feature of this

Stations		No of yards	Descent p yard	Ascent p yard	Whole Descent	Whole Ascent
1	From the Pits to Rough Dean	2541	1/6 of an inch	-	35ft 4in	-
2	From Rough Dean to Byre Engine	882½	-	2 1/8 in	-	151ft 0in
3	From Byre Engine to Meetings	775½	-	7/16 in	-	30ft 0in
4	Mill Engine Bank	775½	-	2 1/8 in	-	115ft 0in
5	1st Incline Plane	1302	1 3/16 inch	-	130ft 4in	-
6	2nd Ditto Do	1224	1 ¼ inch	-	129ft 6in	-
7	3rd Do Do	716	0 15/16 inch	-	54ft 7in	-
8	4th Do Do	902	1 inch	-	76ft 5in	-
9	From 4th incline to top of 5 incline	4350	5/16 inch	-	63ft 5in	-
10	5 Incline to Staith	325	2½ inch	-	67ft 9in	-
Total		13793½	-	-	557ft 4in	296ft 0in

Figure 3; George Dodd's description of the overland railway to Sunderland

part of the line. Dodd records that 6,041 chaldrons (16,000 tons) of small coals were used to raise the embankment four feet to 'equalise the Way for the Locomotive Engines' and 6,161 chaldrons (16,400 tons) on the remainder of the railway. A travelling engine took the sixteen waggons on the second part of their journey above ground – the one and a quarter mile downhill run at about 1:208 from the sidings to the foot of Copt Hill Bank. The two drivers were each paid 21s (£1.05) per week and their boys, the firemen, 12s (60p) per week.

The poster produced for the opening of the colliery shows the three locomotives in operation when the railway opened.[10] The one at the south

end is taking a rake of full waggons to the bottom of the Copt Hill incline. At the north end, one locomotive is waiting for its train of loaded waggons, while the other is returning from the staithes with a dozen empties. It is curious that the northern pair appear to be operating without tenders. All three engines were probably built at the Walker Iron Works of Losh, Wilson and Bell, the company which supplied the iron rails and chairs. By September 1823, a fourth had arrived and George Dodd noted that five were at work in December 1823. The fourth one was deployed at the north end the fifth at the south end. The pyramid structure next to the cabin is a gibbet, housing a bell for signalling which was operated by a boy. There were eight signal bells along the line positioned at the top of Copt Hill, the Meetings, the top of Warden Law Incline and at the bottom of each of the five inclined planes. This is a unique example of signalling on the early railways which predates that of the Stockton and Darlington.

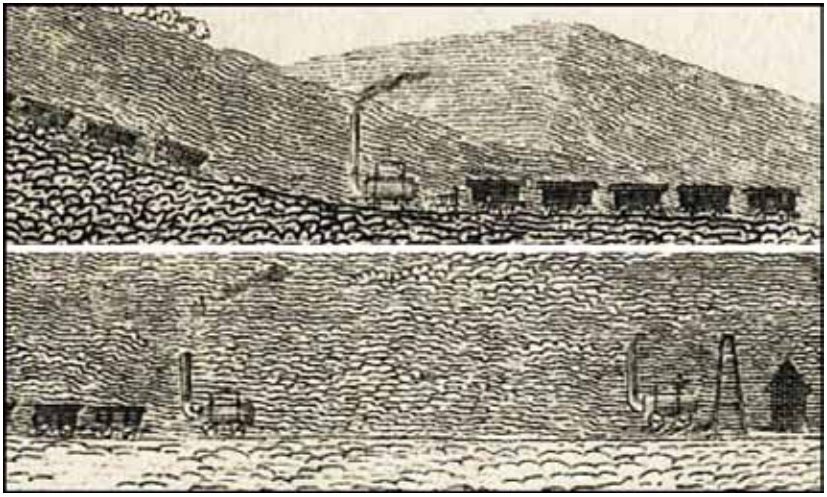

Figure 4; The Three Locomotives in Action on the Hetton Railway in 1822,

At Copt Hill, also known as the Byer Incline, this engine had two 30 inch cylinders which were used to haul eight waggons up the steep climb of 1:16 for 882.5 yards and simultaneously lower eight empties to the foot of the incline. Two boys, one a bell ringer or signalman 'at the meetings owing to the great turn in the bank' which obscured the engineman's view, and the other a greaser who lubricated the waggons, were paid 5s per week each. Four men were employed: a machine man at 21s (£1.05) per week, a man attending to the waggons at 15s (75p), who was probably a set rider, a man 'hanging on waggons at bottom' and a man at the bank top. To reach the summit of Warden Law involved a climb of 1:91 for 775.5 yards and a steep ascent of 1:20 for the remaining 775.5 yards. The engine hauled eight loaded waggons up and let eight empties down. Six men were employed to operate this section of the railway: the engineman at 21s (£1.05) per week, the fireman at 18s, and four men attending to the waggons on either 14s (70p) or 15s (75p) per week.

Four inclined planes were in use on the descent from Warden Law. The First Inclined Plane was operated by two set riders, one with the loaded waggons and one with the empty waggons, each on 15s (75p) a week. A boy was stationed at the meetings where the signal bell was located. He was paid 7s 6d (37p). The Second Inclined Plane was operated by two riders, and a boy 'at the meetings owing to a turn in the way' who was probably another bell boy. The Third Inclined Plane was operated by two men each on 15s (75p) a week. There was also a boy greasing the waggons, paid 5s (25p) a week. At the Fourth Inclined Plane there was also a boy greasing the waggons, again on 5s (25p) a week. The signal bells for the last two planes, which were shorter, were at the foot of the incline rather than the meetings and were probably operated by one of the men.

The railway to the Fifth Incline was a gentle downhill section of 1:125 for one mile and a half which levelled out for the next mile making it ideal for using locomotives. Three locomotives were eventually employed on this section together with their drivers and boys (firemen) on 21s (£1.05) and 12s (60p) a week respectively. There were no signals on this section.

Another self-acting inclined plane operated over the remaining 325 yards to the staithes, a gradient of 1:14. Two men attended at 15s (75p) per week each and one man was responsible for braking at 21s (£1.05) per week. The two large wooden staithes were managed by the staithman, who was responsible for the sale of the coal to the captains of the collier vessels and also for the operation of the waggonway. The importance of his job is reflected in his salary of £3 per week. A further inclined plane at the staithes lowered two waggons at a time. Besides the staithman, six teamers were employed to load the ships, a man to operate the inclined plane and, interestingly, two night watchmen suggesting that theft or criminal damage was a problem. It certainly was a problem elsewhere on waggonways in the eighteenth century. In 1769, it was thought necessary by Parliament to pass an act making 'destroying or damaging…waggonways or other things used in the conveyance of coals' a criminal offence for which the penalty was seven years transportation. Note the bell on the gibbet on the far right at the base of the fifth incline, to signal to the engineman at the top that the train of empty waggons was ready to be hauled up by the force of the loaded waggons descending. The large structure in the background is an inland staith or depot for storing coal to prevent it weathering which reduced the value. The staithman was by far the best paid man involved in the transport system above ground. He received £3 per week whilst the drivers of the travelling engines, and also George Dodd, the inspector of the railway, received a mere 21 shillings (£1.05). The maintenance team led by George Dodd comprised four men and four boys on 18s (80p) and 14s (70p) a week in 1823. George Dodd left Hetton in 1826 to build the first commercially successful locomotive in Scotland and run the railway workshops at Kipps near Glasgow with his sons, which is a testimony to the ability of the man who had managed the Hetton Railway.

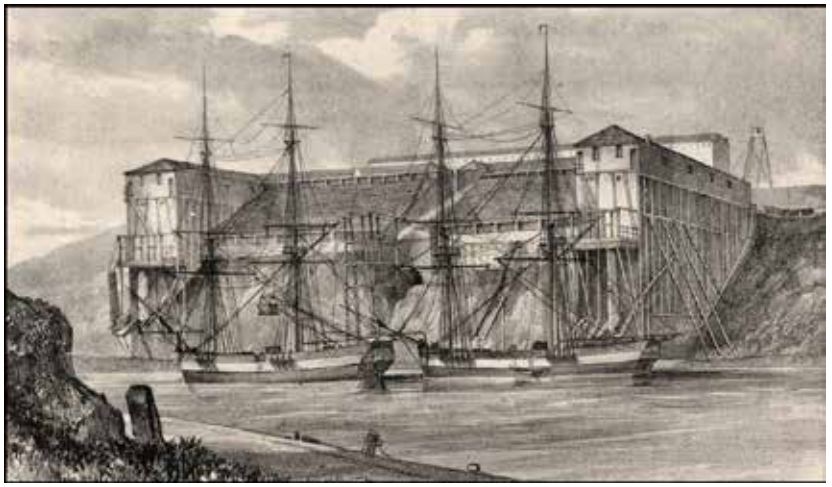

Fig 5; The Staithes [needs a source]

Pithead Crew	Operations		Staith Crew	Maintenance
8 labourers 11s	Locos.	5 drivers 21s	1 staithman 60s	4 men 18s
2 shunters 17s 6d		5 boys 12s	6 teemers	4 boys 14s
	Stationary Engines	2 Enginemen 21s	1 incline plane man	
		2 firemen 18s	2 night watchmen	
	5 Inclined Planes	8 men * 15s		
		2 bellboys 7s 6d		
		2 greasers 5s		
		1 brakeman 21s		
	* these are man riders		wages not recorded	

Fig 6; Workers on the Hetton Overland Railway in 1822

Although George Dodd's account only refers to the workers above ground, it provides some understanding of the personnel needed to operate a railway in the early nineteenth century as the diagram above illustrates. There were others involved, notably the colliery viewer who was in overall charge of the enterprise and would have had access to the administrative and legal staff of the company, but these were the 55 men and boys who got their hands dirty operating half of the transport system.

Interestingly, a comparable record survives in the archives of the Mining Institute of the men and boys needed to operative the Newbottle railway, which terminated alongside the Hetton line at Bishopwearmouth.[11] The drivers of the steam engines – both stationary and travelling – are the best paid men working on these two railways with a weekly wage of 21 shillings (£1.05) which more than matches the earnings of most hewers. But the driver's task was an arduous one since only a single driver is recorded for each engine. Whereas the hewers would have worked about seven hours, the drivers could have been on duty for twice that time during a busy period on the railway. The next category, those men who were paid 18s (90p), belonged to the firemen of the stationary engines, the maintenance engineers on the Hetton line and the team operating the staithes on the Newbottle line. The shunters in the yard at Hetton, who were redeployed waggonmen, earned marginally less – 17s 6d (87p). The rate of pay for a set rider on both railways was 15s (75p). Amongst the boys, the best-paid were those members of the maintenance team at Hetton on 14s (70p) per week which was almost twice as much as the bell boys operating the signals. The boys assisting the waggonmen by driving horses on the flat sections of the Newbottle Way earned 12s (60p) as did those acting as firemen on the locomotive on the Hetton line. However, the usual rate for boys was much less: the bell boys earned 7s 6d (37p), the water carrier for the engine at Middle Herrington earned 6s (30p), but the rate for the humble greaser was only 5s (25p).

Despite their shortcomings, the records of Hetton Colliery, corroborated by those of Newbottle, are important for their scarcity value. Collectively, they provide some understanding of the workers employed on the overland railway and the wages they were paid in the 1820s. Unfortunately, similar detailed records do not survive for the workers on the extensive network of underground railways. Nonetheless, the records show that George Stephenson's system to get the coals from the coal face, first to the surface and then to the collier ships moored in the River Wear, was very complex. There was a great deal of machinery in use, including

four haulage engines, one massive pumping engine, four stationary steam engines, eleven inclined planes and five locomotives. In addition, there were over eighty horses operating mainly below ground but also on the surface for shunting in the marshalling yard beyond the screens. There was a hierarchy of workers with the colliery viewer, the staithman and the superintendent of the railway – the management – at the top, followed by the skilled engineers working the various steam engines to the boys greasing the waggons and operating the bells for signalling. In the mine boys progressed from keeping a trap door, to driving a waggon, to putting, then to being a putter/hewer before being engaged as a full-time hewer. It may be that a similar ladder of promotion existed on the railway with the boys beginning as a greaser and progressing to becoming a bell boy, which would give them experience of railway work, before securing a place on the footplate or with the maintenance team. At the end of their training, there was the possibility of well-paid employment on the railway as drivers, enginemen, firemen or senior members of the permanent way gang where they could earn a significant income for a member of the working class at this time. It is no accident that sons followed their fathers onto the railway and that the senior posts, such as the enginemen, were often held by members of the same family for many years.[12]

1 See Les Turnbull, *Hidden Treasures* (Newcastle: North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers (NEIMME), 2021), for a more detailed account of the winning of Hetton Colliery.

2 C. von Oeynhausen and H. von Dechen, *Railways in England 1826 and 1827* (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons for Newcomen Society, 1971), p. 33-42.

3 John Phillips, Memoirs of William Smith, LL.D. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.13; Charles Hatchett ed. by Arthur Raistrick, T*he Hatchett Diary: a tour through the counties of England and Scotland in 1796 visiting their mines and manufactories* (Truro: Barton, 1967); *Heaton Below the Surface: William 'Strata' Smith and Charles Hatchett*, Heaton History Group archive, https://heatonhistorygroup.org/tag/charles-hatchett [last accessed 29 July 2022]

4 The Common Room/NEIMME/Buddle Diary 1816.

5 Michael W. Flinn, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 386-95.

6 Archives of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, Sy CX 4b.

7 George Dodd's account is privately owned, but a transcript is available in Peter Collins, *Hetton Railway*, which has been reprinted for the bicentenary by the Hetton Local and Natural History Society.

8 Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums: DF/28/1-4, p.441.

9 The Common Room/NEIMME/Watson 5/26.

10 The Common Room/NEIMME/Watson 31/34/; Robinson, *Perspective View 1822*.

11 The Common Room/NEIMME/Watson 59/2/21.

12 The Hetton Railway 200 Committee are to publish two books about the men who worked on the railway, namely *The Diaries of William Hopper and James Mullen* by John Cook and *The Memories of Arthur Temple* by Colin Mountford.

North East Labour History Society

Appreciations

Bill Lawrence

Bill Lawrence, who died on 30th October 2021 aged 79, was a remarkable activist and campaigner - on health and safety issues, but also on history and heritage with the Workers Educational Association (WEA).

He was a national and international expert on construction safety and the campaign to ban workplace asbestos. His work as an activist developed directly from his first-hand experience of working in what he called a "shitty factory" in the 1970s. His first published article appeared in the first edition of Hazards magazine, which is still going strong as a quarterly journal - an important source of advice, information and guidance for workers and

trade unionists. In his early years, he became very knowledgeable on noise and industrial deafness, and campaigned relentlessly on behalf of workers to get the law changed and to obtain compensation for those affected. Like many others, such as the Shrewsbury pickets, he realised that the construction companies and owners responded to anyone raising health and safety concerns by blacklisting them, and he became involved in the Blacklisted Workers Campaign. Many of his subsequent articles over the next 30 years were written over the signature of 'Workers Rights'.

Bill became secretary of the Construction Safety Campaign at a time when deaths in the industry averaged 200-250 a year. He became an expert on asbestos and the subsequent disease of mesothelioma, which directly causes the premature death of many thousands of workers and their families. Bill worked for a time as Health and Safety officer with the Trade Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU) in the North East and subsequently continued to provide expert representation and support for trade unions and their lawyers and members, and the European Member of Parliament, Stephen Hughes.

Bill also lectured on health and safety with the WEA and other organisations and continued to research the lethal behaviour of asbestos companies, who exported the stripping of asbestos lagging in ships, as well as the subsequent mesothelioma, to workers in the developing world. According to Steve Grinter, formerly with the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation, 'Bill became an indefatigable expert on world trade and movement of asbestos. For example, he understood how to trace global shipping movements and made close links with workers and their trade unions around the world to raise awareness as well as to monitor and control this deadly industry'. This led directly to the global campaign to ban asbestos, and he worked closely with Laurie Kazan Allen, at the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat. In 2011, the centenary year of the death of Robert Tressell, author of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, he was awarded the Robert Tressell Award for services to working people by the UK Construction Safety Campaign. Bill was never afraid to challenge

authority. He was a powerful speaker, especially when upholding worker rights and safety standards.

Bill was one of the key organisers of the Hazards Conference in Durham in 2000. Those trade unionists involved in that field have expressed great sadness at his passing.

In more recent years Bill became interested in the history of industrial diseases and this led to his involvement, with Nigel Todd and others, in establishing the North East WEA History and Heritage Branch. He was a pro-active secretary to this new branch bringing to each meeting a range of fascinating speakers. As part of a WEA group, researching the effects of the First World War, he took part in a visit to Belgium. He had already developed knowledge of the Birtley Belgians, who had relocated to Tyneside and formed a community, many of whom were employed in the armaments factory at Birtley. This history so fascinated him he eventually wrote a play about it, which was performed in Belgium. He became an honorary tour guide for Talbot House Museum in Poperinge, which was in unoccupied Belgium during the war and became a rest and recreation centre for all soldiers.

This led to Bill's involvement in a book, Landmarks of Social Progress, published in 2020 by the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers with funding from the European Commission. This recorded the history of a number of European countries, written by trade unionists and grass roots activists. Bill was part of the inaugural panel and, together with Professor Linda Clarke of the University of Westminster, wrote the British section. She has written:

'Bill was enthusiastically involved with the work of the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers, more recently in its ambitious attempt to enhance cross-national understanding and encourage engagement with specific histories of social progress in Europe through the Landmarks of Social Progress project. He was responsible for the UK part, highlighting paths and steps towards achieving the goals of justice, freedom and equality, such as public baths and wash houses (1832), the long

history of the Birtley Belgians (1914) and the conversion plan for Lucas Aerospace (1976). This well expressed some of Bill's many qualities: his internationalism, love and knowledge of labour history, and determination to improve working conditions'.

Bill Lawrence was a remarkable and unusual man. He knew so much and accumulated massive amounts of detailed knowledge. He could talk forever, but would acknowledge this and was kind and sensitive in meetings and encouraged others. He had become progressively unwell over the last few years and in Sept. 2020 he wrote about stepping down as secretary of the History and Heritage Branch, 'I do so enjoy my times with the branch but I fear they are reaching an end…I am advised by family and the clinicians to be extremely careful in what and when I do anything. As ever I feel I know what is best for myself – even though the advisors have made my life so much better. Sounds confusing, I know'.

In March 2021, Bill was named as the recipient of "the Alan," a prize given to UK health and safety activists in appreciation of his sustained efforts to support working people and the disadvantaged, and named after Alan Dalton, the campaigner in whose name this award was given.

At his funeral, his son movingly described their many family holidays to unusual and fascinating destinations in Europe, which Bill researched and for which arranged the train and bus transport. He was a great family man and was loved by his wife, children, grand-children and great grand-children. He will also never be forgotten by the thousands of workers who benefited from his activism and knowledge and knew him to be a man of great intelligence, energy and passion.

Keith Hodgson
Chair of North East WEA

'Bill's poster of his activity as 'Bum on a Bus', produced for a creative WEA event in 2018'.

Obituary; Doreen Henderson

Kath Connolly

I became involved in the Popular Politics Project when the North East Labour History Society, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, took on the huge task of recording the oral histories of political activists in the region. I loved the challenge of meeting and recording how political people I knew had, 'got their politics'. I am so pleased I did, as several of these great local figures are no longer here to tell their own story. The latest to leave us, at the grand age of 94, was Doreen Henderson (Elliott) whom I recorded on 17 November 2012.

She was a political firebrand, a fierce defender of her class, part of the Elliott family folk-singing legend, and a very proud member of a Durham mining family. Above all, Doreen was an incredibly warm woman with a great sense of humour and an infectious laugh. We got to know Doreen and her husband Bryan during the Miners' Strike. They were steadfast in the Chester le Street miners' support group and the wider support networks, entertainers at many socials, and lifelong friend and comrade to so many who shared her politics and her love of working class culture.

Bill Elliott, Doreen's nephew, summed her up beautifully,

'There is a wonderful mining song which she loved, from the Kentucky Coalfields, called 'Which side are you on?' This is not a question needed to be asked of my Auntie Dot.'

Doreen was born in November 1927 to Jack and Em in what was locally known as 'the huts' in Birtley. Doreen described how Elisabethville had been a

First World War colony for the Belgian workers brought to Birtley to make their contribution to the war effort in the local munitions works. As well as homes, it provided a store (still used today as a vehicle bodywork business), hospital, school, church and gendarmerie. Once the war was over, many of the Belgians were repatriated leaving the Elisabethville huts vacant. In the dreadful housing shortages of post-war Durham, these were the only 'Homes Fit for Heroes' that were available locally, and squatters moved in. They were three bedroomed, rent- and electricity-bill-free with flush toilets. This was a domestic luxury she was not to have again until 1936, and the family never again had such a big house. Her dad's brothers lived there, and once one of the huts became vacant word spread to friends and family, so they did not remain vacant for long.

The interviews carried out for this project focused on their politics and so my first question asked of all interviewees was where their politics came from. Doreen was a child of the Durham Coalfield; all four Elliott brothers worked at Harraton Colliery. This was known locally as Cotia, which seems to have been a name derived from Nova Scotia, and given because of the numbers of Scots who made their way into that part of Durham. Both of Elm's brothers worked as miners too, so Doreen was surrounded by miners. She didn't realise she was political, and said it was just the way they were, it was 'just in them'. Conditions for miners and their families were so bad, they had a sense of their class. The majority of pitmen were political without being members of a political party. Union men, they just knew they were 'being shafted'. So they were brought up as socialists. Knowing how hard life was, Doreen was always puzzled why Jack had such a love of the pit. He would say 'she's a bitch'; 'pits were always she'.

Doreen came from a very musical family and music was always a part of her happy childhood in Barley Mow not far from Elizabethville. She described how they would spend hours singing, without her realising then that they were anything other than 'their songs'. Her Dad and older brother Pete joined the Newcastle Folk club and they loved them. Her father was a great raconteur, singing protest and pit songs and playing guitar, banjo, jews harp and accordion. He was, she said, marvellous at telling the tale; '

'They thought pitmen were thick but when they heard him they changed their minds, he said, I'm not a one off tha knaas, there's hundreds of clever people down the pit'.

The Elliotts were part of the folk revival of the 50s and 60s; they established the long-running and very successful Birtley Folk Club. Later when they moved to the Washington Arts Centre, Doreen was a key member of the Davy Lamp Folk Club. Online tributes after her death have described her as a role model and mentor, welcoming everyone and making them feel important.

Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger came up to Newcastle in 1961 and stayed with Jack and Em at their home in Barley Mow. They were intrigued by the wealth of their songs and almost Chaucerian local dialect, and the Elliott family got their first booking at Ewan MacColl's Singers Club in London.

The closure of the pits left most of the ex-mining communities with multiple economic and social problems. In the 1990s/2000s regeneration projects often focused on their mining heritage and replica miners' banners were part of that regeneration.[1] Doreen and her family raised the money to have a Harraton Colliery banner made depicting on one side her father Jack and another great local folk singer from Cotia Colliery, Jock Purdon (who wrote the song *Ye brave bold men of Cotia*.) Displayed in the Pitmen's Parliament at Redhills, it was taken out each July and proudly paraded at the Big Meeting. Rather than the usual accompanying brass band, the Cotia group sang the Pitmen's anthem, an American folksong, ' *Union Miner*,' to the balcony on the County Hotel; always to the delight of the crowd. This was such an important occasion for Doreen, even in her 90s. She had to rely on her walker, and took four hours to walk with it through the streets of Durham.

Doreen died on 20 March 2022, aged 94. Hers was a very special funeral, a joyous event. Family and friends spontaneously joined the piper in singing *Mountain Thyme*, shared many special memories, and gave her a rousing send off with *Union Miner*. The whole atmosphere captured Doreen's spirit. She couldn't have organised it any better! It felt like a coming together of like minded friends and comrades, a great tribute to a life dedicated to her family, her music and her politics.

Doreen's full interview is held at the Durham County Record Office, reference D/NELH 9021, The interview notes can be found on the NELHS Website, www.nelh.net. You can watch a recording of Doreen and Bryan singing at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOyaz9kKOBY.

[1] For a discussion of the importance of the banner project, see, Carol Stephenson and David Wray, 'Now that the work is done: *Community unionism* in a post-industrial context, in Community Unionism, ed. by Jo McBride and Ian Greenwood (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 23-48.

NIGEL TODD: His Life in the WEA

Clerk; Student; Tutor; Historian; Regional Director; Branch Secretary; Regional Committee member; ambassador and advocate.

It is difficult to convey the collective outpouring of shock and grief that followed the unexpected death of Nigel Todd in March 2021. As the news spread throughout Nigel's many networks there was a huge sense of disbelief and loss. He had been working and active that week, and fully involved up to the day he died.

In his Workers' Educational Association (WEA) role, Nigel was a vital and central figure for many decades. The WEA had been an important part of his life since his teenage years when he started work as a clerk in the London District office in 1965, where one of his jobs was to light the coal fires in the office, as well as learning how to take minutes and to understand formal committee structures. It was here he developed his lifelong interest in working class adult education and politics, especially after taking part in a number of WEA classes and a TUC postal course. He was encouraged and supported by the District Secretary and a Tutor Organiser to apply to Ruskin College in 1967, on the two-year Diploma in Social Studies.[1]

Ruskin facilitated the skills, self-confidence and political understanding which helped him take on many important jobs, both with the co-operative movement and the WEA.

I knew Nigel for over 30 years. I first worked with him when he was a WEA tutor, and I was Education Officer for the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE). We ran a joint residential NUPE/WEA Return to Learn Course (R2L) at Durham University. R2L was a ground-breaking course pioneered by the WEA and NUPE, aimed at NUPE members who had left

school with few or no qualifications and wanted to get back to learning. Nigel was very supportive of R2L, and particularly good at reassuring anxious learners taking their first tentative steps into further education. I was impressed with his gentle manner and enthusiasm for learning. It was the quality of the tutoring experience that made the R2L course such a success over so many years as it continued into the new merged union UNISON, and helped thousands of union members back into education.

North East Regional Director

Nigel progressed from being a WEA Tutor to become the North East WEA Regional Director, from 2005 – 2011. At that time the region was in some difficulty financially; he helped rescue the organisation, turned it round and made it once again a force in the Region. Building on the partnership with UNISON and the Open University, he helped establish the innovative and exciting Bridges to Learning (B2L) project in 2001, with funding from Unionlearn and the TUC. This partnership provided secondment opportunities in a number of NHS Trusts and Local Authorities for union learning representatives in order to encourage staff to get back into learning, gain qualifications and progress into professional development. The B2L partnership engaged with many employers and thousands of learners, and was instrumental in demonstrating the role of unions in workforce development and life-long learning. It thrived for 21 years until March 2021, when the Tory Government disgracefully cut its funding.[2]

Nigel was very adept in successfully accessing other funds from Government, including the Single Regeneration Fund (SRB) in Newcastle and Northumberland. These were for adult education projects with disadvantaged communities, with an additional focus on developing civic engagement and democratic activity. He also successfully bid for funds from the high-profile "5 Arts Cities", a collaboration between Channel 5, the Baltic and Newcastle/Gateshead partnership.[3]

He was a gentle, kind man, always self-effacing, and never seeking the limelight; yet he had a quiet, steely determination to make things happen. His list of achievements in so many areas and causes is exceptional, and he had a

profound knowledge of the history of the working class and adult education in our region. He co-authored a fascinating centenary account of the WEA in the north of England from 1910 to 2010.[4]

In his role as Regional Director, he was an early advocate of campaigning against climate change. In partnership with myself from UNISON, David Knight (Regional Director of the Open University), and Russell Porteous (from the regional Co-operative Society) he suggested a series of UN World Development Day Regional Conferences on climate change. One memorable Climate Change conference was held at Newcastle's Discovery Museum in 2008 with around 100 participants. As part of that event a group of Woodcraft Folk young people had been invited to run a session over the lunch period. Led by 14 year old Saskia, they launched into a short play along the lines of Forum Theatre, as inspired by Paulo Freire. Saskia called on the assembled delegates to take on parts and re-do the performance to seek solutions. There followed an embarrassed silence, broken very quickly by Nigel leading the way and encouraging others to take on roles and enter into the spirit of co-operation.

Nigel's commitment to combatting climate change never left him and, after he retired as Regional Director, he took on the voluntary role of Branch Secretary of the first WEA Green Branch.

Towards the end of his time as Regional Director the national organisation embarked on one of its all too frequent attempts to re-organise, in the hope of making the WEA more acceptable to funding bodies, under the heading of New Look. Nigel was prompted into action to defend the original values and principles of adult education he believed in, by circulating a document setting out his ideas, *Re-igniting the Adventure: Towards the Barefoot WEA.*[5]

Albert Mansbridge, who had founded the WEA in 1904, described it as 'an adventure in working class education, as a self-governing organisation where students would determine their own course of study, education for life not narrow training for work'.[6] In his document, Nigel quoted Albert Mansbridge at the outset, 'It is impossible to express in words the spirit of a movement, it is almost always undesirable to try, but there are times when the risk must be run, because it is wise to recall the fundamental principles of its existence'.[7] He

argued against the top-down centralising re-organisation of his managers and suggested a low cost education movement dependent on community association and solidarity, 'rather than marketing, media and layers of management, the local is always the strength and the fundamental building block of effective organisation'.[8]

Back to Local Activism

His thoughts did not win many converts with senior managers and it was not long before Nigel retired to practise what he preached at local level as a volunteer. After helping to set up the first WEA Green Branch, Nigel was successful in obtaining a significant £1mn Big Lottery grant for a project, 'Greening Wingrove', in the West End of Newcastle. He subsequently took on a role as a peripatetic ambassador, encouraging other regions of the WEA to set up Green Branches, and eventually established a national WEA Green Network, with funding support from the Lipman Miliband Trust to help take his local initiative to a national level. Without Nigel's knowledge and skill in networking and politics, it is unlikely any of this would have come to fruition.

Nigel was also actively involved in helping to establish the WEA History and Heritage Branch in the North East, freely sharing his knowledge and skills as a treasured historian. In partnership with Dr Jude Murphy, and a team of committed volunteers from the WEA, he made a considerable contribution to two National Lottery Heritage Fund projects, T*he WEA in World War One* and *Turbulent Times*, both of which collected remembrance, local research and artistic responses to the First World War and the decade beyond. These projects included memorable research trips to war sites in Belgium and France, as well as to archives in London, Cheltenham and Manchester.[9]

Nigel was an active member of our North East Regional Committee and continued to fly the flag for a much wider role for adult education in environmental sustainability and the democratic participation of disadvantaged communities. He continually used his huge network of contacts to raise the profile of the WEA.

At our regional AGM in November 2017 he drew our attention to a long forgotten piece of work from the Ministry of Reconstruction, a Report on the future of Adult Education, following the First World War and the Flu Pandemic.[10] He subsequently moved a motion calling for the WEA to establish a working group to look at celebrating the centenary of this report in 2019. This was forwarded to our National Conference and in due course led to the bringing together of all those interested in adult learning through the Centenary Commission. Nigel played an active part in supporting, researching and facilitating all those involved in the Centenary Commission work advocating for a much wider role for adult and community learning in the pandemic recovery. *[11]

Many members and activists in the WEA have said how heartbroken they were at the loss of a friend, a colleague and a comrade. The last Regional Annual Report featured a range of tributes, including one from the General Secretary of the WEA, Simon Parkinson. Nigel's work was acknowledged at both the North East AGM in November 2021, and the National WEA Conference in October 2021.

Graham Brown from our North East Regional Committee, who knew Nigel well and had worked with him at the Open College Network. said, 'They say no-one is irreplaceable, but Nigel came as close to denying that as anyone I have ever known.'

Nigel's life and legacy is something we celebrate and treasure in the WEA; our task is to ensure his work carries on.

Keith Hodgson,
North East WEA Regional Chair

1 Nigel Todd, *Blitheringly Fantabulous – Ruskin College 1967-69*. (Journal of the NELH, Vol 47, 2016), pp 143 – 150.
2 Bridges to Learning, https://www.bridgestolearning.org.uk .
3 Fivearts cities, http://www.write2b.co.uk/evaluation_five.html
4 Nigel Todd, *A Working Class Hero is Something to Be: The origins of the Workers' Educational Association in the North East* in *The Right to Learn – the WEA in the North of England 1910-2010*. Edited by Jonathon Brown (WEA. London. 2010).

5 Nigel Todd, *Re-igniting the adventure: towards the barefoot WEA*. (Internal unpublished WEA paper, January 2011).
6 Selina Todd, *Snakes and Ladders.* (Penguin Random House, 2021), p 23.
7 Albert Mansbridge, *An adventure in working class education: being the story of the Workers Educational Association 1903-1915*, (London: Longmans, 1920) pp54-55.
8 Nigel Todd, *Re-igniting the adventure*. As above.
9 The Highway – Special Commemorative Edition. The Workers Educational Association in World War 1 in the North East.(London: WEA, 2016).And The Highway – Turbulent Times 1918-28 (London: WEA 2018). https://weainworldwar1.wordpress.com; https://weaturbulent times.wordpress.com
10 Ministry of Reconstruction Adult Education Committee (1919) Final Report, Cmd 321. (London: HMSO).

Centenary Commission on Adult Education – Adult Education and Life Long Learning for 21st Century Britain, (2020, University of Nottingham

TO NIGEL FROM THE SWEDES

-What makes people act?
Talking about popular movements and social action
at the Tyneside Coffee Rooms.
-Many are angry or sad about the state of things
but how come some choose to protest while others brood?
Some organise self-reliant organisations and inventive ways to
make ends meet.
While other just leave things as they are.
What makes people act? What makes them act together?
We never answered those questions thoroughly.
We always came back to them when we met.

But Nigel answered the first question in his own way of being.
He acted.
He did almost all the things social and radical historians study
and write about.
But Nigel never turned the spotlight on himself.
He just talked about all the interesting things he was involved in,
never mentioning what his own role in it all.
Every time we visited the North, he would show us something new.
New schools in old buildings, a greener Wingrove, educational initiatives,
and much, much more.

It maybe that the roses and revolutionaries he studied can be found in
Sweden too.
But there is no Nigel here to write about them
no humble and resolute man like him.

His calm voice and smile made all the things he said even more urgent.
He did not shout, he was like the patient teacher who waits,
for talkers to go silent and listen.

When there is too much populist panic in the world,
too many self-proclaimed saviours or doomsday men at the speaker's corner.
We need to do like Nigel,
act
and speak only when necessary.

We miss you so much. We learned a great deal from you. And we will try in our own ways of being and acting to honour the memory of a very special man.

Katarina, Ola, Carla and Selma
Katerina Friberg

North East Labour History Society

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

Reviews

Michael Barke, Brian Robson and Anthony Champion, ***Newcastle upon Tyne: Mapping the City*** (Berlinn Ltd 2021) xvi+256pp ISBN: 978-1-78027-726-4), £30.

This excellent book is the latest volume in a series that aims to tell the story of individual cities through archive maps and panoramas interpreted through a series of chapters organised chronologically. For Newcastle, the fifty-two chapters range from the thirteenth century to the present day and include essays on both the maps and their historical and geographical context. Thus John Speed's famous Newcastle map of 1610 is preceded by a chapter on the `Coaly Tyne' (mining and the export trade) and is immediately followed by an essay on the impact of the Civil War. This combination of cartography and context helps to make the book both a reference work and a readable history, and as such will undoubtedly appeal to a wide audience.

John Speed's plan of 1610 was the first detailed town plan of Newcastle, but what may surprise some readers is to discover that the original survey was not the work of Speed but local man William Mathew, a source that Speed acknowledges but about whom little is known. This is a good example of the collaborative nature of cartography, requiring a team effort to bring to fruition, from surveyor, to engraver, sometimes an illustrator, a printer, a publisher, and of course a sponsor. Speed's plan was subsequently republished by later map-makers with virtually no changes from the original or any acknowledgement of Speed's original, a practice of borrowing that was not uncommon in the 1600s.

The next detailed survey of Newcastle to be published was that by Corbridge, in 1723, and was another example of borrowing, being used by Henry Bourne (without reference to Corbridge) in his History of Newcastle (1736). As the town of Newcastle grew, so the number of detailed surveys multiplied, and Hutton/Fryer (1770), Beilby (1788), Wood (1827),

and Oliver (1830) are all presented in detail as outstanding examples of Newcastle's rich cartographic heritage. Thereafter, Newcastle's maps are presented through a series of themed essays that include the Town Moor, the impact of the Great Fire in 1854, municipal parks, suburban development, retail development, and the use of maps by the Medical Officer of Health for illustrating the incidence and geographical spread of infectious diseases.

In their introduction, the authors state that the history of a city can only be fully understood in relation to its surrounding area, and for Newcastle this means the river and thus the wider Tyneside. Consequently there are a number of chapters that examine cartographical evidence of early railways (1740s), Tyneside industries (1800s), the regional rail network (1840s), shipbuilding on the Tyne, and Tyneside at War (1940s). In some chapters the authors specifically focus on towns outside Newcastle, such as Jarrow (1936), and North and South Shields. The latter are presented in some detail, with reference to Fryer's plan of the River Tyne (1787), Rook's plan of North Shields (1827), Wood's plan of South Shields, and a later look at Shields and Whitley Bay in the 1940s. Whilst the Tyneside context is important, these chapters diverge from the declared focus on the city of Newcastle. When Berlinn published a similar volume on Glasgow in 2015 they subsequently published a volume on mapping the Clyde (2017). Perhaps a similar volume mapping the Tyne should be considered.

This is a large format book that presents images of historic maps and plans displayed at a scale and size that are readable as documents in their own right, supported by a wealth of interpretative text. Michael Barke and Anthony Champion are retired academics from Newcastle's universities, and their local knowledge and understanding of the history of the town's cartographic heritage is evident throughout this volume. Much of the credit for initiating this volume lies with Brian Robson, a native of our region and former professor of urban geography at Manchester University. Sadly, Brian did not live to see this Newcastle volume published but his co-authors have done him, and Newcastle, proud.

Mike Greatbatch

Peter S Chapman, ***A Tyneside Heritage – South Shields, County Durham and the Chapman Family, 1811-1963,*** (The History Press, 2021) ISBN: 978 0 7509 9626 6, 424 pp., £25.

Peter Chapman's well researched book covers the social and political history of South Shields through the experience of five generations of his family over 150 years. He cleverly combines the story of South Shields growth through the 19th Century with the lives of his great-great-grandfather Robert Chapman and his son Henry as they improved their status from draper, ship owner through to Henry being an accountant. While recognising they were fortunate to have had comfortable lives unlike many in the town, Peter concludes the first half of his book by describing the tragedy of WW1as it touched Henry's family, those they lost and the survivors; reflecting how so many other families had suffered.

I found the middle section of the book, describing Henry's son Robert's political career through the inter-war years, really interesting. Especially those interludes like Robert's brief return to military service, in 1921, which highlighted the Government's planning against the striking miners and how far they were prepared to go. Robert's role as Chair of South Shields Public Assistance Committee demonstrated how 'moderates' like him, despite their philanthropic views, continued implementing Government policies uncritically. While Peter feels Robert's action in meeting a deputation from the unemployed shows his fairness, I feel his refusal to countenance any reversal in benefit cuts is more telling.

So it came as no surprise to learn that the Houghton-le-Spring Conservatives chose Robert as their 'National Candidate' for the 1931 election, where he defeated sitting Labour MP Robert Richardson. Peter portrays Robert carrying out his multiple roles during this period (he had been elected Mayor of South Shields) and displaying a sense of duty, which many current MPs lack. After Robert's defeat at the next election, by unemployed miner William J Stewart, Peter concludes this section with a thorough description of Robert's continuing role in civic society, from

Alderman to promotor of Team Valley Trading Estate as Chair of North Eastern Trading Estates Ltd, highlighting Robert's connections to his community.

The final section provides an interesting insight into the impact of WW2 on South Shields through Robert's involvement in Civil Defence, his wife Hélène's role in the Women's Voluntary Service, and his son's and nephew's military service, including one being awarded the Victoria Cross. Despite Robert's commitment to the community, his opposition to the Labour Council's decision to open shops on Sundays, for the benefit of soldiers, gives a glimpse of Robert being out of touch with changing values. I must admit that I found the final chapter covering Robert's connections with Royalty and the recognition he received for his life's work less interesting than his earlier involvement with the inter-war social problems, but I am sure others won't.

A Tyneside Heritage provided me with interesting personal insights,and views, on the history of South Shields, and the wider community, from people who were personally involved in it, even if I didn't agree with them.

Stuart Barlow

Tony Fox, ***I Sing of my Comrades: Remembering Stockton's International Brigaders,*** (Stockton IB Memorial Project, 2022; pbk, illus, 94 pages, £8).

Readers may well have seen the show, The Ballad of Johnny Longstaff by The Young'uns, the musical account of the life of the Stockton Hunger Marcher and International Brigader of that name. The success of that show stimulated a campaign for a memorial to the Stockton and Thornaby men who served with the International Brigade in Spain. Tony Fox's book is the history of those volunteers and it is produced to raise funds for their memorial. Readers of North East History will have seen some of this story from Tony's article in the 2020 issue, and he contributes regular updates about the campaign to the NELHS Facebook site.

The account in I Sing makes good use of the resources that have become available for historians of the International Brigade in recent years. These include not just the digitisation of local newspapers but the archive of recorded interviews with veterans held at the Imperial War Museum; also the Comintern material housed at the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History. This archive contains the records of the British Battalion and it is available online. In addition the major published works about the British in Spain are used, alongside memoirs and information from Brigaders' relatives. The result is the most comprehensive account to date of the volunteers from the North East, the contribution they made, and what happened to them.

Twenty-two men from Teesside volunteered and eight of them were killed. We are given an account of their recruitment, travel to Spain and such training as the early volunteers received. All the main battles and campaigns of the three years of conflict involved the Teesside contingent, and the account continues with an analysis of what is known about their role in the fighting. The book contributes to the historiography of the British Battalion in at least one important respect, concerning the role of Bert Overton in the Battle of Jarama in 1937.

Overton, a docker from Stockton and an officer at the battle, is blamed in many accounts for incompetence, errors and panic that were a factor in the devastating casualties suffered by the Battalion at Jarama. Tony uses documents from the Russian Archive to refute this and trace their source to claims by Tom Wintringham, another officer at the time who subsequently became famous for his writings on the idea of the 'people's war'. In fact it appears that this was a successful attempt by Wintringham to deflect attention from his own failings and unjustly lay the responsibility on Bert Overton. I hope Tony makes this narrative available for wider acknowledgement and discussion among historians of the Spanish Civil War.

The book also covers the activities of the survivors after their return from Spain. This included continued political activity in some cases, and in several, for example Johnny Longstaff, distinguished service in the armed forces or the merchant navy during the Second World War. The story is brought up to date

with an account of how the British and other International Brigaders returned to and were honoured in democratic Spain, and of the commemorative memorials that have been erected there and in the North East.

I Sing is well-produced (although personally I would have preferred a larger print size) and illustrated by contemporary photographs, artwork and poetry. It is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the North East and the International Brigade. It is available from the People's Bookshop in Durham and the Drake Bookshop in Stockton, and orders can also be placed through the fund raising website www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/stocktonbrigaders. The price is a suggested donation of £8.

Don Watson

Ellen Wilkinson: ***The Town That Was Murdered: The Life Story of Jarrow*** (Merlin Press, ISBN 978-0-85036-749-2, 2019, pbk, 222p, £14.99)

First published in 1939, a month before the outbreak of the Second World War, this excellent account has been out of print for many years. This is a new edition with an introduction by Matt Perry, himself the author of a comprehensive political biography of Ellen Wilkinson. The original Left Book Club edition was one of the Club's famous exposures of the effects of unemployment during the inter-war years, alongside *The Road to Wigan Pier* and Wal Hannington's *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* and *Ten Lean Years*. The quality of the writing is easily their equal.

In the publication publicity, a Left Book Club reviewer commented that the book could have a second title, 'An illustration to Das Kapital.' It does indeed provide a historical account of the development of capitalism in Jarrow and with it the background to the devastation of the local economy in the inter-war years. The first principal phase saw the expansion of the Durham coalfield and the determination of the coal owners to extract the maximum from the workforces whilst allowing the minimum to them. At the same time a hegemony of coal owners, magistrates and Anglican clergy in the early

nineteenth century opposed the efforts of working people to combine to resist and achieve change. The demise of the collieries was followed by the development of Palmer's Shipyard and with it the making of Jarrow as a company town. It offered the most basic of housing and local services, with the domination of local business interests in local government which ensured that rates were kept low despite desperate need for better provision.

Ellen Wilkinson deploys the skills of an investigative journalist as well as a historian, explaining, I believe for the first time, the role of the National Shipping Securities Ltd and the cartel of steel-making and shipbuilding interests in reducing productive capacity; it was not in their financial interests that Jarrow should thrive. The social and health consequences of long-term unemployment and poverty, inevitable given the benefits system and the inadequacies of relief arrangements based on rateable values, are set out in detail.

Yet throughout she highlights how Jarrow people refused victimhood and responded to their situation by forming their own organisations – unions, co-operatives, eventually the Labour Party – in the struggle to assert dignity and shift the balance of power in their favour. As with other Left Book Club editions such as A. L. Morton's *A People's History of England*, it demonstrates how social progress is dependent on action from below and not the magnanimity of elites; the ultimate aim must be the transfer of economic power to working people that socialism represents. Similarly, the thorough research is presented in a highly accessible style.

Matt Perry's Introduction is a concise and fluent account of Wilkinson's political activities and why they, and her best-known book, continue to be important, because of her commitment to trade unionism, to women's equality in the workplace and elsewhere, her internationalism, anti-fascism, and campaigning for refugees. To Wilkinson the agent of change was not simply the Parliamentary Labour Party. Rather, it depended on extra-parliamentary campaigning and the wider movement as a whole. Her well-researched denunciations of the effects of unemployment and poverty resonated through the 1980s and into the contemporary periods of austerity. Unemployment was 'a basic fact of the class struggle' and her statement at the

beginning of the book is as relevant today as it was when written:

> 'In capitalist society vast changes can be made which sweep away the livelihood of a whole town overnight, in the interests of some powerful group, who need take no account of the social consequences of their decisions. These are the facts at the base of the modern labour movement.'

The Town That Was Murdered is a North East labour history classic, and hopefully continuing interest will ensure that it remains in print.

Don Watson

Scottish Labour History Society, www.scottishlabourhistorysociety.scot, subscriptions £20 per year waged, £13 unwaged)

Scottish Labour History, the annual journal of the Scottish Labour History Society, has been published since 1969. It is Scotland's only peer-reviewed labour history journal. Volume 56, for 2021, runs to 212 pages and includes contributions from activists as well as academics.

A theme in this issue is de-industrialisation. 2021 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' work-in, the best known of a series of actions in Scotland that are now recognised as early attempts to thwart the de-industrialisation which accelerated during the following two decades. Two scholarly articles deal with this. One examines the skilful developments in the language used by the workforce leaders and how it played a key role at critical points, successfully legitimising the workers' struggle in the minds of broad swathes of British society. The other examines UCS in the historical context of wider struggles against de-industrialisation before the work-in and subsequently, when it became a benchmark against which subsequent failures were measured. A theme of the article is the activism of the late Jimmy Airlie in the shipbuilding and engineering unions.

A short piece examines the fate of the Maoist Workers' Party of Scotland

(Marxist-Leninist) and the jailing of its leaders in the early 1970s. They had followed the example of their hero Stalin by robbing banks to raise funds. In another article Sam Purdie, a former shaft engineer himself before Ruskin and university, describes the Kames pit disaster of 1957. A catalogue of management failures over safety led to the deaths of 17 miners and the official investigation failed to question those responsible. There is also an account of the Scottish-born Irish revolutionary Margaret Skinnider, a participant in the Easter Rising and the anti-Treaty movement during the Civil War. Her subsequent roles as a feminist and teaching union activist in the Republic have been hidden from history since her death in 1971.

A symposium of reviews discusses de-industrialisation generally in Scotland, Canada and Britain. The Scottish experience was in parallel to England's but with an important political exception. In contrast to the so-called 'red wall', in Scotland the evaporation of the Labour vote was replaced by support for the SNP, a social democratic party seeking self-government in the EU as opposed to the right-wing populism that is Brexit.

A continuing forum has contributions with perspectives on the current and future issues likely to face the study of labour history. 2020 featured Matt Perry on behalf of the Society for the Study of Labour History; 2021 has views from Canadian labour history.

The reviews section is not confined to Scottish history. It includes other relevant books, and compilations of archive deposits, websites and publications of interest to labour historians, reports of events, and obituaries of labour movement figures and other activists.

Subscribers also received an accompanying short book, *Diverse Voices, Challenging Injustice: Banner Tales from Glasgow*. This is an attractively produced and colourful record of the stories behind the banners produced by peace, women's, anti-apartheid and South Asian trade unionists' banners in Scotland since the 1980s. The subscription also gives access to pdf versions of every published article in Scottish Labour History from 1969 to 2021.

Don Watson

North West History Journal No 46, 2021-22. ISBN 13626302 £7.99

Unlike our own Journal, the Journal produced by the North West Labour History Society has an audience beyond members of its Society. It is sold in bookshops and newsagents across the North West, which means the editorial board is always mindful of the importance of good quality graphic design: over 40% of this glossy magazine-style Journal is made up photographs and graphics. What is particularly impressive about it is the way that it successfully merges the desire to engage local people through stories about their own working class history with the requirements and formality of academic rigour.

The full-page photograph on this year's front cover, of a mother accompanied by two small children, pushing a pram across a desolate urban area that looks much like a war zone, provides all the impetus needed to open up this magazine and read more. Once inside, the contents page provides a wide range of historical topics that continue to whet the appetite. The photography of Shirley Baker, whose work adorns the front cover, is the focus of the first article. The author illustrates the article with an impressive array of Baker's photographs of Salford in the 1960s and 1970s. These provide an empathetic but unsentimental portrayal of the consequences of the upheaval of slum clearance, in a period when nationally nearly four million people were being displaced.

Next are two articles linked by a theme: the energies of an emerging merchant class in the North West in the nineteenth century, keen to exploit labour - whether at home or abroad - in order to make their own fortunes. The first article concerns the hypocrisy of John Fielden, a cotton mill owner and a Chartist, who became a MP and fought for the Reform Act, the Ten Hour Act and slavery abolition but at the same time managed to generate enormous wealth for his family's business by speculating on slave-produced cotton. The second article is a less contradictory account of employee persecution. Joseph Baxter Edelsten, John Jones and Arthur Potts, all owners of engineering factories and workshops, profited by disciplining

their workers using the Masters and Servants Acts to capture and arrest errant workers and fine them, and in some cases to imprison them with hard labour, with the help of compliant local magistrates.

The article, 'No Irish Need Apply' by Caitlin Carter was close to my heart. The author, from a family who grew up on a council estate in a segregated Irish community in Manchester, was keen to explore why this segregation continues to exist today, many generations on after the great influx of Irish immigration following the Great Famine.

The theme of resilient women runs through many of the articles. There is a detailed account of a sit-in by mainly female workers at the Meccano factory in 1979 and another article about the success of a women's football team that emerged from the Dick Kerr munitions factory in Preston in 1917. Despite the prejudices against women's football, this team went on the play the Rest of England Women at Goodison in front of a crowd of 53,000 in 1920. Finally there is an extensive article on Ellen Tooley, Eccles' first women councillor.

In the strong Review section at the end of this Journal, I was so engaged by one particularly well written review of Dave Clay's, *A Liverpool Black History 1919-2019*, that I went straight out and bought the book! And as with this Journal, I was not disappointed.

Patrick Candon

Robert Colls, ***This Sporting Life Life Sport and Liberty in England 1760-1960*** (Oxford University Press 2020) ISBN 978-0-1982 208334 391pp. Hbk £22 99p

This book should establish a new field of historical academia.It is huge in scope, rigorous in research, deft in execution but modest in its victory. It shares the episodic character of Colls' other work, and reveals his deep spiritual relationship with sports, from backyard kick about to professorial judgement. The footnotes are extensive, humorous, and combine with the

bibliography to show the massive capacity of this unjustifiably unregarded subject. As well as the fascination of the way it views English popular history, with enough detail to delight any novelist seeking authenticity in ringside, bar-room and street level scenarios from (Crystal) Palace to (St. James) Park.it poses a critical question. How can we expect to understand the people if we fail to comprehend what interests them? Maybe the vigour and organisation of sport was mirrored by union and political representation, but it looks like the former got the 1st XI. Comparisons are indirect, but the loss of British soft power in sport and the 'loss of empire' show the 1st XV didn't do any better. Sporting and national governance are shown as weak, stupid and vindictive, as bullying at Rugby and massacre at Peterloo are explained from another angle. Then again a 'bond contract' which was defeated by pitmen in the 19th Century was not breached by footballers until 1996. Everyone gets a turn in this book – from Chopwell Soviets FC to Cheltenham Ladies College; from Karl Marx to Harry Flashman. The chapter entitled 'All Human Life"' sums it up. This is where the people are and it's not just sport; it's about participation in society. Where, for example would our local, regional or national newspapers be if they didn't include the match results? The author shows the process from an unenclosed peasant existence to an urban, planned grassless environment where the organisation of resistance manifested itself at the community's sense of local identity, not class consciousness. Ii is fascinating and essential and I can't wait to read it again.

Overall verdict – Howked them 5-0! Howay the Lads!

Bill Corcoran

Chartism Day Conference 19 March 2022

This was the first Chartism Day Conference since the one in Newcastle in 2019, and was held at Leeds University in honour of Professor Malcolm Chase, who died in February 2020. It was organised by Drs Joan and Richard Allen of our own Newcastle University, and Henry Irving of the Social History Society. About 55 people registered to attend, including former colleagues and friends of Malcolm Chase. The day was opened by Professor Andrea Major, his colleague at Leeds University, who spoke of his outstanding contribution to labour and social history.

Chartist Lives

Three biographical case studies of Chartist lives, spread through the day, formed a valuable element of the Conference. Dr Janette Martin, archivist at John Rylands Library in Manchester, presented **Samuel Collins (1802-1878)** a poet of Hollinwood, near Oldham. He was present at Peterloo and had worked as a bobbin-winder as a boy, an experience that influenced his later politics and writing. Two collections of poetry written by Collins survive, together with a biography by Benjamin Brierley, a nineteenth-century journalist and writer.

Mark Crail presented the life of his ancestor **James Grassby (1805– 7?)** a Chartist administrator (`an organiser not an orator'), first in Hull where he was born, and later in London as an important figure in the National Charter Association. Although he appears regularly in the *Northern Star* – often cited as a committee member or contributor to Chartist causes – as a backroom administrator Grassby has left few written records, a situation not helped by his wife's decision to burn all his papers when Grassby was indicted on a `conspiracy' charge in 1842. Mark is the host of the website *Chartist Ancestors*.[1]

William Edwards (1796–1849) life was presented by Joan Allen, as his biographer David Osmond, could not attend.[2] He was born near Chepstow, the son of a farmer, and became a founder member of the

Newport Working Men's Society. Edwards' early experience of rural poverty initially led him to become a preacher, and when Chartists began collecting signatures he joined Henry Vincent in touring the mines and ironworks of Monmouthshire. Arrested and tried at Monmouth Assizes, Edwards was imprisoned and on his release became a bookseller. A curious event in his life was his aborted candidacy as a Chartist MP, it being claimed by some that he had been bribed to accept the nomination only to stand down once this was confirmed.

Opposition to Chartism

Dr Richard Allen began the Conference with a paper on the role of Joseph Tregelles Price (1784 – 1854) of Neath in Wales, and the national Peace Society, a small group of influential men, many of whom (like Price) were Quakers. Price and the Peace Society opposed the physical force Chartism that characterised so much of Chartist activity in Wales. Price did not oppose the Chartist goals but argued that demanding six points in one petition would inevitably fail, and it would be better if the six were disaggregated and submitted as separate petitions over a longer period of time. Price successfully persuaded his workforce at Neath Iron Works not to join the Chartists, and intervened to prevent working men from joining the protest at Newport in 1839. He did, though, intervene to try and reduce the sentences of those Chartists convicted at the Assizes.

Dr Joan Allen's paper focused on how the State responded to Chartism through the arrest, trial and imprisonment of Chartist activists. She highlighted the arbitrary handing down of sentences, showing how working class Chartists often received far harsher punishment than their middle class co-conspirators. Better educated and able to draw on greater financial and political support, men like Lovett and Collins in Birmingham could rely on well-placed friends to write letters to the judiciary and Government, while a working man like Samuel Holberry of Sheffield faced 4 years hard labour in Northallerton House of Correction, an experience that resulted in his death from TB in 1842.

Chartism and Political Songs

Dr Mike Sanders of Manchester University presented a paper on the songs composed by John Stafford of Ashton-under-Lyne. Stafford was an illiterate songster whose Songs: *Comic and Sentimental* were transcribed and published by an Ashton publisher in 1840. Perhaps deliberately, the title provides little clue to the politically charged nature of the songs which used popular melodies to promote radical views on a wide range of subjects, from Peterloo to the French Revolution.

The highlight of this in-person Conference (at least for me) was Jennifer Reid's performance of four of the songs via recordings made earlier and now available on YouTube, given online as she was unable to attend. Her obvious love and respect for these songs helped to make clear the powerful impression of Stafford's verse on anyone listening.[3]

The Northern Star, 1843-45

Dr Vic Clarke of York University looked at the editorial changes that resulted from Feargus O'Connor's decision to relocate from Leeds to London in 1843. The first edition of the London paper was on 23 November 1844, when it announced a change of name from *Leeds General Advertiser to National Trades Journal*. The move to London was a result of O'Connor's looming financial crisis, and by focusing more on international news he hoped to rebrand the paper whilst retaining his northern readership.

Memories of Chartism and Contemporary Politics

The way in which Chartism has been reinterpreted since 1918 was the theme of Dr Matt Robert's closing presentation. He identified three distinct interpretations of Chartism: the Fabian view that emphasised collaboration between middle class and working class, which had been popularised in the inter-war years when the generation that experienced Chartism as children were dying out; the militant proletarian view that became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, in which the class consciousness and revolutionary nature of working class Chartism was in the ascendancy;

and the 'Chartists as premature Liberal Democrats' interpretation (a phrase apparently coined by Dorothy Thompson) that today even includes the likes of Michael Gove and Eton College as its advocates. This presentation raised many questions, and resulted in much discussion about the nature of Chartism, commemorative plaques and statues, and how best to bring a wider audience to Chartist history and Chartist lives.

Conference Closure

A heartwarming end to the day was the speech of Shirley Chase who, along with her daughter, had attended the Conference and spoke fondly of her late husband, his contribution to Chartist studies and history teaching generally, and how much he would have enjoyed the various presentations.[4]

Mike Greatbatch

1 https://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/

2 *The Chartist Rambler: William Edwards of Newport,* 1796-1849 (Cardiff: Six Points Publishing, 2022)

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABeDYz2tyxs. Further information on this collection of songs can be found on the Society for the Study of Labour History website: https://sslh.org.uk/2021/06/08/jennifer-reid-sings-the-work-songs-and-ballads-of-nineteenth-century-lancashire/.

4 A full Conference Report is available on https://sslh.org.uk/2022/03/20/chartism-day-2022-report-from-a-day-of-research-song-and-a-missing-friend/ [accessed 20 April 2022]

Bill Lancaster, ***The Making of the Modern World*** (The Common Room, 2022), 188pp. £10.00 paperback, illustrated, and available from the 5 Quarter bar at The Common Room or online via https://thecommonroom.org.uk/collections-2/books/

Sub-titled *The History of the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, Volume 1: 1852-1914*, this book has been published as part of the refurbishment and rebranding of the Institute in 2021. Its

purpose is to present the formation and early history of the Institute through the lives of its leading members, including some not previously available in published biographies. In doing so, the author aims to demonstrate how their innovations influenced industries new and old, and thereby `created what is now the modern world'.

The first part of the book provides an overview of the years 1852 to 1914. It highlights the early importance to the Institute of John Craiggy's School in Crawcrook in which many of its future members (including its first President, Nicholas Wood) received tuition in mathematics and surveying. The Institute was established to develop and promote the twin goals of mine safety and the efficient extraction of minerals, and Lancaster demonstrates how this initial interest encouraged close collaboration and overlap of membership with other North East institutions like the Natural History Society and the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society (the Lit and Phil), which provided the venue for the inaugural meeting on 21 August 1852. It was not until 1868 that the site of the former Medical School adjacent to the Lit and Phil was purchased and funds raised to build a permanent home for the Institute, with Archibald Dunn's Gothic design opening its doors in 1872.

Over the next forty years the influence of the Institute steadily grew, with membership drawn from a wide range of industries including iron, shipbuilding, and engineering in addition to mineral mining. In 1866 the name was changed to include the words `Mechanical Engineers' in recognition of this growing source of members, some of whom now found employment overseas. In June 1878, the General Meeting of the Institute was held in Douai (northern France) where about forty members were feted by their French hosts as representatives of the most important inventions in coal extraction. This international reputation was further enhanced by the `Mining, Engineering, and Industrial Exhibition', held on Newcastle's Town Moor in 1887.

Thus by 1914, the Institute was well established, both within the north east and globally, and still true to its original goals of mine safety and

efficiency by promoting the new technologies of electric lighting and wire-rope haulage.

The second part of the book presents biographies of ten notable members of the Institute, including Nicholas Wood (1795-1865), Matthias Dunn (1788-1869), William Coulson (1791-1865), and Thomas Sopwith (1803-1879). The interests and careers of these gentlemen reflect the history of the Institute and its influence beyond our region.

For example, William Coulson's distinguished career as a sinker of mine shafts took him far beyond his Gateshead birthplace, initially throughout Durham and Northumberland, and later to Bochum and Gelsenkirchen in Germany's Ruhr region. Lancaster uses the Institute's membership list for 1900 to illustrate some of those joining from overseas, especially from North America and Australasia, where similar Institutes of Mining had been established by 1900.

It is this world-leading reputation that ultimately justifies the title of this first volume in the Institute's history. No details are provided of the next volume, and there is no bibliography, though footnotes are used throughout and much of the research is obviously based on the Institute's invaluable *Transactions*. There is no Contents Page but the book is indexed.

Mike Greatbatch

Ray Hudson and Huw Beynon, ***The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain*** (Verso, 2021) ISBN: 9781839761553, 1839761555

The centenary of Labour's historic winning of control of Durham County council saw the collapse of the so-called 'red wall' seats in the 2019 general election. There was a similarly disconcerting spectacle in the former South Wales coalfield, albeit Labour seats there did not turn over to the Tories. *The Shadow of the Mine* deploys Ray Hudson and Huw Beynon's collective expertise to consider how and why the Durham and South Wales coalfields

moved from the centre of British politics and industry to its periphery after 1918, and the consequences for Labour, and the United Kingdom, offering an historical grounding to startling recent political developments.

Chapter one contextualises the two coalfields, offering a comparative overview of their socio-political complexions before 1945. While the South Wales Miners' Federation was much younger than the Durham Miners' Association, both served exporting coalfields. At the time of 'peak coal' (1913) they were the two largest affiliates of the Miners' Federation (MFGB) and therefore key players in labour movement and national politics. The two coalfields intertwined culturally and politically too; as the influence of, for example, the South Wales syndicalists on their Durham counterparts testified. The following four chapters move from coal nationalisation in 1947, through the Wilson and Heath years, the power loading agreement and its consequences, through to Thatcher and the 1984/85 miners' strike. The remaining ten chapters adopt a part chronological, part thematic approach to what happened in the bitter aftermath of the 1984/85 strike and the privatisation of the shrunken British coal industry in the 1990s, bringing us to Brexit and the catastrophic 2019 Labour defeat.

In terms of an historically-based explanatory argument, Hudson and Beynon point convincingly to New Labour's fetishising of 'markets', abdication to the apparently insuperable powers of 'globalisation', worshipping of financial institutions and neglect of the working-class vote in its former (now post-industrial heartlands) in implicating Blair, Brown and all their apparatchiks heavily in events of 2016 and 2019. Earlier policies and people were, however, to some degree also culpable: Hudson and Beynon suggest that nationalisation was responsible for the degradation of the coal mining industry and its communities and earlier Labour administrations also deserve their share of blame. The leadership of the early post-war NUM is also guilty; not least of collusion with the National Coal Board to suppress miners' compensation cases (chapter 13).

There is an underlying assumption in *The Shadow of the Mine* that alienation and neglect in these former mining communities led to voting

Brexit that led to red wall collapse in 2019. But the complexity of recent political responses' attendant flux of political identities might have been explored more. The quotes deployed from interviews with former coal miners and their families that enrich the text appear to have mostly been conducted in the New Labour period. This means that there is a whole generation of younger people growing up in the former coalfield areas who we do not really hear from.

There is also the question of what remains of the community after coal mining ends. *The Shadow of the Mine* discusses Covid in terms of how the crisis has worsened poverty and inequality. But the remarkable spontaneous emergence of neighbourhood mutual aid support groups all over the country suggests a remarkable, and powerful solidaristic resilience. Of course none of this is to deny that the former coal mining areas find themselves in seriously straitened circumstances, which are likely to worsen with the cost of living crisis, a trade union movement shackled by the most restrictive laws in western Europe and a government that is corrupt and out of touch.

The Shadow of the Mine reminds us that Brexit, and the subsequent struggles of the Labour Party and movement were long in the making; that we need to adopt a long view to begin to appreciate the transformation of working-class identities and interests, the complexities of contemporary British politics more generally, and where it, and organised labour, could go next. While there will be disagreement both on quite where the former coal communities now find themselves (and why), and about what their future prospects depend on (and why), *The Shadow of the Mine* asks important questions, and invites us to debate and develop historically informed answers.

Lewis Mates Associate professor in Political Theory (Durham University)

Tyneside Anarchist Archive, ***Anarchism in North East England: 1882-1992*** 1992 (PM Press, 2021)
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Anarchism as a set of revolutionary ideas and practice has tended not to be taken seriously in the British context by academics. Early historians of the British working-class movement like Robin Page Arnot and a succession of academics like Henry Pelling since have sought to denigrate, ignore or marginalise the astounding intellectual and organisational achievements of, for example, the authors of the *Miners' Next Step* who, though syndicalists rather than anarchists, were still far too close to the latter for a later generation of orthodox communists. Even the post-war stalwarts of 'history from below 'reproduced crude caricatures of anarchism and its adherents; see, for examples, Thompson's depiction of Socialist League anarchists in his biography of William Morris, and Hobsbawm's so-called 'primitive rebels'.Yet, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, before the Great war 'in its characteristically variegated forms, [anarchism] was the dominant element in the self-consciously internationalist left'.

While anarchism never inspired mass movements in Britain as it did in Ukraine, Spain and Latin America, it still had (and maintained) a British presence worthy of study. It took a history from below approach of activist historians like John Quail to research the subject, the fruits of which appeared in his seminal *The Slow Burning Fuse. Anarchism in North East England: 1882-1992* is the latest and very welcome addition to this literature by the working-class, activist researcher, collecting and exploring the history of their own movement. A product of the remarkable Tyneside Anarchist Archive (contactable online), *Anarchism in North East England* charts the history of the anarchist movement, its advocates and their deeds from the time that the famous anarchist Prince Kropotkin was invited to

speak by Durham miners at their annual gala in 1882 all the way through two world wars, the struggles of the inter-war period and post-war world, ending in 1992 and the Tyneside riots.

Anarchism in North East England is a brilliant and fascinating work of research throwing light on a whole facet of the radical north east that is seldom written about. Its attention to the sources and its engaged, lively, writing style render it of a piece with the genius of the working-class autodidact tradition that gave us the *Miners' Next Step* and, in this region, George Harvey's *Edwardian* (albeit not anarchist) and, more recently, Tom Brown's propaganda pamphlets. A sizeable but highly readable tome of 505 pages, and priced at a decidedly reasonable nine quid from PM Press (or Waterstones!), *Anarchism in North East England* is a must-read for anyone truly interested in the diversity of revolutionary ideas and activities in this region. Hopefully, its achievement will inspire many more to follow suit.

Lewis Mates (Associate Professor in Political Theory, Durham University)

Paul Guppy ed. ***Bought by Tyrants Sold by Knaves The National Chartist Hymn Book***

The intended publication of this book was brought to our notice about the same time as Mike Greatbatch attended the Chartist day reported above. The book's formal launch took place during the West Gallery Music Association's spring conference in Winchester on 21-22 May 2022 when those assembled sang hymns printed in it.

It is a pity that it was not available for the Chartist day since it presents another fascinating aspect of Chartism.

This is because the book was compiled with a different purpose in mind. For the past 30 years or so the groups of musicologists and folk singers who make up the West Gallery Music Association have been rescuing from derision and obscurity the lively music and words that were sung and played in churches and chapels before the stultifying effects of mid Victorian piety,

pipe organs and standardised hymn books. There is a wealth of social history of the EP. Thompson variety embedded in these researches but here the emphasis is overtly political rather than religious, although as Malcolm Chase himself noted 'religious ideals were seldom far from the surface of Chartism' and Chartist gatherings often echoed the 'Camp meetings ' of early Primitive Methodism

The National Chartist Hymn Book was printed in Rochdale around 1840 for the National Chartist Association.

Paul Guppy, the editor of the compilation, is the leader of the Lancaster based West Gallery group, Gladly Solemn Sound and has transcribed the words to the 16 hymns in the book from the Calderdale Libraries' Weaver to Web website. In the introduction, alongside a general account of Chartism culled from the works of recent historians, he has examined the language used by the writers of the texts. Apart from an Easter hymn there is virtually no reference to religious doctrine but the appeal, where there is one, is to a just deity for help in asserting basic human rights against unjust and corrupt overlords.

The title is taken from the opening line of one of the hymns 'Men of England ye are slaves bought by tyrants sold by knaves,' which goes on to refer to being beaten by policemen's staves. Tyrants and slavery are words frequently used but this is the only reference to police brutality. Two of the hymns draw attention to the plight of factory children and in one of them we find what may be the first use of the phrase' blood, sweat and tears'. There are frequent allusions to food shortages. Yet ire is directed not at the factory owners or parliament but at the idle aristocracy and the Anglican clergy. There is only one use of the word class and only one hymn, ' The Charter is our aim,' directly advocating the cause, ending 'Let each demand a Briton's share in making Britain's laws' Only three of the hymns have tunes indicated, the rest have been supplied from the vast reservoir of popular hymn tunes known to have been used in the period. Where authorship has been identified for either words or tunes those concerned seem to have come from the skilled artisan class, probably autodidacts or the product of

nonconformist Sunday schools or young men's self improvement groups (with as Paul notes several shoemakers).

The book provides an interesting side light on mainstream Chartism. It is on sale for £8. Further information from the West Gallery Music Association www.wgma.org.uk

Win Stokes

Secretary's Report

The Society has 183 members with another 118 people receiving our regular mailings.

Due to the on-going Covid situation all our meetings have been held on Zoom:

17 August – *Striking Women: Women Trade Unionists in France and Britain during and after the First World War,* Alison Fell

7 September - *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain,* Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson interviewed by Charlotte Austin (at the Annual General Meeting)

26 October – *The Life and Work of Mary Macarthur,* Cathy Hunt

14 December – The Annual Christmas Quiz with Peter Brabban

25 January – *Mapping the City of Newcastle,* Mike Barke

25 March – *Eileen O'Shaughnessy: A Life,* Sylvia Topp in conversation with Rosie Serdiville (in conjunction with the Orwell Society at the Tyneside Irish Centre)

5 April – *The Man at the Back: Lord Tom Sawyer and the Modernisation of the Labour Party,* Christopher Massey

3 May – *Hidden Chains: The Slavery Business and North East England,* John Charlton

28 June - *The Closure of the Sunderland Shipyards and the thwarted Cuban Orders,* Bob Clay

At the AGM John Creaby stood down as Chair and Peter Brabban did not seek re-election to the committee. We are grateful to both for their contribution to the Society over many years. Maureen Callcott became our President with John as Vice-President and Liz O'Donnell took over in the Chair.

This issue of *North East History* has been produced by the Editorial Board who are: Rosie Serdiville (Editor), Brian Bennison, Patrick Candon, John Charlton, Steve Grinter, Bill Haylock, Sue Ward, Win Stokes and Don Watson. The Society wishes to record its thanks for their work in difficult financial circumstances.

Thanks also to Patrick Candon for his three-year stint as Editor and to Liz O'Donnell for her contribution to the Editorial Board over several years.

We are also grateful to Peter Nicklin for his continuing work on the Society's website where the revamped *Radical Lives* section provides appreciations and obituaries for over fifty figures from the history of radical and labour movements in the region.

Brian Bennison, Peter Brabban and Liz O'Donnell have done a very effective job in developing and promoting the North East Labour History Facebook page which now has over 1300 followers. There were 6,400 views between 23 April and 21 May with posts and comments from 101 people.

In February we distributed twenty-one books on North East history from the late Joe Bianchi's collection to thirteen members and we thank Ruth Dineen for her kind offer.

Working with the Workers Educational Association, the Co-operative College and the Labour and Society Research Group at Newcastle University we were pleased to organise *The Active Utopian: A Celebration of the Work and Passions of Nigel Todd* held at The Common Room in Newcastle on 20 June. It was attended by over 120 of Nigel's friends and colleagues, a moving and inspiring tribute to a much-missed comrade.

The Society was unable to award the Sid Chaplin Prize in 2021.

David Connolly

Officers:

President:	Maureen Callcott
Vice President:	John Creaby
Chair:	Liz O'Donnell
Vice Chair:	Kath Connolly
Treasurer:	Judith McSwaine
Secretary:	David Connolly
Journal Editors:	Rosie Serdiville (Editor), Brian Bennison, Patrick Candon, John Charlton, Mike Greatbatch, Steve Grinter, Bill Haylock, Sue Ward, Win Stokes and Don Watson

Committee Members:

Brian Bennison (Gosforth)
Patrick Candon (Tynemouth)
John Charlton (Newcastle)
Mike Greatbatch (Newcastle)
Steve Grinter (Wylam)
Peter Nicklin (Newcastle)
Wendy Palace (Stanley)
Rosie Serdiville (Newcastle)
John Stirling (Morpeth)
Win Stokes (Tynemouth)
Don Watson (North Shields)

How to contact the Society

Email: secretary@nelh.net

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	2008	Ruth Blower
1989	Elaine Knox	2009	Rob Doherty
1990	Sylvia Clark	2010	David Reed
1991	Martin Searles	2011	Deborah Smith
1992	David Ridley	2012	James English
1993	Pauline Lynn	2013	Aidan Harper
1994	Kathleen Smith	2014	Molly Courtice
1996	Reg Brown	2015	Adam Woolley
1997	Angela Goldsmith	2016	Leanne Carr
2000	Robert Hope	2017	Leanne Smith
2004	Craig Turnbull	2018	Joel Wootten
2005	Craig Armstrong	2019	India Gerritsen
2006	Elspeth Gould	2020	Hannah Kent
2007	Candice Brockwell	2022	Lucy Jameson

This year's prize will be awarded to Lucy Jameson (Durham University) for her essay, Pneumoconiosis and Social Class in Twentieth-Century County Durham Mining Communities

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: £20 ◯ Students, unwaged: £10 ◯

Institution: £25 ◯

Please add £5 if international postage is required.

3) Payment method:

◯ I have set up a regular annual/monthly payment.

◯ 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 ……

Flying a Historic Standard

TUC Northern

The North East Labour History Society

The Northern Regional TUC is pleased to support the North East Labour History Society.

It is important for us to continue to learn the lessons from our past struggles, to help us organise, educate and campaign even better today.

Our Regional Council comprising of representatives of TUC affiliated unions and trades councils continue to lead the fight with working people here in this region.

In solidarity...

Liz Blackshaw:
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Northern TUC Regional Secretary: Liz Blackshaw
Northern TUC | Unite Building | 1st floor | John Dobson Street | Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8TW
0191 227 5550 | lblackshaw@tuc.org.uk | tuc.org.uk/northern

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North East History Volume 53

- **Black-On-Tyne: The Black Presence on Tyneside in the 1860s.**
- **Their Lives Are Our Lives. The Black Presence in Gateshead in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.**
- **Nigel Todd and the Greening Wingrove Project.**
- **Roses and Revolutionists: Nigel Todd's History of the Clousden Hill Colony**
- **The Progressive Decade? Politics in 1950s Newcastle**
- **Tyneside's Boy Orator: The Legend Examined.**
- **The Labour Party in Newcastle: the struggle for office, 1945-1960.**
- **Uncovering Women's Industrial Past; the Newcastle on Tyne Branch of the National Federation of Women Workers, 1912-13.**
- **Red Ellen, Destroyed Intelligence Files and the Pause Button of History: the Playwright, the Biographer and Public History**
- **What mining families remember about the Miners' Strike in County Durham.**
- **Workers and Wages at Hetton Colliery, County Durham.**

Cover: Nigel Todd by ??

NELH

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/