North East History

Volume 55 2024

Journal of the North East Labour History Society

NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS
OF SOLIDARITY FROM TEACHERS
TO MINERS & THEIR FAMILIES

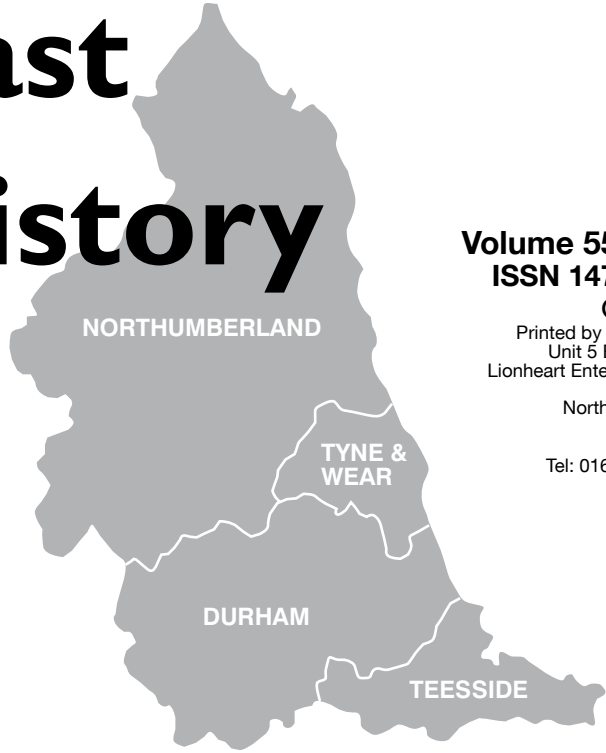
ORGANISE • EDUCATE • AGITATE

NORTHEASTNASUWT

nasuwt.org.uk

north east history

North East History



Volume 55 2024
ISSN 14743248
© 2024
Printed by CBS World
Unit 5 Elm Square
Lionheart Enterprise Park
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 2ES

Tel: 01665 660022

Journal of the North East Labour History Society

Copyright reserved on behalf of the authors and the North East Labour History Society © 2024

www.nelh.net

Contents

Articles:

Commemorations

Reviews

national education union
Northern

We're proud to support the North East Labour History Society

Working together as a movement, we can continue to learn from each other and from the past to campaign more effectively and have a stronger voice for all workers.

NEU members are campaigning for:

- Fair pay rises
- More sustainable workload
- Abolishing Ofsted
- Real change to child poverty
- Recruitment and retention in the profession

Working in education?

Join us in shaping the future of education.

neu.org.uk/join

A note from the Editorial Board

There is a strong oral history element to this year's journal with articles by Win Stokes, Maureen Callcott, Dan Walters and Peter Brabban all exploring historical memory.

The comparison of the winters of 1947 and 1962 are particlularly interesting in the light of Juliet Nicolson's 'Frostquake. All of them are effectively exploring the formative influences that changed both individuals and society.

A life lived in an era of change makes the transcript of Liz O'Donnell's interview with Maureen Callcott so interesting. We are very grateful to Sue Ward for carrying out the transcription as well as working on her own article about the North East in the 18th Century. This is one of a series which we hope to continue.

We are exploring our own history with our new 'From the Archives' section. The present journal looks very different to that early gestetnered version but the material remains interesting and we are keen to draw it to the attention of a new to a new generation of members and readers. Ray Challinor was a founder member of NELHS and a colleague of Maureen Callcott. In this 1982 article he explores the culture of 19th Century radicalism in the North East. We are also using this section to explore the legacy of long term activist Jimmy Murray.

The recent discussion about unemployment rates brings back memories of the debate around the issue in the 1980's. Paul Griffin's article on the response of Centres Against Unemployment seems very timely as does Dan Walter's piece on the experience of migrant Irish workers in the same period.

Equally timely is Naomi Mitchison's report on housing conditions in Sunderland in the 1930's, particularly given her comments on water supply. We are grateful to her family for making the diary available to us.

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
Win Stokes
John Stirling
John Charlton
Steve Grinter
Brian Bennison
Rosie Serdiville (editor)

EXPLORE
Lifelong Learning

Classes, Courses & Workshops

- Learning for the Love of Learning
- Wide Range of Subjects, Taught by Experts
- Welcoming & Accessible Hub in Central Newcastle
- Face-to-Face & Online Sessions
- Termly & Annual Membership Options
- Free Taster Sessions Available

Get in Touch to Find Out More!

weareexplore@gmail.com
www.weareexplore.org.uk

Notes on Contributors

Sue Ward obtained a history degree in 1970, and subsequently worked as a journalist, researcher and trainer for trade unions and others. She sub-edited North East History for some years, finishing with the 2022 edition. This article, like the one on the 1774 elections in Newcastle and Morpeth, may eventually form part of a book on radicalism in the North East between 1760-90.

Dr Paul Griffin is an Assistant Professor in Human Geography at Northumbria University. His research has considered the spatial politics of labour organising and more recently the histories of community responses to unemployment. This research has utilised both archival and oral history research methods. His work can be found in journals such as Antipode, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Political Geography, Journal of Geography in Higher Education, and Progress in Human Geography.

Martin Spence helped to run the radical bookshop, Days of Hope (based in Newcastle) before going on to join Trade Films in Gateshead. For many years he was Assistant General Secretary of BECTU (Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union) in London.

Dan Walters studied History at Newcastle University from 2018-2021, and subsequently went on to receive a Master's degree in Public History from Newcastle University in 2022. He has a keen interest in the history of migration, labour and industry in the Northeast. This article encapsulates the majority of the work undertaken during his Master's degree.

Win Stokes was born in Sunderland and brought up in Billy Row, a pit village just outside Crook, Co Durham. She attended London University and lectured at North East London Polytechnic which became the Radical University of East London. On retirement she spent ten years working for the North East division of the Open University and has been chair of Durham County Local History Society for many years.

Peter Brabban was born three days after the NHS was launched. He grew up in the pit village of Dipton in County Durham. After a Secondary Modern education he went on to a career as a portrait and fashion photographer in London before working in social reportage photography. He worked as a campaigner and aid worker with NGO's such as Oxfam, War on Want, Age Concern and latterly with The National Trust.

Heaton History Group

We are a great grassroots local history group who have been exploring and communicating Heaton's heritage since 2013

We meet monthly for a series of talks and walks. Some of the recent stories about Heaton and the East End that we have researched and publicised include:

- Heaton Divided: Heaton in the Corn Riots of 1740
- Colin Vietch and the Founding of the People's Theatre
- Jack Common: The Streets He Lived On and How They Inspired His Work
- Elsie Tu: A Campaigner Against Poverty in Hong Kong

Take a look at our website to learn more about what we do and how to find us. Just search for www.heatonhistorygroup.org

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 at the end of the Secretary's Report.

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 - 54 (2005 - 2023) can be viewed online at our website: nelh.net/the-societys-journal/previous-issues. There is also a searchable index of articles and reports.

'The Pitmen are resolved not to work'

The miners' strike of 1765 in the Great North Coalfield

Sue Ward

Introduction

Although most people living in the North East are conscious of its history as a coal-mining region, the further back one goes, the less has lodged in popular consciousness. The mining industry of the last two centuries is commemorated in plaques and memorials in Newcastle and across the region, but that of the eighteenth century and earlier is largely invisible. Few residents of middle-class Jesmond, for example, will be aware of the numerous pits and pumping engines that once lined Jesmond Dene.[1] Educational material is similarly limited; a Newcastle University outreach project on the history of mining in Durham and Northumberland goes back no further than the beginning of the 19th century.[2]

In reality, the Great Northern Coalfield's history began in medieval times, and by 1745 it was supplying around half a million tons a year to the London market.[3] Geography gave it a huge comparative advantage over all the other coalfields in Britain, and this was probably at its height in the mid-eighteenth century. It could fairly be characterised as the first modern industry.

There were many stages in the process between the coal first being dug out of the seam underground, and it reaching the consumer in its primary market in London, often several months later. It was estimated in 1765 that 100,000 people depended, directly or indirectly, on the North East's coal trade.[4] At the base of this inverted pyramid were the 4,000 or so pitmen, who went on strike for 7 weeks between mid-August and early October of that year.

The strike has been well written about in the past, including a detailed account in David Levine and Keith Wrightson's 1991 book about industrial Whickham, but this brief article is an attempt to bring it to the attention of today's readership.[5]

The Great Northern Coalfield

Geologically, the Great North Coalfield stretches from Amble in northern Northumberland to Hartlepool in southern County Durham, and from the coast inland into the Pennines. Its comparative advantage over all other coalfields in Britain arose despite the fact that the coal had several unfavourable characteristics. It was too sulphurous for the contemporary methods of iron-making unless processed into coke, and extracting it brought out considerable quantities of 'small coal', unwanted on the London market. Much of it was buried deep underground; the maximum depth of pits in the region is estimated at 400 feet at the beginning of the century, while by 1765 Walker colliery had reached 600 feet, much deeper than in other parts of the country. It was also liable to flooding, and to build-ups of poisonous or explosive gas.[6]

The key factor was the relative ease of transport. Coal was a heavy, low-value commodity. Horses and carts could not carry very much at a time over rough roads and up and down hills. Beyond a couple of miles, the cost of road transport would exceed the cost of production and make the coal too expensive for the market. As a result, most collieries up to the end of the eighteenth century were 'landsale' enterprises – that is, they sold only to customers within the immediate vicinity. By contrast, the 'seasale' enterprises of the North East were situated on the hills on each side of the area's navigable rivers – the Tyne and its tributary the Derwent, and the Wear. It was possible in many places to transport the coal down fairly steady gradients (natural or created) to points where it could be loaded onto the specialist craft known as 'keels' and taken to the harbours at Shields, Sunderland, or one of the minor ports, to be loaded onto collier ships. From there it could be carried to London, with some of it being

offloaded at other East Coast ports, and a small amount being exported elsewhere.

Such transport was certainly not cheap, but it was economic, especially if it could be integrated with the extraction process. The more transport costs per ton could be brought down by the use of new technology, the more worthwhile it was using further technology and more labour to extract larger quantities more cheaply. The key metrics were the unit cost per ton of coal delivered to consumers, as against the unit price that could be charged to them, and eighteenth-century businessmen were well able to calculate this.

The employers

In technically less developed areas, pits were small affairs, rarely employing more than a dozen colliers.' In Northumberland, Durham and Cumberland, by contrast, coal-mining was a large-scale enterprise, the main business of the landed proprietor. All the major landowners were also coal owners, who might work their minerals directly or through salaried agents, or might lease them to capitalist entrepreneurs to work.[7]

Owners might control their pits directly, or lease them to others. The work of managing the pits was done by 'viewers', who might themselves also be owners and lessees, and might also work as what we would now call 'consultants' for other owners. In the larger collieries, they would have deputies and 'keekers' beneath them. Les Turnbull's book, The World of William Brown, gives a vivid picture of the working life of one of the most important of these. A small group of Brown's letters for the beginning of 1765 has survived in the Mining Institute archives, and show him spending much time travelling between pits, while involved in labour issues on the one hand and the installation of new (and very expensive) 'engines' on the other.[8]

The agents who organised the marketing and shipping of the coal were equally important. These agents, known as 'fitters' had in Newcastle been tightly organised into the Hostmen's Company in the preceding centuries,

but that had lost much of its grip by the mid-eighteenth. They remained independent agents, however, owning the keels in which the coal came down-river and in some cases also having shares in the sea-going collier ships, taking work from several coal owners. On the Wear the coal-owners also owned the keels, and a fitter would be employed by a single owner.[9] The Hostmen, together with the Merchant Venturers, retained a tight grip on Newcastle's corporation and governance.[10]

Owners, lessees, viewers, and fitters overlapped, and formed a tightly-organised and wealthy oligarchy, which dominated the economics and politics of the region and were influential also in London. These were the 'Gentlemen of the Coal Trade', as they styled themselves in communications to the pitmen and to the Government during the dispute, firmly part of the eighteenth-century ruling classes. An example recently highlighted by Les Turnbull, less well-known than the Blacketts and the Ridleys who ran Newcastle politics for several decades, is Elizabeth Montagu. She and her husband Edward Montagu owned and took an active interest in the colliery at East Denton, but she was also a successful London hostess and leading light' of the Bluestockings.[11]

North Eastern coal-owning families had been involved in cartels for many years, but from 1726 onwards it took the form of the Grand Alliance. Its purpose, as explained by historians of the industry,

> was to create a union of principal coal owners so firm and powerful that other proprietors must join it in an effective regulation. To this end the original allies must have the harmonious basis of mutual agreements over watercourses, wayleaves, and partnerships.

This cartel and its successors

> never intended to pursue anything other than the interests of the owners and lessees. While they assumed…. that any

> combination or strike by their employees was illegal and ought to be broken up… they never doubted the legality and appropriateness of their own combinations.[12]

The pitmen

On the pitmen's side, there was at least equal social cohesion, but in very different circumstances. They lived mostly in pit villages, in housing provided by the employer either free or at subsidised rents. At least some of the employers provided medical care, and pay when a pit was closed, at least in certain circumstances, though not over Christmas and the New Year when maintenance took place.

Pitmen were often considered 'a race apart'. Those who worked underground would have been very visibly so, since with no pithead baths and very limited washing facilities in their dwellings, they would have had coal dust ingrained in their skins. The larger the colliery and the more technically advanced, the more specialised their jobs were. Hewers were the highly skilled elite, but they relied on many other occupations to transport the coal from the coalface to the shaft, to draw the coal up the shaft, and then to send it on its journey to the market. In pits containing 'fire-engines' (steam-driven pumping engines), blacksmiths and engineers would join the elite. They would often have their own sons with them, working as 'putters' transporting the coal from the face to the shaft, and apprenticed from an early age so as to become accustomed to the arduous working conditions. Flinn and Stoker's analysis suggests that the most skilled men were well-paid compared to others in the labouring classes at the time, and worked relatively shorter hours, but this was much less true for the other occupations.

The skilled workers could also be mobile between pits in their own coalfield – though not generally to other districts where methods of working would differ. Their wages and conditions were laid down in an annual working contract, a 'bond' between worker and employer. Such 'bonds' were not uncommon in other employment sectors, such as

agriculture and domestic service, and the 18th century version was much more of a mutual agreement than it became later, most notoriously in County Durham in the 19th century. The first that has been traced was between the hewers of Benwell and the High Sheriff of Durham in 1703, which 'established a definite rate of payment in money for each score of corves [baskets of coal] worked, an additional price for forward progress, and a special recompense for work of exceptional difficulty'. By the 1760s the bond had become the standard form of contract. Levine and Wrightson see this as not only a move to stabilise the workforce, but also a sign of a 'developing industrial paternalism on the part of at least some of the coal-owners'. They provide examples of payments to sick and injured workmen, and pensions to widows, and also assistance to the workforce when harsh weather or other circumstances meant the industry was at a standstill. In the spring of 1757, for example, the Tyne coal owners arranged for the import of 50,000 bushels of rye 'for the Support of the Worke People employed in their Works', and weekly payments to men and their families. In return for this, however, increasingly the bonds laid down requirements for quality and quantity of output, and undertakings by the pitmen not to combine against them. And in a sign that the employers were not that paternalist, the bonds generally ran for 11 months and 2 weeks at a time, just short of the year required to give the workers 'settlement' rights in their parishes.[13]

Invention and innovation

By the mid-eighteenth century the London market for sea-coal was growing fast, and large-scale investment and technological developments in the extraction and transport of coal were going hand in hand in the Great North Coalfield.

The problem of flooding had been growing more serious as pits went deeper and could not be drained simply by digging a sloping tunnel from the pit workings out of a hillside. However, in 1712 Devon ironmonger Thomas Newcomen had installed his first working steam-pump, at the

time called a 'fire-engine', in a Staffordshire coal-mine. As Flinn and Stoker put it, it was 'clumsy, and uneconomic in its use of fuel… but it worked, and was considerably cheaper per gallon of water raised than the old method of horse-gins'. It made it practicable to exploit deeper seams than before. Take-up was slow, partly because very few blacksmiths were able to build the right boilers, and, in the North East, even slower than in some other regions. Installation took off, however, in the 1760s, with Byker Colliery installing its ninth engine in 1761, and Long Benton its seventh in 1765. William Brown counted 89 in the coalfield in 1769.[14]

Over the same period, the expansion and improvement of waggonways was going on. At the turn of the 18th century, much coal was still being drawn by two horses in little carts each holding 17.5 hundredweight (cwt). Even then, however, the major collieries were investing in the new system; the laying of wooden rails on causeways with gentle gradients, and the design of carts with flanged wheels, meant that 53 cwt of coal could be transported on a wain pulled by a single horse. But creating that gradient might require formidable engineering works. The Great Embankment and the Causey Arch, constructed across Tanfield Moor by Liddell in 1725-6, carried a waggonway eighty feet above a ravine with a span of 105 feet. In the same year, it was estimated that Jesmond colliery was using no fewer than 700 wains to take coal to staithes on the Ouseburn. Over succeeding years there was a steady growth in both the number and length of routes. Even in 1765, these heavy-duty waggonways were enough of a novelty for visiting Swiss engineer Gabriel Jars to provide a very detailed description of how a waggonway worked, and a brilliantly clear drawing to illustrate it. The 1760s saw the first use of cast-iron rails, though it was some time before these became widespread.[15]

Engines to draw up the coal to ground level took longer to arrive, but by the 1760s there were experimental versions in the area. Joseph Oxley built one Newcomen engine adapted for winding at Hartley Colliery in 1763, and another in 1765, but they seem not to have worked well. The real breakthrough did not come until 1781 when Watt patented his

engine. The alternative was horse-powered 'engines', and these too were being improved in these years. Jars was much impressed by the one at Walker, worked by 8 horses.[16]

All these innovations could massively reduce the unit costs per ton of coal, but also meant considerable investment. For Holliwell Reins colliery, when developed in 1752-6, William Peck recorded that 'the Winning of the Colliery, laying the Waggon Ways, Building the Steath [staithes] etc a very great expense – suppose £10,000'.[17]

Since most coal owners were also landowners, they could use ploughed-back profits of both their agricultural enterprises and their mining ones for further investment, and borrow if necessary using their land as security. Only very rarely would they look outside the small circle of other landowners when borrowing. There was though always a risk that expenses would outrun what could be afforded. As Elizabeth Montagu put it, 'a mine at first opening has a prodigious swallow; when it begins to disgorge it makes noble amends… Some who have begun without a fund… have been obliged to lay aside their project before the time that the profits were to come in'.[18]

The coalfield in the 1760s

By the beginning of the 1760s, the Great North Coalfield might be compared to the North Sea oilfields as commercial exploitation took off in the 1970s. Owners and lessees with deep pockets, and viewers with expertise were extremely busy. William Brown's letters from the beginning of 1765 show him grappling not only with the installation of new pumping engines, but with the details of maintenance, repair and improvement of existing ones. On 17 January, for example, on the one hand he is forwarding a tender to an unnamed correspondent 'to find 3 men, leather, oyle [oil], candles lapping cleaning the boylers [boilers] cisterns leathering the buckets clacks and cleaning the flews for £2.14s.10d per week', while in the same group of letters, he is dealing with the creation of new 'horseways' and staithes at the riverside.[19]

At the same time, the pressures of expansion were placing stresses on the labour market. If the Great North Coalfield can be compared to the North Sea oilfields, the pitmen are comparable to the oil-rig 'roustabouts' – highly skilled, indispensable, but in desperately short supply. William Brown's letters show a bad-tempered exasperation both with pitmen who are moving to other collieries, and with the coal owners who are poaching them. As he wrote on 5 January to William Errington at Sandhoe, near Hexham,

> Sir, I understand John Ursop one of my bound servants is employed by you and now working in some of your Collieries contrary to his agreement with me and the laws of this country. You'll be so obliging as discharge the man and prevent my commencing an action against him in order to compell him to do what every honest man ought to do without compulsion'.[20]

Brown was within his rights. The 1747 Masters and Servants Act was draconian as far as the workers were concerned. As explained by J D Ridley in a letter to the Earl of Northumberland during the strike, the law

> makes a provision upon the Information & Complaint on Oath of the Master &c for the Justice to examine and determine, & if the Servant be condemned, the Justice has a Power to commit the Servant to the House of Correction for a time not exceeding one Kalendar month.

This very repressive Act specifically includes 'Miners, Colliers, Pitmen, Keelmen' among those it applies to. It covers 'any Misdemeanor, Miscarriage or Ill-behaviour', and in theory is even-handed, with the workers also able to make complaints against their masters – but in practice, probably not.[21]

However, it was a different matter when a bond came to an end. Advertisements in the Newcastle newspapers throughout the late 1750s and early 1760s offered tempting terms to those willing to move. For example, one in October 1760 promised that

> if the Men who are bound cannot begin Work immediately, they shall be kept at Labouring Work at One Shilling per Day, and their Drinks, till Room be made in the Pits to hold them all; and their Money shall be paid every Fortnight.

Another in November 1764, from West-gate Colliery, said that 'PITMEN who are NOT BOUND, and will work at this Colliery, which is free from Fire, shall not be imposed on in their Measure, but shall meet with as good Encouragement as any where…'[22]

Documents from the Delaval colliery at Hartley include 'An Acco[un]t of Money Layed out with Pittmen & Smiths & mason at Sundry Places for the hire at Hartley Coll[ie]ry from Aug 28th to and within 28th of Nov 1762'. It shows that 1½ or 2 guineas were being paid as 'binding money', much higher than had been customary. The Delaval account covers the autumn binding season, and the men were perfectly within their rights to stop being bound to one master and move to another, and the owners to recruit them.

However, such activities exasperated the other owners. According to the later account in the *Annual Register*,

> it was natural for the several coal-owners on the Tyne and Wear to consider of some method to prevent such proceedings in the future. They therefore had a meeting, at which it was agreed, that no coal-owner should hire another's men, unless they produced a certficate of leave from their late master.[24]

William Brown referred to this agreement gleefully in a letter in the New Year, welcoming support from 'every man that is a friend to liberty but says

something must be done to bring things to a proper consistance', while the men were quoted in the same Annual Register piece as calling it 'a species of slavery not to be endured in a free country'.[25]

The strike begins

Probably aware of the legal position, the men bided their time. But from mid-August, as bonds for the 1764-5 year ended, the pitmen showed a united front in refusing to work on or to sign new ones. The employers insisted that they were still 'bound'. The pitmen stated, in what was effectively a manifesto, that they were bound until the 'latter end of August' or the beginning of September, but that

> the Honourable Gentlemen in the Coal Trade will not let them be free till the 14th of November, 1765, which, instead of 11 Months and 15 days (the respective time of their bonds) is upwards of 14 months; so they leave the Censorious to judge, whether they be right or wrong, as they are of opinion, that they are free from any Bond wherein they were bound.[26]

There was clearly an organisation behind the stoppage, but we know nothing of it. Given the repressive laws, it is not surprising that there are no written records. They might have been unable to find a local printer to produce handbills for them, since earlier that year in London printer John Almon had been prosecuted for 'seditious libel' during the Wilkite controversy.[27] Communication across the coalfield could have been done by written notes destroyed later, or by word of mouth, and even travelling between the furthest apart could be done quite quickly if one could hitch a lift on a waggon or a keel, given the extensive network now in existence.

It looks as if the pitmen were receiving outside advice, and one can hazard a guess as to who was providing this. According to the *Annual Register* account,

> not only the pitmen of the Hartley colliery… belonging to Thomas Delavall esq: continued peaceably at their work, on account of his humane treatment, but even the discontented pitmen at other places were continually sending him assurances of their being so satisfied… that the said colliery should not be molested'.[28]

Another clue, perhaps, lies in the fact that nine years later, Thomas Delaval was one of the (anti-establishment) burgesses' candidates in the contested Newcastle Parliamentary election of 1774.

The pitmen may also have had help with putting their case across to the public. The three Newcastle papers had remarkably little about the dispute in them, at first confining themselves largely to printing advertisements from the two sides apart from a conciliatory editorial on Sept 21 in the *Newcastle Journal*. The London newspapers, however, carried lengthy correspondence putting forward the arguments of both sides. This is not as odd as it might seem today. Londoners had a direct interest in having a steady supply of coal at a reasonable price. Their newspaper editors were not susceptible to pressure from the employers as to what they should print, and the papers would have circulated widely in the North, arriving on the stagecoach within 3 or 4 days of their publication. Even though they were not cheap, sharing newspapers was common especially among political groups and coffee houses and public houses provided easy access to newspapers for those who could not afford to buy their own.[29]

Levine and Wrightson provide a detailed analysis of the correspondence, and there is no space to cover it here. Two points do stand out, however. One is the alarm expressed at the use of troops, with one letter-writer to the London Chronicle expressing his dismay 'as an Englishman, as a man born in a free country, to see the fashion daily more and more prevailing of sending out a regular military force to oppose every commotion of the people'. The second theme, linked to this, was the recognition that the battle was over the pitmen's freedom, not just wages. In their 21

September statement, they had stressed that being obliged to 'serve in the same Colliery for life, which …. will take away the antient character of this Kingdom as being a free nation'.

'Liberty' was a common trope in the eighteenth century, used by the employers and their supporters also, but for the pitmen it was more than just rhetoric. They will have known about the Scottish collier-serfs, who could be bound for life to particular collieries. Such serfdom was hereditary and whole families were regarded as attached to a colliery estate. A long struggle against this serfdom was going on at the time, with an Emancipation Act finally being passed in 1774.[32]

The dispute lasted around seven weeks. The employers took a little while to understand its seriousness, but by 30 August it was being reported that 'not one of the pitmen will work' and that 'the keels are all laid by, the waggons are stopp'd, and the ways broken up and destroyed'.

The employers made a quick but only partial climb-down with a handbill issued on 31 August, of which there is a copy in the National Archives. The Gentlemen in the Coal Trade, it said,

> earnestly recommend to the several PITMEN to go immediately to their Work as they are obliged by law to do, till the expiration of their present Bonds; at which time, they do assure them, that each Pitman shall receive a Discharge in Writing, if he shall require it, that he may be at Liberty to engage in the Service of any other Master, and that no Agreement is entered into… to refuse employing any Pitman, on account of his having served in any other Colliery the Year before.[34]

However, the pitmen were not satisfied. At a series of meetings between representatives of the pitmen and the owners, further demands were put forward. The Annual Register for 1765 gives a detailed narrative;

> the pitmen, made sensible of their importance … rose in their demands, as often as any new proposal was made to them; so that though they in general earn from 12 to 14s a week, they in one colliery insisted on an advance of wages equal to 75 per cent. But the grand article they latterly insisted on was, that all their bonds be given up, though some of them have till Christmas to go; which demand the coal-owners determined not to agree to, for they have always avoided binding too many at one time, lest it should be in their power to distress the trade, by refusing to work till their demands were satisfied'.[35]

As Levine and Wrightson put it, this was 'essentially a struggle over authority, and in particular over the proper relationship between masters and men'. The employers reacted strongly, with advertisements in the local papers in each issue from September 7 onwards asking that no-one else should employ any of the pitmen. This advertisement, the pitmen responded, has 'caused the People whom they were employed under, to discharge them from their Service.'[36]

The employers also brought in the army, with three troops of dragoons arriving in Newcastle from York on 2 September. On 12 September 'the drums beat to arms, and … a strong party of soldiers is marched out of the town'. Their deployment was probably linked to a meeting between the magistrates and the coal owners that day. The Mayor, Walter Blackett, wrote immediately after that meeting to the Earl of Northumberland in London, with a follow-up dated the next day from J D Ridley. The two letters were taken to London together by a Mr Waters, perhaps a confidential clerk, together with 'such a representation as contains the whole truth of their proceedings to this time, & they also confess that they are at a loss what further steps to take than those set forth in their representation'. Mr Waters would, Blackett's letter said, explain personally facts that 'could not properly be reduced to writing'. Ridley's letter spelt

out the owners' problem, in the face of the workers' solidarity. Use of the Masters and Servants Act, he said

> is very well, where two or three or a dozen men desert their Service … but where there is a general Combination of all the Pitmen to the Number of 4000, how can this Measure take Effect? … even if they should not make a formidable Resistance … the punishment of probably 20 or 40 … does not carry with it the least appearance of Terror so as to induce the remaining part of so Large a Number to submit, & those men that should be so confined wou'd be treated as Martyrs for the good Cause and be supported and caressed, and at the end of the time brought home in Triumph.[37]

In the same letter he reported one of the few serious acts of violence of the strike, at Sir Ralph Milbanke's colliery in the afternoon of 13 September, when a body of pitmen cut the ropes used to draw up the coal, and broke machinery and threw it down the pits. Overall, however, there was very little documented violence, apart from the cutting of the waggonways, and two other incidents in County Durham on 17-18 September. In the Auckland area, the pitmen defied the soldiers sent to deter them, and set fire to machinery and coals both above and below ground, while on the same night a pit at Pelton Common was set on fire.[38]

What Mr Waters had to tell the Earl of Northumberland is not known, but possibly it was disclosure of the fact that the employers were lying – and would have been known by many to be lying – in their repeated announcements to the pitmen and the public that there was no agreement or intended agreement to prevent pitmen moving between collieries.[39] This must have weakened the employer's moral position, but in the end it was their staying power that won. It would not have been possible for the pitmen to amass a strike fund. Though they were relatively well paid, anyone bringing up a family would have been hard put to it to build up

savings. It was repeatedly claimed during the dispute that 100,000 men were out of work as a result of the stoppage, and though this might be an exaggeration, even half that number would mean formidable hardship among the poorly paid. The owners and merchants, on the other hand, might face financial difficulties and even bankruptcy if the flow of coal was interrupted, but it would not mean starvation for them. The rising price of coal in London would also not concern them greatly, though rumours that a public enquiry might be launched into the dispute might have given them pause.[40]

The stalemate continued through September, and at the end of the month the employers changed tack, and published two hectoring letters in the Newcastle papers. The first blamed the pitmen's stance on the fact that they had been 'spoiled and debauched by People of inferior virtue', while the second addressed the pitmen directly and patronisingly as 'My Lads', and assured the pitmen that neither the coal owners nor anyone else in Great Britain would 'dare attempt to deprive the lowest Englishman of his liberty'.[41]

Behind the scenes, negotiations were going on. The Newcastle Chronicle reported on 28 September that

> some of our pitmen are now gone to work, and 'tis hoped the rest will soon follow their example, or they must forfeit the respect due to good subjects and useful members of society, all their misunderstandings, & c, having been cleared up to the satisfaction of every reasonable person.

By 5 October, both the *Courant* and the *Chronicle* could report on the terms – effectively a score-draw, with neither side needing to admit defeat – and the men were going back to work. The owners had repudiated any intention of undermining the pitmen's freedom of movement, while the pitmen had accepted new bonds, from the date of expiration of their previous bonds, without insisting on bindings on the same day across the

coalfield. There seems to have been considerable relief, not only that coal would be now available, but also that there had been no great disorder in the course of it. As the *Chronicle* put it

> Their long stick, as the phrase is, has very sensibly affected the poor people of these parts, particularly the cartmen, waggonmen, and keelmen, who have all, however, deservedly gained the esteem and good-will of the country, by their quiet and peaceable behaviour on the occasion.

In the aftermath, there seems to have been a tacit amnesty – perhaps because of the sympathy expressed for the pitmen, in the London papers especially, or because of fears of stirring up trouble once again – towards those committing acts of violence during the strike. Only a handful were tried at the October quarter sessions or at later sessions in 1766, and their sentences were fairly light. For example, Joseph Blacklock and Thomas Lowry were sentenced by Durham magistrates in July 1766 to fines of 1s. 8d. and 3 months' imprisonment for waggonway riots in Whickham and Lamesley. But as Levine and Wrightson say,

> The leniency of these sentences is striking when we consider that the same justices sentenced several offenders to 7 years' transportation for petty theft, and shortly afterwards a woman was sentenced to be whipped around Durham market place for stealing 6d worth of coal…[42]

We do not know, however, whether there was any victimisation of 'ringleaders' when the men went back to work, nor whether the pay rises being demanded were granted.

Conclusion

If the north-eastern coal industry in the 1760s can claim to be the first

modern industry, so too can the strike of 1765 claim to be the first modern industrial strike. We have no documentary evidence of anything that could be considered a trade union, but one there certainly was, in embryonic form. There was a committee; there was a good system of communication between them and the strikers; they had access to outside advice, perhaps even legal advice; and if they did not have a press office, they had members or sympathisers who knew how to make use of both the local and national press. Despite the fairly limited outbreaks of violence, they were overall able to keep the peace and the respect of the industry's customers. This was emphatically *not* 'collective bargaining by riot' seen as characteristic of the eighteenth century by past generations of labour historians.[43] On the contrary, it was an example of a skilled workforce, during a period of labour shortage in their industry, understanding the power of organisation – to the consternation of the employers. The history of this eighteenth-century strike, like the history of the industry itself in that century, deserves to be better known.

Notes:

1 Map of Heaton Banks Colliery based on 18th century map in Ridley Papers, in Les Turnbull, *Coals from Newcastle*, North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers (NEIMME) 2022, p 45.

2 https://www.ncl.ac.uk/webtemplate/libraryassets/external/education-outreach-mining/index.php [accessed 20 May 2024].

3 T S Ashton and Joseph Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, Manchester University Press 2nd edition 1964 (1st edition 1929), p. 194.

4 *Annual Register 1765*, pp. 130-131, available at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101076875374&seq=142 [accessed 29 May 2024]. It was a broadly anti-establishment publication, bringing together stories from the newspapers (especially London ones) over each year. For more information, see the article about it in Wikipedia.

5 David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham 1560-1765*, OUP 1991

6 Except where otherwise referenced, all the information in this section comes from the Introduction in Ashton and Sykes (1929), pp. 1-13.

7 Ashton and Sykes, as note above.

8 Les Turnbull, *The World of William Brown*, North of England Institute of Mining and

Mechanical Engineers (NEIMME), 2016; Brown Collection, NEIMME, 2 letter-books, Brown/1 and Brown/2. The quotations below come from Maureen Dickson's transcription of Vol II, also available at NEIMME. My thanks to Jennifer Hillyard for helping me with these.

9 Flinn and Stoker, p. 269.

10 Sue Ward, 'A Decade of Newcastle Parliamentary Elections, 1774-1784'. *Archaeologia Aeliana Series 5.* Vol 46, 2017, pp. 123-146, p. 128. Turnbull (2024) pp. 3-4 summarises the three-part organisation of the industry. That is, mining and transport to a staith; shipping down river to the sea-going colliers, and finally selling to the consumer.

11 Les Turnbull, 'Elizabeth Montagu: Countess of the Coalpits', NEIMME, 2014 revised 2024, p. 2. I am grateful to Les for providing me with a copy of this paper.

12 Michael W. Flinn and D. Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol 2: The Industrial Revolution*, Clarendon Press, 1984, pp. 258 and 265.

13 Ashton and Sykes, pp. 88-9; Levine and Wrightson, pp. 365-6; *Newcastle Courant and Newcastle Journal*, both 7 May 1757.

14 Flinn and Stoker, pp. 119-22.

15 Turnbull (2022), pp. 11-12 and 20; Flinn and Stoker, p. 149-152; Antoine-Gabriel Jars, *Voyages métallurgiques, ou Recherches et observations sur les mines et forges de fer, la fabrication de l'acier, faites depuis l'année 1757 et compris 1769, en Allemagne, Suède, Norwège, Angleterre et Écosse*, Lyon (France), 1774-1781, pp. 199-200 and plate 5. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65467409/f234.item [accessed 22 May 2024].

16 Jars, pp. 193-94.

17 Turnbull (2016), p.14, quoting NEIMME; Forster 1/5/154 and 155.

18 Flinn and Stoker, pp. 206-9;Turnbull (2014), p 14, quoting MO 1438, letter to Lord Lyttelton, 4 July 1765.

19 Brown/2/ 3, 2/17.

20 Brown/2/ 2.

21 National Archives, ref 37/4/77/48. The Act's long title is *An Act for the better adjusting and more early Recovery of the Wages of certain Servants, and for the better Regulation of such Servants, and of certain apprentices.* Its legal reference is 20 Geo.II c.19. It can be found in Ruffhead, Owen, *The Statutes at Large*, London 1786, https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_public-general-acts-12_ruffhead-owen_1769_7/mode/2up [accessed 2024 05 25].

22 *Newcastle Courant*, 25 October 1760, p. 2; 24 November 1764, p. 3.

23 Delaval Family Papers MSS ESTATE HARTLEY COLLIERY, 1756-1806, Northumberland Archives, 2/DE/7/6/6; Levine and Wrightson, p. 412.

24 *Annual Register 1765*, see note above. A copy of the agreement exists in NEIMME, Watson Collection, view book for 1734-70, ref Wat 2-13 p. 54.

25 Brown/2/5.

26 *Newcastle Journal*, 14 and 21 Sept, and other newspapers.

27 Thomas A Green, *The Jury, Seditious Libel and the Criminal Law*, University of Michigan 1984, available at https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.

cgi?article=1079&context=book_chapters [accessed 28 May 2024]

28 *Annual Register 1765*, as note above.

29 Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society 1695-1855*, Longman 2000, pp. 56-57.

30 Levine and Wrightson, pp. 421-25.

31 Letter from Y.E., *London Chronicle*, 28 Sept-1 Oct.

32 Ashton and Sykes pp 73-79.

33 *London Evening Post*, 7-10 Sept.

34 National Archives, SP 37/4/71, folio 183.

35 *Annual Register* 1765, as note above.

36 Levine and Wrightson, p. 416.

37 National Archives, as note above, folios 184-5. The 'Representation' has not survived.

38 *London Chronicle* 28 Sept–1 Oct; *Newcastle Journal* 21 Sept.

39 There were identically-worded advertisements in several editions of the three Newcastle newspapers during September, signed by 'W.M. Gibson'.

40 *Annual Register* 1765, as note above. *London Evening Post*, 21-24 September.

41 *Newcastle Journal*, 28 Sept; *Newcastle Chronicle*, 5 Oct – published with the editor's explanation that it had arrived too late for entry into the previous week's edition, but 'may not be altogether too late for the service intended'.

42 Levine and Wrightson, p 425-6, quoting Durham Archives, Quarter Sessions records.

43 George Rudé, *The Crowd in History, 1730-1848*, John Wiley 1764, p. 70, quoting Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Machine Breakers', in *Past and Present*, Feb 1952, pp. 57-70. Relying on Hobsbawm and Ashton and Sykes, Rudé claims (p. 72) that the dispute 'developed into an orgy of destruction', which was definitely not the case.

Recollections of Days of Hope Bookshop

Martin Spence

This article first appeared in the Radical Bookselling History Newsletter, Issue 2, April 2021. We are very grateful to them for permission to reprint it.

Days of Hope bookshop in Newcastle upon Tyne was part of an upsurge in 'radical' publishing and bookselling in the 1970s and 1980s. This upsurge had several distinct currents: alternative, environmental, socialist feminist, radical feminist, anarchist, Marxist. Within this mix, Days of Hope was always clear about its own identity: it was a soctalist bookshop, and it emerged from a socialist project.

That project was Tyneside Socialist Centre. The Socialist Centre was established around 1975 partly as a network and forum for the left on Tyneside; but also with an ambition to acquire and run a city-centre building, a 'People's Palace', to act as a meeting place, organising focus, and social centre for the left and labour movement. Leading Socialist centre members included Bob Clay, trade union convenor on Sunderland's buses; Andy McSmith, journalist on the Newcastle Journal; Jim Murray, trade union convenor at Vickers Elswick engineering works; and Hilary Wainwright, an academic at Durham University. [See the appreciation of him elsewhere in this journal]

Inevitably some held themselves aloof from this project, notably the Communist Party of Great Britain which had its own bookshop and premises in Newcastle. But participants included many on the Labour Left; trade union activists; socialist feminists; and some Trotskyists including members of the International Marxist Group (IMG) and Socialist Workers

Party (SWP). At any time this would have been a sufficiently broad constituency to generate fierce debate and disagreement. But this was the period of minority Labour Government, with Healey's infamous resort to the IMF, campaigns against the first welfare spending cuts, and a rising tide of industrial disputes culminating in the so-called "Winter of Discontent'. So there was perhaps an added edge to the left's debates in the late 1970s.

The Socialist Centre took out a lease on a shop in an area called Cradlewell, in the prosperous suburb of Jesmond, about a mile outside Newcastle city centre. In addition to the shop space this building had a large back-room suitable for meetings, and for a while this became the de facto Socialist Centre, although it was never envisaged as realising the full ambition. In the shop space a socialist bookshop was established, Cradlewell Books. Despite this suburban location, the Cradlewell building became sufficiently well-known as a left-wing haunt to attract the attention of the local fascists, and it suffered a firebomb attack. Some stock was damaged but no-one was hurt.

In 1978 a small shop became available at a more central site in Westgate Road, just outside Newcastle's main shopping area. It had been the booking-office of the former Tyne Theatre, later a Stoll Picture House, now being refurbished as the New Tyne Theatre. There was room for a small bookshop, but no meeting space.

This provoked a new round of furious discussions. Some argued that a city-centre bookshop could fly the flag for the Socialist Centre and serve as a step towards the ultimate goal. Others argued that on the contrary, the bookshop itself would soon absorb everyone's energy, and wider ambitions would be forgotten. And once the decision was taken to move to the new site, an argument erupted about its staffing, and the titles it should stock. In the end it was agreed that the shop's workers should be properly employed and paid the rate for the job, as laid down by the Wages Council and endorsed by the shopworkers' union - the fact that there was a debate about this is in itself an interesting reflection on the times. Regarding stock, it was agreed that all the various factions and currents of opinion in the Socialist Centre should submit a list of "essential titles'.

Given that the new bookshop was no longer at Cradlewell, it needed a new name, and the choice was inspired by a recent Ken Loach TV series: Days of Hope. Perhaps inevitably, some played word-games with the new name and referred to the shop as 'Haze of Dope. But the joke palled — not least because the atmosphere of the place, far from being druggy and alternative, was rather puritanical and driven. Legally, it was still a limited company whose directors were leading members of the Socialist Centre.

The first two workers employed to run Days of Hope — one a member of the IMG , the other a member of the SWP - had a difficult working relationship with each other, and with the Socialist Centre directors. In early 1979 there was a change of personnel, to one full-time worker — Martin Spence, a local anti-nuclear activist — and two part-timers. Neither of the part-timers lasted long, and from the autumn of 1979 the shop had two full-time workers, Andy McSmith and Martin Spence. Socialist Centre members Bob Clay and Ted Mason were also closely involved in financial management, and these four made up the committee which ran the shop day-to-day.

Both sides in the earlier debate, about the wisdom of moving the bookshop to Westgate Road, could claim to have been proved right. Days of Hope was seen as a Socialist Centre initiative, and represented its practical presence in the city centre. But it was also true that simply keeping the bookshop going came to absorb much of the energy of Socialist Centre members. A Bookshop Support Group was established, and members made regular donations to subsidise the workers' wages, and organised fund-raisers.

Uta Clay, Bob Clay's partner, did a formidable job cajoling and persuading members to take turns on a volunteer rota, sitting on the till to free up the paid workers to focus on other tasks. But despite all this energy going into the bookshop, as late as the autumn of 1981 the Socialist Centre was still capable of organising major political interventions; in October several hundred attended a public meeting with speakers from the Polish independent union Solidarnovc, jointly organised by the Socialist Centre and the Vickers Elswick Shop Stewards Committee.

Meanwhile back in the bookshop, it was clear from the start that passing trade and purchases by loyal customers would never be enough to keep the place open. So supportive academics, especially at Newcastle University and Newcastle Polytechnic (as was), were persuaded to keep the bookshop informed of their key texts, and to point their students to the bookshop as the best place to buy them — even, in some cases, taking books to the students and selling them in the classroom on the bookshop's behalf. Efforts were made to break into library supply, with some success. Local Labour Parties and trade union branches were encouraged to order bookstalls for their meetings. And from 1980, Days of Hope acted as a key resource for the peace movement on Tyneside, providing literature, badges and campaign materials; serving as an information exchange; and becoming a ticket office for buses and trains to rallies and meetings.

These were also the most brutal years of the war in Ireland, and the bookshop acted as an outlet in North-east England — perhaps the only such outlet - selling Irish republican literature, including the Provisional Sinn Fein weekly paper An Phoblacht. This provoked occasional nuisance visits from the local National Front, and on one occasion a death-threat against one of the workers. But Days of Hope never suffered the violent attacks experienced by some other radical bookshops.

At various times there were serious discussions about moving Days of Hope to other premises, in search of more space and/or a more central location. But on each occasion, once the numbers were crunched, it became evident that the shop was stuck in a vicious circle. The only way it could improve trade was by moving, but its current trading situation was so precarious that it couldn't afford to move. Throughout its history, Days of Hope lived from hand to mouth, unable to generate a sufficient surplus to move on to bigger or better things.

It did however change its legal status. A debate began in 1981 about converting the bookshop into a co-op, but there were different views about the most appropriate form. Some felt that the bookshop was in practice run by a small committed group, and that this reality would be best reflected by

a straightforward workers' co-op. Others felt this would exclude the wider network of volunteers and supporters, and favoured a 'multi-stakeholder' or 'regional' model which would give them a formal stake in the project. The discussion was at times bitter, and continued through 1982, until eventually the second option was adopted. Days of Hope was established as a regional co-op early in 1983. A fair number of Socialist Centre supporters became members, plus others who had never been in the Socialist Centre but felt a connection with the bookshop.

By this time some key participants had changed. In 1982 Bob Clay was selected as the Labour candidate for Sunderland North. He resigned from the bookshop management committee to concentrate on Party work, and was elected to Parliament in 1983. Andy McSmith had also moved on by this time to work in the Labour Party press office in London. He was replaced by Alan Milburn, a local Labour Party and peace movement activist, who now worked alongside Martin Spence. 1984 brought more changes. The year started well with good sales in the early months; the beginning of the Miners' Strike, with its new mood of political urgency, perhaps contributed to this. Yet again, discussion turned to the possibility of moving to better premises, but yet again, once a detailed analysis was done, it was clear that a move wasn't affordable. Then, during the summer of 1984 both the shop's workers left to take up other jobs, Spence to Trade Films in Gateshead, and Milburn to the Trade Union Studies Information Unit in Newcastle.

Two new workers were recruited, Steve Peel and Jan Ligema, and for a while sales held up. But from early 1985 they declined, and in April the New Tyne Theatre warned that in the not-too-distant future it would be giving notice to terminate the shop's lease. It offered alternative accommodation in Thornton Street, just around the corner, but in premises which were entirely unsuitable. The shop limped on, but as ever its precarious financial situation meant that it didn't have the resources to fund an independent rescue plan. In early 1986 Days of Hope had to vacate the premises in Westgate Road. For lack of any alternative, stock was moved to Thornton Street, but by

now the shop's accountant was insisting that the only responsible thing to do was to cease trading. Faced with little choice, the co-op's members voted for closure. Days of Hope formally ceased trading on 28th June 1986.

Unemployed Workers' Centres: Employed and Unemployed Solidarities

Paul Griffin

Newcastle Trades Council had set up a charter of rights for unemployed people. And that was basically saying that it's not your fault you've ended up on the dole, it's the fault of society, it's the fault of the government, they previously had a contract that guaranteed you a job. Now you don't have that guarantee. You need to not give up, not take it personally, but stay collective, and realise that now you're out of work, you have the right to be treated with dignity by the staff in the job centre.[1]

Introduction

In 1978, Newcastle Trades Council officially launched the Tyne and Wear Centre for the Unemployed. With premises at 5 Queen Street, on the Quayside of Newcastle upon Tyne, it provided a space for staff, activists, volunteers and 'unemployed workers' to gather collectively and engage closely with the issue of unemployment. The centre's opening was significant in that it reflected the organising efforts of trade unionists who recognised the changes around them, namely the impacts of deindustrialisation, rising unemployment and the need for worker solidarity beyond the workplace. The centre would become an example

model for other Trades Union Congress (TUC) affiliated Unemployed Workers' Centres that would emerge in the early 1980s. These centres were linked as an initiative coordinated through Trades Councils and nationally through the TUC. Their role varied slightly depending on local approach, but at their core they attempted to operate as spaces of advice, support, organising and education. This paper looks to step inside these centres, specifically their role within the North East, to revisit the history of a persistent alternative to the economic challenges of Thatcherism.

By 1982, there were over 150 centres nationally and a 'Combine' network of centres were also established later in the decade. As is explained further below, these centres provided a wide range of services and activities, as well as campaigning on the issues related to the growing unemployed. The history of this alternative vision of solidarity and care in relation to unemployment, at a time where Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher suggested there was no alternative, is little known, though, and remains a narrative that requires further uncovering. Indeed, the unemployed struggles of inter-war Britain are perhaps more familiar than those within living memory. This short paper begins to address this absence and sits alongside other related work that is beginning to illuminate unemployed struggles from the late 1970s onwards.[2] The centres themselves would often vary slightly in their names, and Newcastle's centre name would change too, but here they are generally grouped together under the umbrella of Unemployed Workers' Centres (UWCs), unless a specific centre is discussed. They reflect a little-known history whereby trade unionists and community organisers intervened within contexts of deindustrialisation and rising unemployment.

Their history is connected to a longer history of political left organising. In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson identified the importance of a 'working class presence' as found in many forms within society, and in doing so indicated the need to document how workers and left political groups establish their role and organising structures within a landscape.[3] This is achieved through protest and resistance,

through demonstrations - banners, flags, documents, papers – but also the presence of physical spaces themselves. The Unemployed Workers' Centres were one of these crucial infrastructures of solidarity and political activity. They opened during a time where the trade union movement was also establishing a presence through resource centres, which occasionally overlapped in their organising and activities. Here, this short historical article introduces some small stories of hope, possibility and success, of which there plenty within the UWCs on a daily basis. The paper identifies the comradery and solidarity found within these centres, but also intends to acknowledge their struggles and difficulties. Doing so is important, as it contrasts some other more dominant versions of unemployment, which repeat the stigmatising language of exclusion, most notably perhaps the language of 'scroungers' which was prominent in the late 1970s and continues to be wielded today.[4]

The paper considers the emergence of UWCs as an historical example of trade union activity beyond the workplace. It focuses particularly on their emergence on Tyneside and in the North East, but similarly recognises how these efforts intersected with a national initiative through the TUC. The significance of this is noted in part above, through the oral history testimony of Kevin Flynn, who would go on to become Tyne and Wear centre co-ordinator. He comments on the need for a collective response to the individual impacts of unemployment, whilst also articulating a sense of trade unionism beyond the workplace. This sentiment was true in the late 1970s and remains relevant now. Centres were active bulwarks against the seismic change caused by Thatcherism and neoliberalism. Their history then provides vital lessons for the labour movement, whilst the question of trade union connections with unemployed struggles remains a prescient one.

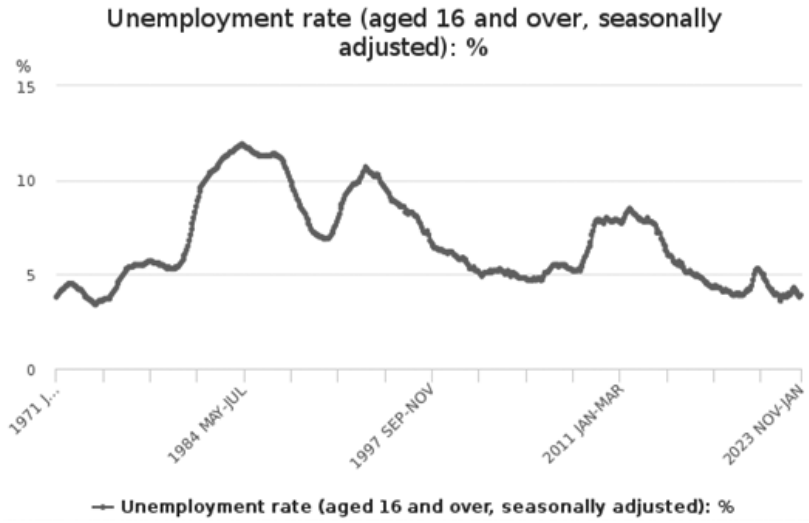
Drawing upon a combination of archival materials and oral histories, through a five-year research project, the paper uncovers a history of sustained trade union activity that resisted and countered the trends of deindustrialisation, redundancy and long-term unemployment. It argues that UWCs were, and in some instances continue to be, spaces of care

and campaigning. Centres have made notable interventions with regards to welfare advice and campaigns across societal and trade union issues, making them examples of the role trade unions can play beyond the workplace. In this regard, they provide histories which might connect with conversations regarding trade union futures. The paper begins with some contextualisation, briefly commenting on the conditions of 1980s Britain and the response of the trade union movement. It then focuses in on the Tyneside centre to document a particular centres history, before linking this regional history with more national trends.

Rising unemployment and trade union responses

The late 1970s witnessed a structural shift in the industrial sector of Britain. Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979 accelerated change in Britain, which had already witnessed rising unemployment throughout the 1970s (see figure 1). The increasing influence of neoliberal thinking shaped an economy that rebuked state interventionism and suppressed worker organising, and heavy industry began to suffer. The political economy of these times is a familiar one but the impact upon communities and the responses of communities are perhaps less well known. This paper looks to trace one set of responses through close engagement with the history of UWCs. Before doing so, though, it is important to contextualise the settings within which they emerged.

Figure 1 – United Kingdom unemployment statistics – 1971-2023[5]



The national trends are mapped out in the figures presented above. They reveal rising rates of unemployment during the 1970s and 1980s, including a significant acceleration from 1979 onwards. At the same time, it was also clear that public spending on unemployment in Britain was significantly reducing as a percentage of GDP during this time. This reduction is intensified in the mid-1980s. Some of this spending was redistributed with an increasing allocation of other forms of social spending, including spending on disability related payments. Overall, though, the trend was for a dramatic rise in unemployment at the same time as restructuring, and fundamentally reducing, spending on unemployment. Regionally, these overall trends were experienced deeply in industrial settings, particularly the North of England.

A BBC Community film produced by the Tyne and Wear centre revealed job losses in the North East in 1979. The list was quite staggering with workers made redundant at the following workplaces:

> Courtaulds – 1560; British Shipbuilders – 900; I.C.I. – 500; Vickers Ltd. – 750
>
> Doxford Engineering – 487; N.B.C. Hylton Colliery – 440; William Press – 600[6]

These job losses contributed to an overall unemployed community of over 5% nationally in late 1979, which would rise considerably in subsequent years, with unemployment peaking at just under 12% in 1984. These national statistics masked regional variations, though, with the North East experiencing 16% unemployment in the 1980s, whilst Merseyside would reach 21.5% in 1986. These numbers were shocking but behind each job loss was also a personal story and set of individual challenges and emotions. This was commented on in a *Marxism Today* article from 1984 entitled 'The Age of Unemployment'. As part of this conversation, Sid Clay, TUC organiser for the Northern Region, commented on his own experience of becoming unemployed and the challenges this posed for the trade union movement:

> The day I was made unemployed the bottom dropped out of my world. Being an activist in a factory, with my whole life structured and geared to the factory, and then suddenly, virtually overnight, to be divorced from all that, left me with a tremendous feeling of social isolation. That is one of the main effects of mass unemployment. […] Who are the unemployed? As activists in the movement, we tend to overlook the importance of this question: the unemployed, in my experience, are not about to join the barricades, they are people with all sorts of problems. Many of them suffer from intense apathy, there are those at the bottom of despair. The unemployed are a broad spectrum of people.[7]

His comments shine light on the experience beneath the surface of abstract labour market statistics. He recognised the life changing impacts of unemployment, the issue of social isolation and more broadly the diversity of people considered 'unemployed.'[8] These assertions were important for the political left and similarly so for any policy response to rising unemployment. They remain important in the present whereby political framings of unemployment and poverty continue to reproduce abstractions that fail to recognise the diversity of challenges faced by those people considered inactive within the labour market.

It was within this context, of rising unemployment and concern for the individuals and communities impacted by unemployment, that Unemployed Workers' Centres emerged as a response from the labour movement. This was a new initiative and contrasted significantly with the 1930s unemployed organising where organised labour was often notable for its absence in supporting the struggles of the unemployed. At the same time, the centres did not emerge in a vacuum and should instead be linked to a wider set of activities associated with the political left in Newcastle and the North East region. Hilary Wainwright was active within the political left on Tyneside in the late 1970s and commented upon the centres emergence when interviewed:

> They were an important transition from a very well organised employment-based trade union movement, to a trade union movement that has to cope with unemployment and precariousness and I think increasingly the idea of centres, you know, you had social centres at one point, in places like Italy and I think here Unemployed Centres was one of our responses.[9]

Wainwright's comments are insightful as they reflect the strong trade union foundations which made Unemployed Workers' Centres possible. Similarly, she points to the wider political left presence on Tyneside in the 1970s. Her archival papers reflect this with the presence of the

Socialist Centre and book shops like 'Days of Hope', complementing the infrastructures of trade unionism. Newcastle Trades Council is particularly visible during this period, which alongside the spaces previously mentioned provided space for left political thinking and organising. It was within this context that a series of meetings and conferences emerged, and the idea of centres began to develop.

Tyneside Centre Against Unemployment (1978-)

It was Colin Randall who led this (the centre), came to the Trades Council committee, but we put this application into the local Manpower Services Commission which had trade unionists on it for funding for a TUC Unemployed Centre. We got the money which allowed us to hire premises which were at 5 Queen Street.

We created the first ever job for a Welfare Rights Officer. We created a job for someone to be the secretary, and doing the administration and then they created a job for someone to be the trade union leader to recruit unemployed people into the trade unions and to run the campaign to persuade the unions to allow unemployed people into the union.[10]

Alec McFadden's words above introduce some of the early stages of setting up the centre. McFadden would go on to become centre coordinator in Newcastle and was similarly involved in the early stages of establishing the centre. The centre officially opened in 1978 with Colin Randall a prominent figure. Randall made the case for the centre during meetings and conferences during this period, arguing that 'Employed and Unemployed – Unite and Fight'. He regularly called for the trade union movement, and wider Labour movement and community organisations, to take a more active role in addressing the struggles of the unemployed. This position was articulated at several meetings in the early 1980s where trade unionists and labour activists would come together to discuss how best to address the challenges of rising unemployment.

UWCs were one such initiative, and the Centre Against Unemployment was opened at 5 Queen Street on the Quayside in Newcastle. Once

established, centre activities focused upon three core areas of activity. McFadden's quotes about reflect these activities, with key roles including:

> Counselling and advice: to provide unemployed people with information and advice about opportunities and assistance for training.
>
> Contact: to provide a focal point in the community where unemployed people could make contact with each other. To encourage the unemployed to participate fully in the work of the Centre.
>
> Representation: to assist and represent the unemployed on issues pertinent to their welfare.[11]

These TUC Guidelines reflected centre principles and the centre on Tyneside was also notable for establishing an Unemployed Workers' Union. This small group of unemployed activists were a visible force in campaigning within the struggles of both workers and unemployed workers. The language of 'unemployed workers' was similarly important and reflected the direct challenge to other more stigmatising language around unemployment circulating during this period. It was underpinned by a deeply felt trade union sensibility, and one that looked to extend trade unionism beyond the workplace. Language was important and the use of 'workers' retained a strong sense of identity aligned with the trade union movement and workplaces.

Kevin Flynn commented on the importance of these connections:

> [A] lot of people who I've spoken to were active in their workplace, as shop stewards and when they found themselves without a job they found a way, the TUC Unemployed Workers' Centres, were a way of continuing that. So, where

> you would have championed the rights of people in work, you found yourself championing the rights of people out of work. Both in the sense of campaigning for more jobs but also out of solidarity.[12]

This sentiment is an important one and reflects the transferability of trade union skillsets. In more recent times, David Stead has been a prime example of this, describing how:

> When I retired from work and therefore Trade Union activity, I decided that I still wanted to continue using that experience in the community. Therefore, I saw involvement with the centre was a natural progression. I decided that I wanted to continue representing people, so therefore involvement with the centre was a natural progression for me.[13]

This work of supporting individual claimants would often parallel trade union representation within a workplace, in that centre users requested support in navigating the welfare system. This often included help with administrative matters, form filling and often appeals and support during more challenging times, such as tribunals. Such efforts were never just made in a purely charitable sense, though, and were often tied to a spirit of solidarity. This was central in differentiating the centres from other services that might be used by unemployed people, such as Citizens Advice Bureau. Throughout oral history interviews, activists and centre staff identified the spirit of *solidarity not charity*, and linked their advice work to campaigns and organising. These campaigns were often critical of government, local authorities, employers and labour market intermediaries. Similarly, this organising was not limited to the issues directly faced by the unemployed, but also expressed support for ongoing workplace disputes and fundraising for trade union struggles.

These fundraising campaigns included town centre collections, with centre activists a regular presence in North East town centres, support at

regional picket lines and involvement in broader campaigns. This included solidarity efforts in the winter of 1984, where the Toy and Turkey Campaign looked to support the miners' strike. These fundraising efforts raised over £20,000 (according to an oral history interview) to support mining communities at Christmas and included support from Jack Charlton, then Newcastle United Football Club manager.[14] Alec McFadden spoke fondly of the efforts made to support the miners, highlighting the wide ranging support during this time:

> There was a lot of young people who were activists and they were members of the Tyneside Unemployed Workers movement and they worked night and day for the miners. They were all political, there was anarchists, Communists, probably Greens, all kinds of different people but they all took the position of supporting the miners […] I'm talking about young men and young women, twenty-three, twenty-four years of age you know, some of them had probably been on YOP [Youth Opportunity Programme – changed to Youth Training Scheme in 1983][15]

There were many successes on Tyneside then. These ranged from individual service users seeking advice, support and help in navigating the welfare system, to unemployed volunteers and activists who utilised the space as a means to remain involved in political organising.

Fundamentally, the role of the centre was to provide a space for trade unionism to intervene in unemployed matters. The impacts of this were perhaps captured best by an anonymous account of connecting with the centre in Newcastle:

> I know the truth, but I'm also very aware that other unemployed people don't feel the same way as I do. I mean I'm not proud of being unemployed, but I don't walk around

> with shoulders shrugged and my head down, trying to pretend I'm not unemployed.
>
> A lot of unemployed people do feel guilty.
>
> A lot of unemployed people never tell their neighbours. They go out in the mornings and come back at night and pretend they have jobs.[16]

The quote above gives a qualitative sense of the individual impacts of involvement within the UWC movement. At a time where the language of scroungers was being articulated by politicians and media, the centre offered an alternative space of solidarity and collective endeavour. The testimony above reflects both these elements, identifying the stigma associated with unemployment but also the alternative offered by the centre and the more dignified possibilities for working with unemployment. Following eight years on the Quayside of the city, the Newcastle centre would move to the Cloth Market in 1986 – the mural below is taken from this space – where it would stay until the mid 2010s. Some tension and challenges arose in later periods, but it should be noted that the Tyne and Wear Centre Against Unemployment remains active in Gateshead, providing invaluable support to individuals where the welfare system remains a harsh and punitive environment.[17]

Image 1 – Tyne and Wear Centre Mural[18]

National developments

Events in Newcastle were notable for their prompt response to the emerging regional challenges faced and in many ways provided a model for future Trades Councils to follow. They were not, though, the only responses of the time. Trade unionists responded in different ways to the struggles faced in their communities. In 1981, for example, the People's March for Jobs witnessed 250 unemployed people march from Liverpool to London to protest against the rising unemployment levels and lack of government intervention. March organisers operated through regional Trades Councils and received wide ranging media attention. In describing their campaign, march organisers highlighted how:

> Ours is a different army. The young unemployed now descending on London may not have starved. They have

> never tasted Army life. They have grown up against the background of the post-war consensus of economic policies which have had at their heart a commitment to full employment and the welfare state. Skinheads from Bolton, punks from Manchester, the mother and her unemployed son from Whaley Bridge, blacks from London and their older marching companions; what brings them together is the cry for work and dignity.[19]

The march was primarily organised through the North West, West Midlands and South East Trades Councils with regional coordinators including Colin Barnett, Pete Carter and Jack Dromey. It articulated a sense of frustration towards the rising levels of unemployment, reflecting trade union concerns and the need for action.[20] Their sentiment was shared by those involved in the Unemployed Workers' Centres movement. Indeed, it was the combination of ongoing trade union discussion and debate, and the visibility of the march for jobs, which prompted a more coordinated response from the Trades Union Congress, through regional Trades Councils. In the early 1980s, the TUC produced guidelines and resources, through regional Trades Councils, to help establish centres. The TUC General Secretary Lionel Murray pledged a commitment to the centres in a letter instructing all affiliated unions and Trades Councils:

- Affiliated unions should do all that they can to retain and recruit more of the unemployed, and to publicise union services available to unemployed members;

- There should be an action programme for the development of unemployed workers' centres throughout the country.[21]

In response, Unemployed Workers' Centres grew considerably in number. By 1982, there were over 150 centres nationally and a 'Combine' network

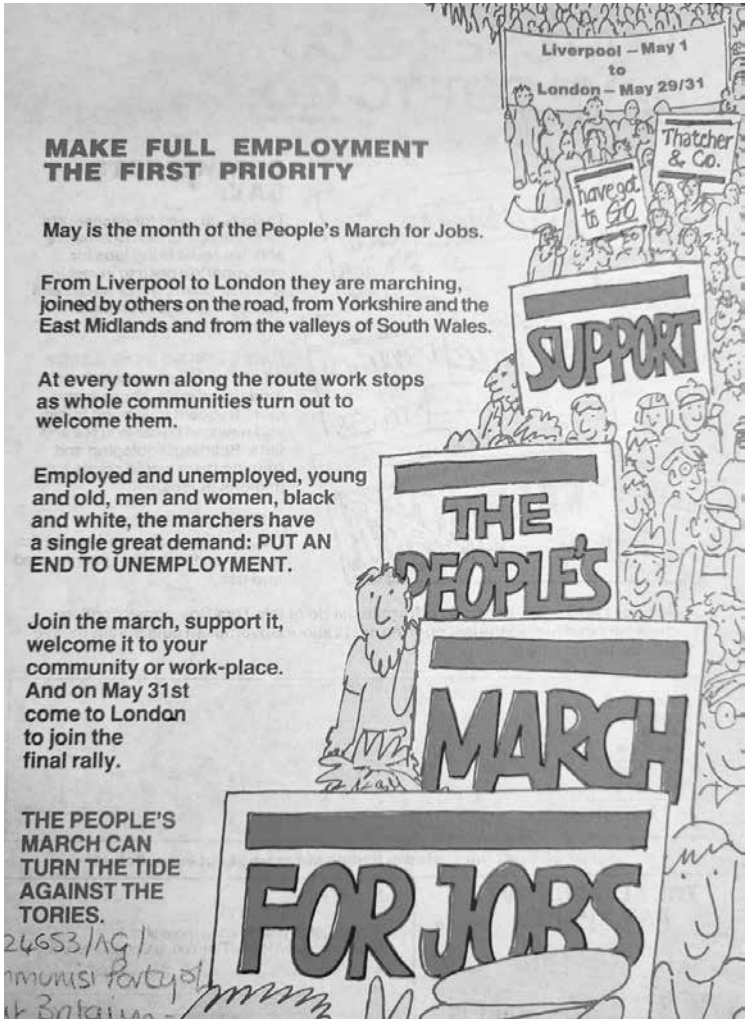
of centres was also established, growing to over 200 centres by 1985. TUC support for the initiative was prominent within conferences yet wider calls for greater involvement, participation and membership of the unemployed within Congress remained a source of considerable tension. That said, the centres grew in number and began to provide vital services across the country as well as providing organising spaces for the trade union movement. The potential here for collaboration between those in-work and those out-of-work was clear in the principles outlined by centres. An oral history with John Knight highlighted the need for such an intervention, as an active trade unionist within Derbyshire:

> You could be in work one week and out of work the next and we need another arm to be able to say look we've got people who can support you there, so such things such as one fund for all became the popular thing to do and it would have worked had we had manufacturing industry and so on. It not only helps people with their benefits but it gives people a voice, and I think that is very, very important because people feel dejected, they feel that they're on their own.[22]

This sentiment was captured in several national campaigns, including working against 'welfare snoopers' and campaigns against increased conditionality, and coordinated work between centres. Perhaps one the most notable developments was the establishment of the One Fund For All (OFFA) scheme whereby workplace Trade Unionists committed to contributing funds towards their local centres. This would provide an independent revenue stream for centres and generally allowed some more overtly 'political' work, which might sometimes be suppressed with local authority and government funding arrangements. The impact of such funding was perhaps most noticeable on Merseyside where an OFFA project generated a significant proportion of centre income. In 1986, The *Guardian* reported that £120,000 was raised by OFFA for centres in the

Merseyside region. Some of these funds still continue today where centres remain active and assist in some of their work and related campaigning.

Image 2 – People's March for Jobs[23]



The work of centres was wide-ranging and would sometimes vary in emphasis. Some centres were known to prioritise welfare advice work, whereas other centres might stress education or position themselves as organising the unemployed. Many centres would attempt to combine these different roles. Industrial relations scholars conducted surveys in the 1980s to consider the work of centres nationally and estimated 'approximately 10,000 unemployed people would be in contact with a centre each week'.[24] Their report stated that there were 353 full time, 446 part time, and 509 volunteers staffing the 115 centres surveyed, with a gender balance of 58% male and 42% female. They also revealed the breadth of work found within centres, as well as the 'main emphasis' of their activities. 57% of UWCs identified 'advice work' as their main emphasis, with 19% citing 'education' and 11.5% 'campaigning'. The survey gives some sense of the work of UWCs and the scale of activity. These were significant spaces providing crucial advice and support for marginalised communities. This survey data aligned with interview reflections found within oral histories with many participants commenting on the combination of welfare advice and campaigning. Indeed, it was this combination that many described as being most distinctive about their work and as being the primary driver for their involvement.

Figure 2 – Aggregated value of centre advice work

YEAR	Aggregated value of Individual Claims and Appeals associated with Derbyshire UWC
2015	£3.28million
2016	£3.56million
2017	£4.05 million
2018	£4.60million

This work was undoubtedly impressive on an individual level but the scale of activity begins to come through in the survey described above. Figure 2 provides further insights into the extent of this work and the impact on service users. The data used is based upon annual reports from the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres and reflects the economic value of the advice work that continues to this day. It reflects work between 2015-2018 but the numbers provide some indication of the work of one region, which might reflect the potential found within these spaces historically. The aggregated values include appeals against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), mostly with regards to Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments, and wider work with general enquiries (e.g. regarding Universal Credit applications) and outreach work (e.g. home visits). The economic impact is significant then in that this money is returned to claimants and undoubtedly re-enters the local economy. It is also noticeable that work within the Derbyshire centres has been targeted towards helping people within these increasingly punitive welfare schemes. The wider point here is that these more recent statistics reflect the continued role of centres and it could also be assumed that a similar collective impact was made through UWCs during the 1980s too.

This work is significant in many terms, but the trade union sensibility that underpins the everyday activisms (of welfare advice and care for people in challenging times) should be recognised as part of this engagement. Oral history interviews across the centres were keen to stress the distinctiveness of their work as aligned with a trade union emphasis on advice *and* campaigning. This is crucial to highlight the distinctiveness of UWC work. Participants consistently stressed the importance of approaching the issues encountered through an ethic of *solidarity* not charity:

You can't find out what the problems that people are facing who are out of work are unless you offer advice. So you have to offer advice, but when they come in, we're not just going to sit there in a bovine fashion and just say well, we can help with that, we can't help with that, you can claim

that, you can't claim with that. If we saw that there was an injustice, then our job was to get people together to do something about that injustice.[25]

We don't ever want to be perceived as we're just doing this out of a voluntary sense or things like that. Our members campaign […] they're into campaigning on all the things that matter to people and its always underpinned with the sense that if you know what you've been sanctioned or whatever, it is not you that's at fault it's the system and we're out there trying to educate people as well and to agitate.[26]

Other oral histories indicated the distinctive nature of UWCs as a working-class space of solidarity, which might contrast again with other more charitable welfare advice services. Participants were keen not to directly criticise other services providing support for unemployed people, often acknowledging the crucial work of welfare advice services, but did also recognise the distinctive feel of a working-class space when tackling the challenges of unemployment.

Liz Smith, from Merseyside, for example, indicated how the Merseyside centre:

> Was very much, not an exclusively working-class organisation, but it was an organisation where anybody from a working-class community would have walked into and felt at home. So in that sense I think that was quite an achievement really.

This sentiment was expressed by many during oral histories. Participants also recognised, though, that these working-class spaces might not have been deemed approachable for all communities, with some centres admitting to a gendered imbalance in both centre organisers and users, and others struggling to reach minority groups in their community. These imbalances were often despite the presence of feminist and anti-racist politics within these spaces, and generally an emphasis was upon providing an open and accessible centre. These tensions must be acknowledged in the making of alternative spaces, though, and it has been particularly refreshing to hear

from centre organisers who are quite willing and open to reflect upon the challenges of widening the reach of their work. Indeed, these challenges should not be viewed as undermining the work of UWCs, but instead as important to acknowledge when thinking about these histories and their connections to present day organising.

Conclusions

I want to keep this place [UWC] alive because it did keep me alive when I was in a terrible state before that time when [x] came to my job centre appointment because he was just brilliant and nothing happened, and it was like wow, the threat, the level of threat was there, and then it was like nothing happened.

This short paper has offered some insights into the world of Unemployed Workers' Centres. An article of this sort can't fully portray the nuance and detail of particular centre histories. With over two hundred centres, and regional variations in their approach, it wouldn't be possible to give a full picture of the centres in a short article like this. Indeed, some will likely feel that their centre experience is not captured in the accounts above. That said, the paper primarily focuses on some small details from the Tyne and Wear centre and some broad-brush strokes in terms of national campaigns and demonstrations against rising unemployment and increasingly punitive approaches of government. These histories are important as they provide some indication of the persistent organising of trade unions and communities in responding to the challenges of 1980s Britain. These histories should be used as prompts for more detailed engagements with other centres in other places.

Whilst the paper has largely provided a positive portrayal of centre histories, it is important to acknowledge the significant decline in their number. This decline follows trends in UK trade union membership with trade union density reducing significantly over the last forty years. Following their peak in the mid-1980s, many centres would close due to changes in local authority funding arrangements, particularly the

replacement of the Manpower Services Commission which left many centres without funding. At present, there are likely ten to twenty centres remaining, and these have variable levels of activity, which is a considerable decline from their peak during the 1980s. The remaining centres, like the Derbyshire centres previously mentioned, continue to conduct remarkable work and punch above their weight. Their persistence is noteworthy, given the many political challenges faced, from Thatcherism to austerity, and most recently a cost-of-living crisis. Yet their decline should also be acknowledged where the working-class presence of Britain has changed considerably since the period where centres were opening.

The concluding quote above is taken from a more recent interview relating to the Tyne and Wear centre and offers a more hopeful endpoint. It indicates a sentiment that might be considered transferable across space and time as a message encountered in many places and throughout the history of UWCs. Individual 'service users' would describe centres as an empathetic space where they felt comfortable and supported. Crucially, the involvement of the trade union movement, in building these spaces and networks of support, shaped a distinctively working-class approach as described above. This perhaps points to the history as a usable past for the trade union movement. At a moment where trade unions face many vulnerabilities and challenges, the history of UWCs indicates the importance of retaining connections with struggles beyond the workplace. More recent efforts by Unite to develop a Unite Community membership scheme (open to those out of work) has been one initiative that picks up some of the sentiment shown above and it is notable that remaining centres have aligned closely with this scheme. The struggles of the unemployed continue then, and the ongoing history of UWCs should provide many lessons for those organising practices.

Notes:

1 Oral history with Kevin Flynn, Tyne and Wear Centre Against Unemployment.

2 P. Griffin, Unemployed Workers' Centres (1978–): Spatial Politics, "Non-Movement",

and the Making of Centres, Antipode, 55, 2 (2023), pp. 393-414.

3 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class.* (Middlesex: Pelican, 1963)

4 See I. Tyler, Stigma: *The Machinery of Inequality.* (London: Zed Books, 2020)

5 Unemployment rate (aged 16 and over, seasonally adjusted). Source ONS: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/timeseries/mgsx/lms [Last accessed: 24/4/2024]

6 'Tyneside Centre for the Unemployed', Community Organising Film (1981). Available from British Film Institute.

7 *Marxism Today*, January 1984, p.31.

8 D, Watson, *No Justice Without a Struggle: The National Unemployed Workers' Movement in the North East of England, 1920-1940*. (London: Merlin Press, 2014)

9 Hilary Wainwright oral history interview.

10 Alec McFadden oral history interview

11 Adapted from Centres for the Unemployed - TUC Guidelines, 1990. Personal document accessed via research participant.

12 Kevin Flynn oral history interview.

13 David Stead oral history interview.

14 See *The Journal*, November 13th, 1984

15 McFadden oral history interview.

16 On the Stones, published by Newcastle Trades Council Centre for the Unemployed. Available from Labour History Archive and Study Centre. Hilary Wainwright Collection. Box 13 File 8.

17 See P. Griffin, Expanding labour geographies: resourcefulness and organising amongst 'unemployed workers', *Geoforum*, 118 (2021), pp. 159-168.

18 Photograph reproduced with permission from Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre

19 People's March Co-ordinators, Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, May 5th 1981, p.13

20 P, Griffin, Solidarity on the Move: Imaginaries and Infrastructures within The People's March for Jobs (1981), *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, early online version (2023).

21 Letter to the secretaries of all affiliated unions, regional councils, Wales trades union council, CATCs and Trades Council. Modern Records Centre, MSS. 292D/135.58/1.

22 John Knight (1949-2021), Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres, oral history interview.

23 Reproduced with permission from the Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

24 "An LRD survey of unemployed workers' centres" – produced by K. Forrester and K. Ward, available from Modern Records Centre. MSS 292D/135.58/3

25 Colin Hampton, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres, oral history interview.

26 UWC interview, August 2017. Participant chose to be anonymous.

27 UWC member interview, May 2018. Participant chose to be anonymous.

The Irish on Tyneside: A history of the Tyne and Wear Metro

Dan Walters

Foreword

In September 2021, I embarked on my Master of Arts degree course in Public History at Newcastle University. Born out of a keen interest in the history of the Irish community in the United Kingdom, the following article represents the work undertaken for my studies. As a public historian, I sought to not only bring new perspectives to the history of Irish communities in Britain, but also to work directly with those Irish communities to inform this. Working in collaboration with the Tyneside Irish Centre and Newcastle University, I researched and produced a project rooted in oral history interviews specifically examining the large numbers of Irish men who came to Newcastle in the second half of the twentieth century to work on major infrastructure projects such as the Tyne Tunnel, Newcastle Airport, and of course, the Tyne and Wear Metro (hereafter referred to as 'the Metro').

As such, the contents of this article are informed by these interviews. All interviewees remain anonymous, and any material quoted within the essay has any personal identifiable information removed. All quotes have been written verbatim to preserve authenticity. As the author, I did not feel it was my place to edit the spoken word. Finally, the contents of this article do not claim to be factually accurate. Oral history interviews do not need to 'seek the truth' – rather, for my purposes, I tried to illuminate experience.

Introduction

The nineteenth century saw Newcastle upon Tyne, alongside the wider North East area, become a key location for Irish migration. By 1851, it had

the fourth largest Irish presence in England.[1] As such, studies on the Irish community in the North East have largely concentrated on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a particular focus on studies based on statistical and census data. Through oral history interviews with five of the men who helped construct the Metro, this work investigates the experience of the Irish labour force in Newcastle upon Tyne in the second half of the twentieth century through the lens of the construction of the Metro.

The history of transport in the Northeast

The history of transport in the North East of England is an illustrious one, with the region boasting the first railroad in the world to use steam locomotives (Stockton and Darlington Railway), in addition to being home to George Stephenson, otherwise known as the 'father of the railways.' Major transport developments in the region ensued; including the introduction of trams, electric trains and trolleybuses. The next chapter in the history of transport in the North East, and one which still plays a major role in many of our lives, was the beginning of the construction of the Metro. Since opening, it has become the third most used light rail system in the UK, representing a key part of people's lives in Tyne and Wear.[2]

Whilst former British Rail stations were redesigned and converted into Metro stations, brand new underground stations were created underneath Newcastle and Gateshead. Completing this major feat of engineering was a skilled workforce specialising in tunnel construction, many of whom hailed from Ireland. A seasonal workforce known as the 'Tunnel Miners', these men travelled all over Ireland and the United Kingdom for work, contributing to many major infrastructure projects over the years, including the Victoria Line in London, the Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station and the well-documented Breadalbane Hydro-Electric Scheme.[3]

The 'Tunnel Miners' – a profile

Irish migration to Britain, and vice versa, has existed for centuries – no doubt due to the close proximity of the two islands. However, migration

is often used as a blanket term and fails to fully unpack the nature of movement across nations. Indeed, large numbers of Irish people migrated to Britain for seasonal work during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, returning home to Ireland once a job was completed.[4] The tunnel miners were no exception. The nature of contract-based work meant men often moved all over Britain and Ireland in search of work.

This resulted in the development of a close, tight-knit community amongst the tunnel miners. The interviews conducted demonstrate this, with many of the men still keeping in contact despite many years of retirement. The importance of the community can be seen through the unveiling of the memorial dedicated to tunnellers from Donegal who sadly passed away whilst working overseas. Opened in 2019, the memorial is situated in Dungloe, County Donegal. There are also regular social events for the community, including the 'Dinner Dance, which are advertised on the popular Facebook group - the 'Donegal Tunnel Tigers.'

Moving to Britain

Family connections were key for those looking to move to Britain. One man discussed the influence of his brother when moving to Britain:

> I had a twin brother. He was in London six months before me, and he came home on holidays, and I liked the way he looked. It was the time of the sports jacket and the tight trousers and the pointed shoes and all the rest. I said I want some of them, so I come back over (to London).

Another man explained how he eventually settled in Newcastle: 'I had an Auntie and an Uncle there (Newcastle), which more or less probably, that's how I ended up getting the flat, through them.'

Moving to Britain was only the first step. Securing work was vital. As previously mentioned, the tight-knit community helped the men to find work as tunnel miners, particularly through social settings:

> In London, there was men, say, would come in for a pint at dinner time. The agents used to go to the pub. If they were looking for men, that's where they went, to pinch labour off one firm.

For securing work on the Metro specifically, two of the men described:

> It was through contacts, people that I knew. People from my side of the family, and relatives, and acquaintances I'd worked with in London.
>
> Just by knowing the foreman, and getting to know. That's how you got all the jobs, by knowing somebody. Word of mouth stuff.

Living in Newcastle and developing a Sense of Place

Unlike the nineteenth century, where the Irish in Newcastle were often found in specific pockets of areas around the city, the tunnel miners lived in various locations throughout Newcastle and Gateshead.[5] One man explained the living situation in West Jesmond: 'We were in digs there for a long time, there were five beds in a room. It was handy for Sandyford Road' (one of the primary entry shafts for the tunnels). Another described living in Gateshead: 'a lot of the Irish fellas, well, quite a few of them stayed in Felling. That was like in boarding houses. I used to give some of them a lift home. There could be up to ten in one house, it was cheap boarding.

For those Irishmen that travelled specifically for work on the Metro, lodging and expenses were paid every six weeks. Additionally, they were entitled to extra money to return home, wherever that may be.

The transient nature of the tunnel miners meant that many of the men who worked on the Metro didn't live in the North East, instead travelling back on the weekends:

> Most of them guys were travelling to London. My brother bought a three bed house in Gateshead… it was a split house. There was a sitting tenant downstairs, and he cleaned it all up. He put seven beds in it, but you see there'd be only two of us there at the weekend. All the rest had gone away home.

Despite this, the tunnel miners experience of Newcastle as a city, alongside the wider Northeast, can only be described as an overwhelmingly positive one. All the men interviewed likened the people of Newcastle to the Irish:

> Once I got a taste of up here, the friendliness of the people, were so much like the Irish people, so much. It was like chalk and cheese coming from London. You would go out in London in the morning, and you'd make a mistake by saying good morning to someone!
>
> I always found they (Geordies) were very like us, they were very similar.
>
> Good type of people, I got on well with them. Geordies, they are a working type. There's no poshness.

Pubs, drinking and socialising were as popular as ever in the 1970s, as fondly remembered by the tunnel miners. For those men working on the Sandyford Road section, The Haymarket and The Farmers Rest were two pubs visited often, due to their close proximity to the Haymarket shaft: 'We drank an awful lot in the Hay-market, because, you see, that's where the shafts were. At that time, you'd come up at lunchtime and have four pints! Now you're not allowed to drink on a job.'

One man spoke of the Farmers Rest:

> That was one busy bar that. It was also busy because what would happen, where the shaft was, at the Haymarket, we

> could come from where we were doing the step-plate jumps, up the shaft, into the pub, have three of four pints and then go back down and go to work again.

Alcohol licensing laws in the 1970s meant that the sale of alcohol was prevented past 10:30pm, resulting in dancerooms and night-clubs, which stayed open till later, thriving. One venue, The Mayfair, was often mentioned in discussions with the men. Opened in 1961, The Mayfair operated as a bar, club, ballroom, and concert venue, hosting Led Zeppelin's first ever UK show. It was closed in 1999.

> We used to go the Mayfair on a Sunday night. There'd be about 40 of us in the bar in the Mayfair on a Sunday night. That would be the boys coming back from London too you see, to go to work on the Monday morning… getting into Newcastle late, and the Mayfair would be open.

The Irish community in Newcastle

Newcastle had a strong Irish community present in the 1970s, with the men recalling the provision of work as a key attraction:

> There was a lot of Irish working. Murphy's employed a lot of Irish workers.
>
> They (the Irish) would be on public works, or drainage and all this. When the Metro started, it drew the Irish from London. There was quite a few from Glasgow, quite a few from London.
>
> With that (the utilities contractors), there was a mass of Irishmen with it. They stayed at that game, and I'd done a bit of it, but there was bigger money on the Metro. It was all cable work.

A key focal point for the Irish community in Newcastle, the Irish Centre, was often brought up unprompted by the men:

> The first Irish Centre when I moved here was on Westgate Road. That closed, and the next one opened on Westmoreland Road.
>
> The Irish Club was up on Westmoreland. That time it was only a house, they turned it into a club. There was a wee priest there I became very pally with.
>
> The old Irish Club was up on Westgate Road, I used to go up there very often...they started bringing in the Irish games then, the hurling, the Gaelic football.

The Irish Club in Newcastle has a long history and has always been a welcoming club, putting on a wide range of activities and events over the years.

For those tunnel miners still living in the Northeast, despite the smaller Irish community, it is still a thriving one.

The construction of the tunnels

Whilst former British Rail stations such as West Jesmond were being converted into brand new Metro stations, men such as those interviewed worked underground beneath Newcastle city centre, entering the ground below via a riding skip at primary entry shafts located at Sandyford Road and Forth Banks. They mined the tunnels between these two points that would ultimately connect and become the Metro stations underneath Newcastle.

The geological make-up of the ground beneath Newcastle is hard, flint-ridden clay. Whilst this didn't pose any major construction barriers, it certainly made life harder for the men boring the tunnels. Despite this, certain sections of the tunnels were constructed through hand-work, as described by one of the men:

> It's hard to excavate it. We'd be there with the air spades, pulling it and pulling it. One day, a mini digger came down. I was delighted! Least now we're not gonna have to shovel it

> like, you know? 15 minutes the mini digger was down there! 15 minutes the chains came down and took it up again. Whole thing was hand-work, except the running tunnels.

The running tunnels refer to the main tunnels where the train's now run. The machinery used for this section are referred to as DOSCO's, however only the main boring could be completed using them. The intricacies within the tunnels such as step-plates and interchanges meant that handwork was often the preferred option.

Enabling all of this was the use of 'shields'. These were temporary support structures used in tunnels so that the permanent structures, often made with steel/iron, could be installed. The shields were manned by 11 men in total; three on the bottom tier, four in the middle tier, three in the top tier and one man 'pulling iron.'

Health and Safety

Construction of the Metro tunnels did not adhere to the standards of health and safety that are present today. The men recalled the lack of helmets whilst underground, which was in contrast to photographs in newspapers at the time depicting people entering the shafts with protective clothing. Tragically, serious accidents did occur. Perhaps the most well-known was the explosion at Forth Street. As reported by the *Irish Independent* 30 April 1976, two men were killed and more seriously injured as gas bottles exploded inside the tunnels, which was further amplified by the presence of compressed air.[6]

Accidents such as this one did help the implementation of increased safety measures. One man recalled that after this explosion, cages were installed in the tunnels to hold loose items including gas bottles.

Modern methods of tunnelling involve the use of compressed air. The basic principle behind this is that the compressed air is forced into the tunnel, so that the structure of the tunnel does not collapse. Compressed air, however, has its dangers, as seen with the Forth Banks explosion.

Compressed air was used in both sections of the Metro construction; though not for long. One man, working on the Sandyford Road section, recalled that the poundage of compressed air was four or five pounds. Another man recalled the poundage being seven or eight pounds. For those who have never worked with compressed air, it is difficult to imagine its effect, however one man remembered his concerns over its use:

> You would know when you're in there. You know the extra strong mints? I used to take them in, you'd leave them, and the whole thing was soft, like jelly. So what was it doing to the old bones?

The dangers surrounding compressed air meant that the men working with it received 'air money.' One man, for example, received an extra £2 per shift when compressed air was on.

Memorial to the Tunnel Tigers in Dungloe, Donegal, Photo credit – Dan Walters 2024

Trade Unions

The labour history and the history of trade unions in the United Kingdom is a rich one, as is the history of trade union disputes during the Metro construction. The lack of proper facilities was a key point of dispute for the men during the Metro construction: 'conditions were improper. No showers, no facilities, no nothing. That's why we went on the union.'

The trade union in question was the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), which, by the end of the 1970s, had over two million members. The influence of Trade Unions in the United Kingdom during the 1970s was widespread. With the influence of discontent in London spreading to the Northeast, the men interviewed eventually took part in an eight-week strike. One man recalled picketing different sites throughout Newcastle, including work happening up at the Kielder dam.

In addition to Trade Union activity, some of the men talked about discontent in the hierarchy of the engineering company responsible for the construction of the Metro. The strike exacerbated this discontent: 'there was a them and us situation (the hierarchy). After the strike, there was even more friction.' Another interviewee explained:

I wasn't liked by the hierarchy, especially after the unions started. remember I came in one day, I went into the office for something, and there was a drawing on the table… there was a programme on TV, the Bionic Man or something, and someone had drew a picture of the guy, and in his right hand was a machine, and he had wrote a Paddy over it, you see. I said that's typical, that's typical of what you think of us!

Strike action in the UK was prominent in the 1970s, with miners strikes in 1974, the Grunswick Dispute between 1976-1978, and 'The Winter of Discontent' between 1978-1979. To aid the large amounts of strike action in the North East, the Trade Union Studies Information Unit was established in 1975, on Ferndene Road in Newcastle, to provide education and resource materials for workers.

One man believed the strike fizzled out due to the transient nature of the tunnel miners:

You've got to remember, most of these men were travelling men, so they weren't gonna stay in Newcastle and pay for lodging and accommodation, when they could go and make a living some-where else… it got to the point where a lot of people just said, we're gaining nothing here. And we gained nothing from it.

Conclusion

The role of the Irish labour force in Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century is often overlooked. Where it is examined, we often see London as the focus. This does not reflect the story of the tunnel miners. The transient nature of their work meant they travelled throughout Britain and Ireland, far and wide, playing key roles in major infrastructure projects. Interviewing the tunnel miners in a Newcastle context has thus shed light not only on the work undertaken in Newcastle, but also this specific, transient migration. The interviews also illuminated the Irish experience in Newcastle in the 1970s, which is a period often overlooked. In order to fully examine the Irish experience in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, further work is required.

1 Frank Neal, 'A Statistical Profile of the Irish Community in Gateshead - The Evidence of the 1851 Census', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 27,1 (2009), p. 54.

2 Light rail and tram statistics, England: year ending March 2023, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/light-rail-and-tram-statistics-england-year-ending-march-2023/light-rail-and-tram-statistics-england-year-ending-march-2023#summary-figures. Accessed 5 June 2024.

3 'Tunnel Tigers': Irish workers' world record feat commemorated in Scotland, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34934795. Accessed 5 June 2024.

4 Richard T. Schaefer, 'Britain's Irish,' in *Encyclopaedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society Volume 1*, ed. by Richard T. Schaefer (London: SAGE Publications), p.206.

5 Cooter, Roger, *The Irish in County Durham and Newcastle c.1840-1880*, PhD Thesis, University of Durham, https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1907/1/1907.pdf, accessed 5 June 2024, p.34.

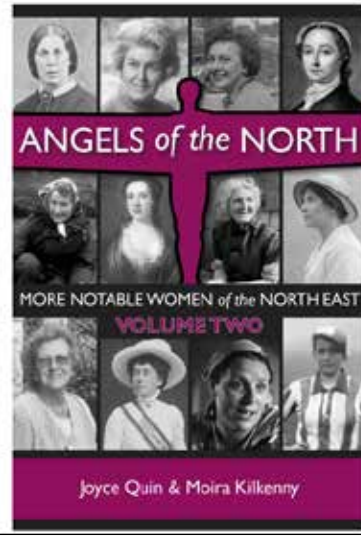
6 Irish Independent, 30 April 1976.

History

and the women who made it

VOLUME TWO - OUT NOW!
NEW BOOK FROM TYNE BRIDGE PUBLISHING

Order direct from:
www.tiny.cc/TyneBooks.
Also sold in City Library and all good bookshops

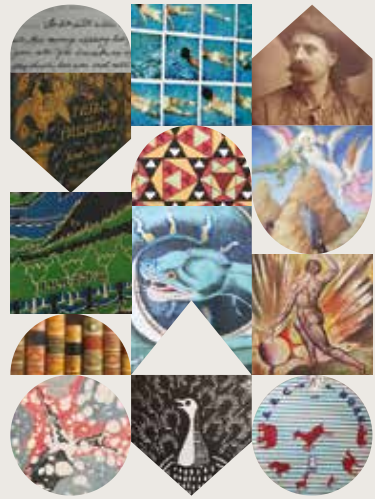


Established 1981

KEEL ROW BOOKS

Explore Tyneside's leading bookshop for second-hand, rare and collectable books. Our new Park View location is in the heart of Whitley Bay, home of great independent shops, cafes and bars.

93-97 Park View,
Whitley Bay, NE26 3RJ
keelrowbooks.com
(+44) 191 2960664



A Proper Working Look: Naomi Mitchison on Sunderland Housing Conditions in 1934

Naomi Mitchison

Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) was one of the 20th Century's best known historical novelists. She was also a poet, a dramatist, a writer of political tracts and an energetic left wing political activist. She was fully engaged with anti-fascism in the 1930s and colonial freedom and Anti-Apartheid after the Second World War. In 1934 with the Lancashire writer, Walter Greenwood (Love on the Dole) she began to map the state of working class housing in the north. She intended a book but it was never published. What survived were entries from her Housing Diary for visits to Sunderland and Durham in April '34. They recently turned up in a sorting of Naomi's papers.

John Charlton, April 2023

Housing Digs, April 23rd, Sunderland

A proper working look: scarfs and shawls. We went down off High Street to the older part of the town, mostly built 120 years ago, at the beginning of the prosperous time. Grand names; Fighting Cock Alley. We went down Covent Garden Street, an area scheduled for demolition. In front of it the houses had been pulled down, and now the tons of rubbish were being carted away, and children playing with the heaps of old bricks. We went into one house after another, mostly let at a rate of something like 3/9 a week per room, though when they were de-controlled so that the rents could be put up, families have to pay up to 7/6 a week for one room. Almost all the

houses were let off in one or two room dwellings, and each house had 15 to 20 tenants, or sometimes even more. Amenities: gas lighting - broken incandescent burners: tap in the yard, oven fireplaces, 1 W.C. in the yard, and sometimes a wash-house, or at least a copper under a penthouse roof. The yard is usually 3 to 5 feet by twenty or so, with a crumbling wall and broken door giving onto a back alley. Some of the W.C.s have wooden seats, or parts of them; some of them have doors that shut, others not. A few dwellings have put in gas stoves, usually because there is something wrong with the oven (which is anyhow tiny), and these work on penny meters. All women seem to do their own baking.

The main thing about these houses is the state of complete dilapidation they are in. They are stone built mostly, but the stones are very ill-shaped and the mortar has come out. The interior plaster has come away, that it is impossible to paper them decently, or make adequate joins between paper and woodwork, doors, mantelpieces and so on. The common passages were of course worst. In some there wasn't even any pretence at papering, just bare plaster or stone, and the windows right out. Tenants do these among them about once a week, but the yards have to be cleaned more often; no decent woman ought to have the job of keeping these yards and W.C.s clean - they don't like letting their children go to them.

Most of the rooms we saw had plenty of furniture, often good old pieces of solid stuff; one tenant had a fine oak dresser which would have cost ten or fifteen pounds in an antique shop, another a good mahogany press. But I think they would all have preferred lighter, modern furniture. Most of this probably harbours bugs. I asked about bugs. Every house had them, in spite of efforts with repapering, puttying cracks and so on. In one room the only way to keep the bugs from the children (including a girl of thirteen) was to move tables into the middle of the room, away from the walls and make them up beds on that. Of course they aren't so bad now, but in summer - It's odd to think that for a great many people the coming of summer and warm weather means just more bugs. Sumer is iccumen in. However there appear to be no rats here.

At the moment everyone is suffering from the lime and dust blown in from the demolished buildings opposite. On the other hand the front rooms get light and sun for the first time in their history. There are going to be municipal flats in the small cleared area, not more than three - stories high (so not much chance of architecting them, or of rehousing very many people), but they will not be nearly as close together as the old houses. These houses are likely to be pulled down during the next year or so. The tenants have had their first notice. Many of them, especially those with large families have been on the waiting list for council houses for years (one man said he had been on for six years, and was upset because strangers had come to Sunderland from outside and got some of the new houses).

There is obviously nothing to do with these houses except pull them down. Everything about them is broken, bannisters, windows, doors. The holes knocked through into the plaster of the walls show layer after layer of wallpaper, put on to brighten and hold things together. The floors are rotten in places, boards loose or with holes in them. The ceilings bulge downward. One woman told me how a whole corner of her ceiling had crashed - she just had time to snatch away a stone of flour she was mixing for bread. And the baby only just got away too! Some of the rooms are a fair size, as these things go, but they are cluttered up with furniture, useless ornaments and so on. They try to patch up the floors with pieces of linoleum and rag rugs.

Some of them are Catholics - ex-Irish probably. One man, a queer, gentle, muddled looking dock labourer, looking round at his bug-ridden room, said: "This is our cross". His wife, mother of eight children - the youngest three, the eldest 21, already joining his father's great army, the out-of-works - was less resigned. The house, she said, "had every misconvenience" - no cupboards (in most houses there is only a small cupboard by the fire for coal), everything broken and ill-fitting.

The women were in general fearfully hadden-doun: they did the very best they possibly could for the children and went without themselves. It must be fearfully difficult to make both ends meet. In the last house there

was a family income of 31/3 for ten people (rent 7/6 for two rooms). Often the children would be fairly well dressed and the mother [wore] a very ragged dress with a sacking apron over it. Meals looked like bread and jam, and tea with condensed, but they usually manage a Sunday dinner with meat. Living in these conditions recreation would be absolutely necessary; there's no alternative of sitting decently by a quiet fireside or walking among grass and trees. I asked one girl if she went to the pictures, and what she liked. "Oh anything with a bit of life in it", she said. Two or three times, women, looking round at their homes, said the same thing to me: "I've no heart to keep it clean." One who said this went on to knock her wall with a broom; plaster rattled down behind it. And she showed me how, under the window, the wall had its cracks - going right through to the outside - stuffed with paper and cardboard; here too the floor boards had rotted right away from the cracked wall.

While I was in this house a visitor came, someone from the cleared area who had gone out to a four-roomed council house, at 8/5 a week rent. "It's grand, it's gorgeous," she said - a big, solid woman in a black shawl - "you're cleaning up after no-one but yourself." She'd heard a cuckoo for the first time - heard tell of them before but they hadn't seemed real - and now in the mornings "we can't sleep for the birds whistling' - such lovely birds - such colours!" And - after an enquiry from her old friend - "the bairns are like little butter-lumps, like little porkers the bairns are." Again: "Men and women get some heart on 'em up there." Which shows at least that the municipal houses are appreciated - she was enthusiastic about the bath, water hot and solid as the bottom of that house. It's only the quite old people that don't transplant well. On the ground floor of that house I caught a glimpse of an old granny wrinkled and with wild-white hair, smoking a pipe.

I don't think I've ever before seen quite such dilapidated and dirty houses, houses so impossible, so heartbreaking to deal with, which were yet inhabited by such decent sort of people. I expect this decency is pretty modern; twenty years ago they mightn't have been - even - safe to go into

if one were one of the "upper classes". There was constant drinking and fighting; there was no sign of that now - the only illegal occupation was street betting.

People are very under-sized; again and again I came on fourteen year old boys who looked more like eleven, with small hands and thin faces, or stunted adults. There were knock knees and bow legs, rickets about again. In a way it's amazing that any children survive. But there are a good many big families - though not perhaps as big on the average as families of a generation ago.

We went on from there to look at the dirty river, mournfully quiet, boats lying idle, and down the High Street in another back street was a house rented by a woman who let off the rooms; she was a widow with several children, a gloomy, hard-worked woman. From there on again, and so to streets sloping down towards the quay with pretty hundred-year old houses - or hundred and fifty more likely - with 4 well-proportioned, small paned windows, and sometimes little porches, streets with names like Maling's Rigg, which had once been the homes of captains and first mates - dreamed about on long voyages - but had now come down in the world, housing each its three or four big dirty families on the dole, I expect even in the captains' days there were bugs in these houses - but then social attitude towards vermin was rather different. And I doubt if they could be adequately reconditioned. It's all a case of re-housing; but it goes too slow. As every bad block is pulled down, so the standard of the people in the next worst block rises, and they must be rehoused too (and of course the houses worsen with age). This rising standard is interesting; it goes much quicker among the worst-off people, especially the young ones, than among the better off, whose job as part of the community is not to raise their physical standard of living into what is in fact luxury, but to raise their mental and moral standards and insist on that sort of goods being better.

Durham

Brickgarth Housing Estate, Easington Lane[1]

Started by seeing some of the old houses in the low lying part of the town fairly near the cathedral. Some of these have been scheduled to be kept as antiquities, for they are fine 17th or perhaps 16th century, with oak beams and so on, and very well built, so that they don't seem too bad to live in, except that there are no amenities in the way of water laid on, and so on. Some are rather damp. Others will be removed, though even these are picturesque enough from outside with their pantiled roofs (these pantiles roofed most of the worst Sunderland houses too, with the patches of 120 years). But most are bad from the wash-house and W.C. point of view. In general they give one the impression of rural rather than urban housing, they are cottages,

We went on out, through country-side - rough pasture made none the better because of constant subsidence as the old workings below collapse. We drove first through a regular country village, then, by winding roads, to a village between three pits, where most of the houses were owned by the Weardale Company. Here there is a Labour majority on the council and they are getting to work. A quarter of the village is new houses, the usual type, and a well-designed, modern looking school instead of the old church school. But the other three quarters are regular pig styes. No doubt Ludworth was worse a generation ago than it is now, but it's foul enough. These ragged little rows -- Victoria Street, Alexandra Street - are brick built with slate roofs. They seem mostly to be three-roomed, or thereabouts, and they are supposed to be worth about 5/- a week: at any rate if a miner doesn't take one as part of his wages, he is allowed an extra 10d a day. Most of these men were working at one of the near-by pits, though the nearest was only used for putting men down - there's no coal coming out of it here but it's a quicker-way than above-ground to the next workings.

Between the houses there is no paving or lighting, but a strip of rough ground with ash-pit privies in the middle, one door a family. The rusty tins are cleared out by the Urban District Council. Between these and the houses there is an open drain crawling with muck and used by the children in preference - which one quite understands - to the privies. In stormy weather the water comes down these - the miners rows are downhill from the main street - the gratings get blocked (and if you take up the gratings the drains themselves get blocked) and the lower houses get flooded. Floors and everything in the bottom drawers, wet filthy. A few houses have gardens of a kind, roughly divided up by broken fences. Hens and ducks wander about and so do odd trickles of water from the pumping of the workings. There is one tap for each row of houses, as sole water supply.

The collieries give these families 12 cwt. of coal every three weeks in summer, every fortnight in Winter, but there is a small haulage cost stopped for this, they have electric light now, and are charged 1/- a week by the colliery Company for that.

Some of the houses have fallen in, the tiles have slid off the roofs into the yards, one which must have been used as chapel or reading room has fallen in too. Most of the small children were filthily dirty, and everything is ramshackle and broken and dirty. One feels that the whole countryside is infected by these pig-styes that the colliery companies keep their men in.

However the children at school looked a very decent lot, and clean; here they have modern sanitation and are taught to use it properly - that sends up their standard of living at once. They are very fair, looking like lowlanders. Some of the little girls have lovely long flaxen curls. The whole place was an extraordinary contrast between old and new.

The question of flats against houses keeps on rising in my mind. I think all the Durham municipal housing is in small houses. But at Sunderland we met a railwayman - a Councillor - who was enthusiastic about building big, beautiful flats. I showed him a photo of the Karl Marx hof. He wants people to have something they can be prouder of than anyone can be of the little houses. Or rather, with a little house, you can be proud of it and of yourself as housewife, but you can't be especially proud of the town which built it for you - you can't be lifted up out of yourself and your own preoccupations. It's a different kind of pride and a different concept of beauty that you get out of living in a great, grandly-architected block of flats.

The present people want houses just because they've been jammed up together in tenements, but I believe the next generation will want flats, because they will realise what flats are and how they can be nobly lived in. It seems a pity not to build for them too, especially as the houses spread the towns out over the country-side, and, with our population which will have diminished a lot in another fifty or a hundred years, that is a great mistake.

[1] Image owned by Tyne & Wear Museums. Creative Commons Licence via Picryl https://picryl.com/media/life-on-the-brickgarth-housing-estate-easington-lane-c2fbb9 Accessed 1.7.24

The End of Childhood - The Winter of 1947

Win Stokes

In the winter of 1947 I had recently passed my 11 plus and started at Wolsingham Grammar School which I was quite enjoying. Although I missed playing out on the unpaved bit of road between the houses with my mates immediately after tea because mother insisted that I should do my homework first. By the time we'd all listened to Dick Barton on the radio it was getting too late for some of the younger ones

Also my teatime was later than that of the non-scholarship kids because we had to be bussed to and from school, a distance of some 6 miles in clapped out pre-war Baldwin and Barlow's buses .The route between Billy Row where we lived and Wolsingham encompassed Harperley Banks (a series of inclines between Crook and the valley of the Wear where Wolsingham lay). Sometimes the elderly buses were gasping by the time they reached the top on the way home and had to pause to cool off. But even more serious for the winter of '47 Baldwin and Barlow's garage was at Tow Law. The buses that covered our route to school had to navigate the ridge from Tow Law via Sunniside and Stanley Hill Top down the steep Billy Row bank before picking us up on Billy Row Green and going on to pick up another clutch of scholars from Hope Street in Crook. If you missed the school bus you missed school because the service buses from Crook market place were only every 45 minutes. They had a number of stops on the way which lengthened the journey and first you had to get down from Billy Row to Crook. Nobody had a car in the village in 1947.

I had nightmares about missing the school bus for years afterwards.

My 12 year old self had little notion of the wider world except for my mother moaning about continued rationing and shortages even though I knew we had won the War. Continued sweet rationing WAS annoying but we were used to a diet of offal and allotment grown vegetables. We kept chickens and had shares in a pig and there was also pigeon pie and rabbit stew, meat acquired I know not how.

Some snowfall was normal every winter. Billy Row, being on a steep hill and on a main road, had its own snow plough pulled by farmers' tractors. I can't remember when the first snow fell in that part of County Durham in 1947 but I think we first remarked on it about the third week in January. From then on until the early March there seemed to be a repeating pattern. It would snow over the weekend leaving us wondering whether the bus would be able to make it. So on Monday morning the eldest pupil in our group (who was 16) would use the public phone on the green to ring the Headmaster who by then would have contacted the bus company to find out what the driving conditions were like. If the drivers said it would be too dangerous then we would be sent home. This was an agreed procedure with the education authority and happened a few times every winter but 1947 was different. It wasn't only Northeastern colliery villages that were snowed in: the whole country was paralysed and it seemed be a repeating pattern over what must have been some 6 weeks. Snow, semi clearance over a few days with roads beginning to be opened again, then another blizzard and back to square one. Initially, we kids enjoyed having a few days off school to play in the snow. At the height of the freeze up and the blizzards the whole of the road along the ridge and Billy Row Bank was closed to traffic and those of us who had the strength to haul our sledges to the top could enjoy a near Cresta Run experience hurtling down the hill. The haul back up was enough to deter more than a couple of goes in one day. That and the fact that our parents strictly forbade it (it was rumoured that some of the Dads borrowed their offspring's' sledges to have a go). It should be pointed out that these sledges were not flimsy plastic things but

made of solid wood with their runners lined with metal strips and usually made by colliery or cokeworks carpenters and blacksmiths. They were perfectly capable of carrying a grown man or several kids. There were usually two of us on ours, sometimes more.

I don't know at what point it began to dawn on me that this was a national emergency, Probably when my mother began to worry that we would run out of candles and coal (IN A PIT VILLAGE!!)and essential foodstuffs because after years of wartime rationing there was not much hoarded to fall back on. Vegetables were frozen in the ground, livestock froze to death if they could not be got in .Our chickens, after surviving a few nights in their hut warmed by a candle under a plant pot, ended up being brought into the lean to pantry, and we ate the weaklings amongst them. They stopped laying although we kept the survivors fed and thawed out water for them .There was only power for a short time each day. My father told me that the reason that our domestic coal supply was cut back was to keep the power stations working but all our houses were heated by open coal fires and all our cooking on kitchen ranges or trivets that pulled over the fire. When we came in after our exploits in the snow our clothes had to be dried on a clothes horse in front of the fire. Getting washing done was an undertaking. We had a washhouse with a copper which needed a fire under it to heat the water but the pipe leading to it was frozen a lot of the time. The practicalities of life became enormous chores.

Each time, as happened every so often during that winter, the roads were briefly opened: we began to hope that this was it, the THAW. And we longed to get back to school. The under 11s of the village, after a few glitches when the outdoor toilets froze, had still been attending for the school was in the middle of the village. Plus the annexe, which would later be designated the Secondary Modern, where useful crafts were taught, still functioned. Some of the bigger lads were drafted in for snow clearing after each recurrent blizzard.. Of course it did eventually end and the exhilaration of sledging down Billy Row Bank became a fond memory, with an almost mythical quality. To my knowledge there was never another

such a winter. And if there had been I would have been too old to enjoy it by sledging down Billy Row Bank.

I thought about it again in 1963 when I was a young mother with a 6 month old baby whose pram would not go up the ice covered pavements of the hill where we lived in a suburb of East London. For weeks I had to park the baby with a neighbour while I staggered precariously in hob nailed boots up to the shops to get provisions and my husband cycled equally precariously to work. There was no exciting sledging then, just frustration. In retrospect the winter of '47 was the end of childhood when snow at least initially provided a playground. But the reality of the situation was borne upon us all too soon.

Harbinger of change

Dipton and the North East during the Winter of 1962/3

Peter Brabban

For those of us who lived through the winter of 1962/3 we will remember the snow drifts, the freezing temperatures and the disruptions to life, work and transport. But the winter also acted as a bridgehead into the 'Sixties'. By the Spring of 1963 the Labour Party had a new leader and direction. The Tory government was staggering toward electoral defeat and shame. The Beatles had just finished their first UK tour and was heading the new youth movement which would be central to change in the coming years. By Spring 1963 Britain was heading toward the liberal sixties.

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(which was rather late for me) -
Between the end of the "Chatterley" ban
And the Beatles' first LP.
Philip Larkin, Annus Mirabilis

The Newcastle Evening Chronicle's weather forecast for the Christmas break of 1962 was spot-on. They informed their readers that it would not be a white Christmas. Snow did not fall on Christmas Day, what the Chronicle didn't know was that Christmas Day would be the last day without snow in nearly three months.

The snow began to fall on Boxing Day.

My sister Mary and her husband Clive arrived at our house on Boxing Day visiting from their home in Crawcrook. "We came for the day and ended up spending five days because the village was cut off" explained Mary.

Our house at this time was in Pikesyde, Dipton in North West Durham. Dipton stands on the side of Pontop Pike which at 312metres (1024 ft) is the highest point for miles around. The village has an altitude of 237metres (777 ft) and is on the North side of Pontop Pike. These geographical facts had an impact on what happened in the next two months.

During the afternoon my dad received a telephone call from his employers; The Northern General Transport Company, it was their Consett Depot asking him to check out traffic in our area and to help deal with the growing crisis. By now it was snowing heavily and the wind was picking up.

Dad changed into his bus inspectors uniform and set out to walk through the snow to the depot. Clive and I decided to join him for part of his journey. Outside, the conditions were extreme, it was freezing cold and the strong wind made it feel even colder. The wind was whipping the snow into growing drifts. I was fourteen and the conditions set my imagination racing; I had just started reading mountaineering books and what was happening seemed to come straight out of 'The White Spider'. We set off up the main road to Consett, the A692, climbing the bank up to High Stables through strong winds and driving snow, daylight was disappearing fast as the afternoon progressed. The view at High Stables was apocalyptic. Vehicles unable to climb the icy road had been abandoned and the drifting snow was piling up against them. I watched as this process happened to a bus abandoned in the road. The snow piled up against the side of the bus until it reached the roof and then started to back fill. A number of cars had already disappeared beneath the snow. The conditions were so bad that it was impossible to stay outside for very long so Clive and I set off back to Pikesyde and I was very grateful to have an adult with me.

The next morning the wind had died down but snow was piled high everywhere. Throughout the region snow-ploughs were working to clear

the roads before an expected big freeze was expected that night. The meteorologists were right and the temperature plunged to minus one degree centigrade freezing the points at Newcastle Central Station, disrupting and slowing rail travel. By Saturday 29th December the Evening Chronicle was reporting,' it is a witch's brew of hard-packed frozen snow, icy patches and fog. More than one hundred vehicles are clearing, gritting and salting roads in County Durham. Sixteen degrees of frost were reported by the Durham Observatory'.[1]

In the New Year on Wednesday 2nd Jan one of the fateful outcomes of the Boxing Day storm came to light when a body was found in the snow just inside the perimeter fence of Consett Iron Company. 'The body of 51-year-old John Simpson Mitchell was found at the foot of the embankment just inside the company's boundary fence. Mr Mitchell had set out for work on Monday at the Iron Company during a snowstorm, he decided to take a short-cut which entailed climbing the fence where he had a heart attack and collapsed and died and his body was covered in snow. His family thought that he was spending the night at his mother's house in Blackhill. A search began when it was found he had not called there'.[2]

By this time snowdrifts blocked 17 major roads in the region and countless minor roads were impassable. Durham County Council had sent out at least 1000 men manning more than 250 snow ploughs, bulldozers and other machines.[3] And still the temperature remained at or below freezing point. Two days later there was a brief thaw, enough for the Chronicle to warn of the danger of flooding. While this was sufficient to help clear some snow in valley and lower areas in high places like Dipton it made no difference. That night the snow began falling again and again and again in the days that followed.

That weekend it was reported that the snow that began falling on Boxing Day in the North East had cost the ratepayers of County Durham some £60,000. Councillors thought this money well spent. For the GPO it was getting critical as their vans were being trapped in snowdrifts as they attempt to repair the 1200 faults reported.[4]

On January 18th the weather became a secondary issue with the announcement that the Labour leader Hugh Gaitskill was critically ill, he died the next day. His death created a power struggle between George Brown, Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan. There would be at least one major change when we came out of the winter conditions.

During that weekend (19th/20th January) another major storm swept across the region with blizzard conditions in many places. On the Monday (21st) the blizzard hit my village of Dipton hard, so much so that the Evening Chronicle devoted its front-page headlines to the plight of the village. The headline read 'Operation Arctic' Dipton people can touch the tops of telegraph poles after gales whip up snow in a fury' 'Villagers fight to keep roads open'. They reported that, 'A full-scale offensive was being launched by men and machines today to open roads into the North West Durham village of Dipton, blocked by mountainous snowdrifts. Cars are buried, snowploughs stranded and, in places people can touch the top of telegraph poles. More than 50 men with bulldozers and snowploughs were working on roads leading into the village this afternoon. Gales during the night whipped up snow into a fury. The main Newcastle to Consett road through the village is cut off by seven-foot drifts. The road to Harelaw is also closed'. The temperature that night dropped to minus 12 degrees centigrade.[5]

My experience of this began at our front door where the path to our garden gate had disappeared beneath over three foot of snow so that the snow was level from the bottom of the front door to the top of our garden gate, despite the fact that there were three steps up to our front door. It took quite some effort to dig it out. Throughout the street people were digging out or clearing snow from the approaches to their houses. Outside of Pikesyde was a landscape completely shaped by snow. The main road (from Consett to Newcastle) through the village looked like a frozen sea with waves created by snowdrift after snowdrift. The road up the Delight Bank was buried under ten foot of snow. Venturing up Pontop Pike with my mates we found that the drifts were huge and we had great fun sliding

down or trying to climb up them. We even attempted to create snow caves by burrowing into the snow. There was enough snow in our street for our gang of kids to make an igloo big enough for all four of us to get inside. The bank that led from Pikesyde onto the main road we transformed into a sledge run, complete with ramp for sledge jumps and it stayed that way for over a week until the road was needed for deliveries.

The author and his mother in

Kids in Pikesyde, Dipton

Northern bus disappearing beneath the snow

John Pinnington and his dog Rebel on Pontop Pike

Icicles on houses in Swinburne Terrace, Dipton

Clearing snow at Pickering Nook. (shot while walking to school)

My winter

By the end of the week (Fri 25th) a short-term thaw eased conditions throughout the region but in Dipton it was hardly felt except that it contributed to a consolidation and compacting of the snow piled up around us. It created what climbers and skiers know as neve snow, firm enough to climb on.

That weekend the news was dominated by the UK,s failure to join the Common market. But for me the big event of the weekend was the appearance on BBC Radios, 'Saturday Club' of The Beatles playing their latest record 'Please Please Me'. I was completely taken by the song and became an instant and lifelong fan of the band.

For nearly a week the weather stayed off the front pages until February was brought in with another blizzard, described by the Evening Chronicle as the 'worst blizzard' of the winter - it had made traffic crawl in Newcastle and throughout Tyneside. The AA reported that 'there isn't a clear road in the whole North East' as snowfalls of three to six inches fell on the region.

Also arriving in the North East at the same time as the blizzard was the Government minister Quintin Hogg or Lord Hailsham. In a rather pathetic attempt to curry favour with North Easterners he arrived wearing a flat cap making him the butt of a number of jokes. Alex Glasgow commemorated the visit with a song entitled, "With his little Cloth cap".

The start of February was marked with a report by the Durham Observatory of the previous months weather and they declared that it, was the coldest January for 23 years. And that 'The mean temperature of 31 degrees Fahrenheit (0.55 degrees Celsius) was the lowest since 1940 and January 23rd with 24 degrees of frost was the coldest day since 1941. Ground frosts were recorded on 29 days of the month'.[6]

Within three days, on Tuesday 5th February, the snow was back and the Evening Chronicle reported that, 'There was more heavy snow today and in parts freezing fog added to bleak prospects as the cost of frost and snow havoc mounted. Drifts of up to twenty feet were blocking roads in the West of County Durham, including eight major and 12 minor roads'. The costs of the winter were mounting up and the chronicle reported 'As

arctic conditions in the North East swept into the seventh week, local councils were faced with bills running into thousands of pounds. The most spectacular rise in snow costs was in County Durham where snow clearing gritting and salting up to last Saturday had cost £320,000'.[7]

The next day the Chronicle was reporting, under the headline, 'Snow teams take K.O.' that the regions councils were giving up in their struggle to keep minor roads open as the blizzard roared on. In County Durham alone fifty roads were blocked. Once again Dipton was in that number. The paper reported 'The creeping menace of drifting snow returned to the North East today. And with it came the worst road chaos for years. Gales whipped up snow into howling blizzards which blocked roads as quickly as ploughs and bulldozers could clear them. All roads to Scotland, including the A1 were blocked. The two main routes between Stanley and Newcastle were blocked by drifts several feet deep. Workmen were trying to clear the roads at Causey and Byermoor (the main road to Dipton).'[8]

The blizzard continued for a third day, the front-page headline in the Chronicle read 'Nightmare fight as blizzards sweep on' and reported that,' Many roads are blocked and villages cut off'. Dipton was, in this list. 'A nightmare struggle to keep the main roads of Northumberland Durham open was continuing this afternoon as the three-day blizzard swept on unabated. All but two of the regions' roads were blocked at some point. Only the A1 and the A69 were completely clear'.[9] These latest blizzards forced me to walk the three miles to my Secondary school in Burnopfield where I arrived late and left early. Perhaps the reason that I arrived late was because I carried my camera and stopped on the way to take photographs.

A week later saw another aspect of the effects of the weather come to the fore. Workers at the Parsons works in Heaton walked out saying that it was too cold to work. Four hundred men on the night shift were the first to take action over the cold when they walked out 'complaining of icy blasts and freezing working temperatures. The five hundred workers on the day shift followed suit saying that management had refused to bring heaters into the works'.[10]

The end of that same week the weather once again deteriorated with the Evening Chronicle declaring in its front-page headline that, 'Worst blizzard yet hits stricken North --- Nine-inch snowfall kills hope of a thaw'. In Dipton we were again struggling to keep the roads open. This was the same throughout County Durham and a spokesman for the County Council declared "We are working flat out all over again; it is becoming a test of endurance for both men and machines as of snow clearing. After nearly two months both men and machines are getting to the exhaustion stage. We now see no signs of a let up'.[11]

Saturday saw the return of The Beatles to Saturday Club on the BBC Light Programme. I was starting to get a little obsessed with the band. I spent many hours in the evenings underneath my bedclothes listening to Radio Luxembourg on my transistor radio. Celebrating whenever either of the Beatles singles was played.

The next week began with deep snow and the battle to keep the roads open. The Chronicle declared that the 'North faces eight week of captivity'. With isolated hamlets and farms once again cut off by snow after 'biting blizzards hit the area with renewed force'. Road clearing operations had been reduced to a 'painfully slow progress after overnight snow'. They went on to report that 20 roads in County Durham were blocked and that conditions were treacherous on the icy surfaces of those roads where traffic was getting through. It went on to warn that 'Continuing snow showers followed by freezing temperatures were forecast'.[12]

When my Dad brought home the Chronicle on Friday (22nd February) I was excited to find an advert on page three for a concert in the City Hall featuring 'Britain's Dynamic Beatles "Love Me Do" "Please Please Me"; Tommy Roe and Chris Montez were also appearing but I had little interest in them compared with the Beatles. I got permission to use the telephone (younger readers must find that phrase very strange) and made a call to A.E. Cook in Saville Place and reserved a ticket. Next day I rushed to Dipton Post Office and exchanged some of my Post Office Saving stamps for a 7/6d postal order which I sent, along with a stamped addressed envelope to

Cooks. A fortnight later the precious ticket arrived in the post.

The next working week began with another significant drop in temperatures. Regional weather centres recorded temperatures of 32 (f) degrees of frost and that this was the coldest weather since the big freeze of 1947. The Chronicle reported that 'The coldest night for sixteen years had brought road and rail chaos to the North-East again today. And the outlook is grim'. British Railways reported that the cooling systems of diesel engines parked at Gosforth train sheds had frozen solid despite the use of anti-freeze. Also, that points and conductor rails across the region had frozen up. Road users were no better off with reports of long-distance lorry drivers lighting fires under their engines to thaw out frozen radiators. Car drivers also found frozen radiators and flat batteries. The paper listed the different overnight temperatures throughout the region.

Hexham 17degrees Fahrenheit (f) (minus 8.333 Celsius)
Durham 10f (minus 12.22 Celsius)
Tynemouth 16f (minus 8.88 Celsius)
South Shields 17.4f (minus 8.11 Celsius)
Sunderland 21f (minus6.11 Celsius)
Ashington 12f (minus 11.11 Celsius)
Wallsend 11.4f (minus 11.444 Celsius)[13]

The freezing temperatures stayed throughout the week leading up the end of the month, the Chronicle headline read 'North-East stays in deep freeze'. Despite bright sunshine the temperatures stayed below freezing and at night was dropping to minus 12 degrees Centigrade (10 degrees F).[14] The freezing temperatures lead to more walkouts in North-East factories and works as it became 'too cold to work'.

March began as February had ended in a 'deepfreeze'. Durham University reported that 'This winter had been the coldest on record for the North-East --- The average temperature in the December – February period was 31.37 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 0.35 Celsius)– below freezing point'. Water companies were appealing to customers not to waste water. This

was not a problem in Dipton where we had been forced to collect water from standpoints for quite a while. The water companies reported that the supply position was 'nearly as bad as a drought'. Their spokesman went on to say 'Because no rain had fallen since December, stocks (of water) were abnormally low, especially at the Burnhope reservoir'.[15]

Then on Wednesday 6th March the temperatures rose and the thaw began. Immediately there were problems as fears of serious flooding in the North-East grew. The River Wear had risen by eight feet and had burst its banks at Durham City. A Mr Brown who lived next to the Wear at Durham told the Chronicle that 'I woke up at midnight to hear the ice floes crashing into the bridges. It was a terrible noise'. The river Tyne was blocked by ice floes at Gateshead.[16]

When the thraw eventually set in and the snow was disappearing from the landscape my mates George, John, and Mickey and I set off on a walk to the woods in the Pont valley. The streams into the valley were gushing with floodwater, the turf beneath our feet was saturated and water rose up every time we put our feet down, even when we were far from a stream. We thought little of this because we lived on a hill but in the valleys, flooding became the next challenge of this ever challenging winter.

The snow was the most obvious sign of this season, transforming the landscapes round us. In Dipton roads ran in canyons of snow created by the snow ploughs. The walls of snow on the side of the road froze into rock hard barriers. But the snow could also be exciting and a plaything waiting to be transformed into igloos or sled courses. It made exploring familiar places exciting and a challenge in getting there. It also seemed to muffle all sounds, sliding off the roofs with a muffled whoop.

But it was the cold that shaped our lives. Life became a constant battle to ward off its bite. It was there when you woke up and poked your head out from beneath the heap of blankets, eiderdowns, coats and anything else that could keep one warm while we built up the courage to leap out of bed and into a bedroom that was so cold ice had formed on the inside of the window. It was there when one raced to get dressed. It was there in

the bathroom that was so cold that undressing was not a choice. Many of us went without a bath for weeks on end. The cold made waiting for a bus torture as it seeped in via one's feet until one stood shivering and stamping. It was not unusual to see people in bus shelters engaged in a slow stamping dance. Fashion went out of the window as it became sensible to wear as many clothes as were needed to keep warm. The balaclava made its last stand. It was the cold that drove workers to abandon their workplaces, that created havoc on the railways by freezing points; it was the cold that froze pipes forcing us to collect water from standpipes. It was a cold that never seemed to leave you.

As week followed week of bad weather our world grew smaller, constrained by the problems of travelling anywhere, even to visit friends. We found ourselves restricted to home and the living room, the one room in the house that had heating. Because this one room also had the television, we also found our world growing larger. Following the terror of the Cuban Missile crisis three months earlier, I found myself paying more attention to the news and to current affairs programmes and became a fan of 'That Was the Week That Was' even if I didn't grasp everything the programme was saying. I remember one sketch where Millicent Martin was doing a monologue in the character of either Christine Keeler or Mandy Rice Davies where she used the line, "He said that I was missing out because I was sitting on a fortune", my dad chortled, my mam looked stern and I looked dumb. As the winter moved toward spring it became apparent that a major sex scandal was brewing in London but nobody was saying what the nature of this scandal was. Combine this with the newspaper coverage of the divorce proceedings of the Duke and Duchess of Argyll. There seemed to be a strong whiff of corruption with posh people in London and beyond caught up in sleaze.

Recently a number of writers have put forward the view that the 'Sixties' as a distinctive period of social and cultural change in the UK did not begin until 1963; not least, historian David Kynaston in his recent book 'On the cusp – Days of '62' who comments that 'The real sixties began on 5

October 1962 when the Beatles hit the world with their first single 'Love Me Do'.[17] This means that the winter of 1962/3 could be seen as a full stop to the world of 1950's Britain. In a personal way this makes sense for me. That winter was the last time that I remember playing without being self-conscious, in other words it was the end of my childhood. The photographs that I took during that winter deepened my commitment to the media and set the course for my future career as a photographer. In just over four months of winter coming to an end I was to leave school, at the age of fifteen (just: I was one week after my fifteenth birthday) and begin life as a working, wage earning individual. My life changed radically in 1963.

On March 23 1963 (a Saturday) I took the number 33 bus from Dipton to Newcastle and made my way to the City Hall. I was there for the 6.30 show featuring The Beatles. It was a revelation. As a boy I was in a distinct minority, most of the theatre being filled with girls. Yet these girls were oblivious to the boys in their midst; they were here for one thing, to see and scream at The Beatles. As other artists struggled to get the attention of the audience, the girls started chanting, 'we want the Beatles'. When at last the Fab Four took to the stage the screaming became deafening as girls who were released from the constraints of home or even society screamed their feelings at the people on stage. I can't say that I heard The Beatles. I heard snatches of their songs but I did know that I had attended something special.

The emergence of The Beatles onto a national stage in early 1963 ushered in a new and powerful youth culture, free from the 1950s taint of delinquency and driven by the demographic changes created by the post war baby boom. As Twiggy was to say in later years, "there seemed to be more of us than them". Many of the baby boomers were already in work, and the biggest group in the cohort, including myself, were just about to enter the workforce in the coming year. This meant for the first time that large numbers of young people had become or were becoming, economically independent, with money to spend on the things we wanted. Dominic Sandford in his history of the 60s 'White Heat' reminds us that, 'It should always be remembered that the real motor behind the social and cultural

changes of the sixties was the steady growth of average weekly earnings, which rose by a staggering 130 per cent between 1955 and 1969'.[18] For the rest of the decade youth became the dominant culture in Britain.

In April, a month after the thaw had set in, Civil Rights activists in the USA, including Martin Luther King, began a campaign against segregation in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. The City authorities in the figure of Sheriff 'Bull' Connor reacted with brutal violence and filled our newspapers and TV screens with pictures of children being bitten by police dogs, hoses turned on little girls and women and the brutality of white policemen towards black people. It had a profound impact upon me. I learned three lessons from this campaign. Firstly, that the USA was a deeply unjust and racist society and not the chrome plated, rock n Roll paradise that many teenagers thought it was. Secondly, that injustice should be confronted. Thirdly, that photographers and photographs could further the cause of social or political movements, something that confirmed me in my passion for the media and shaped my approach to taking photographs for many years to come.

The outcome of the Labour Party leadership campaign produced something of a surprise with the election of Harold Wilson as the new leader. Thought of as the leftist candidate, he was not expected to win but his opponent George Brown was not popular, even with the right wing of the party, because of his drinking and the faux pas he committed while under the influence. His aggressive leadership campaign actually turned off a lot of MPs. Wilsons's election coincided with the March thaw. It was in March that the newspapers began hinting at a relationship between War Minister John Profumo and a young woman called Christine Keeler who had reputedly had an affair with a Russian military advisor at the Russian embassy. The 'Profumo Affair' was about to break in the UK and this would be a factor in Labour winning the General Election of 1964 with Harold Wilson becoming Prime Minister.

By the summer of 1963 the Profumo scandal had fatally undermined the Tory government and shone a poor light on the British establishment.

But if we drill down through this whole affair, through the politics, through the security stuff, through the rampant misogyny of the press and legal professions what we find at the heart of the matter are men grooming young working-class women to be sexual playthings for rich and powerful men. The comparisons with the Jeffrey Epstein case are striking, including suicide.

In terms of its physical impact the winter of 1962/3 showed us clearly that the plans and structures of mankind can be thrown into near complete disorder by the power of nature. A lesson we should be aware of in this era of climate change.

1 Evening Chronicle. Saturday 29th December 1962 p 1
2 Ibid Wednesday 2nd January 1963 p 3
3 Ibid
4 Ibid Tuesday 8th January 1963 p 1
5 Ibid Monday 21st January 1963 p 1
6 Ibid Saturday 2nd February 1963 p 2
7 Ibid Tuesday 5th February 1963 p 2
8 Ibid Wednesday 6th February 1963 p 1
9 Ibid Thursday 7th February 1963 p 1
10 Ibid Wednesday 13th February 1963 p 4
11 Ibid Friday 15th February 1963 p 1
12 Ibid Monday 25th February p 1
13 Ibid
14 Ibid Tuesday 26th February p 2
15 Ibid Monday 4th March 1963 p 1
16 Ibid Wednesday 6th March 1963 p 1
17 David Kynaston, *On the Cusp: Days of '62* , Bloomsbury, 2021, p 202
18 Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A history of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*, Abacus, 2009, p 191

The German Doctor and his contradictions

Raymond Challinor

Historian and activist Ray Challinor (1929-2011) was an early member of the North East Labour History Society, and for some twenty years a contributor of articles, reviews and oral history pieces to our Journal. This article, retrieved from a past issue by John Charlton, is one of a series on Chartism, Owenism, and the origins of Co-operation in the North East which Ray published here during the 1980s. Each explained the rich diversity of early 19th century radicalism in the region, although this one also outlines how it gradually evaporated.

Ray explores the culture of these movements: the lecture courses, journals and reading rooms they promoted; by 1841 Newcastle had thirteen booksellers, most of whom had Chartist sympathies. He identifies how the routine activities of a working-class movement can develop reservoirs of talent through their educational value, and the acquisition of skills useful in other business activities. Ray traces how the unwittingly educational consequences of involvement in Chartism could promote social mobility during a key phase in the growth of British industrial capitalism. At the same time almost every leader of the Miners' Association had their initial training in Chartist organisations. He shows the value of tracing how ideas and experiences in the radical movements change and continue through different phases of development.

The article, presented as a single piece from a series, reflects the footnote practice and organization of North East History at the time and this has not been amended here. Appreciations of Ray as an activist and

historian were published in North East History no, 42 2011 and this issue is available on our website

Don Watson

The German Doctor and his contradictions

In 1854, James Watson, a prominent Newcastle Chartist, was invited to speak at London celebrations to mark the 4th anniversary of the publication of the *People's Paper*. Sharing the platform with him that evening was Doctor Karl Marx, described in the newspaper report of the proceedings as, "the celebrated German exile."[1] While Watson made a typical Chartist speech welcoming the People's Paper as a vehicle for spreading knowledge and consequently helping the workers' cause, Marx took a different line. To him capitalist society was infested with contradictions; education could both liberate and enslave: "There is one great fact characteristic of this our 19th Century, a fact which no party dares to deny. On the one hand there have started into life industrial and scientific forces which no epoch had ever suspected. On the other hand there exist symptoms of decay far surpassing the horrors of the latter times of the Roman Empire. In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary."[2] The growing gulf between the hardship and suffering prevailing among the masses and the possibilities for a much richer, fuller life for all, if its productive resources were properly used, would become increasingly intolerable. Eventually the working class would act as the executioners of the old order. In the *Communist Manifesto* written a few years before Marx had predicted that capitalism would be convulsed by crises of increasing severity, more and more devastating slumps and wars which would either lead to the creation of a socialist society or "the general ruin of the contending classes".

Marx's Manifesto first appeared in English in the *Red Republican*, edited by Julian Harney,[3] serialised in weekly instalments. Helen McFarlane's translation which began "a frightful hobgoblin stalks throughout Europe" had a rather quaint ring to it. Yet by the 1850s the ideas themselves

appeared somewhat strange. As wealth grew prosperity percolated down, all be it in small amounts, to almost every section of society. Class peace replaced class struggle. Capitalism acquired an appearance of permanence and stability. Gone were the fears of 1848. No longer did anyone believe, "a spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism" and, however convincing Marx's analysis may have seemed in 1848, by the mid-1850s he found himself alone with Frederick Engels, virtually without influence having a mere handful of people agreeing with their politics.

Marx learned a considerable amount from studying Britain. A few years ago an American political scientist suggested that Marx had largely developed his ideas about the class nature of the state by observing how the British government reacted to Chartist insurgency[4] but, post 1848 Chartism was to give Marx another phenomenon to witness, a great working class movement in decline. As mass support dwindled so Chartist leaders each in his own particular way, drifted towards conformity. Marx had regarded Julian Harney affectionately but, critically,' as a comrade in arms. Their views however began to diverge further and further. By 1853 Harney found it impossible to sustain publication of the *Red Republican*. Then in 1854 he teamed up with Joseph Cowen, the middle class radical from Newcastle, to produce a much less full blooded journal, the *Northern Tribune*. Soon this too ceased publication so Harney moved, in 1856, to the political seclusion and tranquillity of the Channel Islands where he edited a local paper, the *Jersey Independent*.[5]

James Watson's radical ardours underwent a similar cooling. When Newcastle Chartists heard of the decision to make him the principle speaker along with Karl Marx at the *People's Paper* celebrations they wrote to protest. Their misgivings arose because of Watsons growing Russophobia and infatuation with the Tory views of the eccentric David Urquhart. The final split between Watson and the branch occurred with a highly discreditable episode that gained much publicity in January 1857. A bookseller and newsagent, Watson had for many years supplied the Newcastle Chartist reading room in Nunn Street with its newspapers

and periodicals. Suddenly they decided to stop paying his bills so Watson prosecuted them. He lost his case on a technicality. A well known atheist he refused to give evidence on oath. As a consequence the court would not accept his testimony and dismissed the case. Most newspapers reported the rift between Newcastle radicals with jubilation but the *Gateshead Observer* thought the court's rulings had serious implications. "A man could commit murder in Mr Watson's presence and escaped punishment."[6]

After the lawsuit Watson's politics moved steadily rightwards. He ended up as a prosperous Tyneside businessman, a pillar of respectability, with a large shop in Blackett St. He had travelled a long way since he came to Tyneside as an impoverished cork cutter in 1838, selling a few oddments from a stall in Newcastle's Green Market. Still, a generation later radicals possessed fond memories of James Watson's exploits when he was a man of the people. In 1887 one man recalled James Watson's regular Sunday open air meetings at Newcastle's Quayside, "he had the knack of carrying the audience with him. No man among the Quayside orators was more applauded by the people or more popular."[7] Another more critical admirer conceded he had considerable oratorical talent but was apt to sacrifice sense to the sound."[8] One mentioned that his fame as an agitator helped his business. He made many friends in the colliery villages and the pitmen not unmindful of his services gave him their custom freely."[9]

James Watson came to prominence in the Chartist Movement in the period of The Battle of the Forth. His energy helped to keep things going in the lean years of the mid-1840s. He lost a lot of money in the Land Plan scheme. In 1848 he and John West were elected as Newcastle's delegates to the Chartist Convention. At the final meeting before the departure Watson told the audience they intended to travel to London armed "to make a revolution if they saw a prospect of success."[10] Of course this was not to be. At Kensington Common the demonstrators were greatly outnumbered, both in men and firepower by the police and military, so a small deputation which included Fergus O'Connor and James Watson escorted the mammoth petition, containing five and a half million

signatures to Parliament. Despite the House of Commons' rejection and the ensuing Chartist demoralisation, James Watson remained insistent they should not dilute their programme, trying to secure an alliance with the middle classes.

The reason for his final break with the movement must stay unclear. Obviously the personal animosity generated by the legal action was a big factor. Also it may be that his growing wealth served to make him feel remote from the struggle, detaching him from his former comrades. But almost certainly the political climate of the times, society's growing sense of consensus, influenced him. Chartism itself did not remain immune to the tug of moderation, the call to replace the politics of the knuckle duster with those of the kid-glove.

It is interesting to see the transformation Tyneside Chartism underwent over twenty years by comparing public meetings held in January 1838 and in January 1858. The first of these on New Year's Day 1838 took place on Newcastle Town Moor. The Reverend J R Stevens addressed a massive gathering. He, like his audience, was incensed by the inhumanity of the New Poor Law that broke up families, segregating husbands from wives, in the infamous workhouses. After declaring himself to be "a revolutionist by fire, a revolutionist by blood, to the knife, to the death, he urged people to arm. Any attempt to implement this bill passed by Parliament should encounter all our resistance. Newcastle should be one blaze of fire with only one way to put it out and that was with the blood of all those who support this abominable measure.[11] According to T R Devyr the call to arms was widely heeded. Iron workers on Tyneside busily manufactured cannons, hand grenades and pikes in large quantities for the coming struggle.[12]

What a contrast with the proceedings twenty years later. The form was the same, the content different. The few who attended the meeting in 1858 still called themselves Chartists. They still believed in the Six Points as Thomas Gregson, who moved the resolution, made abundantly clear. Yet his reasoning had subtly changed: his main argument for the Charter was that since working people were the most law abiding section of the

community, they should have a say in making of the laws.[13] Another speaker claimed manhood suffrage was necessary for good and cheap government. He said it cost five times as much to govern Britain as America. Working people accustomed to having to count their pennies, would not be so profligate with the public purse as the country's rich rulers had been.

The transformation over these twenty years obviously had immense significance for Britain's leaders. To have conceded the vote in 1838 would have had very different consequences to conceding it in 1858. The working class, at the earlier date, angry and intransigent, would almost certainly have used their newly gained power to upset the political apple cart. The impoverished many would have elected representatives to dispossess the affluent few. As was subsequently proved when the franchise was extended a few years later, working men could be relied upon to work within the parameters of the existing system, loyally supporting candidates of the two traditional parties. The extension only involved marginal changes. Iindeed, the chartists, talking about the need to cut wasteful public expenditure, might even gladden the heart of right wing politicians today.

It is worthwhile recalling the arguments used by Newcastle Chartists in 1838 when they criticised Chartists in Birmingham and London for their moderation and lack of revolutionary fervour as, ironically, it has relevance to their own subsequent political evolution: "those men were well fed and therefore they relied upon moral force but I labour for a week and be ill-fed and ill-clothed and it would soon convert their moral force to physical force."[14] Clearly by 1858 most Geordies would be better clothed and fed than the Birmingham and London Chartists of twenty years previously yet still it would be wrong to make the crude simplification, bulging bellies equals moderation, starving stomachs equals extremism. A complex constellation of forces created the stability of Victorian society. The expansion of business opportunities, managerial posts, the professions and the labour aristocracy all helped to provide the prospect for upward mobility, the type of self- advancement for individuals that, as ex-Chartist

Samuel Smiles maintained, necessarily accompanied the advancement of Britain as a whole.

The country's progress depended upon a rapid increase in knowledge and skills. The Victorian educational system remained inadequate often not producing the quality or quantity of labour to fill vacancies. While society generally succeeded in muddling through, the deficiencies gave a chance to some, who had acquired knowledge along less orthodox channels, to get on in life. Both Chartism and Owenism saw one of their primary functions as being educational, the diffusion of knowledge among working people, increased enlightenment making social evils all that more obvious, the need to eradicate them that much more pressing. They liked quoting that slogan 'knowledge is power'. It provided the premise for holding lecture courses, publishing journals, maintaining reading rooms. But besides these there were also many other activities which unwittingly had educational value. Merely the hurley-burley of branch meetings, encouraging members to learn how to marshal arguments and think more clearly. The production of leaflets, not to mention reports and letters to newspapers developed their capacity to write. Likewise the organisation of meetings and the selling of pamphlets led to the acquisition of skills that could later be employed in other forms of business activity. Even John Elliott may well have been beneficiary to this process: could not the experience he gained as a doorman to the Newcastle Chartist Hall, dealing with unruly or violent interlopers, have helped him with law and order problems when he later became the Chief Constable of Gateshead?

The fact is that radical organisations in the 1830s and 1840s, the manifestation and the first sustained and national struggles of the newly emergent working class had repercussions on the rest of British society. It developed a reservoir of talent. It also helped to train many who later held prominent positions once the labour movement in all its facets had become firmly established. I've already given evidence elsewhere for suggesting that almost every leader of the miners' association ,the first trade union to organise miners throughout Britain, had secured their initial training in

Chartist organisations.[15] Definitely this is true of Martin Jude, the Miners' Association treasurer, who held a variety of posts in Tyneside Chartism and John Hall, the union's general secretary who had previously been treasurer in the Northumberland Durham Lecturers' Fund. The leader of the first Iron Workers Union, John Kane had been a prominent Newcastle physical force Chartist.[16] Charles Fenwick, the miners MP, was a one time member of the Newcastle Chartist Council[17] while Thomas Burt, another miners MP, recalls in his autobiography that his family sustained supporters of contained physical force although he, a child at the time, was not aware.[18] In the value he attached to education, Thomas Burt remained very much in the Chartist tradition. Lover of books and a campaigner for public libraries he told the opening ceremony that, as a fifteen year old, he walked from Seaton Deleval to Newcastle to spend his first wage packet of eighteen pence on books. He stated his opinion: "We say educate a man not simply because he's got political power and simply to make him a good worker but educate him because he's a man."[19] In other words he believed there was something intrinsically good in education as such. And the quest for enlightenment not simply on politics but a whole variety of subjects was shared by many early Victorian radical Chartists. Owenite journals sought to satisfy this thirst for knowledge, precisely those articles which historians today tend to overlook because they appeared poor and second rate containing information which has been modified or corrected by more recent research, were highly prized by contemporary readers, for whose whose inquiring minds they opened up new territories of intellectual interest.

An alternative culture emerged as Newcastle illustrates. By 1841 thirteen booksellers had establishments in the town. Most of them had Chartist affiliations or Chartist sympathies. They included Thomas Horn who had a shop in Market Street; D France and Thomas Fordyce both with premises in Dean Street; Murray, "a pondering philosophical Chartist" had a market stall as did James Watson. Some years afterwards Joseph Barlow opened a booksellers at the corner of Nelson and Grainger

St. A connecting room ran between the two parts of the premises, the place many people came to hold their discussions becoming known as the Forum. *The Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* claimed the high level of debate attracted advanced speakers from all over the world.[20] Then there was also of course the Chartist reading room in Nunn St as William Allison recalled, in 1889, "the Chartist institution was a place to which many of the more thoughtful and assertive working men of the time went to compare notes; and more than one met these men a strong individuality independent spirit and kindly priorities.[21] Besides taking a wide range of political and literary journals, it ran its own lending library. When the Reverend Joseph Barker emigrated to America he gave all his own collection of books to the library. In this period of Chartist activity he saw the need for a new means to disseminate knowledge.

According to the Dictionary of National Biography Joseph Barker was the pioneer of cheap paperback books.[22] In such an invigorating intellectual milieu it was hardly surprising that a stimulus was given to a remarkable range of enterprise and intellectual inventiveness. A stirring example of personal achievement had already been set by Robert Blakey. Leaving school with practically no formal education at the age of nine he worked cutting rushes at the mouth of the river Wansbeck. This early handicap however did not stop him from building up a business until he was a prosperous Morpeth furrier, the owner and proprietor of the *Northern Liberator* and Professor of Logic at Queens College, Belfast.[23] In a similar fashion when R G Gamage, author of the *History of the Chartist Movement*, found himself without a job or prospect he, "he qualified himself for the medical profession under circumstances of great difficulty."[24] For a while he worked in Newcastle as an assistant to Doctor Heath before starting his own practise at Sans Street, Sunderland. A more frequently used path of upward mobility was provided by the press. We can chronicle many fellow ex chartists as contributors to W E Adams (himself an ex-Chartist) *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*.[25] Another sector of the economy that attracted Chartists was insurance. This was expanding since, once workers

became more wealthy, they were in a position to save putting away for any unforeseen calamities that might occur. By 1862 two million people in England and Wales belonged to friendly societies, while many others invested in building societies, and co-op savings banks.[26] It may be that Chartism appealled to the more affluent or prudent workers. Whatever the reason its journals, in the movement's latter phase ,frequently carried a lot of big advertisements for insurance companies. Often these had Chartists in prominent executive posts, indeed a Chartist conference even set up its own company. In 1853 the Charter sponsored the Labour Parliament, an abortive attempt to bring unity to the many diverse part of the working class. Nevertheless it successfully started the United Brothers Life Assurance Company. Abraham Robinson who managed the co-operative pottery at Coxhoe, County Durham, was one of three provincial directors. Joseph Robinson of Jarrow acted as an agent. James Hogg of Newcastle who subsequently wrote a guide to the iron trade was elected as treasurer to the enterprise. So, the general picture conveyed by the working class in mid-Victorian Britain was assimilation of acceptance of the existing system as at last it was obtaining some of the fruits of industrialization. Simultaneously it developed a stake in society as a class. Its co-operative societies and trade unions usually led by moderates were permitted to exist, while as individuals, workers could protect themselves from at least some of the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune. All told the progress made appeared immense.[27]

As for the German Doctor and his contradictions, these seem to have vanished. Public opinion firmly believed in a better tomorrow. Far from it accepting Marx's necessity of revolution, it accepted at most the need for a few modest reforms. When Karl Marx sat on the platform along with James Watson at the celebrations for the *People's Paper* in 1854 he had no way of knowing that they both would die in the same year or that by that time James Watson would have become a prosperous businessman with orthodox political principles. However, Karl Marx could have speculated about a contradiction he did not mention; the contradiction in

the working class itself. Instead of being as he hoped the executioners of capitalism, the labour movement became its ally with a vested interest in capitalism's continuation.[28]

1 *Peoples Paper*, 5 April,1856.
2 *Marx and Engels on Britain*, pp 446-8.
3 *Red Republican*, 9-30 November, 1850.
4 Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Volume 1, p 183.
5 A R Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, pp 246-248.
6 *Gateshead Observer*, 10 January, 1857. Also *People's Paper*, 17th and 31st January, 1857.
7 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 9th April, 1887.
8 *Ibid*. 2nd February, 1887.
9 *Ibid*, 26th February, 1887.
10 *Ibid*. Account of eye witness, G.Halliwell.
11 R G Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, pp 56-57; *Northern Star*, 6th January, 1838.
12 T A Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century*, pp177-178.
13 *Peoples Paper*, 16th January, 1858.
14 *Northern Liberator*, 28th December, 1838.
15 *The Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, Number 20, Spring 1970, pp 24-25 and also R Challinor and B Ripley, *The Miners' Association: A trade union in the age of the Chartists*, passim.
16 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 16th February, 1887.
17 *Cabinet Newspaper*, 26th February, 1868.
18 *Thomas Burt: An Autobiography*, p 73.
19 Aaron Watson, *A Great Labour Leader*, p 10.
20 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 23rd October, 1886.
21 *Ibid*. 2nd February, 1889.
22 *Dictionary of National Biography*, also *Peoples Paper*.
23 *Memoirs of Robert Blakey*, passim.
24 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, "1st January, 1888.
25 W E Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom*, passim.
26 *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 1st January, 1860.
27 *People's Paper*, 27th April, 1854.
28 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 2nd February, 1889.

Jimmy Murray: An Appreciation

Jimmy Murray: An Appreciation
As part of our 'From the Archives Series', we would like to introduce our readers to Jimmy Murray, a figure of some importance in the North East Labour Movement in the 1970's and '80's. This is reproduced from our website and from Andy McSmith's 19996 book. We are very grateful to all four writers who have allowed us to use their work.

There are several sources of Information about Jim Murray:

- **Hilary Wainwright's obituary of Jim Murray**, published in the Guardian. Hilary was based in the North East at the time of the Workers' Report on Vickers, of which she was co-author, and she also saw the closure of the Elswick works.

- **In a YouTube video which Hilary shot**, Jim tours the Vickers Elswick works which are under demolition and recounts the history of the Elswick works and what they meant to Newcastle's West End.

- The **final piece by Peter Nicklin and John Stirling** adds some extra detail which supplements Hilary's necessarily short newspaper obituary.

- Some of the information in the Nicklin/Stirling piece was drawn from the chapter on Jim Murray in Andy McSmith's Faces of Labour (Verso 1996). Well worth reading if you can get hold of it.

Jim Murray: An independent socialist

Hilary Wainwright, Guardian, 23 January 1989

When the management at the Vickers arms factory at Newcastle brought together the best craftsmen on the Tyne, they made a mistake, said Jim Murray, who for twenty years was the shop stewards' convener. "The highly skilled craftsmen, with all their confidence in their trade, their job and themselves, were going to be very militant. Vickers had created a breeding ground for malcontents."

In this description of the skilful and stroppy men of Elswick Jim Murray, who has died at the age of 59, was also describing himself. He came to the historic Elswick works after a year or two as an engineer at sea – as was the custom for apprentices on the Tyne – and completing a seven-year apprentice-ship at Clarke Chapman's in his native Gateshead. For 14-year-old school-leavers like Jim, an engineering apprenticeship was "the Tyneside passport to success."

Well before his early death Jim Murray was a famous figure on Tyneside, but his success was not conventional. He viewed the climb up the ladder of office with a mixture of cynicism and necessity. He strove for power for himself, for his members, for the northeast, for the Irish, Chileans and other people with whom he felt a bond and for his independent kind of socialism. But he never crawled; and had a barbed contempt for those who did. For years he was a Tyne and Blyth delegate to the powerful national council of the Amalgamated Engineering Union: he was regularly elected to the AEU's national appeals committee, of which he was at one time chairman. But the syndicalist streak in his politics meant that it was his influence on

shop-floor trades-unionism of which he was most proud. As convener at Vickers he was a leader of a movement of shop stewards in engineering companies up and down the Tyne. They supported one another's struggles, organised against the legislation of Conservative and Labour governments, promoted shop stewards' combined committees across the multi-plant corporations: and most creatively, in 1973-75, developed and supported the new Industrial policies of the Labour Party — "Workers' control with management participation" was the slogan promoted by the Tyne shop stewards' conference, of which Jim was chairman.

As the lay president of the AEU's district committee he gave these unofficial movements some official clout. He was twice Labour councillor in Gateshead, where he lived with his eight children and where his wife, Pat, has been a councillor for nearly 20 years. He stood twice as Parliamentary candidate, including in 1970 at Louth, where he raised the Labour vote above the national swing against Jeffrey Archer. But he never got the safe Labour seat or national trades-union position that he might have had he got his hair cut, metaphorically and literally.

He was a dissident within the left as well. At the time of the campaign to change the Labour Party's constitution, his independent cast of mind influenced the course of party history. At the 1979 Labour Party conference the AEU's delegation held the balance and the delegation was split 34-34, plus Jim Murray. Jim Murray supported the reselection of MPs and "democratic" procedures for drawing up the manifesto. But he believed that, with re-selection, MPs should elect the leader: so he voted against the electoral college. The electoral college. he thought, would give the leader too much power.

He was very much a Geordie and at times shamelessly sexist. But he was full of contradictions. His non-sectarian socialism led him to help manage the Socialist Centre bookshop, Days of Hope, which brought Virago to Tyneside. And he ad-mired women like Ellen Wilkinson and Olive Schreiner as writers and as fighters. Whether he read Virago books I do not know, but his love of reading and other cultural pleasures was

another aspect of his dissidence. He would remain in the Cradlewell Arms immersed in Malcolm Lowry's Under The Volcano if he thought he could skip the committee meeting at the Socialist Centre next door. He would prefer to listen in the Bridge Hotel to the Beggarmen's Irish fiddlers or the satirical songs of Alex Glasgow if there was nothing vital on the agenda.

He was at home equally in his convener's cabin at Elswick and the magnificent building of the Literary and Philosophical Society, and had either haven sold Newcastle Scotch Ale he would never have needed to look elsewhere.

In the summer of 1984 the convener's cabin, along with the rest of Elswick. was swept away by the bulldozer. The long trades-union campaign to defend the works had been Imaginative. The shop stewards had demanded alternative, socially useful, products to the Vickers tanks: Typically, he went in a trades-union delegation to Iran to see for himself the country that for many years was Vickers main customer. He came back disgusted: 'There are enormous social, problems: 60 per cent infant mortality through lack of water, and here we are sending them tanks. It is a total waste of our craftsmanship." Jim blamed the failure at the shop stewards' campaign partly on the state of the Labour movement. 'The incorporation of our political and industrial leadership into the-capitalist system has left a vacuum." His achievement was to use the skill and culture of his region and inspire initiatives capable of filling that vacuum.

Jim Murray, born 22 September 1929: died 18 January 1989

Jim Murray, some further information
Peter Nickln and John Stirling

One of four children, Jim Murray's father died when he was six, leaving his mother to raise and feed them all in a two-room house in Gateshead. Leaving school at a time of high employment he went straight into an engineering job and straight into the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Encouraged by his mother, he also became active in Gateshead Labour

Party and in both the union and the party he quickly saw the rottenness of some of the self-serving union and party officials. In 1949 he witnessed the expulsion of Gateshead's Labour MP Konni Zilliacus, accused of being a communist "fellow traveller".

A Labour councillor in Gateshead for nine years he was remembered by Len Edmondson for his excellent work, especially getting Gateshead council to increase its discretionary student grants to the small number of its young people who made it to university.

Learning was key theme throughout his life. As a twelve year old he spent the money he earned in a part-time job on second-hand books from Newcastle's Grainger market. As convenor at Vickers Elswick he had his own cabin, and when his union role didn't demand his time, he would consume the books he always had with him.

Between 1961 and 1979 Jim Murray was the shop stewards' convenor at Vickers Elswick. Vickers was an archetype of British industrial culture at that time: eight grades of canteen and ten grades of toilets, 15,000 unionised workers in 26 separate unions, with 40-50 separate workshops. He became involved in disputes almost every week. Early in his time at Vickers he witnessed the unwillingness of his local MP, Harry Randall, to defy the party machine to defend 400 jobs at the works. This further convinced him of the uselessness of many party and union officials and of the need for independent shop-floor organisation. His intellect, speaking ability and organisational skills could have secured him a place in parliament or at the top of the union, but these he generally eschewed, sticking to his role among the real people, the ones he always represented.

As convenor of the trades unions at Vickers, Jimmy Murray took an active role in two important developments. Firstly, in the growth of union 'Combine Committees'. Unions were typically organised at individual workplaces and, beyond that, on a local geographical basis but Multinational companies were typically multi-plant, as was Vickers. Convening meetings of shop stewards across workplaces (a 'Combine') was therefore crucial to challenging corporate power and Jimmy was actively

involved in the Vicker's initiative. Secondly, the 'Combines' in a number of companies took their lead from the well-known Lucas Aerospace campaign and began to challenge how their companies worked and what they produced – especially in the case of armaments. Jimmy's work with the Vicker's shop stewards in this area led to a link with the local Trades Union Studies Information Unit (TUSIU) and the production of 'A Farewell to Arms?' and culminated in the work published by Huw Beynon and Hilary Wainwright as 'The Workers' Report on Vickers' (Pluto Press 1979).

THE SHOPPIE ON THE SCOTSWOOD ROAD

Andy McSmith, Faces of Labour: The Inside Story, Verso Books, 1996, Chapter Three, THE SHOPPIE ON THE SCOTSWOOD ROAD

A shop steward from Tyneside named Jim Murray once held the future of the Labour Party in his hands. It was he who decided that sitting Labour MPs should face mandatory reselection, thereby sending a score of mostly undistinguished political careers to an early grave. He played no small part in deciding who would control the contents of the 1983 election manifesto, Jim Callaghan and Michael Foot or Tony Benn. Yet he also effectively killed Benn's only chance of becoming leader of the Labour Party. He was therefore to a large extent responsible for the election of Michael Foot. Apart from that, he never found an effective outlet for his immense gifts and spent a long career in honourable pursuit of impossible objectives. Power was placed in his hands by sheer fluke.

Maureen Callcott: A Life In History

Maureen Callcott:

Dr Maureen Callcott was born in Redcar in 1933 and spent 10 months as a child evacuated to Frosterley in rural Weardale during the Second World War.

Educated at Saltburn High School for Girls she went on to do her BA in History at King's College, Newcastle, (then part of Durham University). This was followed by her DipEd, MLitt and PhD at what was by then Newcastle University.

She taught in schools in County Durham, until taking up post as a Lecturer, Kenton Lodge College of Education,1966-72; and then as Senior Lecturer, Newcastle Polytechnic (subsequently Northumbria University) 1982-88, until she took early retirement. She was a Tutor-Counsellor for the Open University for approximately 30 years

She was significant in the foundation of the study of oral history and has been an active and valued member of North East Labour History Society for over 30 years. She was Chair (1986-91), then subsequently elected as the Society's first Vice-President, a post she held until 2021 when she was made President, both posts a recognition of her services to the NELHS.

She was on the board of the Lit and Phil for 16 years, until she retired in 2008.

In 2017 Liz O'Donnell interview Maureen as part of the Popular Politics Project. This transcript was prepared in 2023 by Sue Ward

In this first section Maureen talks about her background, family politics, school and university education. She describes the economic, political and cultural life

she led as a young woman in the 1950's, her developing interests as a historian, her work as a teacher and her personal life as her family grew.

I was born Maureen Gray in Redcar; my dad was a railway accounts clerk. My mother had been a primary schoolteacher but had to leave on marriage. They got married in 1930; they'd come from Weardale, and both felt that they were very lucky to have been allowed to take the tests to go to Wolsingham Grammar School, from different primary schools in the little village of Frosterley.

So what sort of period are we talking about here?
They were born in 1903, got married in 1930, bought – again, this reflected those times – a small new house in Redcar, which was expanding because of the steel works and ICI and shipbuilding, and the big new railway offices in Middlesbrough. Although a lot of people didn't do well in the 1930s, people in regular sort of clerking jobs knew they had an income and a pension … and money was apparently very cheap. I think the income was a lot less than a lot of my friends had, whose dads worked in the steelworks.

My mother had left work when she married, I was born in 1933, my sister in 1938.

The war began the year after that, and we were sent immediately to relatives in Weardale, me to an aunt and my sister to grandparents… I think we were just there for about for eight or nine months, during the phoney war … then they took us back home, and Teesside had quite a lot of bombing.

So you weren't re-evacuated?
No, once the school had a bomb shelter.
Which school were you going to? It was the local primary school in Redcar, newish because we were in the new end of town. It was called after the local alderman, the John Emerson Batty School, so we were called the Batty schoolkids, cruel. I was there from age 5 to 11, from where I passed the 11-plus. At the time, to go to grammar school you paid. I think I was the only

girl from my class. Some boys certainly went to the local boys' grammar school. I went to the Girls' High School in Saltburn. This was in 1944. I think, then you could pay to go, but I passed the scholarship… then a year or two later, with the Education Act, it was all free. I think my parents had to pay a bit at that point, till the Labour Government, Ellen Wilkinson's Education Act. I was there until I was 18.

How did you feel about passing the exam?
I think honestly I expected to because I had been put in for the exam the year before, but I was not ready, I remember the head teacher standing over me, and tapping my back because I was making mistakes in the maths. I think it was assumed I would go, but I was pleased to go. I had a lot of friends in the town, I went to the Methodist Chapel, and joined in their various activities, but I think I was one of the only ones that went to Saltburn. We went on the train every day from Redcar. I was very fortunate, because my mother was a very careful manager, and I was able to learn to play the piano. I also played tennis in the local park, for which you had to buy a ticket.

What about the teachers at the school?
Looking back, they were all Miss, there wasn't a married teacher or a man in the seven years I was there. Several of the teachers at the junior high school were definitely Edwardian ladies with long skirts. They were a mixture really, with very good science. They moved into a new building between my time and my sister's getting into the sixth form, and my sister did do chemistry, but I had very little science. I don't think I could have been a scientist, my maths wasn't very good. I was much more interested in literature and languages, it was only French and Latin that I really enjoyed. I did reasonably well, but I wasn't a star of any sort, apart from history and English, where I used to expect to be near the top of the class.

How usual was it for people to stay on until 18?
It was very rare, and I don't think I realised it so much at the time, but my

best friend in primary school, her parents paid for her to go to Saltburn, but then she left at 14, still the leaving age, just, Ellen Wilkinson's Act raised it to 15. Pat Rennoldson, she went into a bank. Amazing now to think of. Very few of us stayed into the sixth form. In fact, I tried to leave myself.

I wanted to be a journalist, and applied to the local Evening Gazette, I thought I'd gone for an interview, but I was shown all round, and then I went back to the editor and was told to go back to school. My father's boss, whose daughter had been to university, had told my father I should stay on at school. I remember feeling it like a slap in the face, because I thought I had gone for an interview. But later, I did apply and get a Kelmsley graduate traineeship for journalism, but I changed my mind, and married Bill, and went instead for teacher training.

So it was quite rare, and we were quite a small sixth form. I think my parents kept us going, but there was never any money to spare. Anything I did extra, like playing tennis or any sort of leisure, I paid for by part-time jobs in sweet shops and cafés in the town. There was no spare money at home … it was reasonably normal at the time. I always kept my Christmas and birthday presents to buy season tickets for tennis. I never asked for money, I knew my mother kept it in little pots; it was all spoken for. At the same time, we were kept going at school.

What was your parents' attitude to education?

They were in favour of education, as a good thing. My mother's father, grandfather Armstrong, he, I think, was an early socialist in Weardale, I think his name is on the little institute in Frosterley, on the main street. I remember Ruskin's Unto This Last being on the bookshelves. I remember the few books under the eaves in the attic room I slept in on the front street. I heard stories about my grandfather afterwards.

My mother was the eldest of eight, and she wondered how she managed to get to college from Wolsingham Grammar School, none of the boys did. Grandfather walked them out of the parish church during World War I. What my cousin told me, when the war started, in the pulpit were the

squire and the recruiting officer for the Durham Light Infantry, and the vicar, and they were pressing all the young men in the congregation to come out. So he walked the whole family out. He had the principle that if you educate a girl you educate a family; my mother told me there was this philosophy about education.

Were your parents political?
They were members of the Labour Party … someone used to come and collect a subscription every month. They used to get Left Book Club books. So they did have those sort of links, but they weren't active. My father was branch secretary of the Railway Clerks Association …there was a huge bureau in our little sitting room, a roll-top desk where he did his union work. I remember he talked very bitterly about being voted out, he was rather short-tempered. So he was active in his union and used to go to conferences. I think it was it was the Transport Salaried Staffs Association afterwards,that was after the nationalisation. I do remember hearing these things, and being sort of alert.

I joined the Labour League of Youth when I was in the sixth form. Most of the girls still at school joined the Young Conservatives, who had nice dances.

So what did you do in the Labour League of Youth?
We just had debates and speakers, and I think it was disbanded, and then of course when I was 18 and went to university, I visited it on vacation, but I think it faded out from then. It was a bit too radical for the town, for the Labour Party, but I sort of grew away from it, I wasn't political then. My. parents liked all that, they were left wing.

Did either of them talk about the General Strike?
Oh yes, he did, he remembered, he supported the strikers… he had a motorbike before he was married in 1930. [He] talked bitterly about how his neighbour in our little cul-de-sac they bought into, there were eight

houses, and about five of them were railwaymen like my father, they had come because of the big expansion in Middlesbrough. They were buying because they could travel on the train free from Redcar to Middlesbrough - we were quite near the sea - but he talked quite bitterly about Jack Richardson next door … called him a scab and a blackleg. My father had apparently supported the strike, and also used his motorbike to help the strikers.

Tell me about applying to university. What was the procedure then?
I was very surprised to be applying. I had shelved for the time, I suppose, the notion of being a journalist. Other girls were applying, my two best friends, there were three or four of us applying. I applied for a teacher-training course at Durham St Hilds, but my history teacher said I should apply for university. I don't think I really knew what a university was, and I don't think my parents did either, even though my mother had been at Darlington teacher-training college for two years. I can't remember why I came to Newcastle, possibly because it was nearest, but my best friend who I still see, she married an American English prof eventually… she went to Leeds. There were three of us in particular and the other went to Birmingham. I did history because my history teacher suggested I should...

My mother came with me on the train to the interview …I remember wearing a hat and gloves, having been told to dress like this because at school in those days, we had to walk through Saltburn to the train station dressed like that, and we were told to do so for the interview. We went to Eldon Square, when we were supposed to be going to Ellison Place where the history department used to be, we got mixed up and rather panicked. Professor Burn had been to Wolsingham grammar school at the same time as my parents, he'd been in the same year, then moved to Durham School when he was 13… Maybe that's why I got in, but I don't think it was just that. He always asked after my parents.

I was fairly callow, but well-read, because Barbara and I just wanted to read everything, and we took it in turns to buy new Penguins, which were

about sixpence, which was still real money in those days, and the Everyman books, I've given quite a lot away recently, but had quite a few which we were buying while we were in the sixth form, just because we wanted to know what was what.

So what year did you start at Newcastle?
1951, and it was still postwar, there was still rationing of clothes and butter and sugar and whatever else. I moved into an almost new hall of residence, Ethel Williams Hall. It was all women, men had to be out of your room about 6.00, and they had to be out of the common room by… Gosh, it was a different place, at least three evenings a week we had formal dinners and had to wear a gown, I had to buy a gown, though I never wore it in the university except for dinner, and there was a high table. If you were out after 11, you had to sign in and get permission.

There were lots of buses from Four Lane Ends, and I loved the city …I think I made friends immediately. We were all in the same situation, in a sense that it's postwar and there's rationing. I don't remember being overwhelmed by people being posh, when we were introduced as freshers there were a mixture, but I don't remember thinking about class. One or two played lacrosse so had been to girls' boarding school, but it didn't affect me.

What do you remember about what courses you did?
I remember I didn't know what to do with myself; for at least half of the first year, we had six lectures a week, we didn't have any afternoons. We'd been taught very hard at school, with tests nearly every week and a lot of essays, and I really didn't know what to do with all this time. I remember wandering all around the city. I had other friends, one doing architecture and one doing medicine, that I met in the hall, and they were busy morning noon and night. I really didn't know how to fill in the time, and I didn't really grasp Roman or Anglo-Saxon history, though I went through the motions, and we had a very strange tutor, did you know Mrs Olive

Tomkief? We had more women then than later. Several had got in during the war, when the men went away. Olive Tomkief taught medieval … and constitutional history …I didn't really understand anything she said… I do remember going for an essay back, and she said, 'I don't think there are any firsts in this lot'.

I didn't really know what a first was. I had very little conception of a university course. Most of us were first generation university, we were in the same boat, but it was the norm, for women especially, there was a huge proportion of men to women in the university, and still ex-servicemen, and I married one.

I got through the first year, there were twenty-four of us in the first year and half were not allowed to proceed to honours. That reduced us to twelve for the next two years. We had to do Latin and French, which I had done before, as well as the history course. The others had to do a general degree. People who weren't allowed to proceed, they said they failed Latin. It was rather cruel, and my best friend Joan, who had been at Berwick Grammar School, wasn't allowed to proceed to honours, which meant they had to do a general pass degree … Northumberland County Council actually cut her grant because she wasn't allowed to proceed to honours. I had a grant, North Riding County Council was not rich, and one had to have pretty good A-levels to be given a grant and to be able to go to university.

How about during the vacations, did you go home?

Yes, and sometimes I went up and down, as I had got quarter fares, because my father was a railwayman, so I had cheap travel, and could use that to go round the country a bit. Certainly in the summer vacations, I worked in cafés and ice cream kiosks. In fact in my second year, I got a very good job with the local council in the summer in a kiosk on the beach, letting out deckchairs and windbreaks. The little man who was my boss, he would open up and disappear to the club or the betting shop. I knew all the lifeguards, the boys, and on wet days they would come to my cabin and chat, when there was nobody on the beach. There were still quite a lot of people who

came to Redcar for the beach and their holidays in those days. On fine days the deckchairs and windbreaks disappeared quite quickly, I could just read. It was well-paid compared to the exploitation in the ice cream shop I'd worked in since the fifth form on weekends and holidays. It was a cushy number for the next two or three years.

How about political activity? Were you involved in anything?
I wasn't actually, I did join the Socialist Society I think, but I also joined the Methodist Society, I had been quite keen on Methodism at home, and I made friends there. I don't seem to have done anything much in the Socialist Society, and I wasn't actively involved in anything politically. I loved the city, and I remember thinking it was marvellous to have the Theatre Royal. It wasn't at all beyond one's means, to go to the theatre. We didn't go to pubs and clubs, I have to say, I don't think anybody much did. I don't think it was just my Methodism but we didn't live the life that students live now at all. We had a good time, and I loved the opportunity to go to the theatre. In the sixth form I started going with Barbara to concerts in Middlesbrough Town Hall, the Hallé used to come regularly. Pianists, I remember Moura Lympany and quite a few famous people played in Middlesbrough. So we started going to concerts, and again we went to concerts in the city. I don't think the prices were that high relative to what we had, compared to now.

I made my own clothes, just to go out on Saturday night. Some of the girls did seem to have more things than maybe I did. We had had clothes made at home made by a local dressmaker, and she'd made one or two things for me to go away with, my mother tried but she wasn't very good. I remember girls in hall, there was a sewing machine on a table, and girls would say oh we'll go into town, to Fenwicks or a material shop and buy a piece of material, and help each other to make a dress for the evening, run things up. There was still rationing, and I wouldn't have money to buy posh clothes, but I remember making dresses for dances. I kept on doing that for years when I had my children.

Were you still living at Ethel Williams Hall? Yes, for three years, which meant really from one point of view, it was like living in a hotel. We had breakfast and dinner, and at weekends all meals. I think the laundry was done, I don't remember doing any. In many ways it was restricted but we were very privileged to be there. I started meeting Bill, he was President or Chairman of the Morrison Society, that was the History Department Society, I seemed to meet him almost in the first term, and to be going out with him by the second year. He was seven years older than me, and ex-service. In fact he had started at Cambridge and then had to go into the forces, I think he'd gone there in '44 but left at the end of the first year to go into the Air Force, and he came back, and started again up here. His mother was not very well. So there were several ex-servicemen, and that became quite a bit of my social life.

I was much more comfortable with the History course in the second and third years. I felt I knew what it was about, what I was doing.

Was there any period that you were more drawn to?
I think so, I think the nineteenth century increasingly. We didn't do anything very modern, I could have said that at school, our wonderful history teacher who had been in the Wrens, used the brand new syllabus, it was the Northern Joint Board, British and European history up to 1939, so we did the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, so I loved all this in the sixth form, but never got that far at university, even with Joan Taylor, who I gather was in Vienna at the time of the Anschluss. I enjoyed the Victorian period, I did Prof Burns' special subject, I really enjoyed that, more and more I think I was beginning to grasp what it was about, in fact I remember when I was swotting for my finals, we had two years of work examined, had about nine exams. I was holed up at home, morning noon and night, and I think there I was trying to summarise, thinking Oh God, now I know what it is about and it's far too late. I did get a 2:1, to my surprise, having told my parents I'd failed, I'd been very conscious of what I couldn't do in the exams. I think only two of us got a 2:1, but I didn't think of doing any more with it. I was

told after the exam that I was top of the degree year. Nobody got a first, in that year or several others later.

I had got a Kelmsley graduate training place, to do a postgraduate traineeship in journalism.

Where was that based?
In Newcastle, with Thomsons, but I would have had to go round the country. But by my third year, Bill had proposed, and I don't think in those days it would have worked, for me to have gone off, when we were thinking of getting married. Anyway I abandoned that, and after I got my degree I went and did a DipEd and I got a first job at the sort of school I knew, which was the Grangefield Grammar School for Girls in Stockton. Brian Bennison was at the boys' school right next door, actually, but a bit later.

Where did you do the DipEd?
At Newcastle, with a long teaching practice at Whitley Bay grammar school, we were still in the tripartite system, I taught in the girls' high school first for about a year and a half. By Christmas the second year, we were married. We were living in Durham, Bill was teaching at the old Gateshead Grammar School for Boys, and I was going down to Stockton on the bus every day, but then the landlady put us out, and we couldn't find anywhere to live, so I gave my notice in and got a job in the autumn at Hookergate Mixed Grammar School at Rowlands Gill, which was in crisis. The head had been suspended for pilfering all sorts of things, and it was in chaos. I didn't like it at all, so I got pregnant quite quickly. So I was there maybe a year and then left. There was not equal pay for women teachers at that time, so I was being paid less than the male teachers though I had a better degree. Then I was home for ten years and had three children.

This was in which house?
We first had a little house in Rowlands Gill, when we were put out of Durham, for £1,200. I don't think we had any actual money; we must have

had a little bit to put down as deposit. We'd spent about £400 on it, and after I had David and then Alison, we sold it for £1,600 and then we moved into a new house in Sunniside, near Burnopfield. We were there for six or seven years, and I had Andrew, and then we moved to this quite big old house, a colliery manager's sort of house, on Fellside Road in Whickham, which was marvellous. It had a huge garden and lots of rooms so the kids could have a room for table tennis and all sorts. By then I was starting to think of doing something else; I did do quite a lot of odd jobs, with supply teaching, and bits of A-level teaching, and for the Ministry, in the city, I think if civil servants did A-levels, they could get made up to Executive Grade. So I did do some A-level teaching, but not a lot.

Section 2

Here Maureen covers her post graduate work with Norman McCord, the difficulties of being a woman in a mostly male environment, her developing work as an oral historian and her return to work in full time education, eventually at Newcastle Polytechnic.

So what period are we talking about?

About ten years, I suppose. David was born in 1959, each of them born two years after each other. When Andrew was starting at school I don't know why I thought of going into the university, and asking if I could do something. I really didn't have much clue. Bill had done a master's, which was a research degree then, by dissertation or thesis at Durham. I went and saw Joan Taylor and she said you've got a 2:1 … I said I wanted to do a PhD but the only PhDs then were three years, full-time, and I just didn't have the confidence to start one, or the money really, because I would have had to pay, and the kids were getting on. Anyway, I didn't have the confidence to sign my life away for three years, because I hadn't done anything, and Joan said go and talk to Norman McCord.

Norman suggested someone, Bill Purdue. He was doing some earlier North East elections, and I was to follow on, to join Norman's research

group and do an MLitt. There wasn't an MA in that period, so it was to be an MLitt by research, on Parliamentary elections in County Durham in the interwar years. I really didn't know quite what I was going in for, but Norman had a group. It didn't suit me at all, I've never said this to Norman, but he had his group, nearly all men with one woman who was doing the Poor Law; one of Norman's things was to cover all the Poor Law authorities round the North East. There was another woman, but she again was from Hexham, I think. Norman's seminars were in the Turk's Head, and there were all these men deep in beer, I was travelling in from Whickham by then or Sunniside, leaving the kids …I couldn't join in their chat.

They all seemed to know each other, and I got to know some, Frank Manders, Bill Purdue, Maurice Milne I met there … I don't think I went to many of the groups, after one or two. I didn't particularly enjoy going, but Norman helpfully got me a Grundig tape recorder and I started meeting people in all the constituencies, I made an effort to find people, I knew there would be people still living from the interwar years, this was about 1967 or '8 …somehow or other I got to meet people in nearly every constituency, and went to see them, which was fantastic really, and then started taking the Grundig tape recorder around, but it was ad hoc all of that, just bit by bit. I somehow got to meet the regional organiser of the Labour Party, though I wasn't studying the Labour Party, and it was supposed to be Northumberland and Durham but in the end I just did Durham, and I was doing Newcastle as well. There were enough constituencies, there was so much stuff. I met the Northern Regional women's organiser Margaret Gibbs, and she put me in touch with a name in every constituency, that woman knew about everything, not just women I talked to, but key people, where I could find them, where they were still alive.

Margaret had names for everywhere, which was great. She lived at Cambo, with Molly Thompson … they'd been there a long time. They'd met each other at college in Durham, St Hild's I think, in 1910. Margaret had gone to a very early Blaydon Grammar School which apparently was in rooms above the Town Clerk's office in Blaydon, and she talked about

all this, she was an amazing woman. She and Molly had met each other in college, which they rather despised, the rules and regulations, from 1910 to '12, a bit like my mother, Margaret had eventually become the Labour Party women's organiser, and she and Molly had both worked for Sir Charles Trevelyan, who had set Molly up with the school in Cambo, and with a house. They lived there after they retired, in a Trevelyan house. I used to go down to Cambo in those days, getting information from Margaret. We became good friends, and I used to take her to the Labour History Society, she loved to come, until she died when she was 90, and I used to drive her up and down.

So these were the early days, really, of oral history becoming respectable or accepted?

I didn't think of it as a type of history, but I must have written something of what I was doing, and John Saville, a founder of the Oral History Society, asked me to go and say what I was doing at an early conference in Hull. So I was back up and down to Hull, quite a bit with oral history conferences, and some in London. I also wrote up a number of interviews …for his *Directory of Labour Biography*. Oral history was just getting a name, but you know the Romans did it, so it wasn't a new thing, but suddenly it was a Society with a Journal ... I did speak at a conference, I don't know if it was social history or oral history, in Aix en Provence which was fantastic … I think I talked about the organisation of Durham Labour Women. I think I called it Social Movements, *Mouvements Sociale* ... I went to the founding conference of the Social History Society which was at Lancaster, with Harold Perkins. I don't think I did anything particular, but I met people, and was encouraged. By then I'm working.

You did your MLitt?

I started the MLitt, and just suddenly felt I wanted to work. I'd done a bit of supply teaching, bits of A-level teaching. Bill by then had moved from Blaydon to St Mary's, the Catholic teacher-training college teaching

history, so I knew a little bit about teacher-training colleges, which I wouldn't have known, but then a job came up part time teaching history at Kenton Lodge women's teacher-training college, and they wanted someone who would teach history on the B Ed degree. They were just introducing the B Ed degree. People could do the three-year teacher training course for a certificate, and then go on to a fourth year for the B Ed. The modern historian they had, Bob, didn't want to teach at degree level, and they had a very good early modern woman, Betty Bradshaw, who was Head of History, so they advertised for someone part-time to teach Modern History to degree level, and somehow or other, I somehow thought I could, but I think I knew about colleges because Bill was in one, I don't know if I would have done otherwise.

I applied, and I remember a few of us being interviewed. It was three days a week, which I thought that's alright, then I can keep my MLitt going, and probably I'll have the holidays for the kids. I was nervous about taking a job, in a way, and I do remember Cyril Lipman, Councillor Lipman I think he was Council Leader, the Poly head of that at that time, interviewing me, he chaired ... saying, 'well, you want this job, and you've got a husband, you say you've got children, and you're going to do research, how are you going to do this job as well?' It's a question no-one would ever ask now, but I must have somehow or other convinced them that I could, and so that was really my entrée into higher education there at Kenton Lodge. So that was three days a week, and I enjoyed it. I was there for five or six years, but after three or four years, I was told that it was a full-time job. Then we merged with Newcastle College's teacher-training college, sometime after that, and I was told it was a full-time job, and I could have it, otherwise they were going to advertise it. I really didn't want a full-time job, but I decided I would risk it.

So then I'm in full-time, which actually didn't seem any more work than part-time had been, and you were part of everything and organising things and that sort of thing. I think when you were part-time you worked every minute of your contract, whereas full-time you had times when you weren't timetabled. And then at some time, at that point, I wasn't hugely confident,

I didn't just teach history, we had to go round schools and teachers there, students at all levels, we had to go and visit. I went to nursery schools, and primary schools, every sort of school that I really knew nothing about, and I always felt anxious going in to introduce myself to head teachers, and waiting for them to ask what I'd done in the schools, which was nothing. It was alright, but I really wasn't very confident about the education side. Anyway, then they began the History and English degree in Newcastle Poly, and they needed – I think I was half-way in, you said you wondered about people getting into academe, by my latter year or two I think the Poly was taking over the teacher-training, and Bill's was closed, St Mary's College was closed, Kenton Lodge was closed, Northern Counties at Coach Lane was closed, I think I was out before it was closed. We'd moved down into the Polytechnic, into the Lipman Building, doing the teacher training, merged with Newcastle College, and then they were advertising for people for the new history degree, and I think I moved into the third year, the first third year. I was very lucky and Peter Coss who taught in the college too, a medievalist, he became a prof at Cardiff. He and I got into the History faculty. I was in many ways much happier just teaching history than in teacher-training, but it was a different environment. So I moved there, that must have been about 1973, and I had done the MLitt by then, finished it.

Section 3

Maureen discusses the early years of the Open University and the challenges of balancing family life and dealing with attitudes to her as a working woman. She covers embarking on her PHD and the development of her history teaching at the Polytechnic

How was it, as a woman with children, doing all these things?

I don't know really, Bill was doing the same sort of work, so it meant we had the vacations, we were both always doing research, or projects going on, he was very supportive. I didn't think of it as an issue, but I did go to a lot of conferences, I loved getting away, after all the years of being at home.

It was just when I'd got the job in the Poly, they offered me a year's course with the Open University, which was very part-time, it was as a tutor-counsellor for their Arts Foundation course, and I couldn't resist it, and it was just so many Wednesday evenings in the year, meeting my students. It all changed then, the way they did things later, so I said yes, so I was doing another job. I remember Andrew, my younger son, sort of counselling on the phone, students ringing up and him talking to them, because I was tutor-counsellor, but it just seemed to be possible. I do remember, I used to have a class on a Wednesday night, dashing home, my normal life was dashing. I pretty well made a meal every night, at home, we had an evening meal together. Earlier days when I was at home, when I left work, I think Bill did quite a lot of night classes, but by the time I was working, there was more sharing, but with me having been at home all those years I was much better at all those household tasks, plus women are. I'd be dashing home and then out again to the OU, and then suddenly saying what if I didn't come home on Wednesday teatime before I had a class, and I just got to love my Wednesdays, when I stayed in after the morning's teaching and faffed about in the afternoon, or prepared the evening, instead of going home. It was fine.

And also, with the OU, I thought I should see what my students did, which was go to summer school, and I did that for three years, tutor at a summer school …I went in September, when the kids went back to school, and then Bill would take over … the kids had grown a bit. He was willing to do things, and he went to things as well. So I did the OU, which was probably a little bit much, because there was marking, but I enjoyed it, I enjoyed the OU students, as a tutor-counsellor you were there as an academic counsellor through their degree, and it sort of just rolled on. I hadn't intended to keep going, I did stop I think at least twice, and this is going ahead of the story, but when I had to leave work to keep Bill at home eventually [after he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease], I bumped into Jonathan Brown, he was a later organiser of the OU in the area, he said, 'if you ever want to come back to us'. I had stopped doing

that, when I was teaching and Bill's illness as well, and he said, we need somebody for the year coming, and so I fell into that when I left my other job, and I did that for ten years. I did quite a bit more after Bill died, and taught in a prison for a time, at Acklington, for the OU, but that was after I'd left the Poly. Some time in the middle of that, I did the PhD, I can't remember when that started.

So was that at Newcastle?
Yes, I should have got away then, but with the family doing so many things…

Tell me about the area you were specialising in for your PhD?
Initially, I was going to extend the women's history I had been going to do, and then I don't know why it was, partly because of family and things … I became friendly with Norman McCord. We kept meeting, and actually he used to come and visit Bill, he was great because he and Bill, they were in the same year, doing their first degrees. and he kept saying, there was all this stuff on Newcastle city government, that somebody should be doing, and I was talking to Martin Pugh, who did women's history, which I thought was a bit odd, but he did do it very well, I just suddenly thought, well the Newcastle stuff is all there, so I did the reformed Corporation of Newcastle from the 1830s to the turn of the century, and I got fed up with it, rateable values and God knows what. There wasn't a woman in it, right through the nineteenth century. There were interesting aspects, but when you get about half way, you think 'shall I keep going or not?'

So what was your area for teaching?
Nothing before the French Revolution, and I think we all taught pretty well over the three years of the degree. In the first year they would just have a general chronological course of lectures, so I would just be teaching modern Europe or Britain, I can't remember exactly, but then in the second and third years we had a core course, and I think I always lectured somehow in

British history and European history … We had marvellous opportunities then, actually, to offer in the second year, six weeks or a term, two or three of them, and I really enjoyed finding bits and pieces to be interested in. Home Rule for Ireland and different themes like that, and New Imperialism I remember doing, this was in the second year. In the third year, there's a core course they are all doing, but Temple Willcox and I offered a course which was the most popular for many years, on dictatorship and totalitarianism in Europe in the interwar years, but I didn't have any research at all into the sources, I did Germany and Italy, and Temple did Russia, he had some Russian studies, and we shared Spain, I think. The Dic and Tot, they called it. I also offered British political diaries of the interwar years. I really kept going back to my interwar stuff, from my MLitt, so that was another option, and I did another course on the interwar years, can't remember what it was called. I remember we had assessors, and it was questioned whether it was too idiosyncratic, but I kept that, and enjoyed doing it. There are loads of political diaries in that period, and not many women's ones, but some.

Section 4

This section covers Maureen's activities with the North East Labour History Society, working with other founder members and some of the tensions to be found in the History Department at the Polytechnic. This includes a discussion of some of the local political issues (eg. the trial of T Dan Smith) which had an impact on their work.

When did you get involved in the North East Labour History Society?

Quite early on, I don't think I had even moved into the Poly, I think when Norman saw the work I was doing with Margaret Gibb, and Labour women. I don't think he was the founder, he was on the early committee. He asked if I would give a talk at Durham on something to do with that, I can't remember which one, I think it's written up. Then they asked me to join, but certainly when I moved into the Poly there was Raymond Challinor already in the History Department. And also Maurice, he'd

written a very good history of the local press, but he did his MLitt on that, I met Maurice when he started the MLitt with Norman, and then he was in the Poly department; he'd just moved in just a little bit before me. I think I was to teach the third year initially, when they'd just reached modern history, and Maurice was teaching the second year, and he'd moved from Northumberland College, so we met again. Maurice at that point, I think was on the committee, I think everybody was, in the Department, then there was Joe Clarke, who had started the History of Science module, and I met Archie Potts who was in economics and politics I think, but somehow got into it then, and then Raymond Challinor, I think he was really the founder, he was head of history. Lovely man, Raymond, great great friend, terrible head of department.

I remember the first meeting, having come from an overtly and apparently very polite lot of staff in women's teacher training, nobody was openly rude to anybody, there was a coffee break at which people associated politely. But at the first meeting they were all men, I was the only woman for about 10 years in the History division. It was an English and History degree initially, and there were some women doing English, fortunately, but there were ten or eleven men. The very first meeting, we sat down and Tim Curtis (who was very ambitious and moved away to be Director somewhere) said 'Move Challinor out of the chair', and Raymond meekly moved out of the chair. And the English staff were yelling at each other, you know, some of them had all sorts of different theories, goodness me this institution. One colleague wouldn't go into a meeting because he'd been insulted. No, it was amazing. I wasn't really ambitious, but there was a lot of competition between them for limited promotions. By then I became a senior lecturer by staying on, but I think before that there had been people interviewed for promotions, and there was a lot of bitterness and rivalries, even fist-fights among the men, I found it quite incredible. One threw a mug of coffee over Raymond, and the coffee was all over his suit, and he was rushing about, and claiming cleaning; it was quite interesting. Raymond was being very active in all sorts of political activities at that point. We were in the old

Mansion House, in no 1 on Ellison Place, and part of his ceiling fell down, and Raymond moved into the office that Peter Coss and I had. At that time for some complicated reason he had quite a few of Dan Smith's papers, and the Dan Smith trial was on, so we were besieged with reporters, local and national really, and there was also a case, the Liddle Towers case, a local man who died in police custody, and Raymond was one of the leaders of the Liddle Towers campaign, so I'm sitting there, trying to prepare classes and with students and the phone's going all the time, all about Liddle Towers and Dan Smith, and it was quite an education of a different sort, being among all this.

How did you feel about being the only woman? I'm thinking of how sometimes women might say they have to make sure they didn't allow their domestic concerns to impinge?

I don't remember that, I think I was fortunate in that my husband was also in education, so we could somehow manage the need to cover. I always had somebody in at teatime, to be there for when the youngest one by then was coming back from school, and prepare some veg and things, so I could go in and start, and have the basic cleaning done.

Did you get your children on a rota, did they help?

Oh yes, they did, and the eldest one, David, was in charge of washing up, so they used to fight with him now and then. They were all great, actually, and both my boys are now great cooks, I did try to teach them as well, specifically to do things, one night we had a session and they used to endure it and call them Fanny's nights, do you remember Fanny Craddock the TV cook, they'd say oh it's Fanny tonight. Yes, they did have to do stuff, but no great hardship. I remember Andrew saying they'd had a discussion in his class; he told me about a discussion he'd had in the sixth form at Whickham. He didn't say it complainingly, but he said he was the only one who did any cooking and washing up, another did it once a week or something. So that wasn't too bad, and we had the vacations, and went off to conferences and things. I don't remember that being an issue with

colleagues.

I wasn't really ambitious, I wasn't trying to be head of department or anything. There were very very few promotions, there was no professor in those days, there are several now in Northumbria you know. I think Raymond, did he become a Reader, possibly? I think there was one Principal Lecturer. I didn't really aspire to be particularly. Bill in fact was offered to be head of department, and then of Humanities at St Mary's, but I wasn't wanting to step up beyond anybody, but some of the men did, they were ambitious and I wasn't. I think again this was a woman's thing, which wasn't really appropriate, but I liked my job and I was lucky, to be doing a job I really enjoyed, and having the freedom to offer courses. I often changed my courses, and enjoyed doing something else and something else, so I wasn't fighting. I think I was put upon, actually, later on when there were troubles in the Department, one head of department took a complaint to ACAS, he was acting head … Raymond had a stroke, I don't know whether it reached beyond the college, Ray Grace who was the trade union rep, there was quite a carry-on then. I always - from the beginning - if we went out I made sure I paid my share, I didn't allow men to treat me or anything like that, but it wasn't an issue particularly.

Section 5

Maureen talks about taking early retirement, her husbands illness, her subsequent research and publications and working at Acklington Prison. She ends by looking back at what she enjoyed.

And what about writing?

I haven't really done a lot, little articles from time to time and talks, and some at conferences. And then it was after I took early retirement, I had to with Bill, they said he might live two or three years when he was diagnosed, I was 50, and then I was 58 when he died, so he outlived [his diagnosis] by five years, and we never really had a night's sleep, he was at home.

We had nurses round twice every night to turn him in his bed, we were

downstairs in the dining room, but it got harder and harder, so I knew either he went into a home or I stayed at home. He was fantastic, his brain was exactly… but he could barely speak and he couldn't move, we had massive help from social services, and we hired a bit more.

I think I then started…. I remembered interviewing Ruth Dodds, of Gateshead, and she'd read from her diaries to me, about the election of 1931, when Ernest Bevin had stood. And then I heard Ruth had died, and I thought, I wonder if there are any more diaries she'd found apart from what she'd read. I found her executor… I spent some time transcribing the diaries, and then thinking 'they are probably worth publishing' … she hadn't destroyed them, so she couldn't have minded. So I suppose I did that, and Bill was typing all the time on his lap. It was weird; these days, everyone has several machines, I now have two machines, but I remember waiting for him to finish, to use the word-processor. It was not long before he died, I think, that I got a computer, but in 1990 they were much less commonplace. I was doing … other things, and then the diaries, but I haven't done a lot of writing really, things in *Northern History*, some from the Victorian urban government theme, couple of pieces in the Labour History journal.

This is the book you were mentioning?

Yes, but I won't lend you it, as I've got just the one, you can get them for nothing, just the postage, but I summarised a lot of what I'd done, in a piece which I called 'A Woman's Place'.[1] I thought I might get another one, I think we got a few given, and I would give them to my children. Norman edited this, reading it this week I was really pleased with the issues I'd brought up in it. It would be in any library, I'm sure. I did tap in, I wondered if it was… It is still available. I've had an advert from Tyne Bridge Publishing, about their books being e-books now. All about aspects of women's lives, here, rabbit-skinners and stuff I've done, and I'd put it together, various different things. I was rather pleased with myself, I'm not usually.

So during that period when your husband was ill, and afterwards, you

were still working for the OU for a while?

Yes, including at Acklington prison.

What was that like? It was quite mind-boggling, going in there, they were OU students, doing degrees and it was maybe once a month. Quite trying, but very interesting. I was doing it while Bill was still there, somebody must have come in, I would drive up in the morning, and he would always say 'how were your murderers' because they were all lifers, the ones I got, the only people allowed to do degrees were lifers. So you knew what they had done. Mainly they were relatively young men, and we didn't talk about what they had done. I only did track one back, who'd been at a school in Newcastle. They weren't local, mostly, but one I did find, I couldn't resist asking because I knew the ex sixth-form teacher from the old West Denton School. It was a lower-category prison then, mostly they were hoping to be on their way out, and working for degrees to help them to get jobs. Going into the prison, you had to come through a secure system, and when you told the men on the gate what you were there for, 'ohh, nobody pays for us to do degrees' and they were really resentful. It was pretty ghastly, and often you'd get there and they'd all been banged up because they were short of warders, and I'd wasted my time.

I got to know some of the full-time staff very well, and eight or ten to nod to, and I think it was just when I was there, for three or four years, I kept going, and it seemed all worthwhile. It was then taken over by Group4, and most of the staff I think wouldn't work for them. The head of education, I think he took early retirement, and it moved out to Ashington, I think, most of it. Most of them were teaching basic literacy, business studies and things like that, but there were one or two postgraduate researchers in there, mostly I think they were in for sex abuse. There was a headmaster I knew about, I didn't teach him, he wasn't a violent man, but he'd been abusive. They were mostly youngish men, there was only one I didn't actually care for, came and never brought his books, never brought anything, he was filling in time. It was an interesting experience, but the OU did quite a bit

of that, and in Durham as well, in Frankland I think.

But the feeling sometimes coming out, it was a Wednesday morning and I saw all these women, waiting to visit their men later on, I don't know where they'd all come from, and you'd think, goodness, how did they get there, and you'd see like three generations, and you'd see probably granny, mother, kids, waiting in this ghastly waiting area to visit. I never left without feeling a lot of complicated feelings about the place. I was glad I did it.

So looking back on your career, what are your overriding impressions or feelings about it?

I think I've been very lucky, to be allowed to have the education I had. It was a very privileged education to start with, in the High School and university. I think in the first year I was really out of my depth, and then I enjoyed all the teaching I did. I don't think I was particularly great or special, but I think I was quite reasonably good, and very conscientious, and I was interested in my students. I'm still in touch with a few. I enjoyed the opportunity really, to do different things. I think the only thing I would have changed was the PhD. A lot of people have said that, and a lot of PhDs never do get finished, but I am a person who has to finish things. Bill's was on diplomatic history, on the Czech Republic between the wars.

I made some very good friends, and particularly the opportunity to meet new people around conferences and meetings and admired what was coming up behind on the whole.

Section 6

Bibliography

'Parliamentary elections in County Durham 1929-1935', unpublished MLitt thesis (University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1973).

'The Nature and Extent of Political Change in the Inter-War Years: The Example of County Durham', *Northern History*, 16 (1980), 215-237.

'The Making of a Labour Stronghold: Electoral Politics in County Durham 1918-1939', *Colloque International d'Histoire Orale* (1982), 387-399.

'The Challenge of Cholera: The Last Epidemic at Newcastle Upon Tyne',

Northern History, 20 (1984), 167-186.
'The Municipal Administration of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1835-1900', unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1988).
with Michael Barke, 'Municipal Intervention in Housing, 1835-1914' in *Working Class Housing on Tyneside* ed. by Bill Lancaster (Whitley Bay: Bewick Press, 1994), 7-38.
(edited) *A Pilgrimage of Grace: The Diaries of Ruth Dodds (1905-1974)*, (Whitley Bay: Bewick Press, 1995).
'A Woman's Place' in *Water Under The Bridges, Newcastle's Twentieth* Century ed. by Anna Flowers and Vanessa Histon, with introduction by Norman McCord (Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 1999), 79-90.
'A Woman of Vision: A Life of Marion Phillips, MP', *North East History*, 33 (2000), 99-103.
'The Governance of the Victorian City' in *Newcastle upon Tyne, A Modern History*, ed. by Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster (Bognor Regis: Phillimore, 2001), pp. 71-92.
'The Campaign for Public Libraries in Victorian Newcastle', *North East History*, 35 (2004), 99-111.
'The People's Kitchen' and 'Robert Spence Watson', in *Tyneside's Finest*, ed. by John Grundy (Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2006), pp. 81-84.
'Arms and the Women: Women and the War Industries on Tyneside 1914-1918', *North East History*, 41 (2010), 101-115.
with R Challinor, Working Class Politics in North East England (North East Labour History Society with Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic Products, 1983).
Entries in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by Joyce M Bellamy and John Saville (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) for Margaret Gibb (vol. 8, 83-88), Ruth Dodds (vol. 7, 63-67, with Margaret 'Espinasse).

Archive material

Sound recording of an interview between Professor N[orman] McCord and Maureen Callcott of Newcastle Polytechnic, and Joseph Blackwell, January 1970. Topics include Seaham Labour Party, interwar years, working with Sydney Webb, Ramsay Macdonald, Emmanuel Shinwell. Durham Record Office, D/X 1208/25/1-2.

Transcript of recording of interview with Margaret Hunter Gibb, taken by Maureen Callcott, 25 January 1982, Northumberland Archives, NRO 02973/23

Recordings of interviews with Ruth Dodds; topics, Labour Party, Gateshead Council 1928-1939, Gateshead Little Theatre, Society of Friends. Also recording of interview with her sister, historian Madeleine Hope Dodds. Deposited with Ruth Dodds' diaries in Tyne Wear Archives.

[1] *Water Under The Bridges, Newcastle's Twentieth* Century ed. by Anna Flowers and Vanessa Histon, with introduction by Norman McCord (Newcastle: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 1999), 79-90.

North East Labour History Society

Commemorations

Sean Creighton 1947-2024

North East History group members and many others wer shocked and saddened to hear of Sean's death in May of this year. John Charlton, who knew Sean well, posted this on our Facebook page at the time.

"Sean was the main organiser of two successful projects - The Slavery Business and the North East, 2006-2007 and Popular Politics, 2010-12. He was the architect of the enormous Data Base available to everyone researching north east history. Sean will be remembered for his gentle, good humoured manner and research tenacity. He will be missed".

There is a full appreciation of his life and importance on the website of the Society for the Study of Labour History. You can find it by typing in this link or searching for Sean by name. https://sslh.org.uk/2024/05/26/sean-creighton-1947-2024/

North East Labour History Society

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

Reviews

Caroline Barker Bennett. ***Speaking As We Find: Women's Experience of Tyneside Industry 1930s -1980s.*** Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2023, ISBN. 978-1-7392233-2-8. £10

Caroline Barker Bennett has written an informative and inspiring book about those who are, to use Sheila Rowbotham's phrase, so often 'hidden from history'. Which is, of course that half of our population which is female and, in this case, working class. Informative because the research is thorough and wide ranging and, more particularly, because the working women speak for themselves and 'as we find'. Inspiring, not only because of the individual lives that are represented but also because the narrative ends with a group of women seeking to take control of their own working lives in the most difficult of circumstances.

This fascinating book is based on the author's thesis and her recorded interviews with twenty women who lived and worked on Tyneside and who started work between 1934 and 1981. This is an interesting timescale as it covers a period of significant change in the local industrial structure and in the ownership and management of the companies represented here. From the harsh realities of life on the North Shields fish quay to the George Angus factory where the women workers 'didn't know they were born'. These shifts in business organisation often enough became associated with a positive growth in union organisation but negative outcomes in terms of job loss and redundancies.

Barker Bennett's book illustrates just how the women that she recorded coped with these exigencies whilst at the same time managing their 'second shift' as mothers and home keepers. Following the women's stories from school through starting work, to changing jobs and working in the male dominated world of engineering we see generational differences but also strong underlying similarities in the challenges in women's lives. Whilst

some might be alleviated by a 'family firm' atmosphere or an understanding boss the consolidation of capital and multinational corporate takeovers such as at George Angus, brought new systems of work.

Readers will find their own particular interest in the wide-ranging issues that these working lives cover and for me it is the way in which the women seek to control their own working lives. In the first instance this was through the trade union movement. For some this was a 'background' factor which meant that they had decent wages and reduced hours but for two of the women their trade union activities became an important part of their lives at George Angus. Even though, as shop stewards they might 'get sick of being the one everybody's got the right to tell off' (p81), it was union education programmes that opened up different worlds and allowed them to 'say what you think without everybody laughing at you' P84).

The second instance of women taking control is that which comprises the closing chapters of the book and is the inspiring story of Louise Argyle where the women organised a sit-in at their factory and turned the business into a workers' co-operative. No easy task as they had been sold out by the factory owner and faced all the problems of running a small business in a fiercely competitive market place. Whilst some help was on hand from local agencies it was the action of the women themselves that was vital for an enterprise that had started with a spontaneous sit-in.

Barker Bennett has done an outstanding job in bringing these stories together and telling them in such a readable way but it remains, of course, the women who are at its heart and at the centre of the Region's industrial history. Read their stories for yourself: you may well be a part of them.

John Stirling

Huw Beynon and Hilary Wainwright. ***The Workers' Report on Vickers.*** (Pluto Press, 1979,) £2.40 0 86104 066 X

Jimmy Murray [see earlier article] gets one direct mention in this book as co-author of the introduction and as treasurer of the Vickers Shop Stewards' Combine Committee but his presence is embedded in the content. As is a very different trade unionism from that which we see currently and which can lead us either to wallow in the nostalgia of some sort of 'golden age' or be an inspiration for today.

The first thing to do is nullify any notion of a golden age. The book and the workers' organisation which it describes was written in response to the emergence of a de-industrialised North East economy and the waves of redundancy, job losses and devastated communities that went with it. The book was published in 1979 at the fag-end of Jim Callaghan's faltering Labour government and just as Margaret Thatcher was being elected. It was thirteen years before the internet was to be launched to the public but new technologies were on their way as was the financialisation of industrial capitalism.

Such challenges required a new type of union organisation and the book explores how the Vicker's Combine Committee was at the forefront of such activity and the initiatives it took had their roots in the workplaces of a shifting capitalist organisation. Vickers was already on the move from a Tyneside armaments company to an international capitalist conglomerate. Two pages of double column small print (pp54-55) list the multi-faceted UK organisation that the Vicker's workers and their unions were coming to terms with. Leave aside the thirteen overseas bases from Australia via the Lebanon to the USA. Moreover, Vicker's interests in aircraft manufacture and shipbuilding had been nationalised so there was a government to tackle as well as a hydra-headed employer.

Undaunted by the company's failure to recognise the Combine and the challenges it faced the Report records the struggles that took place and the context from which it emerged. Locally, this included support, direct and

indirect from, the Community Development Projects (CDPs funded by the Home Office!); the Trades Union Studies Information Unit; the local authorities which actually had some money and the authors of this Report's base in Durham University. Nationally, there was growing unrest with the nationalisation projects that changed nothing at the workplace and employee 'participation' programmes that failed to deliver any genuine engagement for workers. More positively, examples of workers' plans were being proposed, particularly as a response to 'new technology', different versions of public ownership that centred on ideas of workers' control.

Jimmy Murray and the Vickers Combine Committee are long gone but the questions that the Workers' Report raises remain with us and now seek their answers in a different environment. Complex ownership patterns through financial institutions, hedge funds and shell companies raise new issues about union organising and how to bargain collectively. Union membership has shifted from its strong base in male manufacturing to the public sector and to professional groups like teachers and doctors. How might a worker's report on education or social care be written? There are questions to be asked about funding, the role of the state, where do targets come from and how might workers genuinely participate when they have precarious contracts and no workplace? The workers at Vickers have left an important legacy and it's worth blowing the dust off your old copy of Beynon and Wainwright's book to remind yourself of what can be achieved as well as what was lost.

John Stirling

Don Watson ***Theatre With A Purpose – Amateur Drama In Britain 1919-1949***. (Methuen, 2024) HSBN 978-1-350-23204-4, 220pp. hbk. £76.50

This new book by Don Watson, is part of the Bloomsbury Series of Cultural Histories of Theatre and Performance. The author sets the scene in his Introduction, starting with an extract from a 1945 BBC radio broadcast in which Bill Farrell, Warden of the Spennymoor Settlement, described the Spennymoor Community Players as follows:

Our Theatre Company began with a small group of women – miners' wives and mothers and sisters. Such Theatre Companies always do begin with women. Then they cajoled a man to come in. He, with me, was the only other man in the play, The Cradle Song, which was the first thing we did in public … Our theatre has never been thought of as a place where amateurs play. It is a place where a real job has to be done by actors, poets, painters, singers, dancers, carpenters, electricians, and seamstresses.

Spennymoor Settlement had built its own Everyman Theatre at the end of the 1930s and the Players were just one of an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 performing companies in Britain in the inter war and Second World War years.

Spennymoor's experience demonstrates that amateur drama was not just found in the nation's cities and that this then deprived mining town was sharing in the high point of community theatre. The Settlement, as it is still called locally, was at that time supported by the Pilgrim Trust, government special area funding and local authority funding. However, as this book shows, in post war Britain, government funding for the theatre, run by the Arts Council, ignored Farrell's "real job" approach, and focussed on professional rather than amateur productions .Since 1954, when Durham County Council ceased funding Farrell's warden post, the Settlement has been run by a charitable trust.

After the Introduction, the book is divided into six chapters covering:

- The post Great War encouragement of drama in the work of the Ministry of Reconstruction based on adult education policies.
- The impact of the Educational Settlement movement both before and after the Great War.
- The impact of the great depression on amateur theatre in the 1930s
- Drama festivals and competitions such as those arranged by the British Drama League
- The work of the Left Book Club
- Amateur theatre during the Second World War.

I enjoyed reading Don Watson's book not only because it puts into context my 50 years' experience of attending amateur drama productions in Spennymoor but also because it shines a light on what was achieved by ordinary people in the interwar period to engender cultural health. While this is a welcome nationwide survey, readers of this Journal may be particularly interested in the section on Little Theatres (pp 18-20), which includes Newcastle and Sunderland and Gateshead's Bensham Grove Community Players touring miners' institutes in County Durham with their plays in the late 1920s (p.45). This latter point demonstrated to me that the foundations for the success of Spennymoor Settlement were in place before Bill Farrell arrived with his Pilgrim Trust funding in 1931.

John Banham
Tudhoe

North West History Journal No. 48. 20023-24. ISSN 136263092

Fifty years ago, the North West History Society was formed and this edition of its Journal celebrates the occasion. Its Editorial piece poses the question as to whether things today are that much different from what was happening 50 years ago. The Journal editor, Paula Moorhouse, reminds us that, like today, with an international backdrop of steeply rising energy prices, it was a time of nationally imposed wage restraint as the ideological measure to control inflation. She recalls the industrial action by miners and rail workers, Edward Heath's Three Day Week and her house in darkness apart from the greenish glow of the Tilley lamp while she sat trying to do her homework. She also reminds us it was a time when an elected Socialist government in Chile was brutally overthrown with the connivance of the United States. As Paula concludes, 'some of the names change but the struggle goes on.'

The historic struggle does indeed go on, as this edition of the Journal clearly demonstrates. There are articles about the strike and factory occupation at Lucas Aerospace and the famous 'Lucas Plan' in 1976; the Liverpool Laundry workers strike of 1914; and the Manchester and Salford strike wave in the summer of 1911. All three articles are engagingly written and professionally illustrated.

The article by David Hargreaves about the attitude of the British press (and the Times in particular) to the Great Hunger of 1847 in Ireland - which saw the death of over one million people - is particularly pertinent in light of the attitude our national media's response to the current atrocities in Gaza. The art of 'blaming the victim' was the vitriolic position of the Times. For them, the feckless and undeserving Irish brought the famine on themselves because of their moral deficiencies. Any money spent to alleviate the hunger was wasted because it would only encourage their laziness. By contrast the Northern Star newspaper offers a counter narrative. The editor, Edward Harney, questioned why a famine was happening 'here in the richest kingdom in the world' (Ireland was then part of the United

Kingdom). He had an understanding of the effects of capitalism and colonial foreign policy and highlighted how provisions were continually being imported into England from Ireland while people starved. The famine was not an act of providence (God's Will) but a political choice. However, The Northern Star had only a brief future and was unable to counter the British colonial narrative of racial and religious superiority, while subordinating whole nations to meeting the needs of capitalism.

I particularly enjoyed the personal account by Chris Jones of his participation in The People's March for Jobs in 1981. Halfway through his training as a nurse, Chris joined up with the People's March in Widnes to help out with first aid. This role gave him a unique insight, beyond the bravado and attention-seeking going on at the front of the march, to 'see the marchers' underbelly': dealing with sore feet, treating pre-existing medical problems and homesickness. He was most concerned about the marchers who were well into their 50s, out in the elements all day, smoking and drinking at night. The church halls or school gyms where they slept most nights at one point took on the aspect of a TB ward following a wave of chest infections. By the time the march reached London, Chris had to make his way home and hope to get a sympathetic hearing from the principal at his nursing college as to the reason for his extended absence.

As always, it is a privilege to be asked to review the North West History Society's Journal. It is a compelling read. There is no incongruity between its glossy magazine-style production and the detailed research that underpins its erudition. Fifty years ago the famous Wigan Casino launched the first of its legendary Northern Soul all-nighters but it was closed eight years later - but as the editor of this fine Journal joyfully proclaims - 'We're still dancing!'

Patrick Candon

Tom Kelly, ***No Love Rations & Other Stories,*** (Postbox Press 2023) ISBN 978- 1-913632-33-5. £8.89

Although not my usual read, (the political social historical literature genre), this did not lack the capacity to keep this working class Geordie from reading it in one sitting. It is a number of Tom Kelly's short stories of mostly one to four pages taken from various publications.

Not merely memoirs of Kelly's childhood or his first employment, it does all of this, but captures his Tyneside roots, particularly where he was raised Jarrow, "Jarra".

A poetic one line of a one paragraph piece welcomed me to the book,

"….. I watch streetlight semaphore me as older children run dizzyingly around the fading green lamp post…". It evoked my own early memories. A true welcome to read on!

A one page story, about Christmas Eve, a picture of his early years experience, death of the widow downstairs neighbour, linked the individual, social and community of early 1960's north east.

In "The Day Ration Ended" Kelly reflected on the lost community, the shipyard, all changed like the demolition of the houses "...imagine a war -torn city ". The change exemplified by him "Standing where the pub stood eyeing the Slake or Slaaks, as it was known, which is narrower than I remember. Gone are the vivid colours gifted by the chemical works". I remember the Dunston Slake, like those of Jarrow, dangerous mud deposited on the Tyne edge where we played. Kelly's past childhood memories drift to that time finally recalling an accident playing on a building's remnants, stone throwing and hospital. The last sentence here makes it so personal. "Now I feel the mark on my brow and remember the day rationing ended."

In his postwar reminiscence "John Wayne and me" he writes of his childhood unawareness of the reality of war and death through its portrayal in films or playtime escapades. Even his father's experiences underlined this by mementoes of the war kept in a suitcase, the military regalia and a gun. It ends in a tragic gun accident which is the moral of the story.

Then follow three accounts which underline Kelly's Catholic childhood background, "Confession", "At Eleven", and "The Ironed Man". All the elements of guilt and fear of a youngster are here; Hell and, sin especially "….Mortal sins meant you went straight to Hell forever. 'Forever' was a worry. How long was it?"

The close relationship with grandma and grandad, or granny and "granda" the word used by Kelly and most Geordies, in the extended family of that time is highlighted in "The Hen Cree", "Pot of Gold" and "Saturday Bet". It evoked many of my memories not dissimilar to these short snapshots. A closeness, humorous incidents and the Irish heritage of his granny.

Two stories dwell on his first job in the shipyard, going for the job interview, first incident at the pay desk and a fraught day during his employment in the Time Office.

The book's title narrative, "No Love Rations" sees an older Kelly with his granda , in conversation about the latter's time on the "Wellesley" a "training ship on the Tyne for boys who were 'waifs and strays'. "Their words not mine." His conversation then, to Kelly's surprise and shock, switched to gay relationships with an unexpected moral conclusion.

The last vignette about both his grandparents "Left Without Saying" is about isolation and dying. In only two pages we grasp the solitude of his granda now alone without his granny and then his death. It concludes with Kelly wishing he had known more of their lives. Don't we all?

The book has two final stories which are nearer to my usual reading, "The Jobling Story", a much longer piece, and "Ellen, Maggie and Me". Both relate to the class and political heritage of Jarrow. Again the stories are linked to his personal experience.

The first is about Kelly's research into the tragic story of William Jobling, well known in Jarrow and in local folklore. "As a bairn I would play at Jarra Slacks, mud flats, near Saint Paul's Church at the mouth of the River Don. It was there I first heard of a man being hung and covered in pitch", is how Kelly introduces this piece on the striking miner of the 1832 stoppage.

An accomplice in a murder, hanged and suspended from a public gibbet on Jarrow Slake. Whilst working on the chapbook for the Jobling exhibition in the 1970s, he became engrossed in the story. He gives a most interesting account of unearthing in the Newcastle Keep (and returning to South Tyneside) the gibbet.

Telling the Jobling story, he includes references to the strike, the first Miners' trades union, its leader Thomas Hepburn, Jobling's trial and the judge's summing up (an attack on trade unions). He opined that the extreme and bludgeoning sentence was due to "Perhaps the French Revolution was too near and it was felt the working class should be treated harshly at any sign of insurrection". He then raises personal divergent questions about working class revolt with a concluding sentence "Shelley, after the Peterloo massacre, asked we use this bludgeoning as a means of change:'

> Shake your chains to earth like dew
> Which in sleep had fallen on you —
> Ye are many — they are few."

His final short story is about the 1930s, his granny, Maggie, her work as a Second World War Lady Driller in the shipyard, the struggle against poverty to survive for Jarrow's working class, Ellen Wilkinson MP and the Jarrow Crusade.

The last sentences in this story explains Kelly's motivations for writing, as I felt in reading the Book.

"Ellen and Maggie's lives made me look at my life, I was reminded of what Maggie said, ' Me father could neither read nor write'. I am writing this for Ellen, Maggie and me".

John Creaby

Roger Hawkins, ***The Chartist Philosopher. The life of Robert Blakey, 1795-1878*** (The Morpathia Press, 2023), 824pp. £21.99.Paperback, illustrated. ISBN 9781-902385-20-4.

This is a big book, and not simply because of its page-length. It has been printed and bound at the traditional British paper size of Quarto, or 8x10 inches, and with an average of 600 words per page the book comes in at almost 500,000 words in length. In some respects it is two books in one, being the unfinished memoirs of Robert Blakey (first published in 1879) edited and augmented with additional material by the author. This is made clear at the outset, with the author acknowledging that rather than read from cover to cover it might be more useful to read the Introduction and then use individual chapters to investigate a particular topic; these topics being presented by way of historical context and also as corrections and additions to mistakes and omissions present in Blakey's original memoir.

Robert Blakey was born in Morpeth on 18 May 1795, the son of a mechanic. His life was one of apparent self–made success, initially as an artisan furrier and shopkeeper in Morpeth where he later served as mayor, then as an author of books on philosophy and fishing, before his appointment as professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the prestigious Queen's College in Belfast. He gained a Doctor of Philosophy (from Jena University) in the 1850s and a pension in 1860 that sustained a relatively comfortable life until his death in London in October 1878.

It was his books and his appointment to Queen's College that gave Blakey national significance, as an artisan who scaled the heights of academia and left a legacy of publications that included best selling titles on field sports, particularly fishing and shooting, one of which (Blakey claimed) achieved a circulation in four years of 100,000 copies and another a circulation of sixty thousand copies. These figures are cited by Blakey in relation to how little he was paid as an author, and suggest a life that was not as financially stable as his career might at first suggest. Roger Hawkins' investigation of Blakey's financial condition, with its peaks and troughs throughout his life,

the latter exacerbated by bouts of poor health and the need to care for his first wife following a stroke in 1851, is one of the strengths of the book. Hawkins' demonstrates just how precarious Blakey's life after 1841 actually became.

It was in 1841 that Blakey decided to leave Morpeth and move to Europe and then London to devote his life to writing. Thereafter Blakey sought the patronage of the political establishment and royalty, the latter including the King of Belgium and our own Prince Albert. However, this was nothing new, as Blakey had benefitted in Morpeth from the patronage of local Whig grandees such as William Ord and members of the Grey family of Howick.

So what about his Chartist credentials, the reader might ask, especially given the books headline title – The Chartist Philosopher?

In his memoirs, Blakey did not conceal his early radicalism but rather plays down the significance of Chartism, presenting himself as the provincial town radical who challenged vested interest or bad practice and promoted local schools and other self-improvement initiatives such as the Mechanical and Scientific Institution. As the author points out, by the time the third National Petition had failed in 1848, Blakey was already focusing on his career as a writer and academic, having returned to London from Europe the year before.

If we look at newspaper reports between 1831 and 1839, we find that although Blakey attended public meetings of the Northern Political Union and Newcastle Working Men's Association, his most consistent critique of the political establishment appears to have been the introduction and working of the New Poor Law. An important influence on Blakey was William Cobbett, and his visit to Morpeth in September 1832 is presented as a major event in Blakey's own memoirs. Of course, Blakey and Cobbett were not alone in attacking the New Poor Law; this was a grievance that many middle class intellectuals openly supported.

Blakey's most significant contribution to Chartism here in the North East was his decision to join his friend Thomas Doubleday in the purchase

of the radical newspaper, the Northern Liberator. The importance of the Liberator in providing a regional platform and voice for Chartist issues and grievances is well recognized but it isn't clear how much direct editorial influence Blakey exercised, and when he was charged with seditious libel as owner of the newspaper in August 1839, it is likely that the offending article may have been written by the sub-editor, Thomas Devyr.

The chapters relating to Blakey's involvement in the Northern Liberator account for 128 pages of the roughly 259 pages (or about 32% of the total book) that cover the Chartist period of Blakey's life; of which 41-pages are Blakey's memoir and the rest are Roger Hawkins' additional research and commentary. This includes extracts from Devyr's Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century (published in1882), a detailed account of the Northern Liberator as a business (purchase cost, circulation numbers, stamp duty returns, advertising income, etc) and an estimate of its running costs (provided as an Appendix), together with some useful portraits of notable reform advocates in both Morpeth and Newcastle during the 1830s, being the circle of middle class radicals that Blakey associated with.

The Northern Political Union was a broad alliance of the propertied and the working class, that served as an umbrella for a diverse range of grievances ranging from the Poor Law to church rates and, of course, the franchise. Robert Blakey does not come across as a champion of workers' rights but as an aspiring tradesman eager to make his mark on local politics and academia. The 1835 Municipal Reform Act enabled Blakey to be elected to the new Morpeth Borough Council, serving as Mayor in 1836-37, whilst patronage from well connected local elites helped him achieve his literary and intellectual goals in London and elsewhere after 1841.

Mike Greatbatch

Iain Malcolm, ***Stormy Petrel – Aaron Ernest Gompertz and the rise of the South Shields Labour Party***, (Brown Dog Books and The Self-Publishing Partnership Ltd, 2023) ISBN: 978-1-83952-603-9, 376pp. hardback, £25.

Stormy Petrel, by Iain Malcom, is an enthusiastically written biography of Aaron Ernest Gompertz, one of the early pioneers of the South Shields Labour Party. It begins with Gompertz joining the Independent Labour Party, and tracks his progress through the social and political events of the day, both locally and nationally. It also addresses his relationship with long standing South Shields' MP James Chuter Ede and his transition into the hardnosed Labour Party stalwart, ousted by a new generation of activists.

Malcolm's research into Gompertz's humanist and pacifist stance during the first world war was fascinating to read. As an early member of the No-Conscription Fellowship, founded by Fenner Brockway and Clifford Allen, Gompertz was a firm absolutist and the story of his refusal to be conscripted, ending up in gaol and brutal punishment received, gives a great insight into Gompertz's character. The consistency of his humanist views even during the second world war are made clear along with how Gompertz encouraged respect for conscientious objectors which must have influenced South Shields council's offering of security of employment for objectors.

Malcolm's balanced approach means the book also deals with, what I would describe as, some of Gompertz's less endearing traits, such as his adamant refusal to work with certain groups, like the National Unemployed Workers Movement, due to their Communist Party links. I found it a little disappointing that Malcolm depicts this as a positive aspect of Gompertz's determination to create a social democratic Labour Party, reflecting the moderate views he and Ede held, rather than undertaking a more in depth critical analysis of the consequences of not cooperating with these types of organisations.

The book's description of the party's battles against the undemocratic manipulation of Aldermanic elections, by their opponents during the

1930s, was an interesting part of the story. As well as the political infighting within the party, over the years, and the strained relationships with trade unions which offer insights into the workings of, or not as the case may be, party democracy. I am sure these will resonate with many readers. Malcolm has used the South Shields Labour Party archive, held at the town's library, extensively and effectively to research these events and yet by their very nature the archive material can frustrate, as they don't necessarily record who said what at the time.

Comparisons will inevitably be made with David Clark's history written some thirty years ago, when Clark was still able to speak to some of the party's early activists. Malcolm, however, provides us with much background material on the life of working class families in South Shields and how national party politics were reflected locally, even if the book essentially concludes with Gompertz's death in 1968. As such *Stormy Petrel* is a welcome addition to the history of South Shields and the Labour Party through the lens of a local party's activist story.

Stuart Barlow

Robert Gildea ***Backbone of the Nation:*** Mining Communities and the Great Strike of 1984-5 Yale University Press ISBN 978 -0-300-26658-0 469pp hbk £25 pbk £11.99

A titanic battle against 184,000 miners, 'The British State mobilized unprecedented resources for an industrial conflict…comfortably exceeding what was spent on the Falklands War but Nigel Lawson (Conservative Chancellor of Exchequer) afterwards described as a very good investment' (Ewan Gibbs London Review of Books 2.11.23).

I was particularly drawn to Gildea's title, 'Backbone of the Nation', a term used by Thomas Watson, a Safety Officer from Fife, when in his interview, he remembered his father describing the importance of miners and coal in earlier generations. What a huge contrast to Thatcher's

disgraceful depiction of the strikers and activists as the 'The Enemy Within'. As an activist throughout the year long strike in Durham, I hoped his book would be setting the record straight and show the fortitude and loyalty of the striking families and supporters; their strength, organizational skills, creativity and comradeship. It certainly does this.

Up against the mighty power of the State, most of the British media and the NCB, money raising by the support groups to feed and clothe the striking families was a mammoth task. It required huge commitment and team work, creative thinking, national and international co-operation and solidarity from within the Trade Union and Labour movement. Fabulous concerts from musicians like Billy Bragg and Lindisfarne and a host of others raised not only much need funds but raised much needed morale especially as the year long dispute continued. On the positive side, the strike built new and lifelong friendships, developed social capital; organisational and speaking skills and opportunities opened for some and changed lives for them and future generations,. On the negative side split families and communities and the NUM. The defeat and subsequent closure of the pits destroyed lives and livelihoods, wrecked the social and economic fabric of mining communities- never to be restored. All this in Gildea's book for all to see.

Robert Gildea's book is a rich 'bottom up' record of the strike and while there is mention of the leading political figures this is most definitely the political and personal experience of the those who were involved at community level and the effect the strike had on themselves, their families and communities before, during and after 1984/5. For the first time we have an oral history recording voices from across all three nations of Scotland, Wales and England which tells the story of 148 miners, their wives, children and activists. Robert Gildea, Emeritus Professor of Modern History at Oxford University draws from two hour interviews carried out between 2020-2022 in the Fife, Durham, Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and South Wales coalfields, focusing on a few communities in each coalfield. He includes some who worked during the strike and adds

to this work the wealth of previous literature and research carried out over the last 40 years.

The book is broken into sections to examine the outbreak of the strike, the activities of the support groups, Christmas and the return to work and finally the afterlives of miners, wives and children. Each being compared at a local and regional level it adds to our understanding of why, how and where they differed. Far from being a dry record it makes great reading, prompting memories of some forgotten detail, people and events, demonstrating the different internal organization of the support groups, relationships with the NUM officials and conflicts within.

Forty years on, he makes contact with the interviewees through various activist networks, people still engaging in their communities and heritage. In Durham for example he picked up the interviews we carried out in the North East Labour History Society Popular Politics Project (2011) and deposited in the Durham County archive. So good to know our oral histories are being used in historical research. He speaks with Education4 Action formed in 2013 from the activists of the Support Groups in 1984. Proud of their heritage and eager to pass on to adults and children of Durham the way that the miners through their union fought build fairer, stronger more caring communities. They do this in the hope it will provide inspiration to fight for their communities today.

Former mining areas up and down the country have tried with varying degrees of success to preserve their mining heritage. The biggest living demonstration of Trade Unionism and the mining industry in the UK is the Durham Miners Gala, fought for by the union when it was at serious risk of disappearing after the closure of the last pits. It has undoubtedly helped revive the interest in Durham; the continued success of the Durham Mining Museum, the Women's Banner Group, Mining Art Gallery at Bishop Auckland and this year Durham hosted the national event for the 40th anniversary of the Women Against Pit Closures on 2 March. The strike will be the theme of the Miners' Gala in July 2024. We look forward to the opening of Redhills planned for December 2024 after the multi

million pound major renovation and redevelopment of the Miners' Hall and Pitman's Parliament.

Although there are flaws in some detail of the book, and Gildea acknowledges while names and dates may be lost, the excitement of the struggle to the pain of defeat and the consequences is not easily forgotten. The depiction of the mobilization of mining communities and the long term impact on individuals, families and communities is a wonderful record. It draws our attention to regional differences and the unfair treatment of striking miners at the hands of the state and NCB; men were left jobless, some imprisoned and victimized disproportionately so in Scotland. The defeat of the once mighty miners was a watershed for the Labour and Trade Union Movement.

This is not just a significant piece of Labour history, interviewees across the UK make connections with poverty, food banks, plus drug and alcohol abuse in unequal Britain today, especially so in former mining communities. Issues arising from the strike such as Orgreave are still to be resolved. Gildea suggests in his conclusion that the Miners' Strike and the voices of the men and women who sustained it for a year can offer some guidance and hope to those in both the public and private sectors in dispute in 2022-2023. The circumstances are very different from 1984 but they can certainly draw from the courage and resolve of that momentous time.

Kath Connolly April 2024

Greg Finch, ***The Blacketts: A Northern Dynasty's Rise, Crisis and Redemption*** (Tyne Bridge, 2021), 368pp. £20.00 hardback, illustrated. ISBN 978-1-8382809-5-6.

This book is the result of an immense amount of research by the author, a retired business consultant who gained his D.Phil in English economic history from Oxford University and is now a leading member of Hexham Local History Society and the North Pennines based Dukesfield Project.

Evidence of Dr Finch's meticulous research is evident throughout the book, and a separate 112pp Appendices and Bibliography (accessible online via http://www.dukesfield.org.uk/appendices) is well worth a read in its own right. As the author makes clear, the story of the Blacketts presented in the book rests upon a detailed quantitative analysis of their business activities, and specifically the activities of the first three William Blacketts who created the family business empire that enabled them to rise to prominence within our region.

Descended from a family of wealthy North Pennine farmers, the first William Blackett (1621-80) was baptised at Gateshead, and in 1636 apprenticed to a Newcastle merchant. Finch suggests that Blackett's subsequent rise to civic and business success during the 1640s was facilitated by his close links to the town's Presbyterian elite, connections that enabled him to exploit opportunities created by expanding trade and the post-Civil War political settlement. As a result, Blackett would serve as mayor of Newcastle and subsequently as an MP for the town, a status that would also be achieved by his son, the second William Blackett.

It was William I's decision to invest in lead mining from the 1660s onwards that established the family fortune. Finch devotes two whole chapters to the business options Blackett may have evaluated in the mid-1600s before deciding that lead rather than coal offered the prospect of better returns. This period was crucial to the family's fortunes but Finch's detailed analysis of markets, capital requirement, and economies of scale is typical of his approach throughout the book. His story of the Blackett's is one of canny businessmen calculating every opportunity for economic and material gain, and his analysis is supported by a huge amount of tabulated data presented in the book and the online Appendices.

Blackett's investment in lead mining meant that by 1676 his share of the Newcastle market accounted for 80% of the total volume, and his son and heir William II (1657-1705) diversified the family's interests in mining through the purchase of Kenton manor and its colliery and coal reserves. William II was succeeded by William III (1690-1728), and the book opens

with an account of the latter's funeral in Newcastle in October 1728.

For a book about a family there is surprisingly little about family life; nor is there much on their charitable giving or cultural patronage other than details from wills such as William II's generous bequest of £1,000 to the poor of St Andrew's parish. It is possible that the records (family papers and correspondence) do not provide sufficient evidence to confirm the detail of these activities but fundamentally the book is a business history of the family, and thus details of social and cultural activities are inevitably limited.

A major omission for readers of this journal is the limited attention paid to the contribution of labour. The early part of the book includes a useful explanation of apprenticeship arrangements in seventeenth century Newcastle. However, being a business history the labour force in the family's various mining enterprises tend to be evaluated in terms of the financial cost to their employer, rather than the nature of their employment, their living and working conditions, or their contribution to the success of the business. Even as a unit cost, the workers' economic value is often hard to identify with any certainty; in lead mining for example, the term `pay' in company records often referred to all expenses such as timber, candles and ropes, not just wages.

This is an incredibly detailed book that presents three generations of the Blacketts in the economic and political context of their times. It is a valuable contribution to the study of capital investment in a period of regional economic growth. However, at times this meticulous attention to detail and the author's business management interpretation made the book a dense read. Tyne Bridge should be congratulated for publishing this book, and for retailing at such a modest price.

Mike Greatbatch

Richard Toye *Age of Hope -Labour, 1945 and the Birth of Modern Britain* (Bloomsbury 2023) ISBN 9781472992307 336 pp. Hbk £25.00 also available as Audiobook and Ebook

Coincidentally I am writing this review immediately after hearing the results of the May 2024 local government elections which seem to offer the prospect of a Labour victory at this year's General Election. 'The results of the 2024 General Election will be known and implemented by the time this review is published which poses the question of whether the knowledge that 2024 was election year was what prompted the decision to commemorate the centenary of the first Labour government (the ostensible rationale for Professor Toye's book)

It seems very likely though, even as it stands, the focus of Age of Hope is not on 2024 but on the 1945 post war Attlee government which faced the task of rebuilding a war torn country in a war torn world. Are we supposed to draw parallels with the present? Or learn from the mistakes of the past?

I am of an age to have been the passive beneficiary of many of the reforms set in train by that Attlee administration and the uncomprehending witness of the opinions of my elders as to the effectiveness of its measures. Like many in the North East the policy of nationalisation, for us, meant mainly that of the coal industry. I do remember my father's sceptical tone when he returned from work after Vesting Day declaring 'Well it all belongs to us now. I wonder what the Government will do with it' This struck me as an odd thing to say at the time but retrospectively I think he implied that public ownership and government ownership were not the same thing : certainly putting public utilities largely under government control proved dangerous when the government's ideology changed. Sadly Professor Toye doesn't devote much time to the processes by which nationalisation took place or the way in which it was administered. Now that might have been instructive for a future Labour government.

Commentators on the book identify 'pragmatic idealism ' as the concept dominating the 1945-51 period that it depicts - pragmatism there had to be.

The country was broke and so was much of Europe. A great deal of time and energy had to be spent negotiating the terms on which the USA would lend money to rebuild a devastated country and its exhausted economy. That is one theme and it does offer an interesting light on the subsequent operation of the 'special relationship'.

Another is the dismantling of Empire. Promises of independence and Dominion status made in response to indigenous nationalist movements, that had ensured support across the Empire during the conflict, now had to be honoured but the processes by which that took place were largely untried and inadequately thought through by men with little prior experience of imperial diplomacy.

Professor Toye's biographical approach to the members of Attlee's government demonstrates how little real shared ideology there was among them. Possibly all they shared was the determination not to go back to the nineteen thirties. As an early nineteenth century business historian much of this was unknown territory for me. As a reviewer I couldn't possibly comment on the author's interpretation of a Bevinite foreign policy or Dalton and Cripps financial dealings but what is clear is their commitment to the country's recovery. These were men who had been part of the war effort and remembered pre- war conditions. They wore themselves out in office trying to sort out unprecedented problems but they didn't agree with each other. Nor were the domestic beneficiaries of their efforts necessarily grateful as I witnessed the adults round me railing against various ministers for imposing measures designed to bring stability to the battered economy but little comfort to individual households .

Professor Toye devotes considerable space to the gestation of the National Health Service and to its controversial proponent Aneurin Bevan. This section may well stimulate debate among historians of the period as well as today's politicians for whom the service's current plight is a major issue .It may also justify the reference in the book's subtitle to the Labour government of 1945 as the 'Birth of Modern Britain. 'Modern' is a slippery term to use and quickly becomes outdated. When did the' modernity' supposedly initiated by the

Attlee Labour government come into being and of what did it consist. Is it still with us after Thatcher or are we 'post modern?

Finally one of the timelessly relevant lessons that emerges is that this country may be just a cluster of offshore islands with outdated delusions of grandeur but, whatever our size or relative global importance, what history teaches us is that the best laid schemes of pragmatists and idealists can be derailed by events elsewhere in the world outside any national government's control. Or even the weather… QED

Win Stokes

Secretary's Report 2023-24

The Society has 187 members with another 116 people receiving our mailings. Unless indicated otherwise the following meetings have been held on-line:

22 August – Tony Fox on *Phyllis Short, a lifetime of campaigning*

7 September – Melanie Waters and Victoria Bazin on *Mediating Mood in Feminist Magazines* (Annual General Meeting)

3 October - *Unemployed Resistance (1978 – Now), Trade Unions and Community Organising* with Paul Griffin

14 November – *A Distant World*, John Charlton

12 December – Christmas Quiz with Peter Brabban

16 January – *German Resistance: Enemies of the Nazi State from within the working-class movement*, Merilyn Moos

6 February - *Campaigns Around Poverty and Health in the 1930s*, Don Watson

12 March – *Just A Pit Lass, an account of growing up and living in Easington Colliery*, Heather Wood

16 April – *Washington: Crocodiles and Cows, Sixty Years of a New Town*, John Griffiths

14 May - *The 'Silicon Valley' of The Green Industrial Revolution. But at what cost? An Oral History of Industrial and Energy Transition on Teesside*, Jake Milner

8 July – *Radicalism or Fadicalism? The Nineteenth Century Vegetarian Movement in North East England*, Liz O'Donnell (at the Irish Centre, Newcastle)

This issue of *North East History* has been produced by the Editorial Board who are: Rosie Serdiville (Editor), Brian Bennison, John Charlton, Steve Grinter, John Stirling, Win Stokes and Don Watson. The Society wishes to record its thanks for their work.

We are also grateful to Peter Nicklin for his continuing work on the Society's website, to Judith McSwain for her work as Treasurer and to Liz O'Donnell, Brian Bennison and Peter Brabban for their promotion of our Facebook page which now has over 1400 followers.

The inaugural Founder's Award in memory of our late President, Archie Potts was awarded to the Battle of Stockton Group for their work in promoting awareness of the anti-fascist struggle that took place in the town on 10 September 1933.

This award is to an organisation or group within the region which has through engagement with its community, enhanced our understanding of some aspect of the history of working people.

We regret that there were no entries for this year's Sid Chaplin Prize.

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, John Charlton, Steve Grinter, John Stirling, Win Stokes and Don Watson

Committee Members:

Brian Bennison (Newcastle)
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

Sid Chaplin

The author Sid Chaplin was a founder member of the Society and his Memorial Trophy is awarded each year to the winner of our labour history essay competition. The aim of the competition is to foster 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.

Past winners

1988 Kit Pearce	2004 Craig Turnbull	2014 Molly Courtice
1989 Elaine Knox	2005 Craig Armstrong	2015 Adam Woolley
1990 Sylvia Clark	2006 Elspeth Gould	2016 Leanne Carr
1991 Martin Searles	2007 Candice Brockwell	2017 Leanne Smith
1992 David Ridley	2008 Ruth Blower	2018 Joel Wootten
1993 Pauline Lynn	2009 Rob Doherty	2019 India Gerritsen
1994 Kathleen Smith	2010 David Reed	2020 Hannah Kent
1996 Reg Brown	2011 Deborah Smith	2022 Lucy Jameson
1997 Angela Goldsmith	2012 James English	2024 Abbie Urquhart-Arnold
2000 Robert Hope	2013 Aidan Harper	

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.

Abbie's prize winning essay will appear in our next journal. But meanwhile we thought we might whet your appetite with an abstract. Congratulations to her for an absorbing piece of work.

"This [essay] explores the mining disaster elegies and ballads that emerged following the Seaham pit disaster of 1880 and the West Stanley explosion of 1909 in how they portrayed grief as a multifaceted experience for the widows and families of Seaham and West Stanley. This paper uses a plethora of elegies and ballads from both explosions. From Seaham, Edward Boyle's 'In Memoriam, Lines on The Seaham Colliery Explosion, which occurred early on the Morning of Sept. 8th, 1880', John Rowell Waller's 'To the Memory of 163 Men and Boys, who lost their lives by an Explosion of Gas in New Seaham Pit, Seaham Harbour, which occurred at half-past Two o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, September 8th 1880' will be explored. From West Stanley, this paper will examine Tommy Armstrong's 'West Stanley Explosion 1909', Reverend Ernest Little's 'Wail of Woe', and the anonymously written 'Memorial Verses on the Terrible Disaster at West Stanley on February 16th 1909, Over 150 Lives Lost'. In addition, this dissertation will also make use of the Thomas Anderson Funeral Card, and commemorative napkins from West Stanley. These elegies and ballads interacted with the grief of widows and their families as physical, transitional objects which worked to provide them with a tangible way to mourn their loved ones. This literature focused upon the perspective of women and their children, allowing for a deeper understanding that widows grieved for their own circumstances, and futures as well as their lost husbands and sons. It is also evident that these objects aimed to encourage political activism amongst their reading audiences for positive change concerning the dangerous working conditions of coal mines that led to mass disaster. By utilising the grief of widows, these writers targeted those directly affected by coal mine explosions, who would have been living through the consequences of dangerous working conditions. Through each chapter, these mining disaster elegies and ballads interacted as objects with the widows, which depicted their complex struggles, and worked as a voice to call for a positive future for families".

North East Labour History Society Founder's Award

We have created an annual Founders Award in memory of our late President Archie Potts. Each year a framed certificate of recognition will go to an organisation, society or group within the region which has, through engagement with its community, enhanced our understanding of some aspect of the history of working people. The award will take the form of a framed certificate.

NELHS is keen to ensure that all appropriate groups are made aware of the award and the net is spread widely. We would like to hear from anyone who feels they know of (or belong to) an organisation that would be a contender for the prize.

Those wishing to be considered for the award should submit a statement about themselves and (less than one thousand words please). Additional material in the form of press cuttings, photographs etc may be attached. Submissions should be sent to secretary@nelh.net by the end of January 2025.

Archie Potts Founder's Award 2024
Congratulations to the Battle of Stockton Campaign Group which has won the inaugural Archie Potts founders' Award. There were five excellent submissions for the award, and Stockton's was successful. Many thanks to the others who took part.

Readers of this journal will have seen a number of articles over the years which reflected the development of the campaign. Tony Fox and the original founder members succeeded in researching the events of 1933 and were instrumental in having a memorial created in the town. They also commissioned the editor of this journal to write a short book on the subject. You can find Tony's article in Issue 51 (2020) available on our website.

Here is The Stockton Group's entry.


AGAINST RACISM
British
STOCKTON ON TEES
The Battle of Stockton.
On 10th September 1933, the
people of Stockton stopped a rally of
Mosley's fascist Blackshirts
in the town.
'They shall not pass'
CELEBRATING HERITAGE
1933

Fascism started to take hold across Europe in the early 1930's. In January of 1933, Hitler was elected as Chancellor of Germany. Not long after this, the divisions that fascism brings became apparent. Looking to Germany and Italy as inspiration, Oswald Mosley established the British Union of Fascists. He hoped to appeal to the working class who were disillusioned with the lack of economic solutions posed by The Labour Party and The Conservatives to combat the effects of the Great Depression. The Battle of Stockton took place on 10th September 1933, when members of the British Union of Fascists (also known as Blackshirts) marched on Stockton High Street in the hope of recruiting new members. For the Blackshirts, Stockton was seen as an ideal town to recruit new members as it had been hit especially hard by the [depression] of the 1930s and they expected little, if any, resistance.

Instead, they were met with resistance at The Market Cross by 2,000 local people, including members of the National Unemployed Workers Movement, The Independent Labour party, Trade Unionists and members of the Communist Party. Those resisting forced the Blackshirts down Silver Street, back across The River Tees to Thornaby where their buses were waiting for them. No further attempts to carry out a march or rally in Stockton were ever made by the fascists.

Despite the number of people involved, the Battle of Stockton is little-known and rarely talked about, something which the Battle of Stockton campaign is beginning to change. Formed in January 2018, this volunteer led social history project aims to raise awareness of the battle using a blended approach that engages people in a many different ways.

Working in partnership with Stockton Borough Council a plaque was laid as part of a **heritage trail**. This trail is 1.3miles and fully accessible and the Council explains that it 'takes people around some beautiful buildings and streets that some may not even know exist. A walk for all ages with plenty

of places to stop for a lunch or a quick refreshment break'. It is not possible for BoS to quantify the impact of this trail but the plague – see photo - is the centre piece for activities that commemorate the Battle of Stockton.

There is an **annual fundraising concert**, based in the Georgian Theatre, featuring local musical acts, spoken word, guest speakers and arts and crafts for children. Word of the event has spread far and wide and last year one the performers travelled from Milton Keynes to take part. In his words to be part of radical heritage. BoS estimate that over 500 people have attended the event since it started in 2018 - even reaching people online during the covid lockdowns.

As part of the work BoS has engaged with **local choirs**. A song has been written by a local artist and it has has performed in the town, firstly as part of a 'flash mob', then at the Georgian Theatre and in finally front of a packed house at the Globe Theatre. During lockdown the 1933 Choir performed - socially distanced of course and this was shared on Facebook. In the words of the song, 'the Blackshirts came and we drove them all away, back to their fascist homes'

With our local partners – a brewery and a micro pub - we created a **Battle of Stockton beer**, selling it in the Golden Smog. We estimate that this reached over 250 local people, encouraging some discussion over a welcome pint.

We have sponsored two **Basket Ball trophies**; competed for by the world's first micro pub basketball team with community and inclusivity 'at the heart of our game'. Raising awareness with participants and spectators alike.

Supporting events such as the **Durham Miners Gala** and local **book fairs** has helped us spread the word to a wider audience whilst merchandising has seen Battle of Stockton T-Shirts at a number of places including Glastonbury.

This year the group was chosen to host the AGM of the **International Brigades Memorial Trust** and we were able to use this to not only showcase the Battle of Stockton but also the take pride in the wider history of Stockton on Tees.

Perhaps most importantly the events of 1933 have been brought to life in a **film** featuring artworks by a number of local Teesside artists. Narrated by actor Marlene Sidaway, this dramatic documentary explores the events of the day, the actions of local people and a sample of life in 1930s Stockton. It premiered in 2021 and won an award at the Tees Valley Film Festival in 2022. We estimate that it has been viewed by over 1,000 people.

So what has been the overall effect? At its most simple we know that many more people are aware of what took place in 1933. Both locally and nationally. At the last event volunteers set out to engage with people on market day. The first question they asked was 'do you know about the Battle of Stockton?' Many did and were proud of what had happened all those years ago. Those who did not know have embraced their newly found knowledge of a significant part of Teesside's proud history.

One of the most significant outcomes of the work the Campaign Group continue to do, would be something our grandfathers who stood against the Blackshirts in 1933 would be proud of. Communities of Teesside are brought together to remember and stand united against the forces that seek to divide us.

Further details about the work of the Battle of Stockton Campaign can be found on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/thebattleofstockton

Join Us

The Society is a membership organisation, open to individuals, organisations, libraries and other institutions. A copy of the society's annual journal is sent to you as part of your membership.

Annual subscription rates are:

- Individuals (full rate): £35
- Students, in receipt of benefits: £17
- Institutions: £45
- Solidarity Rate £50 *(to enable members that feel able, to offer extra support for the society's finances)*

Add £5 for international postage of our annual Journal

You can subscribe using Paypal or a Credit/ Debit Card or find a membership form and postal details on our website. You will also find our data protection policy there – we do not share your information with anyone else.

For further information, please e-mail: membership@nelh.net.

https://nelh.net

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:
Regional Secretary of the Northern TUC

Over 150 years of Solidarity

Join a Union

Visit: tuc.org.uk/join-union

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

TUC
Changing the world of work for good

North East History Volume 55

- **'The Pitmen are resolved not to work'**
  The miner's strike of 1765 in the Great North Coalfield
- **Recollections of Days of Hope Bookshop**
- **Unemployed Workers' Centres: Employed and Unemployed Solidarities**
- **The Irish on Tyneside: A history of the Tyne and Wear Metro**
- **A Proper Working Look: Naomi Mitchison on Sunderland Housing Conditions in 1934**
- **The Winter of 47: The End of Childhood**
- **Harbinger of Change, Dipton and the North East in the The Winter of 62/63**
- **Maureen Callcott: A Life in History**
  Interview with Liz O'Donnell, transcribed by Sue Ward

The north east labour history society holds regular meetings on a wide variety of subjects. A calendar of forthcoming events can be found on our website. Back copies 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/